

“A Taste Which Has Obtained So Much Among Us of Late”¹ Classical and Renaissance Themes in English Landscape Gardens

Eliza Rosebrock
Art History
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
1400 Spring Garden Street
Greensboro, North Carolina 27412 USA

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Heather Holian

Abstract

Like many other aesthetic components of culture, garden design follows fashions and trends, some of which come in multiple waves. In the Italian Renaissance, especially from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, it was fashionable both to look back to the gardens of ancient Greece and Rome and to frame the design of a garden within the perspective of Humanist thought. Gardens were thus kept in line with the overall intellectual and philosophical movements of their respective periods. In the eighteenth century, English landscape gardens and those who designed and commissioned them referenced both the classical gardens of ancient Greece and Rome and Italian Renaissance gardens, often conflating the two. This paper will examine how garden design shifted with the rest of English culture toward this renewed interest in classical themes as they became fashionable and interesting. During the eighteenth century, Britain was drawing comparisons between itself and the ancient classical world, even calling itself a new Rome. These comparisons were rooted in politics, but to remain in the realm of what was fashionable in the rest of society, garden designers and their patrons referenced the classical world, too. However, their designs were often based on their own romanticized understandings and interpretations of both Italian Renaissance and ancient gardens. To demonstrate this, I will briefly trace classical themes in garden design through time, exploring how they were used differently in Renaissance gardens and in English landscape gardens and how patrons and designers of the latter adapted the earlier Renaissance themes for their own uses. I will complete case studies of three landscape gardens – those at Chiswick House (1729), at Stourhead (1741-1780), and at Stowe House (1750s) – and examine the design of each as a whole as well as the classical and Italianate themes that were incorporated.

Keywords: Fashions, English Landscape Gardens, Eighteenth Century

1. Introduction

Like many other aesthetic components of culture, garden design follows fashions and trends, some of which come in multiple waves. In the Italian Renaissance, when the ancient classical world was being examined with renewed interest, it was fashionable both to reference the gardens of ancient Greece and Rome and to frame the design of a garden within the perspective of Humanist thought. Eighteenth-century English landscape gardens looked back to both the gardens of ancient Greece and Rome and to Italian Renaissance gardens, often conflating the two. Landscape gardens were carefully cultivated spaces that aimed to look completely natural, but everything was designed and planted with the aim of building upon and perfecting the existing landscape. Paths led visitors on circuitous walks that would open onto long views of other parts of the patron’s estate or an ‘eyecatcher’ like a replica of a Roman temple. Many patrons used these contemporary recreations of classical structures to make political statements, while others had them built to showcase their own wealth and knowledge. English gardens were thus kept in line with the overall intellectual and philosophical movements of their respective periods.

This paper will demonstrate that eighteenth-century garden design shifted along with the rest of English culture toward a renewed interest in classical themes as those themes became fashionable and interesting for the second time (the first being during the Italian Renaissance). During the eighteenth century, Britain drew comparisons between itself and the ancient classical world, even calling itself a new Rome.² These comparisons were rooted in politics, but to remain in the realm of what was fashionable in the rest of society, garden designers and their patrons likewise referenced the classical world. As the English also became enamored of Italian Renaissance gardens, which similarly relied on an adaptation of classical traditions, those designs became a second source of inspiration for English designers. Eventually, the pure elements of Greco-Roman gardens – inasmuch as they could be called pure after many centuries of translation and interpretation – and their Italian Renaissance interpretations both began to find their way into English garden design. However, the designs of the English were often based on their own romanticized understandings and versions of both Italian Renaissance and ancient gardens.

2. Greek Gardens

In the case of ancient Greek gardens, little to no physical evidence remains for archaeologists and other scholars to interpret.³ While this makes the study of Greek gardens difficult and frustrating, it is not impossible to gain a sense of what they would have been like. To understand what people in the eighteenth century would have known about the gardens of ancient Greece, it is best to look at literature by both Greek and other, later authors that discusses, describes, or references Greek gardens.⁴ However, the little archaeological evidence for Greek gardens that is known today would not have been readily available to eighteenth-century garden designers and their patrons. Any evidence of ancient Greek architecture and urban planning was much more accessible but was still not nearly as widespread as it became with the advent of modern technology. In the mid-fifth century BCE, people became to be more interested in creating public gardens.⁵ Gardens shifted from the absolutely functional use of food production to a different kind of functionality. They became places to walk, meet other people, and have conversations and discussions. Garden historian Marie Luise Gothein states emphatically that these gardens did not have any of the usual functional, agricultural uses and that these public garden spaces were the first “pleasure gardens.”⁶

There are many references to Greek gardens in literature, but the famous epic poem attributed to the Greek poet Homer, the *Odyssey*, provides an interesting view of the ideal garden as represented in a fictional story, rather than in correspondence or personal accounts. In the *Odyssey*, the poet provides fairly detailed descriptions of the gardens of Odysseus’s father Laertes on Ithaca and those of Alkinoos (alternately spelled Alcinous) on Scheria, a type after which Laertes modeled his own garden. The two gardens are quite similar in their planting: both contain fruit trees, vineyards, olive trees, and vegetable and herb gardens.⁷ In both Homeric examples, and indeed in most real and fictional gardens in ancient Greece, a garden was representative of one’s control over nature and the harnessing of its power, an understanding that carried through to Roman, Italian Renaissance, and English landscape gardens many centuries later, albeit in different ways. In the case of the garden of Alkinoos on Scheria – and in the garden on Ithaca, since it was modeled after that of Alkinoos – this ordering of nature was also representative of control over Alkinoos’s household and polis.⁸ His garden is more complete than that of Laertes and more orderly, as well.⁹ This may be due to the fact that Alkinoos and his garden have one foot in the world of the gods and the other in the mortal world, whereas Laertes and his garden are entirely mortal; Laertes and Odysseus can follow Alkinoos’s model for both a polis and a garden, but they will always be anchored entirely in the mortal world.¹⁰ In a successful polis, nature was meant to serve mankind, rather than the populace being largely at the mercy of the natural world.¹¹ By only including plants that are useful and by choosing not to describe any ornamental plants that do not have an obvious use, the poet showed the primary function of a garden space: to be productive and provide for those depending on it.¹² They were not “pleasure gardens” but spaces that were explicitly useful in their function.¹³

In the end, Homer’s text and others, whether fiction or nonfiction, do not provide a lot of concrete information about the actual gardening traditions of ancient Greece, but they do provide an idea of the ideal forms nature could take when controlled by man. These idealized descriptions were important to later garden designers— especially in the Italian Renaissance – who were looking back to antiquity for inspiration. It was the accounts of perfectly controlled, ordered nature that most aligned with their own ideas of how a garden should be laid out. Later still, in the eighteenth century, English landscape gardens took these texts and stories and used their descriptions of garden spaces for their own purposes and showing their control of nature by designing spaces that looked as natural as possible.

2.1 Roman Gardens

As with Greek gardens, there are plenty of literary sources about the gardens of ancient Rome, but there is a wider variety in the type of texts. Several were well-known in Italy during the Renaissance and in England during the eighteenth century and would have been read and referenced by those designing and commissioning gardens. Perhaps the most influential were two letters written by Pliny the Younger between 100 and 105 C.E. Here, and in considerable detail, he describes two of his own country villas, one in Tuscany and the other in Laurentum. The letters describe the relationships between the villa and the gardens, the positions of paths, arbors, and other garden features, and the importance of long views over the adjacent landscape.¹⁴ The letters include accounts of the views of both villa gardens, but they were much more valuable for their almost list-like descriptions of all the components of the gardens themselves.¹⁵ Pliny's Tuscan villa, described in greater detail by the Roman author, was at the center of a functional agricultural estate.¹⁶ He tells the reader that the streams nearby were numerous enough to support many waterworks, such as fountains, and describes the frescoes, which were a common feature in Roma villas and gardens.¹⁷ He mentions many plant species, including violets, box, rosemary, mulberries, and figs;¹⁸ oriental plane trees, ivy and other vines, bay laurel, cypress, and fruit trees; and his account of the hippodrome in the garden at his Tuscan villa gives perhaps the most detailed description of the plants in a Roman garden known to date, as well as the layout of the plants listed above.¹⁹

More generally, Pliny's descriptions tell readers of some of the most common and important elements of typical Roman villa gardens. Walks and paths were a favorite part of the garden because they allowed both for exercise and for the admiration of one's own work at improving nature, since there was such an appreciation for nature that had been enhanced by man at this time.²⁰ This philosophy and way of understanding man's interaction with nature when designing a garden carried all the way through the Renaissance in Italy and into eighteenth-century England. The paths in larger Roman gardens usually made a circuit around the garden itself, a concept that was used on a much larger scale in English landscape gardens.²¹ He also mentions terraces, which later became an essential part of Renaissance gardens in Italy, and an orchard planted to look like an uncultivated landscape that stood in contrast with the more formal design of the rest of the garden.²² As one moved further out from the villa, the design of the garden began to blend with the untouched landscape bordering it so that it became unclear where the garden ended and wild nature began.²³ This concept makes several appearances later on in garden design, namely in the part of the garden that Italian Renaissance gardeners called the bosco and in the whole of landscape gardens several centuries after that. It can also be compared to the sacred groves described by Greek authors like Homer, and although sacred groves had a different function than Roman villa gardens, the idea of wild spaces within and around cultivated ones seems to be consistent.

Throughout his extensive descriptions, Pliny constantly returns to the ways in which the contributions of both man and nature were working together to create his gardens.²⁴ By not only showing but emphasizing nature's own, very active hand in the design of gardens, Pliny the Younger's letters touched upon a theme that would reoccur in both Italian Renaissance and English landscape gardens centuries later, such as the Villa d'Este at Tivoli and Stowe in Buckinghamshire. The descriptions in these two letters gave later readers what they thought was a complete picture of an ancient Roman garden on which they could base reconstructions of ancient gardens and from which they could draw inspiration.²⁵

2.2 Italian Renaissance Gardens

An Italian Renaissance garden is something many men would have seen while on The Grand Tour in Europe, including William Kent, one of the designers of the landscape gardens at Stowe in Buckinghamshire, England.²⁶ The original purpose of the gardens attached to Italian villas was a purely functional one, but during the Italian Renaissance, they came to have aesthetic values, too. During the Italian Renaissance, nature was understood in terms of how the natural world could be useful to humans. This view often manifested itself in the use of plants and animals for food and medicine, but art and nature were very frequently paired as concepts that complimented and exaggerated each other.²⁷ Gardens achieved the perfect synthesis of these two ideas, allowing men to control and manipulate nature for the sake of art. However, even in the more aesthetically-based gardens, some, if not all, plants present would have had a use beyond their visual beauty.²⁸ In this period, knowledge of the natural world was expanding at a dramatic rate as new discoveries were made in new lands, and as a result, nature was being studied more and more intensely than before.

Italian Renaissance gardens were frequently divided into several terraces, and terraces were often used to separate the different types of plants, especially if the villa was built on the side of a steep hill, which was often the case.²⁹ There is

not a lot of specific information on exactly what each of the terraces typically contained, but the layout of gardens was generally divided into different types of plants. The top terrace usually contained the bosco, a wooded area that looked like a completely natural wilderness but was actually completely man-made and carefully controlled to look that way.³⁰ Fruit trees were kept out of these woods and in their own section of a garden. The third section contained flowers, herbs, and simples.

At first glance, the bosco does not appear to follow the usual rules applied to garden design during the Italian Renaissance. It does not have the linear, geometrical layout of the rest of the garden, but if examined closely, it actually follows Humanist philosophy perfectly. What looks like an untouched, wild place was actually carefully laid out and planted precisely to trick the viewer into believing that man had not interfered with nature here. This was a demonstration of ultimate control over the natural world, an absolute perfection of nature in which the hand of man was present but could not be seen. It also happens to be done along the same line of thinking that English landscape garden designers followed in the eighteenth century. Just like the bosco, landscape gardens were very carefully constructed to appear as natural as possible while still taking into account a variety of important elements that its designers and patrons felt were essential to creating a beautiful garden space.

As the entire Italian Renaissance was based on the revival of ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, literature, art, and architecture, it stands to reason that gardens followed suit. Educated Renaissance men read many of the same ancient texts that their eighteenth-century English counterparts so frequently referenced, but rather than trying to recreate the descriptions they read, they largely borrowed certain ideas, elements, and plants from the writings of classical authors and incorporated them with their own expanding, modern knowledge.

2.3 English Landscape Gardens

English landscape gardens had their beginning as a modification of the gardens that came before them, namely the French or Baroque style that was in fashion during the seventeenth century. In the early eighteenth century, many – not just garden designers or those who employed them – were beginning to feel that some of the more formal elements of English Baroque gardens, such as the French-style parterre and elaborate topiary, did not look natural.³¹ These gardens very much followed the model of gardens on the European continent, which were designed to have a long view down the middle of the garden and geometrical symmetry on each side of the vista; everything revolved around symmetry, order, and geometry.³² The advent of eighteenth-century Romanticism came in the publication of Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury's, *The Moralists* (1709).³³ As this movement gained more interest and followers, larger numbers of people began to favor what they saw as true, pure nature over any art or interference by man, and the idea of a 'wilderness' began to be considered with greater interest.³⁴

This less formal way of thinking about landscapes and gardens was an enormous change from what was in fashion before, and it coincided with a shift in the English political system. England was beginning to move towards democracy and a reduction in the monarch's ruling power. This meant that the influence of the English court declined significantly, causing wealthy and prominent landowners to spend more time at their own country estates, which in turn caused a rapid increase and interest in building their houses and developing their land, especially by means of garden design.³⁵ Gardening was becoming more competitive than ever before as garden owners made bids to surpass one another and their gardens and homes were in a constant of modification as contemporary fashions and tastes evolved.³⁶ However, it wasn't until after about 1730 that 'landscape' as an idea was appreciated for more than just its literary and philosophical meanings.³⁷ Garden designers and their patrons relied heavily on inspiration from both classical antiquity and the image of Italian landscapes they had constructed based on what they had read and seen in their travels, but another crucial inspiration was the idealized Italian landscapes depicted in the paintings of artists such as Gaspard Dughet, Nicolas Poussin, Claude Lorrain, Jan Frans van Bloeman (nicknamed L'Orizzonte), and Hendrik Frans van Lint, which were especially influential when patrons and designers were thinking about the kinds of views they wanted in their gardens.³⁸ Their romanticized depictions of Italian scenery was an important touchstone in the first half of the eighteenth century, and it provided inspiration and sometimes even views that were recreated in eighteenth-century landscape gardens.³⁹

Within eighteenth-century landscape garden design, there was an overarching idea of the Garden versus Nature. The border between the two was very often blurred as philosophies governing ancient classical gardens and Italian Renaissance gardens were combined: the classical understanding of nature as written about by Greek and Roman authors and the Italian Renaissance understanding of man's control and organization of nature. During the first half of the eighteenth century, several key elements could be picked out as essential to the design of a landscape garden: views and lines of sight through different parts of the garden; water in either a river or a lake, whether natural or constructed; a large expanse of land that was carefully planned to have groves or trees and clumps of other plants that followed the

contours of the land in exactly the right places; architectural features scattered throughout the garden, which were often called ‘eyecatchers’ or ‘fabriques;’ and bridges, especially those following the Palladian style.⁴⁰ All of these elements, along with the renewed interest in the classical world, were in keeping with the larger trends of what was currently fashionable in society, and their inclusion allowed both the landscape gardens’ designers and owners to display their knowledge of those trends.

3. Stowe, Buckinghamshire

The art and architecture of ancient Greece and Rome was an enormous inspiration and model for the eighteenth century, and Neoclassical art and architecture sought to emulate it. Neoclassicism showed itself very clearly in the country homes of the aristocracy and the ideals behind the designs of their extensive gardens. The gardens at Stowe House in Buckinghamshire are one of the most famous examples of this.

Landscape gardens in eighteenth-century England arose gradually and through the work of several prominent garden designers over the course of the century, and Stowe was no exception. The estate had been in the Temple family since 1589, when John Temple purchased the existing house and lands attached to it, and the family began to expand the size of their land holdings soon after taking ownership.⁴¹ Several small villages in the surrounding area were swallowed up in this expansion.⁴² In 1653, Sir Richard Temple, 3rd Baronet, inherited Stowe after the death of his father, and he soon began construction on a larger, more impressive house, which was completed in 1683, and to work on further developing the gardens.⁴³ His son, Richard Temple, inherited the estate in 1697, was given the title of Baron Cobham in 1713, and was made Viscount Cobham four years later.⁴⁴ He began his own program of remodeling and redesigning in the gardens, bringing in Charles Bridgeman and Sir John Vanbrugh, a garden designer and an architect, respectively. The initial enhancements they made to the gardens on the South Front were more formal ones and included the planting of trees in long, straight avenues and the building of several ponds in geometric shapes, which were both typical features of early eighteenth-century gardens.⁴⁵

The landscape garden at Stowe was the only garden on which Charles Bridgeman, William Kent, and Lancelot “Capability” Brown all worked, a significant matter because these three men are seen as some of the giants of garden design during this period. However, they were not all working at Stowe at the same time, and their distinctive styles and contributions represent the changing fashions of garden design during the first half of the eighteenth century in England. After nearly a century of work, through which tastes and fashions shifted significantly, the garden was ultimately a blend of Bridgeman’s original formal, geometrical design and the Romantic, pictorial style used by Kent and Brown.⁴⁶

3.1. Bridgeman

Bridgeman was probably the last of England’s best-known gardeners to work in a predominantly French style;⁴⁷ he kept formal design elements such as parterres and bassins that were laid out to line up with the garden’s geometric plan, but he also introduced several new elements, like rides – “avenues cut through woods to be ridden at a gallop” – as well as walking paths that cleverly opened onto perfectly constructed views, which became one of the key components of a landscape garden.⁴⁸ He also introduced the ha-ha, a sort of retaining wall that was sunk down into a ditch to provide a physical barrier between two areas without interrupting the view – this also became an essential part of a landscape garden’s design.⁴⁹ When combined with Bridgeman’s growing interest in the history, mythology, and literature of classical antiquity, his awareness of views, lines of sight, and the positions of paths and architectural features laid the foundation on which the design of English landscape gardens was built.⁵⁰ Charles Bridgeman paved the way for the next generation of gardeners, those who would work with the existing landscape and alternately manipulate and augment it.

Stowe was not the first garden Bridgeman designed, but it was there that he reached the greatest heights of his career.⁵¹ When Lord Cobham commissioned him to reimagine and expand the gardens, Bridgeman drew out a bird’s-eye view of the design, which noted a variety of features, both natural and architectural. Among these were walks, a parterre with pruned hedges on either side, statues, fountains, lakes, canals, obelisks, and temples.⁵² This early plan covered the design of the western part of the estate but did not yet include any design for the east side.⁵³ The bird’s-eye view allowed Cobham to see how Bridgeman was both working with the natural features of the land and superimposing patterns and geometry on top of it.⁵⁴ The design of the west side was centered on the Rotunda, a point at which multiple lines of sight met and crossed one another. Once he had established its position, Bridgeman had paths laid that all led to the Rotunda, solidifying the design and structure of the garden as a whole.⁵⁵ Much like in Italian Renaissance gardens, Bridgeman was overlaying geometry as devised by man onto the natural world, but he wasn’t going so far as to divide Stowe’s gardens into ordered and disordered sections, like the Renaissance bosco. Rather, he “exploited the existing features and

lie of the land” as part of his design, rather than just working with the land only when necessary, as with the terraces so common in Italian Renaissance gardens.⁵⁶ With Vanbrugh’s death in March of 1726 and his replacement by James Gibbs as architect, Bridgeman began to expand the garden’s design and to begin work on the eastern side of the estate, following Lord Cobham’s orders.⁵⁷ Under Bridgeman, the ha-ha first began to be used to provide uninterrupted views while maintaining barriers between different sections of the garden. Cobham, being a gentleman of society, was always aware of how tastes were changing; when he ordered ha-has put in, he was simply following Joseph Addison’s advice in *The Spectator*, the daily journal that Addison started with Richard Steele:⁵⁸ “to...‘make a pretty Landskip of his own Possessions’” by manipulating what was already present.⁵⁹

In the following decade, Bridgeman and Gibbs – and, beginning in 1730, Kent – worked to meet Lord Cobham’s ambitious expectations, and it appears they were doing so because in 1732, Gilbert West, a nephew of Cobham’s, wrote a very detailed and descriptive poem praising Stowe’s gardens; this is something Cobham almost certainly would not have allowed if sufficient progress had not been made.⁶⁰ However, Charles Bridgeman’s health was beginning to fail by the mid-1730s, and dropsy kept him from doing any work that was even slightly physically demanding.⁶¹ Bridgeman died on July 19, 1738, and even if he did not live to see Stowe’s gardens at their most famous, he had found a way of ensuring that his work would endure.⁶² Years before his death, he had commissioned the publication of a book of engravings that detailed the plan and various views and architectural features of Stowe’s gardens.⁶³ When Bridgeman died in 1738, the book was ready to go to press;⁶⁴ *Views of Stowe*, which contained engravings by Jacques Rigaud and Bernard Baron of a bird’s-eye-view plan and fifteen views of different parts of the garden, was published in 1739 by Bridgeman’s widow, Sarah.⁶⁵ Since his gardens were almost completely remodeled by William Kent about a decade later, they do not survive outside these images.⁶⁶ The idea of controlling and perfecting nature was beginning to take on a different meaning, and Bridgeman’s style can be seen as a transitional one, halfway between the formality left over from Baroque and Renaissance gardens and the loose, natural style of eighteenth-century English landscape gardens.

3.2. Kent

Like James Gibbs and Sir John Vanbrugh before him, William Kent was an architect, but his background was in painting. With his arrival to Stowe came a more pictorial style combined with practical designs that allowed him to “plant [the] pictures” he had envisaged.⁶⁷ Alongside the writings of the poet Alexander Pope, which often contained Pope’s own theories about garden design, Kent’s knowledge of how to compose an image introduced a more painterly landscape garden style and did so to resounding support from the fashionable elite.⁶⁸ It is likely that Kent’s interest in both gardens and classical architecture and imagery came from the time he spent in Rome learning to paint.⁶⁹ In Italy, he would have seen Italian gardens and been aware of the idealized paintings of Italian landscapes and cityscapes by Claude Lorraine, Gaspard Dughet, and others from whom he later drew inspiration for his designs.⁷⁰ By the time he began his work at Stowe, garden design was generally understood to be “a blending of nature, poetry, and painting,” a description that Kent’s designs followed perfectly.⁷¹

Kent came to Stowe as architect in 1730, soon after which he subsequently took over some of Charles Bridgeman’s work and eventually replaced him as head garden designer by around 1735.⁷² After assuming the role of head gardener at Stowe, Kent solidified many of the core components of English landscape gardens. In addition to the projects Lord Cobham assigned specifically to him, after Bridgeman’s death, Kent was also responsible for applying a more pictorial methodology and softening and extending the more rigid, formal design by Bridgeman, a process that was carried on by the man named Lancelot Brown, who was, at the time, Kent’s young assistant and student.⁷³ However, Kent’s most significant contribution to the gardens at Stowe was the design of the Elysian Fields. In 1730, Cobham commissioned Kent to remodel one part of the estate as the Elysian Fields, a part of the underworld to which virtuous and heroic souls were sent in classical mythology.⁷⁴ As indicated in the 1739 publication of Bridgeman’s design, this part of the garden was profoundly different from the rest.⁷⁵ It was radically different from Bridgeman’s style and conventions⁷⁶ and marked a turning point away from the more formal and severe structure seen in earlier examples of landscape gardens.⁷⁷ Joseph Spence remarked that of everything on Lord Cobham’s estate, it was “‘the Elysian Fields that is the painting part of his gardens,’”⁷⁸ a comment which very much highlights Kent’s painterly approach to garden design. Kent found inspiration in the work of the painters Lorraine, Van Lint, Poussin, L’Orizzonte, and Dughet, masters of depicting an idealized Italian landscape, for the type of landscape he wanted to create at Stowe.⁷⁹

There are many architectural features in this part of the garden, and all of them were designed by Kent. They include the Temple of British Worthies, the Temples of Ancient and Modern Virtues, and the Grotto and Shell Temples.⁸⁰ These features were ‘eyecatchers,’ a crucial part of the concept of views and lines of sight that Bridgeman had established, and the Temple of Ancient Virtue and Temple of British Worthies were built by Kent on either end of the Elysian Fields to serve exactly that purpose. In addition to being perfect examples of one of the key components of a landscape garden,

many of these buildings could be read as political statements. By commissioning buildings that alluded to classical antiquity, Cobham was intent on emphasizing the differences between the morality of ancient Roman government and what Cobham and the other Whigs saw as corruption of the administration headed by Sir Robert Walpole at this point in the eighteenth century.⁸¹ The Temple of Ancient Virtue was a simple domed rotunda, modeled after ancient Roman temples, pristine and whole; the nearby Temple of Modern Virtue, on the other hand, was a “mock ruin,” symbolizing the current government’s immorality.⁸² Opposite these, the Temple of British Worthies celebrated patriot Englishmen and -women, while also displaying Lord Cobham’s own nationalist political leanings.⁸³ All of these buildings were built in the Palladian architectural style, a classicizing style that was just beginning to come into fashion.⁸⁴

3.3. Brown

William Kent died in 1748 after a decline in health and multiple years of physical ailments that prevented him from working the way he once did, but by this point, his assistant had been in charge of the gardens’ design for several years.⁸⁵ While Kent was one of the gardeners who John Dixon Hunt called “talented amateurs” who worked with “the noble gardening lords like...Cobham,” Hunt considered Kent’s successor at Stowe a rising professional garden designer.⁸⁶ This man, of course, was Lancelot “Capability” Brown, so-called because of his skill and efficiency in designing gardens.⁸⁷ He began his gardening career under Kent’s tutelage in 1741 and became Stowe’s master gardener around 1744.⁸⁸ Brown would have been in charge of finishing Kent’s designs and making his own modifications until 1751, when he left Stowe to start his own garden design practice in Hammersmith.⁸⁹

Brown followed in his mentor’s footsteps by removing and redesigning some of the last remnants of Bridgeman’s more formal design so that the garden appeared more naturalistic and blended better with the existing landscape. In keeping with the Palladian style used by Kent in many of his architectural features, Brown added a Palladian bridge around 1744 as both an eyecatcher and a means of exploring the landscape and admiring the expanses of water.⁹⁰ One place where it is clearest that he broke with Kent’s style was in his use of water, manipulating it to look far more natural than it had previously.⁹¹ This manipulation was never a minor feat. The projects he completed at Stowe and other gardens were often monumental in the amount of labor required to redirect a river or change the shape of a lake. He frequently wiped any remaining formal layouts away completely, and he had few qualms about removing “[v]alleys, hills, and even whole villages” if it meant that he would have more room to execute his own ambitious designs.⁹² These ‘schemes’ of his may have been fed by what one author called his “destructive tendencies,” but Brown’s style of gardening was at the height of fashion in England in the middle of the eighteenth century.⁹³ Enormous numbers of men may have been required to complete his orders of levelling the landscape and digging out new water features, such as lakes, but many patrons, of whom Cobham was the first, requested his skills.⁹⁴ Brown was made Royal Gardener under King George III, and this solidified his reputation; by this time, he had firmly established the English landscape garden style, and examples of his work appeared throughout England with increasing frequency.⁹⁵

Brown was Cobham’s “right-hand man” for the task of designing the Grecian Valley at Stowe,⁹⁶ which was laid out in an L-shaped ‘valley’ in the northeastern part of the estate.⁹⁷ It was the first time Brown was able to work in the style of landscaping that later made him so famous and gave him an opportunity to step away from simply executing Kent-style designs.⁹⁸ He worked very closely with Cobham on this project, took instructions directly from Cobham himself, and his opinions and suggestions may have even been heard and taken into account by his patron.⁹⁹ The Grecian Valley ended up including both the sort of architectural eyecatchers for which Kent was so well known and the type of landscaping that would eventually make Brown such a sought-after designer. It had trees planted in long belts, which gave way to sweeping lawns that ended at the shore of a small lake, and would originally have had well-shaded walks, clumps of trees, and other plants (these are no longer in existence).¹⁰⁰ This was a place in which a carefully constructed, perfect landscape began to take precedence over the temples and other architectural features, which is why the Grecian Valley was deemed Brown’s most innovative work at Stowe.¹⁰¹ Somewhat like his mentor Kent, Brown had a kind of painterly approach to his designs. He understood what was needed to augment a landscape’s existing natural features and beauty, and he knew that in some places, trees would have to be removed and planted elsewhere to thin out certain sections. It seems Brown knew that landscapes could be controlled and composed like paintings in order to achieve their ideal state. Nature could be perfected, but it wouldn’t be done by imposing geometric forms onto a wilderness as in the Italian Renaissance; rather, it would be done by shaping and manipulating it into an image of the classical ideals and beauty that Cobham and other members of the English aristocracy were so aware of during the eighteenth century.”¹⁰²

4. Conclusion

By the time Brown departed in 1751, Stowe was famous even among Cobham and his inheritor, Richard Grenville's, contemporaries, attracting royal visitors and others who numbered among Europe's nobility and inspiring numerous guidebooks to be written about its grounds.¹⁰³ From Bridgeman and Kent's times until Brown's arrival, the gardens at Stowe were thought to be the epitome of good taste in gardening, and Brown's work boosted their renown even further.¹⁰⁴ During the evolution of the gardens, the Italian Renaissance idea of man's control over nature and the perfection of a garden's natural appearance, as well as the classical history and culture to which they were alluding, were in constant dialogue with the shifting fashions of garden design.

Throughout the long eighteenth century, gardens changed constantly. New garden designers with grand ideas of expansive landscapes rose to take the places of those working in a formal, geometric style. These changes were gradual, but the difference from the beginning to the end of the century was dramatic. Gone were the formal parterres and straight paths that followed orderly plans and patterns. In their places stood scattered groves of trees and rambling walks around whose corners a visitor might find a panoramic view of his host's estate or what appeared to be an ancient Roman temple. Rivers and ponds lent interesting naturalistic features to a landscape so carefully planned and executed that the influence of man could scarcely be seen. Through all of these changes, the fascination of English designers and patrons with the ancient classical world did not waver. The political and social spheres of the English elite were rife with references to classical civilization, and since so many of those aristocrats owned estates with extensive land holdings, it is only natural that they would have had such fashionable themes incorporated into their gardens. Scholars don't always have the original plans for eighteenth-century gardens' designs and the original plantings very rarely remain – Charles Bridgeman's decision to hire engravers to preserve his work was fairly unusual – but gardens were never meant to be static. It is in their nature to change, whether it is with the seasons, with the replacement of old plants by new ones, with the work of one designer overwriting another, or with the tastes and fashions of those funding their work.

5. Acknowledgements

The author wishes to express her sincere gratitude to Dr. Heather Holian, UNCG Department of Art (Art History), without whose guidance and encouragement she would not have completed this project, and to this paper's anonymous reviewer. Both have provided invaluable assistance to me in furthering this work and my future in academics.

6. References

1 Joseph Spence, quoted in John Dixon Hunt, *Garden and Grove: The Italian Renaissance Garden in the English Imagination: 1600-1750* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 12.

2 James William Johnson, *Formation of English Neo-Classical Thought*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 93, accessed February 17, 2020, <https://doi-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.2307/j.ctt183pskd>.

3 Brunilde Sismondo, "Greek Antecedents of Garden Sculpture," in *Ancient Roman Gardens*, ed. Elisabeth B. Macdougall and Wilhelmina F. Jashemski, (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Trustees for Harvard University, 1981), 9.

4 Sismondo, "Greek Antecedents," 9.

5 Marie Luise Gothein, *A History of Garden Art, Volume 1*, ed. Walter P. Wright, trans. Mrs. Archer-Hind (London & Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons Limited/New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Ltd., 1928), 65.

6 Gothein, *A History of Garden Art, Vol. 1*, 70.

7 Annette Lucia Giesecke, *The Epic City: Urbanism, Utopia, and the Garden in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Washington: Center for Hellenic Studies Trustees for Harvard University, 2007), 38.

8 Giesecke, *The Epic City*, 40.

9 Giesecke, *The Epic City*, 38.

10 Giesecke, *The Epic City*, 37.

11 Giesecke, *The Epic City*, 37.

12 Gothein, *A History of Garden Art, Vol. 1*, 55.

13 Giesecke, *The Epic City*, 38.

-
- 14 John Dixon Hunt, *Garden and Grove: The Italian Renaissance Garden in the English Imagination: 1600-1750* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 12.
- 15 Patrick Bowe, *Gardens of the Roman World* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2004), 103-105.
- 16 Bowe, *Gardens of the Roman World*, 102.
- 17 Hunt, *Garden and Grove*, 12.
- 18 Bowe, *Gardens of the Roman World*, 22, 28.
- 19 Bowe, *Gardens of the Roman World*, 43-44.
- 20 Bowe, *Gardens of the Roman World*, 101.
- 21 Bowe, *Gardens of the Roman World*, 28.
- 22 Bowe, *Gardens of the Roman World*, 18.
- 23 Bowe, *Gardens of the Roman World*, 104-105.
- 24 Hunt, *Garden and Grove*, 12.
- 25 Hunt, *Garden and Grove*, 12.
- 26 Germain Bazin, *Paradeisos: The Art of the Garden* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990), 199.
- 27 Lazzaro, *The Italian Renaissance Garden*, 8.
- 28 Lazzaro, *The Italian Renaissance Garden*, 12.
- 29 Lazzaro, *The Italian Renaissance Garden*, 22.
- 30 Lazzaro, *The Italian Renaissance Garden*, 21-22.
- 31 Bazin, *Paradeisos*, 194.
- 32 Bazin, *Paradeisos*, 193.
- 33 Christopher Hussey, *English Gardens and Landscapes: 1700-1750* (London: Country Life Limited, 1967), 28.
- 34 Hussey, *English Gardens and Landscapes*, 28.
- 35 Bazin, *Paradeisos*, 193.
- 36 Bazin, *Paradeisos*, 193.
- 37 Hussey, *English Gardens and Landscapes*, 31.
- 38 Bazin, *Paradeisos*, 194.
- 39 Hussey, *English Gardens and Landscapes*, 27.
- 40 James Stevens Curl, *A Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture*, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), s.v. "landscape garden," 428-430.
- 41 "History of Stowe," National Trust, National Trust, July 12, 2016, accessed February 26, 2020, <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/stowe/features/history-of-stowe>.
- 42 "History of Stowe," accessed February 26, 2020, <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/stowe/features/history-of-stowe>.
- 43 "History of Stowe," accessed February 26, 2020, <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/stowe/features/history-of-stowe>.
- 44 "History of Stowe," accessed February 26, 2020, <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/stowe/features/history-of-stowe>.
- 45 "History of Stowe," accessed February 26, 2020, <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/stowe/features/history-of-stowe>.
- 46 Hussey, *English Gardens and Landscapes*, 90.
- 47 Bazin, *Paradeisos*, 194.
- 48 Filippo Pizzoni, *The Garden: A History in Landscape and Art* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1999), 152.
- 49 Pizzoni, *The Garden*, 152.
- 50 Pizzoni, *The Garden*, 152.
- 51 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 105.
- 52 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 110.
- 53 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 110.
- 54 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 110.
- 55 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 110.
- 56 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 110.
- 57 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 112.
- 58 "Joseph Addison & Richard Steele," *The Open Anthology of Literature in English*, accessed April 27, 2020, virginia-anthology.org/joseph-addison-and-richard-steele/.
- 59 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 119.
- 60 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 113.
- 61 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 123.

-
- 62 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 41.
63 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 114.
64 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 115.
65 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 113.
66 Filippo Pizzoni, *The Garden*, 152.
67 Hussey, *English Gardens and Landscapes*, 30.
68 Hussey, *English Gardens and Landscapes*, 40.
69 Hussey, *English Gardens and Landscapes*, 44.
70 Bazin, *Paradeisos*, 194.
71 Günter Mader and Laila Neubert-Mader, *The English Formal Garden: Five Centuries of Design* (New York: Rizzoli, 1997), 22.
72 Hussey, *English Gardens and Landscapes*, 92.
73 Hussey, *English Gardens and Landscapes*, 92, 47-48.
74 Bazin, *Paradeisos*, 200.
75 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 121.
76 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 120.
77 Bazin, *Paradeisos*, 200.
78 Quoted in Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 121.
79 Bazin, *Paradeisos*, 194.
80 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 121.
81 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 122.
82 Gervase Jackson-Stops and James Pipkin, *The Country House Garden: A Grand Tour* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1987), 190.
83 Jackson-Stops and Pipkin, *The Country House Garden*, 190.
84 Jackson-Stops and Pipkin, *The Country House Garden*, 198.
85 Hussey, *English Gardens and Landscapes*, 48.
86 John Dixon Hunt, *Gardens and the Picturesque: Studies in the History of Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 140.
87 Bazin, *Paradeisos*, 193.
88 Bazin, *Paradeisos*, 193; Hussey, *English Gardens and Landscapes*, 107.
89 Bazin, *Paradeisos*, 193.
90 Jackson-Stops and Pipkin, *The Country House Garden*, 154.
91 Mader and Neubert-Mader, *The English Formal Garden*, 22.
92 Bazin, *Paradeisos*, 193.
93 Jackson-Stops and Pipkin, *The Country House Garden*, 207.
94 Jackson-Stops and Pipkin, *The Country House Garden*, 17.
95 Mader and Neubert-Mader, *The English Formal Garden*, 22.
96 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 124.
97 Dorothy Stroud, *Capability Brown* (London: Country Life Ltd., 1950), 31-32.
98 Thomas Hinde, *Capability Brown: The Story of a Master Gardener* (London: Century Hutchinson, Ltd., 1986), 26.
99 Hinde, *Capability Brown*, 26-27.
100 Hinde, *Capability Brown*, 27.
101 Stroud, *Capability Brown*, 31.
102 Hussey, *English Gardens and Landscapes*, 107.
103 Willis, *Charles Bridgeman*, 106.
104 Hinde, *Capability Brown*, 20.