

John Milton (1608--74)

'How noble and Majestic,' wrote Stephen Switzer, 'that Inimitable Description of paradise by Mr Milton.' The passage in *Paradise Lost* which he (among many others) praises became almost a sacred text for later gardenists: Horace Walpole compared Stourhead with lines 223-7, and Hagley Park with the following three—'What colouring, what freedom of pencil, what landscape . . .' From Milton was derived authority for serpentine lines, natural treatment of water, rural mounds, wooded theatres, and for the rejection of 'nice Art/In Beds and curious knots' in favour of 'Nature boon/Poured forth profuse on Hill and Dale and Plaine'. Admirers of Milton's prototype landscape garden were content to ignore the ambiguities of the passage: its invocation of the art term, 'Lantskip', for what is supposed to be a scene free of art; Milton's linking of his Eden with 'Hesperian Fables', as if to suggest the ultimate unreality of such a scene. Nevertheless, upon Milton's picture the garden inhabited by our first parents were to be based many rural seats of us view during the century that followed *Paradise Lost*. Milton's choice of such a landscape to imagine his prelapsarian world probably owes less to any specific visual sources than to the idea that only after the Fall did man have to invoke art to shore a damaged nature; Walpole was to agree that topiary was unworthy of God's first garden. (A rival theory, looking to the geometrical-planned French gardens, argued that man began in a bestial state, from which his technical and intellectual supremacy gradually removed him.) Milton may possibly be recalling certain features of gardens seen on his Italian journey, which are invoked explicitly in *Paradise Regained* IV, or such literary ones as that of Alcina in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, or any number of Italian and Flemish paintings with landscape backgrounds (see Plate 49).

from *Paradise Lost*, Book IV (1667)

So on he fares, and to the border comes
Of *Eden*, where delicious Paradise,
Now nearer, Crowns with her enclosure green,
As with a rural mound the champain head
Of a steep wilderness, whose hairie sides
With thicket overgrown, grottesque and wilde,
Access deni'd; and over head up grew
Insuperable highth of loftiest shade,
Cedar, and Pine, and Firr, and branching Palm,
 A Silvan Scene, and as the ranks ascend
Shade above shade, a woodie Theatre
Of stateliest view. Yet higher then thir tops
The verdurous wall of Paradise up sprung :
Which to our general Sire gave prospect large
Into his neather Empire neighbouring round.
 And higher then that Wall a circling row
Of goodliest Trees loaden with fairest Fruit,
Blossoms and Fruits at once of golden hue
 Appeerd, with gay enameld colours mixt:
On which the Sun more glad impress'd his beams
Then in fair Evening Cloud, or humid Bow,
When God hath showrd the earth; so lovely seemd
That Lantskip : And of pure now purer aire
Meets his approach, and to the heart inspires
 Vernal delight and joy, able to drive
All sadness but despair: now gentle gales
Fanning thir odoriferous wings dispense
Native perfumes, and whisper whence they stole
Those balmie spoiles . . .

[lines 131-59]

Southward through *Eden* went a River large,
 Nor chang'd his course, but through the shaggie hill
 Pass'd underneath ingulft, for God had thrown
 That Mountain as his Garden mould high rais'd
 Upon the rapid current, which through veins
 Of porous Earth with kindly thirst up drawn,
 Rose a fresh Fountain, and with many a rill
 Waterd the Garden; thence united fell
 Down the steep glade, and met the neather Flood,
 Which from his darksom passage now appears,
 And now divided into four main Streams,
 Runs divers, wandring many a famous Realme
 And Country whereof here needs no account,
 But rather to tell how, if Art could tell,
 How from that Saphire Fount the crisped Brooks,
 Rowling on Orient Pearl and sands of Gold,
 With mazie error under pendant shades
 Ran Nectar, visiting each plant, and fed
 Flours worthy of Paradise which not nice Art
 In Beds and curious Knots, but Nature boon
 Powrd forth profuse on Hill and Dale and Plaine,
 Both where the morning Sun first warmly smote
 The open field, and where the unpierc't shade
 Imbround the noontide Bows: Thus was this place,
 A happy rural seat of various view;
 Groves whose rich Trees wept odorous Gumms and Balme,
 Others whose fruit burnisht with Golden Rinde
 Hung amiable, *Hesperian* Fables true,
 If true, here onely, and of delicious taste :
 Betwixt them Lawns, or level Downs, and Flocks
 Grasing the tender herb, were interpos'd,
 Or palmie hilloc, or the flourie lap
 Of sour irriguous Valley spread her store,
 Flours of all hue, and without Thorn the Rose:
 Another side, umbrageous Grots and Caves
 Of coole recess, o're which the mantling Vine
 Layes forth her purple Grape, and gentle creeps
 Luxuriant; mean while murmuring waters fall
 Down the slope hills, disperst, or in a Lake,
 That to the fringed Bank with Myrtle crownd,
 Her chrystall mirror holds, unite thir streams.

[lines 223-63]