Production, power and the 'natural': explaining the differences between English and American gardens in the eighteenth century

It is not easy to compare and contrast the development of garden design in America and England during the long eighteenth century. Few if any scholars understand equally well the history of designed landscapes on both sides of the Atlantic, and much of the latest research in England is difficult to access from the States, and *vice versa*. Such difficulties are compounded by the fact that we remain, as ever, divided by a common language, and use terms like 'baroque' or 'picturesque' in subtly, occasionally radically, different ways. Few British garden historians would thus describe the kinds of landscapes designed by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown as 'picturesque', not least because his style was so savagely attacked by Picturesque theorists Richard Payne Knight and Uvedale Price; but 'naturalistic' parklands are often so described by American writers. Yet at the same time British and American scholars are arguably united in an easy acceptance, and casual use, of terms like 'landscape garden' and, in particular, 'nature' and 'natural' – the latter a dangerous practise given that nature, as Raymond Williams famously observed, is the "most complex word in our language".[1]

Any attempt to compare the development of 'English' and 'American' gardens presupposes, moreover, that each had a relatively unitary and definable character. But in the eighteenth century, large areas of north America were, of course, occupied by the French and the Spanish, with their own particular landscaping traditions, while the indigenous populations were themselves involved in gardening activities, if largely of a productive rather than ornamental character. In this short essay I will follow what appears to be standard practise, and talk principally about the eastern seaboard and English settled areas, but even

within these there was much variation in the amount of space available for garden-making, in lifestyles, and much else. Such factors underlie the very real differences exhibited by the design and planting of urban gardens in a place like Annapolis, and those associated with plantations in Virginia or Carolina. Yet we should also note that much the same was true on the other side of the Atlantic. The history of British gardens is often told in excessively normative terms, with historians suggesting, or implying, that all members of the population involved in the creation of designed landscapes were doing much the same thing, at much the same time. In reality, there were, in all periods, major differences between rural and urban gardens, and between those of the wealthy and less wealthy – as well as between different parts of England, and different regions of Britain.[2] In short, comparing the stylistic development of gardens on opposite sides of the Atlantic is more complex than might first appear, and is an endeavour fraught with difficulties.

In broad terms, the key difference between the two traditions usually perceived is that American gardens were in some sense old-fashioned: they lagged behind English designs by anything from two to five decades or, to put it another way, their owners and designers hung on to old models of formal, geometric design, and resisted or rejected the fashion for serpentine, irregular and 'natural' forms which developed in England during the early and middle decades of the eighteenth century.[3] All this rather assumes that English gardens were in some sense a benchmark against which those found elsewhere, at least in the English-speaking world, are to be measured. It also perhaps implies a steady and comprehensible progression in garden design, perhaps a linear path, which America *could* lag behind. But before looking in more detail at the chronologies of English and American gardens, it is useful to consider for a moment the influences that, in more general terms, shape gardens and designed landscapes. While these include soils, topography and climate, and the kinds of

plant materials that will thrive or are available in any locality – all important subjects – I will here concentrate on just two, more social and cultural in character.

The first is the spread of ideas and models from elsewhere, or 'diffusion' in old-fashioned archaeological terms. Much conventional garden history is written in a way that highlights the transmission of styles and ideas from one country or geographical area to another. Thus French and Dutch concepts and models, and at times Italian ones, were taken up and then mixed, fused and adapted, in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England.[4] Fashions in garden design, together with aspects of architectural style and other forms of material culture, were copied by elites in one country from those in another partly to demonstrate status through accessing the novel and exotic, and partly because such individuals were exposed to new ideas through foreign marriage, travel or via published texts and illustrations. Contact and proximity will not, however, *necessarily* engender stylistic similarities. The styles of French and English gardens thus diverged significantly in the middle decades of the eighteenth century. On the other hand, a lack of contact between two regions or societies will perhaps encourage a degree of divergence in stylistic development, for it is impossible to emulate something you have never seen.

As the growing separation of French and English garden styles after *c.*1710 demonstrates, particular forms of landscape design will not be adopted if they appear alien to the receiving area, or are otherwise unattractive. And this brings us to the second key influence: the way that gardens and landscapes are shaped by lifestyles, ideologies, use, and social attitudes. Gardens must express the beliefs, conscious or unconscious, of their owners, if not those of their creators; and they must reflect the ways in which they live their lives, in terms of practical food production, recreation, and modes of interaction with family, friends and neighbours. Such factors will lead to the acceptance or rejection, or amendment, of ideas

coming from elsewhere, but they will also of themselves engender new forms and styles, which might then be exported to other geographical areas to which they are suited.

This interaction between local social, economic and ideological imperatives, and patterns of wider stylistic influence and exchange, becomes important when we come to examine eighteenth-century American gardens. Mark Leone's excellent, subtle interpretation of the garden created by William Paca at Annapolis in the 1760s, as a way of establishing and maintaining social control, is a model of archaeological analysis, widely read and rightly influential.[5] But we might also see the Paca garden, more simply, as an attempt to copy designs published by English writers like Batty Langley or Stephen Switzer, whose texts were widely circulated on the eastern seaboard.[6] This does not negate Leone's argument, for we might say that these designs provided an appropriate model for the purpose at hand, conscious or unconscious. As Sherenne Baugher and Lu Anne de Cunzo have emphasised, Americans took aspects of English and European gardens and adopted them, in new ways, to express their own identities, ideologies and lifestyles.[7] But it does raise the question of how far stylistic forms on the ground can be entirely and sufficiently explained in terms of the specific social environments in which we encounter them; and, conversely, whether rather different kinds of garden might, had cultural influence and transmission followed different pathways, have fulfilled the same social role.

Stylistic Divergence?

The broad lines of English garden development in the course of the eighteenth century have been discussed on many occasions, and need not be repeated in detail here. In essence, fashionable gardens in the years around 1700 – as exemplified in the engravings published by Jan Kip and Leonard Knyff in their *Britannia Illustrata* of 1707 – were enclosed by walls or

fences and invariably geometric or ‘formal’ in layout, featuring parterres, topiary, straight gravel paths and linear canals; avenues of regimented trees extended the main axes of the design out across the surrounding landscape.[8] Through the 1710s and 1720s, however, partly under the influence of writers like Stephen Switzer and designers like Charles Bridgeman, simpler forms of geometric garden developed, in which there was less emphasis on parterres and topiary and more on simple grass lawns or ‘plats’, hedges, and ornamental woods or ‘wildernesses ‘, the latter often taking up most of the garden area.[9] From c.1720, at the most fashionable residences, garden walls were often removed and replaced by a sunk fence or ‘ha ha’, allowing prospects out across the surrounding landscape or – more usually – across an adjoining deer park, an extensive sylvan landscape irregularly scattered with trees, now usually functioning as a venison farm rather than a hunting ground, and increasingly embellished with ornamental planting and, in some places, ornamental or quasi-ornamental bodies of water.

In the 1730s more serpentine forms of garden developed under the influence of William Kent, with winding paths, classical buildings and irregular planting; and these, through the 1740s, acquired more and more buildings, rapidly evolving into the complex, irregular but rather cluttered ‘rococo gardens’ containing a profusion of gothic, Chinese and even Islamic buildings.[10] At some places, similar serpentine paths, collections of ornamental buildings, and decorative planting were laid out through working farmland – the so-called *ferme ornées* created, most famously, at Wooburn in Surrey and The Leasowes in the West Midlands.[11] Finally, from the 1760s purely ‘natural’ forms came to dominate. In the ‘landscape parks’ of Capability Brown and his associates all structure and geometry were removed, so that great houses appeared to stand isolated within almost minimalist landscapes of sweeping pastures, scattered with trees and clumps, which were surrounded, in whole or part, by a perimeter belt of woodland. Where possible, such designs included a lake, placed in

the middle distance of the prospect from the house, of serpentine or 'naturalistic' form. Gardens did not disappear from the immediate vicinity of the house but they were now simple arrangements of lawn, gravel paths, and specimen plants, without walls or geometric structure. The landscape park, an expansive and manicured version of the deer park, was the main focus of attention, and surrounded the mansion on all sides.[12]

Many modern students of garden history have accepted Horace Walpole's essentially teleological account – published in his *History of Modern Taste in Gardening* of 1771 - and view all these changing forms of designed landscape as a single thread, leading from 'geometry' to 'nature'.[13] Whether or not we choose to view developments in this way, or otherwise, the history of gardens did not come to an end with Brown. Humphry Repton, from 1788, designed on a more intimate and sometimes smaller scale, and paid greater attention to pleasure grounds and gardens. This was in part because he was servicing a more complex clientele than Brown had done, which included the owners of 'villas' without real landed estates attached: the homes of wealthy bankers, businessmen and manufacturers, whose numbers and economic power were increasing rapidly as England's economy became more complex and more industrial. Over time, Repton's garden designs became more structured, geometric and architectural in character, the pendulum of style thus, in the early nineteenth century, swinging back towards formality.[14]

Perhaps as striking as the gradual rejection of geometry and regularity during the first half of the eighteenth century was another change in the setting of elite residences in England. In the seventeenth century, even at the greatest mansions, practical food production facilities were often quite publicly – even proudly - displayed, including threshing barns (often elaborately constructed), farm yards, rabbit warrens and vegetable gardens. Some garden features, moreover, had at once both an aesthetic and a practical aspect. Ornamental dovecotes were often incorporated into garden designs, geometric water features such as

canals or ‘basons’ were stocked with fish for the kitchens, and the line between an orchard, and a ‘wilderness’, was often a fine one.[15] By the 1760s all such features were – like geometric gardens - being banished wholesale from the vicinity of the greatest residences, and home farms and kitchen garden were relegated to some secluded part of the landscape. The local gentry were soon following suit, and by 1803 Humphry Repton was able to describe how:

> If a Nobleman lets a palace to a Farmer, it will cease to be a palace; and if a Gentleman visibly lives in the midst of barns and dung yards, his house will no longer be a mansion but a farm house. A Villa, a Shooting box and every Rural retreat of elegance require the removal or the concealment of all that is dirty and offensive.[16]

This rejection of useful, practical activity did not only affect the layout of features in the immediate vicinity of the house. The landscape park itself, while certainly having an economic role in terms of the livestock grazing and timber it provided, was a pastoral and Arcadian, rather than a Georgic landscape. Perimetre belts ensured that the surrounding countryside, of enclosed fields and ploughlands, was glimpsed only sparingly, if at all. Brown’s landscapes, and those of Repton, turned their backs firmly on the real countryside, of agricultural production.

Superficially, American and English designed landscapes diverged steadily in the early and middle decades of the eighteenth century. In America, the drift towards more irregular and ‘naturalistic’ forms, and the rejection of overt signs of useful production in the landscape, while not perhaps entirely absent, certainly appears less noticeable. In Abbott Lowell Cumming’s words, “Formality in landscape design and layout of gardens seems to have been the prevailing taste in America during much of the eighteenth century”.[17] Topiary thus remained common in American gardens into the middle decades of the century. As late

as 1754 Ezra Stiles described William Penn's garden near Philadelphia as having "spruce hedges cut into beautiful figures".[18] Indeed, all along the eastern seaboard the kinds of design found at William Byrd's Westover, or at the Governor's Palace at Williamsburg, in the decades around 1700, seem to have remained popular into the 1770s or even beyond, as seen for example in illustrations of George Boyd's house in Portsmouth in 1774, or Moses Gill's at Princeton as late as 1792 [Figure 1]. Everywhere, American gardens remained enclosed, with fences and walls, and were laid out in a geometric and often symmetrical manner. Their design was largely based on the kinds of English models discussed above, although they accentuated particular aspects of these, especially perhaps, as Raffaella Fabiano has argued, those which had been derived in turn directly from Italian Renaissance tradition - like the turf terraces which featured at so many Virginian plantations, such as Kingsmill (from the 1740s) or nearby Carter's Grove (from the 1750s). But French influence can also be discerned, especially in the south.[19] Aspects of the gardens at Middleton Place in South Carolina, for example, recall the designs of Dezallier d'Argenville. We might note, however, that his ideas were also influential in England during this period: we are dealing here with complex and interconnecting flows of stylistic influence. In addition to all this, well into the second half of the century the grounds of even the greatest mansions in America continued to feature practical, horticultural areas and features, proudly displayed and often integrated carefully into the overall design of the grounds.

Divergence Revisited

Stylistic divergence in garden design is perhaps more surprising than we often acknowledge, given the extent to which wealthy men moved freely, both ways, across the Atlantic in the first half of the century, and given that most thought of themselves as English,

and members of a shared society and culture. William Byrd, who created the garden at Westover in Virginia, lived in England until he inherited in 1705 and until 1726 spent half his time there, visiting fashionable gardens like Blenheim.[20] Plantations, in Peter Martin's words, were created by such men in a spirit of "self-conscious emulation of the country house mentality as they imagined or knew it in England".[21] In the first half of the eighteenth century, as in the seventeenth, gardens – in common with other aspects of material culture – were shaped by a strong desire to signal connection with the culture of the homeland.[22] Books, too, flowed freely across the Atlantic. Philip Miller's *Gardener's Dictionary* of 1731 (but with many subsequent editions), and Batty Langley's *New Principles of Gardening* of 1728, were widely represented in the libraries of landowners and urban merchants all along the eastern seaboard.[23]

In fact, the extent of stylistic divergence, at least in the period before the 1760s, may have been exaggerated by many scholars, in part because of widespread misunderstandings about the character, and chronology, of English garden styles. For the generalised account of English garden history presented in the previous section, while perhaps correct in its broad outlines, concentrates too much on what was new and at the cutting edge, and downplays the ordinary and the established: it obscures a more complex history in detail, on the ground. And it is this which we need to examine and understand, before making trans-Atlantic comparisons.

Whatever the chronology at the most fashionable residences, even at the highest social levels many English gardens remained strongly geometric into the 1730s. More importantly, there is a widespread misunderstanding regarding the arcadian gardens of William Kent, and the complex 'rococo gardens' of the 1740s which followed them, for these they did not stand alone but usually co-existed with otherwise geometric landscapes. They formed distinct areas - 'outdoor rooms' - within wider formal frameworks. Observers in the

1740s and 50s often described these compositions as being 'natural' in appearance, but it is not always entirely clear what they meant and the word could certainly embrace scenes which to our eye would seem structured and artificial. One visitor to Studley Royal in Yorkshire in 1752 reported that "Nature has done everything of herself". But he went on to describe how the gardens featured:

> An abundance of cuts thro the Trees as you pass along, for views to Buildings … the canals are form'd into a kind of Parteries. The Trees round it are cut into regular arches, which … has an extream pretty effect not much unlike some parts of the Gardens at Versaille or Marly.[24]

One step down the social ladder, at the level of the local gentry rather than the greatest landowners, English gardens remained even more strongly geometric right through the 1740s and 50s. Some of the *allées* within wildernesses might be laid out in serpentine form but geometric vistas, avenues and straight gravel paths continued to dominate designs [Figure 2]. Geometry did not, therefore, really disappear from English gardens, even at the highest social levels, until the 1750s. Indeed, Capability Brown's earliest designs, such as his proposals for Badminton, drawn up in 1752, were still formal and structured in character [Figure 3]. The small-scale county maps published in the 1760s and 70s – such as that for Hertfordshire, just to the north of London, surveyed by Andrew Dury and John Andrews in 1764 – show that most great houses still possessed grounds which were partly and in some cases largely geometric in form.[25] And what was true in the fashionable south-east of the country was even more true in provincial districts. Here members of the local gentry might retain walled flower gardens, formally planted, into the 1780s.[26] And in towns, middle class gardens similarly often displayed remarkably structured and geometric forms throughout the century. This was in part, perhaps, because it was difficult to arrange small areas of ground in a convincingly 'naturalistic' fashion: it was impossible to create a landscape park on a

diminutive town plot. When we compare the gardens in Rose Lane, Norwich – England's third largest city – as illustrated in the 1770s or 80s; with the design of the Paca garden in Annapolis, reconstructed in its original form of the 1760s; the latter looks, perhaps, rather less old-fashioned than it does when compared with the extensive 'naturalistic' parklands of Capability Brown, with which it is also broadly contemporary, and on which the attention of English historians largely remains focused [Figures 4 and 5]. In general terms, it might be more useful to think of American gardens, when compared with English ones, as 'provincial', rather than as radically different. Even the rather practical, horticultural character of American gardens in the first half of the century is perhaps less out of line with English practise than we might think. At minor manor houses, farmyards, orchards, fish ponds, kitchen gardens and other productive facilities often remained in full view, interdigitated with 'ornamental' features, well into the eighteenth century. Even at a great house like Chatsworth in Derbyshire the kitchen gardens remained close to the house until the 1750s, while the main prospect to the west was over a great fishpond complex and a rabbit warren until both were destroyed, from 1759, by Capability Brown. [27]

American formal gardens did not, moreover, remain unchanged in the early and middle decades of the century. They developed, and in ways which can be paralleled in their English counterparts, reflecting a continuing exchange of design ideas. As noted earlier, ha has were introduced at the wealthiest and most fashionable English gardens from the 1720s, dissolving the boundary between gardens and the wider countryside or adjacent deer park. There was, moreover, an increasing tendency for houses to be built on more elevated sites, with extensive prospects. Where they were not, detached pleasure gardens might be created on a nearby area of rising ground, as at Tring in Hertfordshire in the 1720s, where drives led across the park and up a steep escarpment to a grand terrace, providing extensive panoramas over the Vale of Aylesbury to the north; or at Holkham in Norfolk around the same time,

where Obelisk Wood to the south of the hall was dissected by straight walks, focused on the temple and an obelisk, which framed outward views towards villages, churches and other features in the surrounding landscape.[28] All this has obvious echoes in the plantation gardens of Virginia or Carolina, where from the 1730s ha has began to be employed and terraces, giving views across the surrounding landscape and especially towards rivers, became common. At Westover in Virginia in 1744 a visitor described the "pretilly falling grass plats variegated with pedestals of many different kinds … an extensive prospect of James River and of all the Country and some gentleman's seats on the other side".[29] At Belmont in Philadephia a visitor in 1762 described a landscape which sounds remarkably reminiscent of English Holkham, with "a wood cut into vistas. One avenue gives a fine prospect of the city another looks to the obelisk".[30]

In short, there is little doubt that the 'old-fashioned' character of American gardens, certainly in the period up to the 1760s, can be overstated. While their design might have lagged behind those unusual gardens at the forefront of fashion in England with which garden history has traditionally been obsessed, when compared with the generality of English gardens they may not have appeared unduly archaic. A somewhat 'provincial' character would hardly be surprising, given the distance at which the colonies lay from the mother country, but overall American gardens in 1750 or even 1760 were probably not as different from those in England as we sometime suppose. But after this date, there was a more radical stylistic divergence.

Rejecting the Landscape Park

It is important to note here, once again, the dangers of words and categories. If we lump together all designed landscapes created in England in the early and middle decades of

the eighteenth century, based on the adoption of serpentine lines and a rejection of formal geometry, as 'landscape gardens', 'picturesque gardens' or 'jardin Anglaise', we miss the very real differences between what existed before, and after, the development around 1760 of the classic parkland style we associate with Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. For landscape parks were rather different from the semi-geometric landscapes, often cluttered with buildings and structures, which preceded them. They were simple, extensive and in some cases almost minimalist compositions of grass, wood and water, only sparsely populated with ornamental buildings. And they were more self-contained, usually excluding near views of the surrounding countryside.[31]

Peter Martin, James Kornwulf and others have detected, in the later decades of the eighteenth century, signs of a shift in America towards an engagement with 'natural' gardening.[32] The grounds of The Hermitage in North Carolina were, in the 1760s, said to have been "laid out in the English style", with a creek winding through one of the compartments with banks planted with shrubs.[33] At Maycox in Virginia in 1773 there was a 12 acre garden with "forest and fruit trees … arranged as if nature and art had conspired together… Beautiful vistas, which open up as many pleasing views of the river".[34] But such rather vague descriptions seem to indicate no more than the incorporation of 'serpentine' elements, or evocative buildings, or carefully chosen vistas, into essentially geometric designs, as was common in both England and America in the period before 1760. They do not reflect the adoption of the extensive, sweeping and simple parklands which became so popular in England after this time. At Washington's Mount Vernon, and Jefferson's Monticello, in Martin's words, we meet "successful and comprehensive landscape gardens in Virginia:.[35] But the latter was largely created in the early nineteenth century and will be discussed in more detail a little later, while the grounds of Mount Vernon, in their familiar

form, as represented on the plan drawn by Vaughn, probably date to around the time of Brown's death in 1783.

In reality, the most striking thing about the grounds of Mount Vernon is that, when compared with most of the American gardens so far discussed, their design really does appear out-of-date. Precisely how much depends on interpretation. According to some writers the semi-geometric, symmetrical plan is based on designs by Batty Langley, but this may simply be because we know that a copy of his *New Principles of Gardening* existed in Washington's library. The closest parallels are in fact with English garden designs from the 1750s – from the period when Brown's career was just taking off. Monticello's layout thus bears some similarity to Brown's own proposals for Badminton, from 1752 [Figure 3]; but resembles more closely the designs drawn up by Robert and Thomas Greening in the 1750s, most notably that for Wimpole in Cambridgeshire. While it may not have been as old-fashioned as a derivation from one of Langley's designs might suggest, it was nevertheless, by the 1780s, more than two decades out of date. Although the design included a ha ha, a small deer enclosure and extensive views over the Potomac, there was no all-embracing landscape park, productive facilities were quite proudly displayed, and the Upper Garden included, according to Benjamin Latrobe, a parterre in the form of a Fleur de Lice.[36] In short, while English and American landscapes may have exhibited a measure of divergence before the 1760s it was only after this that they really became stylistically distinct. American elites never really embraced the landscape style associated with Capability Brown.

Why might this have been? At this point it might be helpful to return to the two key forms of influence which, as I argued earlier, shape garden and landscape design, merging and interacting in complex ways: the spread of fashions from elsewhere; and the particular lifestyles, ideologies and social needs of owners and creators. If we consider first issues of cultural transmission, then it is immediately apparent that the rise of the landscape park

coincides closely with the start of political tension between Britain and the American colonies, while its peak period of popularity occurred at a time of open hostility and armed conflict between them. Brown's mature parkland style only really emerged around 1760, and was only widely adopted in England from the end of that decade; by the time that Brown died in 1783, it was already being challenged. There was increasing political hostility between the American colonies and England from the end of the Seven Years War in 1763, and especially from the passing of the Stamp Act in 1765 and the Declaratory Act of 1766. Armed conflict erupted in 1775 and continued until 1783 – significantly, the year of Brown's death. The War was not a complete barrier to travel or the movement of ideas but it doubtless interfered with the free flow of fashion. As William Beiswanger has noted, it "seriously curtailed the book trade" across the Atlantic.[37] American elites, moreover, preparing for or engaged in war, or busy building a new nation in its aftermath, had more important things on their minds than landscape design - as the long delays in the development of Mount Vernon testify. To some extent, therefore, we might argue that the stylistic divergence of English and American gardens through the 1760s, 70s and 80s was a consequence of the American struggle for independence, and the disruption to the flow of styles and ideas which this produced.

But while this may be a partial explanation it is probably not a sufficient one. Of equal importance were the social, economic and environmental differences between the England and America. Most writers on the subject have tended to concentrate on the last of these. In Rosemary Verey's words, 'in England the countryside had already been tamed by years of husbandry, while in America each new plantation was surrounded by wild, untamed land, to be kept at bay, not emulated'.[38] The natural landscape of the Brownian park, that is, had little appeal to a society still grappling with extensive, untamed wilderness. This argument is often repeated but needs to be treated with some caution. By the 1770s the eastern seaboard of America had long passed the pioneer stage of settlement. Travellers

commented on the abundance of gentry houses in the longest-settled districts, especially along the lower reaches of the main rivers. The banks of the James River in Virginia were described in 1780 as ‘embellished with plantations, one more beautiful than the others, and inhabited by the aristocracy of the country’.[39] Elizabeth MacClean has described how, by 1752, there were over 200 country houses within a ten mile radius of Philadelphia.[40] Virginian mansions were carefully orientated ‘to command the best possible prospects of surrounding countryside’, not surrounding *wilderness*.[41] We should not, moreover, exaggerate the extent to which Brownian landscapes resembled wild nature anyway. Smooth and manicured, they would have contrasted as sharply with the woods and swamps of the wilder parts of the eastern seaboard as they did with the rugged upland areas of England, where designers like Thomas White created numerous examples.[42]

While not denying that the relatively underdeveloped – and perhaps, in particular, relatively unenclosed - character of the American landscape may have contributed to the lack of enthusiasm for the simple, open, irregular landscape of the Brownian park, we should perhaps place more emphasis on social and ideological influences. The designs of Capability Brown and his ‘imitators’ expressed the world view, and the lifestyles, of the English social elite in a number of key ways. Firstly, as, already noted, they rejected overt signs of useful agricultural production. While major landowners often maintained a fashionable interest in agricultural improvement – enclosing commons and open fields, experimenting with new crops and livestock breeds – by the 1770s such activities usually took place at a remove from the mansion itself. A direct association between practical husbandry, as Repton emphasised, was incompatible with gentility: it was uncouth in the eyes of social groups now more interested in fashionable *consumption* than in domestic production, and redolent of the life of the farmer. But secondly, the very structure of the landscape park expressed social exclusivity. Landscape parks served in part as private, insulating spaces at a time of

increasing social stratification in England. Their creation almost invariably involved the closure or diversion of roads and footpaths, and in many cases the removal of farms and cottages – occasionally, entire villages. The peripheral belts formed a firm barrier between the landscapes of gentility and the surrounding world. A local poet in Bedale in Yorkshire recounted, in the late eighteenth century, the changes wrought to the landscape in his lifetime, highlighting how the owner of the local mansion, The Rand, had removed neighbouring rights of way:

> And now them roads are done away
> And one made in their room
> Quite to the east, of wide display,
> Where you may go and come,
> Quite unobserved from the Rand,
> The trees do them seclude
> If modern times, do call such grand
> Its from a gloomy mood.[43]

Landscape parks were social islands where owners and their guests shot pheasants and boated on lakes, and rode in fast carriages along serpentine drives [Figure 6]. They embodied, reflected and reinforced the hierarchies within an increasingly polarised society.

Yet we should also note here, perhaps, that enthusiasm for the landscape park was never universal in England, even amongst the wealthy and the educated. Its rejection of overt signs of useful production was criticised by a number of writers, who in particular opposed the removal of practical horticulture to some distant spot. William Cowper in *The Task* of 1785 famously described the pleasures a gentleman might derive from the cultivation of fruit and vegetables, even from a pile of manure.[44] Such attitudes may, in part, explain the continuing creation into the 1770s and 80s of versions of the *ferme ornée*, in which aesthetics

and production were integrated, even by major contemporaries of Brown, such as Richard Woods.[45] Some wealthy individuals, moreover, continued to favour the retention, if not the creation anew, of geometric features like avenues. Many more worried about the stereotyped, repetitive, manufactured character of the landscape park. Mrs Lybbe Powys, writing in 1776, described how "The rage for laying out grounds makes every nobleman and gentleman a copier of their neighbour, till every fine place throughout England is comparatively, at least, alike".[46] In their attempts to create an idealised version of 'nature' Brown and his contemporaries served to suppress the local and individual character of place; and this in turn was widely seen as the imposition of an essentially lowland, south-eastern landscape aesthetic across the nation as a whole, and expressive of the dominance of London's political and economic power. In Thomas Craddock 's words, "They talk of taste just as if it was to be brought down in a broad-wheeled wagon, and they had nothing to do but scatter it at random".[47] A few decades later, Uvedale Price argued that landscapes designed in Brown's style might as well have "been made by contract in London, and then sent down in pieces and put together on the spot".[48] The kinds of attitudes that had shaped the dominant landscape aesthetic in the early years of the eighteenth century did not completely disappear in England after 1760, and this observation helps make sense of developments in America in this period.

The troubled relationship between the colonies, and the mother country, did not simply serve to reduce the exchange of people and ideas across the Atlantic. It widened a developing ideological and cultural gulf. I do not mean here to simply re-state the old idea that, to educated Americans, the 'jardin Anglais' was associated with 'Hanoverian tyranny', but rather to suggest something at once more subtle and more basic. American visitors to England in the nineteenth century often commented not so much on the 'natural' character of park landscapes as on their social exclusivity. "Each estate is shut in from the public road … allowing only a few glimpses through the bars of its iron gates, such is the Englishman's love

of seclusion".[49] Such expressions of social superiority would not have found favour at a time when the rebellious colonies were defining themselves as socially inclusive, and busy creating a form of government in which 'all men are created equal.' Here, all the main social groups amongst the white settlers – rural gentry, merchants, shopkeepers, and artisans – continued to create gardens which expressed an involvement in useful production and which, while often prioritising privacy, eschewed the naked expressions of exclusivity manifest in the extensive, belted parklands of Brown. In gardens, as in other forms of material culture, upper and middle-class Americans continued, to a significant degree, to share a common vocabulary of design.[50] Social and cultural factors like these, more than the persistence of wild and untamed landscapes, mainly explains the divergence of English and American landscape design in the period after the 1750s. As Yentsch has observed, "landscape is a potent, emerging material force in the creation of cultural identity".[51]

The reconvergence of style

The end of the War of Independence in 1783 was followed by a period of mutual suspicion, encouraged by differing attitudes to the Revolution in France and the rise of Napoleon, leading to the eventual outbreak of renewed hostilities in 1812. Nevertheless, there are clear signs from the 1790s of a measure of stylistic convergence in landscape design, although this did not – significantly – involve the widespread adoption in America of the parkland landscapes of Brown. The grounds at Monticello were mostly created in this period, for although much was *planned* by Thomas Jefferson through the last decades of the eighteenth century, such as the burial ground set in the labyrinth, little was actually done until after 1807, more than a quarter of a century after Brown's death.[52] To a significant extent, Jefferson's design was shaped by the kinds of influences which had fashioned American

gardens in earlier decades. Instead of the sweeping parklands that Jefferson had seen in England there were instead tracts of managed woodland and an area of *ferme ornée* or ornamented farmland.[53] While productive, functional features were displayed to a lesser extent than in earlier American landscapes, they were certainly more visible, less spatially marginalised, than would have been the case in England. We can make a useful comparison here between the great mansion of Holkham in Norfolk, England with Monticello; both Palladian in inspiration, but with very different landscapes laid out around them in the decades either side of 1800, in spite of the fact that both were owned by men renowned for their agricultural enthusiasms. Monticello has a landscape closer to the working farms of the villas designed by Palladio; terraces for vegetables and fruit trees descended the hill below the oval lawn and even the slave quarters were kept close to the house. In contrast, Thomas William Coke's home farm was relegated to the far south of the park, well out of sight of the mansion.[54]

But what is equally striking about Monticello, viewed from the perspective of the English gardening tradition, is not so much that it continued to eschew the influence of Brown, but rather that it displays signs of that of his successor Repton, in the prominence given to structure and detail in the pleasure grounds in the immediate vicinity of the mansion, with their elaborate flower beds, gravel paths and specimen trees. And this brings us to a more important observation, for it is arguable (if understandable) that we focus too much on Monticello when examining the development of American gardens in the decades around 1800. As Jefferson was busy laying out his grounds, William Russell Birch was preparing to publish his *Country Seats of America*, which appeared in 1808.[55] His illustrations show very different landscapes, in which houses stand in informal grounds devoid of geometry or overt signs of production. These are quite firmly in the Reptonian, rather than the Brownian, tradition: they are not extensive landscape parks, and the seats themselves appear more akin

to the villas for which Repton often designed the grounds – that is, the homes of a rising class of merchants and financers, rather than the centres of truly rural estates. Birch's subject matter (as Emily Cooperman has made clear) was not the 'remote rural properties' of the new Republic, but 'the American suburban landscape' – the residential villas in the area between New York and Washington DC, in Maryland and Delaware, an area comprising, in the words of Cornelius Stafford in 1804, "a chain of commercial cities, unparalleled in history, whose vigorous impulse is already accelerated by the bold ramifications of turnpikes and canals".[56] The integration of aesthetics and production in American designed landscapes began to be abandoned by people whose wealth owed little to the ownership or exploitation of land. England and America, in terms of garden style, were swinging more into line once again, not simply because contacts had been fully restored with the end of hostilities, but because similar economic and social changes were occurring on both sides of the Atlantic, with the emergence of a complex industrial and commercial society.

Conclusion

In this short essay I have – perhaps unwisely – tried to consider a broad and challenging topic, across an extended period of time. I have argued, in essence, that the extent of the differences between English and American gardens in the period before the 1760s has been exaggerated; and that this is largely due to misunderstandings, widely shared by historians on both sides of the Atlantic, of the way that English gardens developed in this period. From an English perspective, American gardens are perhaps best thought of as 'provincial' rather than as something radically different or markedly 'old-fashioned'. Divergence increased more sharply, however, with the rise to popularity in England of the extensive parkland landscapes of Capability Brown and his contemporaries. American elites

failed to embrace this new aesthetic in part because its popularity coincided with political tension and outright hostilities between colonies and mother country, and in part because it was poorly suited to a society in which values of social inclusivity, and useful production, figured prominently in political discourse. Only from the early nineteenth century do we see renewed convergence in landscape style, as more peaceful relations were established and as both countries embraced new styles of garden design, appropriate to the more complex and commercial societies which were now emerging in each. All this, it should be emphasised, is only a model, useful to think with. The real challenge is to establish a more accurate chronology of stylistic change in both England and America, moving away from normative frameworks; and to evaluate, in a more rigorous manner, the ways in which – and the extent to which – ideas about gardens and landscapes were disseminated from the old world, to the new, in the course of the eighteenth century.

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