ISSN 1755-9928 (Print)
ISSN 2753-3298 (Online)

Journal of
Scottish Thought

Research Articles

The Garden and the Landscape

Author: Sándor Radnóti

Volume 9, Issue 1
Pp: 13-38
2017
Published on: 1st Jan 2017

1495
ABERDEEN
UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Garden and the Landscape

Sándor Radnóti

1. A Contradiction in Terms

The terms 'garden' and 'landscape' are mutually contradictory. The garden is created through human creativity from the raw materials of nature. The landscape, by contrast, is already there, primed for us to go out and find it. The garden is subject to our control, while the landscape exerts its dominion over us. The garden is kept separate from the rest of nature, and as such is a *totum*, whereas the landscape is *pars pro toto*, a component of infinite nature. In the garden, our relationship with nature is as an active participant, but of the landscape we are mere beholders.

The garden starts with its enclosure, which cordons off domesticated nature from its wild cousin. In many languages this starting point is reflected in the word for 'garden', and the etymology of the word 'paradise' can be traced back to the construction of a wall or fence around an area of land, to a garden encircled by a barrier of earth or stone.[1] A garden surrounded by high walls or hedges, arcades or buildings, shuts out external nature, the landscape that carries on where the garden ends. As Walpole explained, 'When the custom of making square gardens enclosed with walls was . . . established, . . . nature and prospect [were excluded]'.[2]

In the Renaissance, inspired by the traditions of ancient Rome,[3] the landscape, alongside considerations of defence, comfort and utility, was readopted as one of the criteria for villa architecture, and significance was once more accorded to the setting of a building in its natural environment, but at this time 'nature and prospect' still played no part in villa gardens. In book V of

1 Cf. Claus Westermann, *Genesis* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976), 287.

2 Horace Walpole, *An Essay on Modern Gardening* (1771; Canton, PA, 1904), 19.

3 See, first and foremost, the two famous letters by Pliny the Younger, in which he describes his properties at Laurentum and Etruria. *The Letters of Pliny the Younger*, II, 17 and V, 6.

his *De Re Aedificatoria*, Alberti not only offered a wealth of practical tips (such as locating one's country estate within manageable distance of the town and making sure that, neither on the journey into town of a morning, nor on the way back home in the evening, would the sun shine directly into one's eyes), but also devoted great attention to the decorative properties of the landscape, as seen through the frames of the villa's windows. 'The rooms used by the prince for receiving guests and for dining should be given the noblest setting. This may be achieved with an elevated position and a view over sea, hills or broad landscape.'[4] Alberti also mentioned paintings of landscapes among his recommended decorations. One thing he did not consider, however, was that the dignity of the place, inasmuch as it derives from the landscape, ought to be in harmony with the gardens, which, for reasons of security, were still deemed to require perimeter walls.[5]

Villas in the Italian Renaissance were intended to reproduce the ancient Roman tradition of the private life of the countryside, as opposed to the public life of the city. This model of behaviour, of a lifestyle filled with recreation, diversion and meditation, could be satisfied with the contrasting opportunities provided by contemplatively taking in the pulchritude of the scenery or by perambulating the garden, socialising, enjoying theatrical performances and having parties.

The enormously extensive French garden, with its regular floral architecture, its geometric arrangement and its avoidance of elevation changes, was a form of absolutist representation *par excellence* of the lifestyle of the sovereign and the aristocracy. Even nature, in its entirety, was subject to the ruler, to order and intellect. With its repetitions, its optical illusions and deceptions, and the reflections generated by artificial water surfaces, the overall impression was one of infinity. The garden around the country mansion – which could also, from a different perspective, be regarded as an outdoor extension of the building, as a continuation of the architecture by other means – became, almost in itself, a kind of 'broad landscape'. This fostered a kind of dialectic relationship between the landscape and the garden.

In what did this relationship inhere? As far as political representation is concerned, there arises the notion of utopianism, of bringing order to the chaos of nature, so that rational human thought may transform the landscape,

4 Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, Robert Tavernor (1485; Cambridge, MA, London, 1988), V, 2, 120. Alberti differed from Pliny in emphasising the elevated position.

5 Ibid., IX, 4.

over as much of the surface of the Earth as possible, into a tamed, controlled garden. This idea may also be understood as the restoration of how things were believed to be in some past golden age. According to a proposition laid down by a theologian in the late seventeenth century, the 'Divine Art and Geometry' of the 'first Earth', 'before the Deluge', was 'smooth, regular, and uniform; without Mountains, and without a Sea.'[6]

The true history of the interrelationship between the landscape and the garden begins, however, not with the transformation of the landscape into a garden, but vice versa, with the determination to convert the garden into a landscape. The prerequisite to this conversion was disdain for the artificiality of the garden combined with admiration for nature in its unchanged, 'natural' state.

As Shaftesbury put it:

> Even the rude rocks, the mossy caverns, the irregular unwrought grottos and broken falls of waters, with all the horrid graces of the wilderness itself, as representing nature more, will be the more engaging and appear with a magnificence beyond the formal mockery of princely gardens.[7]

According to Addison, meanwhile:

> The Beauties of the most stately Garden or Palace lie in a narrow Compass, the Imagination immediately runs them over, and requires something else to gratifie [sic] her; but, in the wide Fields of Nature, the Sight wanders up and down without Confinement, and is fed with an infinite variety of Images, without any certain Stint or Number.[8]

---

6 Thomas Burnet, *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1681; London, 1719), I, 5, 72.

7 Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge, 1999), 317.

8 Joseph Addison et al, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford, 1965; 5 vols) III, 549. (From 'The Pleasures of the Imagination', No. 414, 25 June 1712.) These theoretical considerations were anticipated in a work titled *Campania Foelix* (1700) by Timothy Nourse (1636–99), who suggested that a country seat should be set 'not amongst Enclosures, but in a champaign [sic], open Country'. Cited in John Dixon Hunt, 'Introduction' in John Dixon Hunt & Peter Willis (eds.), *The Genius of the Place. The English Landscape Garden 1620–1820* (Cambridge, MA, London, 1988; 2nd edn), 1–46, 9.

Under the pen of Horace Walpole, the geometric, formal garden was criticised from the perspective of history. He derided such gardens as 'sumptuous and selfish solitudes', in which 'every improvement that was made, was but a step farther from nature'. Also, in his opinion, 'The compass and square were of more use in plantations than the nursery-man.'[9]

By the 1770s, the three main characteristics of the English landscape garden movement (which soon spread throughout the world) were becoming apparent: these were the avoidance of geometric regularity in the garden, the removal of enclosures, and a newfound respect for the particularities of the landscape, that is, its 'capability', or – to put it in loftier, more Virgilian terms (via Shaftesbury and Alexander Pope) – the 'genius of the place'. The open garden implied demolishing the walls that kept the landscape out. Marie Luise Gothein described the change in her classic history of the garden:

> The wall once provided the architectonic garden with its own support and justification, and kept it separate and away from the surrounding landscape, so that it could feel like a world apart and develop as such; this idea was clung to even in the great French style, so deeply beloved was the prospect as a veduta with which to crown the allées. Now, however, there were no longer any enclosing frames for the eye, and the garden became little more than a foreground for the broad landscape behind it.[10]

One of the main techniques now employed was to construct a sunken fence or wall, known as the 'ha-ha', which was believed by Walpole to be an English invention, and which gained popularity as such when it spread across Europe. Charles Joseph, 7th Prince de Ligne, embarked on a tour of eminent European gardens in the late eighteenth century, which also took in the park of Esterházy Palace in North-West Hungary; he described the fact that the palace overlooked one of the most beautiful natural lakes in the world (and not some artificially designed body of water) as one of its greatest advantages, but on the other hand he wondered, 'Why is everything so closed in? Here they should use the ha-has of the English. The Hungarians love open spaces just as much as [the English] do'.[11]

9 Walpole, *An Essay on Modern Gardening*, 21.

10 Marie Luise Gothein, *Geschichte der Gartenkunst*. II. Bd. *Von der Renaissance in Frankreich bis zur Gegenwart* (Jena, 1914), 371.

11 Charles Joseph de Ligne, *Der Garten zu Beloeil nebst einer kritischen Uebersicht der meisten*

2. The Landscape Garden

The conceptual antithesis between the garden and the landscape is a model of the dichotomy between our active and passive attitudes towards nature. Active is when nature is treated as a material to be shaped in accordance with human will, and though the ways of doing so are infinite, they are obviously always constrained within certain limits. Beyond these limits, which – though their lines may be shifted – can never be removed completely, lies the domain of ungovernable nature, unyielding to our aims and intentions, and prone to induce thoughts in us of endless freedom, or else of endless bondage. One of the images and metaphors of this indomitability, culturally defined in its historical genesis and in its evolving forms through history, is the landscape. The garden is nature cultivated, and as such, the word, even in its etymological sense, is part of our culture; the landscape, meanwhile, is a concept that embraces our cultural understanding of that aspect of nature that cannot be reworked or manipulated for human needs. In this sense, the polarity between culture and nature is manifested in the concepts of the garden and the landscape.

In the face of this ideal-typical contrast, the term 'landscape gardening', an oxymoron in the light of the preceding paragraph, poses a whole spectrum of questions. (The phrase 'landscape gardening' only replaced the word 'improvement' at the end of the eighteenth century.) If I return, at random, to the work by de Ligne quoted from just a short while ago, I can see that, in another suggestion of his, taking the features of the landscape as his starting point, he proposed turning the garden of Prince Esterházy, the 'Neptune of Hungary', into a quasi 'theme park', as it were, with lighthouses, pirate legends, fisherman's huts, shipwreck inscriptions, fantastic marine monsters, a temple to the god of the sea, stone steps and railings, gondolas and boats.[12] The garden is not only the material of nature, but also a work of architecture, and alongside the mansion or country house itself, the garden boasts its own unique structures and edifices: antique and Gothic temples, triumphal arches, mediaevalesque fortresses, Palladianesque bridges, manmade grottos, monopteroi (rotundas with roofs supported by columns but without enclosed spaces, built as belvederes), kiosks, hermitages, ruins (often imitation, but also frequently imported from abroad and partly reconstructed) – the list of building types goes on, and what they all have in common is a mythological, historical or political

Gärten Europas (1799; Wörlitz, 1995), 120.

12 Ibid., 118 ff.

allusion of some kind. At the same time, following the tradition established by the Cortile del Belvedere, the garden is an open-air museum, exhibiting statues, fountains, vases and urns, obelisks, herms, sphinxes and even sarcophagi. John Dixon Hunt, following the first systematic work on landscape gardening, made the distinction between the emblematic garden and the expressive garden, where the former demands an allegorical or symbolic reading, and requires background knowledge, while the latter is intended to provoke a variety of passionate emotions.[13]

The history of the garden was long interwoven with the iconographic programmes of Italian gardens. Versailles was conceived around the myth of Apollo; in Stowe, Buckinghamshire, built between 1733 and 1749, ancient virtues were contrasted with (debased) modern ones, the classical past with the national; this would later inspire the famous gardens of Ermenonville; a similar park was built in Wörlitz by Leopold III, Duke of Anhalt-Dessau and a fervent champion of the Enlightenment, who admired the work of the archaeologist and art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann. The names given to the styles used for emblematic buildings in themselves spoke volumes (antique, 'druid', fortress-like early medieval, Gothic, Renaissance-Palladian, Rococo, rustic [*cottage ornée*], Egyptian, Moorish, Turkish, Indian, Chinese, Japanese), and, in addition to the iconographic dimension, this also draws our attention to something else: the symbolic 'staffage' buildings with which landscape gardens were decorated in fact served as experiments in miniature for the different revivalist styles (such as neo-Palladianism, Gothic Revival or Greek Revival) that would later flourish in the monumental stylistic pluralism in nineteenth-century historicist eclecticism.[14] In such instances, nature is

13 Cf. Thomas Whately, *Observations on Modern Gardening. An Eighteenth-Century Study of the English Landscape Garden,* introd. Michael Symes (1770; Woodbridge, 2016), 129. John Dixon Hunt, 'Emblem and Expression in the Eighteenth-century Landscape Garden' in idem, *Gardens and the Picturesque. Studies in the History of Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge, MA, London, 1992), 87; idem, 'Introduction', 38.

14 'The first place where the abundantly variable formal system of the baroque style spectacularly fell apart was in the garden, where it was replaced by buildings derived from the most diverse range of periods, styles and tastes. This was the start of the stylistic freedom of romanticism and eclecticism'. Géza Galavics, *Magyarországi angolkertek* [English Gardens in Hungary] (Budapest, 1999), 30. Several authors have pointed out that country houses and their gardens were often designed in contrasting styles, which can also be understood in the context of eclecticism. E.g. Rudolf Wittkower, 'English Neo-Palladianism, the Landscape Garden, China and the Enlightenment' [1969] in idem, *Palladio and English Palladianism* (London, 1974), 177–90; Joan Bassin, 'The English Landscape Garden in the Eighteenth Century: The Cultural Importance of an English Institution', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal*

relegated to the role of a parergon, a by-work to the garden as a whole and this chimes in with a classical sentiment, quoted by Gothein from an unidentified source: '*le cose che si murano sono superiori a que si piantano*' (things that are built are superior to those that are planted).[15]

Alongside architecture (and the literature that divulges its messages), another important partner in the art of gardening is the theatre, which also tends to treat nature as a mere backdrop. Indeed, as we are informed by Alberti, who took the information from Vitruvius, the décor for the third type of drama after comedy and tragedy, namely satirical plays ('singing of countryside delights and pastoral romance'), was always a woodland landscape.[16] Here we should not confine our thinking to performances held on garden stages, but should also include walks through the park, where the illusionistic impact of the combined dramatic effects had the capacity to make ramblers feel as though they were watching, or even acting in, a theatrical event.[17] In addition to architecture, literature and drama, yet another strand links landscape gardening to landscape painting, but that subject merits a chapter of its own.

As a consequence of the accumulation of meanings and interpretations, landscape gardening experienced a revolution in tastes and style, which spawned a purist – even 'naturalist', if one may say so here – movement, which drastically reduced allusions, connotations, reading materials and landmarks, renounced iconographies and eliminated allegories, whilst giving greater rein to individual reception and sensory stimulation. This was indeed a return to nature, in the sense that the central focus and effort now lay once more on highlighting the landscape. The landscaped parks that were shaped in the 1750s, 60s and 70s radically rejected every form of regularity; this is not to deny, of course, that more cautious and varied precursors of anti-geometric order had already been around for decades. Lines of trees were eschewed, as were patterned flowerbeds; artificial ponds and canals were out of the question;

Concerned with British Studies 11 (1979), 15–32. Garden monuments were precursors to the nineteenth-century cult of the monument. See Adrian von Buttlar, *Der Landschaftsgarten. Gartenkunst des Klassizismus und Romantik* (Köln, 1989), 15. There is also a connection with the cultural history of cemeteries: throughout the nineteenth century, church garden-cemeteries were replaced by landscape garden-cemeteries. In cities, too, city parks and squares were transformed into landscape gardens, with examples in Budapest being the City Park (Városliget) and Margaret Island.

15 Marie Luise Gothein, *Geschichte der Gartenkunst,* 192.

16 Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, VIII, 7, 273. Cf. Vitruvius, *De architectura libri decem*, V, vi, 9.

17 Cf. John Dixon Hunt, 'Theaters, Gardens, and Garden Theaters' in idem, *Gardens and the Picturesque*, 49–73, 49 ff.

instead, vast, grassy meadows were composed, with clumps of trees scattered strategically. 'Walled enclosures close to the house were demolished, and the boundary between the grazed ground of the park and the lawns around the mansion was now marked in its entirety by a sunken fence or haha.'[18]

We can, of course, hardly proceed any further without mentioning the name of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown (1715–83). As I am no specialist, I shall offer no opinion as to whether Brown was a radical, innovative pioneer, as affirmed most pronouncedly by Nikolaus Pevsner, or whether (as is the predilection of modern research) 'just' the most famous and most fashionable among many talented and proficient gardeners of the age, who – together with the amateur gentleman designers and commissioners of gardens – devised the concept and practice of the English garden in the second half of the eighteenth century.[19] In any event, the most interesting innovation ascribable to Capability Brown or to the Capability Men meant that:

> certain ways of experiencing the park [which had existed for centuries, hitherto always independently of the garden] were now being given particular emphasis. The attention paid to approaches, and the proliferation of rides and drives, indicate that the landscape was now considered not simply as a collection of static views, but as something to be experienced in its entirety, and experienced through movement, especially on horseback or in a carriage.[20]

This echoes one of Burke's examples of the beautiful, deemed by him to be one of the most apt: 'Most people must have observed the sort of sense they have had, on being swiftly drawn in an easy coach, on a smooth turf, with gradual ascents and declivities.'[21] To this must be added the opportunities

18 David Brown and Tom Williamson, *Lancelot Brown and the Capability Men. Landscape Revolution in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 2016), 73.

19 The renewed interest in Brown that accompanied the tercentenary of his birth generated instances of both interpretations of his contribution. The conference held in Bath in 2016 would appear to mark the continuation of the Brown renaissance, see Oliver Cox, 'Why Celebrate Capability Brown? Responses and Reactions to Lancelot "Capability" Brown, 1930–2016', *Garden History* 44 (2016), Suppl. 1. *Capability Brown: Perception and Response in a Global Context. The Proceedings of an ICOMOS-UK Conference, held at the University of Bath, 7–9 September 2016*, see also note 35, although the latest monograph (see note 18) takes a revisionist approach.

20 Brown and Williamson, *Lancelot Brown and the Capability Men*, 97.

21 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London, 1757).

for boating that were often provided in landscape gardens and parks, and – first and foremost – the promenades. Some writers aver that the art of walking was discovered in the eighteenth century.[22] There is a wealth of literary material (such as Shaftesbury's *The Moralists*, Rousseau's *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, Schiller's famous poem *Der Spaziergang*, Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, and the novels of Jane Austen) from which we may glean a sense of the sensory and intellectual benefits of partaking in a walk in the garden or in the landscape, and, last but not least, of the phenomenon of taking in the landscape in motion. One of the key tasks of a garden designer was to plan out the possible routes and resting points, or at least to recommend the kinetic mechanism for best enjoying the recreational properties of the park.

3. The Landscape Garden and The Landscape Painting

One of the quotes given above contrasted the kinetic reception of the landscape with the 'collection of static views' (see note 20), by which we should primarily understand the vistas visible from Italian Renaissance villas – prime examples being the Villa Medici in Fiesole and Palladio's La Rotonda in Vicenza – and the images framed by the villa windows, a familiar and much imitated tradition. The novelty now, however, lay in the fact that 'Astutely sited country villas were residential belvederes'.[23] In his writing on Italian villas, Walter Benjamin – almost channelling the spirit of René Magritte – described the landscape as hanging in the window frames, signed by the magisterial hand of God.[24] The divine imagery in the villas (and often also in city palaces) was accompanied by artworks by mortal masters, consisting of frescos and oil paintings depicting the landscape, often as illusions intentionally aiming to deceive the viewer; these marked the beginnings of landscape painting, a genre that would eventually reach its pinnacle in the panoramic canvases of the nineteenth century.

The link between the actual landscape and landscape painting is provided by the framing, specifically the act of viewing an image of the world through the four edges of a frame, which is degrees of magnitude more static than

22 Cf. John Dixon Hunt, 'Time of Walking', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 36 (2016), 297–304.

23 Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (Oxford, 1999), 56.

24 Walter Benjamin, 'Armut hat immer das Nachsehen' in idem, *Illuminationen* http://www.textlog.de/benjamin-armut-nachsehen-kurze-schatten.html, accessed 19 July 2017.

experiencing the landscape while in movement, even if on one level it has its own peculiar dynamism (the close-up and distant view of pictures, the sense of "walking" inside a picture). Throughout the eighteenth century, the landscape gardening movement was inescapably concerned with searching for an analogy to landscape painting, especially that of seventeenth-century Italy. New knowledge about painting, with particular regard to the great landscape painters of the previous century, engendered an attitude that looked upon the landscape as though it were a series of paintings.[25] As early as 1734, Alexander Pope famously told his friend, Joseph Spence, that 'All gardening is landscape-painting',[26] and this notion was put into practice by William Kent (1685–1748), the leading garden designer in the era preceding that of Capability Brown. Hunt, the pre-eminent expert on English Gardens, wrote:

> What is carried over from the connoisseurship of fine art into landscape design, as opposed to landscape appreciation, are: first, an attention to colours, lights and shades, and a peculiarly English version of perspective . . . and second, a relish of different kinds of scenic values, an awareness of different painter's responses to different topographies, and eventually a recognition of Nature herself as the true and only painter.[27]

Paintings by Claude Lorrain, Salvator Rosa, Nicolas Poussin, Gaspard Dughet (also known as Gaspard Poussin), and by their disciples in France and England in the eighteenth century, were held up as models for gardens.[28] One of the reasons for this was the intention to recreate Roman villas and the classical Arcadian landscape 'in England's green and pleasant land', coupled with the literary context of Theocritus, Virgil and the entire pastoral tradition, as well as Roman history,[29] and the desire to give form to the newly rediscovered

25 Cf. Walter John Hipple, Jr., *The Beautiful, The Sublime & The Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale, 1957), 223.

26 Joseph Spence, *Anecdotes, Observations and Characters of Books and Men*, ed. Ernest Rhys (London, 1890), 170.

27 John Dixon Hunt, *The Picturesque Garden in Europe* (London, 2003), 41.

28 This enormous body of work was compiled by Elizabeth Wheeler Manwaring, *Italian Landscape in Eighteenth Century England. A Study Chiefly of the Influence of Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa on English Taste 1700–1800* (1925; London, 1965, 2nd edn).

29 One famous example of how the classical landscape and architecture were recreated in England is at Stourhead in Wiltshire; the 'Pantheon' and bridge in this country estate are often directly associated with the painting by Claude Lorrain titled *Coast View of Delos with Aeneas*, which was in the art collection of Henry Hoare, the owner,

sublime landscape. The didactic poems that were extraordinarily widespread during the century took this as the basis for shaping the paradigm of beautiful Claude and sublime (or picturesque) Salvator. The two almost obligatory landscape experiences of the Grand Tour, which was firmly established by that time, were the crossing of the Alps and the Campagna around Rome – the former was epitomised by Rosa, and the latter by Claude. (The two Poussins, meanwhile, were responsible for 'noble, heroic scenery'.[30]) The other reason was the concept of mimesis in landscape painting, with its insistence that a painting should reflect – even to the point of *trompe l'œil* – a realistic (though obviously idealised) landscape, so that the painting could later be converted back into an actual landscape. I shall return to this theoretical problem a little later.

Capability Brown's landscape gardening movement in the three decades starting in 1750 strove to demolish this system of cultured allusions. After Brown's star faded, the Herefordshire squires – Richard Payne Knight and Uvedale Price – based their sharp criticism of Brown on reference to the picturesque (although the consequences of this in practice were negligible). Yet even during the period when purism in landscape gardening was at its zenith, there was no sudden end to the system of allusions, for they remained in the landscape parks that already existed and continued to develop and exert an influence, in new gardens created or commissioned by designers and landowners whose tastes different from those of Brown, and in the extensive body of literature on the subject. Paradoxically, it was even present in the reception

---

commissioner and co-designer of the gardens. Cf. e.g. Nigel R. Jones, *Architecture of England, Scotland and Wales* (London, 2005), 268; Adrian von Buttlar, 'Englische Garten' in Hans Sarkowitz (ed.), *Die Geschichte der Gärten und Parks* (Frankfurt am Main,. Leipzig, 1998), 178; David Watkin, *The English Vision. The Picturesque in Architecture, Landscape and Garden Design* (London, 1982), 28. Hunt expressed his scepticism about this association, cf. John Dixon Hunt, *The Picturesque Garden in Europe*, 52; S. Lang had earlier cast more general doubt on whether Claude (and other landscape painters) had exerted such a fundamental influence on landscape gardening, or at least on its beginnings, attributing a greater role to the theatrical painting of the Italian Renaissance, cf. S. Lang, 'Genesis of the Landscape Garden' in Nikolaus Pevsner (ed.), *The Picturesque Garden and its Influence Outside the British Isles* (Washington DC, 1974), 3–29. An example of the historical association with ancient Rome is *Cicero with his Friend Atticus and Brother Quintus, at his Villa at Arpinum*, a painting from 1770 by Richard Wilson, which rivals anything by Claude Lorrain, cf. David. H. Solkin, 'The Battle of the Ciceros: Richard Wilson and the Politics of Landscape in the Age of John Wilkes', *Art History* 6 (1983), 406–22.

30 Nikolaus Pevsner, *Visual Planning and the Picturesque*, ed. Mathew Aitchison (Los Angeles, 2010), 119.

of Brown himself, who was exalted by many as a great painter, to the extent that comparing him to Claude, Salvator Rosa, Poussin or 'Risdale' became rather a cliché.[31]

The original meaning of the word 'picturesque', in line with its Italian roots, meant neither more nor less than being worthy of an artist's brush; even William Gilpin, who is regarded as the initiator of the picturesque revolution, having enthusiastically laid down the principles of picturesque beauty in 1768, interpreted the term in essentially the same way. Price was the first writer to elevate the picturesque into a category of equal rank with the beautiful and the sublime, preserving its origin, but nevertheless releasing it from its constraints, not only in painting, but in visuality as a whole (in Price's estimation, Haydn and Scarlatti, for example, composed picturesque music).[32] Knight, on the other hand, was keen to isolate the concept of the picturesque to a visual mode of beauty, to the act of seeing (pre-empting, to a certain extent, the theories of Konrad Fiedler by a good half century).

For both Price and Knight (who dedicated his didactic poem of 1795, titled *The Landscape*, to Price), even though they held opposing theoretical presuppositions,[33] the starting point and main objective of their endeavours was the analysis of landscape gardening and the landscape, and their common stylistic criticism was disrelish for Lancelot Brown. They disparaged his work using terms such as monotony and baldness, mechanical commonplace, doctrinarism, insipidity, spiritlessness, and a new formalism to replace the old, whose key word was serpentinity. When Brown, or his followers, set about levelling the ground, this would mean, in Price's view:

> adieu to all that the painter admires – to all intricacies, to all the beautiful varieties of form, tint, and light and shade; every deep recess – every bold projection – the fantastic roots of trees – the winding paths of sheep – all must go; in a few hours, the rash hand of false taste

31 Cf. Christopher Hussey, *The Picturesque. Studies in a Point of View* (1927; London, 1967; 2nd edn), 138 ff.

32 Cf. Uvedale Price, *Essays on the Picturesque as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful; and, on the Use of Studying Pictures, for the Purpose of Improving Real Landscape* (1795; London, 1810), 80.

33 Price regarded the category of the picturesque as a property of the object, alongside the beautiful and the sublime, whereas Knight (following Hume) considered it subject to the judgment of the observer. Price's objectivity and Knight's subjectivity were analysed by Hipple. See Hipple, *The Beautiful, The Sublime & The Picturesque*, 278–83. See also R. K. Raval, 'The Picturesque: Knight, Turner and Hipple', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 18 (1978), 249–60.

> completely demolishes, what time only, and a thousand lucky accidents can mature, so as to make it become the admiration and study of a Ruysdal [sic] or a Gainsborough; and reduces it to such a thing, as an oilman in Thames-street may at any time contract for by the yard at Islington or Mile-End.[34]

Without resorting to such caustic language, we could summarise these objections as a criticism of simplicity itself, or rather – linking in with the similarly argued condemnation of neo-classicism – of noble simplicity and quiet grandeur.[35] Among the properties that constitute what is beautiful, *smoothness* was defined by Edmund Burke as:

> a quality so essential to beauty, that I do not now recollect anything beautiful that is not smooth. In trees and flowers, smooth leaves are beautiful; smooth slopes of earth in gardens; smooth streams in the landscape.[36]

This smoothness, brought about by levelling and flattening the soil, would now become the main cause for complaint, and furthermore, in conscious association with the concept of the beautiful. Here, Price touched upon something not entirely unknown to Winckelmann, the doyen of neo-classicism, although he made no mention of it in any of his public apologies for classical beauty, but in a private letter. 'The old masters sought to complete their works in perfect beauty, therefore they rarely experimented with variations. Because beauty is extreme, and in extremes there is no variation.'[37] But this variability is of cardinal importance to Price. Likewise, the other extreme, the sublime, would also be subjected to criticism should it become too frequently characterised by uniformity. In classical discourse, beauty creates uniformity, and even Burke's liberation of the sublime was used to rebel against it, even though it is apparent that the sublime can also uniformise with its concept of greatness and littleness. Here, Price came up with a crucial observation: 'to create the

34 Price, *Essays on the Picturesque*, 31 ff.

35 Most recently Hunt attempted to interpret Brown's œuvre in the context of neo-classicism. Cf. John Dixon Hunt, 'Brown and Neo-Classicism', *Garden History* 44 (2016), Suppl. 1, 18–27.

36 Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, part III, section XIV.

37 Johann Joachim Winckelmann's letter to Adam Friedrich Oeser, from the first half of April 1756, in Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Briefe*. In Verbindung mit Hans Diepolder herausgegeben von Walther Rehm (Berlin W, 1952), I, 140, 219.

sublime is above our contracted powers'.[38] As we pursue the improvement of nature, the effect of the sublime can be accentuated or moderated to a certain extent, but it can never be created from scratch.

The picturesque, then, is destined to occupy a broad area between the extremes of the beautiful and the sublime, in which Price's objective is to narrow down the scope of human-created beauty to the classical, and to keep it there. In sculpture, the supreme genre of classicism, there is no picturesque at all. A new facet appears, already signalled in an earlier quotation: time. Time belongs to nature, while a classical building or sculpture is timeless in its idealness. The beautiful, accordingly, is fresh and youthful (the obvious reference here is the eternal spring in Winckelmann's description of the Apollo Belvedere), whereas the picturesque is tied to the period, to the passage of time, and therefore also to evanescence. It follows on from this that an intact Greek temple – whether in real life or in a painting – is beautiful, whereas one in ruins is picturesque. The 'splendid confusion and irregularity'[39] of the Gothic church is another example of the picturesque. The Gothic Revival had long equipped itself with similar principles. 'The Grecian is only proper for magnificent and public buildings. Columns and all their beautiful ornaments look ridiculous when crowded into a closet or a cheesecake house. The variety is little, and admits no charming irregularities.'[40] When the young Goethe first discovered the Gothic, he associated it with organic nature. The main realm of the picturesque is nature, the landscape; its difference from the beautiful is characterised by roughness and variety, intricacy and irregularity, by sudden change, even by rupture. These are all properties of the landscape itself, and that famous comparative drawing which was published in one of Knight's didactic poems, showing a park before and after intervention by Capability Brown, allows us to deduce that the ideal objective of the 'improvement' carried out by the Herefordshire squires was the formation of the natural state, which was recognised, with great erudition and connoisseurship, in landscape paintings, and subsequently recommended to gardeners.

38 Price, *Essays on the Picturesque*, 102.

39 Ibid., 83.

40 Horace Walpole's letter to Horace Mann, 25 February 1750, in *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W. S. Lewis (New Haven, 1937–83, 48 vols), XX, 127. Cf. Watkin, *The English Vision*, 91 ff.

4. Nature and Art

We now return to the question of whether our starting definition of the contradiction in terms between the garden and landscape is not, in fact, neutralised by the emergence of landscape gardening and landscape architecture; of whether – when nature is perfected and embellished, when its faults are corrected, when streams are diverted along new beds, earth is piled up into hillsides, pathways are cut, in short, when the landscape is altered – the antithesis between nature and art, between what is given by nature and what is created by human hands, actually becomes relative. The first step involves separating the utilitarian purposes of the garden (vegetable patch, flowerbed, orchard, vineyard, herbal garden, pasture, etc.) from its hedonistic pleasures.[41] In practice, of course, the majority of gardens were also farms, and their useful parts were clearly separated. Even Lancelot Brown built walls around the vegetable garden.

According to Lord Kames, gardening evolves from a practical art into a fine art by breaking away from its practical function and becoming an object of pure enjoyment. As for the role of the gardener, 'to humour and adorn nature, is the perfection of his art; and that nature, neglecting regularity, distributes her objects in great variety with a bold hand'.[42] There is a *soupçon* of uncertainty in this definition (is this art or nature?). We must not forget that both Shaftesbury and Addison, the previous generation's two leading thinkers on matters of art (among other things), had, more or less simultaneously at the start of the century, placed great emphasis on the primacy of nature over art. This remained the dominant idea in British philosophical thinking on art.

Gardening has never integrated itself as an autonomous art into the modern – or more precisely, the classical modern, or aesthetic – system of art,[43] although from the sixteenth century onwards, practitioners have attempted to elevate it above the status of a handicraft with the same fervour as their counterparts in the fine arts. In the seventeenth century, the French

41 William Shenstone, for example in his 1764 work titled *Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening*, distinguishes between kitchen-gardening, parterre-gardening, and 'landskip' or picturesque gardening. See Hunt & Willis (eds.), *The Genius of the Place*, 289.

42 Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, ed. Peter Jones (1762; Indianapolis, 2005; 6th edn; 2 vols), II, 688. (Chapter XXIV: *Gardening and Architecture*).

43 Cf. Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'The Modern System of the Arts' in idem, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts. Collected Essays* (1951; Princeton, NJ, 1990), 163–227; Jacques Rancière, 'Des régimes de l'art et du faible intérêt de la notion de modernité' in idem, *La partage sensible esthétique et politique* (Paris, 2000), 26–45.

garden managed to achieve equal rank with the traditional artistic genres as the leading national art, the representative art of the *Grand Siècle*, and an art built up around one great, central creative genius, André Le Nôtre (1613–1700);[44] it found itself included in several experiments at classification, undertaken by the likes of Perrault and even Kant. Elsewhere, however, it was mentioned in the same breath as agriculture.

The ultimate failure of the art of horticulture to be canonised as *grand art* can be attributed to a number of reasons. The ornamental garden was part of elite cultural practice, but mainly on the part of the commissioner or observer, rather than that of the creator. This elite was on the ascendant; the French garden was the express privilege of the king and the aristocracy, whereas the English garden could be designed and/or commissioned by both the nobility and the cultured bourgeoisie. Even more importantly, gardens – like art collections and museum initiatives in this period – were often open to the wider community of the upper classes. But the new cultural practice of art, namely high art, which crystallised around the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was characterised by certain fundamental criteria that could only be fulfilled in gardening to a very limited extent.

Let us examine them in order: (1) Even when it came to the increasingly well-defined character and need for objectivation of art, it was hard for the garden to meet this criterion in the long term, for compared with certain other artworks, such as a painting, a poem or a musical composition, which can be regarded as having a certain permanence, completeness and conclusion, the garden is far more exposed to constant change and intervention, and far less likely therefore to be classified as a work of art. There is no way of conserving a garden indefinitely, and gardens cannot benefit from the same kind of institutional guarantee enjoyed by works in other arts, such as a museum, a 'Salon', a publication (whether book, print or sheet music), a system of performances, copyright, and so on. (2) Secondly, innovation, when applied to garden design, took on a sense without any analogies with the other arts, in that the great renewal was the practical implementation of '*Retour à la nature!*', as opposed to the geometrical, formal gardens that were considered artificial. It may also be worth mentioning that in the new philosophical aesthetics – those of Kant and Schiller (and in traces, even as early as Addison) – the quasi-natural character and function of completed artworks were accorded great value, and in artistic practice, in order to achieve this, efforts were made to wipe out all trace of

44 Cf. Stefan Schweizer, *Die Erfindung der Gartenkunst. Gattungsautonomie – Diskursgeschichte – Kunstwerkanspruch* (Berlin, München, 2013), *passim*, esp. 208–307.

human intercession, in a metaphorical sense, of course; gardening, however, not only worked with real nature as its material and medium, but also had real nature as its ultimate goal, and this, with regard to artistic judgment, produced an irreconcilable paradox. (3) Another such paradox arises from the fact that the autonomy of an artwork is barely present in cases where the objectives are to promote the effective functioning of nature and to eliminate all obstacles that stand in the way of hedonistic worth. (4) Idealisation is more closely associated with landscape gardening than objectivation, innovation and autonomy, for the ideal landscape and its attendant idealised ways of life (pastoral, '*beatus ille*', etc.) have their own long-standing cultural histories. However, the purist landscape gardening movement embodied by Brown was not in the least interested in transplanting the Italian or Grecian landscapes into the British Isles, and was more concerned with reducing the amount of architecture, allusions and other tools of idealisation employed in gardens. Essentially, the movement's overarching goal was to simplify every landscape and to help it achieve its own character. As for the modern aspect of idealisation, whereby the audience of a work of art is – in an ideal world – the entire human race, private gardens were as alien to this as possible. By the time public gardens began to fulfil this requirement, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they could at best be regarded as heteronomous products of the applied arts. (5) In autonomous works of art, a kind of dematerialisation came into being, as a new aspect of idealisation, which implied a reduction in the importance of the material. The intrinsic value of the material (which could be immense, as in medieval goldsmithery, for example), considered independently of the work itself, gradually diminished in relative significance; this resulted in works of art being distinguished from treasure, and – at least in part – from luxury items. In gardening, though, such spiritualisation could never be accomplished, for the further gardening progresses from architecture, the greater value is accrued by its material, which is nature itself. This material, consisting of earth, grass and trees, is evidently sturdier and more potent than the material used by any other art. The ideal of the Apollo Belvedere, to persist with the most notable example of the age, is incorporated in the marble it is made from, and this is the property which suppresses its materiality, as Winckelmann so emphatically asserted. But the garden – in particular the English garden – cannot repel its own natural material, with its direct, sensory presence, and even its final objective can only consist of earth, grass and trees. The reception of the garden became extraordinarily spiritualised, but at the price of being accepted not as art, but as the work of nature. (6) The historicism that is so typical of high

art. Artworks are considered as serving more than the present living generations, and must never lose sight of their historical past and future. The garden is poorly suited to this, for the reasons elucidated upon in point 1 above: the mutable, uncertain, fluid nature of its objectivation, and the constant natural corrections taking place in its fabricated being. Naturally, the landscape garden not only has objective historical connections, but also others that are reflected upon and made conscious, but the way these are conceived is more reminiscent of the historic consciousness of a chronicler than it is of actual historic consciousness. When its forebears (such as ancient Roman villas) are reconstructed, then the historical time separating the new from the old is, as it were, destroyed. (7) Finally, the social and intellectual character of the creators of landscape gardens was incompatible with the classical, modern system of art. The path pursued by the musician, the poet and the painter – that is, the path of transformation into a true artist, which was typical of the late eighteenth and the whole of the nineteenth century – was not followed by the gardener, or at least not to the same extent or with the same certitude. The importance of genius and originality in artistic creation grew inexorably (and the concept of the *Originalgenie* gained increasing currency), while gardening remained the realm of the master craftsman, the specialist, or the dilettante nobleman.

The question of whether gardening deserved a place alongside the great arts was debated throughout the eighteenth century, only coming to a conclusion at the century's end. The resounding success of the French garden in the preceding century opened the way, on the one hand, for people to attempt to canonise the art of gardening in a general sense,[45] and on the other hand, for actions against the former style to be dressed up as the art of a new nation, this time Britain. The design and presentation of gardens was accompanied by a surprisingly large amount of literature on gardening, often in the form of didactic poetry. Famous gardens were often described both in words and in illustrations.

The eighteenth-century gardening movement was explicitly regarded by some contemporaries as a new direction for the arts, as summed up in Horace Walpole's famous aphorism: 'Poetry, Painting, and Gardening, or the Science of Landscape, will forever by men of Taste be deemed Three Sisters, or The Three New Graces who dress and adorn Nature'.[46] Those conversant in the

45 The key work on this was *Théorie et pratique du jardinage*, by Antoine-Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville (1680–1765), published in 1709 and read, translated and referred to all through the eighteenth century. Cf. Schweizer, *Die Erfindung der Gartenkunst*, 281 ff.

46 Paget Toynbee (ed.), *Satirical Poems Published Anonymously by William Mason. With Notes*

history of art theory, however, will obviously recognise that it only became possible to speak of 'Three New Graces' because two had already been spoken of for two hundred years. Specifically, the Renaissance theory of *ut pictura poesis*, originating from Horace, adopted gardening as its third art. This enabled Stephanie Ross to refer to *ut hortus poesis* and Hunt to coin the phrase *ut pictura hortus*.[47] 'By the end of the seventeenth century gardens and drama shared with painting a theory of representation and presentation of action that was one of the final flowerings of the Renaissance doctrine of *ut pictura poesis*.'[48]

In the eighteenth century this doctrine was not affected by any new impulses, but until a new system could provide a better answer to the question of how the arts were interrelated, the neo-classicist, humanistic theory (Winckelmann, Sir Joshua Reynolds), together with general understanding, still upheld the principle of poetic painting, painterly poetry, and the complementarity of the two,[49] while the garden continued to feature elements that were analogous to those in both poetry and painting. The poetic or painterly garden could represent the same things as the other two arts. They offered mutual enlightenment, or more precisely, mutual decipherment. This decipherment allegorised the poem, the painting and the garden alike. Iconographic programmes, parables and allegorical symbols surfaced as a network of references, in which everything played a role, as in some *Gesamtkunstwerk*: the poetic text, the painting (as a model), the three-dimensional work, and nature itself. There was no stable theoretical foundation to all this, however, and in fact, in several fundamental ways, the landscape garden, which was increasingly tasked with portraying or recreating nature, contradicted this tradition. Since the doctrine of *ut pictura poesis* was inseparable from the mimetic approach to art, there were difficulties – as we shall see – when it came to addressing the question of how nature could be imitated with nature itself. Moreover, according to humanistic teachings, art had a duty, first and foremost, to imitate *human* activity. This is what may have prompted Rensselaer W. Lee, the author of what is still the

by Horace Walpole (Oxford, 1926), 43. Cited by John Dixon Hunt in several sources, e.g. 'Emblem and Expression', 75.

47 Cf. Stephanie Ross, 'Ut Hortus Poesis – Gardening and Her Sister Arts in Eighteenth-Century England', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 25 (1985), 17–32; John Dixon Hunt, 'Ut Pictura Poesis, Ut Pictura Hortus, and the Picturesque' in idem, *Gardens and the Picturesque*, 105–36.

48 Ibid., 114.

49 Cf. Hussey, *The Picturesque*, 19. Hussey describes the English landscape poets of the first half of the eighteenth century (James Thomson, John Dyer, etc.) as perceiving nature through the idealised medium of landscape paintings. Ibid., 18–50.

most important examination of this question, to write that in the eighteenth century, the doctrine:

> was steadily undermined by forces that were in the long run to make for its destruction. Opposed to the humanistic point of view was the growing interest in external nature with whose freshness and irresponsible freedom Rousseau, the apostle of emotion, was to contrast the life of human beings freighted with custom and constrained by the 'false secondary power' of the reason.[50]

Truth be told, Walpole's comment (much quoted since it was first published in the twentieth century), written not in a formalised essay on gardening but in an ephemeral letter, is not so much a new idea as a conventional one. The debate about rank, which originally aimed to emancipate painting but ended up with a thematic hierarchy that placed poetic history painting right at the top, at least lost a large part of its intellectual energies. Viewed from a different perspective, the process of comparing the different branches of the arts and arranging them in some order found more of a common basis in shared traditions than in any receptiveness towards novelty and innovation; compared with the autonomous openness of the artwork, for the arts, now cross-referenced with each other, there was more to be gained by having a self-contained attribution of meaning.

5. Nature as Landscape

The theoretical elaboration of the picturesque has nothing to do with the doctrine of *ut pictura poesis*, although it sometimes occurs as a commonplace. Instead, the intention was to legitimate landscape gardening with a greater and far older art,[51] which would provide a way of seeing and indeed teach one how to see. Inevitably, one of the factors at play in all this was the fact that the squires, all of whom had partaken of the Grand Tour, tended to look down on Brown, who had been bred a gardener and had never explored beyond the borders of his home kingdom; indeed Brown – unlike Claude, who had

50 Rensselaer W. Lee, 'Ut pictura poesis. The Humanistic Theory of Painting', *Art Bulletin* 22 (1940), 261 ff. The quote about the 'false secondary power' comes from William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, Book II, *The Schoolboy*.

51 Cf. Price, *Essays on the Picturesque*, 10.

been bred a pastry-cook in the previous century – was never acknowledged as having risen above his low-born status.[52] A new invention, and a desideratum of any gentleman embarking on a picturesque tour, which almost caricatured the objective of legitimating the reception of the landscape with painterly vision (and which today seems nothing short of absurd) was the so-called 'Claude glass', a mirror tinted golden brown, which promised to cast a veneer of Claudian colour over the landscape. In a certain sense, the picturesque was a tableau vivant, or a series of them, and the connection between landscape design and the 'living image' performances held as social entertainment was highlighted in Goethe's *Elective Affinities*.[53]

In any event, compared with *ut pictura hortus*, and indeed with allegorical or symbolic gardening in general, the picturesque brought about a radical theoretical change in the common attitude towards nature:

> Nature in its direct effects is only possible when it ceases to be thought of primarily as a carrier of allegorical meaning. The shift to the picturesque, therefore, frees nature from the control of ideal forms. That freedom makes possible an aesthetics of nature and implicitly shifts the aesthetic paradigm from ideal beauty that is embodied in the lesser forms of actual nature available to the senses to natural feeling that is located in the response of the sensitive viewer.[54]

It is somewhat surprising that the main enemy of theorists of the picturesque was Brown (who was no longer alive by the time these theorists arrived on the scene), because it was essentially his movement that had enacted the fundamentally important paradigm shift from lyrical, allegorical, emblematic parks to those conceived in a reductionist, purist, anti-allegorical style. What irked them most about Brown was that he had failed to reformulate the relationship with the corpus of landscape painting, something that devotees of the picturesque revolution were strongly in favour of; in other words, Brown had relinquished not only poetry but also painterliness, and thus had taken the anti-intellectual tendency to the extreme, which the Herefordshire connoisseurs were not prepared to accept.

---

52 Ibid., 242 ff.

53 Cf. David Marshall, *The Frame of Art: Fictions of Aesthetic Experience, 1750–1815* (Baltimore, 2005), 17.

54 Dabney Townsend, 'The Picturesque', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55 (1997), 365–76, 366.

Nevertheless, the image of nature borrowed from painterly experience could not escape its inner contradiction, whereby the extent to which the image of nature accrued by culture took precedence over actual nature, compared with the extent to which it was merely an enhancement of the sense of nature, depended solely on emphasis. Sometimes the picturesque preferred nature over painting, in accordance with the Shaftesbury–Addison tradition and the spirit of the Enlightenment; but sometimes painting legitimated nature, by which we mean not only the way in which educated noblemen, veterans of the Grand Tour, flaunted their supposed cultural superiority, but also remnants of the neo-classical taste, whose essential doctrine, formulated by Winckelmann but already foreshadowed by Alexander Pope ('To copy Nature is to copy them.'[55]), was that it was right and proper to leave the direct representation of nature to those who, in their own art, had already perfected the imitation of nature.

It is true, of course, that aesthetic intervention could be used in order to present nature as landscape not only in painting (and poetry), but also in landscape gardening; but whether this intervention is the *mimesis* of nature, the pre-eminent art of representation, or rather the *ministration* of nature, the protection and ornamentation of actual, pre-existing nature (the latter being how gardening is often understood, even in abstract terms), is a matter of utmost uncertainty.[56] Indeed, when a hill is built, when a stream is dammed to form a lake, or when the ground is levelled to create a meadow, this can also be thought of – as it actually was thought of – as imitating nature. Nevertheless, this representation soon manifests itself once again as a naturally created landscape (after all, nature, even if it has been moulded by human hands, can never be regarded as a *trompe l'œil*), and in the long term, all that remains of human creativity are the buildings and other garden ornaments that 'frame' the landscape, and the pathways that traverse it. Since this question never reached a proper resolution, gardening was ultimately classified in the modern system of art among the heteronomous and not the autonomous arts. The definition put forward by Lord Kames – 'gardening is not an inventive art, but an imitation of nature, or rather nature itself ornamented' – underlines this point.[57] Joachim Ritter, author of the classic philosophical study of the landscape,

55 Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism: Part I*. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/44896, accessed 19 July 2017.

56 The ambivalence of representation and reality in gardening literature is illustrated in detail in Marshall, *The Frame of Art*, 16–39. See also his earlier study: 'The Problem of the Picturesque', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35 (2002), 413–37.

57 Home, *Elements of Criticism*, II, 692.

misunderstood what Kames intended when he interpreted it, in his excursus on the landscape garden, from the point of view of German idealism:

> The innovation and qualitative difference of the landscape garden in the whole of the aesthetic mediation of nature, however, lies in the fact that in the landscape garden, nature is moulded into landscape through the mutational and formative intervention of man, and is employed to *deliver its own aesthetic presentation*. It was in this sense that Home described the landscape as 'nature itself ornamented'.[58]

Lord Kames could hardly have used this phrase 'in this sense'. In one of his approaches, the garden imitates nature. This is not the art of invention, he contends, so it is therefore an imitative art, low down in the academic hierarchy, just as landscape painting is classified at a lower level than poetic (i.e. narrative) painting.[59] In mitigation, the other possibility he sees is that the garden improves upon *found* nature by identifying its strengths and removing all obstacles that hinder its full potential.

The creators and observers of the English landscape garden, together with all the participants in the extensive discourse on the subject, took the primacy of nature over art quite seriously. Thomas Whately writes that gardening 'is as superior to landskip [sic] painting, as a reality to a representation'.[60] According to his friend, William Gilpin, works of art are less apt to spark feelings of passion than works of nature. 'The idea of the great original is so strong, that the copy must be pure, if it do not disgust.' Hipple, who cites these words, is correct in observing a paradox:

---

58 Joachim Ritter, *Subjektivität. Sechs Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main, 1974), 189. (The emphasis is mine – S. R.)

59 When referring to the equality of gardening in the style of the 'ut pictura…' theory, the analogy comparing the garden to landscape painting occurs less than that comparing it to history painting, which is of course facilitated by the fact that the classical landscape paintings taken as models were themselves intended to elevate histories set in landscapes onto a higher shelf in the academic hierarchy. This hierarchy of themes only lost its currency in the nineteenth century.

60 Whately, *Observations on Modern Gardening*, 31. This assertion, stated in the introduction, is later clarified, for a 'landskip painter' may select or 'exclude all objects which may hurt the composition', and can 'determine the season of the year, and the hour of the day, to shew his landskip in whatever light he prefers'. The works of a great master are 'fine exhibitions of nature' and can 'form a taste for beauty', but he warns us that 'their authority is not absolute; they must be used only as studies, not as models'. Ibid., 126 ff.

> a system which isolates a certain property of nature for admiration, a property defined by its excellence as a subject for art, comes at last to reject the art for the nature which was at first only its subject.[61]

But this paradox, this inner tension, is precisely the point. We must not forget that the 'landscape experience' offered by landscape gardens – as different variants of the same basic effects – was very much in line with the idea that prompted people to travel in natural landscapes, with their own unchanging properties. This desire was catered for, from the beginning of the eighteenth century, by the pedagogical institution of the Grand Tour, which took participants across the Alps, affording them a landscape experience that was almost a by-product of the journey, and later on by the picturesque tours of home-grown areas of natural beauty, where the landscape experience was the central aim (and whose main propagandists included the very same William Gilpin).

Both Addison, at the beginning of this period, and Price, at its end, felt the need to search for an answer to the paradoxical relation between art and nature:

> But tho' there are several of these wild Scenes, that are more delightful than any artificial Shows; yet we find the Works of Nature still more pleasant, the more they resemble those of Art: For in this case our Pleasure rises from a double Principle; from the Agreeableness of the Objects to the Eye, and from their Similitude to other Objects: We are pleased as well with comparing their Beauties, as with surveying them, and can represent them to our Minds, either as Copies or Originals. Hence it is that we take Delight in a Prospect which is well laid out, and diversified with Fields and Meadows, Woods and Rivers; in those accidental Landskips of Trees, Clouds and Cities, that are sometimes found in the Veins of Marble; in the curious Fret-work of Rocks and Grottos; and, in a Word, in any thing that hath such a Variety or Regularity as may seem the Effect of Design, in what we call the Works of Chance.[62]

> These are the reasons for studying copies of nature, though the original is before us, that we may not lose the benefit of what is of such great moment in all arts and sciences, the accumulated experience of

61 Hipple, *The Beautiful, The Sublime & The Picturesque*, 198 ff.

62 Addison, *The Spectator*, III, 549–50.

> past ages; and with respect to the art of improving, we may look upon pictures as a set of experiments of the different ways in which trees, buildings, water, &c. may be disposed, grouped, and accompanied, in the most beautiful and striking manner, and in every style, from the most simple and rural, to the grandest and most ornamental.[63]

At the end of Addison's more profound reflection we may identify a precursor to Kantian 'purposiveness without a purpose'. Price, meanwhile, is indebted to Hume's 'test of time'. It is worth noting that both men sought to explain how and why culture also had a role to play alongside the direct experience of nature. We could also say that in these aesthetic considerations, what must be proven is the role of art, whereas later, at least from the aesthetics of Hegel onwards, it is that of nature. Schiller, who was not as familiar with the visual arts as he was with most others, and who was quite uninformed when it came to gardening, was definitely right in noting that 'an attentive observer could not fail to notice that the delight that fills us when we look upon the spectacles of the landscape is inseparable from the notion that these are not the works of an artist but of free nature'.[64]

The primacy of nature expresses the spirit of the age, and the efforts of gardening to open up the landscape, to present itself as a landscape, and to unencumber various notions of the landscape, are all expressions of this priority. It is well known that this spirit made a significant contribution to the development of the sensory culture of the individual, and occasionally led to exaggerated enthusiasm for sentimentality that sometimes verged on caricature. At the same time, the socio-politico-cultural mission of this spirit is evinced by the fact that, all over Europe, during the eighteenth-century revolt against the throne and the altar, the French garden became a metaphor of anti-natural autocracy, as opposed to the liberal naturalness of the English garden. The two opposites proposed – and symbolised – radically different forms of living. The philosophy of liberty was even able to express itself using such images:

> Many persons, no doubt, sincerely think that human beings thus cramped and dwarfed, are as their Maker designed them to be; just as

63 Price, *Essays on the Picturesque*, 4 ff.

64 Friedrich Schiller, *Ueber den Gartenkalender auf das Jahr 1795*. http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/ueber-den-gartenkalender-auf-das-jahr-1795-3312/1, accessed 19 July 2017.

> many have thought that trees are a much finer thing when clipped into pollards, or cut out into figures of animals, than as nature made them.[65]

Aside from the pleasures of a thriving communal life and the acquisition of the sensory enrichment and social ideals that come with it, the sense of nature is also inseparable from a complex set of existential feelings that is diametrically different from this. In his *Philosophical Enquiry*, Edmund Burke described this using phrases such as sublime, self-preservation, terror and delight. Human sociability appears in landscape constructions that are historically and culturally defined, but in every landscape (all of which are, in the final analysis, indomitable) we are confronted simultaneously with the existential limitation of mankind, with the constant presence and inevitability of death, illness, and possibly pain. As defined by Endre Szécsényi:

> Beauty, refinement and civility may be interpreted in the medium of *sensus communis*; unlike the sublime experience of an infinitely expanding physical universe, which is related to the horror of existence of the solitary individual, it iterates the philosophical and existential preconditions which are not determined by the social sphere, but which nevertheless describe the outer limits of all human existence.[66]

The iteration of our existential limitation, such a frequent element of the landscape experience (and one that results in the landscape becoming a *memento mori*), may lead not only to horror, but also to rapture, and moreover not only in the (often morally ambiguous) sense of delaying or eluding direct danger, which played a certain part in Burke's conjecture. The source of this feeling may be acceptance of the natural order, as opposed to – and radically distinguished from – acceptance of the social order.

ELTE Eötvös Loránd University

65 John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (New York, Melbourne, etc., 1901), 116.

66 Endre Szécsényi, *Társiasság és tekintély. Esztétikai politika a 18. századi Angliában* [Sociability and Authority. Aesthetic Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain] (Budapest, 2002), 147.