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# Nationalizing Nature: A Critique of the English National Trust Interpretation of Stowe Landscape Garden

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Claremont McKenna College

Nationalizing Nature: A Critique of the English National Trust Interpretation of  
Stowe Landscape Garden

Submitted to  
Professor Lance Neckar  
Professor Bruce Coats

By  
Sarah Whitney

For  
Senior Thesis  
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**Nationalizing Nature: A Critique of the English National Trust Interpretation  
of Stowe Landscape Garden**

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In partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts degree in Environmental Analysis

2017-18 academic year, Pomona College, Claremont, California

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## **Abstract**

This thesis analyzes the English National Trust's interpretation of the making and reception of Stowe Landscape Garden. Specifically, this is a critique of the Trust's narrative of nationalism, which is overlaid by the use of romantic interpretive themes. Arguably, Stowe's first contribution was the combination of expressions of nature through landscape with architectural and sculptural monuments of Englishness. The National Trust, however, has combined interpretations of multiple landscape gardens across a century, thus blurring its actual significance. Stowe has been lumped into a jumbled framework of anachronistic landscape commentary much based in the literature of reception. The use of receptive history as fact to define concepts like 'Englishness', 'Landscape Garden', and the 'Picturesque' only further aid the unsustainable development of the historical landscape. Stowe is recognized as the most extensive extant landscape garden to exemplify contributions by the first four designers in the medium: Vanbrugh, Bridgeman, Kent, and Brown. Lancelot 'Capability' Brown's place-making role in the history of English landscape, much derided by the proponents of the Picturesque, found its first expression at Stowe from 1740 to 1751. Thus, Stowe's Brownian dominant landscape, of which the bones are still largely intact, should be used as the designated period of interpretation. In this way, the National Trust could fulfill a modern desire for connection to nature, and with greater specificity, diversity and transparency in historical accounts, expand the accessibility of 'Englishness' in the form the consummate national landscape garden.

## Acknowledgments

I first would like to sincerely thank my advisor and reader, Professor Lance Neckar, for his support, guidance, and aid in navigating these complex topics. Without his additional research, I would not have been able to complete this thesis in its entirety. In having access to Professor Neckar's *Observations on a Modern Landscape*, this thesis is able to bring to light issues in the modern interpretation of Stowe landscape garden that have not been discussed in such works based in receptive history. Unpublished as it is, *Observations on a Modern Landscape* identifies the chronological order of work at Stowe, and represents a point of view of landscape, of which has not been done before especially to this extent. Through its challenging development, full of new questions and different avenues to pursue, Professor Neckar has been beyond helpful in directing research and being an enthusiastic aid in forming this thesis. In addition, I would like to thank the Huntington Library, for granting me access to the Stowe Papers and giving me the experience of a lifetime.

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Finally I am so grateful for my family and friends, who have been more than supportive throughout this exciting endeavor. Love you all dearly!

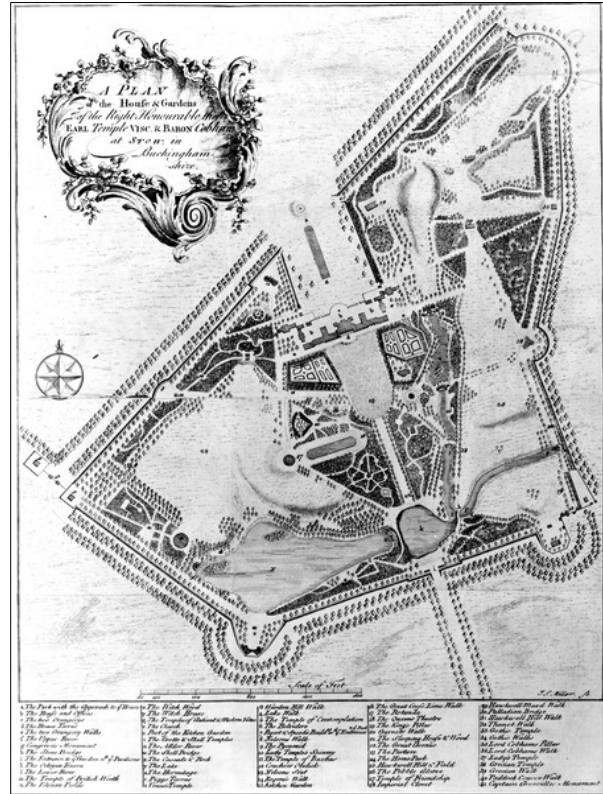
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## Introduction

In the National Trust's comprehensive guide, *Stowe Landscape Garden*, Jonathan Marsden states that "Stowe is the paradigm of the eighteenth-century landscape movement" (Marsden, 2005). The presence and influence of English nationalism within landscape can be clearly witnessed by using Stowe Garden as a vessel. The garden's character, designers, and political ties to the development of Whig liberalism embody the English landscape garden movement. Its transformation of landscape and genius is also claimed to be deeply representative of English values and ideals. Stowe symbolizes a singularly British contribution to landscape design and the arts. From its first inception, Stowe has been a media-popularized landscape, and heavily visited during its development in the 1700s as well as today. The Temple and Grenville families owned Stowe house, garden, and parklands before the house became Stowe School in the 1920s and the garden was passed on to the National Trust in the late 1980s. Richard Temple, later elevated as Viscount Cobham, focused on the development of the garden, and in 1714 began his efforts to establish the garden's new genius (Neckar, *Observations*, 2017). Cobham belonged to the Kit Cat Club with his English Whig friend, John Vanbrugh. Their values are physically present as the first architectural monuments in the garden. The landscape of Stowe that we see today is the culmination of efforts of the three major landscape designers: Charles Bridgeman, William Kent, and Lancelot "Capability" Brown. Each in their own right was revolutionary for their time, and contributed to the development and image of the natural English landscape garden, and even more so, laid the foundation for landscape architecture as a whole. However, there is a complex interpretation issue that stems from the layers of artistic vision and the historiography of the place. The first confusion began in 1731, when the garden served as

literary inspiration for Alexander Pope in his *Epistle to Lord Burlington, On Taste*. This was followed by a succession of visitors who cast their own experiences in print in the first decade of its opening. These narratives also roughly chronicle the fast-changing appearance of the garden as Cobham threw much his energies and money into the place from 1733 until his death in 1749 (Figure 1). The way the National Trust has interpreted Stowe garden has not taken a transparent historical approach in Cobham's inspiration and perspective, and thus has fostered the formation of a particular nationalistic vision of landscape (Figure 2).



**Figure 1: 1736 Sarah Bridgeman's Map of Stowe Garden (Reprinted in (Hunt, 1982))**



**Figure 2: National Trust's Current Map of Stowe Garden ("Stowe," 2017).**



This thesis seeks to identify and critique the concepts of Englishness and nationalism as a landscape idea. In the search for a national landscape, the makers of the landscape garden also confronted the problem of the form that nature would take in the expression of this idea. By distinguishing Cobham's precise political narratives that are embedded in a particular nationalistic symbolism at Stowe, historians can begin to unpack its history as a formative English landscape, but also Cobham's landscape garden's rich specific history. Furthermore, the model of a greater transparency and specificity of such an interpretation of landscape gardens can offer greater accessibility and inclusiveness by inviting those normally not inclined to experience such a historic landscape to do just that. By peering beyond the façade of English politeness and the narrative of unspecific, romanticized, and generally heroic liberal ideas of Englishness, visitors and English citizens alike, can gain insight into the personal stories molded by the complexities of history, art, architecture, and landscape in this specific landscape garden. In Stowe's formal design, it is a paradigmatic example of its authors, the principal progenitors of the eighteenth-century English landscape movement. In this vein of thinking, the National Trust could use the curatorial and interpretive means of historic landscape preservation at their disposal to render a narrative of specific truths. Thus, the Trust would create interpretive settings that allow visitors not only to understand Stowe and its formative place in the making of the landscape garden, but also generate their own concepts of what it might mean to be English and to create a landscape about meaning.

The National Trust is a charity that relies on funds from memberships, personal donors and legacies to uphold the integrity of their acquired properties (About, 2017). The Trust includes leading historians and curatorial staff who are publicizing works about Stowe. They sponsor and promote guidebooks, articles, and online material to market the garden to a wider

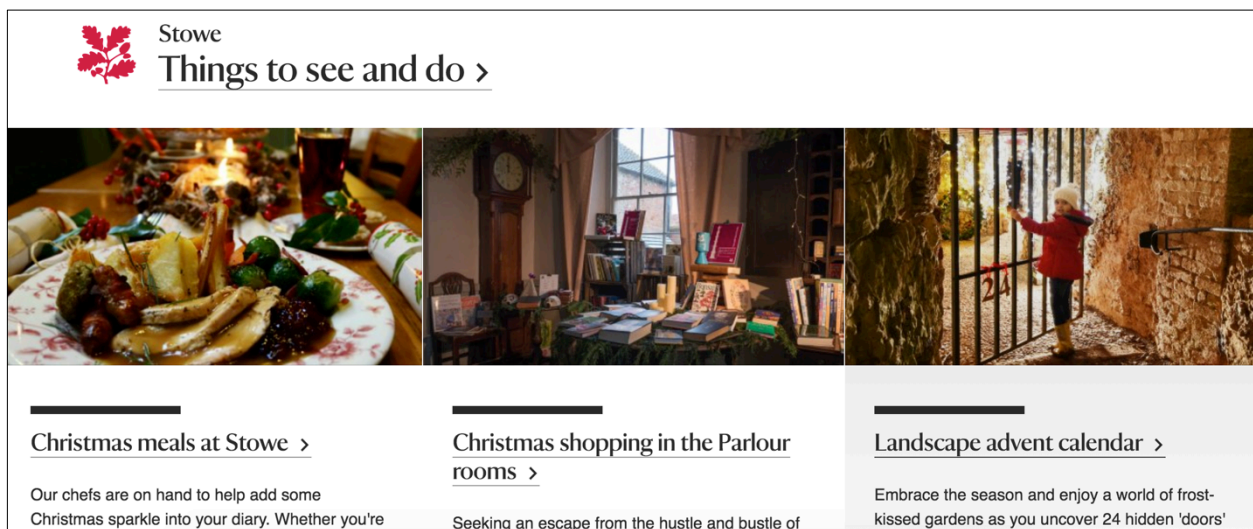
audience. This strategy is in part meant to attract visitors to the place; yet, it also results in revising history in order to entice the public. In their published works, the National Trust tends to



**Figure 3: Marketing of Stowe during the holiday season ("Stowe," 2017)**

generalize about the Whiggish politics of Stowe landscape garden, the high status, wealth, and social organization of the Temples and the Grenvilles. Instead, they focus on the parts of the garden that correspond generally with these narratives. Few of the National Trust's works delve deeply into the interweaving of the narratives of Cobham's politics, morals, interests, aesthetics, or relationships with the designers and how his personal oversight of the garden intersected with the details of the construction of the landscape, the maintenance of the grounds and estate, and the stories of those that ran the day to day operations of the property. On the National Trust website one can read this superficial understanding of the making of the place for which they are responsible. It is clear that the Trust is an organization caught in a marketplace of expectations (Figure 3). Sculpture and architecture have become a key points of interest for some. And probably, more generally a sense of feeling of the past, associated with the historical period of the site's significance. It should be acknowledged that the National Trust is a respected and well-established organization. In this lens, they may have done numerous visitor surveys to understand what would best interest their visitors. In an age where visitors can go online, watch a video, or grab an illustrated book to understand the intricacies and beauty of Stowe, the National

Trust may have decided to provide a landscape characterized by engaging events and political intrigue to attract visitors to the grounds (Figure 4). Thus, today's Stowe focuses their conservation and restoration priorities, and only vaguely, on the personalities and politics in the history design and making of the landscape garden. Their surveys, their intentions, and their overall focus however, is not explicitly stated and therefore perpetuates a particular political landscape with interpretation scattered across a century.



**Figure 4: Activities marketed for Stowe during the holiday season ("Stowe," 2017)**

This thesis also identifies the British cultural question that may underlie the National Trust's interpretation of Stowe garden. The concept of a national character, Englishness, is a complex issue that is heavily contested territory among historians. Addressing the presentation of an English character in a politicized landscape is necessary in order to unpack areas of historical ambiguity. The National Trust's role in England should be to preserve and open history to all English citizens. The organization has an opportunity to interpret Stowe in a way to promote a sustainable vision of the spirit of England, and thus spark discussion and potentially foster a space of inclusiveness. The Trust can be more accurate with their portrayal of the garden, and

thus decrease the expected biases actually reducing the impact of the experience of the landscape. In spite of the National Trust ‘replanting’ flowers in the Grecian Valley, Stowe was always a garden without flowers, built on a male-dominated narrative of British political identity, liberality, and morality (the Gardens at Stowe, 2017). The focus of the Trust on this history will concentrate efforts on the integrity of the garden in their depiction of its most significant period; Viscount Cobham’s, which was culminated with the work of Brown, still evident today. This analysis of the built environment at Stowe, seeks to set a precedent for how to approach interpretation of a historically significant landscape on its own terms.

### **The National Trust’s Current Actions at Stowe**

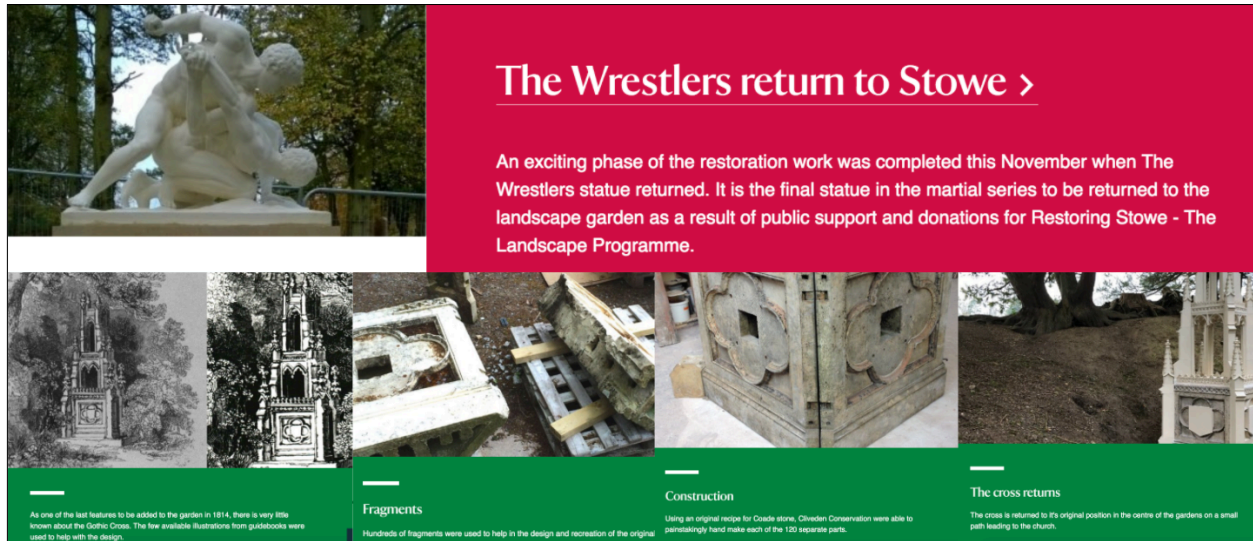
Stowe landscape garden is now the property of the National Trust, and has gone through a series of restoration endeavors in its recent history. Lacey writes that it was not until 1948 that the English National Trust accepted gardens independent of property (Lacey, 2016). Thus describes the National Trust’s relation to Stowe. On their website they focus on four projects; the Conduit House in the Deer Park, the removal of tennis courts near the Palladian Bridge, the Temple of Concord and Victory (Figure 5), and the revitalization of the New Inn (Restoring Stowe, 2017). The majority of the projects listed center around architecture and do not reference the landscape in their description, besides the tennis courts. The National Trust restored the landscape around the home, which in the mid 1970’s had been used as tennis courts for the school. Clearing and replanting thus, was in some part, a priority for the organization, in order to restore the integrity of the landscape. Tree planting, removal, and soil reconstruction may not be something that they want to publicize to the public, strictly because it does not add to their

narrative of political intrigue at Stowe garden. Therefore, they do not publicize the actual landscape work, restoration, and catalogue with the same detail that they do for architectural projects. The continuation of the National Trust's efforts at Stowe indicates their disregard for the communication of landscape history. In other words, the English National trust has not separated their fascination of country houses, the vernacular, and general English architecture from their interpretation and thus restoration of landscape.

In another online source summarizing the history of Stowe, the National Trust glazes over the controversial issue of the Temple family's acquisition of outside villages like Boycott, Dadford and Lamport into the borders of the Stowe estate, or even the takeover of the town of Stowe to which it is named (Stowe, 2017). Not to mention that out of the fairly lengthy description of Stowe garden's history, only one sentence mentions the landscape architects and designers; Charles Bridgeman, William Kent, and Capability Brown (Stowe, 2017). This blurred history of land assembly and vague association with the work of masters, romanticizes Stowe and its complex history. The landscape and 'natural' beauty are what characterize the garden as an English landscape garden, not purely the monuments sprinkled within and the political history of its owners.



**Figure 5: Renovation efforts of the Temple of Concord and Victory ("the Stowe You See Today," 2017)**



**Figure 6: Gothic architecture returning to Stowe garden with the Landscape Programme ("Restoring Stowe 2015-2019," 2017)**

In an attempt to restore this English landscape garden, the National Trust has embarked on the Landscape Programme. Stretching from 2015 to 2019, the project is primarily focused on, ironically, the restoration of Gothic architecture (Figure 6). The National Trust provides a small blurb that the park will reinstate the land used as a 9-hole golf course, but does not further describe what will proceed to happen with this addition. Instead, the organization tends to emphasize their building projects, and supplement their progress using photos and videos. The “Landscape Programme” includes restoring the Queen’s Theatre, the Wrestlers Statues, and four statues within the Grecian Valley. In the Elysian Fields, the “Landscape Programme” will return the Temple of Modern Virtue, the Marquess Urn, the statue of Apollo and the Nine Muses, as well as work on the Shell Bridge. The fact that the restoration project obviously focuses on the architectural programme of the garden yet is called the “Landscape Programme”, is quite paradoxical. If the reader explores the timeline and website, they can view more projects like the restoration of Lampart Pond, Copper Bottom Lake, and a ha-ha. These projects, however, are not

the ones noted on the description section of revitalization efforts and are vastly outweighed by the number of monuments.

Through their Landscape Programme, the National Trust seeks to “bring back a garden claimed by wilderness, and reclaimed by nature, back to its former glory in the 18th and 19th century” (Restoring Stowe 2015-2019, 2017). The first problem with this interpretation is that it is undefined. A lot of changes took place within the landscape garden in the 18th and 19th century. Each designer’s change altered or erased the work of the visionary before them. Using a generalized time period as a means to interpret the history of Stowe makes things extremely complicated. The history of the Stowe garden and park is dispersed, mangled, and mostly receptive. The Huntington Library in California has a collection of Stowe Papers. The collection is made up of over 500,000 drawings, accounts, and miscellaneous documents from 1175 to 1919, all organized (or mixed) in various boxes indexed in a sparsely detailed finding aid. These accounts are only available to those who gain reading privileges to the Huntington Library, and, except for Peter Willis’s work on Bridgeman, have really not been annotated much less categorized or referenced by garden historians or the English National Trust. Focusing on the politics and ideals based on the narrative of visitors rather than accounts and drawings like those at the Huntington, has culminated in the National Trust placing importance on particular designers and monuments. Receptive history of the English landscape garden “embraces a mything national identity”, and fails to recognize the product of its flaws (Conon and Neckar, 2005).

As briefly described, Stowe garden remains a politically charged landscape. It was constructed by Viscount Cobham early in the National Trust’s chosen period of interpretation from the 18th to 19th century. Cobham’s wealth and influence opened the park to few, especially

before 1731, unlike the current condition of the park. The country house, garden, and park were showpieces to visitors and well as the enjoyment and status of the owner (Clarke, 2000). The rise of the English landscape garden itinerary created a list of places to be visited, and the popularization of the Picturesque promised the visual illusion of the continuation of property into woods, which expanded the interest of visitors beyond the estate. Visitors would bring their Claude glass to frame aspects of the landscape, as they focused on the composition and beauty of nature. At houses like Stowe, travellers would have to request access by sending their name to a porter or housekeeper, and if accepted, were guided by such staff (Clarke, 2000). Only those of relatively high status were accepted to view the house, especially if the family was present. Thus, in the 18th century, accessibility was limited to such estates. Today the National Trust has the task of expanding this accessibility. Besides opening the landscape to all visitors and holding events to attract people of all ages, the focus on monuments and their narratives are used as devices to entice and provide an enjoyable experience by connecting people to a historical narrative of politics and opulence rather than nature and beauty.

One can only infer that the addition and focus on the restoration of these monuments is a market-driven attempt to promote tourism and gain revenue for the Trust. Stowe is a hub for tourism for the National Trust. On their site they promote the use of the park for weddings, group visits, school tours, holiday celebrations, “Toddler Tuesday”, eating and shopping (Stowe, 2017). In addition, they have also opened up the park for monthly dog walks, and dog accessibility in general (Stowe, 2017). They have recently promoted the additions of the Deer Park, adjacent to the gardens as well. While this is a promotion of landscape, however, they do not seem to reference the attached fields and grazing area. This disregard for the greater landscape as well as the majority of their current focus on restoration of architectural structures of the garden, indicate



that the attention of the National Trust is still not truly devoted to landscape. The structures' physical presences as noble manifestations of generic "Englishness" are tangible pieces they can advertise to the public. The "Landscape Programme" promotes a singular interpretation of the land as a setting for these garden structures, one which could align with a more nuanced landscape focus, but does not.

There is a current need to expand the garden's interpretation beyond one where white males have transformed these landscapes to an architecture-focused, political weapon, and dominated the ownership and operation of these lands. Works by Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte that illustrate strong female leads in this time period, has led to this transition in English culture and a desire for a women's narrative. Unwavering and fierce characters like Elizabeth Bennet toured gardens like Stowe and described their experiences and perception to aid the development of their character. Thus, to expand and satisfy their audience, Stowe is trying to catch up to reform its 21<sup>st</sup> century self. The National Trust has begun to promote women's roles in Stowe through their narrative of Coade Stone, present by the Gothic Cross (Whyte, 2017).

A specific restoration project promoted on the website is the "Return of the Gothic Cross", located in the Elysian Field. The description of the monument is accompanied by a video. It is a rather lengthy clip describing and interviewing various staff of the National Trust including artists, craftsman, and builders. They show the process by which the molds are poured, their creation of historically significant Coade Stone, and the assembling of the monument. Usually, besides the structure of the building, the National Trust does not explain specifically why they are adding these monuments, how they complement the garden, or why the excess of monuments stretching across time is beneficial to a landscape garden. The head of the project states that the purpose of these renovations is to "bring back a garden claimed by wilderness, and

reclaimed by nature, back to its former glory in the 18th and 19th century”(Restoring Stowe 2015-2019, 2017). This again seems a little paradoxical. Why would the National Trust be attempting to work against nature to “restore” an English landscape garden, and why is a flurry of these monuments so integral to its former glory? While the majority of these projects may not be well explained, the narrative that accompanies the development of Coade Stone provides an example of female leadership in this time period. Mrs. Eleanor Coade, though unmarried, was a talented artist and businesswoman who, from 1771 to 1821, ran the Coade Artificial Stone Company (Whyte, 2017). Historical narratives like this generate the opportunity to expand the audience and visitors of Stowe.

The National Trust strives to “[reflect] fashions and needs of their time, and the personal whims of those who made them” in their restoration of historic gardens (Lacey, 2016). This goal is not without its complexities, as nature is an ever-changing thing. It is a difficult matter to attempt to preserve gardens when the genius of the place has been transformed. Then there is the task of managing these gardens and increasing their accessibility and business to tourists. There is an ever-present tension between minimizing the impact of tourists and opening the landscape for the maximum enjoyment of tourists. While landscape oriented tourism efforts like their “Dog Walks” could continue, the National Trust could instead honor the foundations of the Picturesque by refocusing their efforts in a 21<sup>st</sup> century context. To profit from Stowe’s rich history, the National Trust could expand their understanding and presentation of the garden by unpacking the ecology of the physical landscape, highlight the estate’s land management tactics, and include greater populations in their narrative. For example, the Stowe Papers offer the physical accounting books of all the transactions that have taken place at Stowe. They show the management of the estate, and specifically the park and the garden. Boxes 59, 62 and 65 show

the historical wood business of Stowe and how the business of selling wood and wood products, as well as using it on their own estate, helped Stowe prosper from the physical landscape. In addition, a social narrative that continues to be neglected is that of the contemporaneous importance of the British colonial economic apparatus, including the country's role in establishing the modern slave economy. Slavery and sugar were, with tea and wool, part of the portfolio that sustained the making of many landscape gardens. Although the primary domestic economy of Stowe in Viscount Cobham's period of ownership is related to land, agriculture, and wood, there are also possible indications of involvement in the slave and sugar economies (Stowe Papers Box 64). Clearly the restrictive and positive view of "Englishness" would want to omit this narrative, admittedly speculative, without further research. But once unpacked, a wider view of this history, including that of the abolition movement led by the liberals in coalition with Grenville heirs to Stowe in succeeding generations, would also aid in explaining what it means to be British (Neckar, *Observations*, 2017). And this story, once fully told, may increase the diversity of people interested in the complex history of Stowe and the wider struggles for human freedom and dignity in Britain.

At Stowe, "very little of [Charles Bridgeman's] layout remains today, for it was gradually dismantled in the 1740's [...] into the more confidently sweeping style of the time in harmony with the latter parts of the landscape" (Lacey, 2016). Instead of promoting a particular romantic vision of the garden, the Trust could embrace the most recent form of the garden in their interpretive period, which was a Brownian Landscape. These tactics would work in tandem with previous suggestions to dismantle their restricted narrative of Stowe, and replace it with an expanded definition of "Englishness". Focus on a Brownian landscape would fulfill a greater interest in landscape than monuments, strip the garden of structures of later periods, and expand

the audience of the garden by not focusing on a narrow, non-inclusive political narrative. A Brownian vision would fulfill current interest in nature and ecology, and fulfill a discussion on landscape architecture.

Furthermore, an environmental analysis could expand upon the idea of Stowe garden as a land management tactic, discuss greater parkland, and look at the ecological systems of Stowe garden. Coffin establishes this idea of wilderness' relationship with the Picturesque in England by delving into specific species. The Stowe Papers are primary sources that illustrate Stowe Estate's utilization of wood resources and land practices in Box 62 and 65. Williamson, Podolak et al., and illustrations from the Stowe Papers, show Capability Brown's contributions and changes to the landscape, as well as its natural effects. Additionally, Harney's papers discuss landscape management and horticulture, give positive restoration examples, and introduce restoration and policies in England. The National Trust can apply these to restoration and land management efforts to better their focus on conservation. Furthermore, this information can be provided to a greater audience to illustrate the landscaping and land management practices of this particular English landscape garden.

There is a clear disconnect between the work of historians, and style of commentary about gardens. British publications of the recent period have generally presented gardens, like Stowe, with a romantic and poetic gloss. As seen in John Dixon Hunt's interpretation, the idea of poetry of the English landscape garden trumps the other narratives, visual sources, and the techniques and raw history of the garden itself. This framing of English landscape gardens, their history, owners, and creation reinforces an unsustainable dichotomy. The productions of humans and those of nature are pinned against each other through their separation. The ideals of English landscape architects and designers like Charles Bridgman, William Kent, and Capability Brown

was to inspire self-reflection, moral and, in the case of Stowe, political discourse through idealized landscapes founded in an artful coalition with nature. The actions of the National Trust go against this composite intention by focusing on the monuments, statues, and architecture upon these grounds. The works by Robinson, and the National Trust's "Restoring Stowe 2015-2019," and "The Stowe You See Today" illustrate this point. The National Trust's conservation policy also serves to emphasize this discrepancy in their ideology and actions at Stowe garden (Conservation, 2017). For example, on another portion of their website, the National Trust claims to be "Europe's Largest Conservation Charity", promoting access for everyone from country houses to forests. Yet the head of Conservation is in charge of the Gothic Cross project - further evidence of a different idea of conservation. Overall, these critiques of the National Trust's interpretation of Stowe support the idea that transparency with how the park, and greater park, was used to form the creation of an English landscape garden would be a more accurate, environmentally focused, historical account of Stowe.

### **Problem in Interpretation**

As stated previously, the garden is currently owned by the English National Trust in Buckinghamshire, who works to preserve and restore the landscape to its former glory, as well as open the property for public use. This concept of "former glory" seems to be a bit weary in the exact parameters of its restoration. Their interpretation of Stowe spans across the 18th and 19th century, where many designers came and went. In landscape design, the succession of designers erases or transforms the work of those that came before them. The current garden has a blurred interpretation that does not pertain to a specific designer, but a weighted combination of all

within the time period. Specifically, the National Trust has oriented their restoration efforts to fit a specific interpretation of Stowe as an emblematic garden. In other words, they use a culmination of a particular receptive history, epitomized by the writings of John Dixon Hunt, to interpret and utilize the history of Stowe. Hunt is a well-established garden historian, who has focused his studies on landscape architectural theory. He is the author of numerous books about the historiography and theory of gardens, notably publishing a catalogue of William Kent's landscape drawings, *Gardens and the Picturesque*, and *The Picturesque Garden in Europe* (Landscape Architecture, 2017). His work has inspired and been utilized by those who have followed him, such as John Phibbs. His book, "*Genius of the Place*," came out originally in 1975 and was revised in 1988 and 2000. The book was an attempt to explain the place and purpose of the English landscape garden to a general reader and students of the visual arts (Hunt, 2000). It was well intentioned as it meant to fill a gap in literature and connect vast amounts of work to communicate a clear narrative of the English landscape garden movement. Unfortunately, this is where the historiographical blurring starts within a modern context.

In "*Genius of the Place*", Hunt establishes the importance of these landscapes and their meaning to the people of England. He states, "the creation of gardens is determined by intellectual, social, economic, political, and artistic forces, which in their turn are mirrored in gardens. 'As is the Gardener, so is the Garden', was how Thomas Fuller expressed it in 1732. Garden art, indeed, involves so many aspects of human endeavour that a special place must be claimed for it in the inquiries of cultural history" (Hunt, 2000). In this excerpt, Hunt recognizes the significance of how culture is reflected in landscape, and uses the experiences and ideas of others, like Fuller, to assert this notion. Hunt continues to explain how 'the Genius of the Place' is established by "the appropriate repertoire of sinuous walks and streams, classical and gothick

temples and follies”, which all seamlessly link to the countryside beyond the wall. This illusion created by the invention of the ha-ha, expands the bounds of the property by giving those experiencing the garden, a view of natural lands beyond the property. Despite the reference to paths, water, and natural land beyond, it is important to notice that Hunt described classical and ‘gothick’ temples as an integral part to the garden. Hunt describes how these temples are crucial to inspire thoughts of the knowing viewer as they meander through the emblematic evidences of poetic allusion that are carried by the temples and other structures in the garden. Hunt combines his inclination towards seeing Stowe as an emblematic and structural garden, with cultural elements that associate the character of the English landscape with the antique, Greece and Rome.

Hunt also reiterates Walpole, who describes the English landscape garden as a culmination of “Poetry, Painting and or the science of Landscape”. He says these three sisters, or new graces, are a framework for interpretation of Stowe Garden for those men who love and work with Nature (Hunt, 2000). And thus, Hunt uses the romantic lens of nature as a canvas for art and further provoked thought to continue forward. He reiterates this assertion by stating that “with its open and closed areas, its variety of buildings and forms of water, and the integration of the garden into the larger park, Stowe was a brilliant exercise in the cooperation of art with nature” (Hunt, 2000).

Hunt also claims that this movement spurred the English to develop their own garden style, as a rejection of the French Baroque. He contends that the style relishes in antiquity and claims that the most significant literary influence of the English landscape garden was “from classical Roman writings about villa and rural life” (Hunt, 2000). In this construction of the landscape garden’s stylistic ideas, Greek and Roman gods/goddesses, objects and garden

buildings of classical design are strewn throughout the garden – especially after the arrival of William Kent on the scene- with examples like the Temple of Venus in the Home Park and the Temple of Ancient Virtue in the Elysian Fields. Hunt infers that the antiquity and classicism derives from the intent to establish a narrative of England as the new empire. Thus, in this frame of mind, the landscape garden generally – and Stowe is lumped in here - is a medium that embodies English eighteenth-century culture of the landed aristocracy and gentry. Another example is that the natural English countryside and the relation of art to nature aligns with Christian values of the “harmonious scheme of nature and its benevolent Creator,” (Hunt, 2000). His explanation of the English genius of the garden and its significance in art, lays a foundation to Hunt’s final notion.

Hunt explains “the responsibility for establishing the English landscape garden lay with a small group of professional architects and designers — mainly Vanbrugh, Bridgeman, Kent, Gibbs — working for a limited number of patrons” (Hunt, 2000). In this description, he mentions Vanbrugh and Kent, whose actual productions at Stowe were focused more on architecture than landscape. Hunt elevates the contribution of Kent specifically to critical significance in the foundation of the English landscape movement through his depiction of receptive history. He quotes Walpole, who famously claimed that Kent “leaped the fence” and saw nature as a garden (Hunt, 2000). He also discusses the influence of paintings, sometimes associated with the Picturesque, on the construction, ideology, and fascinations of the English landscape garden, specifically Cobham’s sycophant apologist, Alexander Pope, and his ideology of the garden. Hunt combines the romanticism of art and landscape to elevate the gravity of Kent’s impact, as he uses Walpole again to link Kent’s success to his studies as an artist (Hunt, 2000). Hunt romanticizes Stowe with a narrative established by its architecture and monuments as art, and a



so-called Picturesque genius established also by architects. It is this focused characterization that fails to accurately convey the values and structure of an English landscape garden. Concretely interpreting the landscape is negated by Hunt's narrow history of the politics and romantics that inspired Stowe's narrative. Hunt promotes his vision of the English landscape garden by collecting receptive history accounts that fit his ideals, and emphasizes the work, relationships and politics surrounding Kent specifically. In this, following Walpole's lead, Lancelot 'Capability' Brown's efforts have been left out of interpretation. In "*Genius of the Place*," it may be the case that Hunt, like others before him, did not recognize the impression Brown made at Stowe, despite Dorothy Stroud's biography published in the 1950's.

Based mostly on particular receptive history, Hunt claims that Brown was the most radical of landscape designers. Brown "swept the lawn straight up to the walls of the house, eliminated all terraces, and other remains" of the landscape garden. He focused on using basic materials of the site, which is integral to the expressive feeling of an estate of expanse such as Stowe, with parks and woodland beyond the garden. Brown worked with the "shapes and contours" of the land, plants and water to make what Thomas Whately termed an expressive landscape. This was a garden language of feeling, unencumbered by specific associations that required knowledge, especially of antiquity. (Hunt, 2000). Under Cobham's reign, Brown manipulated the landscape by adding, subtracting and overall softening the edges of the scene, beyond recognition in some cases with respect to images of Bridgeman's garden and the chronicles of earlier visitors (Neckar, Observations, 2017). Hunt claims that 'Capability' Brown's vision of the capability of landscape was revolutionary, but also, at this writing, criticizes its simplicity. Brown's natural form vision scraped away temples, inscriptions, and statues. Hunt argues that banishing these forms from the space hindered the influence of an

English landscape garden by removing those which “had stimulated and directed the minds and imaginations of their visitors” (Hunt, 2000). In this sentiment, Hunt is not alone.

Brown’s reputation was certainly low throughout the nineteenth century when geometric features and an even wilder nature were more preferable (Williamson et al., 2014). Brown is not seen as a founder of the English landscape garden, but instead a radical. The manner in which several writers speak about Brown negates his style to nothing as he remains interested in the Science of the garden. In fact, Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown states “place-making, and a good English Garden, depend entirely upon principle and have very little to do with fashion; for it is a word that in [his] opinion disgraces Science wherever it is found” (Phibbs, 2017). Through this statement, Brown asserts that the overuse of architecture, monuments, and ornament with the garden would detract from nature. For as Walpole reiterates, “Nature was the only true messenger of art” (Phibbs, 2017). For some critics, Brown’s focus on natural forms lack interest and ingenuity, and is rather formulaic with its removal of particular design elements. William Chambers reflects on this lack of ingenuity by claiming that Brown’s work “differs very little from common fields, so closely is common nature copied in most of them” (Hunt, 1988). Walter Scott states that a Brownian landscape garden has “no more resemblance to that nature which we desire to see imitated, than the rouge of an antiquated coquette bearing all the marks of a sedulous toilette, bear to the artless blush of a cottage girl” (Williamson et al., 2014). This crude statement essentially devalues the image of nature and therefore Englishness that Brown constructs in his gardens. It also offers a vastly different opinion than Chambers about Brown’s association with a natural scene. In his book “the Picturesque,” Christopher Hussey negatively stated that Brown applied “a cut and dried system [...] to every scene he was called to improve” (Williamson et al., 2014). This is often a critique of Brown; the combination of his simplicity

and repetitive style somehow negates his vision or presence within this era of English history and the realm of the English landscape garden. Thus, organizations tend to gravitate towards Kent's vision and this vision of Englishness, despite Brown's more recent succession in landscape gardening.

Helmreich writes that while Alexander Pope proclaimed, "in all, let *Nature* never be forgot. /Consult the *Genius* of the *Place* in all," he was an advocate of "introducing classical temples, columns, arches, grottos, and other structures into the landscape" (Helmreich, 2002). This inclination towards Kent stems from a fascination with architecture and monuments in the garden, and more so, with overt classical references and nationalism. This fixation is also present within the organization of the English National Trust. One year after its foundation, the English National Trust acquired the Clergy House at Alfiston, its first vernacular building. Vernacular homes also carry significance as they indicate regional methods of building. These smaller, domestic buildings from the middle-ages used local materials, conformed to a specific style, and indicated a sense of status (Aslet and Powers, 1986). As with later country homes, they provide a tangible historical connection to a part of English history, and the people who lived within these homes. English people strongly valued the country house and its connection to nature (Aslet and Powers, 1986). The home would accompany acres of land around it, as it acted as an escape from a city home. Of course, those of wealth were the 'English people' who had access to this privilege, and those allowed to tour such places also had to be of some status. This fascination with architecture, homes, and their relation to regions and nature is a precedent for analyzing an English landscape garden. Specifically, it seems reasonable for Hunt and the National Trust to have an inclination to value a type of landscape that was contingent upon the presence of monuments and structures like Bridgeman and Kent, rather than a Brownian landscape. This

interpretation offers an emblematic, specific lens of ‘Englishness’ with which both seem to have been fixated in their formal design approaches, especially with respect to nature.

## **A Terminology Issue**

The following sections discuss the vagueness of concepts and terms generated, used, or inferred by the history of reception, or receptive history of the landscape garden: Englishness, Landscape Garden, and the Picturesque. The ambiguity of these concepts has underpinned the general interpretation adopted by the National Trust at Stowe, and portrayed to visitors of the landscape garden. The following section attempts to identify the problem of their use and redefine these terms for greater transparency. In the contents and timeline of this paper, the analysis of the terms will use mostly secondary sources and receptive history to understand how these concepts have matured to their active use today. The presentation of alternate opinions within this section should be read as a means to suggest a restructuring by reinterpretation of Stowe landscape garden and greater estate as a setting of discourse.

### ***History vs. History of Reception; Further Complications***

The image of Stowe today is the product of disorganized interpretation in its reception as much as its actual history, that is, with respect to the actual making of the landscape and its historical contexts in politics, literature and art. The English National Trust does not explicitly identify gaps in history on their website, nor do they specify the documentation of the information they present as facts. In order to expand upon their historiographical portrayal of

‘Englishness’ in the garden, they would need to expand and clarify their history and therefore their specific interpretation of Stowe. There are three identifiable issues with the history of Stowe garden and its interpretation by the English National Trust. These are the concept and portrayal of ‘history’, the physical dispersal of this literature, and the misattribution or uncertainty that comes with interpretation.

The first issue is that the information presented is identified as history rather than the history of reception, or receptive history. History is defined broadly as a “study of past events,” which is commonly received as the presentation of fact (Dictionary, 2017). In scholarship the rules of logical positivism (e.g., using a dispassionate approach to the discovery of historical fact, going to primary sources to validate or question secondary ones) intend to insure the assembly of facts in a defensible narrative of cause and effect. The addition of “receptive” to “history” means a chronology that is “open and responsive to ideas, impressions, or suggestions” (Dictionary, 2017). For landscape, which is difficult to document, reception – records of impressions of places – have passed for primary sources, especially in the historiography of landscape gardens and their visitors. Thus the term is transformed and redefined as impressionable historical accounts that have been influenced by personal bias or other receptive history.

Using transparency in the form of ‘receptive history’ is crucial to inclusiveness of Stowe garden. By presenting information as receptive history, the National Trust is informing visitors that some of the information presented may be faulty, is biased to fit an interpretation, or is significant because of its bias. For example, Samuel Boyse was believed to be the anonymous author of the poem printed in *Gentleman’s Magazine* in later 1742. The footnotes indicate that Boyse based this poem about Stowe off of the third edition of Defoe’s *Tour*. He used the route of the garden as the base of the work, and then supplemented his description and walk with other

writings including those by Gilbert West, a nephew who wrote a poetic tour in 1732. In his guidebook of the gardens, Seeley referenced descriptions from this poem that went beyond the knowledge of Boyse, specifically the Chinese house (Clarke, 1990). Thus the presentation of the garden is completely based on another interpretation of the garden – already a decade old - and may not prove to be accurate.

West's poetic tour was addressed to Alexander Pope, with whose poem, the *Epistle to Lord Burlington, on Taste*, published in 1731, this narrative of receptive history began. Pope had already expressed his nationalist fervor in *Windsor-Forest*, 1713. Pope and William Kent were beneficiaries of the patronage of Burlington. And with Kent's work taking him to Stowe, Pope followed. Pope's poem established the rules of the game for the assessment of country houses and their new large gardens. And he picks Cobham's garden at Stowe, newly completed in its Bridgeman form to be the model of taste. The poem is cast as a long-winded allegory of British identity with *utile dulci* (the useful with the agreeable). Parts of the poem are inscribed on Cobham's monument (designed by Brown) in the garden. English people, in this construction, were to gravitate towards simplicity in dress, discourse and behavior, with a disdain for opulent sophistication (Helmreich, 2002).

Kent was anointed the inventive genius who created the landscape garden in Horace Walpole's essay, *On Modern Gardening*, 1771. Based on absolutely no drawings and a derivative history of his work on country estates, Walpole creates the narrative of Kent's primacy in the discovery that all nature was a garden. There is but a short jump from Walpole to Spence, who often misquoted Pope in his commentaries, and then to John Phibbs, the author of a 2017 book on Capability Brown. In his essay on Englishness, Phibbs asserts that in landscape it is embodied by "a love of organic form", but does not necessarily refer to a purely natural form

(Phibbs, 2017). He cites Walpole who elaborates this aspect of Englishness as he says “he may build a tower for the embellishment of his grounds, but not for indulging in frivolous amusements” (Phibbs, 2017). In addition, Walpole pays homage to the ‘moderns’, who “have carried simplicity, convenience, and neatness of workmanship, to a very great degree of perfection, particularly in England” (Phibbs, 2017). With respect to Stowe, Phibbs quotes Walpole who acknowledges that “the great symbol of English Liberty [is] the Gothic Temple,” designed by James Gibbs (not Kent) and currently being restored by the National Trust (Phibbs, 2017). From these accounts of Englishness, the themes of simplicity, strength, and function over embellishment come up repeatedly. Another example following this Kent-Walpole- infused receptive history is in the 1960s guide to Stowe. The authors, Laurence Whistler, M. J. Gibbon, and G. B. Clarke assert that Kent “invented Landscape Gardening, one of England’s two original contributions to the visual arts: the other being the Perpendicular Gothic” (Neckar, Observations, 2017). This confusing assertion was not derived from primary sources, but rather was a conflated opinion – probably stemming from Walpole - suggesting that Kent was a landscape designer at Stowe after all.

Thus, the idea of clarifying receptive history can also illuminate the personal biases that have shaped the interpretation of the organization. Furthermore, the idea of distinguishing receptive history from actual history might motivate the National Trust to identify and pursue gaps in information about the landscape. For example, there is very little information oriented towards landscape development. In various texts, Brownian landscape is a vague background element (somehow) created by an under-gardener (in one part of the National Trust website, to Kent) who later is in charge. Readings identify that “there is much emphasis on how he ‘swept away’ existing geometric features, replacing them with ‘natural’ landscapes characterized by

sinuous or irregular margins, in the middle distance; and that he planted large numbers of indigenous trees, such as oak, elm, and beech arranged as loose scatters, clumps, and perimeter belts.” (Williamson et al., 2014). In other words, he “systematically removed formal gardens from the vicinity of the mansion, replacing them with lawns and serpentine pleasure grounds” (Williamson et al., 2014). Yet how Brown came to the visualization of the effects of these landscapes, who was in charge of the design decisions, how the designs were specifically constructed, and how Brown used the surrounding parks for infrastructure has been only partially recorded, and therefore subject to some speculation. This said, Stroud documents the design discussion between Cobham and Brown in the creation of the south lawn.

Until the 1950’s, very little scholarship had been devoted to the study of the Brownian landscape, who was better documented than designers at Stowe before him. Williamson et. al’s study of Capability Brown’s contribution to the English Landscape garden seeks to recognize the “gaps in our knowledge” and recorded history. Here he infers to both the lack of concrete history of Capability Brown’s work, it’s platforms, and the influence of receptive history. In the study, they acknowledge that it was Dorothy Stroud who published a monograph that began this analysis about Lancelot Brown and his work. Her work included excerpts from letters, diaries and accounts of Brown’s work that have been re-used by historians on landscape design since (Williamson et al., 2014). It is difficult to understand and write about Brown, as only maps, plans, contracts, a few letters, one account book and few records of his bank account remain (Williamson et al., 2014). Thus one must interpret Brown’s thoughts and values through these limited sources and design aesthetic. Instead to forming their own conclusions, historians focus on others interpretations through history or existing receptive history of Brownian cites.



Stroud's book relates Brown to 214 sites, and more recently the Parks and Gardens' UK database has related his designs to 216 places (Williamson et al., 2014). It is reasonable then for Brown's designs to be somewhat 'formulaic' with the sheer amount of projects taken on during his lifetime. In order to relay his vision and design plans to a team, there must be clear instruction. Typical of landscape gardening, while Brown may not have been the final designer at some of his locations, "the removal of garden walls, extensive planting and the creation or alteration of ponds within the park" breathes Brown (Williamson et al., 2014). The problem with receptive history is that those observing a Brownian landscape do not evaluate the intensity and complexity of construction of one of these landscapes, such as Walpole. Furthermore, the issue with relying on interpretation and receptive history is "that a number, perhaps a large number, of Brown's commissions remain undiscovered and unrecognized - or are known to individual researchers but not widely publicized, and hidden away within the 'grey literature'" (Williamson et al., 2014).

Grey literature is defined as "unpublished reports, conservation management plans, restoration plans, documents relating to Higher Level Stewardship schemes, Heritage Lottery grants and other similar applications for funding" (Williamson et al., 2014). In other words, there is literature in the world that is not accessed by the general public and not publicized within historical interpretations like that of Stowe landscape garden. Furthermore, very little of it is noted in published works, so it is difficult to estimate the extent of this problem, "even in the hands of bodies such as English Heritage and the National Trust" (Williamson et al., 2014). While some of this material may not be academically verifiable, most of the work is believed to hold integrity. Trying to identify these works, and use them for a greater understanding of the

landscape at Stowe may be beneficial to expanding the knowledge of landscape design and thus reorienting the National Trust's interpretation.

Moreover, the sheer dispersal of historical documents and grey literature, along with their inaccessibility, causes a physical obstacle in interpreting Stowe. For example, as mentioned previously, the Huntington Library in San Marino, California is home the Stowe Collection. The collection holds nearly 350,000 pieces belonging to the Stowe house in Buckinghamshire. The papers span across the Grenville, Temple, Nugent and Brydges families as well as papers from the Irish chaplain and librarian, Charles O'Connor, who worked at Stowe from 1792-1828 (Stowe Papers, 2014). The boxes are generally, and rather messily, organized in a series of boxes with a few labeled as miscellaneous. The collection was sold to the Huntington Library in 1921 from Baroness Kinloss, and was bought from Frank Marcham in 1925 (Stowe Papers, 2014). Thus the collection has been nearly halfway around the globe, for the better part of the establishment of the National Trust, and inaccessible by those who are not granted access to the Huntington library. While most Stowe scholars would fulfill this requirement, the amount of primary sources is enormous and their organization is less than to be desired. Thus it would require a significant time to sort through all these boxes. However, if the National Trust incorporated primary information stored in the Stowe Paper's wood accounts into their interpretation of the landscape, they could profit from Stowe's rich history by highlighting the estate's land management tactics. These tactics would incorporate the narrative of Stowe's greater landscape, work to dismantle their restricted narrative, and replace it with an expanded definition of "Englishness" as resourceful entrepreneurs.

## ***1. Englishness***

The creation of the concept of 'Englishness' in receptive history is subtle and almost illusive in the hands of literary commentators; and in other instances, blunt, permeating and overt. Englishness is associated with national identity and the presence of nationalism in imagery and narrative. It is an umbrella term including all of the attributes that make a person, place, or thing English. The idea of a national identity, as with any identity, is the conjunction of values and physical attributes that result from and then frame experience. In the case of 'Englishness,' it is the mix of shared and distinct experiences that differentiate Britain from any other national narrative. The complications of assuming a common identity among a whole nation, even within a presumably singular body of history will appear as differences depending on various vantage points. In this manner, experiences differ and thus identities diverge. So is true with the concept of 'Englishness,' actually a specific narrative of patriotism, concealed by a broader interpretive framework of nationalism at Stowe.

The English landscape garden originally served as a pleasure ground for the aristocracy and others of the "landed gentry" and expanded in the late 19th century as a national symbol to those financially well-positioned (Helmreich, 2002). In this way, the English landscape garden has been a place of privilege. Thus acknowledging the garden as the true essence of 'Englishness' is conditioned by its version of a liberal society in the frame of a privileged view. At the time, literature circled around the idea that a man who has lost his sense of identity or purpose was due to a loss of connection to nature (Helmreich, 2002). In this way, those who truly were sound in themselves had to have access to nature, or preferably the privilege of 'stylized nature' in the form of a landscape garden. There is a barrier to true self-actualization, based

strictly on wealth and status, specifically associated with emblematic rather than expressive gardens. These and other complexities discussed here perpetuate a bounded lens of 'Englishness', pervasive in the publications produced by the English National Trust.

Helmreich asserts broadly that gardens have been vessels for nationalism and party politics (Helmreich, 2002). Phibbs argues that the English landscape garden is not just a British charged landscape, but is rather expressive of the true essence of Englishness. Phibbs further claims that Stowe is a "Victory Garden," filled with monuments of English military figures like General Wolfe and Captain Grenville (Phibbs, 2017). Coffin contributes that there is an 18th century association between antiquity and nationalism as a result of Marlborough's victory at Blenheim in the pivotal War of Spanish Succession at the beginning of the century (Coffin, 1994). The English landscape garden thus generates an idea of "continuity with the past as well as membership within the exclusive club of Englishness, and it set in place value systems with significant ideological importance" (Helmreich, 2002). There is a concept of time and patience within the garden, which results in a complex and changing relationship with history (Lacey, 2016).

Historians have debated the intensity to which Lord Cobham's political ties to the Whig Party have been imprinted in the garden, yet visitors of Stowe cannot deny its presence and influence (Helmreich, 2002). Neckar has attempted to sort this out in more specific political terms with his chronology of the garden in relation to Cobham's political fortunes in his opposition to Robert Walpole. William Kent's contrasting Temples of Ancient and Modern Virtue and the Temple of British Worthies, located in the Elysian Fields and erected around 1734, provide a direct line of understanding of Cobham's specific brand of Whig patriotism in opposition to Walpole. The original drawing of the Worthies by William Kent, showed an exedra

structure dedicated to Lord Burlington and intended to terminate the lawn in his garden of Chiswick House (Coffin, 1994). The design of the Temple as uniquely adapted to Stowe draws both upon English, vaguely gothic, expressions of surface and form, and in detail to antiquity. For example, the design of the niches in the new temple for Cobham bears a striking resemblance to the Hall of Philosophers at Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli.

The Temple of British includes the busts of "fifteen famous Englishmen and one of Queen Elizabeth I" (Coffin, 1994). Of the fifteen, eight represent figures of action. These include: Alfred, the Black Prince, Elizabeth I, Raleigh, Drake, John Hampden, William III, and Sir John Barnard (Coffin, 1994). The other portion of the monument include thinkers: Gresham, Bacon, Milton, Inigo Jones, Shakespeare, Locke, Newton, and Pope. The combination of thinkers and political figures were to represent Cobham's elevation of the myths of an ancient Saxon England and personal political vendettas against the government of Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole (Horace's father) (Coffin, 1994). The Temple of British Worthies demonstrates a difference of politics and a vision of 'Englishness' by Lord Cobham. Helmreich quotes George Bickham in his 1750 guidebook stating the monument is an ode to

those illustrious Worthies, who spent their Lives in Actions; who left Retirement to the calm Philosopher, entered into the Battle of Mankind, and pursued Virtue in the dazzling [sic] Light in which she appears to Patriots and Heroes. Inspired by every generous Sentiment, these gallant Spirits founded Constitutions, shuned the Torrent of Corruption, battled for the State, ventured their Lives in the Defence of their Country, and gloriously bled in the Cause of Liberty (Helmreich, 2002).

Bickham does not exactly reveal that the choice of figures represented in the monument were Cobham's doing. Nor does he reference the figures chosen that were not "Patriots", and who did not "[leave] Retirement to the calm Philosopher", but in fact were true thinkers themselves. In

this manner, Bickham is asserting his own definition of Englishness, who he shares as fact to those who read his Stowe Guidebook. Bickham's idea of Englishness is men of action, "Heroes" who "founded Constitutions", and bled in defence of their country. Similarly, in William Mason's poem, *the English Garden*, he instructs those who are intelligent and free to closely analyze the composition of the landscape garden to "emblemize Britain's identification with [...] citizens' rights guaranteed by the constitution" (Helmreich, 2002). Here, liberty, freedom, and patriotism are the grounds for the creation and success of the English landscape garden.

The inherent presence of Cobham's nationalism composed with temples (mostly by Kent) in their idealized landscape settings is what made Stowe this first political vessel of Englishness. In the mid-eighteenth century, Stowe had been pointedly established as "one of the most important landscape gardens in England" (Helmreich, 2002). At Stowe, one must physically engage with the landscape, immerse oneself in this form of art, absorb history and discern what exactly embodies Englishness. Garden monuments, like the Temple of British Worthies with its very selectively chosen characters, are used to portray Cobham's position in a specific politically and morally charged narrative. The National Trust's idea of flooding a garden with monuments from all periods, regardless of the original design of the garden embodies a broader embrace of a simpler, singular idea of the English spirit, ultimately less accessible because of its celebratory vagueness.

The National Trust writes and publishes a variety of guidebooks and works following this narrative. Most of them touch on the story of Lord Cobham, his political allies, especially family ties to his nephew, the cubs. But these works speak very little of the intersection of these politics with the design and construction of the landscape garden. Instead they promote Stowe a park filled with political intrigue and romance in nature. For example, the National Trust's "Temples

of Delight” tells a story of Stowe as Britain’s pride and glory (Robinson, 1994). Robinson describes broadly the evolution of the garden and its parallel and significance to English politics and development. Robinson romantically claims that the landscape garden “owed much to the influence of poetry, classical landscape painting and the impact of foreign travel” (Robinson, 1994), on architects or designers. Robinson does not write critically on the revolutionary founders of the landscape garden, and their specific use of plants, design or landscape.

Furthermore, Aslet and Powers help explain the importance of the English Country house and vernacular homes to English identity, which continues to be a central focus in English literature as described previously. This aspect of ‘Englishness’ again supports this narrative of gravitation towards class-bound interpretations of architecture with priority in respect to landscape. It also explains the foundations of conservation efforts by the English National Trust. James Lees-Milne, an architectural historian and National Trust employee in charge of their country house efforts from 1936 until the early 1970s, also demonstrates in his published diary entries this fixation on country houses and the traditional English class-based preservation values the English National Trust’s focus on estate properties (Lees-Milne and Bloch, 2007). This fixation is detrimental, as Wright states, “This polarity between traditional nation and modern society set the private values of the aristocratic house against the public egalitarian tendencies of the reforming present. It set ancestral continuities of the aristocratic family off against the social-democratic ideas of citizenship. It set high national culture off against the procedural and bureaucratic realities of the modern State” (Wright, 1991). Thus, in focusing on the landscape only in respect to the county home and its class associations, the National Trust is promoting an exclusive image of Englishness that limits accessibility and also interest.

Stowe's history illustrates the illusion of Englishness as a concrete, unified concept; instead it must be dismantled or at least unpacked. Englishness and nationalism at Stowe have also been criticized, sometimes from a purely aesthetic perspective and sometimes intersecting with the perspective of its positioning of nature. For example, Coffin has questioned the National Trust's manner of conservation, and consequently their tactics of memorial and English pride. Coffin describes the monument-filled Elysian Fields and Grecian Valley of Stowe as "nauseous and tiresome, and only worth preservation for its singularity and antiquity" (Coffin, 1994). This reaction to the current state of interpretation are not few, especially where the matter of Nature is concerned. In his letters about English superiority and character, Walpole says "the King has humored the Genius of the place, and only made of so much Art as is necessary to Help and regulate Nature, without reforming her too much" (Phibbs, 2017). He continues by saying "all the Art and Embellishment we afterwards bestow on them, should give way to Nature" (Phibbs, 2017). A form of historical interpretation contingent upon the construction and narrative of monuments, undermines this idea of Nature. The English way believes that when embellishments are swept away, all that is left is originality, this idea having been first articulated by Thomas Whately (Phibbs, 2017). Horace Walpole, Whately's contemporary, states that "[an Englishman] may build a tower for the embellishment of his grounds, but not for indulging in frivolous amusements" (Phibbs, 2017). Walpole, and later historian John Phibbs, both define 'Englishness' as having an appreciation of nature in its true form, making fuzzy the idea of the Picturesque with respect to the works of Brown, usually thought of as the anti-Picturesque. This confusion once again blurs the concept of Englishness and its place within the English landscape garden.



## 2. *Landscape Garden*

In *Genius of the Place*, John Dixon Hunt states the English landscape was the transformation from geometric Tudor gardens to an art form to be emulated by the rest of Europe. He states that a typical English landscape consists “of undulating grass that leads somewhere down to an irregularly shaped piece of water over which a bridge arches, or trees grouped casually, with cattle or deer about the slopes, and of houses and other buildings glimpsed in the middle of far in the distance” (Hunt, 2000). Hunt reiterates that access to views beyond the property without the obstruction of fences were crucial, and references Walpole, famously praising William Kent as “he leaped the fence, and saw that all nature was a garden” (Hunt, 2000). After identifying the founders of the English landscape garden- “mainly Vanbrugh, Bridgeman, Kent, Gibbs” - Hunt elaborates “the ‘Genius of the Place’ is improved with the appropriate repertoire of sinuous walks and streams, [and] classical and *gothick* temples and follies” (Hunt, 2000). More so that one of these founders of the garden, William Kent, “concentrated upon those moments in a garden where some building focuses attention” (Hunt, 2000). Hunt then speaks of the designer’s memorable work at Stowe. He discusses the garden by leaping from monument to monument with various historical figures opinions on each.

The landscape garden is defined as “informal and ‘natural’ in character, eschewing straight lines and formal geometry” by the English Heritage’s study of Capability Brown. They continue with this definition to comprehend clear elements of the garden. They state “it comprised open expanses of turf, irregularly scattered with individual trees and clumps and was surrounded in whole and part by a perimeter belt. It was ornamented with a serpentine body of water and was usually provided with, at best, a rather sparse scatter of ornamental buildings.

Walled enclosures were demolished, avenues felled” (Williamson et al., 2014). Based on the collection of works he has reviewed, John Phibbs believes an English landscape garden must have limited open ground so as the viewer must discover the surrounding views, whatever he means by “limited.’ There must be unobstructed views of the countryside when necessary, which include concealed boundaries in the form of hedges, ha-has, or woods (Phibbs, 2017).

Williamson et al. and Phibbs, in a rare instance of agreement, directly emphasize the “sparse” buildings present in the garden. More recently, however, authors like Mark Laird, add further confusion, suggesting that Brown’s landscape gardens were “more ‘garden-like’ in character than other an earlier generation assumed: Brown was the creator of pleasure grounds as much as landscape parks” (Williamson et al., 2014). Maybe the weight of significance of structures and political ties could be associated with an English landscape garden if we separated a Brownian landscape as a pleasure garden. For, the ‘modern pleasure garden with its shrubs and exotics would form a very just and easy gradation from architectural ornaments to the natural woods, thickets and pastures” (Williamson et al., 2014). Nevertheless, a Brownian landscape, as with the garden at Stowe, are seen as the foundations for the English Landscape Garden. The problem here is again embedded in the significance to politics represented within the monuments, which may or may not be affiliated with the term landscape garden. For at this moment, the term lays in ambiguity. One must then address this tension of trying to modernize and memorialize Englishness within an English landscape garden to narrow the definition and implications of such a space.

In a memorial context, the English landscape garden at Stowe serves as a remembrance to the past and a nod to progression. As discussed, the English nationalistic tone of the garden is communicated both individually through particular figurines and monuments, and collectively by

the narrative of all the monuments and the weighted political history pushed by the English National Trust. In his chapter on memorial, Coffin states that “it was, however, at Stowe, the residence of Lord Cobham, with at least thirteen monuments or memorials and four commemorative temples as garden decoration, that the concept flourished and undoubtedly influenced its proliferation in other English gardens” (Coffin, 1994). In this segment, Coffin is describing memorial as a linked but not conjoined part of the landscape. In other words, memorial was used by Cobham at Stowe and inspired other gardens, but was not the sole purpose of the landscape garden. Hunt notes that the Temple of Ancient Virtue, “invokes values of the past and is a “temple of remembrance” and that Gilpin understood that design intention” (Neckar, Observations, 2017). In this manner it is observant to both Gilpin and Hunt that memorial and appreciation of the past has its rightful place in the garden, but as Gilpin framed, in its suited place benefitted by the juxtaposition of the landscape. This juxtaposition is noted throughout the garden and specifically in the Elysian Fields. There is a delicate balance of light and shadow, hard and soft edges, nature and art, that make this space unique and memorable in composition (Neckar, Observations, 2017).

Furthermore, as discussed by the busts of Patriots and Worthies alike in the Temple of British Worthies, political history provided contemporary viewers with a real time experience. Cobham also recognized the power of memory as an ode to the past and a connection to the future. This idea permeated his programme of additions to the Elysian Fields and the continuation of “dotting new landscapes with memorable scenes” of British patriotism (Neckar, Observations, 2017). Today, in the National Trust bare descriptive presentation of the Elysian Fields, this fusion of a “natural” landscape setting with this only vaguely understood historical memorial narrative generates little understanding if much nostalgia for some viewers and only a

humorous moment for others when they discover, from the guide, that one of the Worthies is Cobham's favorite greyhound, Fido.

### ***3. Picturesque***

The National Trust have waded into deep waters with their unstudied association of the making of the landscape garden in its first period – of which Stowe is an exemplar - with the late eighteenth-century idea of the Picturesque and the promulgators' associations of that term with English nature. The English fixation on the Picturesque is generally understood to have begun with William Gilpin's pedantic essays on scenes in his travels in Wales and the North. Touring Brown's Stowe, in 1747, he had begun to telegraph his views through the voice of Polyphthon, who in dialogue with Calliophilus, veers off topic of the scenes at Stowe to describe a northern scene of unvarnished natural beauty, one that might be painted. In their Trusted Article on the Picturesque, the National Trust suggests (inaccurately) that Brownian landscapes were “quintessentially Picturesque” (Fay, 2017). For it was “[Brownian] Stowe that originally helped to inspire Gilpin; but following ideas developed in Gilpin's essays and guidebooks, some Picturesque theorists began to take objection to the uniform transformation of English estates into Brownian compositions.” (Fay, 2017). To add further this notion of nature being the true art, Hunt states that “one of the most frequently invoked sources of the English garden, especially its opening out of views and its siting of temples, has been seventeenth century landscape painting,” often associated with the artistic Picturesque Movement (Hunt, 2000). There is another important layer of confusion. In 1794, more than a decade after Brown's death, Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight cast Gilpin's aesthetics into a critique of the influence of Brown and a new set of

guidelines for landscape gardens. Citing the dullness of Brownian landscapes, they took pains to suggest that Brown's inheritor, Humphry Repton, their former friend, was to be circumspectly brought onto an estate, as he, like Brown, was in the business of stripping out its Picturesque natural charms.

Through their publication of a "Trusted Source", then, the English National Trust fuzzily endorses the notion that an "English landscape garden is characterized by structured informality," and "orderly, aesthetically arranged elements draw attention to local flora and landscape features which appear entirely natural, or even 'wild'" (Kroll, 2017). The National Trust recognizes both the rejection of formal geometric form as well as the embrace of the romantic and wild in the form of the Picturesque movement as foundations for their establishment. They inexactly use the Picturesque to explain the addition of artificial ruins and wild nature to the English landscape garden by "Humphry Repton (1752-1818), and his contemporaries in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (Kroll, 2017). Citing Repton in this context adds two more layers of confusion. His work was rejected by the creators of Picturesque guidance for the landscape garden, Price and Payne Knight. And he never worked at Stowe. Furthermore, they attribute Lancelot Capability Brown as one of the "classical influences" of the movement, and characterize Brown's landscapes as "expressing the polite civility to which England's landed class aspired" (Kroll, 2017). Usually "classicism" is seen as the antithesis of the Picturesque.

Each landscape garden has been broadly characterized by its stylized nature, using the term 'Picturesque'. The idea of the Picturesque landscape is "replete with associations of nature's freedoms"(Conon and Neckar, 2005), and further associated with this idealistic vision of England and English country. This idea of the Picturesque is used as a blanket term so that "the

current reception of the Landscape Garden in England, [...] embraces a mythic national identity” (Conon and Neckar, 2005). This Politeness has clouded a critical eye. Walpole characterized Castle Howard as sublime, but in spite of this comment and “its mixed baroque origins, [it has] become linked with other “Picturesque” places; that is, connected by stylized naturalism, and fitted with a historical narrative of liberal political progress in a national ideology” (Conon and Neckar, 2005).

The ‘Picturesque’ has permeated into the interpretation of Stowe garden by the National Trust. When communicating and telling the history of the garden, the Trust focuses on the politics, and concrete designs of monuments that further promote this Whig and liberal political ideologies. The English Landscape Garden offers a veil of historical ambiguity, where politeness glides over the coarse sections of history. This corresponds with a sense of national image that these gardens portray and must uphold; an image that omits or blurs narratives of “warfare, cutthroat commerce, colonialism, slavery, political intrigue, and ideological discord” affiliated with its creators (Conon and Neckar, 2005). The Picturesque has transformed in meaning to be associated with beauty, rather than an untamed, natural image of beauty. The ambiguity of this term has allowed for the National Trust to implement whatever interpretation of Stowe they so choose. In this case, a Kentian, monument-filled landscape.

This confused narrative of sentiment for the Picturesque has influenced the admiration of Kent and his work in the garden. For example, Walpole thought that Kent’s training as an artist and “painter enough” made him a unique landscape designer (Hunt, 2000). In this way, nature gives way to art and not the other way around. Nature is simply the medium of the artist, in this case William Kent, who sculpts and adds other mediums, like architecture to paint an image. Hunt argues that while the order of influence with art and nature may be debated, “what is,

however, undeniable is that painting influences later commentators' thinking about natural scenery; it shaped their responses and gave them a vocabulary with which to articulate their experience of the new gardening" (Hunt, 2000). In this way, art, poetry, literature, and even politics were simply ingrained in the landscape. "These habits of association in paintings and poetry were readily transferable to gardens, either as a part of a designer's intentions upon visitors or, more often and certainly more documentably, as a language of response to landscape" (Hunt, 2000). The National Trust partially acknowledges this paradox as they write "landscape artists took inspiration from nature, but connoisseurs of the Picturesque often appreciated natural scenery based on how closely it resembled those very paintings" (Fay, 2017). Despite art and nature's relationship, the tension of architecture as part of the traditional use of the Picturesque is facetious.

In his response to the Picturesque Movement, landscape theorist and practitioner Humphry Repton proclaimed that artificial ruins did not belong in the garden, and did not include them in his principles of landscaping (Coffin, 1994). With a similar ideology, in the late 1700's, Thomas Johnes "'improved' the Picturesque effect of his estate by planting at least two million trees" (Coffin, 1994). To make a Brownian landscape more Picturesque, Danby transformed Swinton to a completely naturalistic setting using strong qualities of light and shadow in untouched wildness. More trees were planted and the smooth edges of lakes were roughened and natural inlets (Coffin, 1994). If anything, the fact that a Brownian landscape, being the most radical, was not included in the movement suggests that monuments certainly had little place in the Picturesque. Taking up Pope's line of criticism of things not English, Arthur Young, the well-published traveler and aesthetic commentator, wrote about his personal opinion on the relation of the Picturesque to antiquity. In a very English manner, he is opposed to the

antique being used as a place of entertainment, therefore crossing into the realm of frivolous opulence. In his letter in June 1768, he critiques antiquity's place in the Picturesque and writes

It may not here be impertinent to consider for a moment what is the just stile for a ruin to appear in. We generally find them in retired, neglected spots, half filled with rubbish, and the habitation rather of bats, owls, and wild beasts, than of man: The horrible wildness greatly strengthens the idea raised by falling walls, ruined columns, and imperfect arches, both are awful, and impress upon the mind a kind of religious melancholy! an effect so difficult to raise by art, that we scarcely ever find a modern ruin that, in causing such, has the least power. -- Ruins generally appear best at a distance; if you approach them, the effect is weakened, unless the access is somewhat difficult: And, as to penetrating every part by means of artificial paths, it is a question ... whether the more you see by such means does not proportionally lessen the general idea of the whole.... These reasons appear to me of sufficient force to justify the leaving a ruin in the wildest and most melancholy state and ravaging hand of Time can have thrown it into (Coffin, 1994).

For Young, these rehashed antiquities are inauthentic and rather useless. It simply detracts from the landscape and ages to a state that renders it “melancholy”.

In “the Question concerning Technology”, Martin Heidegger expands upon this concept of authenticity and nature by using the Greek concept of *aletheia*. The word describes the truth, or more specifically, the opposite of concealment. The Greeks used the term to describe that the true nature of things lives just below the surface, and we as humans must remove this layer or action of concealment to discover its true form. For it is the nature and need of man to produce art to interpret the object. Heidegger continues to state that the only way to reveal what is concealed is through *Technik*, a craft skill like art or philosophy. *Technik* is a form of *aletheiaum*, which is the act of revealing. The Greeks used *Technik* for *aletheiaum* as a means to be in harmony with nature (Heidegger, 1977). Here the landscape designer must focus on nature as the true form of art, and refine it to reveal an image of the English landscape. This mode of thinking



mirrors Whately's. He struggled to place Stowe in the Picturesque, instead realizing that what Brown had done to re-compose the landscape was something more original, an improvement of nature. In order to use the term Picturesque with historical accuracy in conjunction with Stowe, the interpretation of the garden must change and the use of the word Picturesque must be dissociated with this particular landscape.

### **An Argument for Brown: Whately's Stowe**

In the *Genius of the Place*, Hunt states that "when landscape gardens are no longer, as much of Stowe had been, filled with emblematic devices that initiate meditations upon Liberty, British Worth of Ancient Virtue, the mind is necessarily freer, its associations more flexible, vaguer even, certainly more private" (Hunt, 2000). Here Hunt uses his emerging ideas of "expression" in contrast to "emblem." Thomas Whately made the distinction between these two types of association and affect in his essay, *Observations on Modern Gardening*, 1770. Whately writes of the emblematic and expressive to describe and critique the relation of monuments within the landscape garden. Whately writes "character is very reconcilable with beauty; and even when independent of it, has attracted so much regard, as to occasion several frivolous attempts to produce it; statues, inscriptions and even painting, history and mythology, and a variety of devices have been introduced for this purpose" (Hunt, 2000). The idea that the emblematic cannot capture the true state of nature is the heart of the English landscape garden movement.

Whately's modern take on landscape gardens, then supported the expressive notion that the mind is freer to achieve a type of emotional resonance or feeling and internal thought that

otherwise would be hindered with emblems placed around the garden. Whately critiqued the antiquity- monument-centered form of gardening by saying,

The heathen deities and heroes have therefore had their several places assigned to them in the woods and the lawns of the garden;; natural cascades have been disfigured with river gods; and columns erected only to receive quotations; the compartments of a summer-house have been filled with pictures of gambols and revels, as significant of gaiety; the cypress, because it was once in funerals, has been thought peculiarly adapted to melancholy; and the decorations, the furniture, and the environs of a building have been crowded with puerilities under pressure of propriety. All these devices are rather emblematical than expressive; they may be ingenious contrivances, and recal absent ideas to the recollection; but they make no immediate impression; for they must be examined, compared, perhaps explained, before the whole design of them is well understood.

Here, Whately argues the useless function of these political symbols. For, as they may lay reference to the past, they do not activate thought unless carefully analyzed with other structures in the garden. An average viewer will not absorb what these emblems communicate, and instead they detract from the power of the English inspired setting.

Some, echoing Whately, found the monument-driven landscape to be quite off putting. In his verse “the Enthusiast”, Joseph Warton questions whether the English Landscape Garden of Stowe - with its “marble-mimic gods,” and “parterres embroider’d, obelisks, and urns” - compare to the powerful natural beauty of English natural settings (Clarke, 1990). Meanwhile, Hunt seemed to be in favor of an emblematic narrative to guide the mind in “*Genius of the Place*”. Hunt acknowledges these oppositions as he states, “a Stowe tended to induce the same [emblematic] pattern of thought and reflection -- Rigaud’s views in the gardens [...] reveal no solitary or solipsist meditation; where as in a Brownian park the scope for personal reverie was as great as the absence of directives allowed” (Hunt, 2000).

Gardener and poet, William Mason believed that classic ruins were historically inappropriate to the divinity of nature, and in his poem titled “the English Garden”, wrote,

But Time’s rude mace has here all Roman piles  
 Levell’d so low, that who, on British ground  
 Attempts the task, builds but a splendid lye  
 Which mocks historical credence. Hence the cause  
 Why Saxon piles or Norman here prevail:  
 Form they a rude, ‘tis yet an English whole. (Coffin, 1994).

In his writing, he questions the presence of “Roman piles” in British space. A critical response to a poem by Samuel Boyse about Stowe says, “our country God eclips’d by foreign! hence [to] boasted patriot virtue vain pretence,” inferring that the Garden is not English by valuing other gods, apart from the Christian faith (Clarke, 1990). The response poem claims that the temples’ aesthetics corrupt the human mind’s right to sublime thought, specifically with the grand number and appearance of Roman gods/goddesses. The use of antiquity, once again, seems to detract from the foundation of ‘Englishness’. Williamson states that England has long recognized “the debt Brown owed to William Kent, in whose footsteps be followed at Stowe” (Williamson et al., 2014). Yet he also recognizes that despite the negative reaction spurred by his omission of particular buildings and structures within the garden, Brown represented a development of a strictly English landscape. Thus, a disdain for a Brown landscape at Stowe is then combative with this idea of Englishness. Compared to a monument-focused interpretation, a Brownian interpretation is in conjunction with the idea of unconcealment of natural England, and therefore, the true form of “Englishness”.

Where does Brown belong in all of this? The predominant landscape feeling of Stowe today is his smoothed landscape, reflecting an idealized English landscape by revealing the

capabilities of the spaces of the gardens. Brown enforces his aesthetic ideology by reiterating “Place-making, and a good English Garden, depend entirely upon principle and have very little to do with fashion; for it is a word that in my opinion disgraces Science wherever it is found” (Phibbs, 2017). If we see Brown as being science and art focused echoed in the emphasis on an idealized nature at Stowe, this conception is being disintegrated by the National Trust’s resurrection of monuments and misplacing them (the Chinese House) and especially restoring objects from later periods of the garden such as the Coade Stone memorial (Neckar, Observations, 2017).

This idea is reverberated throughout England. In his letters promoting English superiority, Walpole says “the King has humored the Genius of place, and only made of so much Art as is necessary to Help and regulate Nature, without reforming her too much” (Phibbs, 2017). In his chapter “Of the Principles of the Picturesque Movement,” of *A Treatise on Forming, Improving and Managing Country Residences: I-II*, horticulture designer John Claudius Loudon wrote,

A scene not composed of many parts, and tending to simplicity, will be improved in character with much more ease and effect by removing some of these, and increasing simplicity, than by adding others to produce richness. In picturesque improvement, the character appropriated should always be a natural one, or one justified by propriety, in opposition to such as have been called emblematical and imitative. Emblematical Characters may succeed in poetry or painting, but can never succeed in rural scenery, and seldom in architecture (Loudon, 1806).

As discussed previously, these writings demonstrate an appreciation of the simplistic, the functional, and now the expressive rather than the emblematic. Even though Loudon uses the concept of the Picturesque, it is still significant to understand the favor of a landscape not driven by solely architecture. It is important for the Genius of an English landscape garden to reflect an

inclusive sense of 'Englishness'; one where a wanderer's mind is able to achieve sublime thought in a natural setting. This natural setting embodies Englishness in its art of landscaping, as an ode to the English countryside, rather than an ode to a political party. This definition of Englishness describes an expressive Brownian landscape.

The National Trust focuses on accessibility within their mission statement for Conservation. From "coastlines, castles, country houses and cottages, to farmlands, forests, entire villages, bats and butterflies," the National Trust protects and restores these properties so that "their special qualities are enjoyed and enhanced for ever, for everyone" (Conservation, 2017). This idea of accessibility in Englishness can aid the enjoyment for everyone at Stowe. This is not to say that historic monuments shouldn't be left within the landscape, but rather that they should correspond to those at the time of a Brownian landscape. Brown in many ways reflects an inclusive definition of Englishness. Phibbs states, "the Englishness of the 18th century admires the underdog and protects the minority, not because it identifies with losers but because independence of mind is preferable to victory, and roughness is evidence of integrity" (Phibbs, 2017). Brown in this case is a bit of an underdog in the way he has been deemed as formulaic, and despite his succession to Kent, put aside in the National Trust's interpretation of Stowe. Phibbs suggests that both William Kent and Lancelot Brown "adopt lower-class pleasures in the quest for national identity". However, based on the affiliation of Kent to his patron, Lord Burlington and his club of well-off Englishmen, this interpretation may not stand true. It is notable to acknowledge that Phibbs connects the landscape garden and national identity, yet who Kent or even Brown were working for is a small portion of English society. It would be more logical to adopt the most recent landscape, Brown, in interpretation, with his looser affiliations

with English liberal politics and Cobham's cubs. As discussed previously, this setting would be more inclusive than the interpretation in practice now.

Furthermore, as Whately wrote, the reduction in emblems allows sublime thought evoked by the garden to transcend into a form of meditation. Meditation is a practice not conjoined with any particular spirituality, or beliefs. Instead, meditation is finding spirituality within the awe of the sublime English landscape. In her letterbooks traveling around England, Jemima Marchioness Grey shares her desire for a meditative space and a contempt for Stowe's "artificial ruins, after [she] had been agreeably terrified with something like the rubbish of a creation" (Clarke, 1990). Grey claims that Stowe's monuments lack authenticity and thus are off-putting for her. The garden itself then offers little refuge as she is distracted by these structures' presence. Jemima Marchioness Grey describes her tour of Stowe more in depth as she categorizes the garden as both a surprise and disappointment. She states that there are "fewer pleasant Spots that would suit your Ideas of the Country or a Garden that you can imagine," despite its grandeur. Furthermore, "there is scarcely anything concealed in it" (Clarke, 1990). This notion could be referring to the lack of natural inquisition by the landscape, the lack of subtlety of Nationalistic symbolism, or as Heidegger would say, the lack of *aletheia* - thus the lack of humans to reach of level of discovering the sublime.

Grey then takes the reader stride by stride through sections of the garden, explaining the landscape and appearance of monuments. She states that the "Side of the Garden first finish'd is so Crowded with Buildings that as you see them at a distance seem almost at Top of One Another that each loses its Effect" (Clarke, 1990). She questions the vision, taste, and consideration of genius of Stowe. Furthermore she once again references the notion that vanity has taken hold over virtue within the garden, as the owner continues to add new pieces and

disregard the ones that are present. This behavior mocks the actions of the National Trust. Even the newly developed side of the garden is better for Grey, but still heavy with decor (Clarke, 1990). Greys favorite spots in the garden are the Elysian Fields, the Temple of British Worthies, and the Grotto. Each spot is immersed in green with a presence of water, shadow, or rather a sense of place, enclosure, and shelter. While delicately placing a monument in the immersive, carefully crafted natural setting proves to be inviting. Similarly, she continues to challenge the openness of certain spaces, and suggests that these areas should have embraced the beauty of nature by sparsely planting trees instead of more monuments. Unlike other who have described the garden, Grey seeks peace within a stylized nature rather than a monument-centered landscape (Clarke, 1990). It is accounts like these that call into question the success of the current state of Stowe. Their desires, concerns, and critiques offer alternatives to support a more sustainable, inclusive, and historic landscape garden.

### **Conclusion: Selection, Transparency, and an Inclusive Nationalism**

Stowe is a unique landscape garden. Though paradigmatic in its succession of a design cast of characters, it is ultimately a personal place. It is framed by Viscount Cobham's political perspectives on his nation as it became the center of empire, a concept broadly used by Hunt to (carelessly) assign to the use of Greek and Roman imagery. Rather, it is quite literally a moment in Cobham's aesthetic vision. Cobham may have intended to expose corruption, but in that, added strength to its powers in the actions of the Trust. Thus, the National Trust has a valuable resource in their ownership of the garden. The National Trust can apply a more transparent historical approach in conjunction with other tactics to increase their desire for accessibility, and

enhance the political narrative at Stowe; one that can carry a unique narrative of nationalism, both then and now.

One of these tactics would be defining a clear vision of Stowe, by picking a specific version of the garden. Stowe garden is first an artifact. The landscape with which we see today is mostly the work, or the (first) ideas, of Capability Brown. Brown's designs combine the sentiments of restoring a Whately appreciation of Stowe garden's refined nature, while paying homage to Cobham's particular vision. Yet, given the speed and thoroughness with which the earlier incarnations of Stowe were softened and erased by Brown, and then, later, by nineteenth and twentieth century changes, there is another interpretive problem for which there could be a twenty-first century solution.

The University of Westminster, London, writes a rather intriguing proposal about how the plan to carry out an interpretation of Alexander Pope at Twickenham and Teddington. In order to restore the Grotto to its intended state, the University proposes to use archival history to make "a virtual reconstruction" (Digital, 2017). This would include VR headgear like an Oculus Rift, that would guide the viewer through the intended scenery. The same could be performed at Stowe. The interactive and immersive nature would intrigue and attract visitors. There could be particular points in the garden when visitors could look around and see how the garden has changed and developed. For example, if the National Trust went with a Brownian landscape, they could use VR to further analyze the construction of that landscape, but also illustrate the designers who came before, like William Kent, Charles Bridgeman, and Henry Wise. Areas like the Grecian Valley, the Elysian Fields, or the Octagon Lake could be deconstructed using VR. The combination of VR in a Brownian interpretation, and a more transparent and critical view of history at Stowe, would increase the inclusivity of the landscape. Then, however, there is the



larger context of the interpretive narrative, now fuzzily tilted to meet what the Trust must think its visitors want in a generic country house visit, not necessarily one that is specifically about Stowe.

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This thesis has identified the political, ultimately conservative, English lens of the National Trust's interpretation at Stowe garden. This particular interpretation is in part due to the legacy of Lees-Milne and the last century idea of preservation of England. It is also in part due to their vaguely cited use of receptive history overlaid by their equally vague and gap-filled timeline of the landscape garden. The Trust has overlapped the intentions of the designers, creating a landscape that clothes itself in a false authenticity. They ambiguously use concepts like 'landscape garden' and the 'Picturesque' to blur the faults in their current interpretation.

One solution is essentially to commit to what they have – the first Brown landscape. By using this expressive landscape, they could provide a holistic and transparent history as the framework for their core interpretation of a landscape garden to illustrate its critically important place in English political and art history. Their larger narrative could be guided by using a sustainable framework like the Triple Bottom Line (Hacking, 2008). This framework will only further emphasize the gap in holistic information describing Stowe's landscape, social implications, and current economics. In his work, Williamson begins to illustrate such a broad interpretive approach to English landscape gardens, by identifying the intensive work and materials that went into Capability Brown's design and his supervision of re-landscaping of country house estates (Williamson, 2014).

Previously, the National Trust may not have had jurisdiction over the surrounding countryside, which supported Stowe in its vision of a grander estate. Furthermore, not only did

the surrounding parkland support the Stowe house and garden through its wood business, but also through agriculture and animal husbandry. This landscape, in part, has recently become the property of the National Trust. Therefore, there is a new narrative spanning across ecology, economics and social intricacies that, as mentioned previously in the Stowe Paper's wood accounts, could develop the interpretation of Stowe. Expanding the narrative of Stowe to incorporate a range of people of various interests, could further expand a narrow focused, strictly political narrative. This could in turn stimulate a curiosity in visitors about how the estate was managed, and increase visitation in its breadth of new information. For example, perhaps the National Trust should market information about the extended estate and how new ideas of farming and herding were applied. There is a clear need and desire by scholars for a framework and connection of resources to better interpret and unpack these landscapes, like that seen in the lack of recognition of the contents of the Stowe Papers.

This solution would require a team to conduct research at the Huntington Library's Stowe Collection. The team should at least consist of a landscape historian, a senior historian, and a landscape designer. The landscape historian could place the actions documented in the papers and apply them to the landscape, while a senior historian could relate them to the actions of the owners and give a context to what was happening at that time period in England. Meanwhile a strict landscape architect would be able to discern what materials from the greater estate were used in the garden, and how, at some level, the landscape was actually constructing. This expense for further research would not be a small transaction, but rather a big undertaking, but with possibly profound results. Possibly extending the National Trust's focus beyond class, a Downton Abbey garden-based approach. The interpretation of the garden could explain for

example, Cobham's naming of Nelson's Seat and Rogers Walk after two of his favorite gardeners.

A more transparent approach by the National Trust in expressing Cobham's narratives embedded in Stowe could also be especially beneficial in a time of a national identity crisis. Now is an extremely intriguing time in national politics across the globe, and especially in the United Kingdom. Increasing the transparency of interpretation at Stowe and its portrayal in the garden is an opportunity for the National Trust to address the question, what is nationalism and how does an imperial artifact fit in? Stowe garden is very much an argument about Walpole and the corruption of British politics. The Whig lens of the garden is very specific and very pointed because of Cobham's political stance. A clarification of this lens may cast a light on the current political climate with Brexit.

Brexit is a combination of the words Britain and exit, describing the United Kingdom's vote to leave the European Union, which will go into effect on March 29th, 2019 (Wheeler, 2017). A referendum was the cause of such action. England and Wales voted positively to leave the EU, while Scotland and Northern Island voted to remain (Wheeler, 2017). The vote was very much about what it means to be British, resembling the Englishness narrative currently in play at Stowe. The positive vote of Brexit resounded with negative feelings about immigration, promoting this idea that England is a exclusive and superior nation. While for some it was a surprising decision, the vote revealed the conflicting views of nationalism. The National Trust has an opportunity to form a landscape that could also spark discussion. Greater inclusiveness, accessibility, and transparency at Stowe could define what it means to be British. By embracing the fullness of the charge of transparency and specificity in preservation, which is also to provoke a broader constituency, The National Trust at Stowe would then be better suited to

fulfill the goals outlined in their mission statement, “for ever, for everyone”. Stowe would then not only be authentically recognized as a place of true ‘Englishness,’ but also a political artifact and a place of an evolving ‘Britishness.’

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