

SOME EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BACKGROUND

My aim at this point is to sketch some of the background to the philosophical and aesthetic issues raised by eighteenth-century English gardens. My topics will include the gardening style of seventeenth-century France, which predominated in England at the turn of the century, the institution of the grand tour, which acquainted so many Englishmen with the artistic and cultural achievements of Italy and France, and finally, the academies of art established in Paris and London in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

I. THE FRENCH FORMAL GARDEN

While eighteenth-century English gardens can be traced back to Italian Renaissance models, and ultimately to the gardens of ancient Greece and Rome, I would like to examine their more proximate ancestors, the gardens of seventeenth-century France. French gardens were themselves deeply indebted to Italy; when Charles VIII led his army to Italy and conquered Naples in 1494, Frenchmen saw for the first time the glories of Italian Renaissance civilization. Delighted by the gardens he saw adjoining Italian villas, Charles brought back with him twenty-two Italian artists and four tons of artistic booty¹. A distinctively French gardening style was to develop from these Italian borrowings.

By the time of Louis XIV France was all-powerful. Her hegemony extended beyond politics and warfare to include culture and the arts. French style was imitated in all things, and French gardens sprang up throughout Europe. Since eighteenth-century English gardeners were clearly influenced by and reacting to the predominant French style, I would like to give a brief account of a paradigmatic French formal garden--Louis XIV's estate at Versailles as it evolved from the 1660s until the king's death in 1715.

It is well known how André Le Nôtre came to design the gardens at Versailles. Louis's finance minister, Nicholas Fouquet, hired a trio of artists--the architect Le Vau, the painter Le Brun, and the gardener Le Nôtre--to create his new chateau at Vaux-le-Vicomte. There was no preexisting structure to improve or renovate. The entire complex was built from scratch. It was an undertaking on an unprecedented scale, employing some eighteen thousand men.² As William Howard Adams reports, "three offending villages were leveled and the river Angueil marshalled into a canal over three thousand feet long. Earth was moved to form massive terraces, parterres, and ramps, followed by tree planting on an imposing scale."³ A grand fete was held in 1661 to celebrate the completion of the ensemble. Offended by the conspicuous extravagance of his underling, Louis had him arrested and shortly hired away his trio of artists to improve the small hunting lodge he had inherited at Versailles.

The gardens at Vaux (considered by some Le Nôtre's masterpiece) and at Versailles exhibit the quintessential traits of the French formal garden: symmetry, grandeur, and great expanse. These gardens are rectilinear and architectural, unified by recurrent geometry and relentless axial symmetry. Their design relates house to garden and each garden part to every other.⁴ The broad alleys crossing at right angles or radiating outwards in a *patte d'oie* (goose foot) pattern mark the gardens' structure. While earlier French gardens were often centered on some architectural feature which closed off the view, Le Nôtre swept the alleys to the very horizon, appropriating and controlling all the visible landscape.⁵ The rectilinear areas within the intersections of these alleys

were often given over to *parterres*. These were low gardens (the word comes from "par" and "terre," meaning on or along the ground), in which clipped boxwood, flowers, and colored gravel traced ornate patterns recalling Venetian lace or elaborate brocade. Hence the term *parterre de broderie*, in reference to the art of embroidery. The parterres were designed to be viewed from a lofty vantage point, often one within the chateau itself.⁶

The symmetry and axuality of such views helped to unify the garden. These traits also allowed French gardens to be expanded and added to indefinitely simply by extending the axes and incorporating more land into the garden grid. Le Nôtre did just this in his fifty years of continuous work at Versailles. Comparing a series of garden plans from different years, F. Hamilton Hazlehurst shows how the gardener would first work in one area of the garden, say the northern parterres, then enlarge the southern sections to balance the transverse axis.⁷ The chateau also played a role in this give and take. At times the gardens overwhelmed the building, awaiting intended architectural improvements that would bring the two back into harmony; at other times expansion of the building rendered the existing garden inappropriate and necessitated further work there.⁸

Water was another crucial feature of the French formal garden. The medieval moat gave way to canals traversed by pleasure boats, and fountains and waterworks abounded. The Grand Canal at Versailles was nearly a mile long, with cross canals every half mile. At various times Dutch sailors and Venetian gondoliers were hired to ply its waters. Christopher Thacker claims that "Versailles was in Louis's reign a water garden, one of the great water gardens in the world."¹⁰ At their zenith, the king's gardens contained fourteen hundred fountains.¹¹ This imposed considerable hardship, however, for water was always in short supply. Despite the construction of the machine of Marly in 1688, whose fourteen water wheels raised water from the Seine to reservoirs serving the gardens, and despite ambitious plans to divert local rivers, the fountains could not all play simultaneously. A scheme of signals was devised so that when the king toured the gardens, various water effects could be turned on and off in step with his progress.¹²

As Christopher Thacker notes, Versailles lacked the temples and follies associated with so many gardens from the Renaissance on (153). There were, however, sculptural ensembles throughout the park, and these contributed to a unified iconographical program, one assimilating Louis XIV to the sun god Apollo. André Félibien, a contemporary visitor, commented on this conceit as follows: "Since the Sun is the king's device, and since the poets identify the sun with Apollo, there is nothing in this superb edifice which is not linked to this divinity."¹³

A final ingredient in Le Nôtre's ensemble were the *bosquets*, or groves. These intimate wooded areas provided a relief from the formality and monumentality of the garden as a whole. They were often entered by a single path, and the surrounding greenery cut off any views of the larger ensemble. Within, each enclave contained virtuosic waterworks and places for conversation, dining, and entertainment. The bosquets were altered often during the years Le Nôtre worked at Versailles. For example, the Bosquet des Sources, created in 1675, was replaced by the Colonnade some ten years later,¹⁴ while in 1677 two earlier bosquets, the Pavillon d'Eau and the Berceau d'Eau, gave way to the Arc de Triomphe and the Trois Fontaines.¹⁵ Thus the bosquets were treated much as an art collector treats his paintings, constantly altering the selection open for view.

Let me briefly describe two of the bosquets. I am drawing heavily throughout this section on F. Hamilton Hazlehurst's superb book *Gardens of Illusion*. One bosquet, the Marais, was proposed by Louis's mistress, Louise de La Vallière (91). At its center was a rectangular pool containing a metallic tree. The tree was in fact an elaborate fountain, and water sprayed from its branches and leaves. The border of the basin was lined with metallic ferns and flowers. These too

were fountains, as were the gilded swans gracing each corner. White marble tables at each end of the pool supported baskets of gilded flowers from which jets of water streamed. And finally, along each side of the pool stood two *buffets d'eau*. These were tiers of red and white marble bearing a "mock feast"--urns and vases spewing water in fanciful and diverse forms.

Hazlehurst criticizes the Marais as fussy (9 1) and claims that later bosquets were nobler in scale and conception. Jean Cotelle's painting of the Trois Fontaines (reproduced on page 119 of Hazlehurst's book) shows a long, sloping site divided into three terraces. Each terrace is occupied by a fountain of a different geometric shape--an octagon at the bottom, then a square, then a circle. Water plays from the fountains in myriad ways forming vertical jets, arching crowns, and sparkling liquid tunnels. The three levels are joined by subtly varied stairways and rocaille cascades. When the entire ensemble is viewed on axis, the various fountains align: the arch of the middle level frames the jets of the uppermost pool, and water seems to spill down the upper cascade and flow to the square pool below (111-12). These carefully crafted illusions add to the joy of the bosquet.

To get some sense of the unity and power of Le Nôtre's creation, consider the view west along the main garden axis in the 1670s, shortly after the elongation of the Grand Canal. The garden facade of the chateau extended for more than six hundred feet. A viewer standing there, or looking down from Le Vau's recently completed *enveloppe* which enlarged and balanced that facade, first saw a complex water parterre which mixed water, green borders, plants in vases, and sculpture (79). Its basins were swirling and complicated in form, with a round central pool flanked by four cloverleaf basins (81).¹⁶ Beyond the water parterre stairs led down to the Jardin Bas, a large area of parterres culminating in the Latona Basin. This basin contributed to the garden's iconography for it honored Latona, the mother of Apollo. Legend had it that Latona, banished by the jealous Juno, was jeered by peasants while trying to drink at a spring. As punishment her lover Jupiter turned them into frogs.¹⁷ The Latona Basin features the goddess at the center. Spouting frogs ring the pool's periphery, while various figures in between, writhing and spouting water, are shown midway in their transformation from human to amphibian form (82).

West of the Latona Basin began the Allée Royale, a majestic avenue with broad walks enclosing a central green sward, the *tapis vert*. Beyond the allée was the Grand Canal, which continued along the western axis for nearly a mile. At the juncture of the allée and the canal lay another magnificent fountain, the Bassin d'Apollon. Apollo, the horses which pulled his chariot, and various tritons and whales filled the large quatrefoil basin (83).

The Grand Canal was enlarged in 1671 in order to balance the newly renovated western front of the chateau and to match in scale and grandeur the growing gardens (83). Le Nôtre carefully adjusted the proportions of the canal and the Allée Royale so that they would appear equal in width when viewed from the chateau's second-story terrace. This illusion was accomplished only by making the canal in fact much wider than the allée, and by increasingly elongating the three basins marking the beginning, middle, and end of the canal so that they would all three appear equal and square when viewed from afar (84). From different vantage points, parts of the western garden axis would come in and out of view,¹⁸ thus adding further subtleties to Le Nôtre's scheme.

Le Nôtre devoted great energy to optical effects of the sort just described. Versailles was a garden which constantly controlled and manipulated its viewers' perceptual experience. The vista I have been describing, which stretched westward from the chateau to the visible limits of the horizon, both constituted and expressed Louis's absolute control over a vast stretch of land and, symbolically, over an entire nation. Thacker puts this aspect of Versailles into context, noting that such "conspicuous use of land to adorn one's residence, without any return of crops or fattening of

cattle was a sign of power, and a proof of wealth-English landlords, and even the English monarch, could not afford this ostentation" (152).

Versailles makes a statement not only through its extent, the vast *amount* of land which is put to such use, but through the manner in which that land is leveled, tamed, and regularized, emblazoned with features and designs which everywhere testify to the glory of the Sun King. The magnificence of the gardens of Versailles can be appreciated all the more if we keep in mind how inappropriate and inhospitable the site was to begin with. The swampy and marshy terrain was described by the duc de Saint-Simon as "that most dismal and thankless of spots, without vistas, woods, or water, without soil, even, for all the surrounding land is quicksand or bog."¹⁹ He went on to complain that though the gardens were magnificent, enjoying them was difficult: "To reach any shade one is forced to cross a vast, scorching expanse. The broken stones on the paths burn one's feet, yet without them one would sink into sand or the blackest mud." We should note that Saint-Simon's assessment of the gardens of Versailles is belied by their extraordinary popularity. Visitors crowded the grounds on the rare occasions when they were open to the general public, special tours were arranged for visiting nobility, and Louis himself wrote a guidebook or itinerary, *La manière de montrer les jardins de Versailles*, to aid visitors in appreciating the garden's splendors.

2. THE GRAND TOUR

Before the death of Louis XIV England (and all Europe) was under the cultural sway of seventeenth-century France. Critics and theorists read French treatises in translation, playwrights debated the Aristotelian unities, painters honored the strict hierarchy of genres established by the Académie royale (see below), and gardens were laid out in the French formal style. France's political power waned with the death of the king, but further factors contributed to the decline of her aesthetic hegemony. One of these was the development of the grand tour--the practice of young English gentlemen completing their education with a tour of the Continent.

Englishmen had long traveled in Europe. For example, Sir Philip Sidney made such a journey in 1572 in preparation for a diplomatic career; John Milton and Robert Boyle were among those who made tours in the seventeenth century; and the gardener and diarist John Evelyn spent the years 1643-47 traveling on the Continent in order to avoid the turmoil following the Civil War.²⁰ However, travel became easier after the Peace of Utrecht in 1715, and the eighteenth century marked the heyday of the tour. (B. Sprague Allen notes that the word "tourist" was coined toward the end of the eighteenth century.)²¹

Young Englishmen were typically accompanied by tutors or "bear leaders" whose purpose was to instruct their charges and also to safeguard their moral and religious development. Among the distinguished Englishmen who served at one time or another in this capacity were Thomas Hobbes, Adam Smith, and Joseph Addison. Italy was the ultimate destination of the grand tour. The usual itinerary took travelers across the Channel, then to Paris where the pupils applied themselves to the study of French. A frightening journey across the Alps led to Italy. After venturing as far south as Naples, most English tourists returned home through Germany and the Low Countries.²²

The grand tour just described was fraught with dangers and discomforts. Banditti roamed the Italian countryside, and those who attempted a sea passage to Italy were threatened by the Barbary pirates. Roads were primitive and most inns, wretched. Tourists crossed the Alps in precarious sedan chairs, their coaches dismantled and packed on mules.²³ Horace Walpole's pet

spaniel was snatched by a wolf when his party entered Italy by way of Mont Cenis.²⁴ Despite such difficulties, the tour became more and more routinized. J. H. Plumb writes that "the flow of young men, tutors, and servants had become so large by the 1760's that the structure of modern travel gradually came into existence--printed guidebooks containing maps, road conditions, money and conversion tables; phrase books in every language; coach-hire systems; lists of recommended hotels; couriers; foreign exchange facilities; and specialized guides to beauty spots."²⁵ The most popular guidebook was Thomas Nugent's *The Grand Tour: Containing an Exact Description of Most of the Cities, Towns, and Remarkable Places of Europe*, first published in 1743.

Not all young men profited from the grand tour. Many looked back with regret at the laziness and dissipation that had attended their travels. The pursuit of prostitutes and love affairs figures prominently in James Boswell's memoirs of his tour of the Continent. For a time in Rome he set himself the challenge of having a different woman each day. Sir Francis Dashwood, whose garden at West Wycombe will be discussed below, disgraced himself in various ways on his tour. He wooed the Princess of Russia while disguised as Charles XII (then deceased), and he was banished from the Vatican for setting upon flats at St. Peter's with a horsewhip.²⁸

Many Englishmen also earned criticism for their constant complaints and their intolerance of foreign customs and manners. One Frenchman wrote in 1785 that "In a hundred there are not two that seek to instruct themselves. To cover leagues on land or on water; to take punch and tea at the inns; to speak ill of all the other nations, and to boast without ceasing of their own; that is what the crowd of English call travelling."²⁹ Walpole declared Paris "the ugliest beastliest town in the universe ... a dirty town with a dirtier ditch calling itself the Seine," while Hazlitt objected to Rome's "almost uninterrupted succession of narrow, vulgar-looking streets, where the smell of garlick prevails over the odour of antiquity."³⁰ Lord Chesterfield mocked those English tourists who rose late, breakfasted at length with other Englishmen, spent the day at the English coffee house, and after dinner and a play retired "to the tavern again, where they get very drunk, and where they either quarrel among themselves, or sally forth, commit some riot in the streets, and are taken up by the watch."³¹

Despite such complaints, England benefited immensely from the institution of the grand tour. Important artistic and cultural changes were sparked by the experiences of the travelers. Above all, the tour awakened Englishmen to the legacy of Greece and Rome. Italy was unlike anything they had ever seen. The Roman campagna was imbued with the spirit of antiquity and dotted with actual ruins--reminders of classical civilization. Plumb writes that "the young aristocrats, whether artistically inclined or not, were taught to revere not only the arts but also the past which enshrined them, and so the classical heritage became a vital force in their lives.... They saw themselves as the heirs of a great tradition."³²

The practical effects of this legacy were many. Architecture, for example, came increasingly to reflect ancient models.³³ In the seventeenth century Inigo Jones traveled twice to Italy. He studied treatises (by Vitruvius, Alberti, Serlio, Vignola, and Palladio) as well as Roman ruins and Palladian villas. Jones's designs revolutionized English architecture. He "broke with the current fumbling Jacobean style and revealed how profoundly he had assimilated the spirit of Italian classicism."³⁴

In the eighteenth century, Richard Boyle, third earl of Burlington, became the chief patron of the Palladian revival. An amateur architect, Burlington made two trips to Italy. In Rome he met the painter, architect, and garden designer William Kent who became his friend and protege. Among the architectural projects directly influenced by Burlington's travels were the remodeling of Burlington House in Palladian style and the construction of a country house at Chiswick based on

Palladio's Villa Rotonda.³⁵ The formal gardens at Chiswick were also altered in ways clearly indebted to the Renaissance gardens Burlington and Kent had viewed in Italy. In addition, Burlington supervised the English publication of Palladio's writings on architecture, and in 1728 he sponsored Robert Castell's work *Villas of the Ancients*, which reconstructed accounts of Pliny's villas and gardens in Rome.

The Society of Dilettanti exemplifies further ways in which the grand tour fostered awareness of Europe's classical heritage. The society was founded in 1732 to encourage interest in art and antiquities. Membership was restricted to those gentlemen who had completed a grand tour. The Dilettanti met regularly in various London taverns (prompting Horace Walpole's sarcastic remark that "the nominal qualification for membership is having been in Italy, and the real one being drunk").³⁶ The society sponsored archeological expeditions and scholarly publications. The latter ranged from James Stuart and Nicholas Revert's *The Antiquities of Athens Measured and Delineated* (published in four volumes from 1762 to 1816) to Richard Payne Knight's treatise on the worship of Priapus.³⁷ Richard Chandler's five volumes on Ionian Antiquities (also sponsored by the Society of Dilettanti), the excavations of Herculaneum and Pompeii under the patronage of Charles VII, King of Naples,³⁸ and Piranesi's popular etchings of romanticized ruins all provide further testimony to the eighteenth century's engagement with its classical past.

England also received more concrete benefits from the grand tour. For instance, Burlington returned from his first trip to Italy with 878 pieces of baggage.³⁹ This is an extreme example of the booty taken home by eighteenth-century tourists. A contemporary of Burlington's, Thomas Coke, spent six years on the Continent. He purchased antique sculpture and, as B. Sprague Allen reports, "on one occasion he was actually arrested for attempting to smuggle a fine headless figure of Diana out of the country. Four other precious pieces of antique sculpture were lost at sea on their way to England."⁴⁰ It was generally expected that Englishmen would return from their tour of Italy with valuable souvenirs. (Hibbert gives the following elaborate list: "books of prints, medals, maps, paintings and copies of paintings at Rome, as well as scent, pomatums, bergamot, imperial oil, and *aqua di millefzori*, snuff boxes and silk from Venice; glasses from Murano; swords, canes, soap and rock-crystal from Milan; mosaics of dendrite, and amber, musk, and myrrh from Florence; point lace, sweet-meats and velvet from Genoa; snuff and sausages from Bologna; fire-arms from Brescia; milled gloves from Turin; masks from Modena; spurs and toys from Reggio nell'Emilia.")⁴¹ Soon a network of picture jobbers sprang up to aid travelers with their purchases. Hogarth described them as "importing, by shiploads, Dead Christs, Holy Families, Madonnas, and other dark, dismal subjects, on which they scrawl the names of Italian masters."⁴² A present-day writer adds that "behind these dealers were the native Italian painters and sculptors, 'restoring' Greek and Roman statues, faking Leonardos and Guido Renis, or sometimes, as with the immensely successful Pompeo Batoni, painting portraits of visiting Milords."⁴³

Despite the dangers of fraud and deception, Englishmen like Robert Walpole, Thomas Coke, and William Cavendish built up art collections of major importance in the eighteenth century.⁴⁴ And less wealthy tourists still acquired an interest in the appreciation and acquisition of art. This was the second great legacy of the grand tour.

Landscape painting did not flower in England until the eighteenth century. Earlier, portraiture had been the most popular genre, followed by the solemn historical and religious paintings prescribed by French theorists and academicians (see below). The grand tour changed all this by exposing English travelers to new sorts of natural landscapes--the Alps and the Roman campagna--and to the landscape paintings of the French and Italian masters. In her book *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, Marjorie Hope Nicholson documents the change in taste that occurred

in the eighteenth century with regard to mountain scenery. While seventeenth-century poets and theologians conceived of mountains as "warts, wens, and blisters" that mar the earth, travelers in the eighteenth century sought them out as sources of the sublime. The arduous journey across the Alps primed English tourists to appreciate the landscape paintings of Salvator Rosa. His romantic scenes of fearsome banditti amid craggy, fir-clad hills fed the growing taste for rugged scenes. At the same time, the experience of Italy's classical heritage allowed tourists to enjoy the arcadian landscapes painted by Nicholas Poussin and Claude Lorrain. These two aesthetic poles, represented by the Alps on the one hand and Rome on the other, were codified in Edmund Burke's work *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). A third aesthetic category, the picturesque, was added later in the century. It was associated with the painter Gaspard Dughet (see chap. 5).

Works by Claude, Poussin, Rosa, and Dughet were brought back to England by returning tourists. The paintings functioned as personal and affecting reminders of the tourists' travels. The wide dissemination of prints and engravings also did much to increase the popularity of these four artists.⁴⁵ In the end, the works of Claude, Rosa, and Dughet became so closely associated, respectively, with the aesthetic categories of the beautiful, the sublime, and the picturesque that the artists' names became a shorthand for describing certain sorts of scenes. For example, Horace Walpole, recording a journey over the Alps, wrote: "Precipices, mountains, torrents, wolves, rumblings, Salvator Rosa!"⁴⁶ Later in the century, a tourist guide promised to conduct the traveler "from the delicate touches of *Claude*, verified on *Coniston* Lake, to the noble scenes of *Poussin*, exhibited in *Windermer*-water, and from there to the stupendous romantic ideas of *Salvator Rosa*, realized in the Lake of *Derwent*."⁴⁷

This last quotation indicates one final legacy of the grand tour. Beginning with the final decades of the eighteenth century, the new attitudes toward travel and tourism cultivated on the tour were turned toward Britain herself. English men and women began to travel in pursuit of their native land's beauties, antiquities, and culture. The Wye Valley, the Lake District, the Welsh mountains, and the Scottish Highlands were favorite destinations, and guidebooks to these areas proliferated. For example, William Gilpin published the first of his series of *Observations Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty* in 1782; it was a report of a tour of the Wye Valley taken twelve years earlier. In 1799, Charles Heath published *Excursion down the Wye*, a compendium of extracts from Gilpin and other authors together with "copious historical and topographical information."⁴⁸

In addition to providing practical advice and arcane facts, the guidebooks encouraged travelers to cultivate aesthetic responses to the landscapes they viewed. Tourists not only described natural scenes in terms of the paintings of Claude, Rosa, and Dughet; they also attempted their own sketches. Drawing pads, pens and pencils, watercolor sets, and a "Claude glass" were among the standard accoutrements of the picturesque tourist.⁴⁹ Many guidebooks furthered this enterprise by identifying "station points" where the tourists should pause and produce their sketches (see chap. 5).

As a result of the grand tour and its British extensions, English gentlemen aspired to be amateurs of the arts, men of taste. Hussey writes that the eighteenth century saw a new class emerge in English society, the connoisseur.⁵⁰ Another author notes that "the fashionable young man of the day not only tried his hand at nature poetry but he copied landscape paintings, sketched from the out-of-doors, and designed gardens in delightful selfconfidence."⁵¹ We are left with the picture of the enlightened amateur who returned from his tour of the Continent, built up his cabinet of paintings and prints, read treatises on the arts, improved his estate, and traveled the British

countryside seeking out picturesque scenes. Overall, the institution of the grand tour did much to heighten interest in both landscape and landscape improvement--the art of gardening.

3. ACADEMIES AND THEORY

While the grand tour was responsible for the creation of countless amateurs of the arts, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries also saw an important change in the status of art professionals. During the reign of Louis XIV French artists broke away from the medieval guilds and formed the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture. The development of the Académie--and of the dogmatic doctrines associated with it--helped to elevate painting from a mechanical to a liberal art. It also vastly improved the social status of artists.

In France at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the art of painting was under the control of the medieval guild known as the Maîtrise. The guild's privileges, confirmed repeatedly by monarchs dating back to Philip the Fair in 1260, included setting the terms of apprenticeship, regulating the importation of works of art, and barring nonmembers from keeping an open shop.⁵² In 1646 the Maîtrise tried to extend its power by limiting the number of independent artists who could be employed by the crown. The court artists (members of the royal *Valets de chambre* and *Brevetaires*), angered by this move, began to plan an organization to rival the Maitrise. Their plan won royal approval, and in 1648 the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture held its founding meeting.

The arguments offered in support of the fledgling Académie and the rules laid down at its first meeting show that the institution was intended to serve a number of complementary purposes. Like every other royal institution in seventeenth-century France, the Académie had a political task--to glorify the reign of Louis XIV. But its founders also hoped to ennoble the art of painting and to raise the social status of painters. Finally, the explicit charge to the Académie was that of educating young artists. Its primary focus was pedagogical. But the doctrines and values at the core of the curriculum did much to further the larger goals just listed.

The Académie did not provide the entirety of a young artist's education. Students still lived with their masters and learned the skills of painting, carving, and the modeling of figures in their masters' workshops. To gain admission to the Académie, each student had to present a certificate from his master.⁵³ The Académie, however, held a monopoly on life drawing,⁵⁴ and the academic program was built around a set progression: drawing from drawings, drawing from plaster casts (and originals) of antique sculpture, drawing from live models. These activities were supplemented by lectures on perspective, geometry, and anatomy.⁵⁵

In addition to the traditional course of study just described, the Parisian program offered one important innovation. Beginning in 1667, members of the Académie presented a series of lectures or *conférences* on theoretical and practical problems of art. These lectures were first proposed in the academy's founding statutes of 1648,⁵⁶ but except for a series of "pompous harangues" in 1653, intended to humiliate the members of the Maitrise and drive them from the academy,⁵⁷ nothing was done to implement the plan. It not until Colbert, the king's finance minister, was named vice-protector of the Académie that the founders' ambitious intentions were realized.

Colbert saw that the Académie could contribute in important ways to the splendor and glory of Louis's regime. For the last nineteen years of his life, Colbert carefully monitored the academy's activities. He insisted that the long-awaited lecture series commence, attended the sessions, and he

chided the academicians when they tried to wriggle out this obligation.⁵⁸ Most important of all, Colbert stressed the educational benefits of the lectures. He demanded that each discussion yield a rule, or *précepte positif*, that would be inscribed in the academy's official register. In 1667 Colbert declared that "the decisions of the Académie should be accompanied by the reasons used to determine each resolution ... and not offered naked to the public like oracles one is obliged to believe. Since these matters are all subject to reasoning, anyone whose opinion differs from that of the Académie will surrender once he considers the reasons and demonstrations and responses to the objections he might make."⁵⁹

This reliance on reason shows that Colbert and the academicians were eager to formulate a theory of art, a science of beauty. Convinced that the arts of music and poetry had "infallible rules" leading to each art's perfection, they sought to create an equivalent set of rules which would guarantee the perfection of painting.⁶⁰ The historian Louis Hourticq emphasizes this point: "Of all the arts, it is only painting and sculpture which lack, among their rudiments, a doctrine which is certain. The poet obeys the imperious demands of grammar; the musician studies harmony and counterpoint with their mathematical rigor; the architect absorbs geometry and mechanics which are the most exact of sciences. Is it only the painter who must rest content with an empirical apprenticeship? ... The fundamentals of his art, drawing and painting, don't go beyond the practical.... The Academicians didn't want this."⁶¹

Colbert believed that the "laws of beauty" were best discovered by closely scrutinizing the works of the masters rather than by talking in generalities about art.⁶² Accordingly, he proposed a format for the lectures. Each month one of the best paintings in the king's collection would be explained by an expert in front of the entire academy. For eleven years the *académiciens* adhered conscientiously to Colbert's scheme.⁶³ When first initiated, the monthly lectures were extremely popular. Various entries in the official proceedings of the Académie note measures taken to alleviate the clamor and confusion as the public flocked in to attend the sessions.⁶⁴ Most present-day readers, however, are shocked in looking over the texts of the *conférences*. They seem puerile and petty, greatly removed from what we consider today to be legitimate art criticism. Although writers today criticize the academy's doctrines and deplore their effect on seventeenth-century French painting,⁶⁵ the Parisian *conférences* become less puzzling when we assess them in light of the academy's overall goal. Above all the academicians were concerned to put painting on an equal footing with the two most established and respected arts of the time, literature and theater.⁶⁶

The theory which emerged from the Académie's discussions and debates can be reconstructed from the lectures themselves and from the writings of two of the academy's secretaries, André Félibien and Henri Testelin. Félibien's long preface to the 1667 *Conférences* emphasizes two norms for painting: beauty and nobility.⁶⁷ The standard of beauty was set by the art of ancient Greece. The academicians reserved their highest praise for Greek painters and sculptors; Raphael and Poussin were the only modern artists admitted into this pantheon, precisely because they came so close to replicating the antique ideal. Thus in his lecture on Poussin's *The Israelites Receiving Manna in the Desert*, Charles Le Brun describes how Poussin based each of the major figures on some famous piece of classical sculpture. This is offered as praise and not as a condemnation of Poussin's lack of originality. Instruction was similarly backward-looking. Students learned by copying ancient models. Overall, the goal of painting was not to imitate nature but to improve her by appeal to the canons of antiquity.

The second academic ideal, nobility, was sought through a comparison with the literary arts. The academicians declared that painting shared the subject matter of poetry and drama. They enforced a strict hierarchy of genres which placed history painting at the top, followed by portraits,

animal pictures, landscapes, and still lifes. History paintings took their themes from the Bible, classical myth, and epic poetry. Accordingly, they shared the grand actions and noble subject matter praised by Aristotle in the *Poetics*. Such paintings had moral import. They expressed deep truths about human nature since they showed a group of people united by and responding to a heroic action. By contrast the lesser genres like portraits and landscapes could aspire only to achieve verisimilitude or decorative value.

Those *conférences* which focused on a single painting generally analyzed it in terms of a fixed set of categories. These included composition, proportion, design, color, expression, and light and shade. All too often, however, the lecturers got sidetracked by issues that were not straightforwardly aesthetic. For example, Philippe de Champaigne's discussion of Poussin's painting *Eliezer and Rebecca* quickly descended into a debate about the artist's faithfulness to the Bible. According to the Old Testament story Eliezer had ten camels, but Poussin failed to show them. The *Académiciens* came up with a tortured defense of this artistic license.⁶⁸ Similarly stilted debates occurred regarding a number of other biblical scenes.⁶⁹ Occasionally, however, the lectures were more general, addressing a particular practical or theoretical issue rather than analysing a given painting. Le Brun's discussion of the relative merits of color vs. line is one such case. This lecture took up the longstanding Italian debate between *colore* and *disegno*. Le Brun resolved the debate in favor of line by appeal to a number of Cartesian principles--the supremacy of mind over matter, of the rational over the sensory, of the essential over the accidental.⁷⁰

The atmosphere of theory and discussion extended beyond the halls of the academy, for the academy lectures were published, often with summaries by the secretary. In 1680 Testelin's *Tables de préceptes* presented in synoptic form the academy's views on composition, expression, proportions, chiaroscuro, *ordonnance*, and color. Other art treatises were also available. The most influential were those of Freart de Chambray (1662) and Charles Du Fresnoy (1667). These emphasized roughly the same doctrines as had the academicians. All in effect reprised standard aesthetic views going back to Alberti's treatise *Della pittura* of 1435.

I have described the organization and activity of the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture in considerable detail. This arrangement was replicated in a number of other academies established under Colbert's guidance. These included the academies of Dance (1661), Inscriptions and Belles-lettres (1666), Science (1669), Music (1669), and Architecture (1671). And of course the earliest and most influential of all was the Académie française, founded in 1635 in order to protect and preserve French language and literature.

Let me briefly contrast the situation in England. While there was some awareness of the artistic currents at work in France (for instance, in 1695 John Dryden translated Du Fresnoy's *De arte graphica*, and Le Brun's treatise on expression was translated in 1701), no English counterpart to the French academy of art was proposed until the middle of the eighteenth century. Art instruction at that time took place in various private schools. Sir Godfrey Kneller opened a private studio academy in 1711, and James Thornhill established another after Kneller's death in 1723.⁷¹ Various artists of note were members of these schools. They gathered regularly for life drawing. By 1750, Hogarth's academy in St. Martin's Lane "became the chief practising ground for artists in need of models."⁷²

Some of the factors that precipitated the formation of France's Académie royale were not present in England. In particular, guilds did not threaten individual artists' freedom, and there were no limitations on the importing of artworks from abroad. Nevertheless, different groups tried at various times to form an academy on the French model.⁷³ The Royal Academy of Arts in London was finally founded in 1768.

England's Royal Academy differed from that of Paris in two crucial respects. First, the British academy had from the start two purposes--educating young artists, and staging an annual exhibition. The annual exhibitions (which evolved from earlier ones connected with the Academy's precursors) were immensely popular. They were also highly profitable, and this led to the second difference between the two academies. The London academy was private from the very start. It was supported by revenues from the annual exhibition and was not in any way dependent on the crown. The Academy's income was sufficient not only to run the school but also to sustain various charitable commitments--in particular, the support of indigent artists and their families.

While the organization of London's Royal Academy was strikingly different from that of its Parisian counterpart, the academies promulgated very similar doctrines. In 1769 Sir Joshua Reynolds, first president of the Royal Academy, initiated the practice of delivering a discourse at the prize-giving ceremony that concluded each academic year. In all Reynolds delivered fifteen such discourses. Together they comprise a full statement of the Academy's official position. Reynolds's views were decidedly reactionary. He endorsed the hierarchy of genres established a century earlier in France. And he championed those paintings which exemplified the grand style. Such works were not merely ornamental. Rather, they pursued a general, abstract notion of beauty. Such beauty was only achieved when the artist "got above all singular forms, local customs, particularities, and details"; this in turn was accomplished through "reiterated experience and close comparison."⁷⁴ Reynolds did inform students of one familiar shortcut in their pursuit of this goal--he advised them to study the works of the ancients.

4. GARDENS

The theories of painting proposed by the Paris and London academies posited certain affinities between the arts of painting and literature. The founders of the Académie royale, in particular, were carrying out a self-conscious plan to elevate the art of painting by appropriating the theory, subject matter, and status of her sister art. Great emphasis was placed on the two arts' similarity of content. Thus history paintings, like epic poems, tell tales from classical or biblical sources, embellished with allegory and myth, and replete with didactic and moral messages. Considerable knowledge--classical, historical, and scientific--is needed to create successful paintings *or* successful poems. And finally, painters practicing Reynolds's grand style pursue an ideal beauty outlined by ancient philosophers and exemplified by antique art, much as epic poets pursue the ideals set out in Aristotle's *Poetics*.

Such comparisons ennoble painting by emphasizing its moral and literary content and its debt to classical canons and sources. Given that the academies served the art of painting in this way, why couldn't a similar campaign be mounted for the art of gardening? That is, since many eighteenth-century gardenists had an equally elevated view of the art of gardening,⁷⁵ why didn't they pursue a similar strategy, establishing academies of gardening whose curricula would demonstrate gardening's affinities to both painting and poetry and thereby elevate that pursuit from a mechanical to a liberal art?

In some sense, this enterprise was a possible one. Consider the ways in which an academy of gardening might parallel the academies of painting discussed above. The theory of painting, as formulated by seventeenth-century French theorists, was inspired by a set of paintings they had never seen. The writers of the time rhapsodized about the lost works of Zeuxis and Apelles, telling

familiar tales of painted grapes so real that birds tried to eat them, painted draperies so convincing that viewers tried to pull them aside. Certain lost gardens of antiquity were also known through description. For example, in his *Georgics* Virgil describes a garden in Corycus given over to beekeeping, in the *Odyssey* Homer describes the gardens of King Meinoüs,⁷⁶ and Pliny's letters contain accounts of the gardens at his Laurentian villa and his Tuscan villa. It is easy to imagine these gardens revered and mythologized, grounding and inspiring the nascent garden theory. Secondly, a scientific curriculum could be devised for academies of gardening, featuring courses in botany, agronomy, genetics, and meteorology, just as students in academies of painting studied geometry, optics, anatomy, and perspective. And of course general aesthetic principles of gardening, grounded in a philosophical analysis of such concepts as balance and harmony, unity and multiplicity, form and content, nature and art, could be proposed and defended (as in fact they were late in the eighteenth-century by Sir Uvedale Price, Richard Payne Knight, and Humphry Repton). A foundation of this sort would link gardening theory with classic works in the western philosophical tradition.

Two more points of similarity could guide the creation of an academy of gardening. Promising painters in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries made an obligatory trip to Rome to study the artistic treasures of the classical and Renaissance eras. A similar pilgrimage could acquaint aspiring gardenists with Italian Renaissance gardening treasures--the villa gardens of Rome, Tivoli, and Frascati. Finally, there is a body of gardening literature going back before the seventeenth century. Consider, for example, the following works: Thomas Hill's *Briefve and Pleasaunt Treatyse* (1563),⁷⁷ Jacques Boyceau's *Le traité du jardinage* (1638), Andre Mollet's *Le jardin de plaisir* (1651), Claude Mollet's *Théâtre des plantes et jardinages* (1652), Rene Rapin's *Of Gardens* (1665), Sir William Temple's *Gardens of Epicurus* (1682), Dezallier d'Argenville's *Théorie et pratique du jardin* (1709), Joseph Addison's *Spectator* essays on the pleasures of imagination (1712), Pope's *Guardian* essay on topiary (1713), Stephen Switzer's *Ichnographia Rustica* (1718), Batty Langley's *Principles of Gardening* (1728), William Shenstone's *Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening* (1759), Thomas Whately's *Observations on Modern Gardening* (1770), and Horace Walpole's *History of the Modern Taste in Gardening* (1771). These texts could have been part of the classroom curriculum for an academy of gardening, all of which could have been supplemented by an apprentice system which provided young aspirants practical training under the guidance of master gardeners.

I have been arguing for the possibility--indeed the conceptual coherence and the pedagogical utility--of academies of gardening. I claim that such academies could have been constructed in seventeenth-century France and eighteenth-century England so as mirror very closely both the purpose and practices of the academies of painting described above. But of course Colbert never did establish an Académie de jardins,⁷⁸ nor, to the best of my knowledge, did the eighteenth-century English critics who praised gardening so highly attempt to establish academies, societies, or clubs of gardening.

Some features of gardening may explain its recalcitrance with regard to the pedagogy I have proposed. In seventeenth-century France, gardening operated as a manual trade, passed down from father to son. There are famous families of French gardeners--the Mollets, the Boyceaus, the Le Nôtres--who designed and maintained the royal gardens, wrote gardening books, and traveled to spread French-style gardens to other European nations. For example, Pierre Le Nôtre (1570-1610) was appointed one of the chief gardeners in Catherine de Médicis's newly created Tuileries Garden in 1571; he was succeeded in this post by his son Jean in 1618, who was in turn succeeded in 1637 by his son André, the renowned designer of Vaux and Versailles.⁷⁹ Members of the Mollet family

comprised an even lengthier gardening dynasty. Jacques, head gardener to the duc d'Aumale, was the father of Claude, the author of *Théâtres des plans et jardinages*, gardener to Henri IV, and designer of gardens at Fontainebleau, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, and the Tuileries. Claude's son André (d. 1665), author of *Le jardin de plaisir*, designed gardens abroad--in England, the Netherlands, and Sweden. In 1644 he was named *premier jardinier du roi*. His sons Pierre and Claude held positions at the Tuileries, while their brother Jacques was head gardener at Fontainebleau. Claude was succeeded by his son Charles, who was in turn succeeded by his son Armand-Claude Mollet.⁸⁰ Clearly, the traditional system brought security to many French gardening professionals; some also achieved wealth and recognition. (There is a touching story about André Le Nôtre as an old man touring Versailles in a sedan chair alongside the king.) But the profession continued to operate like a manual trade or mechanical art throughout the seventeenth century, and the gardeners themselves didn't band together to seek the higher status that might come through guilds, societies, academies, and the like.

In England, gardening developed along two quite different paths--amateur and professional. Those gardens that came to define the English landscape style were not associated with the crown, as had been the case in France. Instead, Englishmen like Alexander Pope, William Shenstone, and Henry Hoare designed their own gardens. Later in the century, a new phenomenon emerged--professional gardeners with their own identifiable style (Capability Brown, Humphry Repton, and (perhaps to some extent) William Kent). Along both these lines of development, gardening differed from painting in significant ways. While many English amateurs and connoisseurs painted, drew, and sketched, they remained avid collectors of works by acknowledged masters; they didn't aspire to paint all the paintings that would hang in their homes. They often did, however, aspire to design their own gardens and improve their own estates. Moreover, though gentlemen would amass art collections featuring many noted painters, there seemed to be no sense that their gardens should be a collection displaying individual garden designers' styles. Many gardens were indeed worked on successively by different garden designers, but they would often simply tear up and redo one another's work. Compare hiring Richard Wilson to paint over a landscape by Claude! By the end of the eighteenth century, new attitudes were in place that would have lessened some of these differences between gardening and painting. A growing romantic sensibility encouraged the recognition of genius in any creative endeavor, supporting the notions of individual style and individual fame in gardening as well as in the more traditional arts.

Various objections could be raised to my contention here, that academies of gardening resembling the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century academies of painting could have been established. For example, one contemporary garden designer, Russell Page, writes in his aptly titled book *The Education of a Gardener*, "I know now that one cannot be taught to design gardens academically or theoretically. You have to learn the ways and nature of plants and stone, of water and soil at least as much through the hands as through the head."⁸¹ This objection can be deflected. Academies of gardening would *teach* gardening no more--and no less--than academies of painting taught painting. Recall that the students of the Académie royale were apprenticed to particular painters and did all their practical training with them. The academy curriculum included only theoretical subjects plus the course in life drawing. Garden academies would have been arranged similarly. Historical, scientific, and aesthetic programs of study would be supplemented by hands-on work in actual gardens.

A more serious objection to the possibility I have been promoting concerns the underlying assumption that gardens can be assimilated to the arts of poetry and painting. How could mere gardens share the subject matter of epic poems and mythological paintings? Such comparisons

were indeed made in the eighteenth century. Although the first pairing--gardens and poetry--seems especially unlikely, recent scholarly accounts of eighteenth-century gardens bear it out, showing that such gardens conveyed moral, religious, political, and philosophical messages to viewers strolling through them. In the next chapter, I shall explore in more detail gardens' ability to articulate such messages.