Eva Anglessy **19/02/2024**

Research Paper:

The distinctive personalities of England's gardens and landscapes and their representations in arts in "modern" history.

Duck Island Cottage, on Birdcage Walk, St James Park, London (own photo)

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Acknowledgements

Among the many sources of information that I used for writing this paper, and which are listed in the section "Works cited", I am particularly indebted to the first three episodes of the BBC2 series "The Secret History of the British Garden" (2015), presented by Monty Don, the book *L'Angleterre des jardins*, by Francis Peeters and Guy Vandersande (2021), and a series of three lectures delivered by Professor Malcolm Andrews on English Landscape in 2017, at Gresham College, London[1].

[1] https://www.gresham.ac.uk/watch-now/series/english-landscape

Introduction

As a foreigner who grew up in the 20th century, my perception of British gardens came from the cliché conveyed through TV dramas filmed in country villages, i.e., the idyllic cottage garden in which the arrangement of luscious flowers, hedges, healthy lawns, grasses, and herbs is intentionally created to give an air of relaxation and contentment:

https://www.happysprout.com/outdoor-living/english-garden-start/

This image, however, has been maintained and cherished by British gardeners for more than a century: 'Among the things made by man, nothing is prettier than an English cottage garden, and they often teach lessons that "great" gardeners should learn.' (William Robinson, *The English Flower Garden*, London 1883).[2]

Later I had the opportunity to observe such beautiful country gardens during several trips to England, and to admire the know-how of English gardeners in public parks such as the Dingle Garden in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, or the Valleys Gardens in Harrogate, Yorkshire:

[2] Andrew Clayton Payne, *Victorian Cottages*, p.53

http://www.friendsofvalleygardens.co.uk/

Meanwhile, a tour in Yorkshire national parks and some of their market villages allowed me to taste the delights of English countryside and to capture its essence in photographs, such as the following one, taken by a professional artist:

https://mortonhouseuk.com/15-reasons-to-visit-the-yorkshire-dales/

This research paper explores how the English landscapes and gardens have evolved throughout modern British history. Successive changes, reflecting historical and social changes and interrelating with British arts, have affected their features throughout centuries, giving them distinctive personalities within the European/western culture. This fascinating journey of discovery starts with the Tudor Era and the English "Renaissance", a period which is regarded as the beginning of "Modern" British history, and ends, like Queen Victoria's reign, in the late 19th century.

Chapter 1 – The 16th century
The Tudor Era

Our story of English gardens starts in 1485, after the War of the Roses. This name is derived from the heraldic badges used by the two houses–the Red Rose of Lancaster and the White Rose of York–as in Shakespeare's *Henry VI Part 3* [Act II, sc. 5]:

King Henry: The red rose and the white are on his face,
The fatal colors of our striving houses;
The one his purple blood right well resembles,
The other his pale cheeks methinks presenteth.
Wither one rose and let the other flourish;
If you contend, a thousand lives must wither.

Henry VII introduced the Tudor Rose, which combined both roses, and with its five petals, looks like the wild eglantine rose. It was adopted as the national emblem of England: a symbol of peace and unity in the period following the long civil war.

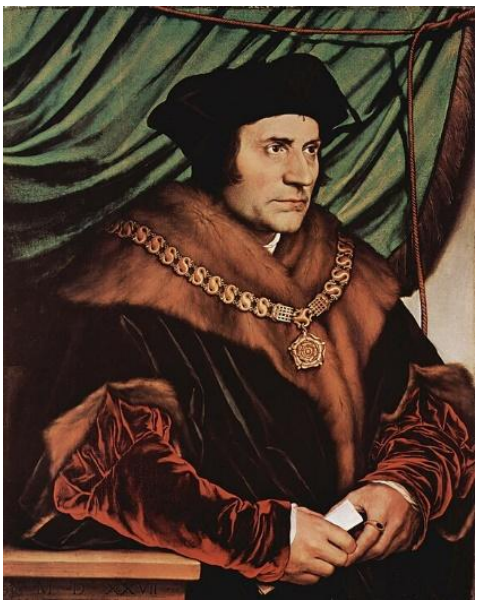
https://mgnv.org/mg-in-the-garden/five-things-to-know-about-shakespeare-and-plants/

Eglantine rose, Wikipedia commons

The eglantine, also called sweetbriar, appears with the musk-rose in one of the most evocative passages in all of Shakespeare's plays: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act II, Scene 1:

Oberon: "I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine.
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,
Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight."

When Holbein painted the *Portrait of Sir Thomas More* in 1527, More was then "a powerful, knighted speaker at the English Parliament (…) He is represented wearing his Tudor Collar of Esses livery chain with Tudor rose, a sign of fealty and high office" (*Wikipedia*).



Holbein, *Portrait of Sir Thomas More*, 1527
Portrait of Sir Thomas More - Wikipedia

Detail showing the Tudor rose in More's chain of office

This rose remained the emblem of the Tudor dynasty until the end: in this portrait, the young courtier wears the Queen's colours, black and white, and he is surrounded by the eglantine rose, a symbol of the Queen. Nicholas Hilliard's masterpiece, *Young Man among Roses* (1585-95)—perhaps the most famous of English miniatures—epitomizes the romantic Elizabethan age.

https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O17315/young-man-among-roses-portrait-miniature-hilliard-nicholas/

According to Francis Peeters, during the Tudor era, the high walls of feudal castles disappeared, allowing to include the view of the beautiful surrounding countryside into the landscape of a garden which had then two functions: with its geometric design (central axis and symmetrical flowerbeds), it enhanced the architecture of the building, and without the previous, defensive walls, it became the logical link between the house building and nature.

Under Elizabeth I, the first aim of the splendid manor houses and their lands was to show the grandeur of their owners. While the land surrounding the house was used as a park and/or a chase, the garden proper had a twofold purpose: first, it supplied the household with vegetables, fruits and medicinal herbs, and second, it was used as a place for various entertainments, such as danse, music and banquets[3]. As Queen Elizabeth encouraged noblemen to build country houses and many London merchants retired to the country, lust for more knowledge and know-how about plants steadily rose, and thanks to the new printing techniques, vernacular garden books entered the market in ever-increasing numbers. From William Turner's *A New Herball*, published in 1551, to John Gerard's *Herball, or Generall Historie of Plantes*, published in 1597, all were best-sellers. The latter remained unsurpassed for decades and is considered as a primary source for Shakespeare's extensive botanical knowledge[4]. The rose was Shakespeare's "favourite" flower: he mentions roses at least 50 times in his work[5]. Everyone knows the quotation by Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene 2:

> What's in a name? That which we call a rose
> By any other name would smell as sweet.

In an age dominated by the conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, codes and religious messages are the keys to understanding the buildings and gardens, as an echo of the metaphysical conceits used by contemporary poets such as John Donne (1572-1631). Lyveden New Bield, in Northamptonshire, was built by Sir Thomas Tresham, knighted by Elizabeth I. Because of his Catholic faith, Tresham was always in and out of prison, and as he died early in 1605, the building was never completed. However, what remains of the house and what was discovered later from the garden's foundations, including a labyrinth, reveal several clues and messages which could have been decoded then by Tresham's persecuted friends.

Tresham' labyrinth was over a mile in length and designed to be walked as an act of contemplation, the journey representing the tortuous but true path of the Catholic through life and on to Heaven. He lined what he called "his circular beds" with white roses (as a symbol of the purity of Virgin Mary) and raspberry plants (symbolising the blood of Christ).

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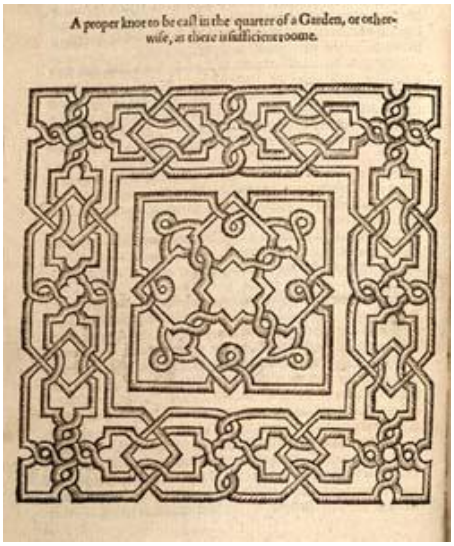
[3] Peeters, Francis, and Vandersande, Guy. *L'Angleterre des jardins*, p. 16. Translated by myself.
[4] Gerit Quealy, *Botanical Shakespeare*, p. 12
[5] https://mgnv.org/mg-in-the-garden/five-things-to-know-about-shakespeare-and-plants/

Labyrinths were a popular feature in the gardens of the 16th and early 17th centuries. As early as 1586 was published a specialized book *The Gardener's Labyrinth*[6] which provided gardeners with designs and illustrations for creating labyrinths and knot-gardens:



page 80: plan for a knot garden:
"Decorative knot gardens were laid out in inventive geometric or abstract designs. Representations of animals, coats or arms and heraldic devices were also popular. The complicated patterns were outlined by using low, close-growing plants such as hyssop, germander, marjoram, savory, thyme, juniper, yew, dwarf box and lavender.
The beds inside the margins would be planted with ornamental flowers or filled with variously coloured earths. These 'knotted' gardens became so elaborate that they were later made solely for the patterns they could provide"[7].

The theme of gardens is important in Shakespeare's plays—29 scenes are set in gardens—and as was the case when he mentioned flowers, they are often used as metaphors. The garden setting lends itself to romantic scenes, comic scenes and even talk of politics and discussions of national importance.[8] A famous example comes from *Richard II* (Act III scene 4), when the gardener and his assistant use the language of their usual work as images to describe the condition of the country brought about by the King's misgovernment:

Assistant: When our sea-walled garden, the whole land,
Is full of weeds, her fairest flowers choked up,
Her fruit-trees all unpruned, her hedges ruined,
Her **knots** disordered, and her wholesome fruits (my emphasis)
Swarming with caterpillars...

Gardener: ...Oh! what pity is it
That he had not so trimmed and dressed his land,
As we this garden! We, at time of year
Do wound the bark, the skin of our fruit trees,
Lest, being over-proud with sap and blood,
With too much riches it confound itself.

While labyrinths were created for the glory of God, they also allowed landowners (and their gardeners) to show an understanding of complexity and a control over nature. And this last idea was to become essential in the following century: the more one could tame and control nature, the greater the demonstration of wealth, status, and power.

[6] https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/library/files/special/exhibns/month/may2001.html
[7] Ibid
[8] https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/blogs/heritage-open-days-garden-event/

The English countryside was also changing in the Tudor Era. In the Medieval period, every parish had had its 'common land,' available for the parishioners to graze their flocks. As the wool trade took off in the Tudor period, however, there was increasing pressure to enclose the better common grazing land, i.e., to take it into private ownership so that it could be used for the more intensive rearing of high-grade sheep. It was a very controversial measure: while it helped to take the country out of a feudal economy and into a commercial economy, it made life for rural peasants much more difficult.

In the first part of Thomas More's *'Utopia'*[9], the character Hythloday describes some of the social problems the practice of enclosures created in 16th-century England:

> Your sheep, that were wont to be so meek and tame and so small eaters, now […] become so great devourers and so wild that they eat up and swallow down the very men themselves. […]. For look in what parts of the realm doth grow the finest and therefore dearest wool: there noble men and gentlemen, yea, and certain abbots […] nor being content that they live in rest and pleasure nothing profiting, the much *annoying the weal public, leave no ground or tillage. They enclose all in pastures; they throw down houses*; they pluck down towns and leave nothing standing but only the church to make of it a sheep-house. And as though you lost no small quantity of ground by forests, chases, lands and parks, those good holy men turn all dwelling places and all glebe-land into desolation and wilderness. *(my emphasis)*

Stretching back to Virgil and Horace, pastoral poetry has usually been associated to sheep rearing, conjuring up images of shepherds and shepherdesses leaning on their crooks. For both classical authors, the pleasures of pastoral are to be found in *otium*, the absence of business and worry associated with the city and the court[10]. It is worth noting great pastoral works were written during the English Renaissance and its development of wool trade, including Edmund Spencer's *The Shepheardes Calendar* (1579), Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (1590), Christopher Marlowe's 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love' (1600), Walter Raleigh's 'The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd' (1600) and John Fletcher's play *The Faithful Shepherdess* (c.1610). However, as portraiture was the only genre commissioned by the Tudors to contemporary painters[11], there are no English rural landscape or garden paintings from this era.

[9] This extract is reproduced from 'Utopia' by Thomas More, 1551 translation: https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2130. Modernized spelling and punctuation by Professor Cathy Shrank
[10] Stephen Bending, 'Literature and Landscape in the Eighteen Century', pp. 4-5
[11] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artists_of_the_Tudor_court

Chapter 2 – The 17th century

With the reign of the Stuarts finishing in bloodshed, the English Civil War, Cromwell, the return of the Stuarts, the Glorious Revolution and the accession of William and Mary to the throne, the 17th century can be regarded as one of the most turbulent in British history.

In this age, before scientific understanding, religious symbolism played a key role in garden design, but the idealized image of a Garden of Eden combined with sheer greed also drove what became a frenzy to acquire new and exotic plants: tulips, for example, became the more sought-for plant in the 17th century, as well as pineapples. Both plants can be seen on the frontispiece of the book *Paradisi in Sole Paradisus Terrestris*[12], which seems a promise made to the readers to help them grow their own Garden of Eden on earth:

[12] Collected by John Parkinson Apothecary of London, 1629, https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.24785763

Numerous writers connected the recreation of Eden in a garden with a wider, seemingly practical proposal: gaining an ever-greater knowledge of nature in order to recover the healing and other arts that had been known to Adam but lost because of the Fall[13].

In Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667), Book IV[14], Eden is described as a luxuriant garden on a plateau-like mountain, irrigated by a large river "divided in four main streams". In this lush vegetation, where the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge are singled out,

[…] from that sapphire fount the crisped brooks, […]	
Ran nectar, visiting each plant, and fed	240
Flowers worthy of Paradise which not nice art	
In **beds and curious knots**, but nature boon	*(my emphasis: see knot gardens above)*
Poured forth profuse on hill and dale and plain,	
Both where the morning sun first warmly smote	
The open field, and where the unpierced shade	245
Embrowned the noontide bowers: thus was this place,	
A happy rural seat of various view;	*(my emphasis)*
Groves whose rich trees wept odorous gums and balm,	
Others whose fruit burnished with golden rind	
Hung amiable, Hesperian Fables true,	250
If true, here only, and of delicious taste:	
Betwixt them lawns, or level downs, and flocks	
Grazing the tender herb, were interposed,	
Or palmy hillock, or the flowery lap	
Of some irriguous valley spread her store,	255
Flowers of all hue, and without thorn the rose:	
Another side, umbrageous grots and caves	
Of cool recess, o'er which the mantling vine	
Lays forth her purple grape, and gently creeps	
Luxuriant; meanwhile murmuring waters fall	260
Down the slope hills, dispersed, or in a lake,	
That to the fringed bank with myrtle crowned,	
Her crystal mirror holds, unite their streams.	

Milton's picture of Eden, as an idealized vision of England's green countryside and luxuriant gardens (where knots and topiaries are non-existent…), has inspired many generations of British writers and artists. The loss of this paradise after the Fall also set a pattern of nostalgia for a vanishing pastoral life, recuring in the next centuries, especially from the second half of the 18th century when its acceleration was brought about by the early Industrial Revolution. It is also interesting to note that in Milton's poem, Adam and Eve's duty is to tend Eden, to keep nature within bounds, implying that man brings order to nature. Though nature is beautiful, it runs rampant (lines 242-3, 259-260), thus man should civilize it.[15]

[13] Professor Jim Endersby, 'Gardens of Empire: The Role of Kew and Colonial Botanic Gardens'
[14] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, pp. 91-92
[15] Book IV (cliffsnotes.com)

This outdoors, private portrait of King Charles I by Van Dyck (1635) is quite unusual: though the king's posture seems quite relax, showing no attribute of power, his size, compared to the horizon line, suggests that he dominates his kingdom and his subjects. As man brings order to nature in gardens, the king's dominating look reminds us that he is at the top of social order…

Van Dyck, Portrait of Charles I on the Hunt, 1635. The Louvre Museum, Paris.[16]

The tension between nature and culture, discussed in a metaphorical sense in philosophy and religion since antiquity, would have a practical influence on the evolution of the design of English gardens in the coming centuries, but in 17th-century gardens, order and control prevailed. When he set in Hampton Court Palace, in Surrey, the new king, Charles II (1660-1685) chose to mark his return from exile with one of the century's most iconic garden features[17], a huge, straight piece of water, a symbol of his power not only over his people, but also over nature itself. The Long Water introduced a French style that had inspired Charles during his exile in France—such as the gardens designed by Le Nôtre in Vaux-le Vicomte[18] in the 1640s—and, for the privileged few who could afford it, his return to England heralded a new era of extravagant garden building.

[16] https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010062167
[17] https://www.hrp.org.uk/hampton-court-palace/whats-on/hampton-court-gardens/
[18] https://vaux-le-vicomte.com/decouvrir/le-jardin-a-la-francaise-2/

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/dd/HamptonCourtFromLongWater.jpg

In Ham House (Surrey), Elizabeth Lauderdale's residence, the French-inspired parterres, designed by Beaumont (who had been trained by Le Nôtre), could be admired by her guests from the reception rooms on the first floor, as well as the tightly cut lawns, fashionable to play balls, and areas of "wilderness", more private, to entertain guests. Although this garden continued the tradition of extreme formality and control over nature, it was designed not just to be admired, but also as a place for recreation and pleasure.

Ham House from the South by Henry Danckaerts, c. 1675. Public domain. [19]

[19] https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=91941667

Interestingly, these garden features are still mentioned a century later, in one of Jane Austen's novels, *Mansfield Park*, when she describes[20] the pleasure grounds of an old mansion "amply furnished in the taste of fifty years back":

> The **lawn**, bounded on each side by a high wall, contained beyond the first plated area, a **bowling-green**, and beyond the bowling-green, a long terrace walk, backed by iron palisades, and commanding a view over them into the tops of the trees of the **wilderness** immediately adjoining. […] A considerable flight of steps landed them into the **wilderness, which was a planted wood of about two acres**, and though chiefly of larch and laurel, and beech cut down, and though laid out with too much regularity, was darkness and shade, and natural beauty, compared with the bowling-green and the terrace." *(my emphasis)*

Then Charles II's death and subsequent overthrow in 1688 of his Catholic brother James II ushered in a new era of garden design. William and Mary brought with them a completely different culture. When they adopted Hampton Court as their favourite palace, they set about transforming the old Tudor palace along their own Dutch tastes. At that time, in France, the great enemy Louis XIV had Versailles, which by 1690 was the great wonder of Europe. Designed by Le Nôtre, like in Vaux le Vicomte, the garden "stretched literally as far as the eye could see and set the tone for aspirational garden. But what William brought was a completely different sensibility: whereas Versailles looked out, with its great avenues and domination, there was something inward-looking about Dutch gardens, something contained and precise, almost finicky, that appealed more to the British sensibility with its enclosed gardens".[21]

https://www.hrp.org.uk/hampton-court-palace/whats-on/privy-garden/

[20] Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, Chapter 9, pp. 85-86
[21] BBC2 – 'The Secret History of the British Garden, Part 1: The 17th Century'.

William's privy garden at Hampton Court Palace, as well as the contemporary gardens at Levens Hall, displayed one of the main features that 17th century's gardeners mastered perfectly: topiary art. Control of nature was king, and wherever possible, gardeners would exercise their powers over nature by clipping everything to shape: the hollies, the roses, the honeysuckles, the lavenders, the philadelphus, etc.

Monty Don thus concludes the first episode of the BBC2 series on the history of British gardens: "In the 17th century, a garden could be a powerful statement. It was not just a space to entertain or pass the time. Gardens defined who you were and what you stood for, whether it was your faith, your understanding of science, or your wealth and status in society. In Ham House, Beaumont also built the first ha-ha ever known in England, allowing the visitor standing in the garden to include the countryside as part of one's garden view. And this feature was to revolutionize gardening in the 18th century, thus ushering in the age of landscape gardening."[22]

The house and Ha-ha at Kingston Lacy in Dorset | © National Trust Images/James Dobson[23]

[22] BBC2 - 'The Secret History of the British Garden, Part 1: The 17th Century'
[23] What is a ha-ha? | Gardens | National Trust

Chapter 3 — The 18th century

From the 18th century, the emergence of modernity in Britain can be associated with the rise to prominence and to influence of a new social class: where the old aristocracy had made its money from land ownership, the best way of making a fortune in the 18th century was to engage large-scale international commerce, or in speculative investment. This gave rise to an urban bourgeois class who had money and time to spare. Their wealth necessarily gave them influence, but it did not necessarily give them status. Within a strong philosophical framework provided by Shaftesbury, Addison, Pope, Hogarth and Burke, politeness and taste, sanctioned by such arbiters as Lord Burlington, became the cultural and social requirements to climb the social ladder. Culture then shifted from a universal Classical past to a specifically national identity that was in the process of being shaped by the modernizing influences of international commerce and enterprise.[24]

According to John Dixon Hunt[25], the close relationship between landscape gardening and literature in the 18th century is celebrated in Horace Walpole's apophthegm: "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." Their cooperation certainly established a new style of landscape gardening, but the fresh ideas the "sisters" promoted, being subject to modification and revision throughout the century, would have consequences on each of them. For example, one development—that from emblematic to expressive gardening—determined parallel movements in literary history. Thus, a conventional history of landscape literature of the 18th century would include John Denham's topographical poem *Cooper's Hill*, the garden poetry of Alexander Pope, James Thomson and Thomas Gray, and at its close, William Gilpin's series of picturesque tours around Britain and Jane Austen's novels.

In another fascinating essay, 'Literature and Landscape in the Eighteenth Century', Stephen Bending uses a post-structuralist approach to explore "what it was these writers wanted from landscape, what they wanted it to be, and why it might matter". Drawing on the oppositions in the representation of landscapes (pastoral and georgic, labour and leisure, country and city, the prospect view and the picturesque), Bending demonstrates the importance of emotion as a driving force in the construction of landscape and the need to understand landscape not as something "out there", but rather as centrally concerned with the expression of self.

24 Notes from 702-civilisation class

25 John Dixon Hunt, 'Emblem and Expressionism in the Eighteen-Century Landscape Garden'.

As those two articles are centred on literature and landscape gardening, I would like to illustrate Bending's demonstration with a famous 18th-century painting. *Mr and Mrs Andrews* (ca. 1750), the masterpiece of Thomas Gainsborough's early career, has been described as a 'triple portrait' of Robert Andrews, his wife and his land:

https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/thomas-gainsborough-mr-and-mrs-andrews

"Surrounded by the beauty of the woods and clouds of the Essex countryside, **self-consciously posing** beside their fertile harvest field and well-stocked pastures, Mr and Mrs Andrews live on in a moving evocation of themselves at home in their own landscape"[26] (my emphasis).
Though Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788) became a famous portrait painter among fashionable clients, he declared that his first love was landscape and began to learn the language of this art from the Dutch 17th-century landscapists, who by 1740 were becoming popular with English collectors. In the background to *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews*—which has been described as "the most English of English pictures"—Gainsborough anticipates the realism of the great English landscapist of the next century, John Constable, but for the most part fancy held sway: his landscapes are of idyllic scenes.[27]

At the end of the 18th century, Walpole's apophthegm could also be illustrated in one of J.M.W. Turner's innovations. As the Royal Academy altered its exhibition procedures in 1798, allowing artists to include verse in the catalogue to accompany their pictures, Turner took immediate advantage of this arrangement and added verses from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and James Thomson's *Seasons* to five paintings of that year's exhibit, thus extending the

[26] https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/thomas-gainsborough-mr-and-mrs-andrews
[27] https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Gainsborough

meaning of landscape painting. Turner's attitude to poetry was that its discursive treatment of a topic, using landscape imagery metaphorically to link ideas in extended chains, would help liberate landscape from a merely topographical register. [28]

At the beginning of the 18th century, gardens turned from sanctuaries to keep nature at bay, in order and control, into a series of carefully manipulated, idealized views of the countryside as a wealthy educated 18th-century nobility wished to portray it. Indeed, in the 18th century, the understanding of landscape was closely tied to painting; thus, from the 1730s, when aristocrats returned home from their "Grand Tour" and took over their country seats, they rejected the existing Dutch formality in their gardens and replaced it with classical influences, such as those inspired by paintings from Claude Gellée (Le Lorrain) or Nicolas Poussin.

In their book *L'Angleterre des jardins* (p. 96), the authors give a striking example of this kind of influence at Stourhead (Wiltshire): the setting of the Pantheon, drawing the eye from across the lake, seems directly inspired by Le Lorrain's *Paysage avec Enée à Délos*, a painting that the rich landowner Henry Hoare had acquired during his trip to Italy:

Enlarged detail from this photo: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stourhead#/media/File:Stourhead_Bridge_A.jpg

[28] Sam Smiles, *J.M.W. Turner*, p. 24

https://www.nationalgalleryimages.co.uk/asset/2028/

Three designers left their marks on 18th-century landscape gardening: William Kent (1685-1748), Lancelot "Capability" Brown (1716-1783) and Humphry Repton (1752-1818). Rousham, in Oxfordshire, was the masterpiece of William Kent. It represents the first phase of English landscape design and has remained almost unaltered for 300 years. William Kent was a painter, stage designer and architect who spent time in Italy, the influence of which can clearly be seen in the gardens at Rousham. There, he developed and completed the original design by the royal gardener, Charles Bridgeman, adding many features to the existing ah-ah–a device giving the viewer of the garden the illusion of an unbroken, continuous rolling lawn, whilst providing boundaries for grazing livestock. He thus designed the ponds and cascades in Venus's Vale, the Cold Bath and the seven-arched Praeneste, Townsend's Building, the Temple of the Mill, and, on the skyline, a sham ruin known as the 'Eyecatcher'. He saw the garden as a stage so that every path culminates in a statue or building and gives a sense of drama, with the garden visitor at centre stage. According to Monty Don[29], "Rousham brilliantly displays how Kent included the landscapes to make an idealized image of the English countryside".

In his essay 'Emblem and Expressionism in the Eighteen-Century Landscape Garden', John Dixon Hunt presents the change of taste in landscape gardening which occurred in England

[29] BBC2 - 'The Secret History of the British Garden, Part 2: The 18th Century'

during the first half of the 18th century: from the emblematic decorations built in the parks of the elite's sumptuous neo-classical properties such as Rousham, to show off their status and knowledge, to the introduction of expressive elements allowing to visualize changing moods in landscape–anticipating that century's later taste for natural scenery and the picturesque.[30] Taking the example of Stowe House and the evolution of its famous landscape gardens (from the Elysian Fields designed by William Kent to the Grecian Valley supervised by Capability Brown), Hunt demonstrates that the change of taste in gardening paralleled those in literary history and argues that such a change was already at work at Twickenham, Pope's own garden.

Indeed, Alexander Pope was not only a poet but also a source of inspiration for landscape designers, being a fervent gardener himself. The perfect representative of Augustan poetry, Pope used the same principles when it came to landscape gardening. Taking its inspiration from ancient Rome and Greece, the Augustan style emphasized elegance, harmony, balance, formal strictness, simplicity and being capable of using sense (thinking rationally and keeping your emotions under control.)[31] In his poem 'Epistle to the Earl of Burlington', he explains these principles to describe what a perfect garden should be like. He illustrates this by contrasting it with a bad example: the garden of Timon:

> "At Timon's Villa let us pass a day,
> Where all cry out, 'What sums are thrown away!'
> So proud, so grand, of that stupendous air,
> Soft and Agreeable come never there." (l. 99-102)

From the second half of the 18th century, the gardens, which had conveyed their landowners' intellectual and personal visions and references, gave way to the works of Lancelot "Capability" Brown, a pupil of Kent. His genius was to create landscape gardens looking as natural as if they had never been transformed by man's work. Croome Court, in Worcestershire, was Brown's first commission. According to Monty Don[32], "he took Kent's ideas a step further, to create gardens that did not just use natural landscape as part of the design but embraced it as far as the eye could see". It took him as much skill to transform the landscape and make it seems natural as the one needed to create a tightly controlled garden. The landowner, the Earl of Coventry, intended to create a utopia with grand ambitions. To achieve it, Brown demolished the old church and buildings to make way to grass. "Croome echoes the growing confidence of Georgian Britain: the country had moved away from the politics of its European neighbours with a settled constitutional monarchy and a more liberal philosophy, and this was expressed in a styled garden that dispensed with formality and created a romanticized image of the Eden".

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[30] According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, the picturesque designates both an artistic concept and a style of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, characterized by **a preoccupation with the pictorial values** of architecture and landscape in combination with each other: https://www.britannica.com/art/picturesque

[31] 'Alexander Pope and the eighteenth-century garden'. *18th Century Media Blog.* November 2012.

[32] BBC2 - 'The Secret History of the British Garden, Part 2: The 18th Century'

During a tour of the north of England, the young J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851) arrived at Harewood House, where "he had been summoned by one of his earliest patrons, Edward Viscount Lascelles, to create a group of watercolour painting views of the house with its Capability Brown surroundings, and the looming ragged shape of Harewood Castle."[33]

JMW Turner (1775-1851), *Harewood House from the South*, 1798. Graphite and watercolour on paper[34].

In all of the Harewood works, Turner moves away from the conventional manner of depicting the country house as the dominating feature of the view and concentrates his attention on the landscape, on the trees, the foliage, the boulders, and, innovatively, he places groups of workers going about their daily business prominently in the foreground. In *Harewood House from the North* (see next page) Turner conveys a sense of movement throughout the view, the water seeming to swirl in a gathering wind as the sky above darkens with threatened rain, causing the haywain to hurry to cover the load on his wagon. As the figures in the fields respond to the forces of nature around them, it is Turner's intention that the viewer is also compelled to engage with the sense of human vitality in its relationship with nature.[35] It is during his tour in the north that Turner discovered his own great potential as a landscape painter, and it is worth noting that though Turner carried sketchbooks, which he would fill with pencil drawings and memoranda, Turner's watercolours were later produced in the studio, not from the motif. [36]

[33] Jane Sellars, *Art and Yorkshire: from Turner to Hockney*, pp. 30-32
[34] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Paintings_by_Joseph_Mallord_William_Turner_in_the_Harewood_House
[35] Jane Sellars, *Art and Yorkshire: from Turner to Hockney*, pp. 30-32
[36] Sam Smiles, *J.M.W Turner*, pp. 20-21.

JMW Turner (1775-1851), *Harewood House from the North*, 1798. Graphite and watercolour on paper. [37]

Brown's work at Croome launching his career, he worked subsequently on over 170 different projects across the country, including at Chatsworth, in Derbyshire. There he swept away much of the existing garden's formality, widened a river and moved an entire village. Behind the landscape gardens often lies a story of people disposed, moved, and a land that had been used in a certain way for centuries suddenly became the property of just one individual. To create these huge parks, landowners used enclosures, which added to those carried out for "agricultural improvement". The practice which had already been denounced two centuries before in Thomas More's *Utopia* (see Chapter 1, p. 9) accelerated during the 17th and 18th centuries. Common land, which had been an important resource for villagers who had just one cow or half a dozen sheep to survive, was disappearing. This may have been a factor in prompting the poorest farmers to move towards urban life as the new working class—as the process of industrialization got going—or to emigrate to British colonies, as suggested in Oliver Goldsmith's poem 'The Deserted Village' (1769):

> (…) Sweet smiling village, loveliest of the lawn,
> Thy sports are fled, and all thy charms withdrawn;
> *Amidst thy bowers the tyrant's hand is seen,*
> And Desolation saddens all thy green:
> *One only master grasps the whole domain,* *(my emphasis))*
> And half a tillage stints thy smiling plain. […]
> And, trembling, shrinking from the spoiler's hand,
> Far, far away thy children leave the land. (…)

[37] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Paintings_by_Joseph_Mallord_William_Turner_in_the_Harewood_House

Goldsmith's deeply nostalgic vision of a country life destroyed by urban modernity epitomizes the lament for a lost way of life, characteristic of pastoral writing, which, according to Frank Kermode, is an essentially urban vision of the country[38]. This traditional representation of the rural idyll in Augustan poetry was later attacked by George Crabbe's poem[39] *The Village* (1783), describing the realities of village life:

> [ ] No; cast by Fortune on a frowning coast,
> Which neither groves nor happy valleys boast;
> Where other cares than those the Muse relates,
> And other shepherds dwell with other mates;
> By such examples taught, I paint the Cot,
> *As Truth will paint it, and as Bards will not*: *(my emphasis)*
> Nor you, ye Poor, of letter'd scorn complain,
> To you the smoothest song is smooth in vain;
> O'ercome by labour, and bow'd down by time,
> Feel you the barren flattery of a rhyme?
> Can poets soothe you, when you pine for bread,
> By winding myrtles round your ruin'd shed?
> Can their light tales your weighty griefs o'erpower,
> Or glad with airy mirth the toilsome hour? […]

Because of the financial cost to construct and maintain these landscape gardens, many aristocrats bankrupted themselves in their endeavour to create landscape art. Many gardens were turned back to farmland, like Capability Brown's gardens at Croome Court (until the National Trust came to the rescue in 1997).

Financed by growing colonial trade and industrial development, from the 1760s any self-respecting landed gentry were creating their own landscape gardens. However, by the end of the 18th century, the whole landscape movement was evolving. Estate priorities had to be reassessed to meet the cost of Napoleonic wars and increased taxation, and from these changes, one dominant figure emerged: Humphry Repton. He had tried his hand at many ventures before he spotted a gap in landscape industry and adroitly filled it. Repton's talent was recognizing the demands of a new clientele and brilliantly marketing his designs. Interestingly, he is mentioned in Austen's novel[40] *Mansfield Park*, Chapter VI, in which a landowner, Mr. Rushworth, intends to have "improvements" made on his property:

> "I must try to do something with it," said Mr Rushworth, "but I do not know what. I hope I shall have some good friend to help me."
> "Your best friend upon such occasion, "said Miss Bertram, calmly, "would be Mr. Repton, I imagine."
> "That is what I was thinking of. As he has done so well by Smith, I think I had better have him at once. His terms are five guineas a day".

[38] Stephen Bending, 'Literature and Landscape in the 18th century', p. 5/22
[39] https://gutenberg.org/files/5203/5203-h/5203-h.htm
[40] Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 51

Repton's trademark was in his red books, let out to the landowner with the drawings, instructions and plans, so that his clients could execute them when and how they pleased. These books were geared as much to the women of the household as to the men, with a lot of references to domesticity, to flowers, to convenience. And at the end of the 18th century, owners wanted less of landscapes and more of gardens. Endsleigh, in Devon, and Stanage (Wales) are two examples of gardens designed by Repton. Few of his projects were fully implemented, but one of the reasons why he is still respected today as a garden designer is because he linked the 18th century landscape garden to the Victorian era and created key elements still implemented in present English gardens—more "dressed" grounds near the house, with sinuous shrubberies, flowerbeds, trellis and ornate garden seats, and fountains, less expensive than Greek temples—as we will see in Chapter 4: The Regency Era.

In the 18th century, English national identity defined itself as everything that was antithetical to a perceived French character, seen as effeminate, deceitful, given to artifice and morally frivolous. English national identity, thus, was constructed as manly, sincere, natural, and morally earnest[41]. Thus, if the beginning of the 18th century celebrated Augustan literature, Palladian houses and landscape gardens, which should reflect the personality of their owners, from the second half to the end of that century the elite reacted against this trend of Neoclassicism, with its emphasis on formality, proportion, order, and exactitude. Taste moved towards more naturalness and sincerity, favoured sensibility in literature, and people welcomed William Gilpin's revolutionary ideas about landscape and picturesque beauty, enhancing the pictorial values of architecture and landscape in combination with each other. If the term "picturesque" originally denoted a landscape scene that looked as if it came out of a painting in the style of Claude Gelée or Gaspard Poussin, in England the Picturesque was defined as an aesthetic quality standing half-way between the sublime (i.e., awe-inspiring) and the beautiful (i.e., serene), and one marked by pleasing variety, irregularity, asymmetry, and interesting texture.

According to Professor Malcom Andrews[42], "William Gilpin book's *Observation on the River Wye…relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty* formally launched picturesque tourism in the early 1790s. It guided the viewer on how to assess landscape scenery, its structure, distribution of masses, tonality and so on. It turned the countryside into an aesthetic amenity". Indeed, as the outbreak of war with France in 1793 had made continental touring extremely hazardous, in its place tourism flourished within the British Isles, exploiting the picturesque attractions of the

[41] Professor Malcolm Andrews, 'English Landscape: The Picturesque'
[42] idem

local landscape, especially Wales and the River Wye, the Lake District, and Scotland. Initially occasioned by necessity, this picturesque tourism also helped to construct a sense of national identity and to buttress patriotic feelings as the historical legacy and scenic charms of Britain were reappraised. Topographical images, whether watercolours or prints, helped the nation to begin to know itself for the first time, and artists—such as Turner in the 1790s—were in demand to supply this growing market.[43]

J.M.W. Turner, *Tintern Abbey: The Crossing and Chancel, Looking towards the East Window*, 1794.[44]

Professor Andrews also explains that, while stimulating at first the tastes for the rough and irregular, the wild and natural (the "scenic sublime" praised by the Romantic poets), picturesque beauty gradually became reconciled with human presence and with the criteria of comfort, utility, and social morality. For Gilpin, *variety* is the greatest aesthetic advantage of English landscape, and the fact that variety is concentrated in such a small compass: he argues that England has small-scale versions of all the great and famous scenic attractions of Europe. Another distinctive characteristic of the native landscape arises from the *intermixture of wood and cultivation*—stemming from the custom of dividing property with hedges, and of planting hedgerows—which is found oftener in English landscape than in the landscapes of other countries:

[43] Sam Smiles, *J.M.W Turner*, p. 20.
[44] https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-tintern-abbey-the-crossing-and-chancel-looking-towards-the-east-window-d00374

David Noton Photography/Alamy Stock Photo [45]

At the end of the 18th century, the resulting distinctive personality of England's country scenery may be summarized in the following quotation[46] : "It was a sweet view—sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright, without being oppressive", the landscape thus epitomizing the moral qualities of Englishness: comfort, control, moderation. As Professor Andrews concludes in his captivating lecture:

> William Gilpin's Picturesque arrived in the last third of the eighteenth century, at a time when English nationalism was particularly intense, when English landscape gardening had asserted a particular kind of patriotic naturalism. As Picturesque theory developed in the 1790s and the European continent closed to English tourists, English landscape aesthetics (for decades dominated by the new Royal Academy) shed some of its original Claudean dependency. Gainsborough's impact, as well as the popularity of Dutch landscapes, were very significant in this respect, and opened the way to Constable's celebrations of English scenery.

[45] https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/habitats/hedgerows/
[46] Jane Austen, *Emma*, Chapter 42, p. 272

Chapter 4 — The Regency Era

By the end of the 18th century, the landscape movement was going outside of fashion because the world had changed: big, new technological developments, big new cities, new ideas demanded new styles of gardening. In the BBC2 programme 'The Secret History of the British Garden, Part 3: The 19th-century' and in Peeters & Vandersande's book *L'Angleterre des jardins*, it seems that, assimilating the 19th century to the reign of Queen Victoria, they overlooked a fascinating, pivotal period in British history: the Regency Era.

> George IV was Regent only from 1811 until 1820, but the term 'Regency', to which his title was given, is usually taken to cover the period from 1794, when the ideas which gave rise to the style began to ferment, until the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837. The fashionable, pleasure-loving Prince (…) was a compulsive builder and an enthusiastic promoter of new ideas in architecture, town planning and technology and it was only to be expected that he would hold strong views on the changing ideas in landscape gardening which preoccupied people at the turn of the century. [47]

The Regency period witnessed the early developments of London's suburbs into fashionable areas for the middle-classes. According to Mavis Batey, if 18th-century taste was aristocratic, Regency taste was indeed more flexible and intuitive and embraced a much wider and more democratic society. The expanding and prosperous mercantile classes wanted suburban villas and gardens, and these became the most numerous clients of the elderly Humphry Repton (see Chapter 3) and the young John Claudius Loudon.[48] Although Regency gardening was a distinctive style and widely used, few examples of it can be identified today because most of these gardens were refashioned in the Victorian period. "Unless the intervening period had caught the eye of an early 19th-century illustrator, such as Ackermann, there [would] be no record of what the Regency gardens looked like".

In the late 1810s, Hampstead Heath, the last of the great open spaces near London, was a traditional recreation ground. If Hampstead was still a village a few miles north of London, it was quickly developing into a London suburb:

> Dear Hampstead, is thy southern face serene,
> Silently smiling on approaching eyes,
> Within, thine ever-shifting looks surprise,—
> Streets, hills, and dells, trees overhead now seen,
> Now down below, the smoking roofs between,—
> A village, revelling in varieties.
> Then northward what a range,—with heath and pond,
> Nature's own ground; woods that let mansions through,
> And cottaged vales with pillowy fields beyond,
> And clump of darkened pines, and prospect blue.

[47] Mavis Batey, *Regency Gardens*, pp. 5-6
[48] https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/story-of-england/georgians/landscape/

In this poem—published in *The Examiner* in November 1815—Leigh Hunt saw Hampstead Village as an adjunct to both the Heath and London. For Walter L. Creese[49], "the village acts both as an alternative to city life and as a nostalgic recollection for those honestly rural village so much further away in the kingdom. A Wordsworthian escape can thus be domesticated, stabilized, brought in close." In the 1810s, Hampstead was also a summer retreat for the painter John Constable, where his family could enjoy its cleaner air. Using Hampstead's elevated point of view in *Sir Richard Steele's Cottage, Hampstead* (1832), Constable also contrasts the relatively rural nature of these suburban surroundings with the smoky metropolis below:

http://collections.britishart.yale.edu/vufind/Record/1668080

In the foreground, a short-stage coach trundles south towards the city. In 1815, some 43 daily short stage return journeys were made between London and Hampstead and the frequent run of stagecoaches was even leading to concerns in Parliament about the state of the road.[50] And on the Heath nearby, Constable would sketch quarrying sand and gravel. The fact that it was partly a working landscape could have reminded him of the men he used to see working in the fields of his native Suffolk.

[49] Walter L. Creese, 'Imagination in the Suburb', p. 53
[50] Richard Marggraf Turley, 'Introduction: Keats's Coordinates'. *Keats's Places*, p. 5 and note 16, p. 24

John Constable, *Hampstead Heath with a Rainbow*, 1836[51]

John Constable, *Hampstead Heath, with the House Called 'The Salt Box'*, c.1819–20[52]

According to Elizabeth Jones[53], the rapid rise in economic status of the urban middle class at the end of the 18th century, combined with urban crowding and a new domestic ethos, brought about an interest in Hampstead and other suburban areas as permanent homes for

[51] https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/constable-hampstead-heath-with-a-rainbow-n01275
[52] https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/constable-hampstead-heath-with-the-house-called-the-salt-box-n01236
[53] Elizabeth Jones, 'Keats in the Suburbs', pp. 24, 29, and 30.

London's wealthier professional and mercantile classes, where they could experience the best of both rural and urban worlds. The suburbs, then, were seen as places that attracted social climbers or "nouveaux riches" (what Lord Byron called "Sunday Bloods"), those who aspired to living in the country, but who had neither land nor the security of a landowner's rent. For her, "the suburban lifestyle was a bourgeois creation, marked by a carefully constructed domesticity, cultivated in what was portrayed by Regency city planners as 'the unspoiled periphery of the urban centres.'" Among them, John Nash (who had been a partner of Humphry Repton) created East and West Park villages, respectively in and to the south of Hampstead.

Park Village East, Regent's Park, architect John Nash (1824-25),
From Thomas H. Shepherd, *Metropolitan Improvements of London*, p. 20 (1829)

Illustration sources: Commons Wikimedia and https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co66389

Here the Regency style, so soon to degenerate, is at its best. Nash honours the notion of 'woods that let mansions through,' evocated in Leigh Hunt's poem on Hampstead (Creese, p. 54), and illustrated by these two paintings by John Constable:

Constable, *The Grove, Hampstead* (1820-21) [54]

Constable, *Trees at Hampstead* (1829)[55]

At the beginning of that period, frustrated by what he saw as the dominant Brownian-type landscape gardening, Uvedale Price (1747–1829) published *An essay 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* in 1794. In this essay, he emphasized the importance of naturalism and harmony with the surrounding environment, while applying the lessons of landscape painting to the practice of landscape gardening. And the same year, Richard Payne Knight (1751–1824) published a didactic poem which was addressed to Price[56].

However, as their aesthetic was suited to the upper classes, the designers of the Regency Era aimed to reform it, as well as the uniform and barren clumps and belts of "Capability" Brown. Thus, they took the ideals of the Picturesque to practical conclusions**,** which could not have been achieved in the vast estate-gardens of the wealthy. The first designer to react to the fact that the Brownian landscape garden had become sterile was Humphry Repton. In *Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1802), he aimed to return to the original picturesque ideals of intricacy and luxuriance and put them to practical use in the smaller urban and suburban lots of the professional classes. As he had previously suggested to the Prince of Wales:

[54] https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/constable-the-grove-hampstead-n01246
[55] https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/constable-trees-at-hampstead-n02659
[56] https://openlibrary.org/books/OL24840657M/An_essay_on_the_picturesque

> In the park scenery, we may realise the landscapes of Claude and Poussin but, in garden scenery, we delight in the rich embellishments, the blended graces of Watteau, where nature is dressed, not disfigured, by art; and where the artificial decorations of architecture and sculpture are softened down by natural accompaniments of vegetation.

Antoine Watteau, La Partie Carrée, c. 1713, The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.[57]

Repton thought that the gardens could be considered as 'so many apartments' belonging to the comfort and pleasure of the house. He recommended ornamental gardening, such as flower baskets on the lawn or a decorative iron fence separating the artificial 'dressed grounds' from the grazed scene. The garden scenery would then provide a 'rich frame' to the landscape rather than become 'part of the picture'[58]. Following the lead of Repton, several treatises, such as John Plaw's *Sketches for Country Houses, Villas and Rural Dwellings* (1800), set the cultural stage for the suburban aesthetic.

Another prominent figure of this era was John Claudius Loudon (1783-1843), a botanist, garden designer, and prolific writer. He was very keen that London's squares should be filled with attractive trees and plants. Although he began by reproducing the picturesque designs of Price and Knight in *Country Residences* (1806), he also quickly adapted his aesthetic to the practical and smaller tastes of the burgeoning middle classes, thus following the trend of Repton and many others.[59] In 1812, he published *Hints on the Transformation of Gardens and Pleasure*

[57] Antoine Watteau - La Partie carrée - Antoine Watteau — Wikipédia (wikipedia.org)
[58] Mavis Batey, *Regency Gardens*, pp. 26-29
[59] Elizabeth Jones, 'Keats in the Suburbs', notes 6 and 25.

Grounds, which contained several designs for small town gardens, and certainly provided inspiration for the gardens of the Regency villas being built around London. Loudon published an *Encyclopaedia of Gardening* in 1822, then gardening magazines. Thanks to improved print technology, the end to the tax on paper and increased literacy, the growing middle-classes were soon able to keep abreast of all the latest horticultural advances.

Regency house developments in Hampstead anticipated the Victorian generalisation of suburbs: according to Creese, a mass-deprivation of sight took place in Victorian cities, even for those who were profiting most from the change, the middle-class. "The island is small; the population is great; each man to be a full man needs a dwelling of his own and some soil that is his to work on. The suburb is the most economical way of supplying these ends." In the suburban garden the owner might demonstrate his mastery over Nature, however minuscule, and relate directly to the soil and environment (Creese, p. 49). In 1838, Loudon published *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion*, a seminal book for Victorian suburban aesthetics. In his book, he announced his intention to prove "that a suburban residence, with a very small portion of the land attached, will contain all that is essential to happiness, in the garden, park, and demesne of the most extensive country residence" (Loudon, p. 8). Thus, the quiet contemplation of distant views, great sweeps of lawn, and a nearby private wood was replaced by a far more packed and animated scene—a close cut lawn, gravelled path trimmed with bright flowers, floral beddings in varied patterns, ornamental ponds, statuary, tents, an iron fountain, etc…

Fountain, Napoleon willow and arch tent, p. 585

Fountain, surrounded by baskets of flowers with the two garden nymphs, p. 589

"The gentility of the overall intention kept the suburban landscape from exploding into a hundred pieces" (Creese, pp. 49-51), as shown in these two illustrations from Loudon's book, presenting his designs for a "second-rate" garden at Drayton Green, near London.

Creese stresses the particularities of suburbs built in this era, arguing that "a sense of truly crystallizing vitality raises the Victorian suburb over all earlier and later forms…Among its inimitable characteristics were its variety and artificiality, its simultaneous reliance on improvisation and ad hoc features…The dream was brought forward to mix with the reality" (Creese, p. 50). In *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion* (p.11), Loudon also claims:

> We have long seen that the poor, by cooperation and self-cultivation, may insure to themselves all that is worth having of the enjoyment of wealthier classes; and it has been our study, for many years past, to find out in what way all the improvements in architecture, gardening, husbandry, and domestic economy, may be brought to bear upon the residences of the working and middle-classes of society.

Elizabeth Jones argues that Loudon's suburban propaganda gave the suburbs the power to turn a city-dwelling worker into an estate-owning member of the gentry, and a promise of social advancement through geographical location that defied long-established notions of property and birth right. And the idea of "self-cultivation" was perhaps the most potent attraction for city-dwellers seeking refuge from the incessant commercial flow of urban life. The library and the garden, integral parts of any suburban residence, were the suburban substitutes for the cultural activities of the metropolis. "As families moved away from the city, they began cultivating the pleasures of nature and art entirely within the confines of their own homes, aided by gardening manuals like those of Loudon…and by the rapidly expanding market for affordable reproductions of painting and sculpture" (Jones, p. 40). The suburban garden was not only a means of social advancement, but it became a way for those seeking natural sustenance to bring Nature home. The cultivation of the villa garden—one of the defining activities of the suburban resident—was thus seen as a way of protesting against the modern world, holding it at bay, or as a defence against the moral degradation of cities.

Thus, Loudon's "gardenesque", a more private and personal aesthetic that was more appropriate to the suburban experience, made it possible for the middle classes to achieve a cultural status of their own, despite their lack of vast property (Jones, pp. 31-33). By the middle of the 19th century, one effect of urbanization was to transform rural life from a common experience to a popular pastime.

We just saw how the Regency suburbs evolved during the first decades of the Victorian Era, and what their characteristics became. Let us go back to 1810s Hampstead now and examine what a Regency villa then looked like.

After the fashion of building picturesque cottages to improve the aesthetic of landowners' estates—not only for peasants and farmers, but also as retreats for gentlemen—the border between these cottage-style affluent dwellings ("cottage orné") and Regency suburban houses and villas became blurred. John Plaw, for instance, had been one of the first to publish pattern books for ornamental cottages and rural dwellings (*Ferme ornée, or, Rural improvements,* 1795) before he published his *Sketches for Country Houses, Villas and Rural Dwellings*. In England, even though the notion of cottage has been constantly changing it has always remained an emblem of the English countryside. So, I find it revealing that, as Leigh Hunt in his poem, both Charles Dilke and Charles Brown, in their letters, referred to the respective half of the villa they shared at Hampstead as a "cottage" (K. Page[60], pp. 254 & 263).

Mavis Batey[61] summarizes the characteristics of the Regency villa as follows:

> Regency houses had stripped canopies, verandahs, balconies and ornamental ironwork and, as an accompaniment to the light playfulness of the architecture, more 'dressed' grounds near the house, with sinuous shrubberies, flowerbeds, trellis and ornate garden seats. (…) There was a new connection between house and garden through conservatories and flower corridors; interior decoration and trellised verandahs complemented each other, fluted curtains, flower stands and flouncing shrubberies matching the elegance of the Regency costume."

To unite the house and the garden, Humphry Repton promoted French windows, "the modern improvement, borrowed from the French, of folding glass doors opening into a garden, by which the effect in a room is like that of a tent or a marquee, and in summer delightful." For example, in *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*[62] (1816), Repton shows the ancient cedar parlour contrasted with the modern living room (p. 55):

In Hampstead, Leigh Hunt's cottage does not exist anymore, but Wentworth Place (known today as Keats's House), built *circa* 1815, provides us with a good example of the Regency house developments of suburban London. According to Kenneth Page, since late

[60] Kenneth Page, 'Wentworth Place: "A Small Cottage, Pleasantly Situate"'
[61] Mavis Batey, *Regency Gardens*, p. 5
[62] https://archive.org/details/fragmentsontheor00rept/page/58/mode/2up

1816, Charles Dilke's family and Charles Brown occupied the two halves of a recently constructed semi-detached villa in a new development, which had been thus advertised in *The Times* (1 August 1815): "…22 lots for the convenience of persons desirous of purchasing small parcels, most delightfully situate on the south-side of Hampstead, adjoining the heath, and commanding very extensive and beautiful views…"[63]

House front (The extension on the left was added in 1838-1839)[64]

At the back of the house, French windows give a direct access to the garden[65]

[63] Kenneth Page, 'Wentworth Place: 'A Small Cottage, Pleasantly Situate'. *Keats's Places*, pp. 246-247
[64] https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/hampstead-stars-attack-alcohol-sales-at-john-keats-museum-wwf23fpqg
[65] Welt-Atlas.de/RK, https://www.welt-atlas.de/foto_von_keats_house_in_hampstead_1-441-32

William Wood, the builder of several houses of this development, probably adapted contemporary villa designs published in the early 19th century. Page mentions the resemblance between Wentworth Place itself and the plans and the descriptions of the houses found in Plate VIII, from John Plaw's *Sketches for Country Houses, Villas and Rural Dwellings*, and in Plates XIII to XVI of Charles Augustin Busby's *A Series of Designs for Villas and Country houses*:

Plaw's Plate 8 (detail) and description
https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/AJKYX7RFUIKWX58K

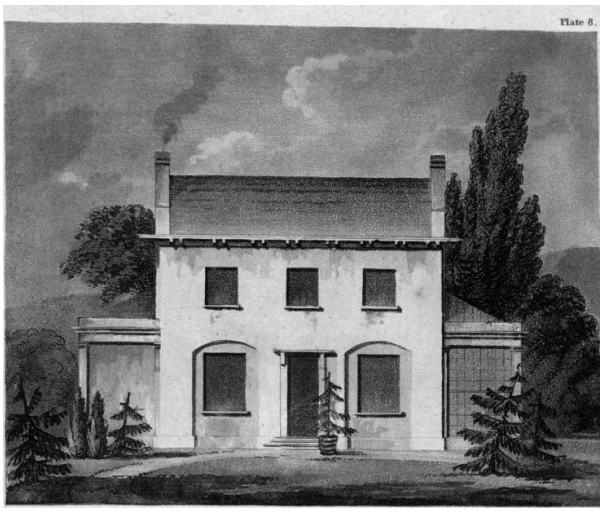

PLATE VIII.

THIS ſketch may be conſidered as a Cottage or Rural Dwelling, making a very comfortable reſidence for a family with a ſmall independent fortune, or a retreat occaſionally to relax from the buſtle of buſineſs.

This building ſhould be of brick, or ſtone plaſtered and ſtuccoed, or rough-caſt: the projection of the cantiliver cornice will protect the front from injury; the covering of ſlate; and the finiſhings within, neat Portland ſtone chimney-pieces, four-pannel moulded doors, baſe and impoſt mouldings, and plaſter cornices to the two beſt rooms; the walls papered, and wood-work painted in plain colours: will amount to 600*l.* or thereabouts.

Busby's Plate XVI (elevation-detail)
https://archive.org/details/seriesofdesignsf00busb/page/n53/mode/2up

PLATES XIII and XIV.

Design for a Country House.

This design, containing all the accommodations usually required by a genteel family, is well calculated for the residence of a gentleman of small fortune. The apartments are of suitable dimensions, and sufficiently numerous. The kitchen and wash-house, together with the servants' bed-rooms, are separated from the other parts of the house; and the interior admits of being decorated according to the taste of an enlightened proprietor.

Page thus concludes (pp. 250-251):

> the interior of Wentworth Place is closer in layout to the house in Plaw's work, but the front elevation appears to be Busby's published design (…) Wentworth Place is a fairly plain and tidy box-like structure, with a number of features that are usually identified as typical of the Regency period, such as a slated hipped roof, first floor windows set under projecting eaves, a string course running the width of the front, lime-washed stucco exteriors concealing the brickwork, windows set in recessed arches and decorative ironwork balconies for pot plants, with French windows opening directly onto the garden at the rear,

as we can see on the photo of the back of the house. Plaw's and Busby's designs were aimed at customers exactly like the Dilke family: aspiring, prosperous middle-class businessmen and civil servants looking for modern, pleasant, suburban but semi-rural residences with easy access to London (as we mentioned p. 28, many daily short stage return journeys were made between London and Hampstead).

John Keats (1795-1821), the youngest of British Romantic poets, moved to live in Wentworth house with his friend Brown in December 1818. The garden was shared, and it seems to have been surrounded by a low fence and a hedge. From Keats's letters and Brown's memoirs, we know that there was probably at the back of the house the remains of an orchard, which included at least one plumtree, and a kitchen garden containing celery, cabbages, radishes, onions, beetroot, runner and French beans, and mignonettes. And in front of the house, the garden almost certainly included the mulberry tree that still occupies a prominent place, a grass plot, and, although there is no contemporary description, flower beds, pot plants and gravel path around the property.[66] Keats knew a great deal about suburban gardening: when he was living at Wentworth Place, he wrote to his sister Fanny:

> I ordered some bulbous roots for you at the Gardeners, and they sent me some, but they are all in bud—and could not been sent, so I put them in our Garden There are some beautiful heaths now in bloom in Pots—either heaths or some seasonable plants I will send you instead—perhaps some that are not yet in bloom that you may see them come out.[67]

Thus, the poet frequented local nurseries, businesses that had become increasingly prominent over the previous fifty years and were about to become a familiar part of the urban landscape. His mention of "some beautiful heaths in bloom in pots" reminds us that the early 19th century also saw the full-scale emergence of container gardening [68]. Interestingly, Leigh Hunt's sister-in-law, Elizabeth Kent, was one of the best-known authorities on this subject: in 1823, she published an excellent guide for city dwellers without gardens of their own: *Flora Domestica, or, the Portable Flower-Garden: with Directions for the Treatment of Plants and Pots and illustrations from the Works of the Poets*. We will see in the next chapter that Victorian garden, large and small, would made great use of plants, kept in tubs and pots. One reason for this fascination was their artificiality—a quality highly important to a generation in rebellion against a standardized conception of nature. Growing in pots 'always checks and counteract the natural habits of the plant', as Loudon observed, and therefore provided a challenge for the gardener. Loudon recommended as an example a garden where the tree collection was kept in tubs and was therefore moveable. Greenhouses and conservatories remained essentially collections of plants in pots until the 1870s, when ideas of interior landscape came in.[69]

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[66] Kenneth Page, 'Wentworth Place: 'A Small Cottage, Pleasantly Situate'. *Keats's Places*, pp. 255-256
[67] 'Letter to Fanny Keats, 12 April 1819'. John Keats, *Selected Letters*, p. 193.
[68] Alan Bewell, 'Keats's "Realm of Flora"', pp. 76-77
[69] Andrew Clayton-Payne, *Victorian Flower Gardens*, p. 82.

Chapter 5 — The 19th century

If the 18th century culture had been shaped by an elitist, wealthy and educated "aristocracy of taste", inspired by classical arts and Augustan poetry, Victorian popular arts would reach the fast-growing middle-classes and educated working-class, thanks to the creation of public museums and parks, mass-produced decorative items and the wide spread of novels through their serial publication in cheap magazines, as well as gardening books and magazines. Not surprisingly, 19th century gardens reflect the huge changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution and the extension of Empire.

According to Monty Don[70], Osborne House was bought by Victoria and Albert as a holiday home on the Isle of Wight, and from 1845, they transformed their estate into an Italian Renaissance-inspired palace. Indeed, at that time, Italianate gardens became widespread, reflecting Britain's renewed confidence and wealth that followed the end of the Napoleonic Wars. This Italian inspiration was highly fashionable, and made a clear, political statement: different from the French gardens (seen as cool, formal, elegant, and balanced), Italianate gardens have more verve. They have formality, but also a lot of statues, lots of water, pots with lemons trees, and the formality was filled with plants. And all these decorations, instead of being carved in marble, could be bought from a catalogue of mass-produced items cast in concrete.

Osborne Things to See and Do | English Heritage (english-heritage.org.uk)

[70] BBC2, 'The Secret History of the British Garden, Part 3: The 19th-century'

In the park were planted many trees, rare and unusual, that were completely new to Europe. "As Britain's dominions grew, so did the horticultural ambitions of the nation's gardeners, increasingly hungry for new, exotic plants, not least as a symbol of growing colonial power"[71]. The dominant forces behind the mania for plant hunting were Kew Botanic Gardens in London—founded in 1761 by Princess Augusta—and the man who became Kew's first official director in 1797 under the patronage of George III: Joseph Banks (1743-1820). In the 1760s, Banks had spent a large part of his wealth on plant hunting and from his expeditions with Captain Cook, brought back about 1300 species of plants unknown to the science before that. Banks triggered a plant-hunting frenzy, and people travelled to the extremities of the globe in the search of new specimens, such as David Douglas (in Canada) and Robert Fortune (in China). However, 95% of specimens failed to survive their journey home, until 1833, when the invention of Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward (the Wardian case, a kind of travelling greenhouse) solved this problem[72].

The next challenge—successfully growing these specimens in British climate—would be addressed by Joseph Paxton (1803-1865), one of the 19th-century towering figures. Paxton forged his career at Chatsworth, in Derbyshire, the home of the Dukes of Devonshire. William Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire, used his wealth to indulge his passion for plant collecting and Paxton employed his energy and genius to create the 22 glasshouses to contain them. Among them, Paxton's great Conservatory was revolutionary, and its building was only made possible thanks to a new development in glass manufacture. It became the test bed for the prefabricated glass and iron structural techniques which Paxton pioneered and would employ for his masterpiece: The Crystal Palace of the Great Exhibition of 1851.

According to Professor Jim Endersby[73], after the death of Joseph Banks in 1820, Kew started a period of decline, while in the antipodes, the botanic garden in Sydney, Australia, was just being created under the direction of Charles Fraser. In 1838, Kew's deterioration had become so serious (particularly when compared with France's national botanic garden, the *Jardin des Plantes* in Paris) that it was brought under government control in 1841. Its appointed, new director, William Hooker, worked hard to make Kew an asset to the nation and corresponded with collectors and enthusiasts all over the world, including Fraser in Sydney. As Kew was literally running out of space to host the new plants, Hooker's new priority was to create a new Palm House. In 1844, Hooker employed Decimus Burton, a pupil of Paxton, to design the greatest glasshouse the world had ever seen. Burton based his design on the upturned

[71] BBC2, 'The Secret History of the British Garden, Part 3: The 19th-century'
[72] Michael Holland, 'Chelsea Physic Garden Through the Ages'
[73] 'Gardens of Empire: Kew and the Colonies', by Professor Jim Endersby

hull of a ship and used the latest wrought-iron technology to span its enormous widths, that were clad with 18,000 panes of glass. And underneath, there was an industrialized complex servicing it: 12 boilers fired by coal, which was brought in through a tunnel with a miniature train…

Palm House, RBG Kew / Thom Hudson: https://www.kew.org/read-and-watch/palm-house-secrets-facts

From being a hidden feature in the 18th century, screened from the principal views by shrubberies so that it did not interfere with the 'natural' image of the landscape, the flower garden had become the most prominent item in the view by mid-19th century. Gardeners discovered that the new exotics—especially the half-hardy perennials, like pelargoniums, verbenas, etc. that had to be protected under glass during the English winters but could flourish outdoors during the summer months—gave them the opportunity to change the appearance of the flower garden every year, and eventually every season. This Victorian fashion not only transformed the Regency gardens but virtually erased them. When Regency gardens had displayed an indiscriminate mixing of flowers, by the 1840s the rules of the 'bedding system' were being worked out. The first principle was 'massing': each bed was to be filled with one type of flower only, for the most emphatic effect of colour. Colours were to be arranged for high contrast: adjacent beds should be widely separated on the spectrum.[74]

When Queen Victoria gave Kew to the nation in 1840, it quickly became a favourite place for the horticulturally empowered middle class to visit. And at the same time, there was a growing feeling that gardens should be available to everyone, regardless of wealth and class. Joseph Strutt spent £10,000 in creating Britain's first public park in Derby, a big, busy industrial

[74] Andrew Clayton-Payne, *Victorian Flower Gardens*, p. 76

town[75]. He turned to J.C. Loudon to design the arboretum of the 11-acre site on the edge of the city. The park was an instant success, and it began a trend: by 1880, nearly every town and city in the country had its own municipal park, complete with lakes, fountains, lawns and promenades. Many were financed by philanthropists, from industrialists to local landowners, and all were established with the same Victorian belief in technological, social and moral improvement.

Derby Arboretum in 1907 (Image: copyright unknown):
https://www.derbytelegraph.co.uk/news/nostalgia/how-garden-designer-john-loudons-1934295

Manicured lawns—thanks to lawnmowers powered by horses—and exotic trees became a mainstay of public parks, but it was the arrival of colour that provides probably the most enduring legacy of Victorian gardens. Flowerbeds were only introduced into public park from 1860, and from the 1880s, emblematic patterns in carpet beddings spread around the world: "It was the first international style since the English landscape garden (…) For enabling this creativity, you needed a range of plants that were not available as natives, because native plants tend to be basically green. So, you had to rely on foreign plants if you wanted different reds, blues and yellows. Thus, you needed the plant introduction and the technology to keep these plants going, which meant that until the second half of the century, these types of carpet beds would not have been very feasible"[76]. Carpets beds were also all the rage in the country house

[75] Derby Arboretum | Parks | In Derby
[76] BBC2, 'The Secret History of the British Garden, Part 3: The 19th-century'

gardens, in which the rich and extravagant owners (such as the Rothschild in Waddesdon) sometimes required their gardeners to change all the annual flowers during the night just to surprise and amaze their guests… In Victorian times, an extravagant array of expensive flowers in vast gardens may have nothing in common with a passion for botany: it could just be an arrogant symbol of the landowner's unfathomable wealth, like sportscars and winter trips on the French Riviera[77]. "By the 1880s, the proponents of a new taste in gardening were pointing to the lack of paintings of early and high Victorian gardening as evidence of its bad taste"[78].
The exuberant and colourful flowerbeds in Victorian gardens inspired some of the floral designs of mechanically woven carpets, which matched the heavy decoration of Victorian houses. Here above is an example of such a carpet, manufactured ca. 1851 by John Crossley & Sons (Halifax) and showed at the 2020 exhibition "Victorian Radicals"[79].

The excesses of the Victorian materialism and flashy tastes, epitomized by this carpet in decorative arts, and by garish carpet beds in garden design, triggered a powerful aesthetic reaction from the second half of the 19th century, including the Pre-Raphaelites in painting, the Arts & Crafts and the Aesthetic movements, and their gardening muse, Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932). Among the towering figures of this era were the art critic John Ruskin, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Morris, Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde.

[77] Francis Peeters and Guy Vandersande, *L'Angleterre des jardins*, p. 120
[78] Andrew Clayton-Payne, *Victorian Flower Gardens*, p. 11.
[79] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qedlVaido5s&ab_channel=YaleBritishArt

Meanwhile, a nostalgic passion for Medieval history and arts launched a revivalist trend in arts, including gardening. By the end of the century, the garden of hedged or walled enclosures, with topiary and Renaissance-style sculptural ornaments, and largely hardy planting, whether herbaceous borders or orchards, had become vernacular for garden design. More readily adapted for the small middle-class garden than the display style of the High-Victorian period, and popular with architects because its formality gave them a greater role in the creation of the garden, it became the basis of the 'arts and crafts' gardens of the Edwardian period, and thus remained a significant influence on the 20th century[80]. So, as far as our story of English garden is concerned, the eclectic tastes of the late Victorian Era and of the ensuing 20th century have led us back—full circle—to its beginning, at the Tudor Era…

Coming back to the beginning of the 19th century, Romantic ideas about nature in literature (in Wordsworth's poetry for instance) took a grip on painting. The English landscape grew in popularity in the 19th century. Once Turner had broken new grounds by exhibiting his paintings with appropriate verse alongside; now it was the norm.[81] John Constable (1776-1837) was the other great Romantic landscape painter of the 19th century. He always saw his calling in landscape painting, which derived from his love of nature and of the hills of his native Suffolk. For *Wivenhoe Park, Essex* (his first important commission), the painter had to work outdoor for the most part of the painting, a process which was revolutionary in 1816.

John Constable, *Wivenhoe Park, Essex*, 1816 - https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.1147.html

[80] Andrew Clayton-Payne, *Victorian Flower Gardens*, p. 125.
[81] Jane Sellars, *Art and Yorkshire: from Turner to Hockney*, p. 40

Though Constable had to modify the actual location of certain elements at the request of the landowner—for example, the house and lake were not actually part of the same view—his interpretation of this landscape, with its pattern of puffy clouds in the sky, enhances the impression of reality. Constable believed that it was through the translation of evanescent effects of light and dark experienced outdoors that the painter expressed emotions, thus capturing what he termed the "chiaroscuro of nature." For Enora Barbey[82], Constable painted a pastoral idyll in his landscapes—a golden age which was vanishing with the Industrial Revolution—and conveyed through his work the nostalgia of this loss. Though his work seems more academical than Turner's, his contemporary rival, Constable revolutionized landscape painting and greatly influenced the work of the French Impressionists, even if the latter did not acknowledge this. Struggling to receive proper recognition, an artistic breakthrough occurred with his "six-foot" pictures around 1820, when Constable was well into his 40s.

John Constable, *The Cornfield*, 1826, The National Gallery, London [83]

[82] Enora Barbey, « John Constable : Une nouvelle idée du paysage ».
[83] https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/john-constable-the-cornfield

According to Professor Andrews[84], one of these "six-foot" pictures, *The Cornfield* (1826), is an unspectacular scene, but emotionally precious to the painter. "It combines and reconciles the Dutch and the Mediterranean landscape traditions: it harmonizes the freshness and vigour of northern skies and brisk breezes with Claudean pastoral repose; it marries Claudean compositional structures with the rough textures cherished by the Picturesque fashion." For him, the picturesque taste displayed in this painting echoes the following lines from a poem by John Clare (1793-1864):

> Old narrow lanes, where trees meet over-head;
> Path-stiles, on which a steeple we espy,
> Peeping and stretching in the distant sky;…
> Old ponds, dim shadowed with a broken tree;--
> These are the picturesque of Taste to me; (*The Rural Muse*, 1835)

He argues that local attachment—such as one's home and its surrounding landscape—was formative in Constable's work, and that the painter was fully aware of the Picturesque tastes and writers, and shared their fondness for lane scenery, cottages, old trees and hedgerows. All these elements are also at the heart of John Clare's poetry. Marketed as 'A Northamptonshire Peasant', Clare's intense devotion to the local, the native, the personal and the neglected in English landscape is extraordinary. He 'loves each desolate neglected spot/that seems in labours hurry left forgot' ('Shadows of Taste', 1831). These neglected spots correspond to the prime picturesque motifs: ancient tree stumps, lichen and moss, derelict old cottages, wild pastures.

Twenty years later, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB), founded in 1848 by William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, would virtually reinvent the landscape genre with their implementation of John Ruskin's principle of "Truth to Nature." Photography played an important role in their redefinition of landscape painting and was in turn influenced by their works. For them, "truth to nature" meant reality observed scientifically through the prism of experience[85]. They treated both foreground and background with the same accurateness, painting with very small brushes usually used for aquarelle: Millais' *Ophelia* and Hunt's *Our English Coasts* are striking examples of the painstaking minutiae of their works (see next page). Their new techniques in painting, as well as their choice of working with girls and prostitutes as models, shocked art critics as soon as they started to exhibit their pictures at the Royal Academy in 1848 and they received vitriolic reviews[86] in *The Times*. At that stage, John Ruskin intervened and had two letters published in *The Times* to defend the PRB's

[84] Professor Malcolm Andrews, 'English Landscape: Constable and Clare'.
[85] Aurélie Petiot, *The Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 106
[86] http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/n.gb1.1851.may.rad.html

paintings in May 1851[87]. His power and authority as an art critic was so great at that time that his support to the PRB changed everything in the public's reception of their art.

John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, (1851-52), wikipedia

William Holman Hunt - Our English Coasts, 1852 (`Strayed Sheep'), wikipedia

[87] http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/n.gb1.1851.may.rad.html

Though Brown's *Pretty Baa-Lambs* and *The Hayfield*, are both remarkable for the treatment of light and shadow, be it under the summer sun or crepuscular light, critics were shocked because he did not use the traditional chiaroscuro technique, and Ruskin once again took the defence of the Pre-Raphaelites.

Ford Madox Brown - Pretty Baa-Lambs (1851), wikipedia

Ford Madox Brown, The Hayfield (1855–6) [88]

[88] https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/brown-the-hayfield-t01920

It seems worthwhile in this essay, dealing with the relationships between literature, painting and nature, to focus briefly on John Ruskin (1819-1900) whose work as art critic deeply influenced Victorian culture: as Charlotte Brontë said in one of her letters, "Ruskin seems to give us new eyes." In *Modern Painters*, Ruskin took the defence of Turner's revolutionary visions of the natural world. No wonder that he also championed the "Pre-Raphaelites painters, who tried to revive the art of the pre-Renaissance and its celebration of simple nature in luminous detail:" according to Malcolm Andrews, Ruskin's writing style, or "word-painting," can even mirror the "gorgeous extravagance" of Turner's image-making. His description of Turner's *The Slave Ship* in Modern Painters, volume 1, can be seen as the epitome of what Andrews calls "the organ-music" of Ruskin's prose.[89]

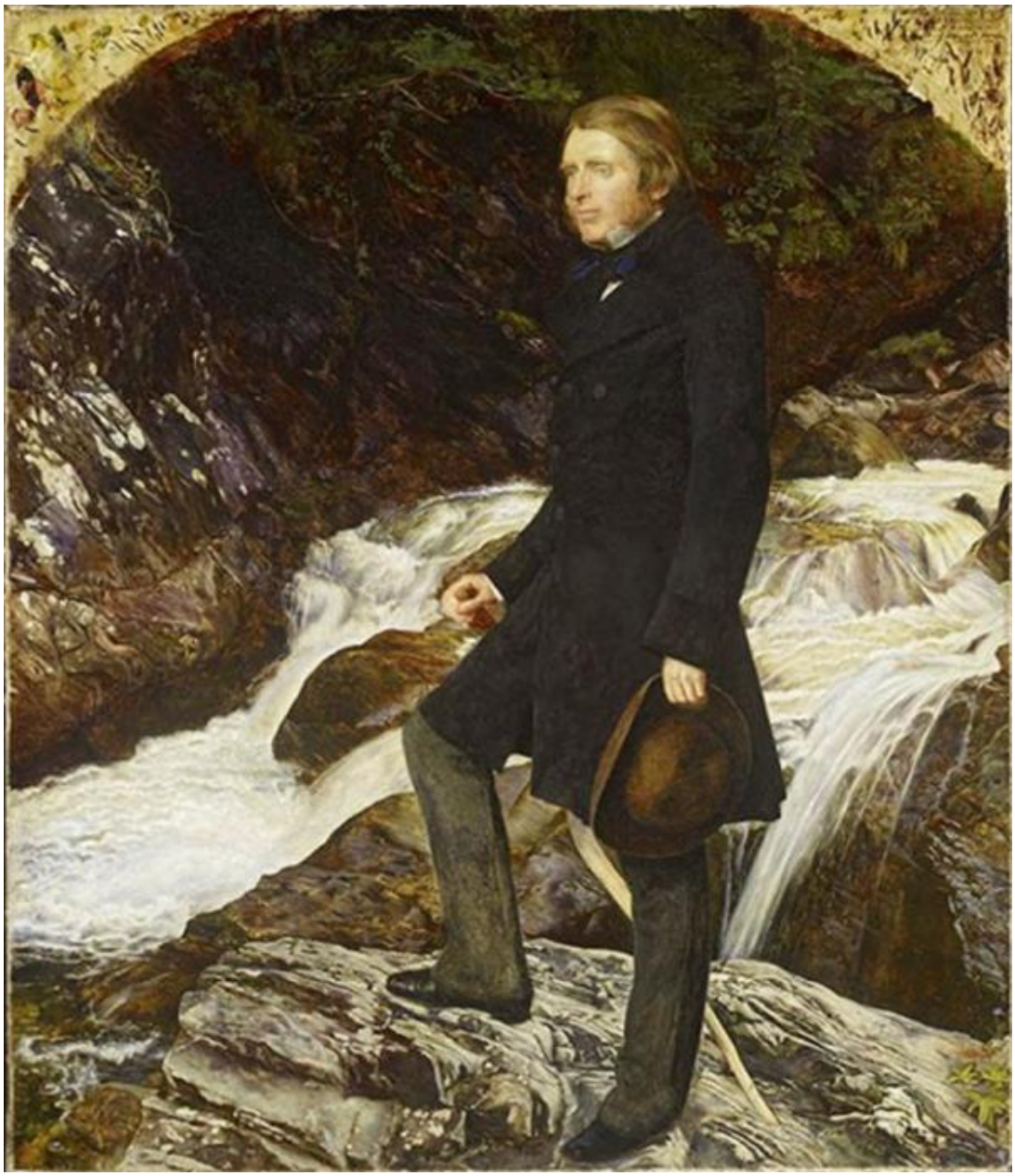
Ruskin also developed, through his lectures on landscape painting, a pantheistic vision of Nature as the book of God, which echoes Wordsworth's, thus making them both important actors in the birth of ecology in Britain. In his lecture "The First Ecologist: John Ruskin and the Futures of Landscape", Paul Sawyer describes Ruskin's evolution from an art critic to a radical social critic, when he became obsessed by the damage wrought by rampant industrialism on both landscape and human welfare, as illustrated this contemporary painting:

William Cowen, *View of Bradford* (1849), Cartwright Hall Art Gallery[90]

Though Cowen took quite a romantic viewpoint, his painting "records the point in time when the new industrial cities of Yorkshire increasingly and inevitably encroached upon the landscape" (Sellars, p. 71).

[89] Malcolm Andrews, 'Ruskin at 200: The Art Critic as a Word-Painter'.
[90] https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/view-of-bradford-22833

This concern would become more pregnant in the Arts and Crafts Movement, led by William Morris, whose artistic thoughts, first inspired by Ruskin's theories in *The Stones of Venice*, would turn towards social reforms and Socialism.



Portrait of John Ruskin, by John Everett Millais (1853–54) [91]

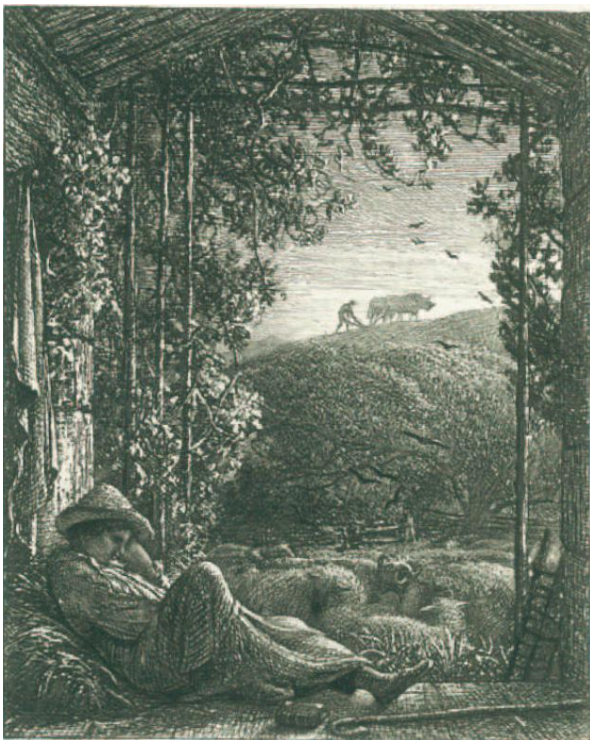
[91] https://www.ashmolean.org/portrait-john-ruskin

‘I hold the genuine—pastoral—feel of landscape to be very rare and difficult of attainment and by far the most lovely department of painting as well as poetry’ (John Constable, letter of 17 December 1824). With Constable’s quotation, Professor Andrews introduces his last lecture on English landscapes: ‘English Landscape: Samuel Palmer and the Pastoral.’ We saw in Chapter 1 (p. 9) that since antiquity, pastoral tradition has always involved a retreat from modern life. These pastoral poems were known as Idylls, meaning short poems. But the anglicising of the pastoral, in literature, came up against comparable problems to those experienced by Constable in his struggles against Academy classicism in landscape conventions. In England, if several writers, from several Elizabethan poets to Andrew Marvell, used the pastoral convention with striking success and vitality, the Augustan pastoral is chiefly remarkable for a quarrel between the Neoclassical critics who preferred “ancient” poetry (such as Alexander Pope) and those who had naturalized the classical conventions (such as Ambrose Philips). As George Crabbe had overtly expressed little tolerance for sustaining the Virgilian conventions in his poem *The Village* at the end of the 18th century, a growing reaction against the artificialities of the genre, combined with new attitudes to the natural man and the natural scene throughout the 19th century, sometimes resulted in a bitter injection of reality into the rustic scenes of writers like Robert Burns, William Wordsworth, John Clare, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, etc.

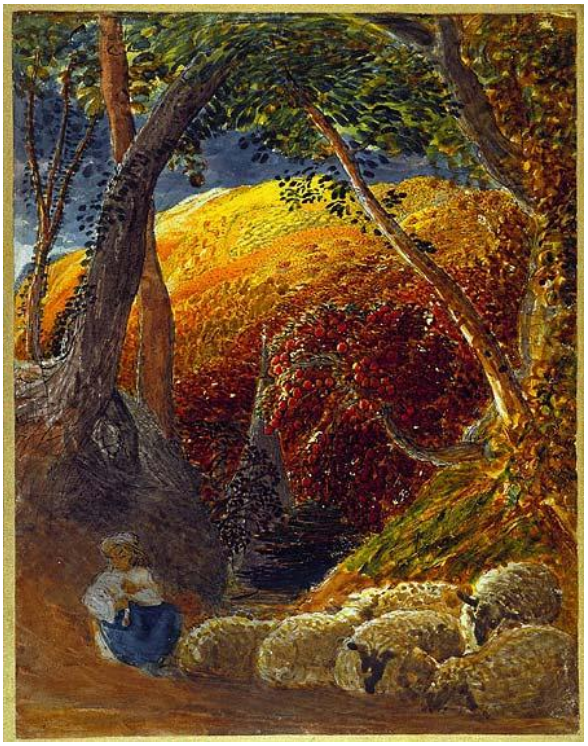
One of the 19th-century pastoral heroes is the shepherd, who, in his remote rural setting, represents both a fading way of life and a symbol of endurance, of continuity. Gabriel Oak, one of the main characters in Thomas Hardy’s pastoral novel *Far from the Madding Crowd*, represents the epitome of the downland shepherd, who stands for an England and an Englishness that typifies patient tenacity and a parental devotion to his flock: he is stoical yet sensitive, one whose livelihood is reliant both on his own tender and expert care and yet also on nature volatile moods.

According to Professor Andrews, there was always a kind of tension in the pastoral tradition, between the social and economic reality of a shepherd’s life and the idealized qualities culturally invested in him and his world. It is this complex amalgamation of myth and social actuality that gave English pastoral in 19th- writing and art such a vigorous life and made it a core part of the national myth, especially at a time in the country’s history when it was industrializing fast and when its cities were expanding. By the mid-century only half the population remained country dwellers, a demographic milestone France was to reach a full century later. The more urbanized the population, the more alien the countryside becomes as a working and living environment, and the more that countryside fades into myth and idyll.

Samuel Palmer (1805-1881) is a key figure in that century for attuning the pastoral tradition to an English idiom, notwithstanding his passionate devotion to Virgil. He also greatly admired the work of the artist and poet William Blake (1757-1827).



Samuel Palmer, *The Sleeping Shepherd* c.1856[92]



Samuel Palmer, *The Magic Apple Tree*, 1830[93]

Far from the landscapes painted by the Pre-Raphaelites, his primitive rural folk inhabit a world that has acquired, in visual terms, a formal primitivism: it is almost as though they and their landscapes have arrived on canvas or paper directly from ancient stained-glass windows. Palmer thus creates a border land, an English Arcadia where rural life and scenery are part myth and part historical topography, and this plays directly into the making of iconic English landscape.

Nowhere did that idyll of a mellow English pastoral surface more captivatingly than in his large watercolour *The Bellman*, completed in the year of his death, 1881. "This is an English nook that has slipped into the past, in two senses: the village belongs to a pre-industrial age, when the bellman would make his sunset round to reassure the villagers that 'All's well'; it is also a scene from Palmer's personal past history" (Professor Andrews).

[92] https://victorianweb.org/painting/palmer/graphics/5.jpg
[93] https://fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/explore-our-collection/highlights/1490

This scene epitomized the idealized character of English scenery for the Victorians, and to me, it echoes the description of a street in the fictional, rural town of Casterbridge, described in a contemporary novel by Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886).

> The front doors of the private houses were mostly left open at this warm autumn time, no thought of umbrella stealers disturbing the minds of the placid burgesses. Hence, through the long, straight, entrance passages thus unclosed could be seen, as through tunnels, the mossy gardens at the back, glowing with nasturtiums, fuchsias, scarlet geraniums, "bloody warriors," snapdragons, and dahlias, this floral blaze being backed by crusted grey stone-work remaining from a yet remoter Casterbridge than the venerable one visible in the street. The old-fashioned fronts of these houses, which had older than old-fashioned backs, rose sheer from the pavement, into which the bow windows protruded like bastions, […] door-steps, scrapers, cellar-hatches, church buttresses, and the overhanging angles of walls which, originally unobtrusive, had become bow-legged and knock-kneed.[94]

According to Richard D. Altick[95], it was to Nature, scaled down to human proportions and domesticated to suit the needs of a home-centred society in a small island nation, that Victorians, afflicted with what Hardy called "the ache of modernism", customarily resorted. Victorians' writing and arts thus elevated pastoral traditions as a core part of the national myth, epitomized by the cottage. In poetry, fiction, sentimental essay and song, and genre and

[94] Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 46
[95] Richard D. Altick, 'The Nature-Loving Victorians'

landscape painting, the cottage was an abiding symbol of man's intimate connection with Nature. The "cottage controversy," joined between Robert Southey, poet-laureate, and Thomas Babington Macaulay, in 1829 illustrates the divergent and emotional responses of Victorian society to this symbol. However damp, cramped, and squalid the rustic dwelling was in reality, it was an integral part of the landscape, and by association, it stood as a reminder of pastoral innocence and purity in contrast to the encroaching, corrupting city. From the late 18th century on, landowners and parish taxpayers found that instead of repairing cottages, let alone building new ones, they could save money by simply knocking them down.[96]

Hardy's novels, such as *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, describes how harsh country life was for workers who had to travel from farm to farm to find work in the fields. Cottages were most often provided by landowners or farmers to their workers for the duration of their contract.

> These annual migrations from farm to farm were on the increase here. When Tess's mother was a child the majority of the field-folk about Marlott had remained all their lives on one farm (…) but latterly the desire for yearly removal had risen to a high pitch. (…) However, all the mutations so increasingly discernible in village life did not originate entirely in the agricultural unrest. The village had formerly contained, side by side with the agricultural labourers, and interesting and better-informed class (…) including the carpenter, the smith, the shoemaker, the huckster, together with non-descript workers other than farm-labourers. (…) But as the long holdings fell in they were seldom again let to similar tenants, and were mostly pulled down, if not absolutely required by the farmer for his hands. Cottagers who were not directly employed on the land were looked up with disfavour, and the banishment of some starved the trade of the others, who were then obliged to follow. These families, who had formed the backbone of the village life in the past, who were the depositaries of the village traditions, had to seek refuge in the large centres; the process, humorously designated by statisticians as "the tendency of the rural population towards the large towns", being really the tendency of water to flow uphill when forced by machinery. (Chapter LI, pp. 372-373)

When labourers' cottages were equipped with gardens, or when their settlements were furnished with allotments at a distance from the cottages, their primary use was to grow food. Up until the 1890s, manuals on cottage gardening were primarily devoted to instructions in fruit and vegetable cultivation, and flowers occupied a very subordinate position. Where flowers were grown in cottage gardens, it was usually for a practical purpose, whether for their medicinal qualities or as scented plants for concealing unpleasant smells. Roses were long regarded as an all-purpose medicinal plant; sage was used for digestive upsets, rosemary for headaches, wallflowers for nervous disorders, jessamine for cough; onions had once be used as an aphrodisiac and later, more commonly, as an antiseptic; the perfume of lavender could be used to counteract faintness as well as to freshen the cottage atmosphere[97].

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[96] George H Ford, 'Felicitous Space: The Cottage Controversy', pp. 31-33.
[97] Andrew Clayton-Payne, *Victorian Flower Gardens*, pp. 38-41.

Myles Birket Foster, *The Cottage Garden* [98]

Arthur Claude Strachan, *Woman outside Cottage with Ducks* [99]

[98] https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1948-1009-4
[99] https://i.pinimg.com/originals/a2/dc/8a/a2dc8ac52d7a71e68607d79396857ee8.jpg

Loudon's *Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture* (1833) provided a model for many landowners in the improvement of their estates, and one of Loudon's recommendations was the provision of gardens[100]. In the 1830s, Gregory Gregory of Harlaxton created such a village for his estate, which was held up as a model by Loudon in his *Gardener's Magazine* for 1840.[101] The most ornamental and flowery of cottage gardens were those created by landowners for their tenants, as evidence of their own taste, but an original desire to give workers a decent home with proper facilities became widely popular in the 19th century and resulted in purpose-built villages, like Port Sunlight in Cheshire. This trend is alluded to in George Eliot's novel *Middlemarch*, through the unsuccessful efforts of Dorothea to design practical cottages for workers on her uncle's estate. By the 1880s, the cottage garden was being proclaimed as an indigenous gardening style. The first major propagandist for this approach was William Robinson, whose anthology *The English Flower Garden*, published in 1883, uses the cottage garden as an alternative to the high Victorian garden (see above, pp 42-44) with its emphasis on architecture and seasonal bedding.[102]

However, for most cottagers, poverty was a fact of life, something one learnt to live with rather than fight against. The essence of cottage life and its culture can be found in such simple activities as breeding pigs, growing vegetables or beekeeping, all of which originated from economic necessity. The large number of pictures painted by artists working in the cottage genre reflect the enormous popularity that this type of painting enjoyed at the turn of the 20th century. The increase in wealth of the new middle-classes meant that there were many more people interested in buying art, and the success of exhibitions of cottage paintings at commercial galleries suggest that buyers living in the cities were eager to be reminded of the countryside[103], or rather, of an illusion of country paradise. Though the cottage artists cannot have been unaware of the miserable lives which some of the cottagers lived, they probably ignored this aspect and used artistic licence to achieve their own ends.

As previously hinted in the extract from Hardy's *Tess* above, the greatest threat to rural life came from progress—especially the mechanization of field work—and the spread of suburbia. A country way of life which had remained the same for centuries altered rapidly. Large cities were now easy to reach, and the higher wages lured many away from the countryside, and the ease of travel broke down the barriers between urban sophistication and rural simplicity[104]. The distinction between the labourer's cottage and the middle-class small house was effaced, as far

[100] Andrew Clayton-Payne, *Victorian Flower Gardens*, p. 17
[101] Ibid, p. 46
[102] Ibid, p. 57.
[103] Andrew Clayton-Payne, *Victorian Cottages*, p. 143
[104] Ibid, p. 68-69

as gardening literature was concerned, by the 1880s. During the Edwardian period the situation became even more confused, as the process of gentrification began to sweep through the rural villages—at least in the southern counties[105].

By an assimilation of Nature and architecture, in late Victorian mansions of the well-to-do, wallpaper, furniture, decorative textiles, iron ornaments, carved screens, and stained glass, all were designed to depict or imitate flowers, vine leaves, and birds, thus bringing a breath of Nature indoors. At this zenith of the Arts and Crafts movement[106], the same decorative impulse could also be seen at work in the semi-detached villas that lined the roads of the garden suburbs laid out by the first town planners. Altick thus concludes his critical review: "These oases of cozy domesticity, shaded by plane trees and ornamented with herbaceous borders, were urban society's symbolic equivalent of the rural cottage. Back to Nature, now, by commuter train".[107]

William Morris, design for "Trellice" Wallpaper, 1862. Wikimedia Commons

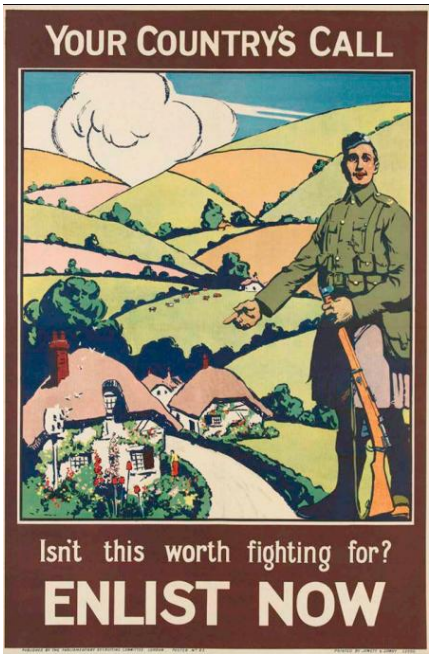
[105] Andrew Clayton-Payne, *Victorian Flower Gardens,* p. 68

[106] The Arts and Crafts movement was an English aesthetic movement of the second half of the 19th century which reacted against the level to which style, craftsmanship, and public taste had sunk in the wake of the Industrial Revolution and its mass-produced and banal decorative arts. Among them was the English reformer, poet, and designer William Morris (1834-1896). https://www.britannica.com/art/Arts-and-Crafts-movement

[107] Richard D. Altick, 'The Nature-Loving Victorians'

Conclusion

From the 18th century, Britain has become so directly identified with the English countryside that in the 20th century, army's propaganda posters for the first and the second World Wars used an *omnium gatherum* of iconic landscape features as backgrounds for their calls to arms[108]:



1. 'Your Country's Call': Poster, published by the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, 1915
2. Frank Newbould, 1942

Men were called to defend their country and their ideals—way of life and moral values—symbolically encapsulated in the pastoral landscapes figuring on these posters. In this idyllic scenery, the harmony between the various natural and man-made components reminds us of Jane Austen's quotation: "It was a sweet view—sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright, without being oppressive." In a similar way, William Blake's poem 'Jerusalem', which praises "England's mountains green" and "pleasant pastures" has become England's unofficial anthem, though this nation is the most populated and urbanized of the United Kingdom. "The more urbanized the population, the more alien the countryside becomes as a working and living environment, and the more that countryside fades into myth and idyll[109]". And this myth, epitomized by the country cottage and its garden, has been part and parcel of Englishness for more than three hundred years.

[108] Malcolm Andrews, 'English Landscape: The Picturesque' and 'Samuel Palmer and the Pastoral'
[109] Malcolm Andrews, 'English Landscape: Samuel Palmer and the Pastoral'

Regarding English gardens, their present relaxed and luxuriant arrangement seems to originate from a fusion of the 19th-century indigenous cottage garden with Gertrude Jekyll's outstanding designs. Today, they are still recognizable at first sight, and their personality continues to influence gardeners from all over the world.

1. Helen Allingham, *A Cottage near Brook, Witley, Surrey*, https://fiveminutehistory.com/20-beautiful-cottages-by-victorian-artist-helen-affingham/
2. Gertrude Jekyll's Great Plat at Hestercombe, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hestercombe_Gardens
3. Levens Hall gardens, https://www.levenshall.co.uk/gardens

Eva Anglessy

Nancy, 19/02/2024

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