BUILDING A ROAD TO HAPPINESS

I have lost my road to happiness, I confess; and, instead of pursuing the way to the fine lawns and venerable oaks which distinguish the region of it, I am got into the pitiful parterre-garden of amusement, and view the nobler scenes at a distance. I think I can see the road too that leads the better way, and can shew it others; but I have many miles to measure back before I can get into it myself, and no kind of resolution to take a single step. My chief amusements at present are the same they have long been, and lie scattered about my farm. The French have what they call a parque ornée; I suppose, approaching about as near to a garden as the park at Hagley. I give my place the title of a ferme ornée; though, if I had money, I should hardly confine myself to such decorations as that name requires. I have made great improvements; and the consequence is, that I long to have you see them.

—William Shenstone, Works

Very well; now go on Zattoo—why the Eminence now is somewhat narrow & steep. O! take ou Tare, Zattoo, don't ou falls, Take hold of Masser's arm—dat's a dood Zattoo!—bess ou, bess ou!

—Thomas Hull, "Shenstone's Walks"

Only a few years into the project that would occupy him another decade and a half until his death in 1763, poet William Shenstone penned the above lament to his close friend Richard Graves in 1748. But in contrast to his closing plea, Shenstone soon did not want for visitors to the landscape garden he was constructing adjacent to his house at the Leasowes, an 89-acre estate about six miles west of Birmingham in the English Midlands. By the 1750s the Leasowes had become a place of some renown, attracting visitors from home and
abroad. Soon after Shenstone’s death numerous guidebooks were published in response to the demands of tourists, both ambulatory and armchair, for aid in appreciating the site.

Visitors’ accounts naturally extolled the natural and architectural beauties of the Leasowes, but they also suggest that the site was more than just the simple aesthetic object of regard that a modern-day visitor might seek, or a stage set for theatrical display of the owner’s tastes and allegiances of the sort that prevailed on aristocratic estates in the decades before Shenstone’s time. Joseph Heely, author of several guidebook accounts of the Leasowes, instead portrayed perambulation of the circuit walk as a private, necessarily autonomous experience, at one point characterizing it as a “solitary maze.” Shenstone’s friend Richard Graves similarly referred to the Leasowes as well suited to a hermit. Equally telling is the midcentury love letter excerpted above. Written circa 1760 by Thomas Hull, a friend of Shenstone, it employed the landscape of the Leasowes as a site on which he played out the course of an intimate encounter with the woman to whom the letter was addressed. Shepherding his love from one point to another along the circuit walk, assisting her over ostensibly treacherous ground, displaying a masterful knowledge of literature, history, and art, addressing her in language that predicated intimacy through baby talk, and ultimately proposing a suggestively private rest in a cozy bower, Hull’s epistolary persona openly exploited the landscape as a means for engaging and exciting deep-seated passions. Heely, Graves, and Hull all expressed confidence in a new instrumentality for landscape: its capacity to serve as a site for private engagement with matters of personal and intimate concern.

The Leasowes has achieved comparable renown among modern historians of landscape, though a propensity to focus on matters of iconography, style, and typology—cued in part by Shenstone’s own reference to a ferme ornée—has left a host of other considerations comparatively neglected. One such concern is anticipated in Shenstone’s first words above. The matter of his landscape garden is introduced by a pointed anxiety over his own happiness, the attainment of which is cast in terms of pursuing a “road” to and through a variety of landscape types. As the discussion below unfolds, it will become evident that Shenstone’s epistolary uses here of road and garden, tying
notions of life-journey to the experience of landscape, bespeak a nascent strategy for getting out of his “pitiful” state of “amusement.” Indeed, the focus of the letter, tying questions of personal happiness and private activity to landscape design, implies an expectation that the material environment, appropriately shaped and fashioned, has the potential to address and engage such problematics of the self. By laying out his estate architecturally and horticulturally as a series of objects and stations concatenated in a linear sequence along a circuit path, each designed to cue certain ideas, memories, or feelings, Shenstone afforded himself a ready itinerary replete with orchestrated opportunities for intellectual, emotional, and physical engagement. Over forty of these points of engagement are shown on a contemporary plan, including the ruins of a former priory, a bower bearing an inscription of Virgilian verse, a seat bearing an inscription dedicated to a

Figure 1. "Plan of the Leasowes," from The Works in Verse and Prose, of William Shenstone (London, 1764).
friend, a Gothic alcove, and well-framed vistas of distant and historic promontories such as the Wrekin. Each afforded pointed and poignant opportunities to dwell on concerns such as heritage, friendship, and happiness, and to do so from a private and solitary perspective.

Such a physical orchestration of the Leasowes according to an explicit set of pathways, leading through a variety of distinct landscape settings and past numerous architectural, sculptural, and literary compositions, was central to the new instrumentality of landscape that Heely, Graves, and Hull all soon recognized. Such an arrangement necessitated the simultaneous engagement of the visitor’s physical, intellectual, and emotional faculties while touring the garden. For example, the physical exhilaration felt upon emerging into an open meadow after a steep climb through a dark wood was met by statuary whose mythological associations would complement, confirm, and enhance that exhilaration. Responses would be all the more pointed as Shenstone plied the itinerary himself, encountering objects and inscriptions that bore an explicit connection to his personal life. Touring the landscape, in other words, entailed exercise that engaged mind and body together in addressing from an individual perspective such personal matters as happiness, friendship, desire, mortality, and heritage.

To raise such matters was nothing new; Alexander Pope’s garden at Twickenham, for example, was well known in Shenstone’s time. But doing so via a series of solitary encounters, sequenced in a linear circuit-walk landscape, was original. The evolution of new and often challenging notions of identity, self, and autonomy in Enlightenment political discourse and capitalist economics had set the stage for the accelerated growth of England’s industrial and mercantile economy in the first half of the eighteenth century, as well as the rapid growth of a flourishing bourgeoisie. By the same token, such factors also posed an increasingly complex problematic for those bourgeois individuals as they sought suitable terms in which to articulate and realize this emerging, distinctly modern form of personhood. In this context, Shenstone’s private circuit walk at the Leasowes—along with the handful of circuit-walk landscapes undertaken from the early 1740s to the early 1760s by other English bourgeois gentlemen—can be seen as more than just another stage in the evolution of landscape taste and fashion. Rather, in this examination of Shenstone’s
work at the Leasowes, I am focusing on one figure who, engaged with the challenges and opportunities posed by bourgeois selfhood and autonomy, employed the domestic landscape as an instrumental medium in which to explore them.

As the essay unfolds below, I will be exploring ways in which the innovative qualities of this landscape and the ways in which it was used both embrace and refract some of the most dynamic currents in eighteenth-century British culture. These range from evolving notions of privacy, property, gender, and domesticity to complex shifts in understanding the production of the self. In larger terms, I am also interested in the general question of how built space—architecture, landscape, urban space, and so on—serves not only to define and police existing social relations, but also in times of change serves as an exploratory and experimental genre for addressing new problems and challenges; this is the light in which I am approaching the work of one bourgeois gentleman in his landscape at the Leasowes.

LANDSCAPING A PRIVATE NARRATIVE

It has long been recognized that eighteenth-century England was a principal stage for the development of modern social, economic, and political structures—articulated in considerable measure through emerging notions of private property, of labor as property of the individual, and of economic prosperity as the realization of individuals’ self-interest. Implications of this growing emphasis on the private individual extended in profound ways to all spheres of society. Capitalism, for example, required the devaluation of systems of social hierarchy and state authority in favor of understanding society as comprised of individuals fully sovereign over themselves, who were at liberty (indeed, increasingly obligated) to articulate their own identities in terms of class, gender, education, taste, occupation, nationality, and other socially variable criteria. Property, in turn—newly defined as that which one could individually “possess” by virtue of one’s labor—became an essential instrument for this exercise of personal liberty. Implicit, and sometimes explicit, in these structural shifts were profound changes and challenges to one’s personal understanding of self and identity.
Western thought has wrestled with the political and existential implications of such personal autonomy ever since, but I want to remain focused on initial, eighteenth-century responses that were executed in a material form. Specifically, I am interested in examining the means by which landscape—part of the material environment in which we physically exist, and which we shape in order to articulate and regulate our existence—became instrumental to the fabrication of solutions to the shifting problematics of personal identity. In particular, I am exploring here the rise of a discrete type of private landscape garden in mid-eighteenth-century England, the circuit-walk garden, as a response to that problematics.

Only a handful of circuit-walk gardens are known to have been constructed in England in the eighteenth century. Along with the Leasowes, those at Stourhead and Painshill are the best known; all these were laid out on the estates of bourgeois gentlemen during the early 1740s to early 1760s. As a type, the circuit-walk garden can be defined as a tract of private land adjacent to a residence, traversed by a walk or path that served as a prescribed route about the premises in a closed loop or circuit. The walk itself, available for the personal use of the proprietor and his guests, could be studded with vistas, monuments, and other scenes and structures that would concentrate the attention of the viewer on particular ideas, memories, or feelings. One principal characteristic of these landscapes was that they were fashioned in a distinctly insular manner: the very closure of the circuit itself effected an inward focus, while a host of landscaping techniques intensified the sense of a sequestered locale, well suited to the private and contemplative activities for which it was reserved. And the fact that the path, as a circuit, prescribed a unitary, closed-ended journey, allowing the visitor to see every feature of the garden, afforded a sense of a complete, and completed, experience.

One of the basic techniques for articulating this insular, private space in circuit-walk gardens was to render a very clear demarcation between the contemplative domain within the boundaries of the landscape garden and the economically productive domains beyond. In some cases hedges and copses might be used to screen farm or pastureland from view, occasionally just a few feet away from where the visitor would stand. In other cases the viewer’s path would lead through woods or below ridges that would prevent sight of the
landscape beyond. And when the viewer emerged into a clearing or onto a crest providing a wider view, the boundaries between landscape garden and productive land were well demarcated: lakes, rivers, hedges, rows of trees, fences, walls, all served to differentiate the garden from the "outside." Such devices generally established a more emphatic division than required simply to keep animals or people in one domain from trespassing in the other. The point was to maintain clearly the landscape garden's integrity and its dissociation from the landscape of capitalized production beyond.

Sometimes, plots of land within the landscape garden would be devoted to vineyards or pastures; the visitor might even traverse meadows, fields, or vineyards as part of the circuit. But such plots were incorporated purposefully as pastoral moments: the prevailing theme was not labor or profit but rather bounty, tranquillity, and otium. Likewise, on most occasions when views of productive landscape might be available from within the landscape garden, they were carefully framed in a manner that, from the visitor's standpoint in the aestheticized private domain, visually subordinated that external domain in which profit, capital, and labor prevailed. The visitor thus was afforded the realization that pursuits of leisure, while requiring physical as well as mental effort (e.g., in making the rounds of the circuit walk), still transcended pursuits of labor. In short, the landscape garden reinforced in material terms, albeit in a fictive manner, the notion of the individual as anterior to, superior to, and detachable from the economic nexus "beyond" and "below."

The defining characteristic of this type of garden was the circuit path: functionally it served the purpose of tying all objects and views, and the visitor's attendant experiences, into a unitary sequence. The visitor undertook such a sequence progressively: a proper visit to the garden, which at a minimum required several hours, involved a linear process of walking from one site or encounter to the next, the experience of each setting the context for those to follow. Moreover, to journey through an entire circuit was to engage in a variety of activities, ranging from the physical travail of walking and climbing to experiencing the pleasures of visual stimulation and intellectual expansion, in the process passing through multiple emotional highs and lows, all nevertheless tied together in patterns and sequences that, ideally, added up to a coherent and meaningful whole. The
extended duration of such an encounter, and the array of evocative and stimulating experiences along the way, amounted to a very rich, concentrated, and above all lived personal narrative—in Shenstone's case, for example, revolving about matters such as happiness, friendship, desire, mortality, and heritage, all particularly pertinent to his own life but germane to many others as well. In short, the landscape garden was an instrument not only for exercising in material (if temporary) terms the isolated autonomy of the visitor, but also for articulating a private narrative figuration that augmented the depth and/or terms of that person's very identity.

Part of what distinguished a circuit-walk garden such as the Leasowes was the sense of connection and cohesion that a tour of the circuit provided. The fact that the walk was designed for individual perambulation—as a personal experience—points to the principal locus in which that cohesion was anchored, the self. The value to be sought in a tour of such a garden lay especially in opportunities for integrating into one's own life the travails, pleasures, and associations experienced along the way. This would be achieved synergistically, through a combination of walking, climbing, and other physical activities, together with the intellectual and emotional expansion arising from experiences along the way and from passing time in an inwardly directed contemplative mode. The resulting rich and focused narrative could then serve to address aspirations, desires, doubts, obligations, and other such concerns in the visitor's own life. Making the journey of the circuit, in other words, was more than a pleasant scenic excursion; if one took the process seriously, the garden offered a substantial apparatus for exploring aspects of one's own selfhood dynamically, through time, effort, and experience—a selfhood that could be further expanded and reinforced regularly by the very act of walking the circuit again.

JOURNEYS TO AND THROUGH THE LEASOWES

The landscape at the Leasowes, a prominent and quintessential example of such a circuit-walk garden, was begun about 1743. The site remains today, but little if any of Shenstone's original work is readily visible, as it has been overtaken by a public park and a golf
course. It is equally difficult to get an adequate idea of the historical appearance of the Leasowes, for although it was much celebrated in its time, surprisingly few contemporary illustrations survive. For knowledge of the site as it stood in Shenstone’s time, visual evidence is limited to a surviving manuscript plan, several drawings, and a few engraved views. On the other hand, there is a wealth of prose material, including detailed descriptions by Shenstone’s publisher Robert Dodsley, garden theorist Thomas Whately, and guidebook author Joseph Heely.¹⁰

These accounts, as with descriptions of other eighteenth-century gardens, were written from the authorial stance of a solitary tourist, narrator, or critic—in other words, they gave the impression that a solitary tour of the premises was standard.¹¹ This may well have misrepresented contemporary practice, in which pairs or groups of friends might accompany each other on a tour, or unacquainted individuals might have been conducted in a group by the gardener or his assistant. But the notion of a solitary tour served to represent the frame of mind in which visitors were expected and presumed to conduct their visit: it would be an intimate, private encounter between the apparatus of the landscape garden and one’s own thoughts and feelings, as mediated by one’s body as it undertook the physical task of traversing the landscape. Thus a tour of a landscape garden, along with a resultant narrative account (oral or written), could be understood to constitute a personal journey, virtually a personal quest, of self-discovery. This is abundantly apparent in contemporary accounts; even Joseph Heely, whose 1777 account largely concerned the orchestration of pictorial composition, explicitly characterized the process of touring the Leasowes as a journey of discovery. He praised Shenstone’s talents in keeping “the spirit of curiosity for ever on the wing” and, significantly, emphasized the focus of the Leasowes on self-discovery by likening it to a “solitary maze.”¹²

In the opening pages of his Description of Hagley, Envil, and the Leasowes (circa 1777), Heely also made explicit the special character of Shenstone’s landscape. He described the journey from the city of Birmingham to the country site of the Leasowes as a transition from the rather dreary domain of labor to a doubly delightful domain of pastoral plenty and aesthetic grandeur:
From Birmingham, indeed, for about five or six miles ... even children of both sexes are seen busily employed, and the tinkling of hammers is the constant music of the road: the vast quantity of nails which are manufactured within the circle of a few miles, is incredible; almost every individual being employed in that branch, except when called from it by the necessity of their attending seed time and harvest. But the opening country soon calls the attention from the busy face of industry, to an endless variety of objects, equally interesting and beautiful. The sudden appearance of a lovely and rich expanse, every way embellished with such a profusion of charms, that the eye knows not where to fix, but wanders among the busy villages, the cultivated fields, and the wood-decked hills, with ineffable delight. Nature from this proud brow [Mucklow Hill, adjacent to the Leasowes] appears replete with those distinctions, which not only fascinate the eye, but fill the mind with the deepest impressions of the majesty of that power from whence every thing proceeds.13

Dodsley’s account (1764) likewise emphasized the sense of disconnection from the economic nexus that the visitor would enjoy. He acknowledged just once the visibility of productive agricultural landscape outside the borders of the Leasowes, and then only as a pictorial “back scene” to a vista from a seat along the Serpentine Path: it was part of “a semicircular range of hills diversified with wood,
scenes of cultivation, and enclosures, to about four or five miles distance.” Farmhouses—laborers’ residences—likewise were mentioned infrequently, and then only in aestheticized terms as “picturesque objects.”

The principal focus of these and other accounts of the Leasowes, however, remained an account of the circuit walk as it passed a series of monuments—a ruined priory, for example, as well as smaller seats and urns, many of them bearing inscriptions evoking feelings and moods tied to the character of the surrounding landscape. Such accounts make it clear that studding the landscape with this series of settings and objects had been done as a way of cuing a variety of particular memories, associations, and moods during the course of the circuit.

An early part of the journey, for example, was through a low, dark, close woods, climbing up a narrow and sometimes difficult path. Here the visitor would experience, both physically and visually, feelings of privation and travail. At the top of the climb, however, the path arrived at a statue of Faunus (Figure 1, no. 14), a deity of shepherds; this focused attention on a sharp transition in the landscape, which beyond the statue opened out into a broad, open pasture. One had, in effect, climbed from the realm of the mundane to the realm of the pastoral, affording such concomitant feelings as relief, exhilaration, and elation. Comparable transitions to other states of mind and bodily feeling occurred at further stages along the tour, culminating at the site called Virgil’s Grove (Figure 1, no. 37). Here at the end of the journey was a calm and tranquil clearing framed by the trunks of majestic trees in an otherwise dense forest, through which a small rivulet passed—affording a perfect site for consolidation in mind and memory of the journey’s experiences and reflection on their further import. For the visitor who had now iterated a substantial personal narrative in real time, through his or her own physical and mental exertions, the Leasowes now provided one final setting well suited to integration of that journey with the greater journey of life.

LANDSCAPE, DISCOURSE, AND NARRATIVE

At first glance it may appear unremarkable that Shenstone, a poet and essayist, produced a landscape extensively punctuated with erudite
inscriptions and references to literary and historical figures. For
decades upon decades the Leasowes was simply labeled a “literary
landscape,” neatly eluding the question of how literature and land-
scape serve to structure and inform human consciousness in ways
that are not necessarily compatible or consistent with each other.
Indeed, this raises a number of complex problems: In what respect
may landscape be a literary construct? In what respect does its func-
tioning constitute (or emulate) literary discourse? In what respect(s)
are they incongruous or inconsonant? And at the Leasowes, for
example, does the introduction of literary texts and allusions into the
landscape necessarily produce a physical environment that functions
as a literary discourse? These, in turn, raise two further questions.
First, to what degree is literary analysis, which has long dominated
discussion of the English landscape garden, able to do justice to its
object? And second, to what degree is verbal language the pre-
eminent structure of human cognition, epistemology, ontology, and
hermeneutics, or do spatial forms, settings, and relationships consti-
tute a separate, independent, and possibly prior structure whose role
is equal to or even greater than that of language? Although these
issues are clearly larger than can be addressed adequately in this
essay, they nevertheless frame my discussion of the Leasowes, and so
they bear brief discussion here.

Work in cultural anthropology and psychoanalytically informed
architectural theory has begun to explore some of these questions in
depth, showing that spatial forms and relations have a discrete and
necessary role in the articulation of human consciousness, and do so
in a manner quite distinct from verbal language. On the other hand,
poststructuralist literary criticism offers persuasive arguments that
human practices, including the material acts of daily life, are in some
respects rendered meaningful through a literary-verbal syntax. In
particular, Michel de Certeau’s inquiries into the “practices of space”
suggest that urban daily life garners considerable significance when
recognized as “pedestrian speech acts” that can be knit together into
“walking rhetorics.” Unlike architectural semioticians who have
analyzed the daily encounter of built space in terms of largely fixed
significances, de Certeau’s analysis suggests that the iterative and
performative aspects of daily life have an instrumental role in the
production of knowledge and consciousness: they provide for a
broad range of signifying practices that may embrace, amplify, inflect, contradict, and even transform the ostensibly fixed significance of objects in built space. One advantage of such an analysis is that it respects personal agency. The individual is not a pawn or puppet of the architectural discourse, nor does architecture necessarily have any essential significance apart from its engagement with the “rhetorics” of daily human practice. A person’s daily practices thus can be regarded as articulating a narrative that engages built surroundings in a continuous process of producing and negotiating meaning. In this respect de Certeau points the way to a more appropriate apparatus for approaching the study of landscape gardens such as Shenstone’s: first, through his insistence that the engagement of built space is a matter of practices, as opposed to a conceptual encounter of a fixed visual apparatus; and second, by arguing that those practices amount to the construction of “stories,” or a narrative, on the part of the individual. Joined with an understanding of space as a medium for the structure of human consciousness, the notion of practice affords an approach to landscape that is participatory, dynamic, and a synthesis of multiple perspectives.

Such an approach allows us to recognize a visit to the Leasowes not simply as an encounter with an environment rich in literary content, but also as a participatory act of spatial articulation in three distinct respects. First, the architecture, sculpture, and landscaping of the site all served as part of a spatial ensemble that not only articulated the dimensions and parameters of the visitor’s experience, but also cued and facilitated the visitor’s choices and actions. Second, a visit required physical exertion, including such tasks as climbing hills and balancing on narrow footholds, as well as inhaling the scents and feeling the textures of surrounding objects. This afforded a material dimension in which the visitor could internalize the experience of the landscape. All this conduced quite effectively to apprehending and remembering the landscape in personal, individual terms. Third, a visit was not a single static event but rather a sequentially connected series of events. To regard the visit as a journey, during which a visitor implicitly constructed a personal narrative, radically shifted the terms of hermeneutic inquiry away from the garden as a static set piece, a didactic tableau available for the passive edification of the spectator. Instead, sites such as the Leasowes were suited to the
active and original participation of the visitor, engaged in a comparatively much more venturesome quest for a lived personal journey.

Viewed in this light, a significant aspect of the landscape at the Leasowes (as at other landscape gardens) was its capacity to facilitate the narrative figuration of identity. Three decades earlier, authors of literary texts had begun to develop narrative techniques for refashioning the terms in which production of identity was understood. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), an early and pivotal instance, took the form of an autonarrative—an apparatus through which an isolated individual was able to explore the articulation of identity in a restricted locale. Prefiguring comparable experiences undertaken by visitors to midcentury landscape gardens such as the Leasowes, Robinson's chronicle became, in the words of Michael McKeon, "an 'auto-didactic' and secular act of self-creation." Here, as in the landscape garden, was the recognition of a crucial premise: that both the opportunity and the responsibility for fashioning identity now were tied to the private individual.

Visitors to landscape gardens, like the readers of *Robinson Crusoe*, juggled a host of fictive constructs and imaginative techniques in exploring the dimensions of identity. And landscape gardens, especially those prescribing a certain route or circuit, had a distinct advantage over textual modes of pursuing such an inquiry: the necessary activity of moving from place to place constantly resituated the body, the gaze, and their frames of reference. This added activity bore two distinct consequences. First, it engaged the physical self in tandem with the intellectual, binding them in a single enterprise. And second, events in the narrative and their consequences became bound to the individual's physical and perceptual capacities. In sum, the process of visiting such a landscape garden rendered palpable the notion that self and identity no longer were matters of nominally fixed orders of being, but rather of journeys—unceasing, unpredictable, and in significant measure dependent on the specific endeavors of the journeyer for their outcome.

Consequently I want to examine the garden landscape at the Leasowes more closely in terms of its capacity to support the rich and complex process of authoring selfhood. It did so in a triple fashion: first, by making an extensive apparatus of literary, historical, and personal allusions available to the visitor; second, by using the
landscape to shape the physical experience of the visitor; and third, by affording structured opportunities for visitors to consolidate their intellectual, emotional, and physical experiences. The result was that visitors would be challenged—indeed required—as part of a garden tour to fabricate narratives according to a host of physical, visual, aural, olfactory, textural, mnemonic, literary-allusive, and other cues. Responses would be specific to each individual, based on their varying feelings, knowledge, and conditioning, the circumstances of their visit, and so forth; it was, in other words, always a personal narrative. Nevertheless, it always was equally a product of the garden itself, based on the limited selection of temples, seats, bowers, inscriptions, and so on, that the walk provided, and the way in which those features were sequenced and orchestrated with the landscape.

**WALKING, TALKING, WRITING**

In practice, the Leasowes was not entirely the sole preserve of its owner. In addition to a steady stream of local visitors, the Leasowes also was visited by individuals and small groups from all over Britain who set out on lengthy tours to visit this and other famous houses and landscape gardens. And while much scholarship on the Leasowes has proceeded on the premise that all of the objects, settings, and inscriptions had fixed meanings that the visitor was obliged to follow as if there were a script, I would like to argue that this landscape actually provided a setting in which the visitor had considerable hermeneutic autonomy. Indeed, any site or object afforded the opportunity to raise a fair range of meanings. In Shenstone's own words, a considerable aspect of "ruinated structures," for example, was "the latitude they afford the imagination ... to recollect any events or circumstances appertaining to their pristine grandeur." In other words, the value of objects was stimulative within a certain range of possibilities, not restrictive or prescriptive. And so whatever meanings visitors might derive were not necessarily oriented to Shenstone's personal literary and social world, although that might remain a response preferred by some; the landscape could also facilitate quite different reactions according to a given person's own learning, history, taste, aspirations, and other characteristics.
Much of the rationale for presuming a fixed meaning resides in the fact that Shenstone’s publisher, Robert Dodsley, incorporated an extensive account of the landscape into the posthumous collection of Shenstone’s Works issued in 1764. Eager to affirm Shenstone’s ability to “discover and improve” the “natural beauties” of the site and to “give them their full effect,” Dodsley no doubt was inclined to paint the effects of Shenstone’s work in terms as precise and definite as possible. The result was, in effect, an official map cast in explicit terms, which ever since has been read all too frequently as if the circuit journey should have been conducted rather like a present-day visit to an art museum, noting and identifying objects in the manner of a connoisseur.

But Dodsley’s account cannot substitute for the actual experience. Indeed, at a point very early in the process of laying out the Leasowes, Shenstone was already exploring ways to escape prescriptive limits and restraints on imaginative expansion. In an elegy of 1746, titled “Taking a View of the Country from His Retirement,” Shenstone celebrated the liberty afforded by landscape to forge one’s own path and one’s own thoughts:

Lord of my time my devious path I bend,
Thro’ fringy woodland, or smooth-shaven lawn;
Or pensile grove, or airy cliff ascend,
And hail the scene by nature’s pencil drawn.

Here if my vista point the mould’ring pile,
Where hood and cowl devotion’s aspect wore,
I trace the tott’ring reliques with a smile,
To think the mental bondage is no more!!

The possibilities afforded through such landscape-mediated autonomy were indeed extraordinary, as is likewise apparent from a visitor’s account of a tour of the Leasowes that took place near the end of Shenstone’s life. The account is in the form of a lengthy manuscript love letter, written in or about 1760, offering a first-person present-tense account of a tour of the garden. Thomas Hull, a friend of Shenstone and the author of the letter, laced his description of his journey through the garden—now I am looking at this, now I am going forward—with comments addressed directly to the recipient of
the letter, his beloved—"we go forward," "Once more I must stop you," and so on—comments that in effect placed her next to his side as his companion for the journey.26

The implications of this epistolary technique may not become apparent, however, until the reader gets a little way into the letter and begins to stumble over the writing: all of a sudden more and more words in this eighteenth-century hand are unrecognizable. No amount of discounting for spelling variants or idiosyncratic orthography can bring sense to the text—until one recognizes that this is eighteenth-century baby talk. As the writer and his epistolary companion approach a steep climb, for example, he uses the pet name "Zattoo" to fuss over her:

Very well; now go on Zattoo—why the Eminence now is somewhat narrow & steep. O! take ou Tare, Zattoo, don't ou falls, Take hold of Masser's arm—dat's a dood Zattoo!—bess ou, bess ou!

And so that this lapse into baby talk won't be misunderstood, the author also explicitly justified his use of it:

But seriously, is it not a kind of Prophanation to talk such Nonsense in this sweet Spot[?]—& yet why should it [be a profanation?]—'tis Elegance—Taste—It implies honest, artless Love, & cannot offend ... the Genius of these Shades.

What Hull's account makes clear is that seats, structures, inscriptions, and vistas could be used as more than objects of aesthetic and intellectual contemplation; they were recognized as sites that afforded the opportunity for forging intense emotional bonds. Not only could these be occasioned by the visitor's private experience of the site's physical or allusive characteristics; the garden elements could serve to arouse and mediate the relationship between himself and his absent beloved (at least from his own perspective), or even between the absent beloved and nature. As they turned down the Lover's Walk and approached the rivulet, Hull deliberately removed himself from the scene and portrayed nature calling instead to her as if she were present:

den, pretty Zattoo—let us go hand in hand into the Lover's Walk—sweetly calculated for a Lover's Walk—Tiss our Masser, Zattoo—See,
the infant Trees, not any much above ten foot high, Yet see how closely they embrace each other, & exclude Heat, & Sound, almost—except that of our sweet Companion, the Rivulet. How snug, how retired & cool is this Arbour, whereto he thus invites his Zattoo—not mine, mark—‘tis his Zattoo he calls, so don’t ou stir for our ife.

These words are followed, tellingly, by a Latin inscription and English translation dedicated to Galatea, a sea nymph in Greek mythology who had been forced to turn her lover Acis into a river. The encounter between Zattoo and the rivulet, then, is framed as a reunion of Galatea and her lost love. This evocation of mythological events very well might have brought to the visitor’s mind a sense of Arcadian intimacy by recalling George Frideric Handel’s immensely popular masque *Acis and Galatea*. Composed in 1718 and revised in 1732, *Acis and Galatea* was perhaps the most frequently performed of Handel’s works right through the 1750s. Its setting was “a rural prospect, diversified with rocks, groves and a river,” where nymphs and shepherds carried on in Arcadian bliss. And here Galatea ensured Acis’s immortality by transforming him into an ever-flowing stream. In her final air she sings to him:

Heart, the seat of soft delight,
Be thou now a fountain bright!
Purple be no more thy blood,
Glide thou like a crystal flood.
Rock, thy hollow womb disclose!
The bubbling fountain, lo! it flows;
Through the plains he joys to rove
Murm’ring still his gentle love.

In the above instances, as in the rest of Thomas Hull’s manuscript, his use of baby talk enhanced his engagement with the site by allowing him to articulate a degree of personal intimacy impossible in standard literary prose. As he put it, baby talk was a medium that facilitated expression of honesty, artlessness, and love. But more than that, the fact that he recounted the whole circuit of the garden in such terms, bringing along his beloved “Zattoo” every step of the journey, rendered the landscape itself an instrument for articulating uncommon dimensions of intimacy.
At its most intense, Hull’s intimacy bordered on the licentious. Having asked his beloved for a kiss—“Tiss our Masser, Zattoo”—Hull led her up a steep serpentine path to a small and cozy bower:

Here we have a little Hill to mount, & close in a Corner, in that Bower, … you must put aside the Boughs to sit down (just Roome for Zattoo & Masser).

The next higher bower—ostensibly reached at the cost of much physical effort—invited even cozier activity:

When we mount somewhat higher, the Trees break to the left, & afford a very extensive Pastoral View. Shall us stop, Zattoo, in this Bower, & take a Nap—sure it is finely calculated, & you are thus invited by Mr. Shenstone’s … words:

Hull provided here a translation of an inscription from Virgil:

Here Leisure & Retirement,
And Caves, & living Lakes, & Tempe cool,
And Low of Herds, & soft refreshing Slumbers
Beneath the Shade invite.28

I am not suggesting that the experience chronicled by Thomas Hull was in any respect normative. Rather, my argument is that the landscape as designed afforded a wide range of quite different, even unique, experiences.29 Certainly the character of Hull’s experience could not be predicted from Dodsley’s dry account; it follows that scores or hundreds of other dissimilar visits likewise could not be predicted. And my greater point is that the landscape furnished a series of structured opportunities for emotional challenge and response; knit together as a complete circuit, the resulting narrative—necessarily different for each visitor—provided an extraordinary opportunity to articulate and refine the terms and structure of one’s identity. The example in hand illustrates this doubly so: for Hull, the garden provided the occasion to conceive and express himself as an “artless” and therefore genuine man of taste, man of experience, and above all lover. By presenting nature—ordinarily a feminine presence—as a masculine entity (“tis his Zattoo he calls”), and personifying nature in terms of the masculine Acis, Hull tellingly enlisted the instrumentality of the landscape in his pursuit. In addition, the
garden setting afforded him the opportunity to articulate his beloved in a complementary fashion, as his ever attentive and responsive companion in intimacy, walking together with him down the Lover’s Walk, climbing arm in arm up a steep and narrow path, amenable to napping together briefly in the Bower, and so on. Thus by means of his actual visit and then his epistolary account, Hull managed to author an identity for himself that was clearly masculine, masterful, powerful, erotic, and desiring; and yet the use of baby talk also made it clear that his identity was mutable, malleable, and avowedly unfulfilled without the presence of its complement, the delicate, comparatively helpless, willingly subordinate “Zattoo.”

**GENDER AND DOMESTICITY**

This complementarity between Hull and his lover, articulated and ratified by Hull without her presence or direct participation, points to a salient aspect of such landscapes, whether experienced in person or vicariously—their utility and complicity in the construction and reinforcement of gender roles.

Not only Hull’s personal experience of the Leasowes but also the broader eighteenth-century literature on landscape manifest a distinctly gendered understanding of landscape gardens. To begin with, the very ways in which knowledge of these gardens was transmitted helped to sustain their gendered character. The fact that Hull’s and all other known accounts of the Leasowes were authored by men bespeaks (literally) the presumptively masculine nature of the process of visiting such a garden. Surely women toured gardens such as the Leasowes, perhaps even as frequently as men, notwithstanding the ostensible difficulties and dangers that Hull cataloged. But women’s experience was framed either by the presence of a male companion, as in Hull’s account, or in terms of masculine categories of perception. Indeed, few if any narrative accounts of any garden landscape were published by women until the nineteenth century, when Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Mansfield Park* (1814) appeared. Nor were women instrumental in the conception and design of any major landscape gardens. Even in Austen’s novels, men were still the “improvers.” Women were capable of assessing the
results with some critical expertise, though in so doing they were beholden to prevailing masculine categories of analysis such as “sublime” or “beautiful.” Thus in touring gardens, it was men who set both the agenda and the terms in which it would be pursued; the role of woman was circumscribed by and subordinated to those very terms.

Such a gendering of landscape is attributable, in part, to the fact that architecture and landscape were masculine professions and that women were seldom the principal proprietors of substantial estates. But it is attributable as well to the peculiar nature of identity construction in the early English Enlightenment: political writers such as Locke, though arguing the autonomy of human consciousness, nevertheless insisted on the origins of political power in domestic patriarchy and on maintaining “the Power that every Husband hath to order the things of private Concernment in his Family.” Locke and those who followed him also understood land-as-property as an institution integral to such a patriarchal polity. And so land itself was readily understood as instrumental in articulating the role of the patriarchal male.

Turning once again to the account of Thomas Hull, the most vivid respect in which it bespeaks a gendered landscape is through the actual uses that he made of the Leasowes. He treated the site as an instrument for articulating not only a highly masculine self, but also a distinctly gendered relationship with his lover. On the one hand, he made a considerable show of his erudition, displaying his knowledge of literary discourse, translating Latin inscriptions, and counseling the most appropriate interpretations and reactions for given texts and objects. He also made clear his knowledge of landscape “art,” suggesting appropriate ways of apprehending various scenes, settings, and natural objects:

Now you see, it opens to an Irregular piece of Pasture-Ground—very pleasing this—see how Nature wantons uncontrouled, & unconfined.

On the other hand, in addition to his role as authority, arbiter, pedagogue, and aesthete—traits all coded “masculine” in the eighteenth century—he also articulated the relationship between himself and his lover in fully gendered terms. Clearly Hull was the teacher,
the one who was in full command of the itinerary and who showed
his companion the way. He also was her protector, repeatedly cau-
tioning her at difficult or dangerous places, and offering assistance in
negotiating them—hardly necessary in an epistolary account, unless
gendering the relationship was a focal aspect of the excursion. But
most telling of all, he was the master—endearing himself to his
beloved through baby talk, to be sure, but repeatedly and consist-
tently authoring her response to him as “Zattoo” (a pet or baby
name) who replies to her “Masser” in baby language, thereby articu-
lating a subordinate, if not infantile, relation to Hull.

Even more remarkable, Hull’s letter shows us that, contrary to
modern presumptions about the domestic realm, it served not
uncommonly as a prominent site for the production of masculine
identity. Much scholarship has focused on the eighteenth-century
genesis of a split between the public sphere, or male realm, and the
domestic sphere, understood as the site for the construction of a new,
“domestic” female identity. Well into the second half of that century,
however, it is clear that a considerable portion of the domestic realm
was yet reserved for the construction of male identity—and explicitly
so, given the manner in which specifically male characteristics
such as authority, arbiter, teacher, protector, master, and so on, were
articulated through a process of contradistinction from their female
opposites.

Nature itself, the material of which “landscapes” and landscape
gardens are fabricated, is genderless prior to human intervention.
Nor does such intervention necessarily impose an essential gen-
deredness on the site. Rather, it is the uses to which the site is put,
and the conventions according to which it is characterized and expe-
rienced, that render it a gendered space. Nor does gendered space
simply remain an inert product of such discursive practices; it also
plays an instrumental role in the production and reproduction of
gender. At the Leasowes, as with other such landscapes, it is thus
appropriate to describe the landscape not simply as gendered but as
gendering: it afforded opportunities to those who made its rounds to
explore and physically perform certain aspects of their gender iden-
tity. Hull did so, in this case, by displaying his “mastery” of literature
and aesthetics, as well as by directly incorporating the topographic,
literary, and architectural features of the garden in his patronizing
and authoritative manner of escorting his lover; other visitors here and elsewhere would readily make similar use of such features to perform comparably gendered roles.

Nevertheless, during the eighteenth century, as now, the matter of gender identity was not always so simple as the heterosexual pairing that Hull proffered in his letter. One cannot presume that Hull’s introduction of a female partner into his account represented the only manner of articulating one’s gender in such a landscape. Indeed, it is significant that some of the foremost examples of circuit-walk gardens—Stourhead, Painshill, the Leasowes—were created by men who were widowed or unmarried while creating their landscapes. Space does not permit a full examination of individual circumstances in each of these cases, ranging from bereavement to homosexuality, but none of these men had a close heterosexual partner when he embarked on such an extensive, expensive landscaping project. Simplistically, one could argue that the energy that would have gone into such a relationship was “displaced” into aesthetic or horticultural activities by building a garden. But this discounts the full breadth of psychological engagement and support that such a garden, once completed, could provide. Indeed, it is a stronger argument that the garden served in part to sustain the particular forms of masculinity that each of these owners had already articulated and would continue to live for the remainder of their lives.

AUTONOMY, EMOTION, AND THE HERMITAGE

Solitude and the cultivation of self were recurrent concerns in contemporary accounts of gardens such as the Leasowes. Heely, after all, likened the Leasowes to a “solitary maze.”36 And in Hull’s narrative, even though his “Zattoo” was addressed in the second person throughout, it is clear that only Hull had made the journey in person. His inclusion of Zattoo in the narrative served only to complement the self he sought to forge alone, as he traversed the landscape by himself.37

Eighteenth-century aesthetic theory clearly abetted and reinforced this emphasis on solitude and individuality, emphasizing in particular the capacity of landscape to precipitate a variety of private
intellectual and emotional responses in the viewer. Early in the century Joseph Addison already had set the agenda by encouraging imaginative expansion in the presence of nature. By midcentury Lord Kames's influential discussion of the landscape garden focused on its potential to directly "raise" a broad range of emotions in the visitor, stressing that gardens were preeminent sites for the production of individual experience and emotion. In Elements of Criticism (1762), Kames emphasized this point in distinguishing three orders of garden. The first, or simplest, was simply "embellished with a number of natural objects, trees, walks, polish'd parterres, flowers, streams, &c"—in other words, a vocabulary of "natural" objects. The second, more complex order incorporated "statues and buildings, that nature and art may be mutually ornamental." On this level, Kames accepted the introduction of iconographic and associative aspects of buildings, but clearly the production of emotional effects was the chief objective. In this respect the third order approached "nearer perfection." It consisted of objects assembled together in order to produce, not only an emotion of beauty, but also some other particular emotion, grandeur, for example, gaiety, or any other above mentioned. The completest plan of a garden is an improvement upon the third, requiring the several parts to be so arranged, as to inspire all the different emotions that can be raised by gardening.

Kames's ideal garden, in other words, would be one that offered the visitor the most diverse range of opportunities for emotional expansion. Kames was silent on the greater purpose of such expansion, although in the case of a winter garden, at least, the goal was not only to achieve certain mental states but also to stimulate thinking of a higher order, "a fine tone of mind for meditation and reasoning." The underlying presumption remains clear: that the private production of emotion was highly valued, particularly if undertaken in a locale such as a garden—where the isolated self became the preferred site for emotions to be concentrated and assimilated according to one's needs and predilections.

By 1770 Thomas Whately, author of Observations on Modern Gardening, extended the discussion over landscape gardening from the production of emotional states to the articulation of distinct modes of
consciousness. He drew a critical distinction between two very different ways in which landscape gardens engaged the observer: on the one hand, by using objects bearing allusive references as emblematic devices, and on the other hand, by providing environments that stimulate emotive expression. Whately illustrated that distinction in remarks on a specific type of building found in numerous midcentury landscape gardens—hermitages. “A hermitage,” he stated, “is the habitation of a recluse; it should be distinguished by its solitude, and its simplicity.” Against that standard—one that facilitated the stimulation of a clear and specific set of emotions privately, in an isolated setting—he contrasted the tendency for some hermitages to be furnished with “crucifixes, hour-glasses, beads, and every other trinket which can be thought of.” He disparaged such collections of objects on the ground that they were “artificial,” but also made the larger point that they diverted one’s attention from “enjoying the retreat,” i.e., experiencing the range of emotions that being in such a reclusive situation would produce. In other words, the associative and allusive (“emblematic”) trains of thought that he attributed to “trinkets” were a different order of consciousness from the “expressive” potential of landscape, a difference to which I will return.

It is significant that Whately chose a hermitage to illustrate his argument, for two reasons. First, the hermitage is both an icon and a locale tied to the exploration of personal identity. To become a hermit per se was hardly the objective of eighteenth-century landowners, landscapists, visitors, or tourists; nevertheless, hermitages appeared frequently in midcentury landscapes, painted as well as built. In considerable measure this was due to the heuristic value afforded by the hermit in his hermitage—an individual voluntarily located in primitive isolation for the purpose of engaging a deeper, perhaps more essential consciousness—serving as an object of contemplation and reflection for the proprietor (or visitor) making the rounds of the garden. In effect, regarding the hermit provided the solitary onlooker an opportunity to regard himself: to reflect, from close range, on his own solitary progress through life, for which the garden walk was a trope; and to ponder the process of forging one’s own identity, the trope for which was the life of the hermit.

As Enlightenment ideology increasingly construed the articulation of identity as a private responsibility, the figure of the hermit
became a ready instrument for naturalizing the ideology of individualism. The hermit, like the "noble savage," helped to justify the premise, fundamental to Cartesian and Lockean epistemologies, that the politically and intellectually autonomous individual exists prior to society. Indeed, a hermit might even imagine himself as the prelapsarian Adam in his primitive hut, as suggested in an account of one hermit, first published in 1727, further reinforcing notions of patriarchal primacy and autonomy: "In this most blessed state he thinks himself as Adam before his fall, having no room for wishes, only that every thing may continue in it's [sic] present condition."45

For the midcentury garden visitor the sight of the hermitage, though possibly inducing feelings of loneliness or melancholy, graphically and materially articulated the ontological primacy of the individual. The hermit, set "free" of worldly connections, was surrounded by the distilled potentialities of nature, which he was expected to utilize in his quest for self-realization; and nature was correspondingly isolated, in a quasi-Edenic fashion, from the corruptions and constraints of society.46 In parallel fashion hermit poetry of the period consistently represented hermitages as structures anterior to art, taste, and fashion; those who inhabited hermitages were seeking freedom from things like the "noise,... folly, fraud and strife"

Figure 3. "Hermit's Cell," from William Wrighte, Grotesque Architecture (London, 1767). Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.
that would otherwise "corrode" their existence. And such, in turn, was no small aspect of Shenstone's landscape at the Leasowes, as described to Shenstone himself in a poem by his close friend Richard Graves. Graves identified the Leasowes as the perfect site for a hermit's retreat:

Yet if some kinder Genius point his way
To where the Muses o'er thy Leasowes stray,
Charm'd with the sylvan beauties of the place,
Where art assumes the sweets of nature's face,
Each hill, each dale, each consecrated grove,
Each lake, and falling stream his rapture move.
Like the sage captive in Calypso's grott,
The cares, the pleasures of the world forgot,
Of calm content he hails the genuine sphere,
And longs to dwell a blissful hermit here.

Strikingly different from the country house, which served in large measure as an instrument for the concentration and deployment of power, the hermitage wholly abjured such interests in favor of a private, inwardly directed course of contemplation free of as much social, political, and material encumbrance as possible. Graves alluded to Odysseus's isolation amid the sylvan pleasures on Calypso's remote island, but the implication remained that, like Odysseus, Shenstone ultimately would seek release from this isolation, strengthened in his personal resolve.

The other aspect of Whately's remark on hermitages concerns the construction of selfhood. His animadversions on crucifixes, hourglasses, beads, and trinkets, and their propensity to divert the hermit's attention, were not mere strictures on clutter. Rather, he clearly distinguished between such distracting allusive objects and the capacity of the site itself and its natural surroundings to sustain "characters"—concerted, original orchestrations of landscape which "give expressions to the several scenes superior to any they [visitors] can receive from allusions."

This was a major and crucial distinction, since in fact he was arguing the difference between two epistemes. The first, represented by a hermitage cluttered with objects of contemplation, was associated with the pre-Enlightenment cabinet of curiosities. Such a collection of
mysterious and wondrous items, objects of their owner’s scrutiny and meditation, was an instrument for penetrating beyond the world of appearances to “higher” knowledge of cosmological and earthly correspondences. It was, in other words, a site for decoding and affirming the place of the owner in the hierarchies of society and the universe. But such an episteme was inimical to Enlightenment principles of intellectual and political autonomy. In effect Whately argued that the landscape no longer could serve (like a cabinet) as a document or instrument of a fixed order. The episteme that he preferred allowed landscape to be construed as a field of opportunities for the individual to define, assemble, and narrate the self privately in a manner consistent with Enlightenment individualist ideology.

Whately’s discussion of landscape hinged on the assertion of a distinction that was in fact problematic: intellectual stimulation by allusive means (“emblem”), versus generation of emotions through visual orchestration of “natural” elements (“expression”). In practice, these were by no means mutually exclusive; indeed, they were employed simultaneously at the Leasowes. But Whately’s analytical overreach did not compromise the larger significance of his argument: that the landscape garden should be understood as a site, like a hermitage, removed from the nexus of public life and social order, where the isolated individual could be “free” to pursue a solitary process of intellectual, imaginative, and emotional expansion tied to the production of a private identity.

TABLEAU, THEATER, PERFORMANCE

Before the middle third of the eighteenth century, landscape gardening was little concerned with the kind of private expansion that Whately advocated and the Leasowes facilitated. One may presume that the cluttered hermitage was, in Whately’s view, a trope for the entire practice of “emblematical” landscape gardening that had reigned across Europe prior to his time: gardens in which the various pavilions, monuments, and such were less an opportunity for individuals to extend diverse dimensions of their own feelings and understanding, than an orchestrated effort to articulate and sustain particular sorts of social and political relations. Examples of the latter
sort of garden range from the sixteenth-century gardens of the Villa d’Este at Tivoli to the early eighteenth-century landscape at Stowe, where the extensive iconographical program was closely tied to the political history and agenda of the owner, Richard Temple, Viscount Cobham, and his circle.52

The evolution of garden design from Renaissance typologies into the sort of apparatus that Whately championed had been part of a lengthy process in which the nature of the activity in which the individual visitor engaged was transformed. The visitor to a Renaissance garden, or even an overtly didactic eighteenth-century landscape such as the early Stowe, had largely been engaged in apprehending a set three-dimensional tableau. Perambulation offered at best the opportunity to explore and gain further insight into an array of complex relations and hierarchies.

By the next stage, beginning in the early eighteenth century, visitors acted in a more participatory fashion, performing one of a limited number of defined roles available in the garden. Not only was a visitor supplied with a succession of “scenes” for observation and contemplation, but in many cases the landscaping served to cast visitors as performers in front of consciously stagelike settings. A set of views of Hartwell House painted in 1738, for example, shows the landscape in the close vicinity of the house fashioned in a highly architectural manner as a series of theatrical settings for social affairs.53 In these spaces, highly structured by topiary and architectural set pieces, those present appear to be spectators as well as actors in a performance: in a domesticated and privatized version of a masque, the participants serve simultaneously as audience and as principal characters, articulating their own influence and position.54 Likewise at Chiswick, the orchestrated uses of hedge walls and converging paths, not to mention the amphitheater, all served to create framed, focused sites for encounters and for being seen. The experience of the Rousham landscape as well was a matter of “plot” and “scene,” a series of carefully staged “settings” assiduously screened and secluded, like a proscenium stage, from the surrounding landscape. A proper visit to the garden was, in many respects, analogous to performance of a masque—especially because the visitor, by virtue of the need to walk through the landscape, was cast in a participatory role in a drama of fixed meanings.55
A few such gardens even amounted to explicit masquelike epitomes of their proprietors. Examples range from Appleton, as chronicled by Andrew Marvell in the 1650s, to Prior Park, near Bath, as described in 1746. The latter site was understood as a singular, material embodiment of the identity or “presence of the master”:

the tranquillity and harmony of the whole only reflecting back the image of his own temper: an appearance of wealth and plenty with plainness and frugality; and yet no one envying, because all are warmed into friendship and gratitude by the rays of his benevolence.\(^56\)

The garden, in other words, was a theatric representation of the owner’s wealth, status, and character.

The third stage in the transformation of the visitor’s role, by now familiar from the above discussion of the Leasowes, occurred in the middle of the eighteenth century. No longer was the visitor cast as a detached observer or provided with a set role. Rather, the landscape served as a well-orchestrated series of occasions to explore a progressive articulation of the perambulator’s own identity—indeed, to

Figure 4. Balthasar Nebot, view of Hartwell House gardens, Buckinghamshire, 1738. From the Buckinghamshire County Museum collections.
perform it. Earlier gardens such as Hartwell or Chiswick were theatrical to the extent that they provided set stages on which visitors simultaneously could be spectators and participants in the ongoing drama. The character of performance at the Leasowes, however, was of a different order. Instead of stage-sized settings that accommodated groups of people, the landscape became a sequence of mostly secluded sites affording private opportunities for the individual visitor’s journey and quest. The relation between visitor and landscape was constituted in terms of each individual’s private experience; and the consummation of that experience required a series of individual, private engagements with the sites, objects, and views in the entire circuit of the garden.

**CONCLUSION: PERFORMANCE, PLACE, AND AUTONOMY**

To be sure, a garden such as the Leasowes was not a site for the construction of anyone’s entire identity; its value lay rather in the degree to which it could facilitate personal articulation of certain dimensions,

Figure 5. John Donowell, “A View of the Three Walks Terminated by the Cassina, the Pavilion, and the Rustic House in the Garden of the Earl of Burlington, at Chiswick,” ca. 1753. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.
e.g., gender, privacy, friendship, desire, and so on. What is remarkable, though not surprising, is that the private landscape garden became identified as the proper site for such pursuits, and that they were facilitated there in such an isolated manner. Such a role for landscape derived, in part, from the Enlightenment’s increasing emphasis on autonomy as a crucial component of the self, both in economic and legal terms, and in cognitive terms. The very notion of the individual self depended on the privatization of the landscape as property. As Locke influentially argued in 1690, terrain appropriated personally by an individual, through the application of personal labor, would necessarily become private territory, and thus that individual’s personal property, distinct and detached from all other interests, including the public or collective interest. The right to appropriate land, to convert it to one’s own personal use, to retain possession of its produce, to bar others from it, and ultimately to alienate or dispose of it—in other words, to convert land to private property—all these rights derived from a single act, the application of one’s own labor to the land.

_As much Land as a Man Tills, Plants, Improves, Cultivates, and can use the Product of, so much is his Property. He by his Labour does, as it were, inclose it from the Common._

God and his Reason commanded him to subdue the Earth, _i.e._ improve it for the benefit of Life, and therein lay out something upon it that was his own, his labour. He that in Obedience to this Command of God, subdued, tilled and sowed any part of it, thereby annexed to it something that was his Property, which another had not Title to, nor could without injury take from him.

So that God, by commanding to subdue, gave Authority so far to appropriate. And the Condition of Humane Life, which requires Labour and Materials to work on, necessarily introduces _Private Possessions_.

By further asserting that individuals had a “property” in themselves, one that they could freely negotiate, Locke also cast individuals themselves as autonomous economic resources, ontologically prior to any form of state control. As Peter Laslett has put it, “property to Locke seems to symbolize rights in their concrete form.” The notion of property as fundamentally contingent on the _individual_ for its existence further sustained the notion that private domains (the
house and the garden chief among them) were instruments for the construction and differentiation of that identity.

The very notion of an autonomous self, and of property as a process of individual alienation by that self, predisposed ordinary relations between the human being and the landscape to be construed in terms of individual proprietorships. In other words, the paradigm was established that a relation between a person and a plot of land was a private one. This, in turn, sustained a greater propensity to understand individuals spatially as each in one's own "private sphere," preferably making use of specific parcels of land—i.e., capital instruments—that belonged to them as property.

Property thus became a critical instrument by which the newly emerging "private sphere," heretofore ill-demarcated, could be defined and given material form. In the case of bourgeois landowners—not least Shenstone at the Leasowes, Hoare at Stourhead, and Hamilton at Painshill—the role of the landscape qua property was the counterpart in gross of what the circuit walk was in fine: an instrument for fashioning private identity. Both as property and as garden, the landscape served as part of the material apparatus by which the owner undertook the process of self-articulation. Thus it was entirely "natural," ideologically speaking, to take a parcel of landscape-as-property (which defined such things as the proprietor's class and status) and to refashion it into landscape-as-garden in a manner that would provide for the material performance of the proprietor's identity.61

Just as Locke had found the appropriation of property to be legitimated through the application of labor, so the articulation of self with respect to landscape had to be sustained through the active physical, intellectual, and emotional participation of the individual pacing the garden on foot. Of course, there is a fundamental dichotomy here as well. Locke required the application of real labor to justify the alienation of property. The garden landscape, as indicated above, thrived on the denial of real labor. The effort required on the part of a visitor to traverse the landscape was "labor" in the most limited sense, since unlike "real" labor there was no opportunity to transform the landscape physically. Still, it was no longer sufficient to deploy images representing fixed personal traits as at Appleton or Prior Park. Rather, a series of occasions was required for the active
participation of the visitor in a dynamic process, experiencing diverse dimensions of self firsthand, in sequence, and over time. The landscape, in short, provided an opportunity for the visitor to work at articulating identity by performing it, in real time and in real (though rarefied) space.

Knowledge, as Donna Haraway and Doreen Massey remind us, is always situated someplace. And it is the specifics of a given place that particularize the circumstances in which identity is produced.\textsuperscript{62} Crucial to the Enlightenment notion of individual autonomy, moreover, was the premise that one’s situation in space and society was neither fixed nor immutable. According to Locke’s highly influential argument, “place” was arbitrary, strictly a matter of position relative to other objects in space, all of which in turn might be moving in relation to others.\textsuperscript{63} Much has been made of how this troubling feature of Lockean epistemology has contributed to the fragmentation and dissolution of modern society. Its consequences also were understood in the shorter run, not least in efforts to redress the loss of fixed, knowable “place” by engaging the landscape in a more flexible and more personalized fashion. For the owner of a site such as the Leasowes, creating a landscape garden offered not only the opportunity to display one’s identity, as in earlier types of landscape gardens, but to define the very circumstances of its production. It could be argued that Lockean epistemology created the necessity of building and using such a landscape for realizing one’s personal, private, and nominally autonomous identity.

Nevertheless, such an opportunity to devise one’s own “road to happiness”—seemingly so open-ended—ironically resulted in an apparatus with pronounced shortcomings. On the one hand, the insularity of the circuit-walk garden was both a defining feature and a challenging limitation. To establish the sense of an ostensibly autonomous self necessarily requires some form of separation from the rest of the world, which gardens like the Leasowes readily provided. Yet that very isolation, with its monadic, hermetic overtones, undermined the very connections to history, heritage, friendships, literature, and so forth, on which the visitor’s successive encounters were based. In addition, the linear experience of the circuit walk established an expectation of a progressive, incremental advance toward self-realization.\textsuperscript{64} But the fact that the walk formed a closed
loop, while suggesting completion of a “whole”—always ending where it started, always reiterating the same trajectory—ironically undermined the sense of an open-ended opportunity, despite the owner’s autonomy in defining, and reacting variably, to all the garden’s component elements. The short-lived success of the circuit-walk garden, limited to the middle decades of the eighteenth century, ultimately suggests that the Enlightenment prospect of a constant linear advance toward progress still defied fulfillment. And yet as a material apparatus for clarifying the objectives, the stakes, and the parameters of that quest, and for pursuing it, the circuit-walk garden proved a quintessential venture of its time.

Notes

I would like to acknowledge with gratitude the contributions of Jill Casid, Jane H. Hancock, Jennifer Horne, Betty Joseph, Negar Mottahedeh, Garth Rockcastle, Richard Guy Wilson, and an anonymous reader. Also, for many courtesies at the Leasowes, I wish to thank Mrs. M. Bateman and officers of the Halesowen Golf Club, Ms. Sally Orton of the Metropolitan Borough of Dudley, and especially Mr. Chris Gallagher for patiently leading me more than once through the site and for sharing his wealth of detailed expertise with me. Research for this project was generously supported by a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship for University Teachers, a visiting scholarship from the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, a grant in aid of research from the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota, and a summer fellowship from the University of Minnesota McKnight Arts and Humanities Endowment.

5. These ranged from doctrines of human rights and freedoms to theories of epistemology and education and the rise of capitalism. John Locke’s two key treatises laying much of the groundwork for these shifts, and from which my
discussion draws, were Two Treatises of Government (London: Awnsham Churchill, 1690) and An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding (London: Thomas Bassett, 1689).


11. Much more rarely one encounters a formal dialogue between two pseudonymous characters, as in William Gilpin’s Dialogue upon the Gardens … at Stow (1748), and occasionally the use of the editorial “we,” as notably in Gilpin’s later works. Michel Baridon, remarking on the solitary nature of the garden experience, writes that “a negation of sociability became the object of social imitation.” See “The Gentleman as Gardener: Pope, Shenstone, Mason,” in Jacques Carré, ed., The Crisis of Courtesy (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 129.


17. Compare the approaches of Pugh, Garden, Nature, Language, who analyzes an eighteenth-century English landscape explicitly as if it were a literary/verbal “text,” and Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson, who argue persuasively that built space functions as a “morphic language,” according to a distinctly different


19. Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 93–110, 115–130. Though I find de Certeau’s hermeneutic of human activity in terms of the production of stories or narratives to be quite useful, I would argue against the notion that those stories are necessarily framed by or produced according to a literary-verbal syntax.


23. As the opportunities for quasi-autonomous production of identity multiplied, so did the range of possibilities according to which identity could be defined, many of them variable according to local conditions and personal circumstances. This in turn pointed, problematically, to the variability of identity itself according to place and over time. “Identity” not only stood to become something fluid, but a highly imperfect notion for understanding the self; for recent discussion, see Marjorie Garber, Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 85–87.


25. Shenstone, Works (1764), 1: 77–78. For a recent account that articulates a fixed range of meanings, see, for example, Richard A. Etlin, The Architecture of
Death (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984), 176–78. I am not suggesting that Shenstone’s landscape was an invitation to unbounded, undisciplined thought; nor am I proposing that Dodsley and a host of other chroniclers were mistaken in locating specific meanings in specific objects, settings, and inscriptions. I am arguing, rather, that the presumption that the landscape consisted of a set of fixed, prescriptive meanings is unfounded. On the matter of Shenstone’s “retirement,” it needs to be understood that this term signified primarily a physically distanced relation between oneself and the world of commerce, court, and city life. Indeed, in the usage of Joseph Giles, a close friend of Shenstone, the term “retirement” actually referred to the physical site of the Leasowes, and not necessarily any activity taking place there (Miscellaneous Poems: On Various Subjects, and Occasions [London: J. Godwin, 1771], 1).


29. The landscape served not only to entice and guide visitors from spot to spot, but also to hold them at given spots dedicated to stimulating particular feelings, ideas, and perceptions. In the following passage from Heely’s account of 1777, the italics are mine: “Guided by the artless path; now lingering, now turning to every inviting object—the dropping fountain called me to its brink, to admire it in a nearer view. I found it whimsical, and pretty, dripping from the crevices of moss-grown stones, into a small clear bason below—and in a delicious spot a little farther, I was fettered to a bench, from whence beauty stole upon me, in features, new, and not less desirable than any other” (Heely, Letters on the Beauties, 2: 214).

30. Marchioness Grey’s epistolary account of Stowe in 1748 is an unpublished example that serves to prove the rule; and it is not fortuitous that she is highly critical of Stowe. Entry dated July 5, 1748, in the letterbook of Jemima, Marchioness Grey, reprinted in G. B. Clarke, ed., Descriptions of Lord Cobham’s Gardens at Stowe (Buckinghamshire Record Society, 1990), 181–85.

31. On the gender specificity of aesthetic categories, see Jochen Schulte-Sasse’s examination of Burke and Wollstonecraft in Die Geburt ästhetischer Kultur (Munich: Fink, forthcoming); also see Jochen Schulte-Sasse, “High/Low and Other Dichotomies,” in Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand, eds., High and Low Cultures: German Attempts at Mediation (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994). My present concern is not so much that “beautiful” and “sublime” may have been coded either “masculine” or “feminine,” but rather, as Schulte-Sasse points out, that such practices served to institutionalize woman as the object of male desire. Not surprisingly, the dual objectification of women and of beauty—their subordination to male jurisdiction—continued on into the next century. “The most enchanting object the eye of man can behold,” wrote Uvedale Price, “is
the face of a beautiful woman; and there, where nature has fixed the throne of beauty, the very seat of its empire, observe how she has guarded it, in her most perfect models, from its two dangerous foes, insipidity and monotony" (Essays on the Picturesque [London: J. Mawman, 1810], 1: 104).

32. Locke, Two Treatises (1967), 34, 192.

33. Hull MS, sheet 2.


35. Following Pierre Bourdieu’s lead in exploring the “cult and culture of the ‘person,’” Andrew Elfenbein points to the eighteenth-century focus on “originality in art” as the “domestication of genius.” Literal articulation of the original self in a private landscape such as the Leasowes exemplifies such a process. See Andrew Elfenbein, Romantic Genius: The Prehistory of a Homosexual Role (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 67.

36. Heely, Letters on the Beauties, 2: 166. Solitude was not always valued positively. Visiting Hawkstone, another circuit-walk garden, in 1774, Dr. Johnson remarked on “the horrid of solitude” he found there (Oswald, “Beauties,” 18).


39. Extracts here are from the sixth edition, “with the author’s last corrections and additions,” Elements of Criticism (Edinburgh: Bell and Creech, 1785), 1: 436. The “other” emotions to which Kames referred included “beauty from regularity, order, proportion, colour, utility,” plus emotions “of grandeur, of sweetness, of gaiety, of melancholy, of wildness, and even of surprise or wonder” (1: 432). In a parallel vein, Peter de Bolla cites Sir John Dalrymple’s “Essay on Landscape Gardening” from the 1750s, in which Dalrymple “outlines a theory of the sentiments that are aroused by different visual experiences” of landscape (“The Charm’d Eye,” 96–97).

40. Kames, Elements of Criticism. In preferring winding walks over straight walks, he stated: “In short, the walks in pleasure-ground [sic] ought not to have any appearance of a road: my intention is not to make a journey, but to feast my eye on the beauties of art and nature” (1: 445). On the subject of a winter garden, he wrote: “In youth, lively spirits give too great a propensity to pleasure and amusement, making us averse to serious occupation. That untoward bias may be corrected in some degree by a winter-garden, which produces in the mind a calm satisfaction, free from agitation of passion, whether gay or gloomy; a fine tone of
mind for meditation and reasoning” (1: 449). Kames concluded his remarks by suggesting a moral value to gardening: “Other fine arts may be perverted to excite irregular, and even vicious, emotions: but gardening, which inspires the purest and most refined pleasures, cannot fail to promote every good affection. The gaiety and harmony of mind it produceth, inclining the spectator to communicate his satisfaction to others, and to make them happy as he is himself, tend naturally to establish in him a habit of humanity and benevolence” (1: 449).


42. Whately, Observations on Modern Gardening (1777), 152. Whately’s argument here implicitly parallels the broader course of eighteenth-century Protestant theological indictments of “Papist” reliance on object and ritual, favoring instead the internalization—even the privatization—of one’s relationship with the Deity.

43. In this respect there are limited parallels between the hermitage and the “primitive hut,” itself an object of considerable interest to Enlightenment architects. See Joseph Rykwert, On Adam’s House in Paradise (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1972).

44. Given the gendered nature of such landscapes and of the activities undertaken there, my use of the masculine pronoun is deliberate.

45. Peter Longueville, The Hermit; or, The Unparalleled Sufferings and Surprising Adventures of Mr. Philip Quarll (London: Harrison, 1786), 92. Toward the end of the century the garden at Hawkstone, Shropshire, could boast the residence of Adam and Eve: “This rural habitation is occupied by a Man and his Wife, who may well be called the Adam and Eve of this delightful Eden. Adam is busily employed in cleaning his ground, whilst Eve bestirs herself about her domestic affairs, and feeds her poultry, which flock round her in great numbers on the ringing of a bell” (Rodenhurst, A Description of Hawkstone, 33).

46. As early as 1749 Shenstone sent his friend Lady Luxborough a “Plan … for a Hermits Seat on a Bank above my Hermitage.” That same year he apologized that his “Summer-House” had been built before he conceived of laying out his landscape as a whole, saying, “I built it merely as a Study, without regarding it as an object” (Letters of William Shenstone, ed. Marjorie Williams [Oxford: Blackwell, 1939], 197, 215; italics in original). It is clear from the account of a close friend, Richard Graves, that despite similar functions these were separate structures. Although some recent accounts suggest that the hermitage became the “root-house” dedicated to the Earl of Stamford, Graves’s account suggests that this is unlikely (Recollection of Some Particulars in the Life of the Late William Shenstone [London: Dodsley, 1788], 51, 59). Instead, notions common to all these structures—retirement, solitude, reflection—came to characterize the entire landscape at the Leasowes. Indeed, Graves characterized the Leasowes as the preferred

47. See for example, "On the Queen’s Grotto," Gentleman’s Magazine 3 (1733): 41; "To the Rev. Mr. R— on His Hermitage," Gentleman’s Magazine 17 (1747): 391; and Abraham de la Pryme, "A Poem on the Said Hermit," Gentleman’s Magazine 17 (1747): 23–24. Of course, the question of whether the absence of such intrusions into one’s consciousness is indeed "freedom" is itself diagnostic of the Enlightenment’s struggle to disentangle the private from the collective.


49. Whately, Observations on Modern Gardening (1777), 153.

50. On the cabinet of curiosities and its corresponding episteme, see Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge (London: Routledge, 1992), as well as the anchor of much of her thinking, Michel Foucault, The Order of Things (London: Tavistock, 1970). In some respects the privy garden (i.e., "private" garden), originating as a type at least as early as the sixteenth century, can be seen as the outdoor analogue to the cabinet of curiosities. On privy gardens, see, e.g., David Jacques, "The History of the Privy Garden," Apollo 142, no. 403 (September 1995), 23–42.

51. Stephen Bending has argued, very convincingly, that "emblem" and "expression" were two sides of the same coin. See "Re-reading the Eighteenth-Century English Landscape Garden," in Harriet Ritvo et al., An English Arcadia: Landscape and Architecture in Britain and America (San Marino, Calif.: Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1992), 379–99. Still, this is not to discount the astuteness of Whately’s analysis. Rather, it points to the complexity of the issues with which he was dealing and to the fact that no clean break occurred between one episteme and the next.


57. Judith Butler’s notion of identity as performative regards identity neither as an original quality within the body itself, nor as equivalent to the consciousness within that body. Rather, identity is produced as a constant flow of “acts, gestures, [and] enactments,” that is, a series of “fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.” Building on her discussion of gender as an aspect of identity, one may argue that identity itself has “no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* [New York: Routledge, 1990], 136).


59. Ibid., 287.

60. Ibid., 102.

61. Aristocratic estates, in addition to their great size, encompassed economic and juridical domains, and readily defined an elite status, rank, prestige, and power for their owners. Bourgeois estates, in contrast, were smaller, and their owners lacked the social powers and obligations that nobility on larger estates possessed; thus in a certain sense the opportunity for self-definition apart from the social nexus was greater on a bourgeois estate.


64. Anne Bermingham, in “Sameness in the Name of Difference” (presented at the Tenth International Congress on the Enlightenment, Dublin, July 1999), offers a comparable instance of a midcentury challenge to the hegemony of linearity of narrative and knowledge. In her discussion of the Print Room at Castle-town House, created in the 1760s, she argues that the heterogeneity of the prints hung in this room forms a collection from which a single, linear narrative is absent, where meaning is contingent, mediated by context and experience.