

William Mason: Nature and The English Garden, 1750-1785

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Abstract

This thesis offers a re-assessment of the life and works of a major but neglected eighteenth-century poet, Rev. William Mason. It focuses on his diverse engagements with nature as a philosophical concept and in its domestic form, the garden. Broadly conceived of, this dissertation argues for the centrality of Mason's Anglicanism and Whig politics to his work as a playwright, poet, and garden designer. More specifically, it argues that Mason's writings on nature during his early career (1750-1759) are statements of orthodox belief and conservative Whiggism, which seek to defend the religious and political establishment of mid-eighteenth century Britain. In his later work, particularly in his four-volume georgic poem entitled *The English Garden* (1772-1783), Mason continues to use nature as a vehicle through which to espouse Anglicanism and Whiggism. Yet his position with regards to the political establishment had changed and his work in this period criticizes the government and its handling of the American War. Alongside this narrative of continuity and change, three of Mason's garden designs are analyzed for the manner in which they physically realize the theories of his written work. Throughout the thesis Mason is treated as a writer engaged in a wide range of eighteenth-century debates and involved in a series of networks. The multifariousness of his activities necessitates a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on English literature, art history, intellectual history, political history, religious history and garden history.

Identifying and analyzing the importance of orthodox Anglican belief to Mason's work, this thesis takes issue with the methodologies currently adopted in the academic discipline of garden history. Although strong on the political and social aspects of eighteenth-century gardening, religion is often overlooked in modern garden histories. This thesis rectifies this omission by simultaneously dealing with the philosophical, political and theological issues surrounding nature and gardening in the eighteenth century.

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Declaration

No material contained herein has been presented by me before and this thesis is entirely my own work. Furthermore, the work in this thesis has not been previously submitted for award at this or any other institution.

Introduction

At a 2012 symposium held in honour of literary historian John Barrell an attendee asked, “Who now has heard of Mason?”¹ Designed to highlight historical anachronisms the rhetorical question implied only scholars of eighteenth-century studies have heard of William Mason (and even amongst them he is not very well known) when in the eighteenth century any literate person would have known his work. This thesis focuses on Mason’s diverse engagements with nature and gardening. So diverse are these engagements, encompassing sermons, historical plays, private poetry, a four-volume georgic, satires, and garden designs, that a multidisciplinary approach is adopted, drawing on methods from art history, English literature, history of religion, and history of philosophy, all gathered under the umbrella of garden history.² The chapters range from theoretical discussion of mid-eighteenth century moral philosophy and its relationship to Mason’s plays in the first two chapters, to an emblematical reading of a flower garden he designed in the last chapter. It is argued throughout that Mason’s religious and political beliefs offer a vital framework for understanding his output.

Before the more precise objectives and arguments of this thesis are laid out and positioned within modern scholarship, a sketch of Mason’s life will be given. Due to his relative obscurity as a historical figure a biography, no matter how brief, is an important way in which the arguments of this thesis can be contextualized. It also avoids burdening the main body of the text with biographical detail.

A Biographical Sketch of William Mason

William Mason was born in Kingston-Upon-Hull, Yorkshire, on the twenty-third of February 1725. The only child of Rev. William Mason (1694-1753), a staunch Whig and vicar of the high-income church of Holy Trinity, Hull (Fig. 1), Mason was from a well-to-do family and attended the same grammar school as Andrew Marvell had. The

¹ University of York, 1 November, 2012.

² For discussions of the advantages and disadvantages of such an approach see, M. Strober, *Interdisciplinary Conversations: Challenging Habits of Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011): Ch. 2.

school was just across the road from his father's church and ensured him a high standard of education (Fig. 2). In addition to his father's clerical position, Mason's family would have enjoyed a prominent social status in eighteenth-century Hull. His great-grandfather Robert had been sheriff and Mayor of Hull, and his grandfather Hugh had been Controller of Customs. He was also distantly related to Matthew Hutton, who was Archbishop of York (1747-57) and then Canterbury (1757-58), and the aristocratic Robert D'Arcy, Fourth Earl of Holderness.³ Mason never knew his mother as she died in childbed at the end of 1725.⁴ Perhaps as a result of her death he had an especially close relationship with his father. In an early poem, *Epistolary Address to the Author's Father* (1746), Mason fondly remembers a "tender childhood" during which his father taught him the arts of music, painting, and poetry, alongside the "graver science" of a virtuous Christian life.⁵ Predominantly a display of filial affection and gratitude for a financial allowance, the poem also shows Mason reflecting on his ability to cross artistic disciplines at a young age, a skill he would display throughout his life.

Mason left Hull in 1742 to be admitted to St. John's College, Cambridge, as a pensioner. During his time as a student William Powell and Thomas Balguy tutored him. He befriended Thomas Gray, William Whitehead, Richard Stonehewer, and Richard Hurd.⁶ And through Hurd he was introduced to the influential clergyman William Warburton, later Bishop of Gloucester. With the exception of Gray, who is notoriously undemonstrative on such matters, Mason's circle of friends at Cambridge was composed entirely of conservative Whigs. Mason's Whiggism is evident in *Il Pacifico* (1744), which celebrates peace as a means of promoting trade. Moreover, it

³ For Mason's family tree see, Draper, *William Mason: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (New York: The New York University Press, 1924): 330.

⁴ Following his wife's death, William Mason Sr. remarried twice. First he married Sarah Haynes (d. 1741) and then in 1747 he married Mary Ryles. With Mary he had a daughter named Ann.

⁵ The poem was first published in W. Mason, *Poems by William Mason, M.A.* Vol. 3 (York, 1797): 109-113. Interestingly there is a framed poem in the vestry of All Saints, Aston, which claims to have been written by a six-year old Mason, unfortunately the claims cannot be verified.

⁶ For Mason's introduction to, and relationship with Hurd see the recently republished, E. H. Pearce (ed.) and L. Whibley (modern ed.), *The Correspondence of Richard Hurd and William Mason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): xviii-xx.

was published in a collection of poems from Cambridge alumni commemorating the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748), generally accepted as an achievement of the then Whig government.⁷ It was also one of three imitations of John Milton that Mason wrote as a student.⁸

After graduating, Mason was made a fellow of Pembroke College.⁹ The income from his fellowship alongside an allowance from his father allowed him a life of leisured ease and culture in Cambridge. He continued writing pro-Whig poetry with *Isis, An Elegy* (1749), which attacked Oxford University for Jacobitism only four years after the Jacobite rebellion of 1745. Unfortunately for Mason – who did not originally intend to publish the poem¹⁰ – Thomas Warton replied to *Isis* with *The Triumph of Isis* (1755). Warton’s work is universally considered the better poem. Both Thomas Gray and Richard Hurd were friends of Warton and the event caused embarrassment on both sides. Good naturedly and sensibly Mason admitted the superiority of *The Triumph of Isis* and refused to republish *Isis* from then on; he eventually befriended Warton.¹¹

⁷ For the treaty as a ‘Whig triumph’ see, J. Black, *Parliament and Foreign Policy in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 88.

⁸ The other poems are *Il Bellicoso*, a companion poem to *Il Pacifico* (thus they form an imitation of Milton’s *Il Penseroso* and *L’Allegro*), and *Museus, A Monody to the Memory of Mr. Pope. In Imitation of Milton’s Lycidas*. They were all written around 1744 but published later. They were published respectively in, G. Pearch (ed.) *A Collection of Poems in Four Volumes. By Several Hands* Vol. 3, The Second Edition (London, 1770): 86-92; J. Bentham (ed.), *Gratulatio Academiae Cantabrigiensis de Reditu Serenissimi Regis Georgii II. Post Pacem & Libertatem Europæ Feliciter Restitutam Anno MDCCXLVIII* (Cantabrigiæ, 1748); W. Mason, *Musæus: a Monody to the Memory of Mr. Pope, In Imitation of Milton’s Lycidas*. (London, 1747).

⁹ Before receiving a fellowship there was some personal politics that Mason had to overcome, which is explained in a posthumously published letter. See, *Gentleman’s Magazine*, Vol. XXI, Part II (London, 1801).

¹⁰ It was first published without Mason’s knowledge in *The London Evening Post* (2-4 February), where an anonymous Tory rewrote it into a parody. This forced Mason to publish the full version, making public a poem originally intended as a private statement.

¹¹ In 1777, by which time the two men were friends, Mason wrote to Warton, “And if I put any value upon my own juvenile production [*Isis*], it is because it is written on those old Whig principles, which I am as proud of holding now that they are *out* of fashion and I am turned fifty, as I then was when they were *in* fashion, and I was hardly turned twenty. I trust, Sir, you are a Tory moderate enough to forgive me this

Mason's next publication was a play, *Elfrida* (1752). A progressive mix of a plot from Anglo-Saxon history presented in the form of an Ancient Greek tragedy, *Elfrida* was a great success and made Mason's name well-known amongst the reading public. In 1753, at a time when he must have felt most buoyant, Mason's father died and left him out of his will and thus financially scuppered. Saved by family connections, Mason was offered the role of secretary by Robert D'Arcy, fourth Earl of Holderness, who was then Secretary of State for the Southern Department. As part of Mason's new duties he accompanied his patron on an ambassadorial trip to Germany where, through William Whitehead, he met George Simon Harcourt, later the second Earl of Nuneham.¹²

After some indecision Mason took clerical orders and was granted the living of Aston, South Yorkshire, by Holderness. However, like many other eighteenth-century clergy Mason continued in his literary ambitions. He published a collection of odes in 1756 and started work on a second play, *Caractacus* (1759). Like *Elfrida*, *Caractacus* mixed British history and Ancient Greek tragedy. In 1764 Mason published a collection of his poems to date, mainly pastoral and political in content, and the two plays, all of which he was roundly satirized for.¹³ In this period he also embarked on an amateur career as a garden designer, designing gardens for his rectory in Aston and Richard Hurd's house in Thurstaston. During the late 1750s and early 1760s, Mason also sought and found promotion in the church.

wrong." R. Mant (ed.), *The Poetical Works of the Late Thomas Warton* (Oxford, 1802): xviii.

¹² It was on this trip that Mason saw a 'harpsichord-piano,' which he introduced to Britain and has secured his place in modern histories of the piano. See, D. Rowland (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Piano* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 16. Due to improvements he made to the instrument he is also said to have invented the 'celestinette' or 'piano-forte.' See, *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, Vol. CVII (London, 1800): 372; K. Fordoński and P. Urbański, *Casimir Britannicus: English Translations, Paraphrases, and Emulations of the Poetry of Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski* (London: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 2008): 199-201.

¹³ The satires directed at Mason confirm his status as a poet of some reputation. See, *The Prophecy of Famine; The Author and The Rosciad* in C. Churchill, *Poems*, Vols. I and II (London, 1768). The two former poems directly name Mason and in the latter poems both he and Gray are ironically named the 'Cambridge worthies.' See also, *Ode To Oblivion* in R. Lloyd, *Poems*, (London, 1762). Lloyd's poems mock Mason's antiquarian interests.

In the mid-1760s Mason continued to write but published less.¹⁴ He contented himself with fulfilling his clerical duties and doing additional garden work, laying out a “Stromboli walk” at Middleton Park and an approach to the house at Rokeby.¹⁵ In 1765 he married Mary Sherman. Again Mason’s happiness was not to last. Mary died of consumption less than two years after their marriage.¹⁶ Her death famously gave rise to the tender side of Thomas Gray who wrote to his friend:

“I break in upon you at a moment, when we least of all are permitted to disturb our friends, only to say, that you are daily and hourly present to my thoughts. If the worst be not yet past, you will neglect and pardon me: but if the last struggle be over; if the poor object of your long anxieties be no longer sensible to your kindness, or to her own suffering, allow me (at least an idea, for what could I do, were I present more than this?) to sit by you in silence, and pity from my heart not her, who is at rest, but you, who lose her. May He, who made us, the Master of our pleasures and of our pains, preserve and support you! Adieu!

I have long understood how little you had to hope.”¹⁷

The years following Mary’s death marked the beginning of a resurgence of publications and engagement in public life for Mason, aided by a considerable inheritance of land (worth £1500 p.a. in rent) from John Hutton, brother of the Archbishop of Canterbury.¹⁸ The first major literary work Mason published was Book One of the four books of *The English Garden* (1772-1782), which he dedicated to the

¹⁴ Mason wrote or started three plays in this period: *The Surprise* (c.1761); *The World of Today* (c. 1761); *Argentile and Curan* (c.1766).

¹⁵ M. Batey, ‘William Mason, English Gardener’, *Garden History*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Feb., 1973): 19.

¹⁶ Mason was genuinely attached to Mary and never remarried. He wrote to Walpole years later of her as one, “who you know was once so very dear to me, and whose memory will ever sit closest to my heart.” P. Cunningham, *The Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Oxford*, Vol. 4 (London, 1858): 201.

¹⁷ P. Toynbee and L. Whibley, *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, Vol. 3 (Oxford, Clarendon Press: 1971): 954.

¹⁸ The land was Marske, North Riding of Yorkshire. His increased income enabled him to have his rectory redesigned by John Carr and to do more work on his garden. Around this time Mason, at the request of Gray, also aided Dr. Thomas Wharton in laying out a garden at Old Park, County Durham, of which little information survives. See, Toynbee and Whibley, *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, Vol. 3, 987, 1043.

memory of his wife, and described as an “Episodico-didactico-pathetico-politico-farrago, unlike everything that ever was written or will be written.”¹⁹ In conjunction with the garden aesthetics that might be expected *The English Garden* is a relentlessly political work. Book One reflects Mason’s growing social concerns, whilst Books Two, Three, and Four reflect his concerns over Britain’s war with America. The same years also saw Mason embark on a career as a satirist working under the pseudonym Malcolm McGreggor. By the end of the decade he was an important member of the recently formed Yorkshire Association, an organization of non-aristocrats that pushed for the economic reform of parliament.

On a personal level the beginning of the 1770s saw the death of Gray and the deepening of Mason’s friendship with Horace Walpole.²⁰ In the early 1770s George Simon Harcourt asked Mason to help design a flower garden with phenomenally successful and interesting results. Later in the same decade Mason’s political stance over the American War cost him the friendship of Richard Hurd with whom he had previously been very close.

Mason continued to publish poetry throughout the 1780s and 1790s, was an active participant in the abolitionist cause, and pushed for the reform of York Lunatic Asylum.²¹ His final work was a didactic poem, based on Dryden’s *Religio Laici*, entitled *Religio Clerici, or The Faith of a Clergyman of the Church of England* (1797). It consists of a defence of Christian orthodoxy against what seemed to him an ever-growing number of heretics and atheists. He died in 1797 from “a mortification occasioned by breaking his shin in stepping from his carriage”²² and was buried in his

¹⁹ Cunningham, *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, Vol. 4, 493.

²⁰ The death of Gray led to the publication of Mason’s successful biography of Gray, which James Boswell used as the model for his even more successful biography of Samuel Johnson. See, J. Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* (London, 1791): 4.

²¹ Mason was an early correspondent of William Wilberforce who was also a native of Hull. See, J. Murray, *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*, Vol. 1 (London, 1840). For Mason’s work on the York Asylum see, A. Akehurst, *Architecture and Philanthropy: Building Hospitals in Eighteenth-Century York* (PhD Thesis, University of York, 2008).

²² J. Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century: Comprising Biographical Memoirs of William Bowyer, Printer, F.S.A. and Many of His Learned Friends* (London, 1812): 241.

Aston parish. A monument to Mason was placed in Poets Corner, Westminster Abbey (Fig. 3) and many years later another was erected in York Minster.

The nineteenth century saw a slow decline in Mason's reputation. But interest was high enough, and his friends considered important enough, that the majority of his correspondences were published as well as several biographies.²³ Hartley Coleridge's assessment of him is reasonably representative of the period. He claimed Mason was the greatest poet from the north of Britain since Andrew Marvell but that, "He had the good fortune... to be born in one of those 'vacant interlunar' periods of literature, when a little poetic talent goes a great way... his genius is praised by some who themselves possessed more."²⁴ By the end of the century Mason was forgotten to all but literary specialists.

Twentieth-Century Scholarship on Mason

At the beginning of the twentieth-century, literary historian John Draper wrote what remains the sole biography of Mason, *William Mason: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (1924).²⁵ Draper's is an obsessively detailed but unsympathetic biography. His observations suffer from his underlying thesis that Mason's writing rests uneasily between "two opposing schools", the "neo-classical" and "romantic."²⁶ It is a reductive approach and the teleological suggestion that Mason was somehow

²³ A detailed chronology of nineteenth-century biographies of Mason is available in Draper, *William Mason*, 3-15. Mason's major correspondences, for example with Gray, Hurd, and Walpole are all readily available. Mason's correspondence with George Simon Harcourt is to be found in the privately printed *Harcourt Papers* (Oxford, 1880), a complete copy of which is held at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. His letters to his curate Christopher Alderson are held in manuscript and as microfilm in Rotherham Archives, (Ref: 864-F, Alternate Ref: SY737/F).

²⁴ H. Coleridge *Biographia Borealis: or, Lives of Distinguished Northerners* (London, 1833): 397.

²⁵ There are several contemporary reviews of Draper's work that give a sense of Mason's reputation at the beginning of the century: E. J. Morley, 'William Mason: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Culture by John W. Draper', *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Oct., 1925): 497; A. D. McKillop, 'William Mason: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Culture by John W. Draper', *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 42, No. 7 (Nov., 1927), pp. 478-479; G. C. Moore-Smith, 'William Mason, a Study in Eighteenth-Century Culture by John W. Draper', *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Oct., 1925), pp. 476-478.

²⁶ Draper, *William Mason*, 226.

attempting to write ‘romantic’ poetry is unsound.²⁷ Draper’s criticism also fails to take into account differences of genre in Mason’s writing. For example, he criticizes *The English Garden* for not sticking to its task: “he is just as likely to talk politics or religion or what-not, as to stick to fences or barn-yards”,²⁸ which is not a criticism that would be made of the wide-ranging subject matter of Virgil’s *Georgics*, the literary model for Mason’s poem. Draper also criticizes Mason’s philosophy, which he argues contains the contradictory belief that man is “basically bad and basically good.”²⁹ He bases this on Mason supposedly holding simultaneously to a Shaftesburian ‘moral sense’ and a belief in original sin. As will be demonstrated the issue is far more complex than this and certainly much more deeply thought out than Draper implies. However, as a biographer Draper is still in most essential facts entirely sound.³⁰ The minuteness of his research cannot claim to be rivaled here and what is disputed is interpretation more often than information.

Soon after Draper’s work, Paget Toynbee published a collection of Mason’s satires with annotations by Horace Walpole and then, using Toynbee, Isobel Chase wrote an article on Mason’s satire, *An Heroic Epistle to Sir William Chambers* (1773).³¹ Following this there was a slump in interest with very little study made of Mason in the mid-twentieth century. Misinformation is rife in the few treatments of any aspect of his work or life with the exception of an illuminating short article by John Nabholz exploring Mason’s influence on William Wordsworth and another on his relationship with journalist and printer John Almon.³²

²⁷ An interesting treatment of this issue is, Marshall Brown’s *Preromanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

²⁸ Draper, *William Mason*, 226.

²⁹ Draper, *William Mason*, 232.

³⁰ Points of refutation will be footnoted below.

³¹ P. Toynbee, *Satirical Poems Published Anonymously by William Mason. With Notes By Horace Walpole* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926); I. Chase, ‘William Mason and Sir William Chambers’ *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening*, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 35 (1936): 517-29.

³² J. R. Nabholz, ‘Wordsworth and William Mason’, *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 15, No. 59 (Aug., 1964), pp. 297-302; R. R. Rea, ‘Mason, Walpole, and That Rogue Almon’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Feb., 1960), pp. 187-193. For more on Mason’s influence on Wordsworth see, R. Gravil, *Wordsworth’s Bardic Vocation, 1787-1942* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 14-20.

A revival of sorts came in 1973 when York Minster Library and York Art Gallery held an exhibition entitled, *A Candidate for Praise: William Mason, 1725-97*.³³ In the same year an article by famed garden historian Mavis Batey focused on Mason's garden design at Nuneham-Courtenay (at the time she was undertaking a project to restore the garden to its past glory; unfortunately the project fell through).³⁴ In 1989 Stephen Bending published an article on and including Mason's *An Essay on the Arrangement of Flowers in Pleasure Grounds*,³⁵ and in 1994 Batey returned to the Nuneham-Courtenay flower garden in another article.³⁶ Since then Mark Laird has put the flower garden at the centre of his important book, *The Flowering of the Landscape Garden* (1999), establishing it as a *locus classicus* of the pleasure ground tradition.³⁷ Mason's plays have received one detailed study, a chapter in Edith Hall and Fiona Macintosh's *Greek Tragedy and the British Theatre: 1660-1914* (2005), while his minor poems remain almost entirely ignored.³⁸ *The English Garden* is by far Mason's

³³ For the catalogue see, B. Barr and J. Ingamells, (eds.), *A Candidate for Praise: William Mason, 1725-97* (York: York Festival Committee, 1973). For reviews of the exhibition see, N. Temperley 'William Mason: An Exhibition', *The Musical Times*, Vol. 114, No. 1567 (Sep., 1973), p. 894; J. Anthony, 'A Candidate for Praise: [William Mason, 1725-97]', *Garden History*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Autumn, 1973), pp. 31-32.

³⁴ M. Batey, *William Mason, English Gardener*. For the restoration of the garden see, Rose, S. 'Romance and Romanticism: The Restoration of Mason's Garden at Nuneham', *Quarterly Newsletter (Garden History Society)*, No. 12 (Spring, 1970), pp. 13-17.

³⁵ S. Bending, 'William Mason's 'An Essay on the Arrangement of Flowers in Pleasure Grounds'', *Journal of Garden History*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (1989), pp. 217-220.

³⁶ M. Batey, 'Two Romantic Picturesque Flower Gardens', *Garden History*, Vol. 22, No. 2, The Picturesque (Winter, 1994), pp. 197-205.

³⁷ M. Laird, *The Flowering of the English Landscape* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999). See also, M. Laird and J. Harvey, "'Our Equally Favorite Hobby Horse': The Flower Gardens of Lady Elizabeth Lee at Hartwell and the 2nd Earl Harcourt at Nuneham Courtenay', *Garden History*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Autumn, 1990), pp. 103-154. The term *locus classicus* is used by Laird in 'The Culture of Horticulture' in M. Conan (ed.) *Bourgeois and Aristocratic Cultural Encounters in Garden Art, 1550-1850* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2002).

³⁸ An exception is the concluding section of C. Mounsey, 'Persona, Elegy, and Desire', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 46, No. 3, Restoration and Eighteenth Century (Summer, 2006), pp. 601-618. Apart from scholarly publications mention should be made of Gwen Staveley's *William Mason: A Son of Hull, A Fame Forgotten* (Hull: Loclio, 2001), which although adding no new information to Draper's account of Mason raised funds for the restoration of the old reading room in Aston (Mason had it built to improve facilities for the village children). In March

most studied and cited work. It is frequently quoted in books and articles on the subject of the picturesque and eighteenth-century garden design in order to support arguments ranging from the symbolism of woodland to the balance between art and nature in eighteenth-century landscape aesthetics.³⁹ But until now the political and religious aspects of his poem have never been studied in-depth.

This thesis does not intend to be a full reappraisal of Mason as an historical figure but instead explores his work where it is concerned with nature and gardening. Within this limited interpretative framework it refutes Draper's basic interpretation of Mason's philosophy and literature, provides the first detailed chronology and emblematic reading of the Nuneham-Courtenay flower garden and suggests a new reading of his plays. Moreover, it will use his work to show the importance of religion and politics in his conceptualization of nature and gardening. Rather than discussing the place of his work in eighteenth-century garden design, as has been done to a certain extent already, this dissertation demonstrates the importance of religion and politics to eighteenth-century conceptions of nature and to the life and work of an eighteenth-century garden designer.

Religion, Politics, and Eighteenth-Century Garden History

In the introduction to a 2013 collection of essays on eighteenth-century gardening, entitled *A Cultural History of Gardens In The Age of Enlightenment*, Stephen Bending notes "perhaps the most profound question asked in garden history at the moment is what the garden is."⁴⁰ As Bending makes clear, to be able to answer the question

2014 a blue plaque was placed on the restored building in honour of its founder. See, <http://www.gsey.org.uk/news.php?id=588>.

³⁹ See for example, J. Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972): 60, 62; J. D. Hunt and P. Willis (eds.) *The Genius of the Place: The English Landscape Garden, 1620-1820* (London: Paul Elek Ltd., 1975): 308-310; S. Daniels, 'The Political Iconography of Woodland in Later Georgian England' in D. Cosgrove and S. Daniels, *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 43-82; M. Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989): 10, 29, 36, 61.

⁴⁰ S. Bending, 'Introduction' in S. Bending (ed.) *A Cultural History of Gardens: In the Age of Enlightenment* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013): 4.

necessitates more than (but definitely does not exclude) archaeological and material histories such as Tom Williamson's *Polite Landscapes* (1995) and more than (but again not excluding) botanical histories and histories of design, such as Mark Laird's *The Flowering of the Landscape Garden* (1999).⁴¹ Although these histories, particularly the former, re-assessed and revealed the inadequacy of over-reliance on textual records, they cannot explain all the uses to which a garden could be put, nor can they wholly explain how they were understood and experienced. In light of this, Bending suggests a 'turn to reception.'⁴² Concentrating on the reception of a garden enables the garden historian to explore what a garden might have meant to an eighteenth-century owner, visitor, or viewer, and subsequently their wider cultural importance. Focusing on reception this thesis further argues with regards to William Mason that the question 'What is nature?' needs to precede 'What is a garden?' The answer is found in a detailed explication of Mason's religious beliefs, which are intimately connected to his politics. Therefore, the answer to Bending's question partly comes from a conjunction of religious history, political history, and garden history.

In the previous few decades the history of eighteenth-century religion has become increasingly important to various historical disciplines. This is because the late-nineteenth and twentieth-century secularization of the enlightenment period has been significantly challenged.⁴³ With regards to eighteenth-century political history J. G. A. Pocock, one of the leading revisionists of the enlightenment period, has remarked:

⁴¹ See also, J. Harris, 'A Pioneer in Gardening: Dickie Bateman Re-assessed,' *Apollo* (October, 1993); T. Mowl, *Gentleman and Players: Gardeners of the English Landscape* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 2000); J. Meir, *Sanderson Miller and his Landscapes* (Chichester: Phillimore & Co. Ltd., 2006); J. Meir, *Sanderson Miller (1716-80) Landscape Design and Buildings in the Landscape* (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of York, 2004); F. Cowell, *Richard Woods (1715-1793): Master of the Pleasure Garden* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009).

⁴² An example of a garden historian focusing on the reception of gardens is Bending's own *Green Retreats: Women, Gardens and Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁴³ For a useful overview of the secularization of history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries see, B. W. Young, 'Religious History and the Eighteenth-Century Historian' *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Sep., 2000): 849-868. See also the introduction to, D. Sorokin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008).

“The great discovery which we constantly make and remake as historians is that English political debate is constantly subordinate to English political theology; and few of us know one-tenth of the theology available to competently trained divines and laymen among our predecessors.”⁴⁴

Modern day landscape aestheticians also remark on the importance of belief or disbelief in God in the act of engaging with and aesthetically appreciating nature:

“...the modern world takes a short cut with the question of beauty: everyone, unless having a distinct reason for believing the contrary, such as a specific religious faith, unhesitatingly takes it for granted that extreme subjectivism must hold sway... The most important unanswered question concerning natural beauty is to explain what is now to ground our interest in it *or* how such interest, if self-justifying, requires no ground or foundation.”⁴⁵

Garden historians of the eighteenth century are yet to make a sustained response to these developments and ideas.⁴⁶ Although the discipline is acutely aware of political, economic, and social issues that surrounded eighteenth-century gardens, it has not seriously dealt with the implications of a worldview grounded in religious belief and it remains a periphery issue.⁴⁷ A trite but telling example comes from Tim Richardson’s

⁴⁴ J. G. A. Pocock, ‘A Discourse on Sovereignty: Observations on the Work in Progress’, in N. Phillipson and Q. Skinner (eds.), *Political Discourse in early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 381.

⁴⁵ T. J. Diffey, ‘Natural Beauty without Metaphysics’ in S. Kemal and I. Gaskell, *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 43, 61. In the same collection see, N. Carroll, ‘On Being Moved By Nature: Between Religion and Natural History.’ For detailed critiques of theistic approaches to an aesthetic appreciation of landscape see, M. Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature: Essays on the Aesthetics of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002): 4-6; A. Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art, and Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2000): 81-85.

⁴⁶ Outside the eighteenth century there are many good examples of theologically nuanced accounts of gardening. See for example, A. S. Weiss, *Mirrors of Infinity: The French Formal Garden and Seventeenth-Century Metaphysics* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995); M. Conan (ed.) *Sacred Gardens and Landscapes: Ritual and Agency* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2007).

⁴⁷ There are important exceptions, M. Kelsall, ‘The Iconography of Stourhead’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 46, (1983): pp. 133-143; M. Schulz, *Paradise Preserved: Recreations of Eden in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-*

Arcadian Friends: Inventing The English Landscape Garden (2007) a work of popular garden history and an otherwise very useful overview of the development of the landscape garden in the eighteenth century. Richardson, failing to take the issue of religious faith at all seriously, claims of Joseph Addison, a key figure in early eighteenth-century philosophies of nature and garden design, and others, “Men like Addison only believed in public.”⁴⁸ By wide consent Addison was one of the most sophisticated defenders of a form of Christian orthodoxy.⁴⁹ The idea that he was a superficial believer is remarkable and whoever ‘Men like Addison’ are is anyone’s guess. It is perhaps unfair to expect any detailed engagement with theological history in a book aimed at a general readership, but such opinions are symptomatic of the modern garden histories that form Richardson’s secondary sources. A more scholarly example comes from an essay in the aforementioned *A Cultural History of Gardens In The Age of Enlightenment* entitled ‘Meaning.’ Author of the essay Patrick Eyres writes:

“The garden was a conspicuous signifier of the landowner’s aesthetic and horticultural connoisseurship, which would be evident in the sylvan and botanical compositions and, simultaneously, in the poetic, philosophical, and painterly associations invoked by the landscape, architecture, sculpture, and inscriptions. In short, the ability of gardening to embody and communicate complex messages created the opportunity to synthesize personal aggrandizement, political ideology, and aesthetic vision with horticultural fashion.”⁵⁰

century England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); M. Charlesworth, ‘Sacred Landscape: Signs of Religion in the Eighteenth-Century’, *Journal of the Garden History Society*, 13:192 (1993): 56-68. Piety is also a recurring theme in Bending’s *Green Retreats*.

⁴⁸ T. Richardson, *The Arcadian Friends: Inventing the English Garden Landscape* (London: Bantam, 2007): 314.

⁴⁹ See for example, J. Money, ‘Science, Technology and Dissent in English Provincial Culture: From Newtonian Transformation to Agnostic Incarnation’ in P. Wood (ed.) *Science and Dissent in England, 1688-1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004): 98. But also see Addison’s posthumously published, *The Evidences of the Christian Religion; To Which are Added, Several Discourses against Atheism and Infidelity, and in Defence of the Christian Revelation, Occasionally Published by Him and Others* (London, 1730).

⁵⁰ P. Eyres, ‘Meaning’ in Bending (ed.), *A Cultural History of Gardens*, pp. 115-116.

In the final sentence of this passage, Eyres' secularizes eighteenth-century gardens with a familiar reading of them as places of display. The interaction between a person and a garden becomes one of power relations between a viewer and a creator. Throughout the collection of essays there is little detailed engagement with theological beliefs, although many authors do briefly acknowledge its importance⁵¹ and Rachel Crawford's passage on Protestant debates over representation is an important exception.⁵² It is not that the readings are necessarily erroneous because of their lack of engagement with the history of religion, but that they miss a fundamental way in which nature and therefore gardens were understood and experienced in the eighteenth century.

One way to begin to reconstruct how eighteenth-century religious beliefs may have informed the reception of a garden is through the broader concept of 'nature', of which a garden is a specific type of representation. Scott D. Evans has convincingly argued that eighteenth-century concepts of nature were founded on an Aristotelian metaphysics that had been Christianized by scholastic theologians such as Thomas Aquinas. Generally speaking, for there was much dispute over these matters, the eighteenth-century model of nature creates a conceptual, though "ontologically inseparable", split in reality.⁵³ Thus the 'natural world' (the 'things' perceived by the senses) is only a part of the eighteenth-century's inconceivably complex nature, which is the creation and arguably representative of God. God is behind and within the natural world as its first cause and, depending on your theology, a providential actor within it.

Chapters One and Two of this thesis use Mason's only two published plays, *Elfrida* and *Caractacus*, to explore his theology as it existed in the 1750s and to demonstrate how his religious and political beliefs grounded his understanding of the relationship between aesthetics and nature. The plays are established as attacks on a growing trend

⁵¹ The index notes 39 pages on which religion is claimed as an influence on gardening but only three of them run into two or more pages. A similar argument could be made in regards to another recent collection of essays, M. Calder (ed.) *Experiencing the Garden in the Eighteenth Century* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006).

⁵² R. Crawford, 'Verbal Representations' in Bending, *A Cultural History of Gardens*, 142-145.

⁵³ S. D. Evans, *Samuel Johnson's "General Nature": Tradition and Transition in Eighteenth-Century Discourse* (London: Associated University Presses, 1999): 107.

in British poetry for ‘poetic enthusiasm.’ Core to poetic enthusiasm was a moral-aesthetic in which an ‘enthusiastic’ response to ‘natural’ nature was connected to moral improvement. It is argued that Mason attacks poetic enthusiasm because he is concerned it undermines the values, such as empiricism and reason, which defined mid-eighteenth-century orthodox latitudinarian Anglicanism.⁵⁴ It is concluded that Mason conceived of ‘natural’ nature as morally ambiguous and highly problematic. It is further argued Mason’s work can be positioned within Pocock’s notion of an eighteenth-century ‘Conservative Enlightenment.’⁵⁵ Pocock convincingly describes a predominantly Whig project that sought to champion the use of empiricism, defend the established church and orthodox belief, espouse religious toleration, reject Catholicism and Jacobitism, and promote limited political power for the monarchy. All of these elements can be seen in Mason’s plays, thus Pocock’s work offers a framework in which Mason’s work on nature in the 1750s can be read as simultaneously political and religious. Moreover, recent scholarship has shown the growth in ‘enthusiastic poetry’ in the 1730s to 1750s but no analysis has been made of the replies of orthodox believers. A study of Mason’s two plays constitutes such an analysis.

As Mason developed intellectually and his situation changed, his life and work became more concerned with social politics. Garden historians have long appreciated the social and political uses to which a garden could be put⁵⁶ and, moreover, there is a

⁵⁴ Latitudinarian is a complex term, with a complex enough history that it can be defined in multiple ways. Here it is used in the loose sense that a latitudinarian, “held it possible for reasonable members of the same church to maintain conversation and diminish dogma on points of substance on which they might disagree.” This definition, which is used throughout the thesis, comes from J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Enthusiasm: The Antiself of Enlightenment’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 1/2, *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650-1850* (1997): 15.

⁵⁵ J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Clergy and Commerce: the Conservative Enlightenment in England,’ in R. Ajello (ed) *L'Età dei Lumi: Studi Storici Sul Settecento Europeo in Onore di Franco Venturi* Vol. 1, (Napoli: Jovene Editore, 1985): 523-62; ‘Within the Margins: The Definitions of Orthodoxy’ in R. D. Lund (ed.), *The Margins of Orthodoxy: Heterodox Writing and Cultural Response, 1660-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁵⁶ T. Williamson, *Polite Landscapes: Gardens and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995); Conan, *Bourgeois and Aristocratic Cultural Encounters*.

wealth of work on this topic by literary scholars of the eighteenth-century landscape.⁵⁷ Within these histories the garden and/or landscape has been shown to be a site of social mobility for the middle classes and a means by which the aristocracy could assert and reassert their position of cultural dominance. Chapter Three contributes to this scholarship by exploring Mason's life as a parish priest in the small country village of Aston. It argues that he fashioned a public persona for himself as a 'gentlemen-writer' through a combination of his profession, the literary trope of rural retirement and a garden designed on the same principles as aristocratic pleasure grounds. The first half of Chapter Four deepens the discussion by arguing that in Book One of *The English Garden* Mason attempted to include a certain section of the middle classes amongst those who can practice a 'liberal' style of gardening, that is to say an intellectually superior and more meaningful style of garden, which was usually considered the reserve of aristocrats. The second half of the chapter argues that Mason's political concerns changed dramatically with the onset of war with America and that this is evident in the last three books of *The English Garden*. It concludes that a juxtaposition of Book One with Books Two, Three and Four, evinces the working out of a relationship between politics and aesthetics in which politics is the predominant force. As part of this conclusion it is shown that Mason maintains theological orthodoxy throughout *The English Garden*. At the end of Chapter Four it becomes clear how, by the end of the 1770s, Mason's work on nature was used as a means of political opposition to the government, whereas Chapters One and Two had shown how his work on nature in the 1750s was pro-government.

Taking a different tack Chapter Five argues that the Nuneham-Courtenay flower garden, co-created by Mason with George Simon Harcourt, was designed on early picturesque principles with emblems of George Simon's politics as well as other more standard emblems of retirement, pleasure, and melancholy. As the only garden design of Mason's that is well documented it offers an important insight into his abilities as a

⁵⁷ J. Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); A. Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986); N. Everett, *Tory View of the Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); S. Copley and P. Garside (eds.), *Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape, and Aesthetics Since 1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); P. De Bolla, *The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape, and Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

garden designer. Moreover, it will be argued that Mason and Harcourt humorously use some of the emblematical features of the garden to subtly undercut any overly serious reading of it. Chapter Five is an important reminder to the modern garden historian, and anyone studying William Mason's life, that there is a risk in always taking his work too seriously. Mason himself was a man of great and often admirably self-deprecating humour, which it is hoped comes through at times in the following work.

The outline sketched above may suggest that this thesis is going a long way round to try and answer the question 'What is a garden?' It may, for example, seem irrelevant to Bending's question which moral philosophy inspired Mason's treatment of nature in a play he wrote years before he seriously started practicing gardening, or at least be too tangential a connection to be intellectually satisfying. Another objection may also be that not all of Mason's garden designs are properly investigated, for example the 'stromboli walk' at Middleton Park or Dr. Wharton's garden at Old Park, Durham (even if this is due to a lack of extant evidence). Also the actual garden aesthetic of *The English Garden* is largely ignored to give room for a political reading of the poem that focuses on a few select passages. However, what is attempted is the recreation of Mason's worldview, which was replete with religious and political beliefs. Through an understanding of his worldview it is argued that a garden, for William Mason, was a site of theological and political associations that are not so much imbedded in the garden itself as in him as a viewer. His life, it is argued, demonstrates that the reading of a garden must be the reading of its viewer.

Chapter 1. Enthusiasm and Nature: The Theological and Political Context of
Elfrida

On the 30th April 1764, William Mason preached in front of King George III. His text was Acts 17: 11-12, and he entitled the sermon *Infidelity and Enthusiasm, Equally Averse From Rational Enquiry*. From the text he draws the following conclusions:

- I. That, in our enquiries after truth, all opinions ought to be heard with readiness, and received with candor, freedom, and impartiality;
- II. That diligence should be used in the search after truth, and the arguments on both sides scrutinized with accuracy and precision;
- III. That the truth of the Christian religion demands this test, and receives advantage from it.

Mason then goes on to state of a hypothetical religious enthusiast:

“I would ask him if sometimes, on the bare assertion of the over-heated leader of his sect, he has not been led to brand many respectable persons with peculiar heretical names, at the same time without so much as understanding the meaning of the terms he employed for their reprobation? I would question him, whether he has not, at one time, taken the unintelligible jargon of some mad mystic for divine sublimity; at another, the vulgar cant of some illiterate fanatic, for apostolical simplicity?”¹

Mason’s sermon is one in a very long line of attacks on religious enthusiasm made by orthodox Anglican divines.² As Mason demonstrates, the main concern for orthodox believers was that religious enthusiasts made religious truth a matter of subjective

¹ W. Mason, *The Works of William Mason, in Four Volumes*, Vol. 4 (London, 1811): 46-47.

² For an overview of the topic that reaches back into the seventeenth century see, M. Heyd, *Be Sober and Reasonable: The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries*, (New York: E.J. Brill, 1995); J. G. A. Pocock, *Enthusiasm: The Antiself of Enlightenment*. For a variety of perspectives on the topic see, L. E. Klein and A. J. La Vopa (eds.), *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650-1850* (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1998).

experience: if religious enthusiasts *felt* convinced that what they were hearing was truly God's word, then it was. Worse, perhaps, was that in the seventeenth century religious enthusiasm had led to political factionalism and the English Civil War.³ Religious enthusiasm was dangerous. Mason's response to it was to posit a Christian faith scrutinized (and ultimately validated) by reason.

This chapter explores a literary trend connected to religious enthusiasm that appeared in the 1730s called 'poetic enthusiasm' and William Mason's attack on it in his play *Elfrida* (1752). Poetic enthusiasm is used as a way into Mason's conception of nature because it combines morality and a taste for 'natural' nature (that is, nature untouched by human hands). It is generally accepted by modern scholars that in the eighteenth-century a taste for 'natural' nature developed without being challenged. By reading Mason's work as a reply to poetic enthusiasm it becomes clear that the aesthetic appreciation of 'natural' nature was problematic for him. It is argued that, as with Mason's sermon against religious enthusiasm, the critiques he makes of poetic enthusiasm are intended to further the cause of a philosophy and faith based on reason. It is concluded that for Mason, unlike the best known poets of his time, the aesthetic appreciation of nature must be divorced from issues of morality and should instead rely on the twin principles of empiricism and reason.⁴

Due to a lack of scholarship on the topic of poetic enthusiasm, the first section of this chapter consists of an analysis of the philosophy of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, which strongly influenced poetic enthusiasm. Particularly important is the way in which Shaftesbury intertwines his 'moral sense' theory with an enthusiastic apostrophizing of nature to create a moral-aesthetic of nature. Leading

³ For one of Mason's friends on this issue see, W. Warburton, *The Doctrine of Grace: Or, the Office and Operations of the Holy Spirit Vindicated from the Insults of Infidelity, and the Abuses of Fanaticism*, Vol. 2 (London, 1763): 317. See also the concluding paragraphs of Mason's sermon.

⁴ It is recognized here that the term 'aesthetic' was not used in the early eighteenth century. For the history of the term and its origins in Germany see, P. Guyer 'The Origins of Modern Aesthetics: 1711-1735' in P. Kivy (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); T. M. Costelloe, *The British Aesthetic Tradition From Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 1-5. It is adopted here because it is concise and as Guyer and Costelloe have shown it is an appropriate concept in the context of early eighteenth-century Britain even if, as a word, it is not.

on from this, an analysis is made of the mid-century orthodox response to Shaftesbury's moral-aesthetic of nature, through the work of two of Mason's friends (and, once Mason took orders in 1755, colleagues in the Church of England): Rev. William Warburton and Rev. John Brown. Thus the first half of this chapter constitutes the philosophical and theological background to both poetic enthusiasm and Mason's orthodox response to it.

The second half of this chapter begins with a reading of William Whitehead's poem, *The Enthusiast* (1754). Whitehead was a close friend of Mason's and his work was a deliberate critique of Joseph Warton's Shaftesbury-influenced *The Enthusiast, or Lover of Nature*, a defining work of poetic enthusiasm. Thus Whitehead's poem offers a means of further contextualizing Mason's work and the orthodox response to poetic enthusiasm. The final section interprets Mason's play *Elfrida* by drawing together all the above analyses. It demonstrates that Mason's play evinces a conception of nature antithetical to poetic enthusiasm and one in which nature is morally ambiguous. To interpret *Elfrida* within the eighteenth century more broadly, the conclusion will position Mason's work within J. G. A. Pocock's notion of an eighteenth-century 'conservative enlightenment.' Pocock convincingly posits a project in which philosophies based on empiricism and reason combined with Whig politics and orthodox Anglicanism to protect the political and religious *status quo* of mid-eighteenth century Britain. By arguing that *Elfrida* was a part of this project, this chapter shows how Mason's conception of nature was influenced by his religious and political beliefs and the role Mason's work played in the eighteenth century more widely. The approach of Chapter One will be continued in Chapter Two's analysis of Mason's second play, *Caractacus* (1759).

Shaftesbury and Poetic Enthusiasm

Due to its negative connection with religious enthusiasm, any use of the word enthusiasm in the eighteenth century, or of related terms, such as ecstasy, rapture, fanaticism, or over-heated imagination, carried with it connotations of the

abandonment of reason due to over-excitement of the emotions.⁵ However, in an important, if slightly flawed study, *Elations: The Poetics of Enthusiasm in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (1999), Shaun Irlam argues:

“Towards the end of the seventeenth century, adjacent to the strictures of Augustan neoclassicism (an inadequate label for this period), the lineaments of religious enthusiasm were rehabilitated and made respectable as poetic enthusiasm by such writers as Sir Richard Blackmore, John Dennis, Isaac Watts, John Hughes, and Shaftesbury... It was a reappraisal that first gathered momentum with Edward Young and James Thomson and acquired critical mass after 1740 with the appearance of the Wartons, Akenside, Collins, and Gray.”⁶

Irlam’s account is useful because it convincingly signals a shift in literary taste towards poetic enthusiasm.⁷ Less convincing is the teleology imbedded in his argument that these writers and poets were working towards the successful rehabilitation of Enthusiasm, which would result in a form of Enthusiasm untroubled by the debates surrounding its religious counterpart.⁸ To begin to understand more closely why this new trend of poetic enthusiasm remained problematic, it should be considered as the direct descendant of the intertwining of ‘moral sense’ theory and an enthusiastic apostrophizing of nature championed in the philosophy of the Third Earl of Shaftesbury. Irlam ignores this connection.

⁵ For an example of one of Mason’s friends attacking enthusiasm, which is not examined here, see, R. Hurd, *The Mischiefs of Enthusiasm and Bigotry* (London, 1752).

⁶ S. Irlam, *Elations: The Poetics of Enthusiasm in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999): 54. Elsewhere Irlam summarizes his aim: “[to] rewrite the literary history of a particular period in English literature around the politics and literature of ‘Enthusiasm.’”

⁷ For similar accounts in a different register see, T. Clark, *The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a Crisis of Subjectivity in Romantic and Post-Romantic Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997): 65 and L. Sanyal, *English Literature in Eighteenth Century* (New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 2006): 72-77.

⁸ John Mee makes a similar criticism in, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 4-5. See also Mee’s review of Irlam, *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 52, No. 205 (Feb., 2001), pp. 117-119.

In his defining publication, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), which predominantly consisted of a collection of previously published tracts, Shaftesbury draws an analogy between aesthetic taste and what is now known as his moral sense theory.⁹ The analogy is an attempt to explain the essentially indefinable way in which his moral sense theory operates. Shaftesbury claims people instinctively judge right and wrong (his moral sense theory) in a similar way to which they instinctively judge an object as beautiful or ugly (aesthetic taste). Therefore, people are as pleased when they recognize what he calls “moral beauty” as when they see aesthetic beauty. His ambiguous fusion of language from both aesthetics and moral philosophy, of which ‘moral beauty’ is a striking example, results in passages such as:

“Will it not be found in this respect, above all, ‘That what is BEAUTIFUL is *Harmonious* and *Proportionable*; what is *Harmonious* and *Proportionable*, is TRUE; and what is at once both *Beautiful* and *True*, is of consequence, *Agreeable* and GOOD?’”¹⁰

And elsewhere:

“the Admiration and Love of Order, Harmony and Proportion, in whatever kind, is naturally improving to the Temper, advantageous to social Affection, and highly assistant to *Virtue*; which is it-self no other than the Love of Order and Beauty in Society.”¹¹

In both passages beauty is equated with the aesthetic properties of harmony and proportion. The first passage includes an important moral leap in which beauty is equated with truth and then truth with good. In the second passage a similar leap is

⁹ Shaftesbury rarely uses the term ‘moral sense’ and when he does he clearly attempts to regulate it with intellectual reasoning. See, I. Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 124. For earlier moral sense theorists see, M. B. Gill, *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): Ch. 7.

¹⁰ Shaftesbury, ‘Miscellaneous Writings’ in *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, Vol. 3 (London, 1732): 345.

¹¹ Shaftesbury, ‘An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit’ in *Characteristicks*, Vol. 2, 75.

made and the love of harmony and proportion results in virtue and sociability. The extent to which the precise meaning of Shaftesbury's philosophy is retrievable from such passages as these is not at stake here. What is important is that he applies this moral-aesthetic, no matter how vague, to the natural world. In the natural world he sees an abundance of order and beauty, which he assumes is a reflection of a benevolent 'universal mind', or God. Shaftesbury's response to nature is dressed in a language of rhapsody, or enthusiasm.¹²

"O Glorious *Nature!* Supremely Fair, and sovereignly Good... whose Study brings such Wisdom, and whose Contemplation such Delight; whose every single Work affords an ampler Scene, and is a nobler spectacle than all which ever Art presented! – O mighty *Nature!* Wise Substitute of Providence, impower'd Creatress! O Thou empowering [sic.] DEITY, Supreme Creator!"¹³

Shaftesbury is creating an aesthetic of nature in which emotional and enthusiastic response precedes rational response. Furthermore, such an aesthetic response to nature is morally improving. It was his apostrophizing of nature for its combination of natural and moral beauty that was influential on the poetic enthusiasm of the 1730s onwards. Indeed Shaftesbury himself claimed:

"...all sound *Love* and *Admiration* is ENTHUSIASM: The Transports of *Poets*, the Sublime of *Orators*... the Love of *Arts*... I am content to be this *new Enthusiast*."¹⁴

Implicit in Shaftesbury's use of 'new' at the end of this passage is an acknowledgement that he is trying to rehabilitate Enthusiasm. It is along these lines that Irlam's narrative can be sustained and the connection between Shaftesbury and poetic enthusiasm is most obvious. For example, in the explanatory preface to *Winter* (1726), the first book of *The Seasons*, James Thomson, one of Irlam's 'enthusiastic poets', writes, "I know no Subject more elevating, more amusing; more ready to

¹² A. D. McKillop, 'Shaftesbury in Joseph Warton's *Enthusiast*', *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 70, No. 5 (May, 1955), pp. 337-339; R. Terry, 'The Rhapsodical Manner in the Eighteenth Century', *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 87, No. 2 (April, 1992), pp. 273-285.

¹³ Shaftesbury, 'The Moralists, A Rhapsody' in *Characteristicks*, Vol. 2, 183.

¹⁴ Shaftesbury, 'The Moralists, A Rhapsody' in *Characteristicks*, Vol. 2, 400.

awake the poetical Enthusiasm, the philosophical Reflection, and the moral Sentiment, than the *Works of Nature*.”¹⁵ Like Shaftesbury, Thomson combines philosophy, morality, and nature to create a poetic style that he describes as enthusiastic. However, both in terms of eighteenth-century literature and philosophy Irlam’s narrative is far too one-sided. The majority of eighteenth-century orthodox theologians were unconvinced by Shaftesbury’s moral sense theory and the link he appears to postulate between morality and aesthetics. And poetic enthusiasm was as equally problematic for some poets, including William Mason. The explication of the orthodox response to Shaftesbury will create an appropriate foundation on which to base a reading of Mason’s attack on poetic enthusiasm in *Elfrida*.

The Orthodox Response to Shaftesbury

For eighteenth-century orthodox divines with Whig sympathies, such as will be explored here, Shaftesbury was a figure of two halves. In his favour, he was a Whig who supported limited power for the monarchy and encouraged free trade and religious toleration. But the problem was that he was a Deist and much of his philosophy was an attempt to undermine Christianity and his one time teacher, John Locke.¹⁶ Locke’s philosophy was hugely important to the way many orthodox theologians defended and explained their faith (ironically as Locke was a Socinianist). Here, the focus will be on how the orthodox divine, and friend of Mason, Rev. William Warburton attacked Shaftesbury’s moral sense theory. And, leading on from this, how Warburton’s colleague in the Church of England Rev. John Brown attacked Shaftesbury’s moral-aesthetics. Firstly, though, the intellectual roots of Warburton’s, Brown’s, and thus Mason’s, work, will be explored through the figure of John Locke.

¹⁵ J. Thomson, *Winter. A Poem*. Second Edition (London, 1726): 15. For a detailed discussion of Shaftesbury’s influence on Thomson see, S. Lethbridge, *James Thomson’s Defence of Poetry: Intertextual Allusion in The Seasons* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003). Page 55 has a bibliography of other works that explore this connection.

¹⁶ Warburton describes Shaftesbury: “He was temperate, chaste, honest, and a lover of his country... How far Mr. *Locke* contributed to the cultivating [of] these qualities, I will not enquire: But that inveterate rancor which he indulged against *Christianity*, it is certain he had not from his master. It was Mr. *Locke*’s love of it that seems principally to have exposed him to his pupil’s bitterest insults.” W. Warburton, *The Divine Legation of Moses*, Vol. 1, Fourth Edition (London, 1765): xxvii.

In the dedication to freethinkers that begins Warburton's sprawling nine-volume defence of orthodox Anglicanism, *The Divine Legation of Moses* (1738-41),¹⁷ he describes the difference between Locke and Shaftesbury:

“When Mr. *Locke* reasoned against *innate ideas*, he brought it as one argument against them, that virtue and vice, in many places, were not regulated by the nature of things, which they must have been, were there such *innate ideas*; but by mere fashion and vogue... But it was crime enough that he labored to overthrow *innate ideas*; things that the noble author [Shaftesbury] understood to be the foundation of his *moral sense*... In vain did Mr. *Locke* incessantly repeat that, “the divine law is the only true touchstone of moral rectitude.” This did but increase his pupil's resentment, who had his faculties possessed with the MORAL SENSE, as “the only true touchstone of moral rectitude.”¹⁸

As Warburton recognizes, Locke argued that human beings do not have any innate principles.¹⁹ From this Locke drew two important conclusions. Firstly, that personality, opinion, and belief were solely determined by culture and education. Secondly, that empirical investigation and intellectual reasoning are man's primary means of gaining knowledge. Due to his emphasis on reason Locke castigated religious enthusiasm as, “laying by Reason [to] set up Revelation, without it” and condemned it as, “the ungrounded Fancies of a Man's own Brain.”²⁰ Locke instead proposed a ‘reasonable’ belief in Christianity formed from a combination of Scripture and reasoning based on empirical observation.²¹ Moreover, Locke grounds his moral philosophy in revealed religion. He claimed that an action is only morally good or bad

¹⁷ The edition of *The Divine Legation* used is the fourth edition and dates from 1765 when it had been ‘enlarged and corrected.’ A comparison between the earlier editions and the fourth edition shows no substantial changes in the passages relevant to this study, only Warburton's attempts to clarify his position.

¹⁸ Warburton, *The Divine Legation of Moses*, Vol. 1, ix-xix.

¹⁹ J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding, In Four Books*, Fifth Edition (London, 1706): Ch. 2 and 3, respectively entitled, ‘No Innate Principles in the Mind’ and ‘No Innate Practical Principles.’

²⁰ Locke, *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding*, 587.

²¹ J. Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration* (London, 1689); *The Reasonableness of Christianity, As Delivered in the Scriptures* (London, 1693). Locke's works on religion are collected together with an excellent introduction in V. Nuovo, *John Locke: Writings on Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

depending whether or not it adheres with the divine law of God, which is reinforced by the prospect of “Rewards and Punishments, of infinite weight and duration, in another Life.”²²

Unlike Shaftesbury, Locke sees no connection between morality and an aesthetic of nature. In *A Second Treatise of Government* Locke writes:

“...land that is left wholly to nature, that hath no improvement or pasturage, tillage, or planting, is called, as indeed it is, *waste*; and we shall find the benefit of it amount to little more than nothing.”²³

In terms of aesthetics Locke was what is now known as an associationist.²⁴ Associationism, as one early eighteenth-century commentator puts it, “is where two or more ideas, constantly and immediately follow or succeed one another in the mind, so that the one shall almost infallibly produce the other; whether there be any natural relation between them, or not.”²⁵ For an associationist, when a person looks at an object the associations in their mind already held with that object condition their emotional response and aesthetic judgment. In the quote above Locke associates an empty landscape with unproductivity, which differs enormously from Shaftesbury’s enthusiastic moral response to nature. Moreover, for the majority of associationists, including Locke, the connection between an object and its association is potentially arbitrary, a point made more of in the following chapter. It is in this intellectual tradition, defined by Locke’s championing of reason, empiricism and (a skeptical form of) associationism, that Mason and his friends were writing and developed their response to Shaftesbury and poetic enthusiasm.

²² Locke, *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding*, 247. For a detailed discussion of this issue see, N. Wolterstoff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 134-148.

²³ J. Locke, *Two Treatise of Government* (London, 1713): 212. See also, 208.

²⁴ Locke, *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding*, 279-284. These pages encompass a section entitled ‘Of the Association of Ideas.’

²⁵ E. Chambers, *Cyclopædia: Or, An Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* Vol. 1. (London, 1728): 161. For a complete overview of associationism ranging from Hobbes and Locke to Alison see, M. Kallich, *The Association of Ideas and Critical Theory in Eighteenth-Century England* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970). For Locke’s impact on eighteenth-century aesthetic theory, predominantly through Joseph Addison see, Costelloe, *The British Aesthetic Tradition*, 38-49.

In the main body of *The Divine Legation*, the dedication of which was used above to introduce Locke's philosophy, William Warburton develops his own 'threefold cord' approach to moral philosophy. He attempts to moderate between what he saw as the three possible foundations of moral rectitude: moral sense/instinct, reason/the essential difference of things, and the will of God/divine law.²⁶ Warburton's attempt, spread over twenty-seven pages has recently been described as, "The most elaborate reconciling project undertaken by an eighteenth-century moralist."²⁷ However, it was widely criticized in the eighteenth-century, as it is now, for 'theistic volunteerism' and for oversimplifying the case for moral sense theory and reason.²⁸ It is useful here because of the manner in which Warburton represents Shaftesbury's moral sense theory.

When critiquing Shaftesbury's moral sense theory, Warburton argues, "Men are misled by the name of *instinct* (which we allow the *moral sense* to be) to imagine that its impressions operate very strongly... [But] it is only a friendly monitor of the judgment; and a conciliator, as it were between Reason and the sensual appetites..."²⁹ He goes on to describe the moral sense as "weak", "delicate" and "easily lost" because it can be "confounded by other appetites." He makes plain what he means by 'other appetites':

"National Manners... would in time, effectually, though insensibly, efface the idea of the *moral sense*, in the generality of men. Almost infinite are the popular Customs, in

²⁶ Warburton, *The Divine Legation of Moses*, 87.

²⁷ T. H. Irwin, *The Threefold Cord: Reconciling Strategies in Moral Theory* in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. 108, (2008), pp. 121-133: 126.

²⁸ For eighteenth-century critiques see, C. Trotter, *Remarks upon some Writers in the Controversy concerning the Foundation of Moral Duty and Moral Obligation* first printed anonymously in *The History of the Works of the Learned* (London, 1743) and T. Bott, *An Answer to the Reverend Mr. Warburton's Divine Legation of Moses* (London, 1743): Part 3. For modern day critiques see, J. Harris, 'Answering Bayle's Question: Religious Belief in the Moral Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment' in D. Garber and S. M. Nadler (eds.), *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 229-254 and T. H. Irwin, *The Development of Ethics, Vol. 2: From Suarez to Rousseau* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 831-837.

²⁹ Warburton, *The Divine Legation of Moses*, 105.

the several nations and ages of mankind, which owe their birth to the more violent passions of fear, lust, and anger... *Custom* is a power which opposes the *moral sense* not partially, or at certain times and places, but universally.”³⁰

Following Locke very closely, Warburton’s point is that the human ways of thinking and reacting are culturally conditioned – the Shaftesbury vs. Locke argument over innate principles certainly has similarities to the nature vs. nurture debates of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries – to the point where culture becomes indistinguishable from human instinct. Warburton differs from Locke by admitting that the moral sense exists. He describes it as a mediator between reason and the appetites. Although he quickly goes on to claim that the moral sense is too easily confused with culturally determined desires to be a useful source of moral knowledge, he displays a way of thinking about the problem that will prove useful in understanding *Caractacus*. In general, however, for Warburton moral sense theory is dangerous because it makes the individual person the source of moral judgment. Theoretically this might be okay but the moral sense of each individual has been warped in different ways by culture and habit. Each individual will therefore make different moral judgments. The result of moral sense theory is therefore moral subjectivism, which strongly echoes Mason’s sermon against religious enthusiasm quoted at the beginning of this chapter. As with Locke, Warburton does not entertain the possibility of a relationship between aesthetics and morality and ignores the issue throughout his critique of Shaftesbury.

One man who did not ignore the issue of Shaftesbury’s moral-aesthetics was Rev. John Brown. Inspired and encouraged by Warburton,³¹ Brown continued the orthodox

³⁰ Warburton, *The Divine Legation of Moses*, 107-108.

³¹ Brown had caught the attention of Warburton with his *Essay on Satire, Occasion’d by the Death of Mr. Pope* (1745), which had praised both Warburton and Pope. Through Warburton Brown was introduced to the Ralph Allen Circle at Prior Park (*Essays on the Characteristics* is dedicated to Allen). See, W. Roberts, *A Dawn of Imaginative Feeling: The Contribution of John Brown (1715-66) to Eighteenth-Century Thought and Literature* (Carlisle: Northern Academic Press, 1996). Eventually Brown and Warburton would have a serious falling out. Part of this was that in *Characteristics* Brown clearly disagrees with elements of Warburton’s work. Warburton lamented as much to Richard Hurd. See, T. Cadell and W. Davies (eds.), *Letters from a Late Eminent Prelate to His Friend*, Second Edition (London, 1809): 52-3, 58-59.

attack on Shaftesbury in *Essay on the Characteristics* (1751).³² Within the essay Brown offers the following criticism of Shaftesbury's fusion of language from the lexicons of aesthetics and moral philosophy:

“Nothing is so common among the Writers on Morality as ‘the Harmony of Virtue’ – ‘The Proportion of Virtue.’ So the noble writer [Shaftesbury] frequently expresseth himself. But his favourite Term, borrowed indeed from the Ancients, is ‘the BEAUTY of Virtue.’... Of this our Author and his Followers, especially the most ingenious of them [Francis Hutcheson], are so *enamoured*, that they seem utterly to have forgot they are *talking in Metaphor*.”³³

Brown claims that the Shaftesburians have become ‘so enamoured’ with their analogy between aesthetic taste and moral philosophy that the analogy has become inappropriate.³⁴ The term ‘so enamoured’ insinuates their enthusiasm has got the better of them. For Brown, the realms of morality and aesthetics should be kept separate. Later in the same essay, using Joseph Addison's phrase ‘Pleasures of the Imagination’ to mean a pleasurable aesthetic response to an artwork, Brown makes an argument against Shaftesbury's use of an analogy between aesthetic taste and moral judgment:

“’Tis true, the Pleasures of the Imagination and Virtue are often *united* in the same Mind; but ‘tis equally true, that they are often *separate*; that they who are most sensible to the *one*, are entire Strangers to the *other*; that one Man, to *purchase* a fine

³² The essay is composed of three sections. The first section was an attack on Shaftesbury's use of ridicule as a test of truth. The second attacks Shaftesbury's moral sense theory. The third section a defence of religious revelation.

³³ Brown, *Essays on the Characteristics*, 161-162. A footnote to the text itself makes it clear that ‘the most ingenious’ of Shaftesbury's followers is intended to mean Francis Hutcheson.

³⁴ Interestingly, although Brown does not entirely mistrust the use of metaphors in argument, Locke did. Metaphor for Locke was a manifestation of ‘wit’ and as such inappropriate for argument as it would not stand up to the “severe Rules of Truth.” See, Locke, *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding*, 90, 589. Also, S. H. Clark, “‘The Whole Internal World His Own’: Locke and Metaphor Reconsidered,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (Apr., 1998), pp. 241-265.

Picture, will *oppress* his Tenant; that another, to *relieve* his distressed Tenant, will *sell* his Statues or his Pictures.”³⁵

There is no proof of a necessary connection between aesthetic taste and moral philosophy. A person might have perfect aesthetic taste and be virtuous. But he may also have perfect aesthetic taste and not be virtuous. Aesthetics and morality are therefore not analogous and moral-aesthetics is a philosophically unsound way to approach the world. Like Warburton in *The Divine Legation*, elsewhere in *Essay on the Characteristics* Brown points out the determining influence culture can have on the moral sense as a reason against its use as a foundation of moral rectitude, while at the same time confirming its existence.³⁶

Returning to Mason’s critique of religious enthusiasm that opened this chapter a similarity between that work and the work of Locke, Warburton, and Brown emerges. Religious enthusiasm, as Mason represents it, was dangerous because it was a form of Christian belief that seemed to espouse moral subjectivism and was not subjected to an objective and rational test. Similarly, for Warburton and Brown, moral sense theories also lead to moral subjectivism. Following Locke, they argued that morality should be founded on empirical reasoning and divine law. As the work of Brown most clearly shows, inherent in their championing of reasoning is the rejection of any form of moral-aesthetics.

It should come as no surprise then that, when a trend for poetic enthusiasm appeared in the 1730s and 40s, with obvious connections to Shaftesbury’s moral-aesthetics, it was challenged by Mason. For theologians, such as Warburton and Brown, it was out of their remit as they focused on purely theological disputations. For poets like Mason and his friend William Whitehead, it was a chance to defend the faith in their own discipline. Irlam’s narrative of an unproblematic development of poetic enthusiasm, defined in the work of Thomson, Young, the Wartons, Akenside, Collins, and Gray (a list to which can be added, John Gilbert Cooper, John Byrom, and Robert Blair), should certainly be challenged. But in addition it can be said that his narrative maps onto

³⁵ Brown, *Essays on the Characteristics*, 180. See also, 177-179, 189-190, 229. For the difference between aesthetic taste and religious belief see, 229-230.

³⁶ Brown, *Essays on the Characteristics*, 139-140, 206-207.

another frequently accepted idea. As the eighteenth century unfolded ‘natural’ nature, that is nature untouched by human hands, became widely accepted as worthy of aesthetic appreciation and played an important part in the rise of the English landscape garden.³⁷ In general this is true. But, as will now become clear, implicit in Mason’s and Whitehead’s challenges to poetic enthusiasm is a problematized aesthetic of ‘natural’ nature.

William Whitehead’s *The Enthusiast*

In turning from theology to William Whitehead’s poem *The Enthusiast* and William Mason’s play *Elfrida* it is important to be aware of differing genre conventions. Driven by logical argument Warburton’s and Brown’s systematic theological rebuttals of Shaftesbury are different to Whitehead’s and Mason’s poetic literature with its concerns for narrative consistency and poetic expression. But it is not collapsing literary genres into each other to argue that Mason’s and Whitehead’s works share an ideological foundation with Warburton’s and Brown’s. What comes to light is that both Whitehead and Mason play with genre conventions to reinforce their arguments and that their work offered a means by which complex theological ideas might be presented before a wider audience. The first of the two poetic works to be analyzed is William Whitehead’s *The Enthusiast* (1754), which was written as a rebuttal of Joseph Warton’s poem, *The Enthusiast, Or Lover of Nature* (first published 1744, revised 1748).³⁸ Warton’s poem, which will now be explored to set the context for Whitehead’s poem, is an exemplary piece of poetic enthusiasm.³⁹

³⁷ K. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983). For the impact of Shaftesbury’s ‘natural’ nature on British gardening see, See, C. H. Hinant, ‘A Philosophical Origin of the English Landscape Garden’, *Bulletin of Research in Humanities*, Vol. 93. (1980), pp. 292-306; J. D. Hunt, *Garden and Grove: The Italian Renaissance Garden in the English Imagination, 1600-1750* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1986): 180-184; T. Mowl, ‘Directions from the Grave: The Problem with Lord Shaftesbury’, *Garden History*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Spring, 2004), pp. 35-48; K. Myers, ‘Shaftesbury, Pope, And Original Sacred Nature’ *Garden History*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Summer, 2010), pp. 3-19.

³⁸ The first version was published as a stand-alone poem, *The Enthusiast* (London, 1744). Four years later a revised version appeared in Robert Dodsley (ed.), *A Collection of Poems, By Several Hands*, Vol. 3. (London, 1748): 68–78.

³⁹ In a later work Warton wrote, “Poetry, after all, cannot well subsist, at least is never so striking, without a tincture of enthusiasm.”³⁹ See, J. Warton, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope* (London, 1756): 320.

At the beginning of *The Enthusiast* Warton openly rejects what he labels, “artificial” nature and declares “Lead me from Gardens deckt with Art's vain Poms.”⁴⁰ He then wanders through a ‘natural’ landscape, growing ever more enthusiastic and in raptures about the effect it has on him. He exclaims:

All-beauteous nature! By thy boundless charms
Opprest, O where shall I begin thy praise,
Where turn th’ ecstatic eye, how ease my breast
That pants with wild astonishment and love!⁴¹

Warton’s rejection of artificial nature and enthusiasm for ‘natural’ nature includes a rejection of the city for the country, which itself is a rejection of vice for virtue and the present for the past.⁴² At the end of the poem five apparitions appear, Philosophy, Contemplation, Solitude, Virtue and Innocence, but only to “Forsake Britannia’s Isle; who fondly stoops/To Vice, her favourite Paramour.”⁴³

Compared to a poet such as John Gilbert Cooper, who writes in the preface to his poem *The Power of Harmony*, “It is observable, that whatever is true, just, and harmonious, whether in Nature or Morals, gives an instantaneous pleasure to the mind, exclusive of reflection”,⁴⁴ Warton’s application of a Shaftesburian moral-aesthetics is relatively obtuse. But throughout the poem there is a strong connection between an enthusiastic response to nature and virtue. In the four lines quoted above, nature inspires the poet to see with an ‘ecstatic eye’ and *feel* both ‘wild astonishment and love.’ In another passage “The Bards of old” gather in nature to “eagerly” learn “The moral strains she taught to mend mankind.”⁴⁵ And finally, echoing various passages in which Shaftesbury claims harmony “of whatever kind” and “uniformity of

⁴⁰ Dodsley, *A Collection of Poems By Several Hands*, 97.

⁴¹ Dodsley, *A Collection of Poems*, 102-103.

⁴² For example, Warton juxtaposes a lost ‘golden age’ with the ‘smoky cities’ of the eighteenth century.

⁴³ Dodsley, *A Collection of Poems*, 105.

⁴⁴ J. G. Cooper, *The Power of Harmony* (London, 1745): 5.

⁴⁵ Dodsley, *A Collection of Poems*, 98.

mind... are highly assistant to virtue”,⁴⁶ Warton praises nature for its ability “to raise, to soothe, to harmonize the mind.”⁴⁷ *The Enthusiast* highlights an enthusiastic response to nature as an appropriate aesthetic response and clearly connects an enthusiastic aesthetic response to nature with moral improvement. Thus Warton comes very close to evincing a Shaftesburian moral-aesthetics.

In order to contradict Warton’s poem, and others like it, William Whitehead’s *The Enthusiast* first adopts Warton’s ideas and then subverts them. Whitehead’s *The Enthusiast* begins as the year is turning from Spring to Summer, “When every flower on every hill/In every vale, had drank its fill...” Whitehead’s enthusiast serenely wanders through this idyll along a “devious way/With loitering steps regardless where...” The enthusiast finds himself in solitude away from the public world and away from, “the learn’d, the wise/The great.” In this solitude, “Contemplation points the road/Thro’ Nature’s charms to Nature’s God!” and a ‘Stoic stillness reigns.’ Whitehead describes the effect on the enthusiast:

The tyrant passions all subside,
Fear, anger, pity, shame and pride
No more my bosom move;
Yet still I felt, or seem’d to feel
A kind of visionary zeal
Of universal love.⁴⁸

Up to this point Whitehead’s poem is very similar to Warton’s. The figure is away from the city and in isolation surrounded by nature. Through a ‘visionary zeal’ (read, enthusiasm) they are led to *feel* love.⁴⁹ But all the while Whitehead has been

⁴⁶ Shaftesbury, ‘An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit’ in *Characteristicks*, Vol. 2 (London, 1732): 75-76.

⁴⁷ Dodsley, *A Collection of Poems*, 103.

⁴⁸ W. Whitehead, *The Enthusiast, An Ode in Poems on Several Occasions, with the Roman Father, A Tragedy* (London, 1754): 87-88.

⁴⁹ Although the calm of this passage does not match the consistently ‘enthusiastic’ tone of Warton’s poem Whitehead is also taking aim at other ‘Shaftesburian’ poets, such as Cooper whose, “intellectual Pow’rs/sink to divine repose” and Akenside who states, “the passions, gently sooth’d away/Sink to divine repose, and love and joy/Alone are waking.” See, J. G. Cooper, *The Power of Harmony*, 14, and M.

undermining the value of the enthusiast's actions by using words such as 'loitering' and 'regardless' that remove a sense of purposefulness and rationality. He brings the studied ambiguity of his poem to a climax when he states, "I felt, or *seem'd* to feel." In other words, the enthusiast is under an illusion. From this point on the poem turns into a condemnation of the unthinking and easily fooled enthusiast:

When lo! a voice! a voice I hear!
'Twas Reason whisper'd in my ear
These monitory strains:
What mean'st thou, man? would'st thou unbind
The ties which constitute thy kind,
The pleasures and the pains?⁵⁰

Whitehead introduces reason as an antidote for enthusiasm. The personified Reason's main complaint is that the enthusiast's love for nature and solitude has led him away from society and that in searching out only rapture and joy he has forfeited his humanity, which is composed of both pleasure and pain. Continuing in the guise of Reason Whitehead claims:

The same Almighty Power unseen
Who spreads the gay or solemn scene...
He bids the tyrant passions rage,
He bids them war eternal wage,
And combat each his foe:
Till from dissensions concords rise,
And beauties from deformities,
And happiness from woe.

At the beginning of the passage there is no visual connection to God, he is 'unseen.' In this way Whitehead forestalls any aesthetic connection between the natural world and moral knowledge (God being the assumed source of all moral knowledge). The

Akenside, *The Pleasures of Imagination. A Poem in Three Books*. (London, 1744): 14.

⁵⁰ Whitehead, *The Enthusiast*, 87-89.

last three lines assert a morally complex worldview that combats Shaftesburian ideas of harmony by claiming concord comes from dissension and beauty comes from deformities and happiness from woe. In answer to this moral complexity, Whitehead champions social benevolence, “Each bliss unshar’d is unenjoy’d/Each power is weak, unless employ’d/Some social good to gain.” He then again denies a link between aesthetics and virtue:

Shall light, and shade, and warmth, and air,
With those exalted joys compare
Which active virtue feels...

Whitehead closes by admitting that retreats into nature are useful but only as one of “life’s refreshing springs/To sooth him on his way” because ultimately “man was made for man.”⁵¹

Ideologically, William Whitehead’s poem is very similar to William Warburton’s and John Brown’s theology. He begins by undercutting the credibility of an enthusiastic response to nature by claiming it is illusory, which parallels Warburton’s and Brown’s criticisms of the moral sense for being too easily confused with culturally determined desires. Like Brown, Whitehead’s discrediting of enthusiasts and their emphasis on solitary retreat into nature is because virtue can only be achieved in a social setting. And, again like Brown, Whitehead insists that there is no relationship between aesthetics and virtue. What Whitehead does not explicitly do, which the theologians do, is to emphasize a religious motive to virtue. But the worldview of his poem can safely be described as religious, with its passages on God the creator of nature, who is intimately connected to reason and benevolently in control of circumstance: ‘He [God] bids the tyrant passions rage... And beauties from deformities/And happiness from woe.’

Turning now to William Mason’s *Elfrida*, the relationship between enthusiasm and reason takes on a new set of emphases. More than Whitehead, Mason is concerned to highlight the relationship between virtue, reason and God, and the lack of a positive

⁵¹ Whitehead, *The Enthusiast*, 90-91.

relationship between them and the appearance of nature. Although he is less blatant in his attack on poetic enthusiasm, Mason clearly has poetic enthusiasts in mind as one of several targets. A play gives him more scope for targets than a relatively short poem such as Whitehead's would have done.

William Mason's *Elfrida*

William Mason's *Elfrida* is a play set in tenth-century Britain. The play's narrative and its characters are historically accurate in as much as they follow the details of Elfrida's life as it is recorded in medieval accounts, such as William of Malmesbury's *Deeds of the English Kings* (1125). The plot of Mason's play revolves around the clandestine marriage of Elfrida, daughter of Orgar, Earl of Devonshire, and Athelwold, a Lord and courtier to King Edgar. Having heard rumours of Elfrida's beauty King Edgar sends Athelwold to see if they are true. Athelwold falls in love with Elfrida, and she with him, and they marry. Athelwold attempts to hide the marriage at court by keeping Elfrida at his country retreat. Elfrida's father, not knowing the real reason for his daughter's seclusion, sees it as insulting and comes to hate Athelwold. King Edgar eventually finds out about the marriage. He pretends to forgive Athelwold and invites him hunting but then murders him. Widowed, Elfrida commits herself to religious duty rather than marry again, though her father tries to convince her to marry the king. The play ends here but the medieval histories record that Elfrida did not end up in a convent but instead married the king.

Mason's *Elfrida* was the first attempt in the English language to resurrect the form of Ancient Greek tragedies, including a chorus, since Milton's *Samson Agonistes* (1671). As Edith Hall and Fiona Macintosh have pointed out *Elfrida* has "echoes of" four Ancient Greek tragedies: Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and *Trachiniae*, and Euripides' *Hippolytus*, and *Phoenissae*.⁵² Besides its antiquarian interest in Greek revivalism and British history, for an eighteenth-century audience it would have been seen as a comment on the issues surrounding Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act (1753) and as

⁵² F. Hall and E. Macintosh, *Greek Tragedy and the British Theatre, 1600-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 191.

anti-Catholic propaganda.⁵³ But here the task is to highlight the relationship between the central moral of the play, which is the importance of truth, and an aesthetic of nature.

Ancient Greek tragedies, such as *Philoctetes*, often use disguises, lies, and tragic irony to explore the moral importance of truth.⁵⁴ In *Philoctetes* the otherwise morally upright Neoptolemus fools Philoctetes into thinking he hates Odysseus in order to gain the bow of Heracles. Ultimately, however, Neoptolemus realizes the value of living truthfully because it benefits the wider community even if it does not benefit himself personally.⁵⁵ As Mason was basing his play on Ancient Greek tragedies it is no surprise that similar themes of truth, lies, disguise and irony are present in *Elfrida*. Indeed all of the crucial narrative moments of Mason's play turn on false appearance. At first Orgar appears on stage disguised as a kindly hermit, tricking the chorus into allowing him to stay in their private grove, where he hears the truth behind Athelwold's actions. Athelwold's motives for keeping Elfrida in the country are kept secret and it is the unveiling of the secret to the King that leads to Athelwold's death. The King lies to Athelwold in order to lure him out hunting so that he can kill him, initiating the tragic climax of the play. Alongside the characters' actions, nature is also used to present moral lessons.

The first instance of Mason using a combination of irony and nature occurs in the opening passage. The entire play unfolds on a lawn in front of Athelwold's castle and the following words, spoken by Orgar, set the scene:

How nobly does this venerable wood,

⁵³ Hall and Macintosh have an excellent chapter on the relationship between Whitehead's *Creusa, Queen of Athens* (1754) and the Marriage Act. It is therefore surprising that *Elfrida* is not discussed as well. See, Hall and Macintosh, *Greek Tragedy*, Ch. 5. For *Elfrida* in relation to historical revivalism see, J. Black, *Culture in Eighteenth-Century England: A Subject for Taste* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005): 222-223.

⁵⁴ For the use of irony in Ancient Greek tragedies see, R. B. Rutherford, *Greek Tragic Style: Form, Language and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): Ch. 8.

⁵⁵ For an example of the complexity of truth in Sophocles' play see, N. Austin, *Sophocles' Philoctetes and the Great Train Robbery* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011): 144-145.

Gilt with the glories of the orient sun,
Embosom yon fair mansion! The soft air
Salutes me with most cool and temp'rate breath;
And, as I tread, the flow'r-besprinkled lawn
Sends up a gale of fragrance. I should guess,
If e'er Content deign'd visit mortal clime,
This was her place of dearest-residence.
Grant Heav'n I find it such!⁵⁶

The irony is in the last three lines because the spot that seems so irenic will turn out to be a scene of emotional turmoil. The play thus begins on an ironic note initiated by the seemingly ideal natural surroundings (that Orgar can only 'guess' highlights the issue of making judgments based on appearances). Later in the play when news reaches Harewood that King Edgar is on his way Elfrida plans to dull her beauty by using the dye of a flower. Before she does, she looks at the flower and, speaking to the Chorus, moralizes:

'Tis strange, my Virgins, this sweet child of Summer,
Silken and soft, whose breath perfumes the air,
Whose gay vest paints the Morn, should in its bosom
Hide such pollution? Yet 'tis often thus:
All are not as they seem.⁵⁷

Within the play this is one of the most potent passages. As a structural device it directly follows the Chorus' Ode to Constancy and marks the beginning of a section that culminates with their Ode to Truth. Within this new section (bookmarked by the two odes) is the revelation of another untruth: Elfrida's father has been masquerading as an itinerant old man and disapproves of her marriage to Athelwold. Moreover, to heighten the impact of the passage as an emotional and ideological device Mason has it spoken by Elfrida. She is the only central character in the play that acts without any form of deceit. The passage therefore gives moral wisdom to Elfrida's actions as well as being a pithy summation of the play's moral centre. The moral also has a

⁵⁶ Mason, *Elfrida*, 1.

⁵⁷ Mason, *Elfrida*, 38.

secondary meaning, however, as the object of Elfrida's moralizing is a flower, a natural object. Her reasoning implies that nature cannot be taken at face value, regardless of its beauty.

Mason again draws out the danger of a superficial appreciation of nature near the end of the play. Once the King and Athelwold leave Elfrida to go hunting, but before the messenger arrives with the news that the King has killed Athelwold, the Chorus voices its doubt over the King's intentions:

The same sequester'd Pine,
Which veils the gurgling Ringdove with its boughs,
Whets with its knotty trunk the Boar's vext tooth,
And points each fang with death.⁵⁸

The passage contains the same meaning as Elfrida's moralizing over the flower because the appearance of nature is again morally indifferent. That is not to say that nature is not beautiful, it clearly can be, but that it has no sure connection with moral truth. In two of the Chorus' four odes, Ode to Content and Ode to Truth,⁵⁹ Mason offers his solution to the moral complexity surrounding truth and points his critique in the direction of poetic enthusiasm.

The first of the two odes to appear in the play is Ode to Content. The ode is a response to Elfrida's request for the Chorus to sing her a song to pass the time as she awaits the arrival of Athelwold. Her request is that they sing in the,

vein
Of that old minstrelsy, which whilom breath'd
Thro' each time-honor'd grove of British oak.
There, where the spreading consecrated boughs
Fed the sage mistletoe, the holy Druids

⁵⁸ Mason, *Elfrida*, 69.

⁵⁹ The Ode was also printed as a separate piece. See, J. Drummond (ed.), *A Collection of Poems for Reading and Repetition. Selected from the most Celebrated British poets*, (Edinburgh, 1762) and *The Beauties of the English Drama*, Vol. 4 (London, 1777). In both these collections other sections of *Elfrida* are also quoted.

Lay rapt in moral musings; while the Bards
Call'd from their wiry harps such solemn airs,
As drew down Fancy from the realms of Light
To paint some radiant vision on their minds,
Of high mysterious import.

Elfrida's request is essentially to ask that the Chorus will sing to her in a style that used to encourage ancient druids to lie 'rapt in moral musings.' The combination of rapt (read, rapture or rhapsody) and moralizing points firmly towards Shaftesbury's work and the poets influenced by him. That enthusiasm is the target of this passage is further reinforced by the use of the words fancy, vision, and mysterious. The reference to druids may be a direct reference to the passage in Warton quoted above. It is also an early indication of Mason's antipathy towards ancient druids, explored in greater detail in Chapter Two.⁶⁰ Mason uses the Chorus' reply, entitled Ode to Content, to make his criticism of enthusiasm:

The Turtle tells her plaintive tale,
Sequester'd in some shadowy vale;
The Lark in radiant aether flotes,
And swells his wild extatic notes:
Meanwhile on yonder hawthorn spray
The Linnet wakes her temp'rate lay;
She haunts no solitary shade,
She flutters o'er no sun-shine mean,
No love-lorn griefs depress her song,
No raptures lift it loudly high,
But soft she trills, amid th' aerial throng,
Smooth simple strains of sob'rest harmony.⁶¹

The Chorus' reply to Elfrida denies her request, suggesting instead a moral of restraint. They use a linnet as a metaphor for content. Content is a middle way

⁶⁰ It may also be a reference to the "sacred groves" in Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks* (London, 1732): 343.

⁶¹ Mason, *Elfrida*, 17-18.

between melancholy and enthusiasm, which are metaphorically referred to as a turtledove and lark respectively. The lark (enthusiasm) is characterized as singing in ‘wild extatic notes’, whereas the linnet (content) does not sing in ‘raptures.’ The use of extatic and raptures are both links to poetic enthusiasm. Moreover, the linnet maps onto the methodology of the defenders of orthodoxy in choosing a middle way between two extremes: enthusiasm and rational dissent. Ode to Truth, the last of the Chorus’ moralizing odes helps put their advice into a more specific context.

The Ode to Truth is primarily anti-Catholic. It disparages prayers of supplication to saints, angels, and Mary,⁶² encouraging instead the application of reason, which it does in the voice of Truth:

“Attend, ye Sons of Men; attend, and say,”
Does not enough of my refulgent ray
Break thro’ the veil of your mortality!
Say, does not Reason in this form descry
Unnumber’d, nameless glories, that surpass
The Angel’s floating pomp, the Seraph’s glowing grace?

In this stanza reason far outweighs the importance of angels and seraphs and is described as the form of Truth’s ‘refulgent ray.’ Mason is making a confident statement in favour of both a faith based on reason and the new philosophies and sciences that are now considered to have defined the intellectual progress of the ‘Enlightenment.’ The circumspection of Ode to Content and the rationality of Ode to Truth result in a rejection of anything mysterious, be it poetic enthusiasm or Catholicism, and a championing of reason. Importantly there is an evocation of the Christian religion at the end of Ode to Truth:

Know, Mortals, know; ere first ye sprung,
Ere first these in æther hung,
I [Truth] shone amid the heav’nly throng.

⁶² The third stanza is anti-Marian, beginning with the confrontational, “Shall then your earth-born daughters vie/With me?” and continuing to assert Mary was human and nothing more.

These eyes beheld Creation's day,
This voice began the choral lay,
And taught Archangels their triumphant song.
Pleas'd I survey'd bright Nature's gradual birth...

The ode continues by describing a chronology of the creation of the world in a manner that mirrors the Genesis account. It concludes:

Last Man arose, erect in youthful grace,
Heav'n's hallow'd image stamp'd upon his face,
And, as he rose, the high behest was giv'n,
"That I alone of all the host of heav'n,
"Should reign Protectress of the godlike Youth"
Thus the Almighty spake: he spake and call'd me Truth.⁶³

These final passages claim that truth is the protector of mankind. They imply that truth, which Mason has already intertwined with reason, is mankind's ultimate defence. Moreover, truth, and therefore reason, is God-given. The Ode draws on the Genesis account to affirm its roots in the Bible and to avoid allowing a non-biblical interpretation of its message.

In *Elfrida* Mason opens up questions about the nature of truth and answers them with a combination of circumspection and the application of God-given reason. Within this broad moral arc he questions whether there is a relationship between morality and an aesthetic appreciation of the natural world. He answers this, as had Warburton and Brown before him, and as Whitehead would soon after him, in the negative. For Mason, nature can seem irenic but hide tragedy, it can seem beautiful but hide ugliness, and it shelters both the gentle bird and the brutish boar. Taking the Ode to Content into consideration, Mason clearly takes aim at poets who respond enthusiastically to nature and to them he suggests a moral of caution. Although not obviously referenced in the play's narrative Mason's cautions over false appearances and rhapsodies come from the same reasoning that allowed Warburton, Brown, and

⁶³ Mason, *Elfrida*, 51-52.

Whitehead, to criticize the moral sense and are at their foundation Lockean, based in an objective, empirical and ‘reasonable’ approach to the natural world and morality.

Conclusion

In 1744 Mason published one of his very first poems, *Il Pacifico* (1744, revised 1747, first published 1748).⁶⁴ An admittedly juvenile composition, one passage of it does make an interesting comparison with the above readings:

I'll swift retreat,
Where Camus winds with murmur sweet:
There teach me, piercing Locke, t' explore
The busy mind's ideal store;
There, heav'n-rapt Newton, guide my way
Mid rolling worlds, thro' floods of day,
To mark the vagrant comets road,
And thro' his wonders trace the God.⁶⁵

Mason is offering an assessment of learning at Cambridge. He claims that scientific exploration of nature reveals God amongst his works, which is a methodology often labeled physico-theology and linked with Newtonian science and Lockean empiricism.⁶⁶ Using *Il Pacifico* it could be strongly argued that in the early 1740s, that is during his university years and just after, Mason had a relatively simple conception of nature.

⁶⁴ Mason recalls, “It was not till about the year 1747 that I had the happiness of being introduced to the acquaintance of Mr. Gray. Some very juvenile imitations of Milton's juvenile poems, which I had written a year or two before, and of which the Monody on Mr. Pope's death was the principal, he then, at the request of one of my friends, was so obliging as to revise.” Mason, *The Poems of Mr. Gray*, 166.

⁶⁵ Bentham (ed.), *Gratulatio Academicæ Cantabrigiensis*, 101-102.

⁶⁶ The best reading of this trope is M. Røstvig's, *Happy Man: Studies in Metamorphoses of a Classical Ideal*, Vols. 1 and 2 (Oslo, 1962). For the application of science to theology and literature in the period see, M. H. Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetic of the Infinite* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959).

This chapter has in effect argued that Mason's play *Elfrida* demonstrates the necessity for a physico-theological and empirical approach to nature, from which the existence of God must be intellectually inferred. Furthermore, it has shown how *Elfrida* rejected an enthusiastic moral-aesthetic of nature, which had a great influence on the growing trend for poetic enthusiasm. And it has demonstrated that Mason's rejection of an enthusiastic moral-aesthetics sits within a wider rejection of the Third Earl of Shaftesbury's philosophy made by his friends in the Church of England. Due to the close ideological relationship of *Elfrida* to the works of men like William Warburton and John Brown, a political interpretation of Mason's play can be offered.

J. G. A. Pocock has convincingly described a 'conservative enlightenment', which took place during the first half of the eighteenth century and within which he names Warburton as a key figure.⁶⁷ The term conservative enlightenment denotes, as Karen O'Brien puts it, "a broadly Whiggish Enlightenment, concerned to preserve the constitutional arrangements, the (restricted) civil rights and religious toleration enshrined in the settlement of 1688-89, as well as to... preserve a civil social space from religious fanaticism."⁶⁸ Simply put, Warburton, and his circle of friends and followers, which includes Brown, Whitehead, and Mason,⁶⁹ supported both the

⁶⁷ The term, also known as the 'Clerical Enlightenment' and 'Religious Enlightenment.' See Pocock, *Clergy and Commerce*. For other approaches that are inspired by, and revisions of Pocock's work see, J. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity and the Emancipation of Man, 1670-1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); J. Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680-160* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); R. Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin Press, 2000); D. Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment*.

⁶⁸ K. O'Brien, *Women and the Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 4.

⁶⁹ Warburton's group of friends and followers, which also includes Richard Hurd, Thomas Balguy, John Towne and Jonathan Toup, has historically been labeled the 'Warburtonians.' However, the term is rejected here because it flattens differences between the men and suggests an invariability of ideas and activity where there was in fact great diversity. For a history of the term and the controversies they were engaged in see, E. Evans, *Warburton and the Warburtonians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932). The term has been used in Simon During's *Exit Capitalism: Literary Culture, Theory, and Post-Secular Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2009). For the importance of Warburton see, B. W. Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England: Theological Debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford, 1998), Ch. 5; R. G. Ingram, 'William Warburton, Divine Action, and Enlightened Christianity', in W. Gibson and R. G. Ingram (eds.), *Religious Identities in Britain*,

political and theological *status quo*, which since the ascension of George I in 1714 was defined by a mutually supportive Whig government and a national church espousing orthodox Anglicanism.⁷⁰ Moreover, like the linnet of *Elfrida*, contributors to the Conservative Enlightenment positioned their work between the enthusiasm of so-called religious fanatics, who claimed a personal relationship with God, and the Rational Dissenters, who purported to use reason as a means of disproving orthodox belief, resulting in a number of heresies but predominantly Arianism, Socinianism, Deism, and skepticism.

As seen above, *Elfrida* sets the criticism of poetic enthusiasm alongside a castigation of Catholicism and, not analyzed here, an unrestrained monarchy (see King Edgar's murder of Athelwold). In the mid-century Catholicism was still seen as a threat to civil society – the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 occurred only seven years before *Elfrida* was published. And Mason's treatment of King Edgar shows that he supported a limit on the monarchy's political power, which was seen by Whigs as central to the 1688 settlement. Thus *Elfrida* accords with O'Brien's description of the Conservative Enlightenment. In a subtler way Mason's emphasis on reason, which he ties in with the creation account in Genesis, shows that the aesthetic of nature he adopted and promoted used the same epistemology and reasoning as Warburton, Brown, and other theologians who were then defending the political *status quo* and the Church of England; a method he himself also promoted in his sermons. The conclusion must be that *Elfrida* contributed to a political and theological project that sought to defend an established Whig government and Anglican orthodoxy. At the same time, it can also be concluded that Mason's philosophical conception of nature was inherently Whiggish and orthodox.

Turning now to Mason's second antiquarian play, *Caractacus*, it will be argued that Mason continues to problematize nature as morally ambiguous, but this time by using theories of the sublime and the figures of ancient druids. It will further be argued that he questions and complicates the relationship between the natural and rhetorical

1660-1832 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); R. M. Ryley, *William Warburton* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984).

⁷⁰ N. Yates, *Eighteenth-Century Britain: Religion and Politics, 1714-1815* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2008): 20-24, 70-72.

sublime, sentimentality, and moral knowledge. Thus Chapter Two at once broadens and nuances the arguments of this chapter. It shows how Mason's conception of nature developed through the 1750s, but how his support for Anglican orthodoxy and Whig politics continued.

Chapter 2. Enthusiasm and Nature: Theology and Politics in *Caractacus*

In the first section of his incalculably influential treatise on sublime rhetoric Dionysius Longinus wrote:

“... the Sublime not only persuades, but even throws an Audience into Transport. The Marvellous always works with more surprising Force, than that which barely persuades or delights. In most Cases, it is wholly in our own Power, either to resist or yield to persuasion. But the Sublime, endued with Strength irresistible, strikes home, and triumphs over every Hearer.”¹

Longinus argues that sublime rhetoric can persuade an audience regardless of whether or not they want to be persuaded. He raises serious questions about the relationship between sublime rhetoric and truth. The power of sublime rhetoric to persuade does not lie in the truthfulness of the words spoken, as is claimed of logical or rational argument, but its ability to ‘transport’ or ‘enthuse’ a listener.² One man in the eighteenth century who was skeptical of the sublime for this reason was William Warburton. In a work aimed at the refutation of religious enthusiasm, he asked, “What is SUBLIMITY but the application of such images, as arbitrary or casual connexions [sic.], rather than their own native grandeur, however dignified and ennobled?” He concluded that the aim of such rhetoric was, “to stifle reason, and inflame the passions” before adding, “But the propagation of Christian Truths indispensably requires the aid of reason, and requires no other human aid.”³

The first section of this chapter demonstrates that in his second play *Caractacus* (1759) William Mason adopts a similarly skeptical version of the rhetorical sublime

¹ W. Smith (trans.), *Dionysius Longinus on the Sublime* (London, 1739): 3.

² For other analyses see, P. Bullard, ‘Rhetoric and Eloquence: The Language of Persuasion’ in J. Harris (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 100; J. Lamb, ‘The Sublime’ in G. Kennedy, H.B. Nisbet, C. Rawson (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, Vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 394-416.

³ Warburton, *The Doctrine of Grace*, 72, 75. For other more intricate skeptical uses of the sublime related to Toryism see, J. Noggle, *The Skeptical Sublime: Aesthetic Ideology in Pope and the Tory Satirists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); C. Fanning, ‘The Scriblerian Sublime’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 45, No. 3, Restoration and Eighteenth Century (Summer, 2005), pp. 647-667.

to Warburton, and that he applies it to the natural sublime as well as the rhetorical sublime in order to further propagate rationality over enthusiasm. It will be argued that he makes this point predominantly through a juxtaposition of the play's ancient druids and the rationality of Caractacus' sentimental daughter Evelina. Building on this it will be shown how Mason's combination of the sublime and the druids subverts positive versions of ancient British druids that appeared in works of poetic enthusiasm. Ultimately, his more reprehensible version of ancient druids played a small part in the way the British landscape was engaged with later in the century and into the nineteenth.

The final section returns to the internal content of *Caractacus* to argue that, alongside issues of rationality and enthusiasm, Mason metaphorically uses the landscape of his play to raise questions about political liberty, colonialism, and religious tolerance. To conclude, the issues explored in the first two chapters of this thesis will be summarized and used to demonstrate that Mason's conception of nature was imbued with religion and politics and that, as a young man, nature was an important means by which he expressed and argued for the validity of his beliefs.

The 'Associative' Natural Sublime in *Caractacus*

The plot of *Caractacus* is a conflation, with entirely original additions, of two accounts of Roman Britain in Tacitus' *Annals*: the defeat and capture of Caractacus (12.33-38) and the last stand of the Druids (14.29-30).⁴ The Roman general Aulus Didius is attempting to capture the British King Caractacus. Caractacus has fled to Mona (modern day Anglesey) with his daughter Evelina to seek the protection of the druids who live there. Aulus Didius uses two captured British princes, Elidurus and Vellinus (sons of Queen Cartimandua), to capture Caractacus, though only Vellinus is

⁴ Mason makes very specific references to Tacitus' account. The language he uses suggests he is lifting from a 1716 edition, *The Annals and History of Cornelius Tacitus; His account of the Ancient Germans, and the Life of Agricola. Made English by Several Hands. With Political Reflections from Monsieur Amelot de la Houssay; and Notes of the Learned Sir Henry Savile, Rickius, and Others. In Three Volumes.* The Second Edition, Vol. 2 (London, 1716): 241-248, 342. As the notes at the back of the play make clear additional ancient sources were Julius Caesar's *Gaelic Wars*, Pliny's *Natural History*, Dion Chrysostom's *Discourses*, Strabo's *Geography*, The Hervarer Saga, and Vettius Valens (through John Selden).

wholeheartedly compliant. Caractacus' son Arvirgus, who at the beginning of the play is believed to have abandoned his father, appears towards the end to lead Britain into battle against the Romans. He is joined by Elidurus, who in the course of the play breaks with his brother and sides with the Britons. The Britons lose and Arvirgus is slain in the battle. Caractacus then takes up arms, but is captured. The play ends with Caractacus and Evelina (who, true to Mason's sentimental streak, has fallen in love with Elidurus) being taken to Rome as captives.

Although the narrative of the play is focused on the lay Britons, the most important characters are the druids. They form the chorus of the play and regularly advise the Britons on military and moral issues. However, throughout the play Mason subtly undercuts the druids' advice and moral rectitude to show they are manipulative, irrational and immoral. An important way in which Mason does this is by contrasting the sublime rites, trances and dreams through which the druids control the Britons with the rationality and sentimentality of Caractacus' daughter Evelina. As will be shown this affects the way the natural sublime is to be understood in *Caractacus*.

The connection between the ancient druids and the sublime is intimated by one of the most important eighteenth-century authorities on druids, Rev. Henry Rowlands. Rowlands lived and worked on Anglesey and produced a history of the island entitled *Mona Antiqua Restaurata* (1723),⁵ which Mason makes use of in *Caractacus*. Rowlands states:

"...one thing there was that struck a general Terrour [sic.], with which they [the druids] might awe and over-rule their Laicks to almost any thing they pleas'd; and that was what these *Druids* took the greatest Care and Pains to inculcate to the People, viz. the People's indispensable Obligation of the necessary Rites and Duties of Oblations and Sacrifice..."⁶

⁵ S. Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity: Ancient Britain and the Romantic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); G. Parry, *The Trophies of Time: English Antiquarians of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, second ed. 2007): 329.

⁶ H. Rowlands, *Mona Antiqua Restaurata* (Dublin, 1723): 66-67.

For Rowlands the druids' ability to control the laity (laicks) rests in their ability to keep them in a state of terror and awe. They achieve this through religious rites and obligations. By the mid-eighteenth century the emotional states of terror and awe had both become commonplaces of the sublime.⁷ In his famous treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757, rev. 1759) Edmund Burke writes, "[Terror] robs the mind of all its power of acting and reasoning," and awe "takes away the free use of [our] faculties."⁸ As Longinus and Warburton do in the passages that open this chapter, Burke argues the sublime overpowers human reason. Moreover, when discussing the relationship of obscurity to the sublime, Burke gives a clear-cut example of how nature might be used as a means to create fear and terror and thus reinforce rule. He uses druids as his example:

"Those despotic governments, which are founded on the passions of men, and principally upon the passion of fear, keep their chief as much as may be from the public eye. The policy has been the same in many cases of religion. Almost all the heathen temples were dark... For this purpose too the druids performed all their ceremonies in the bosom of the darkest woods, and in the shade of the oldest and most spreading oaks."⁹

The combination of terror, fear, power and nature found in Burke is also found in *Caractacus*. The play opens with a description of the druids' grove, in which the entire play is set. It is made by the Roman General Aulus Didius:

This is the secret centre of the isle:
Here, Romans, pause, and let the eye of wonder
Gaze on the solemn scene; behold yon oak,
How stern he frowns, and with his broad brown arms

⁷ Terror, as the more specific of the two terms, had been a particularly well treated in regards to the sublime by the mid-century. See, J. Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (London, 1704): 18-19, 69-70 and J. Addison in *The Spectator*, Vol. 6. (London, 1712-15): 88.

⁸ E. Burke. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, The Second Edition (London, 1759): 96, 117.

⁹ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 44. In *An Essay Towards an Abridgment of the English History* (1760). Burke deals evenhandedly with the druids, casting them as practitioners of natural religion but not worshippers of a Triune god.

Chills the pale plain beneath him: mark yon altar,
 The dark stream brawling round it's rugged base,
 These cliffs, these yawning caverns, this wide circus,
 Skirted with unhewn stone: they awe my soul,
 As if the very Genius of the place
 Himself appear'd, and with terrific tread
 Stalk'd thro' his drear domain. And yet, my friends,
 (If shapes like his be but the fancy's coinage)
 Surely there is a hidden power, that reigns
 'Mid the lone majesty of untam'd nature,
 Controuling sober reason; tell me else,
 Why do these haunts of barb'rous superstition
 O'ercome me thus? I scorn them, yet they awe me.¹⁰

Didius' description of the grove creates an image in which the landscape is threatening, 'stern he [an oak tree] frowns', unwelcoming, 'chill...plain', seemingly void of light, 'dark stream', and expansive, 'yawning caverns... wide circus.' In the second half of the speech he attempts to be rational in the face of this example of the natural sublime, 'If shapes like his be but the fancy's coinage' and 'Why do these haunts of barb'rous superstition/O'ercome me thus?' But in the end the sight of the 'lone majesty of untam'd nature' controls his 'sober reason' and 'awes' him.¹¹ Following his description he calls on the British brothers, Elidurus and Vellinus, and says, "Explain this scene of horror."¹² Didius' description of the natural setting of the play combines awe, horror and the overcoming of reason in the way seen in Rowlands' scholarly history of the druids and Burke's philosophical treatise on the sublime.

¹⁰ W. Mason, *Caractacus, a Dramatic Poem. Written on the Model of the Antient Greek Tragedy* (London, 1759): 1.

¹¹ Interestingly Archibald Alison uses the phrase 'lone majesty of nature' in a section on the sublime his treatise *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (London, 1815): 438. The closeness of the language suggests he has this opening scene in mind. The phrase was also used in several of the 'tours' of Britain footnoted below for being influenced by *Caractacus*. See also, R. Griffiths (ed.) *The Monthly Review, Or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 28 (London, 1763): 376. The phrase is used here as exemplary of sublime writing.

¹² Mason, *Caractacus*, 1.

Part of Didius recognizes he is being irrational and yet he cannot help but be awed by the oak grove. When he asks the brother to explain the sublime scene, they do so by associating it with the druids:

Daring Roman,
Thy footsteps press on consecrated ground:
These mighty piles of magic-planted rock,
Thus rang'd in mystic order, mark the place
Where but at times of holiest festival
The Druid leads his train.

Leading on from this, Elidurus highlights the druids' supernatural powers, "The spirits of the air/Of earth, of water, nay of heav'n itself/Do listen to their lay."¹³ The brothers' reply to Didius' request to explain his reaction to the landscape is vital to understanding how Mason understands the natural sublime to operate. The Britons do not explain the natural sublime through its aesthetic qualities (for example, expanse and darkness), but by linking it to the druids and the druids' supernatural powers: it is 'consecrated ground.' The landscape is sublime by association.

In a number of recent publications Cian Duffy has convincingly argued that in the early to mid-eighteenth century it was assumed cultural biases or associations predetermined aesthetic reaction to the natural sublime.¹⁴ A famous eighteenth-

¹³ Mason, *Caractacus*, 3.

¹⁴ Duffy states, "it mattered what you saw; it mattered who you were and where you were when you saw it; and it mattered why you were there looking at it in the first place." See C. Duffy, *The Landscapes of the Sublime 1700-1830: 'Classic Ground'* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 6. See also, C. Duffy, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); C. Duffy and P. Howell, *Cultures of the Sublime: Selected Readings, 1750-1830* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Duffy is drawing on the work of Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla. See, P. De Bolla, *Discourse of the Sublime* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1989); A. Ashfield and P. De Bolla (eds.) *The Sublime: A Reader in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Further, she is arguing against the influence of Samuel Holt Monk who, "describes the sublime as an affect or category of perception rather than as a property of objects." See S. H. Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in Eighteenth-Century England; With a New Preface by the Author* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1960).

century example of this assumption, taken from a friend of Mason's, is found in Thomas Gray's on-site description of the Alps: "Mr. Walpole says our memory sees more than our eyes in this country."¹⁵ Walpole's point, which is the same as Duffy's, is that the associations the Alps already hold for himself and Gray have pre-conditioned their response to the landscape. The above analysis of the opening scene of *Caractacus* supports Duffy's conclusion by showing that the Britons' reaction to the sublime landscape of the play is conditioned by their fear of the druids. But more can be said. It will now be shown that the druids reinforce the association between themselves and the natural sublime using two odes. Leading on from this, it will be demonstrated that the druids' multifarious uses of the sublime are dangerous because they arouse enthusiasm and false hope in the Britons (particularly Caractacus). Finally, because the druids are so closely associated with the natural sublime and the sublime is dangerous it will be argued that in *Caractacus* Mason is problematizing nature as a philosophical concept.

The first ode the druids use to reinforce the association between themselves and the natural sublime addresses Snowdon. It opens with a forceful request to the mountain, intimating that the druids have a special relationship with their surrounding landscape and the spirits that live there:

MONA on Snowdon calls:
Hear, thou King of the mountains, hear;
Hark, she speaks from all her strings;
Hark, her loudest echo rings;
King of mountains bend thine ear:
Send thy spirits, send them soon...¹⁶

The passage begins by eliding the druids' identity with the island of Mona. It carries on as a command to Mount Snowdon to send its 'spirits' to Mona. The druids create an image of themselves as humans whose relationship to the landscape is one in which they can talk in the imperative. The theme of the druids' control over nature continues in the second ode. The topic of the ode is the story of the first druidic bard,

¹⁵ D. Tovey, (ed.), *Letters of Thomas Gray*, Vol. 1 (London, 1913): 69.

¹⁶ Mason, *Caractacus*, 18.

who used his song to bring life to beautiful nature and silence and peace to sublime nature:

Mute 'til then was ev'ry plain,
Save where the flood 'mid mountains rude
Tumbled his tide amain;
And echo from th' impending wood
Resounded the hoarse strain;
While from the north the sullen gale
With hollow whistlings shook the vale;
Dismal notes, and answer'd soon
By savage howl the heaths among...

Thou spak'st, imperial Lyre,
The rough roar ceas'd, and airs from high
Lapt the land in exstasy [sic.]...¹⁷

In the second ode, more obviously than in the first, the druids claim that they have control over nature and use their power to bring order and happiness: 'The rough roar ceas'd, and the airs from high/Lapt the land in exstasy.' But the word ecstasy, also seen in *Elfrida*, subtly undercuts the druids' claims. It is in tension with the idea of peace and order as it connotes an overwhelming and heightened happiness, not a peaceful happiness. Samuel Johnson, for instance, used the word to define 'Rapture' and thought it synonymous with "transport; violence of any pleasing passion; enthusiasm; uncommon heat of imagination."¹⁸ For now it is most important to note that the landscape, which so awes and horrifies the ancient Britons (and to some extent the Roman General Aulus Didius), is under the control of the druids, or so the druids claim. In this way the druids increase their power over the Britons.

Alongside the odes, the druids practice rites and experience prophetic trances and dreams. Mason dresses these moments in sublime language. For example, the first rite contains a golden sickle taken from the tomb of dead druids, an animal sacrifice, and

¹⁷ Mason, *Caractacus*, 29.

¹⁸ S. Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol. 2 (London, 1755).

“foaming snakes.”¹⁹ The druids use the knowledge they gain through these sublime experiences to guide the Britons in their defence of Britain against the Romans. However, throughout the play and in the eventual defeat of the Britons the druids’ advice is proven to be ineffective. Mason creates a direct link between the druids’ use of the sublime and the failure of the Britons. In doing so he demonstrates the arbitrariness and danger of the sublime.

The way in which Mason points towards the arbitrariness of the druids’ use of the sublime is exemplified in a passage initiated by the treacherous Briton Vellinus. Under Roman orders he and his brother Elidurus visit the sacred oak grove to ask Caractacus to help fight the Romans (having gained Caractacus’ trust Vellinus would deliver him straight to the Romans). Caractacus jumps at the chance. But the druids caution him otherwise. Referring to their rites they say, “Has the bleeding victim/Poured a propitious stream? the milk-white steeds/Unrein’d and neighing pranc’d with fav’ring steps?” The answer is no. Leading on from this the druids assert their political power over Caractacus, “Thou art a King, a sov’rein o’er frail man/I am a Druid, servant of the Gods/Such service is above such sov’reignty/As well thou know’st.” Then, falling into a prophetic trance they foresee:

The time will come, when Destiny and Death,
Thron’d in burning car, the thund’ring wheels
Arm’d with gigantic scythes of adamant,
Shall scour this field of life, and in their rear
The fiend Oblivion: kingdoms, empires, worlds
Melt in the general blaze...

Thinking the druids’ prophecy foretells the Britons triumphing over the Romans Caractacus reacts with great enthusiasm, “Speak ever thus/And I will hear thee/’till attention faint/In heedless extasy.”²⁰ The sublime rhetoric of the druids has moved Caractacus to a reckless state of enthusiasm: ‘heedless extasy.’ Caractacus’ reaction is ironic because the end of *a* kingdom will come but it will be the end of Caractacus’ kingdom, brought about by the triumph of the Romans. The danger of the sublime and

¹⁹ Mason, *Caractacus*, 2-3, 10-11, 32.

²⁰ Mason, *Caractacus*, 25-26.

enthusiasm becomes evident because together they have convinced Caractacus of an untruth. Moreover, the druids' description of 'burning cars' with 'gigantic scythes' matches a later passage in which Caractacus describes Roman chariots as "scythed cars." Therefore Caractacus could have interpreted the prophecy properly but his enthusiastic reaction forestalls any chance he has of grasping the prophecies truth. The moral does not stop here.

Immediately following their exchange with Caractacus the druids are lulled to sleep by the singing of a bard. Whilst asleep they suffer an ominous and sublime nightmare the meaning of which they cannot decipher. They are awoken by the approach of Evelina who unwittingly brings with her the meaning of the nightmare. At first Evelina is hesitant to enter the grove, describing herself as "prone to fear", presumably because of a combination of the sublime natural setting and her fear of the supernatural powers of the druids. She overcomes her fear and tells the druids that she is suspicious of Vellinus' offer. Her reasoning is based on observation and dressed in simple language.

Evelina noticed that while Vellinus was confidently talking his brother Elidurus was nervous. This first aroused her suspicion. She further reasons that if, as Vellinus claims, her mother was alive she would not just send a trinket, which the brothers had given to Evelina as proof they had met her mother, but also some kind of message. The druids believe Evelina and instantly conclude, "They must be spies." The druids want to test Elidurus with another rite to discover whether the brothers are telling the truth. If he fails they will kill him. Evelina, fearing for Elidurus' life (she is at this point developing a romantic attachment to him) convinces them to let her talk to Elidurus. She does so and eventually reasons the truth from him. Having admitted that he and his brother had meant to betray Caractacus to the Romans, Elidurus is found blameless. Meanwhile, however, Vellinus has escaped to join the Romans. At the end of the passage Elidurus makes the following critique of the druids:

For, what tho' Wisdom lifts ye next to those Gods,
Ye cannot, like to them, unlock Men's breasts,

And read their inmost thoughts.²¹

This passage is the only critique of the druids made by a Briton in *Caractacus*. Elidurus begins by describing the druids as wise but then contradicts the compliment by claiming the druids are incapable of understanding human nature. More closely it can be said that the druids' failure to understand human nature is due to the ineffectiveness of their only source of knowledge: sublime rites, trances and dreams. The sublime fails because it has no real connection to the things that happen in the world. It is therefore arbitrary. Despite its arbitrariness the sublime is convincing and therefore it is dangerous, a point driven home by Caractacus' 'heedless extasy' and misinterpretation of the druids' prophecy. In sharp contrast to the druids' failure is Evelina. She is able to understand human nature and does so through rational methods spurred on by sentiment. Evelina's sentimental streak should not be seen as Mason wholeheartedly embracing an epistemology based on feeling because her feelings are only a spur to her using reason to uncover truth. As was shown in the last chapter, Warburton saw the moral sense, which could also be called sentiment, as a "a conciliator, as it were between Reason and the sensual appetites",²² Mason adopts a similar idea.

The arbitrariness of the druids' sublime power and the danger of enthusiasm is displayed again near the end of the play. After Evelina's brother, Arvigarus, and Elidurus have gone to fight the Romans a bard falls into a trance and foresees Britain fighting for its freedom. Enthused again Caractacus gets excited and wants to rush into battle. The druids look at the rites:

Stay thee, Prince,
And mark what clear and amber-skirted clouds
Rise from the altar's verge, and cleave the skies:
O 'tis a prosperous omen! Soon expect
To hear glad tidings.

²¹ Mason, *Caractacus*, 53.

²² Warburton, *The Divine Legation*, 105.

The glad tidings do come as a bard who witnessed the battle between the Britons and the Romans reports that the Romans have fled. The druids triumphantly reply, “Did I not say we had a power within us/That might appall ev’n Romans?” To this the bard replies, “And it did.” However, the Romans have only tactically retreated and begin to burn down the grove. Evelina is the first to know about the fire and tries to tell her father. However, he is too enthused by the druids’ words to listen and thinks the fire is the dawn. The druids are wrong again and the price of their failure is terrible.

It has been shown that the druids purposefully associate themselves with the natural sublime in order to improve their control over the Britons. Alongside this it has also be shown that the druids’ use of the sublime is dangerously arbitrary because it has no real connection with what happens in the world but does have the ability to enthuse its listeners to the point that they cannot reason properly. Uniting these conclusions with the beginning of this section where it was argued that Mason deploys an ‘Associative’ model of the natural sublime a more nuanced comment on Mason’s conception of nature can be made.

If the natural sublime is based on an associative model of aesthetics, that is to say the power of the natural sublime comes from the things with which it is associated in the mind of the viewer, then it is open to the same criticisms that were made of associationism more generally. As John Locke, considered one of the founders of associationism and a powerful influence on Mason and his colleagues, wrote:

“there is another connexion of ideas wholly owing to *chance* or *custom*: Ideas that in themselves are not all of kin, come to be so united in some men’s minds, that it is very hard to separate them; they always keep in company, and the one no sooner at any time comes into the understanding, but its associate appears with it; and if they are more than two which are thus united, the whole gang, always inseparable, show themselves together.”²³

Locke is arguing that many associations are arbitrary because they are ‘wholly owing to *chance* or *custom*.’ Moreover, although arbitrary, the link between an object and its

²³ Locke, *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding*, 280.

associations is ‘very hard to separate’, so that the link may seem entirely natural. At the very beginning of this chapter it was shown that Warburton made a similar critique of the sublime, arguing it was nothing more than ‘arbitrary and casual connections’ (which shows that Warburton held an associative concept of the sublime). By showing that the power the druids claimed to possess had no real connection to the things that happen in the world and by linking the Britons’ fear and horror of the natural sublime to the druids’ power, Mason demonstrated that he thought that the natural sublime was nothing more than a set of arbitrary connections. Furthermore, he uses this to continue championing rationality over enthusiasm. As he had done in *Elfrida* he demonstrates that nature is morally ambiguous but, in addition, in *Caractacus* it becomes a dangerous and potent tool.

***Caractacus* and Poetic Enthusiasm**

It is now clear that Mason uses *Caractacus* to champion reason over enthusiasm and the sublime, much as he had used *Elfrida* to champion reason over Shaftesburian readings of nature. Before continuing the interpretation of Mason’s concept of nature in *Caractacus*, this section argues that his version of ancient druids are antithetical to the version of ancient druids popularized in works of poetic enthusiasm. As part of this argument, an analysis of the influence Thomas Gray on *Caractacus* will be made, as well as an exploration of how Mason’s work popularized critiques of enthusiasm and thereby promoted the cause of reason.

The general consensus in the eighteenth century was that the ancient druids of Britain had practiced a corrupted form of the Noahic religion, which the earliest druids had brought with them as they migrated west in the first few generations after the flood recorded in Genesis.²⁴ However, the extent to which Noahic religion had been

²⁴ C. Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 70. See also, S. Piggot, *Ancient Britons and the Antiquarian Imagination: Ideas from the Renaissance to the Regency* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989); *William Stukeley: An Eighteenth-century Antiquary* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985); *Ruin’d in a Landscape: Essays in Antiquarianism* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1976); T. Gale, *The Court of the Gentiles: or a Discours Touching the Original of Human Literature, both Philologie and Philosophie, from the Scriptures & Jewish Church*, Part II (Oxford, 1672): 82-83.

corrupted by the first century AD was much debated. For some, such as Rev. Henry Rowlands and John Toland, the druids' religion and the druids themselves were absolutely corrupt. Toland further claimed that just as the ancient druids had "lead the people by the nose," so did the eighteenth-century clergy.²⁵ Concerned by Toland's attacks on the established church, many mid-eighteenth-century scholars defended the druids and argued they practiced a religion which, because the Catholic Church had not defiled it, was akin to Protestantism.²⁶ The most famous proponent of this view was William Stukeley, who argued that the druids' religion was "so extremely like Christianity, that in effect it differ'd from it only in this; they believed in a Messiah who was to come into this world, as we believe in him that is come."²⁷

Running in parallel to the antiquarian scholars who held a positive view of the ancient druids was a literary trend that treated druids and bards as patriotic moral mouthpieces in order to use Britain's or Wales' past to glorify their present.²⁸ Of this trend Richard

²⁵ J. Toland, *A Specimen of the Critical History of the Celtic Religion and Learning...* in *A Collection of Several pieces of Mr. John Toland, now First Publish'd from his Original manuscripts: with Some Memoirs of his Life and Writings* Vol. 1 (London, 1726): 12. See also, J. A. I. Champion 'John Toland, the Druids, and the Politics of Celtic Scholarship', *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 127 (May, 2001), pp. 321-342.

²⁶ W. Cooke, *An Enquiry into the Patriarchal and Druidical Religion* (London, 1754, sec. ed. 1755). For a fuller bibliography reaching into the seventeenth century see, C. Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 71.

²⁷ W. Stukeley, *Stonehenge a Temple Restor'd to the British Druids*, (London, 1740): 2. See also, Piggot, *William Stukeley*. For a different rebuttal of Toland and one more akin to Rowlands' work see, A. Young, *An Historical Dissertation on Idolatrous Corruptions in Religion from the Beginning of the World; and On the Methods taken by Divine Providence in Reforming them*, Vol. 2 (London, 1734): 164-166.

²⁸ The issue of Mason's eliding of national identities is beyond the scope of this chapter but is most evident is the manner in which Wales and England are given a collective political and religious identity. For scholarship on this area see, K. Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and The British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). Trumpener's work has been reviewed and rejected by scholars working on the formation of Welsh national identity in this period. See, J. Mulholland, *Sounding Imperial: Poetic Voice and the Politics of Empire, 1730-1820* (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 2013): 69-75; S. Prescott, "'Gray's Pale Spectre": Evan Evans, Thomas Gray, and the Rise of Welsh Bardic Nationalism,' *Modern Philology*, Vol. 104, No. 1 (Autumn, 2006), pp. 72-95. Other works that discuss the role of Gray's work in the formation of British identity are H. Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue: The Rise of British Literature from Dryden to Ossian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 397-98; D. Griffin,

Terry has recently argued that “the cultural reverence accorded to Druids in the eighteenth century comes about only through a process of rehabilitation, in which a blind or tolerant eye was turned to the unsavoury aspects of Druidical practices dwelt on in the classical sources.”²⁹ Terry’s words are reminiscent of Shaun Irlam’s argument, explored in Chapter One, that in the 1730s and 1740s ‘the lineaments of religious enthusiasm were rehabilitated and made respectable as poetic enthusiasm.’ Indeed many of the poets that rehabilitated enthusiasm into poetic enthusiasm were simultaneously involved in the mid-eighteenth-century rehabilitation of ancient druids into patriotic moral mouthpieces.

James Thomson’s *Liberty*, William Collins’ *Ode to Liberty*, Gray’s *The Bard*, and Warton’s *The Enthusiast* are important poems for Terry’s argument. They also form what F. P. Lock, with useful concision, calls the ‘soft’ school of historical thought on the druids.³⁰ Except for Gray, whose work will be explored below, all of these poets were connected with poetic enthusiasm and the moral-aesthetic philosophy of Shaftsbury. In works of poetic enthusiasm, ancient druids were characterized as innocent, truthful men, who enjoyed a positive relationship with the lay Britons. In the fourth book of *Liberty*, entitled *Britain* (1736), James Thomson describes how he saw the relationship between the druids and the Britons:

Bold were those BRITONS, who, the careless Sons
Of Nature, roam’d the Forest-Bounds, at once,
Their verdant City, high-embowering Fence,
And the gay Circle of their woodland Wars:
For by the *Druid* taught, that Death but shifts

Patriotism and Poetry in Eighteenth-Century Britain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 166-74; R. Terry, *Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

²⁹ R. Terry ‘Thomson and the Druids’ in R. Terry (ed.) *James Thomson: Essays for the Tercentenary* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000): 144. See also, Terry, *Poetry*, Ch. 2.

³⁰ F. P. Lock, ‘Burke and Religion’ in I. Crowe (ed.) *An Imaginative Whig: Reassessing the Life and Work of Edmund Burke* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2005): 22-23. Lock argues that Burke fell between the two schools.

The vital Scene, they that prime Fear despis'd...³¹

The Britons are 'Sons of Nature.' Moreover, by describing the ancient Britons' as inhabiting a 'verdant city', Thomson presents a carefully balanced depiction of the Britons as civilized but uncorrupted. A few lines after this passage he makes the same point more potently. He characterizes the ancient Britons as "by *tyrant Force*/And still more by *tyrant Custom, unsubdu'd*."³² Integral to Thomson's characterization of the moral existence of the ancient Britons are the druids. In the first edition of the poem, a footnote to the word druid states that, "The druids, amongst the ancient Gauls and Britons, had the Care and Direction of all religious matters."³³ Within the text of the poem, the druids teach the ancient Britons not to be afraid of death, which better enables them to fight for their country. The relationship between the druids and the ancient Britons is therefore political and entirely unproblematic. As a whole Thomson's poem tracks the rise and fall of the world's great empires as they move away from natural innocence and virtue and succumb to the vices of civilization. Unlike the druids of *Caractacus*, the druids of Thomson's poem are stabilizing factors in the political and moral lives of the ancient Britons and enable the defence of British liberty.

In *The Enthusiast*, Joseph Warton goes further than Thomson in conjoining the 'soft' school of druids with a Shaftesburian enthusiasm for nature:

The bards of old,
Fair Nature's friends, sought such retreats, to charm
Sweet Echo with their songs; oft too they met
In summer evenings, near sequestered bow'rs,
Or mountain-nymph, or Muse, and eager learned
The moral strains she taught to mend mankind.³⁴

³¹ J. Thomson, *Britain: Being the Fourth Part of Liberty, a Poem*, (London, 1736): 35.

³² Thomson, *Britain*, 35.

³³ Thomson, *Britain*, 35.

³⁴ Dodsley, *A Collection of Poems*, 98.

The relationship Warton's ancient druids enjoy with is both a friendly and moral one. They would meet together in a natural setting, sing songs and 'eagerly' – the word connotes a level of enthusiasm – learn moral laws. The lessons they learn from nature are intended to 'mend mankind.' As in Thomson's poem, Warton's druids have a positive civic use. In the previous chapter it was argued that Warton's poem was founded on a philosophy in which retreat into nature coupled with an enthusiastic response to nature serves a moral purpose. Warton uses the ancient druids to exemplify this philosophy.

A comparison between Thomson and Warton's poems and *Caractacus* reveals two important differences. Firstly, Mason adopts a 'hard' scholarly version of ancient druids. Unlike Warton and Thomson, he stays true to the classical sources (which in the eighteenth century were the only sources) depicting the druids of *Caractacus* as selfishly and manipulatively dominating the political and religious lives of the ancient Britons. Secondly, within the wider framework of Warton's and Thomson's poems, their 'soft' druids are used to promote a conception of nature in which the natural world is morally improving. Within the wider framework of *Caractacus*, it has been shown that Mason is intent on complicating nature and depicting it as morally ambiguous. Mason uses the druids to show that nature can be manipulated into a tool with which political dominance can be gained by one group of people. The obvious target of *Caractacus* is Catholicism, especially due to the play's condemnation of rites, mystery and superstition. But Mason was also very aware of poems such as Thomson's and Warton's. He would have known he was positioning himself against them too. Alongside *Elfrida*, *Caractacus* provides a rebuttal of authors who, influenced by Shaftesbury, championed a link between 'enthusiastic' responses to nature and morality. The question over Thomas Gray – recognized as both a practitioner of poetic enthusiasm and an influence on Mason – can now be dealt with. In doing so the above arguments will be reinforced.

A letter in Mason's extensive correspondence with Gray over *Caractacus* confirms Mason was attempting to counterbalance his depictions of the sublime with reason.³⁵

Gray says:

"I must not have my fancy raised to that agreeable pitch of heathenism and wild magical enthusiasm, and then have you let me drop into moral philosophy and cold good sense. I remember you insulted me when I saw you last, and affected to call that which delighted my imagination nonsense."³⁶

Gray praises Mason's ability to write in an enthusiastic (sublime) style but regrets that there are other passages in *Caractacus* that are stylistically at odds with these moments of poetic enthusiasm. It was argued above that Mason was purposefully and very subtly juxtaposing the sublime and reason in order to undercut superstition and enthusiasm and promote reason. Gray is aware of this but does not seem interested. As with the other 'enthusiastic poets', Gray was primarily interested in poetry as a means of exploring and creating subjective moods and heightening imaginative experience (although unlike his enthusiastic contemporaries he was fairly contemptuous of Shaftesbury).³⁷ Most famously Gray's Pindaric ode *The Bard* (1757) used a sublime representation of an ancient bard to predict the future of British poetry and champion a sublime, or enthusiastic, poetic style. The way Mason was writing *Caractacus* meant it did not comfortably fit into Gray's agenda for poetry. However, due to the many letters Gray wrote to Mason with suggestions for *Caractacus*, and his reputation for being the better and more interesting poet, Gray's influence on *Caractacus* has been greatly overstated in modern scholarship.³⁸ A letter such as the

³⁵ For the correspondence see, Tovey, *Letters of Thomas Gray*, Vol. 1, CXXXVI; CXL; CXLI; CL *Letters*, Vol. 2 (London, 1913): CLIX; CLX; CLXI; CLXV; CLXVIII; CLXXI; CLXXVIII; CLXXIX; CLXXXII; CLXXXIV; CLXXXVW. Elsewhere, Mason also states that it was discussed in person. See, Mason, *The Poems of Mr. Gray*, 233.

³⁶ Tovey, *Letters of Thomas Gray*, Vol. 1, 61.

³⁷ Gray wrote a long damning opinion of Shaftesbury in which he tellingly states, "he was reckoned a fine writer, and seemed always to mean more than he said." It was the literary style of Shaftesbury that Gray liked, including his rhapsodies on nature but he did not agree with the philosophy behind them. See Mason, *The Poems of Mr. Gray*, 263-264.

³⁸ Rather unfairly one early twentieth-century critic wrote "floundering about in the unsounded depths of Celtic antiquities, [and] would surely have come to grief had it

above should not be read as a castigation of Mason that would have substantially changed *Caractacus*. Indeed the correspondence between Mason and Gray over the play came to an end because Mason asserted his independence from Gray's attempts to control the ideas in the play (it is also interesting to note that in the above passage it is Mason that ridicules Gray for his nonsensical imagination). Mason wrote to Gray:

“...by what you talk of ‘measure, and rhythm, and expression,’ I think I shall never be able to finish them, - never certainly at all if I am not to throw out my ideas at large; so, whether I am right or wrong, I must have it my way in that: therefore speak no more of it.”³⁹

Mason's assertion of independence from Gray could not be clearer. In this letter he takes full ownership of the way in which he wanted to write the play: ‘if I am not to throw out my ideas at large.’ Mason's correspondence with Gray over *Caractacus* reveals that Mason was purposefully juxtaposing a sublime form of poetic enthusiasm with a philosophy of reason so that reason would come out as the better philosophy. This was not to Gray's taste but, as the first section of this chapter has shown, this did not stop Mason carrying out his plans. Moreover, *Caractacus* is distinct from Gray's poem *The Bard*, and other works of poetic enthusiasm, in presenting a ‘hard’, non-patriotic, version of druids and bards.

not been for the ceaseless efforts of his painstaking friend and critic, Gray.” E. Snyder, *Thomas Gray's Interest in Celtic in Modern Philology*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Apr., 1914): 6. See also, A. L. Owen, *The Famous Druids: A Survey of Three Centuries of English Literature on the Druids* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962): 147-148. Other evidence that Gray's influence has been overstated is that in one of his criticisms Gray accused Mason of lying about having read Keysler's *Antiquitates Selectæ Septentrionales et Celticæ*.³⁸ In fact Mason had read it and he indignantly replied, “it is a little hard upon my no-reading to believe I have not read Keysler.” Tovey, *Letters of Thomas Gray*, Vol. 2, 12.

³⁹ In an apologetic reply to Mason Gray offered a useful analogy of his role in the writing of *Caractacus*: “Now I desire you would neither think me severe, nor at all regard what I say any further than it coincides with your own judgment; for the child [*Caractacus*] deserves your partiality; it is a healthy well-made boy, with an ingenuous countenance, and promises to live long. I would only wash its face, dress it a little, make it walk upright and strong, and keep it from learning paw words.”³⁹ Tovey, *Letters of Thomas Gray*, Vol. 2, 21-22. Tovey notes “paw is baby-language for ‘naughty.’” Tovey, *Letters of Thomas Gray*, Vol. 2, 16-17.

The impact of Mason's 'hard' druids can be seen in a number of poems in the second half of the eighteenth century. For example, James Foot's poem *Penseroso* (1771), which in a footnote admits to being influenced by Mason, featured druids and lines such as, "bloody altars, knives and death prepared/For human victims."⁴⁰ Moreover, Mason's hard version of ancient druids influenced multiple 'tours' of the British landscape made in the later eighteenth century and early nineteenth. This is particularly the case when the tourist is confronted with such landscape features as stone circles.⁴¹ For want of space only two shall be dealt with here.⁴²

The first example is from a guide by William Hutchinson entitled *An Excursion to the Lakes in Westmoreland and Cumberland in 1773* (1774). Mason's play is referred to twice in quick succession as Hutchinson lets his eye and mind wander over a stone circle in Cumbria (commonly known as Long Meg and Her Daughters):

“Whilst we stood admiring this place the following thoughts occurred to my memory.

‘Mark yon altar

This wide circus

Skirted with unhewn stone: they awe my soul

⁴⁰ J. Foot, *Penseroso, Or the Pensive Philosopher in his Solitudes, a Poem in Six Books* (London, 1771): 164. See also, G. Ridley, *Melampus, A Poem in Four Books, with Notes* (London, 1781): 167; Mr. Pratt, (Samuel Jackson), *Humanity, or the Rights of Nature, a Poem; in Two Books. By the Author of Sympathy* (London, 1788): 68. Blake would also take a negative view of druids in *Milton* (1804).

⁴¹ For the rise in interest and visits to the home landscape see the introduction to, B. Colbert (ed.), *Travel Writing and Tourism in Britain and Ireland* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) and M. Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*.

⁴² Other examples are, E. Clarke, *A Tour Through the South of England, Wales, and Part of Ireland, Made During the Summer of 1791* (London, 1793): 114; W. Bingley, *A Tour Round North Wales, Performed During the Summer of 1798*, Vol. 2. (London, 1800): 242; R. Warner, *A Walk Through Some of the Western counties of England* (London, 1800): 175; F. C. Rivington and J. Rivington (eds.), *A Series of Letters Between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot*, Vol. 4, (London, 1809): 90; L. M. Callcot, *Letters on India* (London, 1814): 71; S. C. Walford, *Recollections of a Ramble, During the Summer of 1816, in a Letter to a Friend* (London, 1817): 66-67; P. D. Hardy (ed.), *The Dublin Penny Annual*, Vol. 1. Issue. 1 (Dublin, 1833): 29; *The Cambrian Tourist, Or Post-chaise Companion Through Wales* (London, 1834): 195; J. A. Paris, *A Guide to the Mount's Bay and the Land's End* (London, 1842): 113; G. P. White, *A Tour in Connamara: With Remarks on its Great Physical Capabilities*, (London, 1849): 57.

As if the very genius of the place
Himself appeared, and with terrific tread
Stalk'd through this drear domain.”
Know that thou stands on consecrated ground;
The mighty pile of magic-planted rock,
Thus rang'd in mystic order, marks the place
Where but at times of holiest festival,
The druid leads his train.’

My ideas wandered in the fields of imagination over the druids sacrifice of the milk-white steers, consecrated by the mistletoe – I reflected on the trembling enthusiastic multitudes, who here perhaps had assembled to hear the priestly dictates touching government, and moral conduct; – to learn the druids arrogant philosophy and superstitions, and cherish an implicit faith of the immortality of man’s intellectual spirit, though in transmigration to reptiles and beasts of prey. – Perhaps here Princes submissively have stood to hear the haughty druid exclaim –

‘Thou art a king, a sovereign o’er frail men;
I am a druid, servant of the Gods;
Such service is above such sovereignty.’⁴³

Hutchinson begins his description of the landscape with a quote from the opening scene of *Caractacus*. He then describes the lay Britons as ‘trembling enthusiasts’, which neatly describes how fear, horror and the sublime are combined in the way the druids control the people. After this Hutchinson shows that he is aware of the politics of *Caractacus* in so much as he thinks the druids controlled the people politically and morally. He turns to a condemnation of the druids and the beliefs they inculcated into

⁴³ W. Hutchinson, *An Excursion to the Lakes in Westmoreland and Cumberland in 1773* (London, 1774): 97-99. Hutchinson in fact misremembers a few lines, heightening the likeliness that he is remembering it on the spot, and amalgamates passages, perhaps highlighting an exceptionally agile literary memory (if he were copying from a text it would presumably be exactly the same). For more on quoting works on landscape *in situ* see, J. D. Hunt, *Gardens and the Picturesque: Studies in the History of Landscape Architecture* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1994): 188.

the Britons, ending with another quote from Mason's play, which condemns the druids and their political control of Britain.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Elizabeth Spence, writing about Scotland, similarly uses *Caractacus*. She records, "On one of the hills adjacent to Pitcaithley there is to be seen a singular druidical curiosity called the rocking stone. The use of the rocking stones, or creed of our ancestors concerning them, is well expressed by Mason:

Behold yon huge
And unhewn sphere of living adamant,
Which, poised by magic, rests its central weight
On yonder pointed rock. Firm as it seems,
Such is its strange and virtuous property,
It moves obsequiously to the gentlest touch
Of him whose breast is pure; but to a traitor,
Though even a giant's prowess nerv'd his arm,
It stands as firm as Snowdon!

Caractacus.

This ordeal was made subservient to the designs of the druidical priests who conducted it."⁴⁴

Spence's laconic and loaded final line suggests that she, like Hutchinson, imagined the ancient druids of Britain to be self-interested and politically deviant. When confronted with a relic from Britain's past, she too refers to Mason's play to express her feelings and moves from that expression to a political condemnation of the druids.

This section has shown that in *Caractacus* Mason bucks a literary trend to create a 'hard', scholarly, characterization of ancient druids. The reason for this is two fold. Firstly, he wants his play to be historically convincing (although anyone with

⁴⁴ E. Spence, *Sketches of the Present Manners, Customs, and Scenery of Scotland, With Incidental Remarks on the Scottish Character*, 2nd ed. vol. 2 (London, 1811): 15.

knowledge of ancient Britain would have known that at points the play conflated time periods). Secondly, he wants to combat the notion, propagated in works of poetic enthusiasm, that an enthusiastic response to nature was morally good.

The final section returns to a reading of *Caractacus*, to consider how in one short but vital passage at the end of the play the landscape is used metaphorically to demonstrate the political and religious tensions exhibited elsewhere in the play.

The Landscape as Metaphor in *Caractacus*

Alongside exploring personal relations between Britons, Mason explores the relationship between Britain and the invading forces of Rome. The Romans' decisive victory over the Britons comes when they set fire to the druids' grove. Here it is argued that the burning of the landscape is both a metaphorical and literal way to replace the tyranny and intolerance of the druids with the rationality of the Romans. But at the same time it is argued that the burning of the landscape is a metaphorical and literal way to destroy an important element of British political liberty and replace it with the pro-slavery stance of the Romans.⁴⁵ At the beginning of the play the tensions between the Romans and Britons are explored in a speech made by Caractacus to a group of Roman soldiers captured by the Britons.

At the beginning of the speech Caractacus positively contrasts Britain to Rome:

Hear me, Romans, hear.

That you are captives, is the chance of war:

⁴⁵ Edith Hall and Fiona Macintosh recognize this tension. However, they attribute it to the 1770s production of *Caractacus* for the stage, not the original edition of 1759. See Hall and Macintosh, *Greek Tragedy*, 189-190. There is no reason that it should not be attributed to the 1759 edition as a reflection over concerns about Britain's role as a colonizer and the dangers of luxury that conquest and growth brings. In *Caractacus* this is particularly explored in the relationship between Elidurus and Vellinus, the latter of whom is corrupted by Roman gold. For other examples of literature that explored the dangers of colonialism in this period see, S. Kaul, *Poem of Nation, Anthems of Empire: English Verse in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000). John Brown also wrote an important critique along these lines, *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (London, 1757).

Yet captives as ye are, in Britain's eye
You are not slaves. Barbarians tho' you call us,
We know the native rights, man claims from man,
And therefore never shall we gall your necks
With chains, or drag you at our scythed cars
In arrogance of triumph.⁴⁶

The opening passage of the speech centres on the issue of political liberty. Caractacus argues that Britons are morally superior to the Romans because they do not enslave their captives whereas the Romans not only have slaves but parade them in triumphal marches.⁴⁷ Adopting a Lockean language of 'natural rights' he claims that man has an inalienable right to liberty.⁴⁸ Locke himself had condoned the slave trade, but mid-century critics of the slave trade adapted his arguments, among them William Warburton and another friend of Mason's, the moral philosopher James Beattie.⁴⁹ The personal and political liberty of eighteenth-century British subjects was commonly accepted in Britain at this time. Mason is thus aligning ancient and modern Britain to demonstrate that the country had always been free, while presenting Britain as a country that could extend its liberties to other countries. The next two and a half lines of the speech carry a warning for modern day Britain:

Nor, till taught
By Rome (what Britain should scorn to learn)

⁴⁶ Mason, *Caractacus*, 73-74.

⁴⁷ Later in his life Mason would become a pro-abolitionist and was an earlier encourager of William Wilberforce. In a sermon against the slave trade he would again state that slavery is unnatural. W. Mason, *An Occasional Discourse, Preached in the Cathedral of St. Peter in York, January 27, 1788, on the Subject of the African Slave-Trade*. (York, 1788).

⁴⁸ Locke had argued, "The *State of Nature* has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges every one: And Reason, which is that Law, teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions." Locke, *Two Treatise of Government*, 183.

⁴⁹ See, W. Warburton, *A Sermon Preached Before the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts*, February 21, 1766 (London, 1766). For an overview of the situation mid-century see, S. Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1759-1815* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009): 61-76.

Her avarice, will we barter ye for gold.⁵⁰

Although the Britons are presented as more virtuous than the Romans, there is a suggestion that Britain may acquire Rome's avarice and thus slide into immorality. The corruptibility of Britain was an important point for Mason, which he had introduced earlier on when Evelina, referring to Rome's bribing of the treacherous Briton Vellinus, despairingly says, "...and gold, vile gold/Has now a charm for Britons."⁵¹ Throughout the first half of the eighteenth century the expanding British Empire was frequently and positively paralleled with the glory and accomplishments of the Roman Empire. But the parallel also warned of the dangers of avarice and luxury, which it was claimed brought about the fall of the Roman Empire.⁵² In 1759, three years into the Seven Years War, the questions of luxury and corruption became more urgent after heavy defeats at Minorca and Oswego and the government's disastrous handling of the situation. Both defeats were blamed on moral corruption, avarice and effeminacy brought on by luxury.⁵³

In the next section of Caractacus' speech he moves from what might be labeled the 'secular politics' of slavery, avarice, and natural rights, back to a religious topic. In moving from politics to religion he accidentally undercuts his own claims of the Britons' moral rectitude:

True ye are captives, and our country's safety
Forbids, we give you back to liberty:
We give ye therefore to the immortal gods,

⁵⁰ Mason, *Caractacus*, 73-74.

⁵¹ Mason, *Caractacus*, 46-47.

⁵² Kaul, *Poem of Nation*, Ch. 2.

⁵³ John Brown's *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (London, 1757) was one of the most successful works to link the spread of luxury in eighteenth-century Britain to their early failures in the war. See also, M. J. Cardwell, *Arts and Arms: Literature, Politics and Patriotism During the Seven Years War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004). In two sermons made during the war Warburton drew a different, but similar, analogy between Britain and ancient Israel – two countries in his eyes who were God's elect. As Nicolas Guyatt points out though, for Warburton, "The identification of Britain as an elect nation might readily remind Britons of Israel's providential destruction as of its prosperity." N. Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 67.

To them we lift ye in the radiant cloud
Of sacrifice.⁵⁴

Caractacus is in a quandary as he does not want to enslave the Romans, but at the same time he cannot risk giving them their freedom only to have them take up arms against Britain again. His way out is to sacrifice them to the gods. To an eighteenth-century audience Caractacus' speech is dramatically split in two. The first section praises the political liberties of ancient Britain by refusing to impinge on the natural rights of man. But the second section compromises the first by implying the ancient Britons followed an immoral religion (led by the druids).⁵⁵ Caractacus' speech is thus a speech of two halves. In the first half he is a moral political leader. In the second half he is under the control of the druids and follows them into immorality. At the same time Caractacus' speech argues that the Romans are immoral themselves as they practice slavery and endanger the Britons' virtue.

⁵⁴ Mason, *Caractacus*, 74.

⁵⁵ Both Warburton and Hurd were against the inclusion of human sacrifice in the play. Hurd wrote to Mason, "Dr. Warburton says he has received your Letter, and intends to write to You, I believe to scold You for your human Sacrifices. I confess, I wish this only blemish were remov'd from your tragedy, as I hope it will be in some future edition." S. Brewer, *The Early Letters of Richard Hurd, 1739-1762* (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1995): 339. Rather problematically for modern scholarship Mason seems to have acquiesced to Warburton's and Hurd's requests right at the end of his life. In an enlarged 1796 version of *Caractacus* an additional five lines are added in which the druids reply to Caractacus' call for human sacrifice. The druids claim their altar:

never yet
Has stream'd with human gore, nor ever shall
While we hold office here. 'Tis true that Gauls,
True too that Britons, by the Gauls mistaught,
Have done such deeds of horror..."

The druids admit that druids from Gaul did sacrifice humans, and under the influence of these druids British druids had sacrificed humans too. But they distance themselves from the act here. Mason's refusal to add such an apology in the 1759 edition shows he is committed to a 'hard' version of ancient British druids. Moreover, use of the 1796 edition has led to confused criticism of Mason's play by both Hartley Coleridge, who criticizes *Caractacus* for lacking historical accuracy and D. C. Tovey who claims Mason decided that his druids would not sacrifice humans. Most recently Fuwa Yuri has made this mistake. See, F. Yuri, 'The Welsh Revival and English Medievalism', *Journal of Art and Letters*, Vol. 73 (1997), pp. 162-175.

Similar to the opening of his speech to the captive Romans, Caractacus' first words in the play centre on political liberty. He enters the druids' oak tree grove and says:

Druid, these groves
Have caught the dismal colouring of my soul,
Changing their dark dun garbs to very sable,
In pity to their guest. Hail, hallow'd oaks!
Hail, British born! Who, last of British race,
Hold your primeval rights by nature's charter;
Not at the nod of Caesar. Happy foresters,
Ye wave your bold heads 'mid the liberal air;
Nor ask, for privilege (sic), a praetor's edict.
Ye, with your tough and intertwined roots,
Grasp the firm rocks ye sprung from; and, erect
In knotty hardihood, still proudly spread
Your leafy banners 'gainst the tyrannous north,
Who Roman like assails you. Tell me, Druid,
Is it not better to be such as these,
Than be the thing I am?

The passage opens with Caractacus claiming that the landscape is sympathetic towards him because of his fate (he had recently lost a battle and his wife to the Romans and been abandoned by his son). He goes on to claim that the oaks are indigenous to Britain and describes them as the 'last of British race.' This description creates a tight parallel between the trees and the British people, which recognizes that due to the threat of the Romans the British people may be the last of their race too. The trees are a metaphor of a 'primeval' liberty that was bequeathed by nature not by a Caesar. He draws a comparison between the 'liberal air' that the tops of the trees freely enjoy and their 'tough and intertwined roots.' The comparison suggests that political liberty is an ancient, well-ingrained concept in Britain. At the end of the passage Caractacus claims he wants to be like the defiant trees.

Soon after this first speech, Caractacus restates the same desire:

I was born,
A king; and Heav'n, who bade these warrior oaks
Lift their green shields against the fiery sun,
To fence their subject plain, did mean, that I
Should, with as firm an arm, protect my people,
Against the pestilent glare of Rome's ambition.
I fail'd; and how I fail'd, thou know'st too well.⁵⁶

Although this second passage ends with Caractacus' failure to defend his people from the Romans, its premise is that Caractacus should defend his people and has been ordained by heaven to do so. As with the first passage Caractacus sees a parallel between his role as a protector and the ability of the trees to shade and protect people. The reference to a divine appointment is the only point in which the religious impinges on the political in these passages. Even then Caractacus does not see himself as a defender of the druidical religion but of the people, which is a political role.

In his treatment of the landscape as a metaphor, as with the first half of his speech to the captive Romans, Caractacus sees Britain as a land of political liberty. Thus, when the Romans set fire to the landscape at the end of the play it can be said to both actually and metaphorically threaten British liberty. But this is not the only way that the burning of the grove can be understood. It can also be understood as a triumph of Roman rationalism over the superstitious druids.

After Aulus Didus' opening description of the druids' grove and Elidurus' explanation of it as 'consecrated ground,' the Roman general says dismissively, "Prince, I did not moor/My light-arm'd shallops on this dangerous strand/To sooth a fruitless curiosity." To which Elidurus replies, "If here the Monarch rests/Presumptuous Chief! thou might'st as well essay/To pluck him from yon stars" because:

underneath
The soil we tread, a hundred secret paths,
Scoop thro' the living rock in winding maze,

⁵⁶ Mason, *Caractacus*, 12-13.

Lead to as many caverns, dark, and deep:
‘Mid which the hoary sages act their rites
Mysterious, rites of such strange potency,
As, done in open day, would dim the sun,
Tho’ thron’d in noontide brightness.

Elidurus, showing complete belief in the power of the druids to dim the sun at noon, argues that a combination of the landscape and the druids’ powers will be enough to protect them from the Romans. He asks Didius what the Romans will do if the druids do interfere. Again Didius shows no concern for the power of the druids and his answer to the problem of the landscape is brutally simplistic:

Then force must take its way: then flaming brands,
And biting axes, wielded by our soldiers,
Must level these thick shades...

Princes, her ev’ry trunk shall on the ground
Measure its magnitude...⁵⁷

Aulus Didius has no regard or fear of the landscape or the druids and this passage presages the burning of the grove at the end of the play, which shows up the impotence of the druids’ rites and ends their resistance. Following the burning the Romans enter triumphantly, interrupting a dirge to the slain Arvirgus. Didius exclaims:

Ye bloody priests,
Behold, we burst on your infernal rites,
And bid ye pause. Instant restore our soldiers,
Nor hope that superstition’s ruthless step
Shall wade in Roman gore. Ye savage men,
Did not our laws give license to all faiths,
We would o’erturn your altars, headlong heave

⁵⁷ Mason, *Caractacus*, 3-5.

These shapeless symbols of your barbarous gods,
And let the golden sun into your caves.⁵⁸

The opening line draws attention to the immoral human sacrifices of the druids mentioned in Caractacus' speech. The druids are 'superstitious,' 'ruthless,' 'savage,' and practice 'infernal rites.' In contradistinction the Romans are tolerant of all faiths (italicized middle line) and in the final lines Didius claims that through iconoclasm they can civilize the Britons.⁵⁹ It was generally accepted in the eighteenth century that the Romans did civilize Britain by introducing such signposts of civilization as improved agricultural, construction and fortification methods, and sea-navigation.⁶⁰ Thus there is a moral justification for their burning down of the landscape and the burning of the landscape is literally the end of the druids' reign of terror.⁶¹ It can also be taken metaphorically as the triumphing of religious tolerance over religious intolerance and of rationality over irrationality.

Finally, it can be said that the burning of the landscape at the end of *Caractacus* is a metaphorical destruction of British political liberty. But it is also the metaphorical destruction of the ancient British religion and the superstition and intolerance it embodied. As with Caractacus' speech to the captive Romans it is an act that is

⁵⁸ Mason, *Caractacus*, 81.

⁵⁹ The 'caves' may allude both to the druids' cave and pun on Plato's famous caves in which true forms are seen only as shadows. The golden sun (potentially another pun using Christ the son of God) is the Christian gospel, which will disperse shadows and reveal truth as it was a common eighteenth-century assumption that the Roman's paved the way for the introduction of the Christian gospel into Britain. See, Rowlands, *Mona Antiqua Restaurata*, 95.

⁶⁰ Rev. G. Heath, *The New History, Survey and Description of the City and Suburbs of Bristol* (Bristol, 1794): 6; Henry Needler's *A Sea-Piece, Sent in a Letter from Portsmouth, in October, 1711* in H. Needler, *The Works of Mr. Henry Needler* (London, 1724), pp. 22-26. The Romans were also credited with the introduction of cheese to Cheshire. See *Britannica Curiosa*, Vol. 5 (London, 1777): 132. The power of the Romans civilize the Britons is also referred to in *Caractacus* when Didius claims, "The Romans fight/Not to enslave, but humanize the world." Mason, *Caractacus*, 82.

⁶¹ Some years after the publication of *Caractacus* Warburton defended the Romans' burning the druids' sacred groves because of the druids' "infernal rites", which were "hurtful to society", W. Warburton, *The Works of the Right Reverend William Warburton, Lord Bishop of Gloucester in Seven Volumes*, Vol. 1 (London, 1788): 427.

fraught with tension, being neither entirely good nor bad. Once again Mason's use of nature is morally ambiguous and conceptually malleable.

Conclusion

In the first section of this chapter it was shown that Mason questions the value of the rhetorical and natural sublime by demonstrating that its power is arbitrary and that it can be put to deviant uses. This leads to the championing of reason over enthusiasm. It was then argued in the second section that *Caractacus* continued the attack on poetic enthusiasm, which Mason had begun in *Elfrida*. The popularity of Mason's 'hard' version of ancient druids was shown in two descriptions of stone circles from the later eighteenth century. The third section showed that alongside a critique of the natural sublime, the landscape of *Caractacus* was also used by Mason as a metaphor for the unresolved political tensions within the play. Thus nature is conceived of in *Caractacus* as morally ambiguous. For the most part it plays a negative role in the action of the play, being used by the druids to intimidate their rivals. But it is also used by Caractacus himself to symbolize the noble concept of British liberty and as a call to defend those liberties.

Taking the conclusions of Chapter One into account, a more nuanced interpretation of the role of *Caractacus* in both Mason's life and the wider culture of the eighteenth century becomes evident. Like the concepts in *Elfrida*, the main threads of thought in *Caractacus* can be positioned within Pocock's 'Conservative Enlightenment.' *Caractacus* castigates Catholicism and (with no sense of irony) champions religious tolerance, while also combating 'enthusiasm' through the application of reason and rationality. Thus it tacitly agrees with Warburton's conclusion, quoted at the beginning of the chapter, that, 'the propagation of Christian Truths indispensably requires the aid of reason, and requires no other human aid.' Moreover, the relationship between Caractacus and the druids shows that Mason, like Warburton's *Alliance of Church and State* (1736), championed an Erastian relationship between Church and State.⁶² *Caractacus* also reveals Mason's developing political ideas and literary skills. The subtlety with which he critiques the sublime is, in literary terms,

⁶² S. Taylor, "William Warburton and the Alliance of Church and State", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 43 (1992), pp. 271-286.

far beyond the moralizing of *Elfrida*. And the way in which he creates and manages the ambiguity in the relationship between Britain and the colonizing Romans also displays great artistic and political sensitivity. Indeed, with the aid of hindsight, the broad political questions *Caractacus* asks of Britain as a colonizing nation are the first signs of what will become Mason's pro-American stance in *The English Garden*, explored in Chapter Four.

Between them *Elfrida* and *Caractacus* are statements of Mason's belief in a certain philosophic and religious worldview, which propagates reason over all else and claims it as a bedrock of orthodox Anglican belief. As shown at the end of section two of this chapter, the plays were important mouthpieces to disseminate this worldview throughout mid-eighteenth-century Britain (assuming as seems reasonable that the majority of literate men and women preferred to watch or read a play rather than read the heavy theological tracts of Warburton and his fellow theologians). Taken together *Elfrida* and *Caractacus* confirm that during the 1750s debates over nature – one of the most contested topics of the century – Mason was on the side that united a reasonable empiricism with Anglican orthodoxy and Whig politics, simultaneously generating an aesthetic of nature in which nature was morally ambiguous and nature was to be enjoyed only with caution.

Chapter 3. Rural Toils and Ingenuous Arts: Mason's Rural Retirement

In the late 1780s, the famous actress Sarah Siddons wrote to her friend Elizabeth Harcourt:

“I had the pleasure of seeing my dear Mr. Mason at Sheffield, and went and spent a day at his beautiful little Paradise; tho’ I lov’d him and venerated his genius as much as possible, my love and admiration is wonderfully increase’d since my having seen him domesticated... It is impossible to describe the delight it gives one, and the good it does one, to hear and see that severe countenance and voice grow instantly benign and melodious at the sight of any of his poor neighbours or domestics... the good man took us into his church, which is characteristic of himself, and wears an air of simple dignity. It was not Sunday, yet many people were assembled to hear the little children of the parish sing some poetry, which he has with his usual exquisite taste collected from the Psalms, and adapted to elegant music of different composers. This was altogether too much and too fine a sort of pleasure to enjoy long; it over flow’d at my eyes; but a few moments like these convince one very forcibly there is a state of happiness in store for us which it ‘hath not entered the heart of man to conceive...’”¹

Siddons description of Mason’s life and his care for his parishioners gives the impression of a man happily settled into a virtuous existence. Broadly speaking, this chapter studies the beginnings of the life Siddons describes. It turns from the intellectual history of the previous two chapters to combine English literature, garden history and social history in order to trace Mason’s life as he took orders in the Church of England in 1755 and left the intellectual and social hub of Cambridge for a well paid living in the obscure country parish of Aston, South Yorkshire. Due to the relative comfort of his new living, upon taking orders Mason could be described as occupying the social position of, in the words of A. T. Hart, a “gentlemen-by-profession rather than by birth.”² However, on closer inspection his life as it unfolded in Aston and his own conception of his social standing and the way he expressed it is

¹ W. Harcourt, and L. Harcourt, (eds.), *Harcourt Papers*, Vol. 8 (Oxford, 1880): 312-313.

² Hart, *The Eighteenth-Century Country Parson*, 12.

far more complex than this. This chapter reveals the complexities in Mason's life between 1755 and 1764 and analyzes the ways in which he used nature and its domestic form the garden to express his discontent, rectify his unhappiness, and modify his social status.

The first section of this chapter covers the early years of Mason's career as Aston's parish priest (1753-1757) and analyzes his unwilling entry into the priesthood from a position of social privilege. In two private poems, Mason and his close friend Richard Hurd characterize Mason's departure from Cambridge to Aston as a form of unnatural captivity. They ironically use the country as a metaphor for artifice and the city as a metaphor for naturalness. Nature becomes a way in which Mason expresses his frustration at having to take orders. The second section covers the early 1760s, by which time Mason had settled down in Aston. It is argued that Mason wanted to fashion a public persona for himself as a 'gentleman-writer.' And that this involved jettisoning mention of his career in the church, adopting the rural retirement trope, and cautiously defining himself as (almost) the social equal of his aristocratic patron. A detailed analysis of Richard Hurd's retirement, which also entailed leaving Cambridge for an obscure country parish and was coeval with Mason's (although it began later), is offered as a comparison to Mason's life. Mason's attempts to define himself as a 'gentleman-writer' is in sharp contrast to Hurd who uses the rural retirement trope to define himself as a 'gentleman-by-profession.' Taken together sections one and two argue that nature was a key concept through which Mason could initially express disappointment at having to take orders and subsequently use to redefine himself as a gentlemanly poet of rural retirement.

Moving from literary studies to garden history, in the final section it is argued that the gardens Mason designed for himself and Hurd copied the recent style of 'pleasure grounds' adopted by the aristocracy. Therefore the final section reinforces the picture of Mason in the late 1750s and early 1760s defining himself as a man of social importance. And it also shows that gardens were an important way members of the middle classes could close the social gap between themselves and the aristocratic social elite.

The City as Nature: Mason's Taking of Orders

In 1753, the year following the publication of *Elfrida*, William Mason was living a happy life in Cambridge. He wrote poetry and plays and spent time in discussion with his peers. At this point Mason had no financial concerns. He was jointly funded by an allowance from his father, who was a clergyman of a high-income church,³ as well as a small fellowship from Pembroke College. But disaster struck when his father died and unexpectedly left him out of the will. Moreover, his fellowship was due to run out the following year. The reasoning behind his father's decision remains irretrievable. The inheritance went entirely to Mason's stepmother and her daughter but there seems to have been no ill-will between Mason and his father, nor between Mason and his stepfamily.⁴ It is conceivable that William Mason Sr. was unimpressed by the manner in which his son was spending his allowance and wished to force him into the priesthood, the only employment Mason was trained for, but there may be other reasons obscured by history. Whatever the case, his father's decision caused Mason vexation and was interpreted by his friends as a great injustice. Thomas Gray, for example, described himself as "both surprised and angry" and suspected foul play on the part of Mason's stepmother.⁵

As unfortunate as Mason may seem at this point in his life, he was also fortunate in that he had family connections to the aristocracy. Almost as soon as he was left out of his father's will he was written into the will of John Hutton, brother of Matthew Sutton, Archbishop of Canterbury. Upon Hutton's death at the end of the 1760s Mason was left financially secure for the rest of his life.⁶ More practically, he was taken on as secretary to his distant relative and now patron, Robert D'Arcy, Lord

³ Draper, *William Mason*, 18.

⁴ Mason describes the event: "...my father, by the strangest disposition of his affairs that can possibly be conceived, has left all my paternal estate to my mother-in-law [stepmother] for her life and entailed it so on my little sister." Tovey, *Letters of Thomas Gray*, Vol. 1, 238.

⁵ Tovey, *Letters of Thomas Gray*, Vol. 1, 239. In the same letter that Gray states his suspicions he also says that Mason shows "no resentment" towards his stepmother. As Mason was in Hull at the time of his father's death and for the reading of the will and still shows no signs of resentment or suspicion over his stepmother's behaviour (and they continued to share an amiable relationship) Gray's accusations seem a little hasty.

⁶ Draper, *William Mason*, 44.

Holderness. Holderness was then serving as Secretary of State for the Southern Department. Although he was little more than a political tool for the Duke of Newcastle, Secretary of State for the Northern Department, it was an important public position.⁷

At some point during his tenure as secretary to Holderness, Mason's patron offered him the benefice of Aston, South Yorkshire. Mason was undecided as to whether or not to take the living and turned to William Warburton for advice. Warburton told Mason to accept only if he had, 'a *call*... nothing fanatical or superstitious; but an inclination, and, on that, a resolution, to dedicate all his studies to the service of religion, and totally to abandon his poetry... [because] we are fighting with infidelity *Pro Aris et Focis*.'⁸ Soon after consulting Warburton, Mason did take orders. In late 1755 he moved to Aston to begin life in the country as a parish priest and chaplain to Holderness. At first his friends genuinely believed he would follow Warburton's advice and give up writing poetry. Hurd for example, wrote to Mason, "I have no expectation of entertainment from the wits of these days, I mean now that You have burnt your Lyre."⁹ But if Mason abandoned his poetry at all, he did not abandon it for long. He would spend the rest of his life combining literary endeavors and religious duties.

As with other men fulfilling the role of a parish priest occupying a country living (often known as a 'country parson'), Mason's expectations of his standard of living would have been determined by his social background, education and fortune in finding a generous patron.¹⁰ As the son of a well-off clergyman, with an MA from

⁷ H. M. Scott, "D'Arcy, Robert, fourth earl of Holderness (1718–1778)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), Online Edition, Lawrence Goldman (ed.), January 2008.

⁸ Cadell and Davies, *Letters*, 171.

⁹ Brewer, *The Early Letters of Richard Hurd*, 278.

¹⁰ For social histories of country parsons see, A. T. Hart, *The Eighteenth-Century Country Parson: Circa 1689 to 1830* (Shrewsbury: Wilding & Son Ltd., 1955); J. Rule, *Albion's People: English Society 1714-1815* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 1992): 48; N. Yates, *Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Ch. 5. For the duties Mason would have to perform as chaplain to Holderness see, W. Gibson, *A Social History of the Domestic Chaplain: 1530-1840* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997): Ch. 3. For the general state of parish churches in Yorkshire around this period see, J. Jago and E. Royle, 'The Eighteenth-Century Church in Yorkshire. Archbishop

Cambridge, several published literary works, and an aristocratic patron to whom he was related, Mason was near the top of the social order of country parsons and must have expected to live a very comfortable life. However, due to the circumstances surrounding his taking of orders Mason was at first very unhappy with his fate, which is evinced in two private poems.¹¹ The poems, exchanged by Hurd and Mason in their correspondence, adopt a metaphor of a caged linnet to describe Mason and his change in fortune. More broadly, in both of them freedom is associated with nature and Mason's past in the city, whereas Mason's present situation in the country is associated with money and captivity.

Hurd, who began the exchange, aptly described his short poem as, "monitory or rather vituperative"¹² and entitled it with ironic aggrandizement, *Sonnet Addressed to Mr. Mason on his Leaving College and Going into the Family of Lord Holderness* (1756):¹³

Was it for this insidious Friendship strove
To clasp our bosoms in its silken snare,
For this, thy virtues bloom'd so wondrous fair,
And Fame for thee th' unfading chaplet wove?
Say will yon linnet from her spray [sic.] remove,
Where sportive she, and free from every care
Warbles at will her softly soothing air,
And for the glittering cage desert the grove?

Drummond's Primary Visitation of 1764', *Borthwick Papers* (York: University of York, 1999) and R. Hall and S. Richardson, 'The Anglican Clergy and Yorkshire Politics in the Eighteenth Century', *Borthwick Papers* (York: University of York, 1998).

¹¹ There is another public poem, entitled *Upon Mr. Mason's Taking Orders* (1753), by David Garrick. It expresses a similar sentiment to Hurd and Mason but lightly veils it with humour. The poem is addressed to Holderness and in the first half the Muses admonishes Mason's patron for 'seducing' him away from them, "Could he [Holderness], ungrateful, and unkind!/From us estrange our Mason's mind." The second half of the poem answers this with a firm no: Mason could never leave behind the muses, "Whate'er he now has sworn, he swore/With stronger zeal to us before." D. Garrick, *Poetical Works, with Explanatory Notes*, Vol. 2 (London, 1785).

¹² Pearce and Whibley, *The Correspondence of Richard Hurd*, 25.

¹³ More precisely the poem was written in January 1756 (Mason accepted Aston in Dec. 1755).

Then may'st thou, sweetest of the tuneful quire,
Thy gentle muse, thy loved and loving friend,
The golden competence, the vacant hour,
Celestial blessings, barter for the hire
Of witlings base, and thy free soul descend
To toil for unblest'd gold, and flatter power.¹⁴

The short poem begins with a rhetorical question across four lines that intimates Mason's new situation is a waste of his poetic talents and that Hurd is hurt to see such a fate befall his friend. The use of a chaplet, with its medieval overtones, to describe Mason's undying fame, where a wreath would be equally as appropriate but more classical, is a reference to the medieval revivalism of *Elfrida* (*Caractacus* had not yet been written). Hurd then adopts the metaphorical device of referring to his friend as a linnet. Not only was the linnet a popular eighteenth-century pet and topic for poetry, plays, and novels,¹⁵ its use would also have had an ironical ring to Mason's ears as he had used a linnet in *Elfrida* as a symbol of content (Hurd's poem is all about discontent). Hurd characterizes the linnet as a bird that lives in nature and enjoys a carefree life and one of creative freedom, 'Warbles *at will* her softly soothing air.' He asks whether 'for the glittering cage' Mason will 'desert the grove'? By doing so Hurd is juxtaposing the artificial but alluring with the natural world and implies the level and type of comfort that Mason will enjoy.¹⁶ Should Mason choose the cage over the grove he will enter into a life of bartering and hiring his talent to those who cannot appreciate it and will only use it to flatter themselves. The language Hurd uses here is a language of commerce and suggests that Mason's life is something of a commodity. The term 'unblest gold' is a fairly caustic comment on becoming a

¹⁴ F. Kilvert, *Memoirs of the life and writings of the Right Rev. Richard Hurd* (London, 1860): 62.

¹⁵ See for example Thomas Gray's *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College* (1747); John Breval, *The Rape of Helen* (1737); John Gay, *Dione, A Pastoral Tragedy* (1719); Sarah Dixon, *The Linnet* (1740). For a history of caged birds in the late eighteenth century, W. Powell Jones, *The Captive Linnet: A Footnote on Eighteenth-Century Sentiment in Philological Quarterly*, 33 (January, 1954): pp. 330-337. See also, T. Keymer, *Richardson's 'Clarissa' and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 184.

¹⁶ William Gibson has previously noted the implication of Mason's future comfort. See, Gibson *A Social History*, 67.

clergyman for financial gain. The allusions to *Elfrida* are a reminder to Mason of what he had already achieved as a poet.

Adopting the caged linnet metaphor, albeit less vituperatively and more despairingly, Mason replied to Hurd:

A gentle linnet, debonnaire [sic] and gay,
Whilom had roved the wood in careless vein,
Perch'd where it pleased, and with its honied strain
Had waked the morn, and closed the eye of day.

A Fowler heard, and o'er her custom'd spray
Inwove of limed twigs the tangling train,
And with her favourite food bestrew'd the plain:
The wiry cage unseen at distance lay.

Blythe and unweeting, to the charmed tree
The songster comes, and claps his little wing,
Then downward bends to peck the golden fare.

Will no kind hand the struggling captive free?
He yields to fate. He droops: forgets to sing,
And greets his lord with no sweet-warbled air!¹⁷

As with Hurd's poem, Mason uses the linnet and its environment to create a picture of his life before he took orders as natural and free, 'Perched where it pleased.' But he does not take up Hurd's questioning tone. For Mason his situation is one of a predominantly unjust fate. The middle two stanzas lack clarity and the fowler's trap could be interpreted either as his inheritance, which fell through, or Holderness' patronage, which Mason accepted only to find himself trapped in a life he did not really want. He does, however, self-deprecatingly claim that gold is his 'favourite food' implying that he has his own greed to blame for his predicament. Despite this

¹⁷ Kilvert, *Memoirs*, 62-63.

the last three lines are simultaneously fatalistic and defiant. Mason resigns himself to a fate he does not want. At the same time he refuses to sing for his patron. He will not thank Holderness for his patronage, nor ‘flatter’ him as Hurd had suggested he would.

Both poems are predominantly complaints, although both include interpretations of Mason’s situation as the result of his own actions. Hurd asks questions of Mason as if the choice is not yet made, and Mason partly blames his own greed. As complaints both poems are obviously problematic. Without the patronage of Holderness, Mason would not have been able to survive, or would have been forced into a much less comfortable way to make a living (no surprise then that the poems remained private until the nineteenth century). More interestingly, the conceit of Mason being a linnet out in the wild who is then captured shows the importance of metaphors drawn from the natural world to Mason. They were ways through which he could understand and express sorrow, frustration and friendship. Moreover, in reality Mason was moving from the city to the country but both poems turn this on its head by suggesting that by moving from the city to the country Mason was moving from nature to artifice. As will be shown, Mason later reversed this interpretation of his life through the literary trope of rural retirement.

A revealing comparison can be made between the two private poems and a public statement Hurd made two years later about Mason’s retirement at the end of *A Letter to Mr. Mason; On the Marks of Imitation* (1757).¹⁸ The churlish tone and content of the private poems is gone and the dichotomy of nature and artifice is exchanged for one of usefulness and idleness. The work itself is a treatise on the rights and wrongs of literary imitation. It ends with a tribute to the time Hurd and Mason had spent together in Cambridge since they had first met at University in 1747:

“But we have lain, as the poet speaks, on these primrose beds, too long. It is time that you now rise to your own nobler inventions; and that I return myself to those, less

¹⁸ The timing of Hurd’s tribute may seem odd as Mason had left Cambridge for the country parish of Aston, several years earlier in 1753, and Hurd would not leave for his own country parish, Thurcaston, until two years later in 1759 (although the decision had obviously been made at this point). But it can be sensibly explained by postulating either that it was written a while before it was published, or that Hurd is conflating time periods for effect.

pleasing, perhaps, but more useful studies from which your friendly solicitations have called me. Such as these amusements are, however, I cannot repent me of them, since they have been innocent at least, and even ingenuous; and, what I am fondest to recollect, have helped to enliven those many years of friendship we have pass'd together in this place. I see indeed, with regret, the approach of that time, which threatens to take me both from it [Cambridge], and you. But however fortune may dispose of me, she cannot throw me to a distance, to which your affection and good wishes, at least, will not follow me.”¹⁹

In this ‘open letter’ Hurd glosses over the unhappy reality behind Mason’s move from Cambridge to Aston. He emphasizes that Mason is making a switch from idleness to usefulness. Mason will ‘rise’ to his ‘nobler inventions’ (poetry), and Hurd will ‘return’ to his ‘useful studies’ (theology). Hurd’s words are rendered painfully ironic if compared to his earlier description of the ‘descent’ of Mason’s ‘free soul’ in the private poem. Furthermore, Hurd fails to mention Mason’s new role as a clergyman. The most obvious reason is that Hurd did not want to show disrespect to a profession he held in high esteem and practiced. But it also suggests that he knew that Mason was not keen on his new employment and predominantly wanted to be defined in front of the public as a writer (an idea reinforced by Hurd’s publication as a whole).²⁰

¹⁹ R. Hurd, *A Letter to Mr. Mason; On the Marks of Imitation* (London, 1757): 75.

²⁰ In his own poem on Mason’s move away from Cambridge, William Whitehead criticized Mason for preferring his writing over his religious duties: “How oft, beneath some hoary shade/Where Cam glides indolently slow/Hast thou, as indolently laid/Prefer’d to heaven thy fav’rite vow.” Whitehead, whose work reads like the poetic counterpart to Warburton’s advice, also uses a bird metaphor, which suggest he knew of the private poems Mason and Hurd exchanged:

That bird, thy fancy frees from care,
 With many a fear, unknown to thee,
Must rove to glean his scanty fare
 From field to field, from tree to tree:
His lot, united with his kind,
Has all its little joys confin’d;
The Lover’s and the Parent’s ties
 Alarm by turns his anxious breast;
Yet, bound by fate, by instinct wise,
He hails with songs the rising morn,
And pleas’d at evening’s cool return
 He sings himself to rest.

However, it was not long before Mason's attitude towards his situation brightened, and perhaps to his surprise he displayed a real vocation for the priesthood. At the end of the 1750s Mason reported of his life in Aston, "I lead the sweetest nothing of a life you can imagine, and yet I paint and I write and I play... O, but then I preach, and have such congregations and am so much admir'd that I am afraid it will make a Coxcomb of me..."²¹ A letter from Whitehead confirms his success and happy life, "He is much the finest preacher in the whole county, and villages and towns flock to hear him. He has a favourite blacksmith whom he has taught to sing Marcello's Psalms like an angel..."²² Moreover, in the late 1750s and early 1760s Mason pushed hard for preferment in the church and received a number of positions: Prebend of Holme in the York Minster (1756, resigned 1762); Chaplain to George II (1757); Chaplain to George III (1760, resigned 1772); Precentor of York Minster and Prebend of Driffield (1762, held until death). When Mason received the last of these Gray wrote, "I heartily rejoice with you in your establishment, and with myself that I lived to see it – to see your insatiable mouth stopped, and your anxious periwig at rest and slumbering in a stall. The Bishop of London, you see, is dead; there is a fine opening..."²³ Such a *volte-face* over Aston and priesthood is most likely the result of a combination of time, a comfortable standard of living, and Mason's suitability for the role of parish priest.

It is also apparent that these developments in Mason's life create for him a relatively prominent social status. His preferments saw him take on important political positions. A chaplaincy to the King meant preaching in front of the monarchy and arguably being able to persuade them through sermonizing (for example, the sermon against enthusiasm analyzed in Chapter One was preached in front of George III). Mason's progress in his church career is also reflected in his literary career. In 1756 he published a collection of odes, in 1759 *Caractacus*, and in 1764 his first collection

R. Dodsley, *A Collection of Poems in Six Volumes, by Several Hands*, Vol. VI. (London, 1758): 314.

²¹ Harcourt and Harcourt, *Harcourt Papers*, Vol. 7, 8.

²² Harcourt and Harcourt, *Harcourt Papers*, Vol. 7, 214.

²³ Tovey, *Letters of Thomas Gray*, Vol. 3, 247-248.

of poems (distinct from his odes). All three works met with great success, giving Mason greater social prominence.

This section has shown that Mason entered the priesthood from a privileged but unhappy situation. Both he and Hurd responded to this change in Mason's life in a private exchange of poems. They imagined that Mason was transitioning from a position of natural freedom to one of artifice, captivity and financial security. Nature in the poems is used ironically because in reality Mason was moving from the city to the countryside. Alongside these private poems of complaint, in *On the Marks of Imitation* Hurd publicly represented Mason's departure from Cambridge as a change from idleness to usefulness and as a continuation of Mason's work as a writer. In the next section it will be shown that in the early 1760s Mason took to happily referring to his life in Aston as a rural retirement and, as Hurd had done, defining himself before the public as a poet. But it is important to note that the happiness Mason found in the 1760s came after great dissatisfaction, after a few years in the role of parish priest, and after several preferments within the wider church.

Rural Retirement

The eighteenth-century 'rural retirement' is a loaded and complex notion, familiar to literary and garden historians.²⁴ As a literary trope rural retirement stretches back as far as antiquity, where it was most famously and influentially expressed in Horace's 'Happy Man' who spends his life in the country pursuing agricultural/horticultural activities.²⁵ Inherent in the eighteenth-century manifestation of the trope is the idea

²⁴ Two classic studies are, M. Røstvig, *The Happy Man*, and R. Williams *Country and City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). See also, M. Ketcham, *Transparent Designs: Reading, Performance, and Form in the Spectator Papers* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1985); D. Solkin, *Painting for Money* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1992): Ch. 1; P. Bacscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and their Poetry*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005): Ch. 6; J. Goodridge, *Rural Life in Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); L. Sanyal, *English Literature*, Ch. 5.

²⁵ In Abraham Cowley's translation of Horace's famous second epode:

Happy the Man whom bounteous Gods allow
With his own Hand Paternal Grounds to plough!
Like the first golden Mortals Happy he

that the country is the antithesis of the city both morally and physically. The country is imagined to be free from the vice, temptations and filthy air of the city and so encourages a meditative existence in which healthy fresh air and the beauty of nature can be taken in. However, there is a complication because vice-ridden though it may be, the city is the site of sociability, civilization, benevolence and public achievement. For the men and women of the eighteenth century,²⁶ as for many before them, a sharp distinction between city vice and country virtue created moral tension. Should one live away from vice and thus in greater virtue, or live with the risk of falling to temptation but with the opportunity to rid others of vice? Some men, such as Joseph Addison, answered moderately that the country should be used as a sort of analeptic. For others, such as Samuel Johnson, rural retirement was a self-centered and unchristian act.²⁷ As will be shown below, Hurd and Mason were well aware of these issues. Moreover, they presented more of a challenge for Hurd than they did for Mason as both men sought to craft public personas for themselves.

Mason's most obvious adoption of the rural retirement trope as a means of crafting a public persona coincides with an important act of social definition. It is found in the image on the title page of his 1764 collection of poems and in the dedicatory sonnet to Holderness that follows it. The title page (Fig. 4) is an image of the various arts in which Mason engaged. The left side is dominated by music, painting, drama, and architecture. The right side is given over to images of gardening and nature: gardening tools, a potted plant and a beehive. A string of flowers flows through the image. At the bottom is a scroll with an epigram from Martial, "Vitum quæ faciunt beatorium." A translation by Ben Jonson was widely known in the eighteenth century,

From Business and the cares of Money free!

Hurd, *Select Works of Mr. A. Cowley*, Vol. 2, 199.

²⁶ For women's relationship to retirement see Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, Ch. 6 and Bending, *Green Retreats*.

²⁷ For J. Addison's statement on retirement see, *The Spectator*, Vol. VI, 58. For William Whitehead see his poem *The Enthusiast*, explored in Chapter One. Whitehead, writing against complete retirement into nature, claims "man was made for man." Johnson was the eighteenth-century's most famous and outspoken critic of rural retirement. See, S. Johnson, *The Works of Samuel Johnson in Nine Volumes*, Vol. 4 (London, 1825): 128; *The Rambler in Four Volumes*, Vol. 1 (London, 1793): 69. And for Johnson's opinions on Cowley's retirement see, S. Johnson, *The Lives of the English Poets* (London, 1831): 4-6.

which Samuel Johnson had further popularized: “The things that make the happier life are these.”²⁸ Thus the title page is an image of Mason’s happy life, one of artistic endeavor and horticultural activity and noticeably devoid of any mention of his professional life. The dedicatory sonnet to Holderness, reinforces and develops this image of Mason:

D’ARCY, to thee, whate’er of happier vein,
Smit with the love of Song, my youth essay’d,
This verse devotes from ASTON’S secret shade,
Where letter’d Ease, thy gift, endears the scene.
Here, as the light-wing’d moments glide serene,
I weave the bower, around the tufted mead
In careless flow the simple pathway lead,
And strew with many a rose the shaven green.
So, to deceive my solitary days,
With rural toils ingenuous arts I blend,
Secure from envy, negligent of praise,
Yet not unknown to fame, if D’ARCY lend
His wonted smile to dignify my lays,
The Muse’s Patron, but the Poet’s Friend.²⁹

Immediately striking is Mason’s reference to his patron by the familiar term of his last name, D’Arcy. Although not as familiar as a first name it is much less formal than using his aristocratic title Holderness, which he uses in the dedication on the previous page. Thus there is juxtaposition between the Holderness of the dedication and the D’ARCY of the sonnet. From here Mason creates an image of himself entirely centred on leisure. He briefly credits his ‘letter’d Ease’ as D’Arcy’s ‘gift’ but does not dwell on the issue of patronage to avoid encumbering the innocent, light-hearted tone

²⁸ See, J. Brady, “‘Noe fault, but Life’: Jonson’s Folio as Monument and Barrier,” in J. Brady and W. H. Herendeen, *Ben Jonson’s 1616 Folio* (Cranbury, NJ.: Associated Universities Press, 1991): 213.

²⁹ W. Mason, *Poems* (London, 1764): iii. Mason sent a draft of the sonnet to Gray, it is recorded in R. Bentley (ed.), *The Correspondence of Thomas Gray and William Mason: To which are Added Some Letters Addressed by Gray to the Rev. James Brown* (London, 1853): 310-311.

of the poem with associations of work and finance. All the imagery Mason uses to describe himself and his life in the middle of the sonnet is drawn from the language of rural retirement. Mason lives in solitude away from praise or envy and thus enjoys an unaffected innocence (see also his claim above that he leads the ‘sweetest nothing of a life’), which he spends in gardening. The real ingenuity of the poem comes when Mason artfully blends his clerical duties, ‘rural toils,’ with his poetry, ‘ingenuous arts.’ The combination of ‘rural’ and ‘toils’ makes his priestly duties sound agricultural, and thus they fit with the image of him as a solitary gardener, and ‘ingenuous arts’ glosses over any contentiousness in his poetry, some of which was overtly political. There is certainly tension in Mason’s praise of solitude and his desire for fame. More significantly, in the last line Mason again seeks to level the relationship between him and Holderness. The aristocrat becomes, ‘The Muse’s Patron, but the Poet’s Friend.’ Any relationship of financial dependence is transferred to the Muse, or poetry, while Mason and Holderness enjoy the more socially equal relationship of friendship.

The public persona Mason crafts for himself in *Sonnet to Holderness* is of a poet living in rural retirement who does not write poetry for money or fame (although the tension over the issue of fame has been noted above). His poetry is ‘ingenuous’, supposedly untainted by political prejudice and assumed to contain the virtues that country living leads to. It is certainly distinct from the eighteenth-century ‘hack writer’, who lived in the city as a hired hand and whose opinions could be bought. Moreover, Mason carefully balances deference to his aristocratic patron while defining himself as (almost) his social equal. Mason therefore becomes a ‘gentleman writer.’³⁰ The situation was different for Richard Hurd, whose life offers a revealing comparison to Mason’s.

Richard Hurd was the son of a yeoman and attended a good grammar school. However, unlike Mason who was admitted to Cambridge as a pensioner, he did not have the money to pay all his fees and was admitted to the university as a sizar, the

³⁰ For a wider survey and analysis of ‘gentleman authors’ and ‘hack writers’ see, O. M. Brack Jr., ‘Tobias Smollet: The Life of an Author’ in C. D. Johnson, *New Contexts for Eighteenth-Century British Fiction: “Hearts Resolved and Hands Prepared”*, *Essays in Honor of Jerry C. Beasley* (Lanham: University of Delaware, 2011), pp. 17-40.

lowest rank of undergraduate (he did, however, improve his standing by winning a scholarship in his first year). Again unlike Mason who had lived a life of literary ease after graduating, when Hurd graduated he went straight into work. He took orders in the Church of England, received a living from the Macro family and then gained a fellowship at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. He spent the next fourteen years occupying various positions for Cambridge University, during which he befriended Mason and William Warburton and rose to literary prominence and controversy with an edition of Horace's *Ars Poetica* (1749) and *Epistola ad Augustum* (1751), and his own *The Mischiefs of Enthusiasm and Bigotry* (1752), and *On the Delicacy of Friendship: A Seventh Dissertation* (1755).³¹

In 1757 Hurd accepted the college living of Thurcaston, Leicestershire, which was one of the richest in the college's possession. As a result he moved from Cambridge in 1758. The year leading up to the move was a productive one and saw a joint publication by himself and Warburton, *Remarks on Mr. David Hume's Essay on the Natural History of Religion* (1757), his own *A Letter to Mr. Mason: On the Marks of Imitation*: (1757), and the major writing period for one of his most important works, *Moral and Political Dialogues* (1759). Although not as dramatic as Mason's departure, and certainly not as rife with emotional angst, Hurd may also have left Cambridge because he felt he had to. In 1756 his health was failing from what he diagnosed as an "inherited woe" and he thought that the country would be better for his health (his father had died earlier in the decade, which may have also spurred him to consider his health).³² The most immediately obvious difference between Mason's and Hurd's departures from Cambridge is that Mason's came from a position of privilege and disappointment, whereas Hurd's came after roughly a decade and a half of work.

Unfortunately, very few letters of the many exchanged by Hurd and Mason in this period survive. The reason for this is that after Mason's death Hurd and his nephew, also named Richard Hurd, destroyed the vast majority of the letters. 130 letters were

³¹ A useful, short biography of Hurd, on which the above paragraph draws heavily, and which includes a list of his roles at Cambridge can be found in, Brewer, *The Early Letters of Richard Hurd*, x-ix.

³² Brewer, *The Early Letters of Richard Hurd*, 291-292.

returned to Hurd by Mason's curate Christopher Alderson out of which only 30 were saved. On these 30 Hurd's nephew recorded 34 extracts from the destroyed 100.³³ Fortunately for this study, the younger Richard Hurd was keen to record two things: his uncle's progress with *Moral and Political Dialogues* and his opinions of life at Thurcaston.

In the earliest extract to survive, Hurd writes to Mason that he spent a fortnight in Thurcaston. He records the value of the living as £200 and states, "The place [is] agreeable enough for a Summer Residence. I doubt whether I shall be fond of it in Winter." A year later on 10 July 1758, as his house is being worked on he writes uncharitably, "The plain truth is, these Leicestershire workmen are insufferably tedious, not to say stupid... I shall lose the best part of the Summer, before I can live in this retirement as I would do." But the next month he writes, "The trouble and delays of workmen... had seized me when I writ last... you are not to think that I am at all dissatisfied with my retirement in Thurcaston. I even like it so well that I am almost determin'd to return to Cambridge no more." But Hurd did envy Mason when John Wood, a poet, playwright and friend of both men since their undergraduate years became Mason's curate, "I envy you such a neighbor as Mr. Wood, who will make your retirement, not only easy, but delightful to you."³⁴ What these early letters reveal is that Hurd immediately cast his move from Cambridge to Thurcaston as a retirement.

As the years passed by in Thurcaston, Hurd's use of rural retirement language became more precise and related primarily to his garden and his distance from the 'world.' He writes to Mason, quoting Milton's *Il Penseroso*, "You know the passion of my heart is, 'Retired Leisure/That in trim gardens taketh pleasure.'"³⁵ He was also particularly keen on a passage from Horace, 'Hae latebrae dulces, etiam, si credis, amoenae,'

³³ All the extracts and the history are given in J. Nankivell, 'Extracts from the Destroyed Letters of Richard Hurd to William Mason', *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Apr., 1950), pp. 153-163.

³⁴ Nankivell, *Extracts*, 161. Elsewhere, Hurd happily reported to Warburton, "I am here perfectly quiet, for I have delightfully bad roads about me." J. Cradock, *Literary and Miscellaneous Memoirs*, Vol. 4 (London, 1828): 195. For more on John Wood becoming Mason's curate see, Bentley, *The Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, 75-76.

³⁵ Nankivell, *Extracts*, 161.

[Translated in the period as, “This pleasing, this delicious soft retreat”³⁶]. The second of these quotations Hurd proposed for the arbour in his garden and suggested to the author Joseph Cradock for his own garden.³⁷ Throughout the late 1750s and early 1760s, Hurd variously describes Thurcaston as an ‘enjoyable solitude’, ‘an asylum from what is called the world’ and a ‘delicious retreat.’³⁸

These extracts from Hurd’s correspondence with Mason create a picture of Hurd’s life in Thurcaston as an enjoyable and leisurely retirement. But it would be amiss to think that Hurd’s life was leisurely. The above are only extracts from letters. Many other letters Hurd sent to Mason from Thurcaston concerned themselves with Hurd’s career as a theologian. Moreover, works by both men published around 1759 demonstrate that Hurd wished to be perceived as living in a rural retirement that furthered his work as a theologian; much as Mason used his rural life in Aston to create an image of himself as an unaffected, and therefore virtuous, poet. The first of these works to be analyzed is an elegy that Mason wrote for Hurd. It was attached to the second edition of *Caractacus* (1759), and was most likely intended as a public reply to *On the Marks of Imitation*.

Over fourteen stanzas Mason writes of his desire to resurrect the forms of Ancient Greek tragedy and the encouragement he received from Hurd in his endeavors. The final stanzas praise Hurd’s own writings, personal morality and rejection of worldly fame. It finishes with a picture of Hurd ‘in Low Thurcaston’s sequester’d Bower... distant from promotions view,’

Yet, shelter'd there by calm Contentment's wing;
Pleas'd he could smile, and with sage Hooker's eye
“See from his mother earth God's blessings spring,

³⁶ P. Francis (trans.), *The Epistles and Art of Poetry of Horace. In Latin and English*, Vol. 4. (London, 1746): 123. The line is taken from Horace’s sixteenth epistle.

³⁷ Nankivell, *Extracts*, 160; J. Cradock, *Literary and Miscellaneous Memoirs; Village memoirs, in a series of letters; Literary memoirs and epistolary correspondence; Poems*, Vol. 4 (London, 1828): 196. Hurd never used the motto as he wrote to Warburton, he did not ‘deal in mottos.’ See, Cadell and Davies, *Letters*, 431.

³⁸ Nankivell, *Extracts*, 161.

And eat his bread in peace and privacy.”³⁹

Mason presents Hurd in rural retirement and makes a claim for Hurd’s disinterestedness in preferment, ‘distant from promotions view’, thus freeing him from accusations of clerical greed.⁴⁰ At the same time he shows that Hurd’s retirement is appropriate to his position as a man of theological reputation. The way in which Mason does this is to parallel Hurd and Richard Hooker, a hero of moderate Anglican theology – Warburton, for example, had his portrait painted reading Hooker’s *Of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (Fig. 5). The parallel between Hurd and Hooker is achieved in the final two lines, which are an almost direct quote, poeticized for metrical reasons, from a letter of Hooker’s to Archbishop Whitgift:

“But, my Lord, I shall never be able to finish what I have begun [*Of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*] unless I be removed into some quiet country parsonage, where I may see God’s blessings spring out of my mother earth, and eat my own bread in peace and privacy.”⁴¹

Mason uses Hooker because it was a rural retirement that allowed the sixteenth-century divine to write *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, a crucial book for eighteenth-century theology and law.⁴² In effect Mason asks: why should Hurd not also be able to use his retirement to write important theology? In this way Mason addresses the issue, described above, that Hurd’s rural retirement could be conceived as selfish and draws a positive parallel between Hurd and a much lauded theologian.

³⁹ W. Mason, ‘To The Reverend Mr. Hurd’ in *Caractacus*, vi-vii.

⁴⁰ For overviews of anti-clericalism in the eighteenth century see, R. I. Ingram, *Religion, Reform and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century: Thomas Secker and the Church of England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007): Chapter 4; N. Aston, and M. Cragoe (eds.), *Anticlericalism in Britain: C.1500-1914* (London: Sutton Publishing, 2000).

⁴¹ R. Hooker, *The Works of that Learned and Judicious Divine, Mr. Richard Hooker, in Eight Books... There is also Prefix'd Before the Book, The Life of the Author, Sometime Written by Isaac Walton* (London, 1705): 24.

⁴² Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment*, 31-38, 61; D. MacCulloch, ‘Richard Hooker’s Reputation’, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 117, No. 473 (Sep., 2002), pp. 773-812; R. Eccleshall, ‘Richard Hooker and the Peculiarities of the English: The Reception of the *Ecclesiastical Polity* in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’, *History of Political Thought* II/1 (1981), pp. 63-177.

In the same year as Mason's elegy appeared, Hurd had similarly presented himself before the public as a theologian living in a rural retirement and argued for the validity of such a life. The work in question is a dialogic essay entitled *On Retirement*, which was part of Hurd's *Moral and Political Dialogues* (1759). The dialogue is between Abraham Cowley and his friend and posthumous editor Thomas Sprat. It is set during Cowley's life after he had retired from court to a country living.⁴³ Sprat essentially takes the line that Cowley's retirement is motivated by a selfish and unchristian desire for his own happiness. Cowley's main defense is to claim that retirement must be an entirely subjective choice. It should only be taken by those whose "temper and turn of mind... talents [and] circumstances"⁴⁴ would suit it. Cowley will prove the value of his retirement to the wider public by writing a work that he could not write if he were not in retirement. A fascinating essay, *On Retirement* echoes the retroactive validation of retirement found in Cowley's *Essays*, which he produced in his retirement, as well as the subjectivism of Petrarch's *De Vita Solitaria*.⁴⁵ Written and published at the time Hurd was moving to Thurcaston, *On Retirement* can be read as an apology for his own retirement. The following passage then, spoken by Cowley, is an image of Hurd's life in Thurcaston:

"But look upon this scene before you, and tell me what inducements I can possibly have to quit it for any thing you can promise me in exchange? Is there in that vast labyrinth you call the world, where so many thousands lose themselves in endless wandering and perplexities, any corner where the mind can recollect itself so perfectly, where it can attend to its own business, and pursue its proper interests so conveniently, as in this quiet and sequestered spot? Here the passions subside, or, if they continue to agitate, do not however transport the mind with those feverish and vexatious fervours, which distract us in public life. This is the seat of virtue and of reason; here I can fashion my life by the precepts of duty and conscience; and here I

⁴³ Richard Hurd records the details of Cowley's retirement in a short biography of Cowley that he prefixed to his own collection of the poet's works. See, R. Hurd (ed.), *Select Works of Mr. A. Cowley; In Two Volumes: With a Preface and Notes by the Editor*, Vol. 1 (London, 1772): 16-19. For the most recent scholarly biography of Cowley see, J. G. Taaffe, *Abraham Cowley* (New York, 1972).

⁴⁴ R. Hurd, *Moral and Political Dialogues* (London, 1759): 47.

⁴⁵ M. A. Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008): 59-64.

have leisure to make acquaintance, that acquaintance which elsewhere is so rarely, if ever, made, with the ways and works of God.”⁴⁶

Hurd’s point, and one that is common to much retirement literature, is that only away from the city and in the countryside can he find the peace, quiet, calm, and freedom from distractions that will enable him to focus fully on contemplative thought. In such a setting, and with the help of reason, it is possible to come to a deeper understanding of God. Having gained these insights, Hurd will share them with his country. In the same way Mason had joined theological study and rural retirement in his elegy to Hurd. However, although Hurd did produce important theological works whilst living at Thurcaston,⁴⁷ he was not distant ‘from promotion’s view.’ In 1760 he became chaplain to Warburton, in 1762 he received the sinecure of Folkton, Yorkshire, and in 1767 he became Archdeacon of Gloucester (Warburton was Bishop of Gloucester).

Mason and Hurd’s lives in the late 1750s and early 1760s offer an interesting comparison that reveals similarities and differences. They were both clergymen who left the social and cultural hub of Cambridge for country parishes. Despite their differing social backgrounds, in the context of eighteenth-century society their departure from Cambridge allowed them to occupy the social position of ‘gentlemen-by-profession rather than by birth.’ Moreover, they both adopted a language of rural retirement to describe their new lives. In public Hurd represented Mason as leaving Cambridge to continue with his poetry, which Mason reinforced in *Sonnet to Holderness*; whereas Mason represented Hurd’s life to the public as a pious retreat, as Hurd did in *On the Marks of Imitation* and *On Retirement*. For Mason, the issue of social status was particularly important to how he desired to be perceived by the public. In *Sonnet to Holderness* he fashioned an image of himself as the friend and (almost) social equal of his aristocratic patron. Problematically he could only do this when he defined himself as a poet not as a clergyman, jettisoning any mention of his paid employment. He therefore defined himself before his reading public as a ‘gentleman-writer’ not, as Hurd had, as a ‘gentlemen-by-profession.’ Turning now to a study of the gardens of the two backwater rectories it will be postulated – as will

⁴⁶ Hurd, *Moral and Political Dialogues*, 47.

⁴⁷ The two major works Hurd produced at Thurcaston are, *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762) and *Dialogues on the Uses of Travel* (1764).

become clear the scarcity of evidence allows nothing but postulation – that Mason’s garden allowed him an additional way of gentrifying himself.

Mason’s and Hurd’s ‘Pleasure Grounds’

In the past decade an important body of scholarship has appeared on a particular trend in mid-eighteenth century English garden design. Work has been done on neglected ‘improvers’ such as Robert Greening, Thomas Wright, and Sanderson Miller and their successors, a ‘new wave’ of improvers, amongst the most prominent of whom are Nathaniel Richmond, William Emes, and Richard Woods.⁴⁸ This ‘new wave’ – the generation to which William Mason could be said to belong – have until now been obscured by the figure of Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown, who himself has not escaped reevaluation.⁴⁹ Central to the discoveries of this scholarship is the importance of the ‘pleasure ground.’⁵⁰

The term ‘pleasure ground’ lacked clear definition in the middle of the eighteenth century. It could be variously a plantation walk, an area with a water feature, or, should the estate be small, an entire estate. The most commonly accepted use of the word is as Philip Miller defined it in his 1768 *Gardener’s Dictionary*, “an open lawn of grass, properly bounded by plantations... Where flowers are desired, there may be borders continued round the extent of the lawn...”⁵¹ By this definition ‘pleasure ground’ can be synonymous with ‘flower garden,’ which could alternatively be used to describe a space dedicated to the cultivation of rare flowers. To confuse things further the former definition could also, from the 1750s, be, or include, a

⁴⁸ T. Mowl, *Gentleman and Players*; J. Meir, *Sanderson Miller and his Landscapes* (Chichester, Phillimore & Co. Ltd., 2006); J. Meir, *Sanderson Miller (1716-80) Landscape Design and Buildings in the Landscape* (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of York, 2004); F. Cowell, *Richard Woods (1715-1793): Master of the Pleasure Garden* (Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2009).

⁴⁹ J. Brown, *Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown: The Omnipotent Magician, 1716-1783* (London, Random House, 2011).

⁵⁰ This itself finds its impetus in scholarship of the 1990s, for example, J. Harris, ‘A Pioneer in Gardening: Dickie Bateman re-assessed,’ *Apollo* (October, 1993), pp. 227-233; T. Williamson, *Polite Landscapes*; Laird, *Flowering of the English Landscape*; Laird, *The Culture of Horticulture*.

⁵¹ Quoted in Cowell, *Richard Woods*, 52.

‘shrubbery.’⁵² Most probably due to scarcity of surviving documentation on the gardens of the lower orders of society, the focus of ‘pleasure ground’ scholarship has been on aristocratic residences. But it will now be argued that the gardens designed by Mason for his and Hurd’s country rectories are an example of middling sorts adopting this aristocratic style of gardening. Unfortunately evidence for the gardens is slim and the problems of recovering their designs are many.

The first difficulty lies in establishing a detailed chronology for either garden. Hurd’s garden was certainly begun almost as soon as he moved to Thurcaston, at the beginning of 1759.⁵³ But due to the destruction of the letters exchanged by Mason and Hurd, discussed above, the only clear information that survives is the following:

“By the by, you [Mason] will find evry thing to your mind, when you come again this way, except my old barn, and my Garden: tho’ this last is gradually *brightening*, as Middleton said to Lord Hervy, by the strokes of your pencil.”⁵⁴

Interestingly, later in the century it was claimed that Hurd kept the old barn because he did not want to forget his humble origins.⁵⁵ Although it does not reveal much about the garden’s design it demonstrates both Hurd’s recognition that he had moved up in social status and that he used elements of his garden emblematically.

As for Mason’s own garden at his Aston rectory, Thomas Gray offers a hint when he writes in 1760 of improvements at Aston (which he does not like). However, not only is this five years after Mason moved to the parish but Gray is vague and ‘improvements’ may or may not be a reference to Mason’s garden.⁵⁶ The first reliable

⁵² Laird, *Flowering of the English Landscape*, 109-113.

⁵³ A letter from Hurd to his patron Cox Macro, dated 13th August, 1758, states “After a good deal of expence (sic) and trouble I have at last got three or four rooms fitted up for my convenience.” Brewer, *The Early Letters of Richard Hurd*, 327.

⁵⁴ Nankivell, *Extracts*, 159.

⁵⁵ R. Bentley, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Rev. Richard Hurd* (London, 1860): 358.

⁵⁶ Nineteenth-century historian John Mitford takes it that Gray was referring to his garden. See, J. Mitford, *The Correspondence of Thomas Gray and William Mason: To which are Added Some Letters Addressed by Gray to the Rev. James Brown* (London, 1853): 281. Gray was writing to Mason in 1760, and Mitford adds a footnote stating

source for Mason's garden may be a map commissioned by Lord Holderness in 1762 of the land surrounding his two manors of Aston and Wales, both in the West Riding of Yorkshire. On this map Mason's rectory can be seen, with a very undistinguished garden behind the house (Fig. 6). However, as the map is generally not very detailed it may not be at all representative of what was on the ground and thus only gives a sense of scale.⁵⁷

The best bit of evidence for Mason's Aston garden is found in *Sonnet to Holderness*. Mason writes of his garden, 'Around the tufted mead/In careless flow the simple pathway lead.' From these two lines it is reasonable to conclude that Mason's garden featured a central lawn around which was a path. As this was a path that 'flowed' it can safely be concluded that it was curvilinear. A little of the garden's content can be garnered from the letters exchanged by Mason and his curate Alderson. For example, in a letter dated June 22nd 1764 Mason sends directions to his curate for the building of a beehive and asks, "Tell me also if the sun dial be done, the arbour painted."⁵⁸ Like Hurd's, Mason's garden was designed with an arbour and, rather nicely, the letter also reveals that the beehive in the title page to Mason's *Poems* was a direct reference to the Aston garden.

The above is the extent of information about Hurd and Mason's gardens coeval with their design and goes to show how little there is. However, there are descriptions from the early nineteenth century.⁵⁹ The first to be analyzed is a description of Hurd's garden. It comes from the memoirs of author Joseph Cradock. Unfortunately no sure date is ascertainable from the internal evidence of the memoir:

"It was not my good fortune to be ever introduced to either Warton or Mason. I once called on Mr. Hurd at Thurstaston, and he said to me: 'I wish you had come sooner,

that Mason rebuilt his rectory and redid the garden. But this was not until much later in decade when Mason came into the inheritance John Sutton had left him.

⁵⁷ Now held in Rotherham Archives, ref: 227/Z.

⁵⁸ Rotherham Archives, ref: 864-F (Alternate ref: SY737/F).

⁵⁹ There is alternate description of Mason's garden than the one given but this is simply a rewording, when it is not a direct copy, of Hunter's observations. See, '*The Poets of Yorkshire, Commenced by W.C. Newsom; Complete and Publ. By J. Holland* (London, 1845). There is also a brief description in Mitford, *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, 210.

for Mason has just left me; he is going to Aston: I think you must have passed him in the gateway, he got up very early this morning to plant those roses opposite, and otherwise decorate my grounds; he boasts that he knows exactly where every rose ought to be planted.’

I walked over the lawn and shrubbery, and thought he had displayed much taste in the proper style of an English garden. A winding path conducted the visitor through rather an open grove, then crossed over the lawn opposite the house, passed through a much deeper grove, and came out full on the forest hills, in nearly the same point of view as they are seen from the last turnpike on the London road to Leicester. Such was ‘low Thurstaston's sequester'd bower;’ but I do not think he considered himself as placed there, ‘distant from Promotion's view.’”⁶⁰

Cradock was himself a keen gardener and in another of his works, an epistolary novel entitled *Village Memoirs* (1775), there are several passages on the ‘English style’ of garden design. He describes the ‘English style’ in terms that will be familiar to garden historians. It is based on simplicity, unity, and variety, and corresponds to the ‘Genius of the Place.’ The Leasowes and Stowe exemplify it and certainly, he believes, it is different to all foreign models.⁶¹ So when Cradock states Hurd’s garden was ‘in the proper style of an English garden’ it can be taken that it was designed on these principles. A conjunction of Cradock’s memoir and the ‘careless flow’ of Mason’s description of his garden path in *Sonnet to Holderness* confirms Mason was designing in the ‘English’ style characterized by its rejection of symmetry and emphasis on lawns and curvy lines.

The best description of Mason’s garden from the early nineteenth century comes from an admirer of Mason, Joseph Hunter:

“The general design is one irregular walk amidst shrubs and flowers, which winds around an extensive area, in which are grass-plats, flower beds, and small groves of

⁶⁰ J. Cradock, *Literary and Miscellaneous Memoirs; Village Memoirs, in a Series of Letters; Literary Memoirs and Epistolary Correspondence; Poems*, Vol. 4 (London, 1828): 194-195.

⁶¹ J. Cradock, *Village Memoirs* (Dublin, 1775): 109-115, 117-120.

tulip trees and other garden shrubs, with seats and arbours judiciously disposed; and here and there an opening for the prospect of the hills of Derbyshire seen towards the setting sun.”⁶²

Hunter’s description cannot confirm the design of the garden in the early 1760s as he states that the Alderson’s had done some work on the garden since Mason’s death.⁶³ Moreover, in June 1767 Mason was left a small legacy by an Aunt and in 1768 he inherited a large sum, £1500 a year, from the death of John Hutton.⁶⁴ Using this money he remodeled his garden and hired John Carr to rebuild the rectory.⁶⁵ When Gray died in 1771 Mason added a summerhouse dedicated to his memory. Thus it is predominantly this later garden that Hunter is describing. However, what Hunter is describing is the basics of a mid-eighteenth-century pleasure ground: a central lawn and winding path with shrubs and flowers. Given that *Sonnet to Holderness* describes a similar style of garden, it is probable that the Aston garden of the early nineteenth century was a similar shape and general design to the Aston garden of the 1760s.

From the evidence scattered over a period of fifty years it can definitely be said that the gardens were in the ‘English’ style and featured another stalwart of English designs: arbours. Mason’s design featured a central lawn with a path winding around it, while Hurd’s had a shrubbery and a lawn split in two by a path. The general use of

⁶² J. Hunter, *South Yorkshire: The History and Topography of Doncaster*, Vol. 2, (London, 1828): 168.

⁶³ Christopher Alderson took over the benefice of Aston upon Mason’s death. He and his wife were keen gardeners and Alderson would help form Queen Charlotte’s private gardens at Frogmore. See, J. Roberts, *Royal Landscape: The Gardens and Parks of Windsor* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997): 221-222.

⁶⁴ Thomas Gray to Nicholls, “Mr. Hutton being dead, he [Mason] has now a landed estate, the income of which in a few years will be considerable.” Mrs Delany to Miss Dewes, “I hear Mr. Mason has an estate left him of £1500 a year by a distant relation; it is happy when fortune falls into such good hands.” Both quoted in Draper, *William Mason*, 76.

⁶⁵ For a brief discussion of Mason’s rectory see *Country Life*, April 12, 1956: 752-753. Draper, quoting Tovey, who is quoting Mitford, misdates the completion of the rectory to 1771, a mistake repeated in the *Country Life* article. It wasn’t finished in May, 1772, as Mason writes to Alderson, in the unpublished Rotherham correspondence, that he is still consulting Carr about a staircase. William Gilpin calls it, “one of the most comfortable, and elegant parsonage-houses in England,” and a “sweet retreat.” See, W. Gilpin, *Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1776*, 1 (London, 1782): 20.

an irregular style coupled with a focus on open lawns and the inclusion of a shrubbery are integral features of the English pleasure ground as it existed during the 1750s and 1760s. There are two places that Mason could have taken design ideas from. Both are aristocratic residences.

The first is the garden of Syon House, seen on John Rocque's map of Richmond House (Fig. 7).⁶⁶ The garden was designed by Capability Brown, and is an important example of Brown's abilities in the pleasure ground tradition.⁶⁷ A meandering walk makes its way around a central lawn and through a shrubbery. At various points there would have been views into the lawn on which there are a few clumps of trees. These trees interact with others planted nearer the banks of the Thames and must have allowed for views across the river. The perimeter walk makes a feature of the lawn and the occasional views across it. Contrasted with the multifarious garden designs south of the Thames at Richmond, Syon House garden is compact and unified. This reflects its status as part of a private retreat – not too distant from London to be inconvenient but far enough to be a retreat – for its aristocratic owners Hugh and Elizabeth Percy, Count and Countess of Northumberland.⁶⁸

The second example Mason would have known about (he would have known about the first example through this one) is his patron Lord Holderness' Sion Hill House, which was situated between Syon House and Osterley Park.⁶⁹ In 1756 Brown was

⁶⁶ Rocque spells Syon with an i. However, it is most commonly spelt with a y, which is the spelling adopted hereafter.

⁶⁷ Jane Brown in her recent biography of Lancelot Brown states that this became “the pattern for many of Lancelot's meandering perimeter walks, with view into the park and the greatest sense of space – freedom alternated with the seclusion.” She further speculates that it was inspired by Frances Hertford's garden at Percy Lodge, which is credited to her and her husband's own inventiveness. Frances was the mother of Lady Elizabeth who, along with her husband Sir Hugh Smithson, had inherited Syon House in 1750. Brown, *Omnipotent Magician*, 114-116.

⁶⁸ The Percy's also hired Brown to design a landscape garden for Alnwick Castle, a much grander statement and more suitable to Alnwick's role as a countryseat. P. Willis, “Capability Brown in Northumberland”, *Garden History*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Autumn, 1981), pp. 157-183. They were also important patrons to many other major artists and architects, including Canaletto, Robert Adam (at Syon House and their residence in London), James Wyatt, and Robert Chippendale. Hugh Percy was one of two vice presidents of the Society for the Encouragement of Learning.

⁶⁹ In the 1750s Osterley was in a state of disrepair and no influence of modern gardening would have come from there to Sion Hill House. For a brief history of the

hired to improve this small estate.⁷⁰ The only surviving plan, from a French publication entitled *Détails de Nouveaux Jardins à la Mode* (1755-88), shows the similarities between the gardens of the two neighbours (Fig. 8). Sion Hill also had a meandering walk around the garden, though the central lawn was cut in two by a path. Either side featured open lawns, flowery shrubs and borders, and clumps. The left half of the garden was much plainer than the right, which includes water features. Through his patron William Mason would have had access to this garden, and that of Syon House as well. Thus he had access to the recently developed trend of pleasure grounds.⁷¹ The shrubberies, winding walks, and open lawns at these residences would not have escaped the eye of a keen gardener. The extant evidence for Mason's garden and for Hurd's thus strongly suggests they were designed in imitation of these aristocratic gardens.

Much more evidence is needed to give an exact time scale for Mason's implementation of his designs and the changes they went through. But it is possible to gauge how their owners understood them and the use they put them to, that is the reception of the garden. Hurd delighted in using his garden to imagine himself in retirement and utilized his rural setting to create an image of himself as a clergyman in the ideal situation to write important theological works. A garden in the style used at aristocratic private retreats could only have added to this image of himself by providing physical evidence of his important status. For Mason, his garden was an important way to define himself as a 'gentleman-writer' and a poet of rural retirement. Moreover, returning yet again to the sonnet he wrote to Holderness a nuanced argument can be made about the way in which Mason used his garden to define his social status. Not only did he claim to be his aristocratic patron's friend but his reference to his garden's design – 'Around the tufted mead/In careless flow the

rejuvenation of Osterley, including the addition of a landscape by Brown see, *Osterley Park and House, Middlesex* (Swindon, National Trust, 2009).

⁷⁰ Mark Laird claims only a 'conjectural' connection between the gardens of Syon House and Sion Hill House, only being able to show Brown working at Syon. Jane Brown, through Brown's accounts, has shown that he also worked at Sion Hill. See, Laird, *Flowering of the English Landscape*, 144 and Brown, *Omnipotent Magician*, 118.

⁷¹ Many of Mason's letters are addressed from Sion Hill and in a 1768 diary entry Lady Mary Coke recalls visiting the house only to find Mason as the sole occupant. D. Douglas (ed.), *The Letters and Journals of Lady Mary Coke, Vol. 2* (Edinburgh, 1889): 247.

simple pathway lead' – demonstrates an equal taste to his patron's. Mason's seemingly ingenuous line was an important claim to his ability to share aesthetic taste with his social 'better.'

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how William Mason used nature to deal with the frustration of being forced into taking orders in the Church of England. And how he subsequently used nature to define himself as a gentlemanly poet of rural retirement. In response to his taking of orders, he and Hurd ironically used a wild linnet as a metaphor for himself and nature as a metaphor for the city life of Cambridge. Having come to terms with his new situation, Mason began to use nature and the literary trope of rural retirement to show that he lived a life of leisured ease. In turn this allowed him to define himself as a gentleman and imply that his poetry was unaffected by personal desire and thus, in the eyes of his eighteenth-century readership, virtuous. However, in order to achieve this Mason had to gloss over his professional career as a clergyman. The manner in which Mason defined himself as a gentleman-writer is in sharp contrast to Hurd who used his rural retirement to show that he was in a position to write important theology and thus defined himself as a gentleman-by-profession. Finally, the gardens Mason designed for himself and Hurd, which copied a recent trend in aristocratic garden design, reinforce the image of the two men in a gentlemanly rural retirement. They were spaces in which Mason and Hurd could both imagine and act out their written works.

Through a combination of the disciplines of English literature, social history and garden history this chapter has further shown how nature operated in the life and works of William Mason. In the previous two chapters it has been argued that he used nature as a site to make contentions about moral philosophy, rationality and aesthetics all ultimately in the defence of a moderate, or 'reasonable' Anglicanism that grew up in the eighteenth century (it is important to recognize that there is no contradiction in Mason wanting to defend Christianity and not wanting to be a clergyman). In this chapter nature is again a tool for Mason. It was a way in which he could metaphorically describe his disappointment at what he considered an unjust and

perplexing fate. And it was a tool with which, whether in literature imaginatively or in a garden literally, he turned his fate into something positive.

Chapter 4. *The English Garden*

For the majority of the 1760s, Mason lived peacefully and happily and after the collection of poems in 1764 stopped publishing his work. In 1765 he married Mary Sherman and to all of his friends, and probably to himself, it seemed as if his middle-age was to be an easy and enjoyable one. But tragedy struck when Mary fell ill and despite Mason's many attempts to improve her health she died in 1767. After her death Mason found the impetus to write again, a fact celebrated by the blank scroll he holds in Reynolds' portrait of him (Fig. 9). Reynolds based the portrait on an earlier representation of Mason by his former pupil Pierre Falconet in which Mason mournfully holds a scroll on which is written the epitaph for his wife (Fig. 10).¹ The first project Mason embarked on was to be for many his defining work, *The English Garden* (1772-1782), a four-volume didactic poem on the art of the 'irregular', or 'English' style of gardening.

The English Garden takes up the challenge laid down in a passage of Virgil's *Georgics*: "My song to flowery gardens might extend.../But straitened for my space I must forsake/This task for others, afterwards, to take."² By poeticizing the 'general principles' (theoretical foundations and practical techniques), that make up the so-called 'English' style in a georgic Mason would have hoped to teach his audience precepts "through a by-way,"³ and to ennoble a subject already widely practiced and represented in many practical treatises.⁴ As didactic poetry was generally thought to

¹ Not only was Falconet Reynolds' former pupil but Falconet's portrait of Mason was hanging in Nuneham-Courtenay when Reynolds was paid by George Simon Harcourt, owner of Nuneham-Courtenay and close friend of Mason's, to restore the estates paintings. Therefore Reynolds would have known the image, as would many in Mason's friendship and professional circle as George Simon was friendly with them all.

² J. Dryden, *The Works of Virgil: Containing his Pastorals, Georgics and Æneis. Translated into English Verse in Three Volumes. Adorn'd with above a Hundred Sculptures*, Vol. 1. The Third Edition (London, 1709): 188-189. Mason admits as much in Book III, ll. 80-82.

³ Joseph Addison's *Essay on the Georgics* in J. Dryden, *The Works of Virgil: Containing his Pastorals, Georgics and Æneis. Translated into English Verse in Three Volumes. Adorn'd with above a Hundred Sculptures*, Vol. 1. The Third Edition (London, 1709): 82.

⁴ Especially well-known is a work footnoted by Mason, T. Whately, *Observations on Modern Gardening* (London, 1770).

run the risk of instructing without pleasing and thus boring its audience, the poem is punctuated with episodic narratives and moralizing.⁵

Scholars have already considered *The English Garden* in the wider context of eighteenth-century garden design, especially its emphasis on ‘picturesque designs’ and irregularity.⁶ A different approach is taken here analyzing the poem in the context of Mason’s intellectual life, particularly his political and theological beliefs. Predominantly focusing on garden and art theory, the first part of this chapter explores Book One of *The English Garden* (1772), which was originally conceived of as a stand-alone work.⁷ It argues that Book One deliberately attempts to consolidate the ‘English’, or ‘irregular’ style as the dominant and national style by giving it the same theoretical underpinning as Joshua Reynolds was giving painting in his *Discourses on Art*. Reynolds’ discourses were themselves an attempt to create a school of art appropriate to the recently founded Royal Academy. At the same time it will be shown that Reynolds’ and Mason’s works have similar political aims. A contrast with William Chambers’ *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening*, also published in 1772, and an analysis of Mason’s famous satire on that work, *An Heroic Epistle to Sir William Chambers* (1773), highlights and substantiates the argument.

The second part of the chapter charts the development of Mason’s pro-American politics in Books Two, Three, and Four of *The English Garden* alongside the satires

⁵ See, Addison’s *Essay on the Georgics*, footnoted above, and L. P. Wilkinson, *The Georgics: A Critical Survey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

⁶ For *The English Garden* and the ‘English’ style, i.e. curvilinear and ‘natural’ Dorothy Stroud’s classic text, *Capability Brown* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1950) still has some pertinent remarks, as does Hunt and Willis, *The Genius of the Place*, 308. For the poem’s relationship to the picturesque see, M. Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, 187-193; J. Macarthur, *The Picturesque: Architecture, Disgust, and Other Irregularities* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013): 4, 33; S. K. Robinson, *Inquiry into the Picturesque*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991): 6-7. For other readings see, D. R. Coffin, *The English Garden: Meditation and Memorial* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); S. Daniels, *The Political Iconography of Woodland in Later Georgian England* in D. Cosgrove and S. Daniels (eds.), *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 74-77.

⁷ W. Mason, *The English Garden: A Poem. Book the First*, First Edition (London, 1772): Advertisement.

he was writing under the pseudonym Malcolm McGregor.⁸ As the American war continued Mason's politics both inside and outside his literary work become increasingly oppositional until in Book Four he all but gives up teaching the art of gardening for a sentimental narrative in support of America. Gardening in Book Four is no longer propagated as a national art but an art that must take a backstage role while the real business of politics is sorted out. There is therefore an obvious disparity between Book One and Book Four. The chapter concludes this can best be understood as a response to the shifting political situation of the 1770s, revealing Mason's understanding of the relationship between aesthetics and politics. At the same time it is argued Mason's religious orthodoxy is consistently displayed throughout the work and thus *The English Garden* offers an insight into how faith, politics, and aesthetics continued to be intertwined in Mason's work.

1772: *The English Garden*, Book One

The founding of the Royal Academy in 1768 gave great hope to all those who 'cringed' under the perceived paucity of English art.⁹ For example, Reynolds, glossing over a multitude of what were then considered bad traits in English artistic practice, claimed, "We...have nothing to unlearn."¹⁰ It was argued that a royally supported academy, based on Italian and French precedents, would put England on an equal footing with its continental rivals.¹¹ Moreover, it would create greater cultural independence. In an encomium on the newly founded academy, Rev. Dr. Thomas Franklin exclaimed:

⁸ The satirical reasoning behind Mason's choice of pseudonym is explained in Draper, *William Mason*, 256.

⁹ The reading here is indebted to what has become known as 'cultural cringe' theory. For a collection of essays by the scholar who coined the term see, A. A. Philips, *The Cultural Cringe* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2006).

¹⁰ R. Wark (ed.), *Sir Joshua Reynolds: Discourses on Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975): 16. For a discussion of Reynolds and a national school, see J. Barrell, 'Sir Joshua Reynolds and the Englishness of English Art' in H. K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 154-176 and M. A. Cheetha, *Artwriting, Nation, and Cosmopolitanism in Britain: The 'Englishness' of English Art Theory since the Eighteenth Century* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012): 41-48.

¹¹ H. Hooek, *The King's Artists: The Royal Academy of Arts and the Politics of British Culture, 1760-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Behold! A brighter train of years,
A new Augustan age appear,
The time, not distant far, shall come,
When England's tasteful youth no more
Shall wander to Italia's classic shore;
No more to foreign climes shall roam,
In search for models better found at home.¹²

Although there is an irony in Franklin's desire to reject Italy at the same time as recreating an Augustan age, his point is clear. English youth may have taste but they have to go to foreign countries to find works of art to inspire and help them to improve their work (copying from past masters was a core part of an artist's training). It would be better if the young Britons did not have to go abroad. Reifying and better explaining the reasoning behind Franklin's poem, Reynolds in his inaugural discourse stated, "The principal advantage of an Academy is that, beside furnishing able men to direct the Student, it will be a repository for the great examples of Art... How many men of great natural abilities have been lost to this nation, for want of these advantages!"¹³ In a country so proud of its political liberties, a lack of cultural liberty and the artistic excellence it implies, was keenly felt and the Royal Academy was to supply this want.

The situation was very different when it came to gardening at the beginning of the 1770s, at least as Mason saw it. In Book One of *The English Garden* he gives a potted history in quasi-religious language of the English style of gardening. Francis Bacon is the prophet of the true taste in gardening, John Milton is the herald, and the Champions are Addison, Pope, Kent, Southcote, Shenstone, and ultimately Capability Brown. Each one of these men takes English gardening closer to an entirely 'natural' style based on simplicity and curvilinear lines, which Mason labels the 'English' style. Thus Mason equates Englishness with naturalness. As with Horace Walpole's history of gardening, a work footnoted in Book One though it would not appear until

¹² T. Franklin, *The Triumph of the Arts* (first published, 1769) in W. Sandby, *The History of the Royal Academy of Arts from its Foundation in 1768 to the Present Time*, Vol. 1 (London, 1862): 129-130.

¹³ Wark, *Discourses on Art*, 15.

1782,¹⁴ Mason's history claims cultural independence for English gardening by omitting any contemporaneous foreign influence. Garden historians have long recognized this as a 'Whig myth', which glosses over important influences and nuances so that the "history of stylistic change [becomes] an emblem of English liberty, gained by Whig politics."¹⁵ Moreover, a culturally independent history of gardening allows Mason to make the following claim:

Meanwhile, ye youths! Whose sympathetic souls
Would taste those genuine charms, which faintly smile
In my descriptive song, O visit oft
The finish'd scenes, that boast the forming hand
Of these creative Genii! Feel ye there
What REYNOLDS felt, when first the Vatican
Unbarr'd her gates, and to his raptur'd eye
Gave Raffael's glories...¹⁶

For Franklin and Reynolds the RA meant that one day English artists would not need to travel abroad for artistic models and inspiration. Mason, however, could confidently encourage his readers to stay at home (even as his evocation of the Vatican and Raphael demonstrate the importance of Italian models). This idea had been reinforced by other contemporary publications, such as Thomas Whately's *Observations on Modern Gardening* (1770) and George Mason's *An Essay on Design in Gardening* (1768). With their long lists of exemplary English gardens, both authors imply that the 'English' style of gardening around 1770 only needed consolidating, whereas Franklin and Reynolds can only predict the progress of English art. Despite such an important difference there are similarities between the way Mason and

¹⁴ It appeared as Chapter Six of H. Wapole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England; With Some Account of the Principal Artists; and Incidental Notes on Other Arts; Collected by the Late Mr. George Vertue; and Now Digested and Published from His Original Mss.* Vol. 4. The Third Edition, with Additions (London, 1782).

¹⁵ S. Bending, 'Horace Walpole and Eighteenth-Century Garden History', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 57, (1994): 222. For other challenges to this myth see, T. Williamson, *Polite Landscapes*; J. D. Hunt, *Garden and Grove: The Italian Renaissance Garden and the English Imagination, 1600-1750* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1986); T. Richardson, *Arcadian Friends: Inventing the English Landscape Garden* (London : Bantam, 2007).

¹⁶ Mason, *The English Garden: Book the First*, 29.

Reynolds conceive of their own arts, discernable through a comparison of Reynolds' *Discourses* and Book One of *The English Garden*.

Reynolds' *Discourses on Art* are notoriously inconsistent and should not be taken as a systematic statement of art theory.¹⁷ But it is clear that for the majority of the 1770s¹⁸ Reynolds considered artistic and critical ability to be founded on an ability to abstract general forms from particular forms;¹⁹ or perfect forms from imperfect forms; or beautiful forms from deformed forms. For instance, in his ninth discourse he states:

“The Art which we profess has beauty for its object; this it is our business to discover and to express; but the beauty of which we are in quest is general and intellectual; it is an idea that subsists only in the mind; the sight never beheld it, nor has the hand expressed it: it is an idea residing in the breast of the artist, which he is always laboring to impart, and which he dies at last without imparting; but which he is yet so far able to communicate, as to raise the thoughts, and extend the views of the spectator... and be among the means of bestowing on whole nations refinement of taste... by disentangling the mind from appetite, and conducting the thoughts through successive stages of excellence, till that contemplation of universal rectitude and harmony which began by Taste, may, as it is exalted and refined, conclude in Virtue.”²⁰

Reynolds' theory, which is loosely neo-platonic, is that every physical object is a poor reflection of a general/ideal/universal form and that ideal forms are the most beautiful. For Reynolds, the ability to abstract general/ideal forms from particular/non-ideal forms is the result of empirical observation of the physical world, including nature. The forms are hidden within the physical world and only need discovering. He recommends the study of masters such as Raphael and Michelangelo because they

¹⁷ W. Hipple, *The Beautiful, The Sublime, and The Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale: The Southern Illinois University Press, 1957): 134-136; Costelloe, *The British Aesthetic Tradition*, 82-93.

¹⁸ John Barrell recognizes a change in Reynolds' thought in the later discourses as he comes to accept the necessity of tradition and particularities.

¹⁹ A good overview of this argument is found in Wark, *Discourses on Art*, xviii-xxiv.

²⁰ Wark, *Discourses on Art*, 171.

had an ability to achieve such abstraction.²¹ There are two outcomes from Reynolds' theory of general forms. The first is that the beauty of a general form encourages contemplation and contemplation of general forms encourages virtue, whereas particular forms, an example of which might be fashionable clothes, are entangled with 'appetite' or vice, such as pride or avarice. Secondly, as H. Hoock has pointed out, Reynolds' general forms are a type of "patriotism, which promoted the glory of a country in terms of its conformity to universal values."²² General forms are universal *not* English, but at the same time it is to the credit of the English if it can be shown that they practice an artistic style that conforms to universal forms.

Mason shares Reynolds' preoccupation with the abstraction of general forms from particular forms. Book One opens with a promise to teach, "rules, from Nature drawn." For example, a cow naturally takes a winding path, which supports Mason's claims for the superiority of an aesthetics based on curvilinear lines over straight lines and harsh angles, which had by the 1770s long been a core part of English aesthetic theory. The line, "rules, from Nature drawn" exemplifies the idea found in Reynolds that empirical study of nature will result in the ability to imitate its best parts (general forms). Like Reynolds, Mason recommends the study of particular artists because they have been able to realize general forms:

... confess that beauty is best taught
By those, the favor'd few, whom Heav'n has lent
The power to seize, select, and reunite
Her loveliest features; and of these to form
One Archetype compleat [sic] of sovereign Grace.
Here Nature sees her fairest forms more fair;
Owns them for hers, yet owns herself excell'd

²¹ He does not, in his earlier discourses, suggest that artistic genius plays any role in the discovery of general forms, only hard work, which is a good lesson for students but it also because Reynolds, as a good empiricist, is wary of indefinable terms such as 'genius.' For a change in Reynolds' thought near the end of the 1770s see, S. Haggarty who notes Reynolds' increasing willingness to adopt ideas of artistic genius, *Blake's Gifts: Poetry and the Politics of Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 116-117.

²² Hoock, *The King's Artists*, 109.

By what herself produc'd.²³

The artists Mason names as exemplary are Raphael and the landscapists Nicolas Poussin, Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa. He champions these artists for their ability to select and highlight the beautiful forms of nature, and reject its deformities, thus showing a tight correlation with Reynolds. It has long been recognized that the so-called English style of gardening was influenced by this neo-platonic conception of nature.²⁴ However, in the eighteenth century it is Mason who most clearly uses a theory of 'general forms' to give gardening the same theoretical basis as painting and to develop the idea of designing gardens on so-called picturesque principals.

Again like Reynolds, Mason propagates the use of his style of gardening for contemplation. The following passage is contrasted to the fashion of prospects which leads people to, "applaud alike... the good and bad." The contrast implies that contemplation leads to virtue:

Here meanwhile
Ev'n in the dull, unseen, unseeing dell,
Thy taste contemns, shall Contemplation imp
Her eagle plumes; the Poet here shall hold
Sweet converse with his Muse; the curious Sage,
Who comments on great Nature's ample tome,
Shall find that volume here.²⁵

Mason's intertwining of general forms fit for contemplation with the irregular style, which through the history of English gardening described above he has shown to be inherently English, can also be read using Hooch's analysis of Reynolds' *Discourses* as, 'patriotism, which promoted the glory of a country in terms of its conformity to universal values.' The publication of *The English Garden* at a time when an artistic theory of general forms was being institutionalized through Reynolds' *Discourses*

²³ Mason, *The English Garden: Book the First*, 13.

²⁴ For an overview see, T. Turner, *Garden History: Philosophy and Design, 2000 BC-2000 AD* (New York: Spon Press, 2004): 23-29.

²⁵ Mason, *The English Garden: Book the First*, 7.

strongly suggests that Mason and Reynolds were using similar means of working towards the same end, being the patriotic promotion of English art. But at the same time it should not be forgotten that Mason did not acknowledge the need for the continental artworks that were so vital to Reynolds and both were arguing the case for different arts. A consideration of the politics of the two works allows a greater nuancing of why both men used an aesthetic of general forms.

The most significant work of modern scholarship on the politics of Reynolds' *Discourses* is John Barrell's *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt* (1986). Barrell convincingly argues that Reynolds' *Discourses* sought to create an expanded 'republic of taste,' which is to say that issues of taste and aesthetic judgment were not for Reynolds solely the remit of the aristocracy, but also of those of good breeding and intelligence.²⁶ Reynolds' aesthetic of general forms was part of this project because it gave painting an intellectual and philosophical foundation, raising it from a 'mechanic art' to a 'liberal art.' Thus painters who practiced an art of general forms were intellectuals and should have an equal say in issues of aesthetics. The traditional view, against which Reynolds was arguing is found in the work of the Third Earl of Shaftesbury who argued that only the leisured classes have the time to understand and engage in philosophy and thus make decisions on such issues.²⁷

Like Reynolds, Mason was addressing an audience that was broader than the aristocracy:

Begin the song! And ye of Albion's sons
Attend; Ye freeborn, ye ingenuous few,
Who heirs of competence, if not of wealth,
Preserve that vestal purity of soul
Whence genuine taste proceeds...²⁸

²⁶ J. Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986): 13-18. See also, R. Wendorf, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Painter in Society* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996): 24-26.

²⁷ Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting*, 8, 18.

²⁸ Mason, *The English Garden: Book the First*, 3.

Mason's intended audience is not large. It is composed of an 'ingenuous few' who are not necessarily wealthy as it is 'purity of soul' that enables taste not wealth. Mason once again displays great confidence in the strength of English gardening, claiming his audience are the 'heirs of competence.' He hints that their advantage is one given to them by a political system because they are 'freeborn.' He then qualifies more precisely the type of audience he has in mind:

To you blest youths,
I sing; whether in Academic groves
Studios ye rove; or, fraught with learning's stores,
Visit the Latian plain...²⁹

To garden in the style Mason is propagating requires an advanced degree of knowledge as either one must have been to university or have gone on the grand tour, which, as the lives of Mason's friends Thomas Gray and Richard Hurd prove, does not necessitate an aristocratic, or leisured status.³⁰ In arguing that gardeners do not need to be wealthy aristocrats but do need a good education to practice gardening Mason is implying that gardening is an intellectual, thus 'liberal', art. As shown above, the intellectual 'proof' that gardening is a liberal art is that it is based on the discovery of general forms within nature and their subsequent application in garden design. The parallels between Mason and Reynolds' work are evident in that both men are concerned to give their respective arts greater intellectual credibility and to thus make gardeners or artists 'gentlemen-by-practice.'

William Burgh in his commentary on *The English Garden*, read and approved by Mason and subsequently attached to the 1784 four-volume edition,³¹ confirms the

²⁹ Mason, *The English Garden: Book the First*, 3.

³⁰ Although he was from a relatively humble background Gray went on the tour with Walpole in the 1740s. Hurd, also from a humble background, received a scholarship to attend Cambridge. What William Warburton, who did neither, thought of Mason's criteria is unfortunately unknown.

³¹ W. Mason, *The English Garden: A Poem. In Four Books A New Edition, Corrected. To which are Added, a Commentary and Notes, by W. Burgh* (London, 1783): 122. Hereafter it is this edition that is referred to. Close comparison of the various editions has been made and there are no major changes between them.

presence of parallels between painting and gardening for an eighteenth-century reader:

“I think it proper to apprize my Reader, that I use the general term GARDENING for that peculiar species of modern improvement which is the subject of the Poem, as it is distinguished from common horticulture and planting – The Gardener in my sense, and in that of the Poet [Mason], bears the same relation to the Kitchen-Gardener that the Painter does to the House-Painter.”³²

Burgh concisely brings together all the above concerns. For him gardening can be a mechanic art, which is what a ‘Kitchen-gardener’ practices, or a liberal art. As he makes clear, *The English Garden* is aimed at those who want to practice gardening as a liberal art. He then draws an analogy with painting that not only implies both arts can be practiced as either liberal or mechanic arts but also that gardening is as equally intellectual, or liberal as painting. As shown, the subtext of Burgh’s definition of a gardener is that in Book One of *The English Garden* Mason attempts to define a gardener as someone who is learned, though not necessarily aristocratic, and who practices an art philosophically robust enough, because of its basis in an aesthetic of general forms, to reflect their intellectual capabilities and justify their interest. To this can be added that the use of general forms was a patriotic move that gave England the glory for embodying universal aesthetic values in its gardens and that Mason wanted to include certain members of the middle classes in the designing of such gardens. Before moving onto Books Two, Three, and Four, it will be shown that the conclusion explicated here lay at the heart of Mason’s well-known political and aesthetic dispute with William Chambers.

1773: An Heroic Epistle to William Chambers

Book One of *The English Garden* made an important case for the irregular style of garden design to be recognized as the dominant style in England. However, unlike Reynolds, Mason did not have official approval from the Royal Academy. As gardening fell outside the RA’s remit this may seem unproblematic. But Mason’s

³² W. Mason, *The English Garden: In Four Books*, 193.

work faced immediate competition from William Chambers. Chambers was a personal favourite of the King's, treasurer of the RA, and a Tory, who did have royal and academy approval and used it.³³ Chambers' work was entitled *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* and was published the same year as *The English Garden*. The two works are very different attempts to create or consolidate a school of gardening and a comparison richly contextualizes their aesthetic-political ideas. Moreover, Mason's famous satire *An Heroic Epistle to Sir William Chambers, Knight, Comptroller General of his Majesty's Works, And Author of a late Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (1773) offers a response to Chambers' work, albeit a response at times exaggerated for comic effect.³⁴ Published anonymously it was one of the most successful and talked about satires of the second half of the eighteenth century.³⁵

The title page of Chambers' *A Dissertation* (Fig. 11) and its dedication make explicit reference to the RA. Beneath the image, which makes no obvious reference to oriental gardening and was remarked on in the period only as one of "two beautiful copper plates",³⁶ is written "Printed by W. Griffin, Printer to the ROYAL ACADEMY; sold by Him in Catherine Street: and by T. DAVIES, Bookseller to the ROYAL

³³ Nicholas Savage has previously argued that following the foundation of the academy Chambers, "sat down to compose a series of dissertations on architecture with the clear intention of publishing them as a statement of Academy-approved policy comparable to that laid down in Reynolds's first two or three discourses." It is argued here that he attempted a similar feat for the art of gardening. N. Savage, 'The 'Viceroy' of the Academy: Sir William Chamber and the Royal Protection of the Arts' in J. Harris (ed.) *William Chambers: Architect to George III* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996): 195.

³⁴ Other useful works on *An Heroic Epistle* are, S. Bending, 'A Natural Revolution?' in K. Sharpe and S. N. Zwicker, *Refiguring Revolutions: Aesthetics and Politics from the English Revolution to the Romantic Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Draper, *William Mason*, 237-254. For the satire's publication history see, Rea, *Mason, Walpole*.

³⁵ As late as 1926 Pagnet Toynbee felt justified in printing an 'Exposé of the Mystification.' See, Toynbee, *Satirical Poems*, 9-29. Guesses at time ranged through Christopher Anstey, Soame Jenyns, Richard Owen Cambridge, William Hayley, and William Cowper. Walpole's letters to Mason around the time of the publication of *An Heroic Postscript, An Heroic Epistle's* sequel, show him distancing himself from its publication for fear of damaging his niece Maria's standing at court. She was married to the William, Duke of Gloucester, brother of George III.

³⁶ J. Bell, *Universal Catalogue for the Year MDCCLXXII* (London, 1772): No page numbers but see No. 751.

ACADEMY...”³⁷ On the following page is a dedication to the King the end of which reads:

“A Sketch of the present little Performance was graciously received by Your MAJESTY many years ago, and found a kind reception in the world, under the Influence of Your Patronage. This is more ample, I wish it may be more perfect than the original; that it may have a juster title to Your Indulgence, and better pretensions to the favor of the Publick.”³⁸

Above the dedication is a picture of both sides of a coin (Fig. 12). On one side is George III and on the other the Royal Academy. Chambers’ appeal to royal approval and patronage and to the authority of the RA could not be clearer. Following the title page the preface asks, “Is it not singular then, that an Art [gardening] with which a considerable part of our enjoyments is so universally connected, should have no regular professors in our quarter of the world?”³⁹ Chambers believes that gardening needs professional practitioners just as painting and sculpting had. His dissertation should be seen as an attempt to define what the practice of professional gardeners would be.

Structurally *A Dissertation* is split into three sections. Part one explains the beauty of the Chinese method of laying out a garden, centering mainly on the creation of views and a balance of art and nature (pgs. 11-29). Part two describes the three types of ornamental gardening, which are the pleasing, the terrible, and the surprising, and features fantastic descriptions of Chinese gardens filled with tigers, instruments of torture, and replica towns (29-42). Part three, the longest part, concludes the dissertation with practical advice on walks, water features, and planting (42-94). Chambers’ aim was to challenge the Brownian style of landscape gardens, which he claimed, “differ very little from common fields”, and it is only recently that scholars have pointed out the many similarities between Chambers and theorists of the Brownian style (including Mason): a concern over the correct balance of art and nature, creation of picturesque views, hiding of buildings, graduated planting

³⁷ W. Chambers, *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (London, 1772): Title Page.

³⁸ Chambers, *A Dissertation*, Dedication Page.

³⁹ Chambers, *A Dissertation*, iii.

schemes, colour and plant combinations.⁴⁰ The case for the similarity between Chambers' work and the Brownian style is made by appealing to Chambers' *An Explanatory Discourse*, which was annexed to a second edition of *A Dissertation* in 1773 when the original work met with criticism. Chambers claims the original was "truth garbed in fiction" intimating the most fantastic parts had been taken too literally, but he also continues to make statements Mason would have contested.⁴¹ It is thus a mistake to over emphasize their similarities or overlook their differences.

Underlying Chambers' approach to gardening is a heavy emphasis on what would now be called the psychological reception of a garden.⁴² In the preface to *A Dissertation* he writes, "Gardening is of a different nature: its dominion is general; its effects upon the human mind certain and invariable; without any previous information, without being taught, all men are delighted with the gay luxuriant scenery of summer and depressed at the dismal aspect of autumnal prospects..."⁴³ What then follows shows a consistent interest in how a garden might be formed to affect the mind of the viewer in certain ways; predominantly through the pleasing, terrible, and surprising, which "excite in the mind of the spectator, quick successions

⁴⁰ R. C. Bald, "Sir William Chambers and the Chinese Garden: in J. Ching and W. Oxtoby (ed.), *Discovering China: European Interpretations of the Enlightenment* (Rochester, N. Y.: Rochester University Press, 1992); E. Harris, "Designs of Chinese Buildings and the *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening*" in J. Harris (ed.), *Sir William Chambers: Knight of the Pole Star* (London: A. Zwemmer, 1970); Bending, 'A Natural Revolution?'; Yu Liu, *Seeds of a Different Eden: Chinese Gardening and a New English Aesthetic Ideal* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2008).

⁴¹ One such statement not explored below that would have really irked Mason is that English gardens put "too much stress on nature and simplicity." At the beginning of *The English Garden* Mason 'dedicated' his poem to simplicity. See, W. Chambers, *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening to which is Annexed An Explanatory Discourse* (London, 1773): 145.

⁴² For a similar concern in his architectural work see W. Chambers, *Treatise on Civil Architecture* (1759; 2nd ed., 1768): i-iii, 18, 63, 74-76. The psychological approach of Chambers has also been noted by Richard Quaintance. See Quaintance's essay, 'Toward Distinguishing Between Theme Park Publics: William Chamber's Landscape Theory vs. His Kew Practice' in T. G. Young and R. B. Riley (eds.), *Theme Park Landscapes: Antecedents and Variations* (Washington D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002): 25-48.

⁴³ Chambers, *A Dissertation*, ii.

of opposite and violent sensations.”⁴⁴ David Porter has recently argued that for Chambers, “the centrality of the experience [in the garden is] geographical alterity” as “he repeatedly stresses the usefulness of ‘transplanting the peculiarities of one country to another’ in achieving the requisite variety of sensory impressions in gardens anywhere.”⁴⁵ Porter points towards a ‘geographical otherness’ that leads to psychologically stimulating and exotic associations. Inevitably this leads Chambers away from general forms and towards particular forms. Mason and Reynolds had stressed the exact opposite. Where they were interested in forms fit for contemplation, Chambers is interested in forms that strike and excite the mind. Nor does *A Dissertation* offer any discussion about the ways in which a garden or nature might inspire a viewer to act virtuously.⁴⁶

As is more widely recognized Chambers is also at odds with Mason and Reynolds politically, which can be seen by comparing Chambers’ imagined audience and Mason and Reynolds’ ‘expanded community of taste.’ As demonstrated above Chambers had in mind the creation of ‘regular professors’ of gardening, which for him excluded men of low birth:

“...in this island, [gardening] is abandoned to kitchen gardeners, well skilled in the culture of sallads [sic], but little acquainted with the principles of Ornamental Gardening. It cannot be expected that men uneducated, and doomed by their condition to waste the vigor of life in hard labour, should ever go far in so refined, so difficult a pursuit.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ W. Chambers, *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (London, 1772): 38. For the repetition of similar points in Chambers’ later work see, *An Explanatory Discourse* see, Chambers, *A Dissertation: An Explanatory Discourse*, 130-132, 146-147.

⁴⁵ D. Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 49.

⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that *A Dissertation* does not once use the word ‘virtue.’ A similar work in terms of the psychological effect of Chinese gardening is the anonymously published, *The Rise and Progress of the Present Taste in Planting Parks, Pleasure Grounds, Gardens &c.* (London, 1767).

⁴⁷ Chambers, *A Dissertation*, iii. In a section within the dissertation Chambers writes, “In China, Gardening is a distinct profession, requiring an extensive study; to the perfection of which few arrive. The Gardeners there, far from being either ignorant or illiterate, are men of high abilities, who join to good natural parts, most ornaments that study, travelling, and long experience can supply them...” Chambers, *A Dissertation*, 11-12.

Even if the unnecessarily vitriolic ‘kitchen gardener’ jibe at Brown is excluded,⁴⁸ and it is accepted that Mason would agree with Chambers that a gardener needs to be well educated, it can still be said that Mason would stop short of claiming men are ‘doomed by their condition’ (after all Richard Hurd and William Warburton managed to climb from lowly backgrounds to prominent positions). The difference is one of emphasis. Chambers’ work emphasizes that poor men cannot garden ‘intellectually’, Mason’s work emphasizes that not only rich men may garden ‘intellectually.’ More obviously problematic for Mason was a later passage in which Chambers united wealth, power and taste:

“To the generality of Europeans, many of the foregoing descriptions may seem improbable; and the execution of what has been described, in some measure impracticable: but those who are better acquainted with the East, know that nothing is too great for Eastern magnificence to attempt; and there can be few impossibilities, where treasures are inexhaustible, where power is unlimited, and where munificence has no bounds.”⁴⁹

Although Chambers seemed to renege on this standpoint in *An Explanatory Discourse* he also emphatically restated it.⁵⁰ The phrase that must have caught Mason’s Whiggish eye is ‘where power is unlimited.’ The equating of unlimited power and aesthetic taste has political connotations. Mason would have read this passage as a Tory desire to increase the prerogative powers of the crown and to establish elite arbiters of taste, the second of which is at odds with the use of general forms in Book One of *The English Garden*.

Mason was quick to reply to Chambers and point out their differences with *An Heroic Epistle to William Chambers*.⁵¹ The epistle is drenched from beginning to end in

⁴⁸ There are well-rehearsed personal reasons why Chambers takes aim at Brown: Brown’s improvements at Richmond and Lord Clive rejecting Chambers’ plans for the Claremont estate in favour of Brown’s. See, Brown, *Omnipotent Magician*, 238.

⁴⁹ Chambers, *A Dissertation*, 92-93.

⁵⁰ Chambers, *A Dissertation: An Explanatory Discourse*, 123-124, 143.

⁵¹ Mason’s publisher delayed the publication of *An Heroic Epistle* for three months because he wanted to wait until “town was full.” See, Rea, *Mason, Walpole*, 188.

sarcasm and opens with an address to the ‘Knight of the Polar Star! By Fortune plac’d/To shine the Cynosure of British taste.’ A Swedish honour, Knight of the Polar Star was awarded to Chambers by Gustav III in 1771. Mason uses it to compromise Chambers’ Englishness, a point he drives home in the next two lines, “Whose orb collects, in one refulgent view/The scatter’d glories of Chinese Virtù.” In the first four lines Mason implies that it is incongruous that a sinophile Swede should be in charge of English taste.⁵² In the next two pages Chambers is called upon to teach his art and a list of men who support Chambers is given, the majority of whom are Tories: Dr. Hill, Samuel Johnson, James Scott, John Shebbeare, David Hume, John Home, James Macpherson, Tobias Smollett, and David Mallet.⁵³

From here the epistle is loosely structured around the supposed three elements of Chinese gardening: the pleasing, horrid and enchanting.⁵⁴ The first (and longest) third of the poem sarcastically criticizes English garden designers:

There was a time, “in Esher’s peaceful grove,
When Kent and Nature vy’d for Pelham’s love,”
That Pope beheld them with auspicious smile,
And own’d that Beauty blest their mutual toil.
Mistaken Bard! could such a pair design
Scenes fit to live in thy immortal line?⁵⁵

The theme of this part of the poem is the restoration of beauty to Britain through aesthetically pleasing garden designs. To achieve this the works of Brown must be destroyed and replaced with Chambers’ designs. Next Mason plays on the idea of the

⁵² Furthermore, Chambers cannot have done himself any favours in *An Explanatory Discourse* when he makes positive comments on French gardening. See, pp. 150-152.

⁵³ In his comments on Mason’s satires, Walpole noted, “As David Hume & Dr. Beattie were both rewarded by the King for writing for & against religion & each other, so also were David Mallet & Dr. Warburton.” See, Toynbee, *Satirical Poems*, 57.

⁵⁴ This idea is found in *The Rise and Progress of the Present Taste in Planting Parks, Pleasure Grounds, Gardens &c.* (London, 1767): 4. In *An Heroic Epistle* it is listed as what pleases, frightens and surprises.

⁵⁵ W. Mason, *An Heroic Epistle To Sir William Chambers* (London, 1773): 10.

horrid by ingeniously satirizing Chambers' suggestion that instruments of torture are suitable for gardens:

“Now to our lawns of dalliance and delight,
Join we the groves of horror and affright;
To this atchieve [sic] no foreign aids we try,
Thy gibbets, Bagshot! Shall our wants supply;
Hounslow, whose heath sublimer terror fills,
Shall with her gibbets lend her powder mills,
Here too, O King of Vengeance, in thy fane,
Tremendous Wilkes shall rattle his gold chain;
And round that fane on many a Tyburn tree,
Hang fragments dire of Newgate-history;
On this shall H*ll*d's dying speech be read,
Here B-te's confession, and his wooden head;
While all the minor plunderers of the age
(Too numerous far for this contracted page)
The R*g*ys, Mungos, B*ds*ws there,
In straw-stufft [sic] effigy, shall kick the air.”⁵⁶

In this chilling passage Mason conjoins English gardens with two scenes from English history pre-1688. The first is Bagshot Park, a famous Stuart hunting ground. The second, Hounslow Heath, was where James II posted his army – conducting military exercises and mock battles – to intimidate both parliament and the population of London whilst he filled positions of political power with Catholics. From these two sites gibbets and powder mills are to be taken as symbols of violence with which to fill English gardens. Mason argues that if Britain were to imitate the Chinese they would fill their gardens with reminders of how terrible the reign of the Stuarts had been.⁵⁷ The passage ends with the clamour of John Wilkes' rattling chain, the dying speech of Henry Fox, first Baron Holland, known as “the public defaulter of

⁵⁶ Mason, *An Heroic Epistle*, 14-15.

⁵⁷ Although Chambers descriptions of gardens are less fantastic in *An Explanatory Discourse* he still claims gardens are suitable places for scenes of horror, including the use of gibbets. See, pp. 130-131.

unaccounted millions,”⁵⁸ and Lord Bute’s ‘confession.’ The scene is completed with the image of the ‘minor plunderers of the age’ – in reality political enemies of Walpole and Mason: Richard Rigby, Jeremiah Dyson, and Thomas Bradshaw – kicking their legs in the air as they hang for their crimes.

The final third of *An Heroic Epistle* satirizes the ‘enchanted’ idea of a miniature town found in the Emperor of China’s garden: “In this town the Emperors of China... are frequently diverted with the hurry and bustle of the capital.”⁵⁹ Again Mason turns the idea on its head by imagining what it would be like to fill an English garden with a miniature version of an English city: “Brentford with London’s charm will we adorn.”⁶⁰ The result is Hogarthian chaos. Of the various scenes perhaps the most memorable is Jemmy Twitcher – identified by Walpole as John Montagu, Earl of Sandwich⁶¹ – arrested by famed pickpocket George Barrington for stealing the handkerchief of James Murray, Earl of Dunbar, a Jacobite.⁶² After all the madness Mason is left asking:

Be these the rural pastimes that attend
Great B*nsw*k’s leisure: these shall best unbend
His royal mind, whene’er, from state withdraw’n,
He treads the velvet of his Richmond lawn.⁶³

An Heroic Epistle works on three fronts and includes forceful political point scoring. It begins with slurs on the ‘Englishness’ of Chambers and charges of royal favoritism. The middle section ridicules the most fantastic section of Chambers’ *Dissertation*, which Mason may or may not have taken seriously but was certainly able to use for scoring more political points with references to pre-1688 England and absolutist

⁵⁸ Charles Fox’s memorable phrase, quoted in W. Cobbett, *The Parliamentary History of England, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803* (London, 1814): 1119-1120.

⁵⁹ Mason, *An Heroic Epistle*, 15.

⁶⁰ Mason, *An Heroic Epistle*, 16.

⁶¹ Twitcher is the betrayer of Macheath in John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728).

⁶² The handkerchief is a reference to the Earl’s distant ancestor ‘Black’ Agnes who, having been left in charge by her absent husband, stood on the battlements of her castle as it was attacked and coolly wiped away the dust from her handkerchief. Walpole delightedly wrote to Mason claiming ‘*he has stolen to Earl of Denbigh’s handkerchief* is the proverb in fashion.’ See, Toynbee, *Satirical Poems*, 15.

⁶³ Mason, *An Heroic Epistle*, 18.

monarchies. The first two sections therefore confirm the antipathy Mason felt towards an aesthetic influenced by foreign ideas and a politics of increased political powers for the monarchy and the aristocratic elite, which he would have seen as a very Tory combination. The final third, of which the four lines quoted above are the climax, confirms the difference between the garden theories of Mason and Chambers. Mason thinks that Chambers' style of garden is not fit for the King to 'unbend/His royal mind.'⁶⁴ Many years before in *Il Pacifico* (1744) Mason had claimed he would 'unbend my mind' in 'silent gloom'. Here 'unbend' is used in the same sense of relaxing the mind and intimates that a garden should not, as Chambers would have it, 'excite' the mind, but should lead to quiet contemplation as Mason and Reynolds had argued in their work.

A comparison of Book One of *The English Garden* and *A Dissertation* shows that Mason promotes an 'English' style of gardening combining a politics of increased participation in culture and taste for certain members of the middle classes with an aesthetic theory of general forms that gives philosophical credibility to gardening. When the 'English' style came under threat from Chambers, Mason was confident enough in his ideas to unleash a barrage of sarcasm that ridiculed his opponent for foreign affectation, elitism, and inappropriate garden theory.

1776-1782: *The English Garden*, Books Two, Three, and Four

Following the success of *An Heroic Epistle* – fourteen editions in two years – Mason wrote the cloyingly self-congratulatory *A Postscript to An Heroic Epistle*.⁶⁵ The onset

⁶⁴ It should be noted this is not a reference to George III's famous mental illness, which had first manifested in 1765 but was not the subject of public speculation until the more severe illness of 1788-89. See, A. R. Rushton, *Royal Maladies: Inherited Diseases in the Ruling Houses of Europe* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2008): 40-47. For public indifference to the King's 1765 illness see, P. D. G. Thomas, *George III: King and Politicians, 1760-1770* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002): viii.

⁶⁵ For Mason's earlier satires see, Draper, *William Mason, 237-239. An Heroic Epistle* also inspired a slew of imitations which Draper records, pp. 254-255. Moreover, *An Heroic Epistle* itself set off a slew of replies and replies to replies: *A Familiar Epistle, to the Author of the Heroic Epistle to Sir William Chambers, and of the Heroic Postscript to the Public* (1774); *Kien Long: A Chinese Imperial Eclogue. Translated*

of war with the American colonies and the continuing, albeit misguided,⁶⁶ Whig belief in George III's cabalistic Tory government in the mid-to-late-1770s spurred Mason to write a number of oppositional satires under the pseudonym Malcolm McGreggor. The satires mix personal and national politics with great vehemence. Fear of tarnishing his subject matter and argument with party politics led Mason to make only relatively indirect references to political issues in Books Two and Three of *The English Garden*. However, by Book Four the political situation had changed so dramatically that Mason's politics supplanted garden aesthetics.

To be a pro-American Briton after 1775 and in the aftermath of America's declaration of independence was not necessarily to be pro-American independence and early on the majority of opinion was divided between 'coercive' and 'conciliatory' measures. Should the colonies be violently forced to obey British law, or should the laws that brought about their revolt be repealed? It was only with France's entry into the war in 1778 that the political opposition felt there was no choice but American independence and even then it was an uncomfortable choice for them to make.⁶⁷ During the war the majority of Anglican clergymen backed 'coercion,' and preferred to praise the monarchy, promote obedience to law, and castigate oppositional politics.⁶⁸ Richard Hurd was one such clergyman. Mason was not and the American War saw a temporary end to their friendship.⁶⁹

from a Curious Oriental Manuscript (1775) and *The Heroic Epistle Answered: By the R---- H----- Lord C-----* (1776).

⁶⁶ Since the 1960s, the belief in a secret club of 'King's Friends' working to bring down the constitution has been entirely defunct. But it is an important Whig myth that Mason and Walpole genuinely believed and feared. See, I. R. Christie, *Myth and Reality in Late-Eighteenth-Century Politics: And Other Papers* (Los Angeles: California University Press, 1970): 29-31; F. O'Gorman, 'The Myth of Lord Bute's Secret Influence', in K. W. Schweizer (ed.), *Lord Bute: Essays in Re-interpretation* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988), pp. 57-81.

⁶⁷ F. O'Gorman, 'The Parliamentary Opposition to the Government's American Policy 1760-1782' in H. T. Dickinson (ed.), *Britain and the American Revolution* (London: Longman, 1998): 97-123.

⁶⁸ J. E. Bradley, 'The Anglican Pulpit, the Social Order, and the Resurgence of Toryism during the American Revolution', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Autumn, 1989), pp. 361-388.

⁶⁹ Pearce and Whibley, *The Correspondence of Richard Hurd*, 95-96.

Book Two of *The English Garden* was published in the spring of 1776, while war was raging and at least two months before the declaration of American independence.⁷⁰ Ostensibly the book is concerned with the ground plan of a garden and the creation of fences. Mason has three types of fences. Ha-has, wire fences and human fences, by which he meant that the local poor could act as deterrents for, and perform checks on, undesirable parts of the natural world. His descriptions of the poor forming human fences are uncannily akin to Gainsborough's cottage door scenes and would be open to the same critique John Barrell makes of Gainsborough's work.⁷¹ In a less subtle way Mason politicizes the topic of fences by drawing an analogy from nature centred on political liberty: hares often gnaw their way through wire fences and cows destroy them using their horns, thereby hares and cows (metonyms for nature) "Proclaim their hate of thralldom":

Nothing brooks

Confinement, save degenerate Man alone,
Who deems a monarch's smile can gild his chains.⁷²

Given the broad scheme of Book Two this passage should not be read as anti-monarchist, only anti-the extension of the monarchy's prerogative powers. The book culminates in a narrative episode about Abdalonymus, who was pronounced King of Sidon by Alexander the Great. Before being discovered by Alexander the Great, Abdalonymus lived in rural retirement, cultivating a garden on the outskirts of Sidon, unaware of the turmoil in the city. The narrative follows a pastoral passage on the young rural poor, who not only form part of Mason's 'living fence' but also act as a *memento mori* for the sensitive landowner. He claims:

Ah! Who, when such life's momentary dream,
Would mix in hireling senates, strenuous there

⁷⁰ On the 20th May Walpole wrote to Mason that he had received the 'second book of his garden.' J. Mitford (ed.) *The Correspondence of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford, and the Rev. William Mason: Now First Pub. From the Original Mss.*, Vol. 2 (London, 1851): 255-256. Draper misdates the publication of Book II to 1777. See, Draper, *William Mason*, 80.

⁷¹ Barrell, *Dark Side of the Landscape*, Ch. 1.

⁷² Mason, *The English Garden: In Four Books*, 44.

To crush the venal Hydra, whose fell crests
Rise with recruited venom from the wound!
Who, for so vain a conflict, would forego
Thy sylvan haunts, celestial solitude!⁷³

The image of a hydra was commonly used in the eighteenth century to “describe the difficulty of imposing order on increasingly global systems of labor.”⁷⁴ Mason’s use of the word ‘hydra’ therefore politicalizes the *memento mori*, using the reality of death and the shortness of life as reasons not to become embroiled in political struggles, the American War being the obvious reference. It is thus that he introduces the passage on Abdalonymus not only as a moral but also a pointedly political story.

Although when Alexander the Great proclaims him King, Abdalonymus is described as a “rightful Sov’reign, doubly dear/By birth and virtue”, he at first refuses the role:

Stern he stood,
Or if he smil’d, ‘twas a contemptuous smile,
That held the pageant honours in disdain.
Then burst the people’s voice, in loud acclaim,
And bad him be their Father.⁷⁵

Abdalonymus only accepts the crown on the grounds that his people consent to his ruling. His actions may suggest an elected monarchy – not unknown in the eighteenth century⁷⁶ – but it may also suggest that the solution to political turbulence is disengagement. The people, or America, accept the King because of his virtuous

⁷³ Mason, *The English Garden: In Four Books*, 49.

⁷⁴ P. Linebaugh and M. Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000): 3.

⁷⁵ Mason, *The English Garden: In Four Books*, 54.

⁷⁶ In a chapter entitled ‘Eighteenth-Century Monarchy’ Jeremy Black gives a neat summation of available modes of rule. Poland, for example, had an elected monarch (though in the mid-century the title had passed from father to son). J. Black, *George III: America’s Last King* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

behaviour, defined by his distance from political affairs.⁷⁷ The passage has strong overtones of the rural retirement tradition and more specifically the use of a garden and the countryside to promote virtuous behaviour. A year into the war, but still before the declaration of independence, Mason sided with conciliatory tactics.

Mason's view of the war as expressed in Book Two opposes the British government's tactics in dealing with the American colonies but still assumes unity can be achieved, or at least it remains ambiguous about the possibility of American independence. His first satire on the war, also written in 1776 but under the satirical pseudonym McGreggor,⁷⁸ *An Ode To Mr. Pinchbeck, Upon his Newly Invented Patent Candle-Snuffers*, reinforces this. Christopher Pinchbeck was an inventor and favourite of the King.⁷⁹ Mason imagines a group of Tories – including Bute, Mansfield, North and Johnson – using a giant candle-snuffer designed by Pinchbeck to “snuff the Candle of State/That burns a little blue.”⁸⁰ The ode, like the parliamentary opposition in this period, makes no certain claims for or against independence, preferring to castigate British violence.

In 1777 Mason, again as McGreggor, wrote two more pro-American satires publishing them together as, *An Epistle to Dr. Shebbeare* and *An Ode to Sir Fletcher Norton* (1777). *An Epistle to Dr. Shebbeare* takes aim at the unfairness of taxing the

⁷⁷ For a detailed and influential discussion of how the role of the monarchy during the American War was fraught with ambiguity see, J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Political Thought in the English-Speaking Atlantic, 1760-1790’ in Pocock (ed.), *The Varieties of British Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 246-320.

⁷⁸ Draper states that this was written in 1777 but the dating on the title-page suggests otherwise. He could also find only one edition but there were at least five. See, Draper, *William Mason*, 256-257, fn. 160. Mason's satire was also published in a joint edition with William Preston's *A Congratulatory Poem on the Late Successes of British Arms, Particularly the Triumphant Evacuation of Boston* (1776).

⁷⁹ For a run-through of Pinchbeck's many talents see, B. Bensaude-Vincent and C. Blondel (eds.), *Science and Spectacle in the European Enlightenment* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008): 31-33.

⁸⁰ W. Mason, *Ode to Mr. Pinchbeck, Upon His Newly Invented Patent Candle-Snuffers, by Malcolm M'greggor, Esq; Author of the Heroic Epistle to Sir William Chambers, and the Heroic Postscript* (London, 1776): 5. Walpole wrote in his notes to Mason's satires, “no deprecation of the Colonies, could mollify the British Administration, who heaped violence & cruel acts of Parliament on one another, till they had united all the Colonies in a Common Cause, & then endeavoured to dragoon them by fire, sword, & massacre into unlimited Submission.” See, Toynbee, *Satires*, 98.

colonies without allowing them representation in parliament. It also suggests that Mason was disgruntled with the main party of opposition, the Rockingham Whigs, because they were not being decisive enough. As Mason puts it, “poor Opposition wants a head.”⁸¹ After the victories of the Americans in the battles of Saratoga (September-October 1777), it had become clear American independence could not be stopped but the Rockingham opposition still stalled and was increasingly seen as ineffectual.⁸²

1779, the year Book Three was published, began with another political poem. Written in defence of Admiral Keppel who had been court-martialed after a failure against the French in the First Battle of Ushant, 27 July, 1778,⁸³ this poem was not satirical and was published under Mason’s own name. One of many published on the topic by oppositional Whigs the ode favoured an end to the war and focused on defeating the French. Another poem by Mason, recorded by Walpole but not published, was even more caustic:

YE Courtly Heroes who so boldly vote
To cut America’s collective throat
And hope to tear her limb from limb asunder
With Johnson’s, Eden’s and Lord Carlisle’s thunder,
Your threats are vain, your very looks are fibs
Cowards! Ye quake at crackers and at squibs,
Trembling lest every stone the rabble darts

⁸¹ W. Mason, *An Epistle to Dr. Shebbeare: to which is added an Ode to Sir Fletcher Norton, in Imitation of Horace, Ode Viii. Book IV. By Malcolm Macgreggor, of Knightsbridge, Esq. Author of the Heroic Epistle to Sir Wm. Chambers, &c.* (London, 1777): 14.

⁸² H. T. Dickinson, ‘The Impact of the War on British Politics’ in E. G. Gray and J. Kamensky (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of The American Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 360-362.

⁸³ A nice narrative of the events can be found in S. Weintraub, *Iron Tears: America's Battle for Freedom, Britain's Quagmire: 1775-1783* (New York: Free Press, 2005): Ch. 9. For an account that ties Keppel’s trial into a wider context of radicalism see, N. Rodgers, ‘The Gordon Riots and the Politics of War’ in I. Haywood and J. Seed (eds.), *Gordon Riots: Politics, Culture and Insurrection in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 24-25. For other popular representations of Keppel see, M. Hallett, *Reynolds: Portraiture in Action* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014): 100-105.

Should break the casement of your guilty hearts.⁸⁴

There is greater frustration in the poems and Mason's open authorship of the Keppel ode displays an increasingly public role to his pro-American sentiments. The end of Book Three of *The English Garden*, also published in 1779, mirrors this as Mason makes a barely veiled call to action. The passage in question spans 80 lines and is a contemplative passage on water. A water nymph speaks:

O revere

Our power: for were its vital force withheld,
Where then were Vegetation's vernal bloom,
Where it's autumnal Wealth? But we are kind
As powerful; O let reverence lead to love,
And both to emulation!

From here the nymph asks, "When did our streams/By force unpent, in dull stagnation sleep?" From both these passages, and from the stream itself, Mason draws the following lesson:

O learn from us,

And tell it to thy Nation, British Bard!
Uncurb'd Ambition, unresisting Sloth,
And base Dependence are the fiends accurst [sic.]
That pull down mighty empires.⁸⁵

The above passages exhibit Mason's fears that the American war was damaging British trade, which between the end of the Seven Years War and the onset of the American War had been relatively stable.⁸⁶ The 'vital force' of the river brings

⁸⁴ Horace Walpole also records another poem by Mason following Keppel's acquittal. H. Walpole, *Journal of the Reign of King George II from the Year 1771 to 1783*, Vol. 2 (London, 1859): 347-348.

⁸⁵ Mason, *The English Garden: In Four Books*, 83-84.

⁸⁶ C. Knick Harley, 'Trade: Discovery, Mercantilism, and Technology', in R. Floud and P. Johnson (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Britain, Vol. 1: Industrialisation 1700-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 191.

‘vernal bloom’ and ‘wealth.’ By comparison during the war the rivers have become ‘stagnated.’ The lesson Mason draws out is that Britain as a political state and colonizing country should not be over ambitious, which seems to imply that they should not try to hold on to the American colonies and that America should not be dependent on Britain. Compared to Book Two, this passage in Book Three is much more forceful in its language and it is clear that Mason is calling for some kind of oppositional action against the government. At the end of 1779 (roughly November), Mason answered his own call by involving himself with the newly formed Yorkshire Association, a group founded by Rev. Christopher Wyvill.

The Yorkshire Association, which was composed of rural men of property and Rockingham Whigs (the former were often unhappy about the presence of the latter) and inspired by the costs of the American war, was formed to petition for the economic reform of parliament. After early success and enthusiasm saw the spread of an ‘Association Movement’ into other counties, desire grew for reforms to include 100 extra county MPs and annual, or at least triennial, parliaments.⁸⁷ Mason, who chaired several of the Yorkshire Association’s meetings,⁸⁸ supported all these measures, which put him at odds with the more moderate sections of the group.⁸⁹ The change, not so much in his political beliefs but in his increased political forthrightness is expressed in Book Four of *The English Garden*.

With either a great deal of self-aggrandizement or self-deprecation, Mason wrote to Walpole of the fourth book:

For an overview of eighteenth-century trade and statistics, P. Deane and W. A. Cole, *British Economic Growth: 1688-1959* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980): Ch. 2, reference to American War, pp. 82-96.

⁸⁷ The most helpful study of the Yorkshire Association remains, I. R. Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform: The Parliamentary Reform Movement in British Politics, 1760-1785* (London: Macmillan, 1962).

⁸⁸ C. Wyvill (ed.), *Political Papers, Chiefly Respecting the Attempt of the County of York, and Other Considerable Districts, Commenced In 1779, And Continued During Several Subsequent Years, to Effect a Reformation of the Parliament of Great-Britain* Vol. 1 (York, 1794): 52-56. For Mason’s organizing of the first meeting see, Mitford *The Correspondence of Horace Walpole*, 53-55.

⁸⁹ Mason complained to George Simon Harcourt about the Rockingham Whigs, who were seen as a moderating force. See, Harcourt and Harcourt, *Harcourt Papers*, Vol. 7, 67-68.

“...the subject... is that of Ornamental Buildings, Menageries, Conservatories, &c., and with this I have contrived to interweave a pathetic story throughout, so that the whole book will be... an Episodico-didactico-pathetico-politico-farrago, unlike every thing [that] ever was written or will be written. The improvers will like it for its taste, the ladies for its tenderness; opposition for its Americality; - yet of this last it has no more than was absolutely necessary for the fable, and that so gently touched, that even Bishops will be forced to applaud it for its humanity – I had almost said Christianity.”⁹⁰

The narrative is introduced by the following explanation, “...precepts tire, and this fastidious Age/Rejects the strain didactic: try then/In livelier Narrative the truths to veil/We dare not dictate.”⁹¹ A well-off young man named Alcander inherits his father’s land on the coast and begins to improve it. While he is improving it he spies a ship being wrecked at sea. Alcander and his men dive in to rescue the crew but only ‘one tender maid’, Nerina, survives. Alcander promptly falls in love with her but his love is unrequited. After several sentimental episodes it turns out that she is from the American colonies and is the daughter of a Boston parson whose village has been burned to the ground by the British. She is engaged to a man called Cleon, who saved her father’s life and was duly rewarded with the promise of her hand in marriage. When Cleon turns up at Alcander’s estate the shock of seeing him again, on top of a year spent nervously fearing for the life of her father, kills Nerina but not before she can admit her true love to Alcander and Alcander can assure Cleon she has not be unfaithful to her father’s promise. All the action occurs in a pleasure garden Alcander builds for Nerina featuring various types of ornament (thus ensuring some kind of consistency with the overall didactic arc of *The English Garden*).

The story is a loose allegory of the relationship between Britain and America and the possibility of recreating a working union between the two. Alcander’s attempts to win the love of Nerina are consistently spurned because due to the war she is no longer in a position to give him her love freely. The bittersweet ending in which Nerina admits she does love Alcander only to die could be read to suggest that the politics of war have destroyed the great potential for close relationships, as close as family, between

⁹⁰ Mitford, *The Correspondence of Horace Walpole*, 137-138.

⁹¹ Mason, *The English Garden: In Four Books*, 89.

the countries. That Mason entirely blames Britain for the course of events is confirmed by rather heavy-handed allusions to a Britain that, “like remorseless Cain/Thirsted for Brother’s blood...” or burned an American village with “ruthless flames/That spar’d nor friend nor foe, nor sex nor age...”⁹²

Within the story the art of gardening is literally the background matter. It is predominantly a site reserved for narrative action and there is a perceivable difference, openly admitted by Mason in the line ‘precepts tire’, between the didactic approach of Books One, Two, and Three and that of Book Four. The difference is explained at the end of the poem in a prophetic stanza, the topic of which is Mason’s imagined youthful readership and the future of Britain:

They perchance,
Led by the Muse to solitude and shade,
May turn that Art we sing to soothing use,
At this ill-omen’d hour, when Rapine rides
In titled triumph; when Corruption waves
Her banners broadly in the face of day,
And shews th’ indignant world the host of slaves
She turns from Honour’s standard.

Gardening becomes a ‘soothing’ and consolatory art, no longer an ornament of civilization as it was in Book One. Instead it provides a space of moral retreat and a place to await a change in Britain’s political circumstances:

Patient there,
Yet not desponding, shall the sons of Peace
Await the day, when, smarting with his wrongs,
Old England’s Genius wakes; when with him wakes
That plain Integrity, Contempt of gold,
Disdain of slav’ry, liberal Awe of rule
Which fixt the rights of People, Peers, and Prince,

⁹² Mason, *The English Garden: In Four Books*, 111.

And on them founded the majestic pile
 Of BRITISH FREEDOM; bad fair ALBION rise
 The scourge of tyrants; sovereign of the seas;
 And arbitress of empires. Oh return,
 Ye long-lost train of Virtues! Swift return
 To save ('tis ALBION prompts your Poet's prayer)
 Her Throne, her Altars, and her laureate Bowers.⁹³

For Mason it is inevitable that 'Old England', a reference to England after 1688 and before the imagined Tory-led corruption of British politics,⁹⁴ will return. When it does, it will bring back many of the virtues that he had praised in *Elfrida* and *Caractacus* and England will again be a power for good in global politics. The poem ends with a Whiggish imagining of Britain returning to a balanced constitution, 'Which fixt the rights of People, Peers, and Prince' and, with the reestablishment of the constitution, the saving of 'Her Throne, her Altars, and her laureate Bowers.' Mason remains true to the beliefs held throughout his life in the necessity for Britain's monarchy and its church and alongside these its gardens. Burgh, who was also a member of the Yorkshire Association, confirms this interpretation in his comments on the final stanza of Mason's poem:

"...he [Mason] concludes this book, as he had done with the first, with an address to those of his countrymen who have relish for the politer arts; but as an interval of more than ten years had past between the times when the first and fourth books were written, that art, therefore, which in the former he exhorts them to practice for the embellishment of a then prosperous country, in the latter he recommends, merely for the purpose of amusement and self-consolation, at a period when the freedom and prosperity of that country lay oppressed beneath the weight of an immoral, a peculating, a sanguinary, and desolating system."⁹⁵

⁹³ Mason, *The English Garden: In Four Books*, 116-117.

⁹⁴ It could also be purposefully loaded with overtones of the legendary prophecy of King Arthur's return. For the admittedly limited use of Arthurian legend in the eighteenth century see, A. Lupack, 'The Arthurian Legend in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries' in H. Fulton, *A Companion to Arthurian Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012), pp. 340-354.

⁹⁵ Mason, *The English Garden: In Four Books*, 188.

Burgh's use of 'freedom and prosperity' moves between a language of politics and commerce. It calls attention to the same combination in Mason's stanza where British freedom results in them being 'sovereign of the seas.' This last phrase could be taken to refer to both favourable trading conditions and military strength. Most importantly, however, Burgh makes it clear that in the political climate of the late 1770s and early 1780s the English style of gardening is no longer an adornment of Britain's greatness.

Conclusion

Taken as a whole *The English Garden* maps William Mason's aesthetic response to cultural and political developments between 1770-1782. Book One, conceived of as a stand-alone book, was an attempt to consolidate a national style of gardening by convincingly demonstrating that the 'English', or 'irregular' style of gardening had the same theoretical foundations as painting. Mason's confidence in the importance of gardening as an art to Britain is evident not only in the book itself, with its unapologetically patriotic history of English gardening and parallel with the increasingly established 'liberal' art of painting, but also in his ridiculing of Chambers' alternative in *An Heroic Epistle*. However, between Books Two and Four Mason's confidence in the political importance of gardening was severely shaken by, in his opinion, the disastrous manner in which the British government handled the American War. Due to the degeneration of Britain's political system during the American War, in Book Four the irregular style is no longer an adornment of the nation and must retreat while the political situation is mended. For him political action is the means through which political situations are improved, shown by his actions outside his literary works, particularly his involvement with the Yorkshire Association. The developments between Book One and Book Four can be further explained through a quote, taken from Francis Bacon, on the title page of *The English Garden*:

“A garden is the purest of human pleasures; it is the greatest refreshment to the spirits of man, without which buildings and palaces are but gross handy-works. And a man shall ever see, that when ages

grow to civility and elegance, men come to build stately, sooner than to garden finely: as if gardening were the greater perfection.”⁹⁶

By placing this quote at the beginning of his poem Mason demonstrates that he understands gardens to be an adornment of a well-developed civilization, a point also made by Burgh above. A reading of all four books of *The English Garden* reinforces the primacy of politics over art. Without good politics there can be no good art because, although art may adorn or at most refine a political situation, it can never create it or mend it if it becomes too badly damaged. There are parallels to this view in Richard Hurd’s *On the Uses of Foreign Travel* (1764) a fictional dialogic essay between John Locke and the Third Earl of Shaftesbury. Hurd has Shaftesbury say:

“It is notorious enough how backward we have been, and still are, in all these elegant and muse-like applications. There is little or nothing in the way of *picture*, *sculpture*, and the arts of *design* among us, that can stand the test of a knowing and judicious eye... We have been solicitous to procure a just taste in policy and government, and have at length succeeded in this first and highest emulation. It may now be proper to apply the liberty, we have so happily gained, to other improvements... It must then be our own fault, if our progress in every elegant pursuit do not keep pace with our excellent constitution.”⁹⁷

Shaftesbury, whose main argument throughout the dialogue is the necessity of an improving educational trip to Europe, cringes at England’s lack of good art and uses it as one of his core arguments. Locke, unsurprisingly used as a mouthpiece for Hurd’s own opinions,⁹⁸ undercuts Shaftesbury, not by directly arguing against him but by questioning the true importance of the arts, which he calls merely “elegant and polite amusements.”⁹⁹ Locke’s laconic response to Shaftesbury’s argument firmly states that politics must be the primary concern over the aesthetic. Such a mindset is evident in

⁹⁶ Used on the title page of the following editions of *The English Garden: The English Garden: Book the First* (1772); *The English Garden in Four Books* (1782); *The English Garden: In Four Books* (1783).

⁹⁷ R. Hurd, *On the Uses of Foreign Travel* (Dublin, 1764): 39-40.

⁹⁸ H. Hoock’s suggestion that Hurd demanded, “that the arts keep up with the advanced state of both England’s commerce and her liberty” is therefore based on a misreading of the dialogue. See, Hoock, *The King’s Artists*, 25-6, 146.

⁹⁹ Hurd, *On the Uses of Foreign Travel*, 93.

The English Garden as a whole. Moreover, the parallels between Mason's work and Hurd's 1764 work is a reminder of Mason's intellectual roots in the Lockean philosophy that dominated the 'Conservative Enlightenment', analyzed in Chapters One and Two. There it was shown that, in agreement with other Whig theologians and writers, Mason held a philosophically skeptical view of the moral value of aesthetics. In *The English Garden*, he continues to subordinate aesthetic to political concerns.

It would be mistaken, however, to suggest that politics is the only ideologically important factor in *The English Garden*. Although it is not primarily a religious poem there are scattered affirmations of Mason's religious beliefs. In Book Three he lists a number of general precepts that a gardener should know:

those general properties of form,
Dimension, growth, duration, strength, and hue,
The first imprest, when, at the dawn of time,
The form-deciding, life-inspiring word
Pronounced them into being.¹⁰⁰

The last two lines are a conflation of the opening to St. John's gospel, "In the beginning was the word..." and the opening of Genesis in which God speaks creation into existence. Through a reference to St. John's gospel Mason alludes to Christ (the 'word'). And by giving Christ the Word the action of God, 'speaking', Mason affirms an orthodox relationship between Christ and the God of the Old Testament. Although in John 1 the word is a creative being, "through him all things were made", he does not speak. As it is only the God of Genesis that speaks, the conflation of the two passages confirms Christ as one and the same as the God of the Old Testament. To Christ Mason credits the creation of all forms. It can thus be taken as a statement of orthodox Trinitarian belief.

In Book Two, Mason, perhaps with an eye on various biblical passages that do the same,¹⁰¹ uses stray sheep to explore the theme of the Fall of Man. On viewing a herd of sheep Mason writes:

¹⁰⁰ Mason, *The English Garden*, 63.

A gleam of happiness primæval seems
 To snatch me back to joys my nature claim'd,
 Ere vice defil'd, ere slavery sunk the world,
 And all was faith and freedom: Then was man
 Creation's king, yet friend...
 Then, nor the curling horn had learn'd to sound
 The savage song of chace [sic]; the barbed shaft
 Had then no poison'd point; nor thou, fell tube!
 Whose iron entrails hide the sulphurous blast,
 Satanic engine, knew'st the ruthless power
 Of thundering death around thee...
 Instinct, alas, like wayward Reason, now
 Veers from its pole. There was a golden time
 When each created being kept its sphere
 Appointed, nor infring'd its neighbour's right.¹⁰²

In this passage Mason imagines a prelapsarian state of man, before war and advanced weapons. It was commonplace in eighteenth-century moderate theology to interpret the fall of man as a fall from 'Reason.'¹⁰³ But Mason also implicates man's instinct. Although the issue is left unresolved and it is not a systematic statement of theology there are two conclusions that can be reasonably postulated from this passage. Firstly, if man cannot reason or feel effectively it seems likely that Mason still holds to Warburton's theology of moral knowledge as subservient to the will of God and divine revelation, which undermined the same two sources of moral knowledge and was explored in Chapter One. Secondly, for Mason the state of nature after the fall is

¹⁰¹ Psalm, 119:176; Isaiah, 53:6; Luke, 15:3-7.

¹⁰² Mason, *The English Garden: In Four Books*, 37-39.

¹⁰³ Patrick Müller gives a useful summary of this issue in latitudinarian thought, *Latitudinarianism and Didacticism in Eighteenth Century Literature: Moral Theology in Fielding, Sterne, and Goldsmith* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009): 167. It may also be helpful to note that Mason was probably not a biblical literalist. Warburton notes of the story of the fall, "...the FALL: a real fact, told allegorically." Warburton, *Divine Legation*, Vol. 3, 116. For Mason's father's view on the fall see, W. Mason (Sr.) *The Duty of Maintaining Publick Work-houses for Employing the Poor. A Sermon Preach'd in the Parish-Church of the Holy Trinity in Kingston upon Hull. On Sunday, called Quinquagesima, February 20, 1726* (York, 1726).

an imperfect reflection of a once perfect nature. It follows then that gardening should be the art of abstracting perfect natural forms from imperfect natural forms. Thus there is a theological foundation to Mason's garden theory.

Pushing the argument for the importance of religion to its limits it could be said that Mason's gardener is essentially a religious being. In Book One, Mason uses religious language to describe his desired audience who must have 'purity of soul' and follows it by alluding to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, claiming 'miscreated Art/[is the] Offspring of Sin and Shame.' Therefore good gardening is associated with religious virtue and bad gardening is associated with vice and sin (and ultimately, the Fall). And in the story of Abdalonymus, the future King is presented as an entirely devout being, praying and living an irenic vice-free life. William Burgh in his commentary on this passage notes:

"...the Gardener may be justly characterized as 'one who inflicts no terror; who entertains no hostile disposition, but is an universal friend; whose hands, unstained with blood, are devoutly consecrated to that God who blesses his orchards, his vintage, his threshing-floor, and his plough; who vindicates his equality in an equal state, and strenuously opposes himself to the unconstitutional encroachments of Aristocratic or Monarchic power.'"¹⁰⁴

Throughout this chapter it has been demonstrated that *The English Garden* is imbued with changing politics but passages such as those above show that it is simultaneously a work of unremitting Christian orthodoxy. Like this quote from Burgh, Mason's description to Walpole of the 'Americality' of the fourth book that 'Bishops will be forced to applaud it for its humanity – I had almost said Christianity' is a smooth conjoining of the Whig ideal of a balanced constitution that limits elitism and royal prerogative powers and religious belief. Mason's political-theological stance is arguably made all the more persuasive to its eighteenth-century British audience because it is situated within a book that had begun by setting out a patriotic and intellectual aesthetic of gardening. Finally it should be noted that the unification of nature, politics and religion in *The English Garden* is no longer put to the use of the

¹⁰⁴ Mason, *The English Garden: In Four Books*, 164.

political state, as Chapters One and Two argued for *Elfrida* and *Caractacus*. In *The English Garden* they combine to oppose the government.

Chapter 5. The Nuneham-Courtenay Flower Garden

At the beginning of the 1770s, while he was writing Book One of *The English Garden*, Mason was asked by his close friend George Simon Harcourt (1736-1809) to design a small flower garden for the Harcourt estate of Nuneham-Courtenay, Oxfordshire. It fast became one of the most lauded gardens of the second half of the century and was visited and revisited by men and women as diverse as John Wesley, Horace Walpole, Sarah Siddons, Lady Louisa Stuart, and the Royal Family.¹ In recent scholarship the garden has been seen as a *locus classicus* of the pleasure ground tradition, which it was argued in Chapter Three Mason had already implemented at his Aston rectory. However, a sound chronology of the garden's development still needs establishing. And a thorough going study of the busts, statues and inscriptions that formed the ideological content of the garden has not yet been made. Given the fame of the garden in its time and again in the twenty-first century it is remarkable that this has not been attempted until now.

The first half of this chapter consists of a detailed chronology of the developments of the Nuneham-Courtenay flower garden. It argues that in the late 1770s the garden was briefly used as means by which George Simon could display his republican beliefs and that the garden's aesthetic demonstrates a taste and ability for picturesque design. The second half of this chapter considers the ideology of the garden as it existed in the 1780s. It refutes modern scholarship's over-emphasis of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's influence on the garden and argues that the design of the garden relies on no single philosophy of interpretation and does not contain a programmatic meaning. Instead it is a heady combination of mirth, melancholy, politics, retirement ideology, George Simon's family history, and self-deprecating in-jokes.

¹ J. Emory (ed.), *The Journal of the Reverend John Wesley: Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford*, Vol. 2 (New York, 1837): 604; A. Clarke (ed.), *Gleanings from an Old Portfolio Containing Some Correspondence between Lady Louisa Stuart and Her Sister, Caroline, Countess of Portarlengton, and Other Friends and Relatives*, Vol. 3, (Edinburgh, 1898): 75; C. C. Orr, "Queen Charlotte, 'Scientific Queen'" in C. C. Orr (ed.), *Queenship in Britain, 1660-1837: Royal Patronage, Court Culture, and Dynastic Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002): 257-258.

Compared to the topics of the previous four chapters the Nuneham-Courtenay flower garden does not easily reveal much about William Mason's personal beliefs. This is because the garden is not read simply as Mason's design, which is how it has previously been presented.² Instead it is read as predominantly reflecting the life and beliefs of George Simon, which, as it will be shown makes more sense of the garden and the primary sources. From here it is concluded which elements of it can reasonably be attributed to Mason and what these reveal about his conception of how gardens work, what they mean, and what they are.

A Chronology of the Nuneham-Courtenay Flower Garden

The life of the Nuneham-Courtenay flower garden spanned 1770-1830, although after George Simon's death in 1809 along with the rest of the estate's landscape it went "untouched."³ The three most important primary sources for the garden are a series of written descriptions published by George Simon over the period 1777-97, two watercolours by Paul Sandy (1777-78), now only knowable through engravings, and a detailed plan of the garden (1785). Besides these there are Lancelot Brown's plan of the Nuneham estate (1779), two plans of the garden from the 1790s, contemporary comments in letters, and a description in William Combe's *An History of the River Thames* (1794). The earliest surviving references to the creation of the garden are found in the correspondence of Mason and George Simon.

The flower garden was started around 1770 but was soon impinged upon by the first Earl of Nuneham who built a laundry adjoining the flower garden, in May or June 1772.⁴ Soon after this on September 26th 1772, Mason writes to George Simon that he

² The best bit of evidence for this point of view is a letter from Frederick Montagu to Mrs. Delany, "Lord Harcourt has such a flower-garden as excels every flower garden which ever existed either in history or romance. Bowers, statues, inscriptions, busts, temples – all planned by Mason." Lady Llanover (ed.), *Delaney Correspondence*, Vol. 3 (London, 1862): 100. As will be shown, the majority of the evidence goes against this view and suggests that Montagu is exaggerating or has been exaggerated to.

³ Harcourt and Harcourt, *Harcourt Papers*, Vol. 12, 221.

⁴ This was much to the distress of George Simon but to the amusement of William Whitehead who wrote a short humorous poem on the occasion.

has traced over an old plan – neither the old nor the new plan are extant,⁵ – superintending a circuitous gravel walk and changing the shape of the beds to show that there should be no less than six feet between them to allow for walking. He also writes:

“As to the shape of these beds you may vary them as you please, in such a way as to have the best effect from the principal buildings. Your eye on the spot must direct that; my plan only means to show you in what manner, not the precise thing, for I dare say, if I was to superintend the work myself, I should adhere closely to the plan in nothing but the circuit of walk... if you follow my plan exactly, as you say you will, you will certainly do wrong... I blush to think how Walter Clerk [head gardener of Nuneham] will despise it.”⁶

The early letters are vital for understanding Mason’s role in the design of the garden. He was the garden’s general designer, which is to say that he gave George Simon and his head gardener Walter Clarke a general plan for the garden, including a path that set its bounds, but nothing more. Unfortunately, without the plan he is referring to it is impossible to say what exactly this amounts to or whether Mason is being overly self-deprecating about his abilities. More positively the letters are evidence that the flower garden was to be designed with the creation of views in mind. As Mason was a regular visitor to Nuneham-Courtenay in this period he would have had a hand in making the views. But there is no reason that, as Mason suggests, George Simon and Walter Clarke did not as well and it is thus impossible to say exactly how the workload was shared. There is also very little evidence in these early letters as to the emblematical features of the garden. All that can be said is that as late as the summer of 1774, William Whitehead was asked for an inscription to put underneath a statue of Hebe.⁷ In the same letter there is a hint that George Simon was thinking of putting a statue of Hercules in the garden, but evidently nothing came of this. The first detailed

⁵ A plan exists in the Bodleian Library, filed as dating from 1772, but this is incorrect. The plan dates from c. 1795. It is the same as another plan of that year found at Stanton Harcourt.

⁶ Harcourt and Harcourt, *Harcourt Papers*, Vol. 7, 33-34.

⁷ In the same letter there is some suggestion that a statue of Hercules may be included in the garden. This was never actualized. Harcourt and Harcourt, *Harcourt Papers*, Vol. 7, 316-318.

knowledge of the garden's emblematical features came four years later in 1778, in the first published description of the garden.

The publication of a description of the Nuneham-Courtenay flower garden was most likely the result of the death of George Simon's father, the first Earl of Nuneham, in 1777.⁸ The first Earl was a tender father who showed great concern for George Simon, who was often ill, and the happiness of his daughter-in-law. But he was also often at odds with his son who demonstrated artistic ability (Figs. 13 and 14) and chose a life of art and philosophy over public politics for the Whig party (he was once shown up by his son when George Simon's only early foray into politics ended in him voting against the administration).⁹ The first Earl's death not only gave George Simon complete control of the estate, which he used to have the landscape remodeled by 'Capability' Brown, but also greater freedom to express his ideologies in his flower garden and to publicize the results. However, it is also important to note that when the first earl died George Simon was infuriated at what he saw as the King's and government's failure to appropriately honour his father. As a result he severed all ties with court and parliament. Both his greater ideological freedom and personal anti-monarchism are evident in the flower garden as it exists in the first description.

The description was published as a written companion to two watercolours George Simon had commissioned from Paul Sandby of the garden. These were subsequently engraved by William Watts and published in George Kearsly's *The Copperplate Magazine* (1774-1778), which was where the description was published. Both engravings (with a changed description, see below) were used again three years later

⁸ For Simon Harcourt's relationship to the Nuneham estate and the possibility that Nuneham is the 'deserted village' of Goldsmith's famous poem see, M. Batey, "Nuneham Courtenay: An Oxfordshire 18th-Century Deserted Village", *Oxoniensa*, XXXIII (1968); M. Airs, "'Good & Not Expensive...': Lord Harcourt's Nuneham Courtenay", *Architectural History*, Vol. 44, Essays in Architectural History Presented to John Newman (2001), pp. 394-400.

⁹ The first Earl was a Whig and a military man. He was a founding member of the dilettanti society, and an active political figure that raised troops in defence of the King during the Jacobite rebellion of 1745. He also briefly tutored the future George III, was British ambassador to Paris, and near the end of his life was Viceroy of Ireland. Despite this Horace Walpole described him as "devoted to the Court but diffident and complaisant." J. Lane (ed.), *The Last Journals of Horace Walpole During the Reign of George III, from 1771-1783*, Vol. 1 (London, 1910): 251.

in 1781 in Sandby's *A Collection of One Hundred and Fifty Select Views of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland* (Figs. 15 and 16), which went through two editions.¹⁰

George Simon's text introduces the garden by its size – “about an acre and a quarter” – and by claiming that its irregular form, unequal ground and the layout of the trees make it appear “of considerable extent.” The garden's boundary was “concealed by a deep plantation of shrubs, which ties with the surrounding forest trees that stand in the park.” He notes the irregularity of “patches of flowers and clumps of shrubs” and the gravel walk which leads around the garden passed the various buildings and busts.¹¹ After this he lists the order of the buildings and busts in the garden, including their inscriptions and the names of the authors of the inscriptions.

The monuments that punctuate George Simon's itinerary of the garden in 1778 appear in the following order: a bust of Flora, with an inscription from Chaucer; Faunus, with an inscription from William Whitehead; Pan, with an inscription from Milton; the grotto, with an inscription from Milton; Apollo, with an inscription from Metastasio and the Temple of Flora, outside of which is a bust of Venus with an inscription from Dryden's translation of Lucretius. This is where the description accompanying Plate One ends. Plate Two starts with a bust of Locke, with an inscription from Thomson and Mason. It then proceeds in the following order: a Colonnade featuring busts of Cato the Censor, Marcus Brutus, and Demosthenes and a medallion of Milton, with an inscription from Thomson and one from Andrew Marvell; on one side of the colonnade was a bust of Cato of Utica, with an inscription from Rousseau and on the other a bust of Rousseau, with an inscription from Brooke Boothby. Then came a bust of Prior, with an inscription from Prior; an urn dedicated to Frances Poole, Viscountess Palmerston, with an inscription from Whitehead; a bust of Cowley, with

¹⁰ For the importance of such collections in both the growth of tourism and the promotion of the aristocracy and the confirmation of their places as leaders of taste, which the Nuneham engravings certainly contributed to, see, C. Christie, *The British Country House in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000): 27-30; de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye*: Ch. 3. William Watts put out his own collection in 1779, entitled *The Seats of the Nobility and Gentry*. The Nuneham engravings were left out of Watts' collection, presumably because Sandby planned to use them in his own collection. The second edition of Sandby's work was published in 1783.

¹¹ P. Sandby, *A Collection of One Hundred and Fifty Select Views of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland* (London, 1781): 41.

an inscription from Cowley; the Conservatory; and finally the statue of Hebe, with an inscription from Whitehead.¹² Nearly all of these busts, statues, and buildings remained in the garden until it was destroyed in 1830. The exception is the colonnade.

With its busts of Cato the Censor, Marcus Brutus, Demosthenes, Cato of Utica, Rousseau, and medallion of John Milton the colonnade was a blatant statement of republicanism. Demosthenes was primarily famed for his skill as an orator and took his own life rather than live under a monarchy. Similarly Cato of Utica, when faced with the choice of life under a monarchy or death, chose death; and Marcus Brutus assassinated Julius Caesar after he showed signs of monarchical behaviour.¹³ Cato the Censor was known as a champion of Roman republicanism and Rousseau's political theory was considered to be an updated classical republicanism.¹⁴ John Milton was a supporter of Oliver Cromwell and thus a direct link to England's spell as a republic.

George Simon had been an admirer of Rousseau since the 1750s. He had secretly sheltered the Genevan philosopher at Nuneham during his 'exile' in the 1760s and befriended Britain's most famous 'Rousseauian' Brooke Boothby.¹⁵ Through the

¹² Only at two points does George Simon mention the planting scheme: firstly the planting around the commemorative urn, which was "Placed on an altar encircled with cypresses... within a recess in the shrubbery that surrounds the garden. The bank that rises above it planted with flowers, and a weeping willow, large Weymouth pines, and other evergreens form the background." He also describes the conservatory as being planted with, "bergamot, cedrati, limoncelli, and orange trees of various kinds." In the summer the walls and ceilings of the conservatory could be removed. The back wall was covered with a trellis planted with "lemon, citron, and pomegranate trees, intermixed with all the different sorts of jasmynes." Sandby, *A Collection*, 45-46. For a more detailed discussion of the plants and flowers of the garden see, Laird, *Flowering of the English Landscape*, 350-361.

¹³ See their biographies in Volumes 6 and 8 respectively of John Dryden's, *Plutarch's Lives in Eight Volumes. Translated from the Greek. To which is Prefixed, the Life of Plutarch*, Vols. 1-8 (London, 1749). Cato and his death, as discussed below, was most popularly known in the eighteenth century through Addison's play *Cato, A Tragedy* (1712).

¹⁴ M. Viroli, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the 'Well-Ordered Society'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹⁵ E. Duffy, *Rousseau in England: The Context for Shelley's Critique of the Enlightenment* (California, University of California Press, 1979): Chapters 1 and 2; M. Cranston, *The Solitary Self: Jean Jacques Rousseau in Exile and Adversity* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997); L. Damrosch, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Restless Genius* (New York, Houghton Mifflin Books, 2005); Ann-Marie Thornton "A Gift from Jean-Jacques Rousseau to George Simon Harcourt: Etchings and Proofs

influence of Rousseau, George Simon started to espouse republican beliefs. He became patron of the Republican historian Catherine Macaulay,¹⁶ and along with his wife he instituted an annual festival on the Nuneham estate that rewarded local villagers who displayed either skill or virtue, mimicking a passage in Rousseau's *Nouvelle Heloise* (1761).¹⁷ More contentiously he wore a Brutus ring, removed the coronets from his coaches and refused to be referred to by his aristocratic title. There is a slight irony in the Republican colonnade because it certainly would not have been introduced while George Simon's father was alive, but at the same time it can be read as a symbol of his personal antagonism towards the monarchy because of the way he felt the King had mistreated his father.

The colonnade did not last long, however. In 1780 George Simon published an updated description of the flower garden in *The Pocket Companion for Oxford* and the colonnade does not feature. Instead there is a bower where the colonnade once stood.¹⁸ As the busts of Cato and Rousseau remain, but there are no longer busts of Demosthenes, Cato the Censor, or Marcus Brutus, it is a reasonable conjecture that the bower is simply the colonnade renamed and devoid of the majority of its busts. George Simon was clearly becoming disenchanted with his earlier political beliefs as is also clear from his refusal to act as patron to Catherine Macaulay's William of Orange slating *History of England from the Revolution to the Present Time* (1778).¹⁹ Moreover, in 1780 George Simon commissioned a huge state portrait from Reynolds, which shows the Harcourt family in their coronation clothes, and is distinctly 'un-republican' (Fig. 17). Finally, in 1783, after two failed attempts by his friends to get

of the Illustrations to His Works," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*: Vol. 14: Iss. 3, Article 21 (2002); S. Zonneveld, *Sir Brooke Boothby: Rousseau's Roving Baronet Friend* (Voorburg: De Nieuwe Haagsche, 2004): 36.

¹⁶ B. Hill, *The Republican Virago: The Life and Times of Catharine Macaulay, Historian*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2002): 213.

¹⁷ For the institution of festivals see, J. J. Rousseau, *Eloisa: or, a Series of Original Letters Collected and Published by J. J. Rousseau Translated from the French. In Four Volumes*, Vol. 3, Second Edition (London, 1761): 76-77. Elizabeth Harcourt describes the spinning festival in Harcourt and Harcourt, *Harcourt Papers*, Vol. 3, 101-107.

¹⁸ D. Prince (ed.), *A New Pocket Companion for Oxford. A New Edition, Corrected, Much Enlarged, and Adorned with a Plan of the University and City, and Six Other Plates*, (Oxford, 1780): 128-132. On June 8th, 1778, Mason wrote to George Simon about the building of a bower. Harcourt and Harcourt, *Harcourt Papers*, Vol. 7, 57.

¹⁹ Hill, *The Republican Virago*, 213; Zonneveld, *Sir Brooke Boothby*, 36.

him a role in the ministry, Harcourt returned to public politics in support of William Pitt the Younger, on the supposition that “the king had been ill-treated by the old ministry, and that the new one ought to be supported.”²⁰ The colonnade thus became a piece of personal history George Simon preferred to write out.

The same year George Simon returned to public politics he published a third description of the garden called *Nuneham-Courtenay, Seat of Lord Harcourt* (confirming that he was happy for people to refer to him by his title again). It differs significantly from the previous two descriptions by being a tour of the garden. For example, it uses phrases such as “proceeding through a continuation of the same Shrubbery.”²¹ The new description also describes more changes in the flower garden’s layout. Rousseau and Cato are separate from the bower, which has been placed on the other side of the garden.²² And the bust of Cowley has moved nearer to the entrance of the garden. It was this description of the flower garden that featured in every reprint of the *Companion for Oxford* until it was discontinued in 1797.²³

²⁰ Harcourt and Harcourt, *Harcourt Papers*, Vol. 3, 173-174.

²¹ G. S. Harcourt, *Nuneham-Courtenay, The Seat of the Earl of Harcourt* (Oxford, 1783): 14. It thus fits into the vogue for literary itineraries of gardens and landscapes popularized by William Gilpin. See, W. Gilpin, *A Dialogue Upon the Gardens of the Right Honourable the Lord Viscount Cobham, at Stow in Buckinghamshire* (London, 1748); *Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, &c. Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; Made in the Summer of the Year 1770* (London, 1782). See also, J. Macarthur, *The Picturesque: Architecture, Disgust and Other Irregularities* (New York, Routledge, 2007): Ch. 5.

²² The dimensions of the building, painted green, were twelve by ten feet and inside was a “cast of Cupid and Psyche from the Antique” and an inscription from Marvell. The exterior was covered with a trellis, also green, “against which [were] planted Roses, Woodbines, Jessamines, and several kinds of Creeper, and appears like three Arches cut through Shrubbery.” Harcourt, *Nuneham-Courtenay*, 15. Whether or not it was an entirely new building from the colonnade is a matter of conjecture. It seems likely that it was. A later source describes the bower as having “three unequal arches,” which would mean it was an imitation of a building found in Book IV of *The English Garden*. This is noted in, J. Dugdale, *The New British Traveller* (London, 1819): 72. For the original reference see, W. Mason, *The English Garden in Four Books* (Dublin, 1786): 104.

²³ D. Prince (ed.), *A New Pocket Companion for Oxford. A New Edition, Corrected, Much Enlarged, and Adorned with a Plan of the University and City, and Six Other Plates*, (Oxford, 1783). Between 1783 and 1797 *A New Pocket Companion* went through at least fourteen editions.

In 1785 a detailed plan of the flower garden was made (Fig. 18). It is the most detailed and earliest plan extant. The date of the map coincides with the visit of the Royal Family to Nuneham, and it is now filed under ‘Miscellaneous Plans and Drawings’ in the National Archives, Kew.²⁴ Thus it is almost certainly a presentation copy made for the Royal Family. It measures 47cm x 33cm and includes a key detailing the identity and position of the busts and statues, although it does not include the inscriptions that go with them (Fig. 19). Flowers are represented in red, yellow, and blue,²⁵ so general positioning is known but not what type of flower. The trees and the shrubs are represented in dark green. The positioning of the busts on the map accords precisely with the written description of 1783. Moreover, the map shows that the garden still featured the central axis that Sandby painted from both ends in 1777. Due to the consistency between these three sources the ‘pictures’ that were designed as part of the garden are retrievable.

In the engraving of Sandby’s *A View from the Statue of Hebe* (Fig. 15) the view through the garden to the Temple of Flora is created by three trees in the foreground (Figs. 20 and 21) and one tree in the far background on the left, which is not on the plan because it is part of the wider landscape of the estate. When the view is reversed as in *View from the Temple of Flora* (Fig. 16) the foreground is open, but defined by shrubs, small conifers, and cypresses. The three trees that formed the foreground of Sandby’s other picture now define the background (Figs. 22 and 23). The trees that form this background are all evident on the plan.²⁶ In this way the central axis of the garden was ingeniously designed to have the formal elements of a picture from either end of it.

²⁴ Held as, ‘Office of Works and Successors: Miscellaneous Plans and Drawings. Gardens. Oxfordshire: Nuneham Courtenay. Plan of a flower garden.’ Ref: WORK38-349. Also cited in Laird, *Flowering of the English Landscape*.

²⁵ An anonymous note on the back of the map reads, “NB The clumps coloured Red and Yellow are flowers only – The rest are shrubs except the clumps on each side of the Temple, which are flowers back’d with shrubs.” Blue is included in the above as representing flowers as it seems an unlikely colour to use for shrubs.

²⁶ The only anomaly, marked by a red dot on Fig. 21, is a tall tree in the Sandby picture looking from the Temple of Flora to the Statue of Hebe. This it seems is a little bit of artistic license from Sandby to make his picture accord more closely to his own compositional ideal. However, this tree seems to be hidden by another in the front left foreground in *View from the Statue of Hebe*, and pokes out to the right of it. Sandby has slightly skewed the perspective in one of the pictures to diminish a background tree and highlight a foreground tree.

The two pictures from opposing ends of the central axis can be usefully compared to Claude Lorrain's 1646, *Landscape with Hagar and the Angel* (Fig. 24). As in Lorrain's painting, trees moving from the foreground to the background are used to create a visual pathway through the scene. The winding path in *View from the Statue of Hebe* and the kidney-bean-shaped flowerbeds in both, like the background landscape and river of *Landscape with Hagar*, help give the composition an apparently unstructured fluidity. The main compositional difference is that, unlike Claude's painting, the flower garden has no distant horizon. Overall the above analysis accords closely with lines in *The English Garden*:

O great POUSSIN! O Nature's darling, CLAUDE!
What if some rash and sacrilegious hand
Tore from your canvas those umbrageous pines²⁷

In this passage, which is one of many, Mason is making the link between landscape painting and gardening. For Mason, the trees that Poussin and Claude use to frame their pictures are vital compositional devices and were they to be taken out the picture would be ruined. The theoretical and political implications of a link between painting and gardening were seen in the previous chapter. In the Nuneham-Courtenay flower garden the theory was applied. Moreover, the link between landscape painting and gardening is evinced multiple times in the garden. Excluding the two views Sandby painted, there are four other key viewing points (Fig. 25). The map shows that after the first bend in the path there was an open view across the garden. Following on from this the centre of the garden could be seen from the grotto. From the bower there was a view to the memorial urn. Finally, from the conservatory there is another open view of the garden.

In the early 1790s the design shifted again (Fig. 26). In this period the bust of Rousseau was moved and the flowerbeds were allowed to grow out of their borders to become wilder in appearance. This may well have been to keep it in touch with gardening ideas as they developed in the 1790s. In particular the later picturesque,

²⁷ Mason, *The English Garden: In Four Books*, 10.

which championed a more ‘wild’ and rough garden aesthetic.²⁸ In the last contemporary description of any detail, *An History of the River Thames* (1794), William Combe confirms the presence of a rougher picturesque in the Nuneham-Courtenay flower garden. But he adds little of any relevance to what is already known from previous descriptions.²⁹

The above chronology shows that the Nuneham-Courtenay flower garden developed slowly at the start and then went through three important changes: the introduction and removal of a republican colonnade; a stable period in the 1780s; and the introduction of a late, or ‘rough’ picturesque in the 1790s. Due to its stability and the sources available from this period it is the garden of the 1780s that will be investigated below for its emblematical meaning.

As for William Mason several conclusions can be drawn. As seen in the early letters Mason was certainly the garden’s designer but this does not mean that he controlled the creation of all it. It was created through the combined efforts of Mason, Harcourt, and Walter Clarke. Moreover, the ‘picturesque’ approach to gardening that Mason champions in *The English Garden*, in which gardening is indebted to landscape painting’s compositional devices was implemented at Nuneham. Thus George Simon’s flower garden might be described as the realization of the theories of *The English Garden*. Despite these obvious influences there is certainly a limit to Mason’s control of the garden. The short-lived ‘republican phase’ of the garden would not have been to his taste. Although he certainly wanted to limit the prerogative powers of

²⁸ The picturesque can, in very general terms, be described as a third aesthetic category alongside the sublime and the beautiful. It relies not only on nature appearing ‘like a picture’, but also on a ruggedness that is neither beautiful, nor sublime, but is still pleasing. Prime examples are the works of Salvator Rosa and Thomas Gainsborough’s scenes of the rural poor. See Copley and Garside, *The Politics of the Picturesque*, 1-13; D. Marshall, ‘The Problem of the Picturesque’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Aesthetics and the Disciplines (Spring, 2002), pp. 413-437.

²⁹ Passing reference is also made to it by a ‘picturesque publication’ by Samuel Ireland, which was dedicated to George Simon. Ireland however, spends the majority of his description of Nuneham-Courtenay on the recently installed Carfax Monument. He mentions the flower garden only to say it is “the most perfect assemblage I remember to have seen.” S. Ireland, *Picturesque Views Along the Thames*, Vol. 1 (London, 1792): 120.

the monarchy he did not seriously want Britain to be a republic.³⁰ Neither was Mason in thrall to Rousseau to the extent that George Simon was. In the 1760s, along with Hurd and Warburton,³¹ Mason had been a great admirer of the philosopher.³² However, by the mid-1770s, around the time the bust of Rousseau was being placed in the flower garden, Mason wrote to Horace Walpole, he had, “always pitied” Rousseau.³³

An Emblematical Reading of the Nuneham-Courtenay Flower Garden

The only author to explore the Nuneham-Courtenay flower garden ideologically in any depth is Mavis Batey. The main thrust of Batey’s argument is that the flower garden was, “inspired by book IV, letter xi of...*Nouvelle Heloise*” and relied upon Rousseau’s sentimental philosophy.³⁴ Many contemporary scholars who mention the garden in passing have accepted her arguments.³⁵

Batey’s conclusion is reasonable and it is not the aim here to entirely refute it. As discussed above, George Simon was a huge admirer of Rousseau, as in some respects was Mason. Like Julie’s garden in the passage Batey refers to, George Simon’s

³⁰ Due to some of his more ‘radical’ politics Mason did have to defend himself from charges of Republicanism. For example, in a letter to Alderson he writes, “I wish you kindly hint this to Lady Holderness that she may not think me so much of a Republican as I have been represented. You know nothing is further from my sentiments.” Whibley, *The Correspondence of Richard Hurd and William Mason*, 96.

³¹ For Hurd and Warburton the enthusiasm was short lived. Warburton’s theories in *Alliance of Church and State* were twice criticized in Rousseau’s *The Social Contract* (1762, first translated into English in 1764).

³² In 1767, Whitehead, never an admirer of Rousseau, wrote disparagingly of Mason and George Simon’s newfound habit of referring to their *ennui*, which he claimed was an affectation derived from Rousseau. See, Harcourt and Harcourt, *Harcourt Papers*, Vol. 7, 266, 272-273.

³³ Mitford, *Correspondence of Horace Walpole*, Vol. 2, 9.

³⁴ Batey, *William Mason, English Gardener*, 14.

³⁵ S. Rose, “Romance and Romanticism: The Restoration of Mason’s Garden at Nuneham”, *Quarterly Newsletter* (Garden History Society), No. 12 (Spring, 1970), pp. 13-17; J. H. Casid, *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2005): 255-256; J. Marsden, *The Wisdom of George the Third: Papers from a Symposium at the Queen’s Gallery, Buckingham Palace* (London, Royal Collection, 2004): 340; Zonneveld, *Sir Brooke Boothby*, 86. For Batey’s other work on the garden see, *Two Romantic Picturesque Flower Gardens and Jane Austen and the English Landscape* (London, Barn Elms 1996): 32-33.

garden had high and thick borders of trees and shrubberies.³⁶ Moreover, there were three direct quotations from *Nouvelle Heloise* and a bust of Rousseau in the garden. However, Mark Laird has already shown that there were plenty of prototypes in the English garden pleasure ground tradition that could have influenced the design of the flower garden,³⁷ to which Mason's and Hurd's rectory gardens should be added. Furthermore, there is a relatively simple reason why a limit should be placed on the influence of Rousseau's philosophy in this context.

Rousseau's first major work *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (1750, translated into English in 1751) argues that the development of the arts and sciences is the main contributory factor to the degeneration of human virtue and happiness. Rousseau claims that civilization is increasingly separating mankind from a natural state in which virtue and morality best exist. His argument runs that modern society had become enslaved to manmade traditions encapsulated and perpetuated by the arts and sciences. So when in *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* Rousseau briefly discusses gardens, they must adhere to his rejection of civilization:

“Our gardens are adorn'd with statues, and our galleries with paintings. What, think you, do these master-pieces of art, expos'd thus to publick admiration, represent? Perhaps the great men who gloriously defended the liberty of their country? Or those still greater who inriched [sic] it with their virtues? No, no, they are the images of all the paths where reason and the heart may stray...”³⁸

³⁶ Rousseau, *Eloisa*, Vol. 3, 117-129.

³⁷ Laird, *The Flowering of the English Landscape*, 213-238, 329-360.

³⁸ J. J. Rousseau, *The Discourse which Carried the Præmium at the Academy of Dijon, in MDCCL. On this Question, Propos'd by the said Academy, whether the Re-Establishment of Arts and Sciences has Contributed to the Refining of Manners. By a Citizen of Geneva. Translated from the French original.* (London, 1751): 48. A related thought is found in the passage of *La Nouvelle Heloise* that Batey argues is as an influence on Nuneham. Saint-Preux, in discussing “Lord Cobham's celebrated park at Stow...” says: “...The proprietor who made this stately solitude has even erected ruins, temples, old buildings, and different ages as well as different places are collected with more than mortal magnificence. This is the very thing I dislike... Are we not destined to trouble enough, without making our amusements a fatigue?” Rousseau, *Eloisa*, Vol. 3, 139.

Rousseau argues that a garden should exist apart from reminders of civilization. There is an obvious discrepancy between this and the Nuneham-Courtenay flower garden simply because there were busts and inscriptions in the flower garden. It went against Rousseau's writing so far as to provide in Cato of Utica an example of a famous man, 'who gloriously defended the liberty' of his country. Whether or not Cato of Utica was a Republican or Whig hero (see below), with regards to Rousseau's philosophy a bust of Cato was an image of civilization and thus a 'path where reason and the heart may stray.'

It is counterproductive to look for any one philosophical system to explain the flower garden. The available primary sources offer a valid alternative route to explore the garden around 1785. In order to do this a written 'tour' of the garden will be recreated interspersed with analyses of the busts, inscriptions, statues, buildings, and planting. The result is the explication of a highly personal garden, loaded with in-jokes, clichés, sincere sentimentality, Whig politics, and competing philosophies.

The 1785 map shows that a visitor to the flower garden would enter through a gate (Fig. 19). On the gate were inscribed words from Rousseau's *Nouvelle Heloise*:

Si l'Auteur de la nature est grand dans les grandes choses, il est tres-grand dans les petites.³⁹

Trans: "If the Author of nature displays his greatness in great things, he appears still greater in those which are small."⁴⁰

A dual reference to God as the creator of nature and to Rousseau, the inscription turns the expectation of the experience of the flower garden into a potentially religious one. In 1762 Rousseau had published *Emile*, which had featured the controversial section, 'Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar.' The section was taken as Rousseau's own profession of Deism, or highly unorthodox Christianity, and an attack on revealed religion. In conjunction with other sections of the book the passage resulted in the

³⁹ Harcourt, *Nuneham-Courtenay*, 12.

⁴⁰ Rousseau, *Eloisa*, Vol. 3, 135.

book being burned in both Geneva and Paris.⁴¹ Placing a religious quote from Rousseau at the beginning of the flower garden could be interpreted as a controversial decision and one Mason as an Anglican may not have wholeheartedly endorsed.

Immediately on the other side of the gate, blocking any view to the lawn, was a large bed of shrubs in front of which stood a bust of the Roman goddess Flora. As with the other gods and goddesses in the garden, a statue of Flora has overtones of religious rituals and the sacred. Beneath the bust were inscribed words from Chaucer:

Here springs the Violet all new,
And fresh Periwinkle riche of hew;
And Flowers yellow, white, and red
Such plenty grew there ner in mede:
Full gay is all the grounde, and quaint
And poudrid, as men had it peint,
With many a fresh and sundry Flower
That castin up full good favour.⁴²

The most straightforward reading of this inscription is that it is a reference to the surrounding garden and a celebration of its natural beauty. But the original context of the quote is Chaucer's translation of the *Roman de la Rose*, perhaps the most famous of all medieval romances. The quotation is from the first part of the poem written by Guillaume de Lorris (c. 1230),⁴³ and part of a section describing the inside of the walled Garden of Mirth, built by the allegorical figure Pleasure. In this garden the human protagonist of the poem, who is searching for the woman of his desires, learns the art of love, directed by the God of Love and other allegorical figures. In the end

⁴¹ L. Damrosch, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Restless Genius* (New York, Houghton Mifflin Books, 2005): 342-344, 357-361. For an alternative reading of why *Emile* was controversial, based in its educational theories see, J. J. Popiel, *Rousseau's Daughters: Domesticity, Education, and Autonomy in Modern France* (Lebanon, NH.: University of New Hampshire Press, 2008): Ch. 1. For a modern reading of the 'Profession of Faith' see, J. Macy, "'God Helps Those Who Help Themselves': New Light on the Theological-Political Teaching in Rousseau's 'Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar'" *Polity*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Summer, 1992), pp. 615-632.

⁴² Harcourt, *Nuneham-Courtenay*, 13.

⁴³ De Lorris died with the work unfinished; Jean de Meun (c.1270-80) completed it.

the protagonist overcomes various obstacles, including chastity, to obtain his desires. The Garden of Mirth in de Lorris' poem is a place in which pleasure, love, and eroticism are combined. Therefore, for some visitors, the first inscription they came across would bring to mind the wider context of the poem from which it was taken and thus a more deviant reading of the garden. Considering the interest of Mason and his friends in literary history there should be no doubt that he and his close friends could have interpreted it in this way.

From Flora the path curved right, around the bed of shrubs, leading to a bust of Abraham Cowley, a figure familiar from Richard Hurd's dialogic essay *On Retirement*. The area surrounding Cowley was rich in flowerbeds and shrubbery and there were extensive views across the garden (Fig. 26). Inscribed beneath the bust was a quote from Cowley's poem *The Garden* (1668). The four lines are based on Epicurus' philosophy that the end of mankind is pleasure and that Epicurus sought this pleasure in his garden:

When Epicurus to the World had taught,
That Pleasure was the chiefest good,
His life he to his doctrine brought,
And in a garden's shade, that sovereign good he sought.⁴⁴

The quote should not be taken as an endorsement of Epicureanism as a philosophical system. Instead it reinforces the idea found in Cowley's *Essays* and Hurd's *On Retirement*, explored in Chapter Three, that a garden is a pleasurable place to seek retirement. Given Cowley's own retirement from the court into the country after the restoration of Charles II, the seventeenth-century poet is intended as an inspirational figure worthy of imitation.

After the bust of Cowley the path continued for several metres with uninterrupted views across the garden. Then it runs into a more "wild and retired" section. On either side shrubs blocked any views into the centre of the garden. Here there were busts of Rousseau and Cato (it was also where the republican colonnade used to stand).

⁴⁴ Harcourt, *Nuneham-Courtenay*, 13.

Beneath the bust of Rousseau were words written especially for the garden by Brooke Boothby:

Say, is thy honest Heart to Virtue warm!
Can Genius animate thy feeling Breast!
Approach, behold this venerable Form,
'Tis Rousseau, let thy Bosom speak the rest.

And beneath the bust of Cato were words from *Nouvelle Heloise*:

A'ce nom saint, & auguste, tout ami de la vertu
Doit mettre le front dans la poussiere, & honoror
En silence la memoire du plus grand des hommes.⁴⁵

Trans: "At that august and sacred name, every friend to virtue should bow to the ground, and honour the memory of the greatest hero in silence."⁴⁶

The 'wild' planting of the garden in this area was intended to reflect and heighten the effect of the busts' sentimental inscriptions. The virtue of Rousseau is assumed to be enough to elicit an emotional response of veneration, a word that borders on religious language (the irony of having a bust of Rousseau in the flower garden has been noted above). Stripped of the republican symbolism of the colonnade Cato can be read as a symbol of patriotism. Since Joseph Addison's play *Cato* (1712) both Whigs and Tories had claimed Cato of Utica as a politically important symbol of the virtue of defending liberty.⁴⁷ Moreover, he was an obvious candidate for a sentimental reading

⁴⁵ Harcourt, *Nuneham-Courtenay*, 13.

⁴⁶ J. J. Rousseau, *Eloisa*, 277.

⁴⁷ Alexander Pope famously noted of the first performance of *Cato*: "The numerous claps of the Whig Party on the one side of the theatre were echoed by the Tories on the other..." quoted in P. Davis, 'Latin Epic: Virgil, Lucan, and Others' in D. Hopkins and C. Martindale (eds.), *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature: The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature: Volume 3 (1660-1790)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 149.

because of his sacrificial death.⁴⁸ Using the word ‘sacred’ the inscription again plays with a link between sentimental response to secular figures and religious feelings.

From the busts of Rousseau and Cato the path continued, surrounded by high shrubs and trees until it entered the grotto. Inside, “on a piece of white Marble of an irregular form,”⁴⁹ was a quote taken from John Milton’s *Comus*:

Musing Meditation most affects
The pensive secrecy of desert Cell
And Wisdom’s self
Oft seeks to sweet retired Solitude,
Where with her best nurse, Contemplation,
She plumes her feathers, and lets grow her wings,
That in the various Bustle of Resort,
Were all too ruffled, and sometimes impair’d.⁵⁰

Milton’s poem refers to the contrast between an active and a contemplative life (*negotium v. otium*) in which the contemplative life leads to wisdom and virtue. It therefore echoes the bust of Cowley with its implications of the virtue of a ‘retired’ life and, perhaps, offered a chance for reflection on the busts of Rousseau and Cato. Moreover, the quotation from *Comus* continues the use of religious imagery, ‘pensive secrecy of desert Cell’, which connotes a hermetic lifestyle and may even call to mind religious figures such as the anchorites.⁵¹

However, the grotto should not be imagined as an entirely solitary or dour place. The map shows that it was covered in flowers and had a view out into the centre of the garden (Fig. 26).⁵² It was also a space in which poems were written by visitors and

⁴⁸ J. Ellison, *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1999): Ch. 2.

⁴⁹ Harcourt, *Nuneham-Courtenay*, 14.

⁵⁰ Harcourt, *Nuneham-Courtenay*, 14.

⁵¹ An overview of hermitages and their use in the eighteenth century can be found in, G. Campbell, *The Hermit in the Garden: From Imperial Rome to Ornamental Gnome* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013): Ch. 2 and Ch. 4.

⁵² There is a literary precedent for a grotto covered in flowers. See *For A Grotto* in M. Akenside, *The Poems of Mark Akenside, M.D.* (London, 1772): 370.

left for other visitors to read and thus a site of shared experience. In a reprint of his description of the flower garden in 1797, George Simon Harcourt added seven poems written in the garden by visitors, one was called *To Gratitude, left in the Grotto in the Flower-Garden*.⁵³ As it was intended that others would read the poems they are demonstrative of Jürgen Habermas' 'audience-oriented privacy,'⁵⁴ and a clear way in which the grotto can be read as a place of sociability, even when it was a place of solitude.

Moving on from the grotto the next bust was of John Locke. The inscription was a combination of lines from James Thomson's *The Seasons* and Mason's *Isis*:

Who Made the Whole Internal World his own,
And shew'd confess'd to Reason's purged Eye,
That Nature's first best Gift was Liberty.⁵⁵

As was noted in Chapter One, Whigs celebrated John Locke in the eighteenth century for arguing that man was born without innate ideas, hence, 'Nature's best Gift was Liberty.' But also in Chapter One it was argued that Mason and his friends and colleagues used Locke's empiricism to oppose philosophies that linked emotion and virtue. Potentially there is a philosophical tension between the sentimental inscriptions beneath Rousseau and Cato, with their emphasis on an emotional response, and the invocation here of Locke's empiricism. It is not that sentimentality and empiricism cannot exist side by side, but that the design of the flower garden does not consistently support a sentimental or empirical philosophy.

Moving on from the grotto the path leads uphill to the Temple of Flora and once again views of the garden open up on the left. In front of the temple there was a gap in the

⁵³ G. Harcourt, *Description of Nuneham-Courtenay* (Oxford, 1797): 57-58.

⁵⁴ J. Habermas, *Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989): 43-51. For Habermas *Nouvelle Heloise* is one of the defining works of the turn towards the "institutionalization of a privateness oriented to an audience." See also, G. Russell and C. Tuite, 'Introducing Romantic Sociability' in G. Russell and C. Tuite, (eds.), *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁵⁵ Harcourt, *Nuneham-Courtenay*, 14.

flowerbeds, which created the view Paul Sandby painted and which was explored above for its relationship to picturesque design. Outside the temple there were two busts, one of Pan and one of Faunus. Beneath Pan were words from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, celebrating the view:

Here universal Pan,
Knit with the Graces, and the hours in dance,
Leads on th' eternal Spring.⁵⁶

The invocation of the surrounding natural beauty is found again, but this time humorously, beneath the bust of Faunus:

Faunus would oft, as Horace sings,
Delighted with his rural seats,
Forsake Arcadia's groves and springs,
For soft Lueretile's retreats.
'Twas Beauty charm'd, what wonder then,
Enamour'd of a fairer scene,
The changeful God should change again,
And here, forever fix his reign!⁵⁷

The poem, written especially for the garden by William Whitehead, alludes to Horace's Ode 1.17. In it Faunus leaves his Greek home Arcadia for Mt. Lucretilis in Rome.⁵⁸ Whitehead's poem suggests that Faunus has now left Lucretilis for Nuneham, having been enticed by the beauty of the flower garden. Essentially Faunus leaves a happy retirement for an even happier one at Nuneham.

⁵⁶ Harcourt, *Nuneham-Courtenay*, 15.

⁵⁷ Harcourt, *Nuneham-Courtenay*, 15.

⁵⁸ In Horace's ode it is specifically Mt. Lycaeus that Faunus leaves but Arcadia is here synonymic. Furthermore, Horace's Mt. Lucretilis is now known as Mt. Gennaro, the highest mountain in the Sabine Hills. For an eighteenth-century English translation see, T. Hare, *A Translation of the Odes and Epodes of Horace into English Verse* (London, 1737): 37-39.

Going inside the temple, on the back wall was a medallion of Flora. Beneath the medallion was an inscription from Ariosto, taken from the sixth canto of *Orlando Furioso*, and quoted in the original Italian:

Vaghi boschetti di soavi Allori,
Di Palme e d'amenissime Mortelle,
Cedri, & Aranci c'havean frutti e fiori
Contesti in varie forme e tutte belle,
Facean riparo a i fervidi calori
Di giorni estivi con lor spesse ombrelle;
E tra quei rami con sicuri voli
Cantando se ne giano i Rossignoli.⁵⁹

Trans: The pretty little groves with laurels sweet,
And myrtles, cedars, palms, which give delight,
The orange-trees, with fruit and flowers replete,
Woven in various forms, all fair and bright,
A shelter made against the fervent [sic.] heat
Of summer days, with their umbrellos [sic.] light:
And 'midst the boughs, with unmolested wing,
The nightingales fly up and down, and sing.⁶⁰

As with the quotation from Chaucer beneath the bust of Flora, on the face of it this quote is a celebration of natural beauty but an in-joke becomes evident if it is considered in its original context. In Ariosto's poem it describes "a living hell"⁶¹ where the evil creator of the garden Alcina has transformed her ex-lovers into trees, rocks and animals. The quotation is thus a lighthearted piece of veiled irony.

Roughly three metres from the Temple of Flora was the bower. On one side there was a bust of Venus and on the other a bust of Apollo. They were inscribed with words

⁵⁹ Harcourt, *Nuneham-Courtenay*, 14.

⁶⁰ W. Huggins, (trans.), *Orlando Furioso*, by Ludovico Ariosto Vol. 1. (London, 1757): 72.

⁶¹ I. Beretta, *The World's A Garden: Garden Poetry of the English Renaissance* (Uppsala, Uppsala University Press, 1993): 54.

from John Dryden's translation of Lucretius' *Address to Venus* and a sole line from Metastasio's *Artaserse*, respectively. They continue the trend of simply describing the beauty of the garden:

Thee, Goddess, thee the clouds and tempests fear,
And at thy pleasing presence disappear:
For thee the land in fragrant flow'rs is dress'd.⁶²

Lucido Dio,
per cui L'april fiorisce.⁶³

Trans: Resplendent god, by whom April blooms.⁶⁴

Through the arches of the bower a cast of Cupid and Psyche could be seen. Above the cast was a quote from Andrew Marvell's *The Garland*:

Fair Quiet have I found thee here,
With Innocence thy sister dear!
Mistaken long, I sought thee then,
In busy companies of Men,
Your sacred Plants, at length I know,
Will only in Retirement grow.
Society is all but rude,
To this delicious solitude,
Where all the Flowers, and Trees do close
To weave the Garland of Repose.⁶⁵

⁶² Harcourt, *Nuneham-Courtenay*, 15. The translation comes from T. Creech (trans.), *T. Lucretius Carus, Of the Nature of Things*, Vols. 1 and 2 (London, 1714): 525.

⁶³ Harcourt, *Nuneham-Courtenay*, 15. The quote is from, P. Metastasio, *Artaserse. Drama Per Musica da Rappresentarsi Nel Regio Teatra dell Hay-Market* (London, 1734): 49.

⁶⁴ *Artaxerxes. An English Opera. As it is Performed at the Theatre-Royal in Covent-Garden* (London, 1761): 43.

⁶⁵ Harcourt, *Nuneham-Courtenay*, 15-16.

Like the bust of Cowley, the inscription from Milton in the grotto, and Whitehead's humorous inscription beneath Pan, Marvell's poem draws on a language of retirement. But unlike the inscription in the grotto it is loaded more towards pleasure than virtue. The cast of Cupid and Psyche that shared the bower with Marvell's inscription reinforces this and again subverts any attempt at an overly serious reading of the garden.

The story/allegory of Cupid and Psyche was popular in the eighteenth century. The message was generally accepted as one of a journey from unrest and wrong to rest, contentment, and joy, which would make sense of the bower's inscription. But more can be said. The tale is inherently erotic. Cupid falls in love with Psyche and marries her without her knowing who he is. He remains unknown to her and only visits her at night to sleep with her.⁶⁶ Although some eighteenth-century commentators tried to clean it up as an allegory of the soul's progress to heaven, or rewrote it to enforce the importance of chastity,⁶⁷ most people treated it as erotic. It was depicted in several suggestive works of art, including paintings by Giuseppe Maria Crespi and Joshua Reynolds (Figs. 27 and 28). And in Henry Fielding's *The Miser* (1733) an adaptation of Moliere's *L'Avare*, it is wryly noted that the stories of Mars and Venus, Adonis and Venus, and Cupid and Psyche make "hangings very proper for the bed-chamber."⁶⁸ The placing of the cast in a bower, the site of countless amorous meetings in

⁶⁶ Soon after she becomes curious and betrays his trust and by the light of a lamp looks at him. He awakes when a drop of oil from the lamp falls on him. He flies away and she must complete a variety of challenges before they are once again united. The story ends with Psyche bearing a child named Pleasure. The story is found in Apuleius' second AD work, *Golden Ass*. For a modern translation see, J. A. Hanson, *Metamorphoses* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989).

⁶⁷ Warburton takes the first view, bluntly stating, "There was no man, though he regarded the golden Ass as a thing of mere amusement, but saw that the story of Cupid and Psyche was a philosophic allegory of the progress of the soul to perfection, in the possession of divine love and the reward of immortality." Warburton, *Divine Legation*, Vol. 1, 386. See also, M. L'abbé Banier, *The Mythology and Fables of the Ancients, Explain'd from History*, Vol. 2, (London, 1739-40): 342-348 and Thomas Nicholls, 'Cupid and Psyche' in *A Collection of Miscellanies, in Verse and Prose, With Original Poetry and Fugitive Pieces*, Vol. 1 (Dublin, 1795): 273-274.

⁶⁸ H. Fielding, *The Miser, A Comedy, Taken from Plautus and Moliere*. (Edinburgh, 1733): 19.

literature, including *La Nouvelle Heloise*,⁶⁹ and no doubt in real life, only furthers the possibility of reading the cast as alluding to the eroticism of the tale.⁷⁰

After the lightheartedness of the Temple of Flora and bower the garden path became more secluded. Continuing up a slight incline in an exaggerated curve it came to a bust of Matthew Prior, set in a recess in the shadows of trees and shrubbery. Prior may simply be, like Cowley, an emblem of retirement. As a 1777 biography of Prior noted:

“Mr. Prior, after the fatigues of length of years, passed in various scenes of action, was desirous of spending the remainder of his days in a rural tranquility, which the greatest men in all ages have been fond of enjoying; he was so happy as to succeed in his wish, living a very retired and contemplative life at Down-Hall in Essex, and found a more solid and innocent satisfaction among woods and meadows, than he had enjoyed in the hurry and tumults of the world, the courts of princes, or the conducting of foreign negotiations.”⁷¹

However, Prior is also a politically complex figure. Before he took this retirement he had been an active political figure, first on the side of the Whig Party and then on the side of the Tories. Moreover, George Simon’s great-grandfather, the famous Tory lawyer Simon Harcourt, had patronized Prior after his turn from Whiggism to Toryism.⁷² Equally intriguing are the words beneath Prior’s bust taken from his own *The Garland*:

⁶⁹ Rousseau, *Eloisa*, Vol. 1, 50.

⁷⁰ Very recently interesting studies have been made in which in eighteenth-century literature the bower is seen as both a place of temptation and triumph. See, K. Lipsedge, *Domestic Space in Eighteenth-Century British Novels* (New York, Palgrave Macmillian, 2012); C. Kairoff, *Anna Seward and the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Maryland, John Hopkins University Press, 2012). Kairoff’s study argues that Anna Seward’s *Louisa* (1784) is a revision of *La Nouvelle Heloise* and key to this is the heroine’s triumph over temptation in the bower.

⁷¹ M. Prior, *The Poetical Works of Matthew Prior. In Three Volumes, With the Life of the Author*, Vol. 1. (Edinburgh, 1777): xvi. This is a paraphrase from R. Shiells, *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland, to the Time of Dean Swift* (London, 1753).

⁷² Oliver Goldsmith credits Simon Harcourt as, alongside Henry Bolingbroke and Robert Harley, being the man around which Tories rallied as the Whigs began their ascendancy in the second decade of the eighteenth century. See, O. Goldsmith, *The*

See, Friend, in some few fleeting Hours,
See yonder what a change is made!
Ah me! The blooming pride of May,
And that of beauty are but one;
At morn, both flourish, bright and gay,
Both fade at evening, pale and gone.⁷³

In the context of a garden these words are a melancholy commentary on the transient state of nature and thus the garden itself. Again for the knowledgeable visitor a deeper meaning is available. Taken as whole Prior's *The Garland* draws an analogy between human life and nature. The poem begins with a description of a beautiful girl, Cloe. She is bedecked with flowers. However, as the poem progresses the flowers age, their beauty is lost, and finally they die. Watching the flowers die Cloe is drawn into introspective reflection:

Such as she is who died to-day,
Such I, alas! may be to-morrow;
Go, Damon, bid thy Muse display
The justice of thy Cloe's sorrow.⁷⁴

Cloe realizes that the dying flowers are analogous to herself and her beauty and that she too will one day die. A knowledgeable visitor to the garden would be reminded of this conceit. A third level of meaning is available if this idea is turned on the figure of Prior himself. His life story is one of transience of moving from Whig to Tory. This is reversed in the figures of George Simon and his father who turned the Harcourt

*History of England, from the Earliest Times to the Death of George II. By Dr. Goldsmith. In Four Volumes. Vol. 4 (London, 1771): 137. George Simon is famed for acting as a defence lawyer to Sacheverell at the beginning of the eighteenth century. See, J. L. Lucaites "Constitutional Argument in a National Theater: The Impeachment Trial of Dr. Henry Sacheverell" in Robert Hariman (ed.), *Popular Trials: Rhetoric, Mass Media, and the Law* (Tuscaloosa: Alabama University Press, 1990): 31-55. It was this Simon Harcourt who bought the Nuneham-Courtenay estate in 1710.*

⁷³ Harcourt, *Nuneham-Courtenay*, 16.

⁷⁴ Prior, *The Poetical Works of Matthew Prior*, Vol. 1, 22-123.

family from Tory to Whig. The Tory politician Prior thus may be an emblem of political transience and a call *not* to be like Prior.

Moving on from the bust of Prior and its invocations of passing time and fading beauty the path continues to be hemmed in and shadowy and leads to a memorial urn to the Viscountess Palmerston. It was engraved with a long elegy by Whitehead and surrounded by Cypress trees, a traditional symbol of death and melancholy.⁷⁵ The Viscountess was a close friend of the Harcourt family who tragically died in childbed on June 1, 1769, not even two years after she had married Henry, Viscount Palmerston.⁷⁶ Prior's inscription, with its suggestion that pleasure, or beauty, is intrinsically connected to melancholy and death, can be understood as bridging the gap between the 'pleasure' of the garden near the Temple of Flora and the melancholic urn, with its funerary connotations.

From here the walk back to the beginning is reasonably straight, going past the conservatory that housed various exotic fruit trees. After the seclusion around the bust of Prior and the urn the views once again open up across the garden. A tour of the garden concluded with a statue of Hebe, underneath of which was a site-specific inscription written by Whitehead:

Hebe, from thy cup divine,
Shed, O shed! Nectarous dew,
Here o'er Nature's living shrine,
Th' immortal drops diffuse:
Here while every bloom's display'd,
Shining fair in vernal pride,
Catch the colours ere they fade,
And check the green blood's ebbing tide,

⁷⁵ There are many examples but Edward Young offers a well-known one from the mid-century, "*This is creation's melancholy vault/The vale Funeral, The sad cypress gloom...*" E. Young, *The Complaint: or, Night-Thoughts on Life, Death & Immortality* (London, 1742): 7. See also, B. Linden, *Silent City on a Hill: Picturesque Landscapes of Memory and Boston's Mount Auburn Cemetery*, (Massachusetts, Massachusetts University Press, 2007): 32-37.

⁷⁶ S. Urban, *The Gentleman's Magazine, Vol. 112* (London, 1812): 416.

Till youth eternal like thine own prevail,
Safe from the night's damp wing or day's insidious gale.⁷⁷

The inscription is a prayer that will never be answered (the god prayed to is archaic and thus powerless). Whitehead's use of the word 'shrine' evokes both worship and death. His poem simultaneously admits the transience of nature while claiming it as something beautiful and worth saving.

The above analysis of the Nuneham-Courtenay flower garden shows that, for its relatively small size, it held an impressive array of ideas. There is no single dominant theme but competing, or juxtaposed themes. Sentimentality features in the busts of Cato and Rousseau, but soon after reference is made to Locke's empirical philosophy. Melancholy sits alongside pleasure, which at a stretch could be interpreted as a purposeful juxtaposition along the lines of Milton's *Il Penseroso* and *L'Allegro*. Political allusions are evident and so are highly personal statements about the Harcourt's family history. But some of these ideas are subtly and humorously undercut by the hidden meanings of inscriptions when understood in their original contexts and the wry eroticism alluded to by the use of Chaucer and the cast of Cupid and Psyche. To read the garden 'properly' a visitor would have reacted in different ways to different sections, sometimes responding emotionally, and sometimes responding intellectually. At the same time a visitor would have to take parts of it seriously and other parts light-heartedly.

In order to understand this last point, and it is an important one, it is worth returning to Rousseau's *Nouvelle Heloise*. Saint-Preux, the book's protagonist, reports a conversation he has with Julie about her garden, Elysium:

"Well, how does it appear to you? Said she, as we were coming back; are you got to the end of the world yet? No, I replied, I am quite out of the world, and you have in truth transported me into Elysium. The pompous name she has given this orchard [Elyisum], said Mr. Wolmar, very well deserves that raillery. Be modest in your commendation of childish amusements, and be assured that they have never

⁷⁷ Harcourt, *Nuneham-Courtenay*, 17.

intrenched [sic.] on the concerns of the mistress of a family. I know it, I am sure of it, I replied, and childish amusements please me more in this way than the labours of men.”⁷⁸

The point that Rousseau has his three characters make is a subtle and far-reaching one. Julie’s creation is ‘childish.’ But so long as it does not interrupt her in her duties it is also good. Thus it should be praised but not lavishly. Julie should never be controlled by, or addicted to pleasure and must not see it as an end in itself. Similarly, at another point in the book Saint-Preux says, “However agreeable it may be to fix my residence in this house, I am determined, I have sworn, that when I grow too fond of my abode, I will quit it immediately.”⁷⁹ Virtue therefore lies in moderation. The underlying humour of the Nuneham-Courtenay flower garden demonstrates that neither William Mason, nor George Simon, ever took their creation too seriously and were aware of the consuming dangers of pleasure.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter it has been shown that William Mason was not solely responsible for the design, either symbolic or physical, of the Nuneham-Courtenay flower garden. He was happy to leave the creation of views within the garden, which implies the planting and laying out of the flowerbeds, to George Simon and his head gardener Walter Clarke. Furthermore, the private correspondence relating to the garden shows that George Simon played an active role in setting out the statues, busts, and inscriptions. But Mason was certainly responsible for a large part of the garden’s design. He designed the path around the garden and presumably he had a large say in the emblematical features; although left to his own devices Mason certainly would not have put up a republican colonnade in the late 1770s and probably would not have put up a bust of Prior.

Despite some doubt over the extent of Mason’s influence on the garden useful conclusions can be made in regard to his contribution. Firstly, and most obviously, he

⁷⁸ Rousseau, *Eloisa*, Vol. 3, 129.

⁷⁹ Rousseau, *Eloisa*, Vol. 3, 46. Later on Julie’s philosophy is declared to be “abstinence from what we delight in.” Rousseau, *Eloisa*, Vol. 4, 121.

was a very capable garden designer. Secondly, he designed gardens on the same principles he espoused in *The English Garden*. Thirdly, he, together with George Simon, was actually conservative in the way he approached garden design. The pleasure ground style had existed since the 1750s and the use of busts, inscriptions, and buildings had been features of English gardening since the turn of the eighteenth century, being used at estates such as Castle Howard.⁸⁰ Finally, he knew the limits to which a garden should be taken seriously.

Throughout this thesis much of the analysis has focused on how Mason's written work, and at times life, was imbued with nuanced theoretical notions about nature, religion, and politics. Broadly speaking, the same links can be seen in the Nuneham-Courtenay flower garden. There were religious invocations in the inscription from Rousseau and the statues of ancient deities. There was also politics in the prominence of Whig and Republican figures. Nature, apart from being the very stuff the garden was made of, was personified in the statues of Flora, Hebe, Pan, and Faunus, and celebrated in many of the inscriptions. In one aspect, however, the design of the garden differs significantly from Mason's written work. The Nuneham-Courtenay flower garden does not offer a consistent means of understanding it philosophically and it certainly does not espouse orthodox Anglicanism. It must be concluded that the garden reveals more about the intellectual life of George Simon than it does the intellectual life of William Mason.

⁸⁰ Michel Baridon has made a recent and fascinating reading of early eighteenth-century designs and their relationship to scientific discoveries. See his essay, 'Understanding Nature and the Aesthetics of the Landscape Garden' in Calder, *Experiencing the Garden*, pp. 65-86.

Conclusion

William Mason's work on nature and gardening defies easy classification because it intersects with an array of different groups and ideas. By undertaking a broad analysis of his work, including sermons, plays, poems, and gardens, this thesis has shown that he focused his poetic energies on problematizing the growing trend for an 'enthusiastic' aesthetic of nature in the 1750s. From this it can be concluded his own aesthetic of nature was one in which nature is morally ambiguous and natural beauty is dangerously superficial. As he put it in *Elfrida*:

The same sequester'd Pine,
Which veils the gurgling Ringdove with its boughs,
Whets with its knotty trunk the Boar's vext tooth,
And points each fang with death.¹

In the 1770s, *The English Garden* shows the impact Mason's conception of nature in the 1750s had on his garden theory. Gardening is the art of creating a beautiful 'natural' nature. It is not the art of leaving nature to itself to be beautiful because it will not be. Therefore an empirical approach is needed to attain the beautiful general forms of nature before they can be implemented in a garden.

But for the importance of latitudinarian orthodox Anglican theology, which it has been shown is an important influence on Mason's work, such a conclusion would hardly be noteworthy. As noted in Chapter Four, it has long been recognized that the so-called English style of gardening was based on these theories of abstraction, which are rooted in Plato's 'Theory of Ideas.' Moreover, Mason's work was not simply influenced by the orthodox theology of his period, friends, and colleagues, but formed part of the defence of the Church of England against what he perceived as threatening and increasingly popular heterodox ideas. This is confirmed by the analysis of his plays in Chapters One and Two, but it is particularly revealing that he linked his ideas on garden design with orthodox theology in *The English Garden*, for instance in his affirmation of the Trinity in Book Three. Mason's use of theology in *The English*

¹ Mason, *Elfrida*, 69.

Garden shows how important it was for him to give his garden design a religious foundation, a point that should not, if for no other reason than the fear of anachronism, be overlooked by modern scholars.

The importance of theology and religious belief has thus been established as vital to Mason's work on nature and gardening. But it has also been the aim of this thesis to elucidate the link between his work on nature and gardening and his political beliefs. In a relatively straightforward way this has been achieved by showing that in his life, in Hurd's life, and in *The English Garden*, the garden was a means by which social status was negated and eighteenth-century Britain's rigid social hierarchies were challenged. In a more complex way, Chapter Four demonstrated that for Mason the garden was a political tool for the patriotic adornment of a nation. But should that nation fall into corruption, as Britain did during the American War, then political action should take precedence over gardening. In this case gardening becomes an activity of retreat, offering a space for reflection and moral sustenance whilst the improvement of the nation is awaited.

Political and religious belief should not, without great caution, be separated when considering Mason's work. Chapters One and Two demonstrated that in his plays nature was used as the site for the contestation of theological and cultural ideas. And through the framework of J. G. A. Pocock's 'Conservative Enlightenment', it was shown how the defence of the established church was intertwined with Whig politics and the maintenance of the political state. A narrative in which the defense of Anglican orthodoxy is also the defense of the established political state is demonstrably not a stable one throughout the eighteenth century. In *The English Garden*, Whig politics and orthodox religion are joined as Mason first seeks to adorn Britain as a political state with a style of gardening that recreates the forms originally created by the Christian Trinitarian God and then, without changing theology or politics, he moves into opposition against the government. A narrative in which Anglican orthodoxy and Whig politics are united fractures less easily. Mason shows consistency in his championing of the Whig principles of free trade, religious toleration, a constitution in which there is limited power for the monarchy, anti-elitism, social mobility for elements of the middle classes, and anti-slavery (this last increased greatly with the abolitionist movement but is evident from *Caractacus*

onwards). And he shows consistency in his propagation of Anglican orthodoxy from *Elfrida* until his very last work *Religio Clerici* (1797), published in the year of his death. In Mason's work on nature and gardening Whig politics and Anglican orthodoxy mutually reinforce each other. Mason's conception of nature was founded on a theology that drew heavily on philosophical ideas associated with leading Whig figures, such as John Locke, and which in other areas of eighteenth-century debate were used to defend Whig and Anglican principles. Within this conception of nature, nature is symbolic of Whig ideas. It should be recognized, however, that such a conclusion is only satisfactory when provided with a caveat over the definitions of 'Whig' and 'Anglican orthodoxy.' By Whig is meant an essentially conservative form of Whiggism. It hoped to balance historical precedent with modern innovation and is thus distinct from more radical Whigs who since the beginning of the eighteenth century had wished to make Britain a republic. By Anglican Orthodoxy is meant a latitudinarian form of Anglicanism that adopted the scientific and philosophical advances of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the creation of a 'reasonable' Anglicanism. In its willingness to extend religious toleration to dissenting Protestants and to challenge and scrutinize scriptural authority it was distinct from High-Church Anglicanism. On this basis, Mason's unification of politics, religion, nature, and gardening, become increasingly unique to him and cannot be claimed as representative of the eighteenth century more generally. It is on this point of individuality and how it affects the discipline of garden history that this thesis will close.

At the end of the introduction it was stated that 'the reading of a garden must be the reading of its viewer.' The need to qualify terms of theological and political description when describing Mason's beliefs goes a long way to confirming this conclusion; but it was also shown in Chapter Five's analysis of the Nuneham-Courtenay flower garden. Mason, George Simon Harcourt, and Walter Clarke's creation included a plethora of in-jokes that a viewer did not need to know to grasp meaning within the garden (it would be no surprise if some of these were missed) and was otherwise open to a variety of interpretations. Nowhere is this more evident than the inscription from Rousseau on the gate: 'If the Author of nature displays his greatness in great things, he appears still greater in those which are small.' For Mason, the 'author of nature' was God as defined within his latitudinarian orthodox

Anglican theology. For George Simon, the ‘author of nature’ was, at least for a while, the God of Rousseau’s Deism. If the two men who had the biggest role in creating the garden could not agree on the meaning of the quote that welcomed visitors to their creation, it raises serious questions about what the garden means because its definition changes with each viewer. Such an argument can be reduced to the point of absurdity, at least as far as the possibility of garden history as a discipline is concerned, by claiming that tying the garden’s meaning to its viewer results in a new garden each time it is visited, because people change with time and their reaction to objects fluctuates with mood. Such an approach is unconstructive for garden history. However, what this thesis has shown is that an multidisciplinary approach to garden history, which pays special attention to religious and political history, constructs a nuanced understanding of the reception of the eighteenth-century garden and provides fresh insight into the worldviews that their creators brought with them into a garden.

Illustrations



Fig. 1. *Holy Trinity*, Hull, Photo by the Author



Fig. 2. *Hull Grammar School*, Photo by the Author



Fig. 3. J. Bacon, *Monument to William Mason in Westminster Abbey*, 1799.

P O E M S

BY

WILLIAM MASON, M. A.

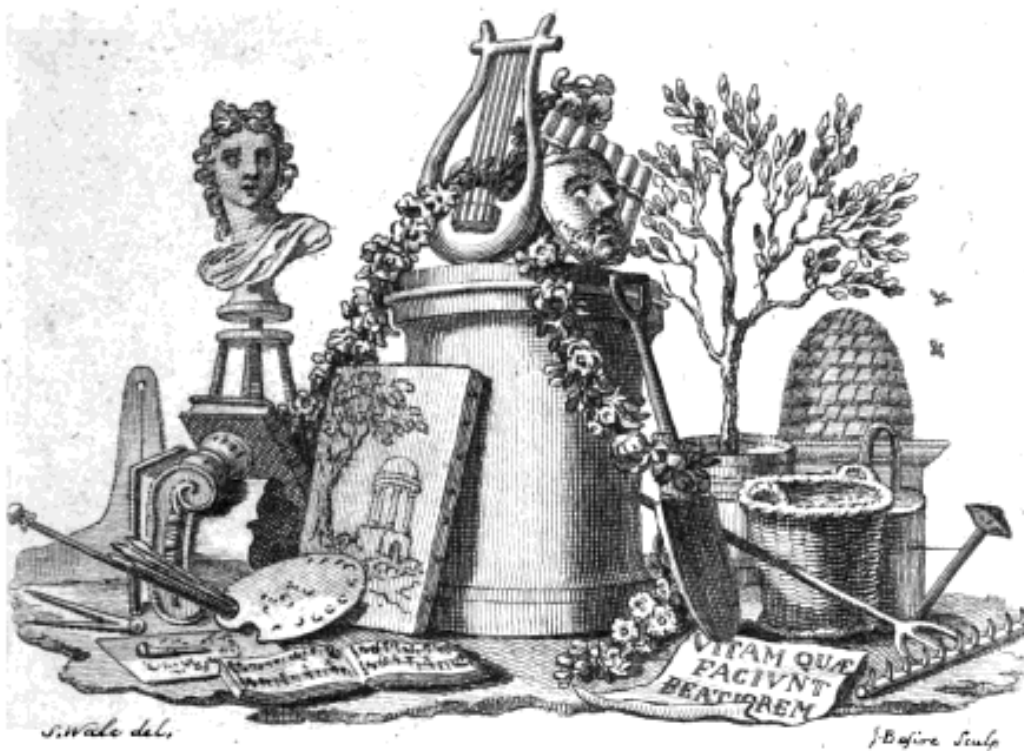


Fig. 4. Samuel Wale, *Title Page of William Mason's Poems*, 1764



Fig. 5. Henry Hoare, *William Warburton*, Oil on Canvas (Date Unknown)



Fig. 6. G. Jackson, *Detail of A Plan of the Manors of Aston and Wales in the West Riding of the County of York belonging to the Right Honourable Robert Earl of Holderness, 1762.* Mason's Rectory is labeled 51

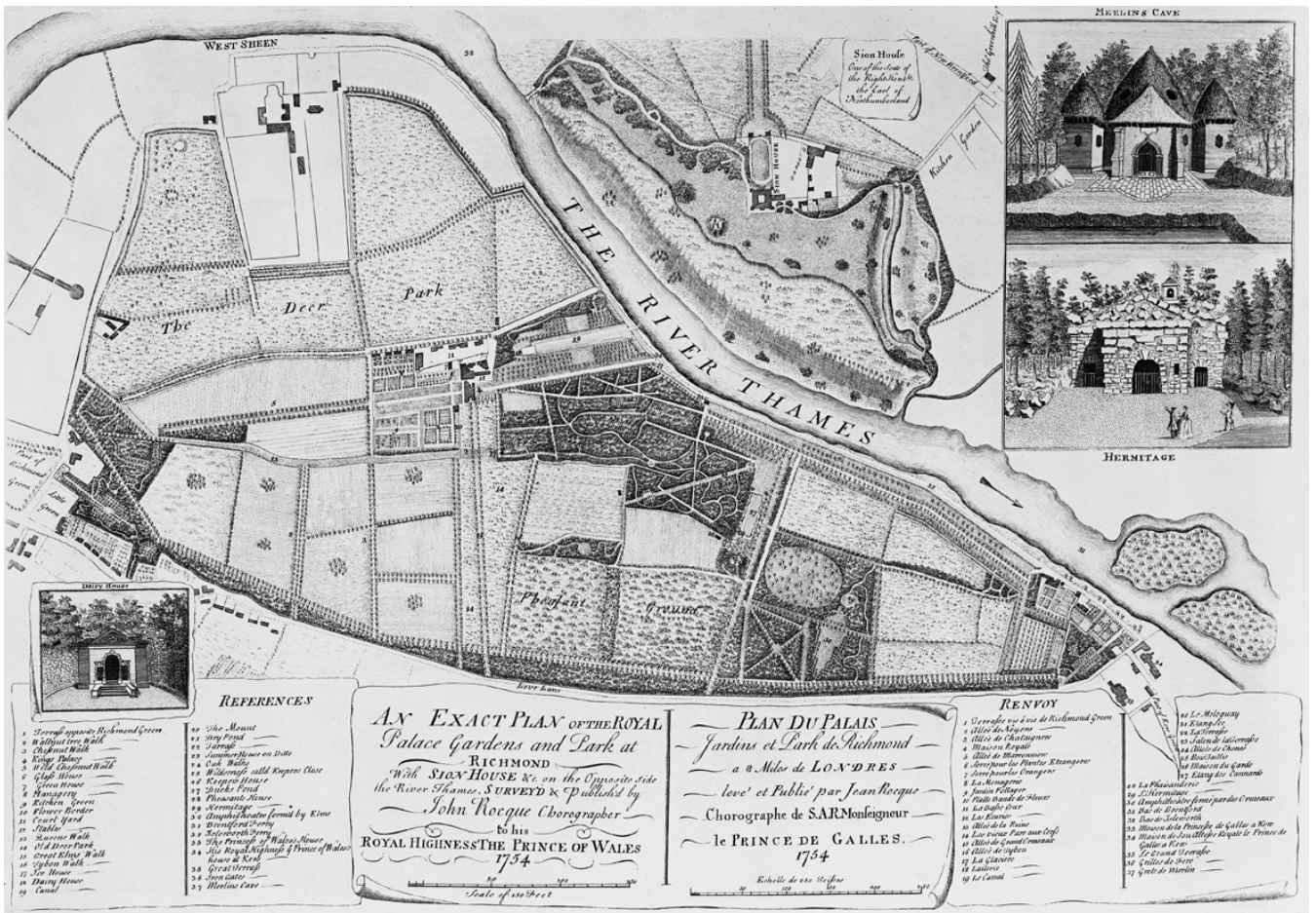


Fig. 7. John Rocque, *An Exact Plan of the Royal Palace Gardens and Park at Richmond with Sion House, 1754*

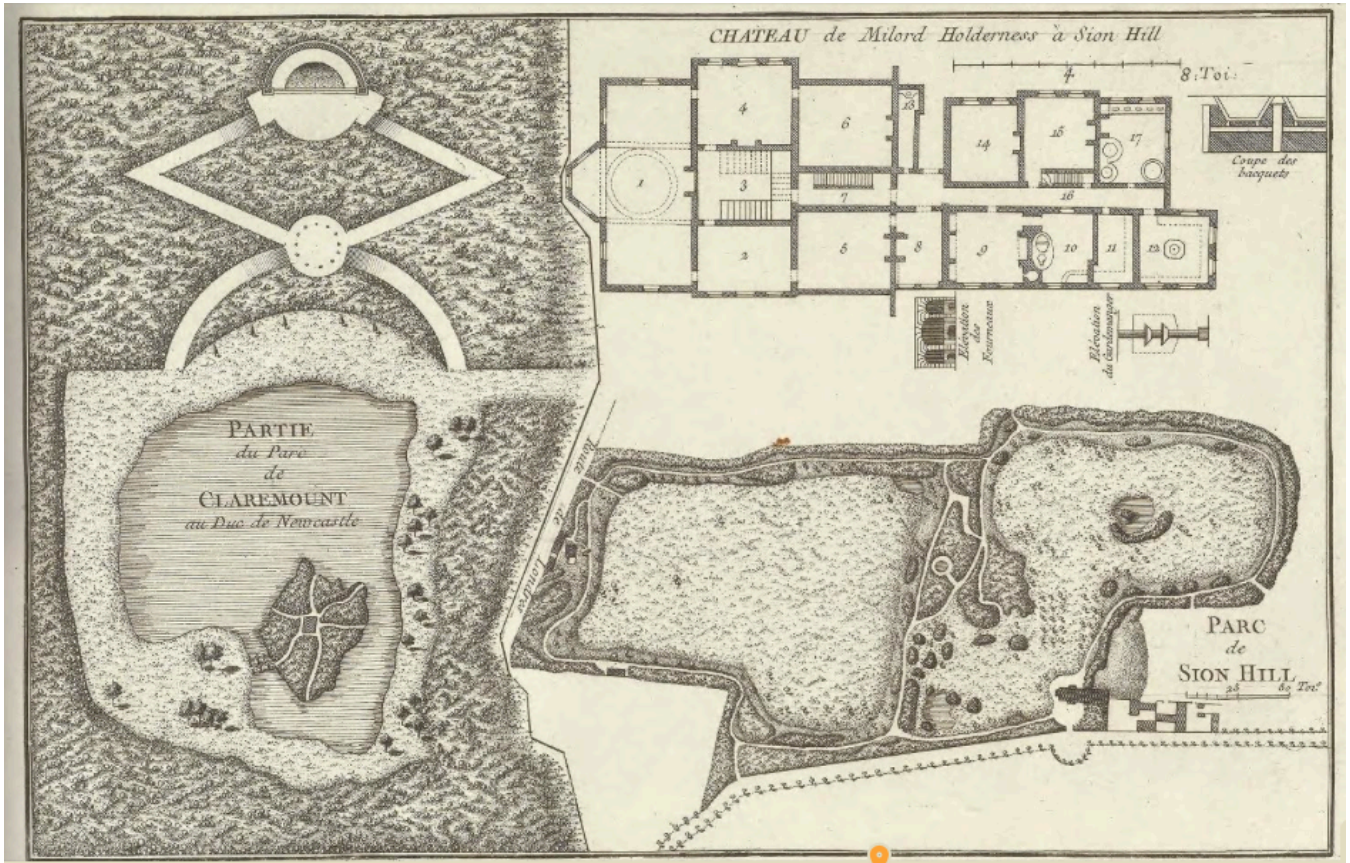


Fig. 8. *Chateau de Milord Holderness a Sion Hill*, from *Détails de Nouveaux Jardins à la Mode*, 1775-88



Fig. 9. Joshua Reynolds, *William Mason*, Oil on Canvas, 1774 (Reproduced by kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Pembroke College, Cambridge).



Fig. 10. Unknown artist, after Pierre-Etienne Falconet,
William Mason, 1767



Fig. 11. Francesco Bartolozzi, RA, after Giovanni Battista Cipriani, *Title Page of A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening*, Copper-plate engraving, 1772



Fig. 12. Francesco Bartolozzi, RA, *Dedication Page of A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening*, Etching, 1772.



Fig. 13. George Simon Harcourt, Early of Nuneham, *Cottages in Nuneham Park*, Oil on Panel, 49 x 64 cm, 1797 (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum)



Fig. 14. George Simon Harcourt, *A View of the Ruins of the Chapel at Stanton-Harcourt in the County of Oxford*, 42.6 x 52.1 cm, 1763 (London, British Museum)



P. Sandby pinxt.
View of the Flower Garden at Nuneham, from the Statue of Hebe to the Temple of Flora.
Published according to the Act by G. Knapp, at N^o. 46 in Fleet Street, Jun^y. 1777.
W. Watts sculp.

Fig. 15. W. Watts, *View of the Flower Garden at Nuneham from the Statue of Hebe to the Temple of Flora*, etching after Paul Sandby, in *A Collection of One Hundred and Fifty Select Views of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland*, 1777



View of the Flower Garden at Nuneham, from the Temple of Flora to the Statue of Hebe.

Published as the Act directs, July 1777, by G. Kearsley, X^o 48 in Fleet Street.

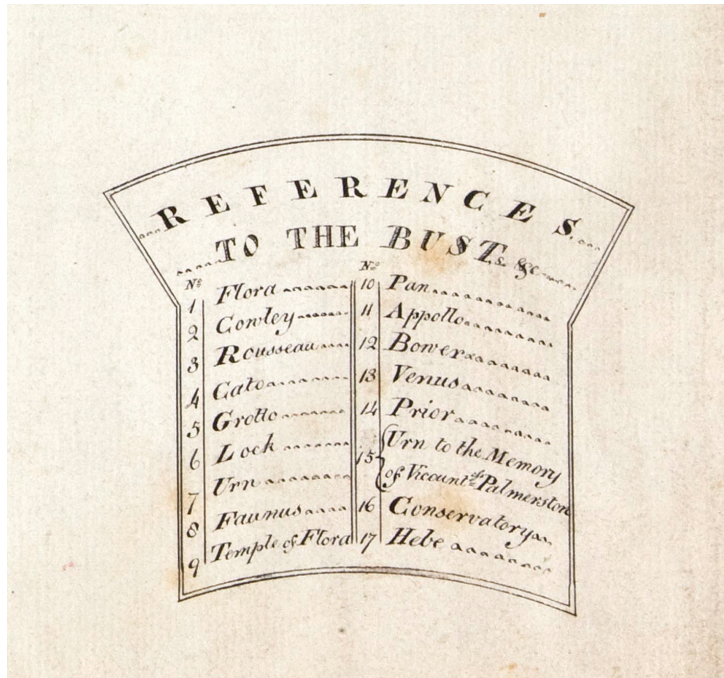
Fig. 16. W. Watts, *View of the Flower Garden at Nuneham from the Temple of Flora to the Statue of Hebe*, etching after Paul Sandby, in *A Collection of One Hundred and Fifty Select Views of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland*, 1777



Fig. 17. Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Portrait of the Harcourt Family*, Oil on canvas, 148 x 172 cm, 1780 (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)



Fig. 18. Unknown Artist, *Plan of Nuneham Flower Garden*, 1785 (National Archives, Kew. Ref: Work38-349)



18 (a). Detail Showing the References to the Busts



18 (b). Detail Showing the Entrance and the Area Surrounding the Bust of Cowley



18 (c). Detail Showing the Area Surrounding the Busts of Rousseau and Cato and the Grotto



18 (d). Detail Showing the Temple of Flora



18 (e). Detail Showing the Area Surrounding the Bower, the Bust of Prior and the Urn to Viscountess Palmerston



18 (f). Detail Showing the Conservatory



Fig. 19. Annotated 1785 Plan of Nuneham Flower Garden



Fig. 20. 1785 Plan showing placement of trees, taken from Sandby, which create a 'picturesque' view from the statue of Hebe



Fig. 21. View from the Statue of Hebe with black dots that accord with the blank circles of Fig. 18



Fig. 22. 1785 Plan showing the placement of trees, taken from Sandby, which create a 'picturesque' view from the Temple of Flora

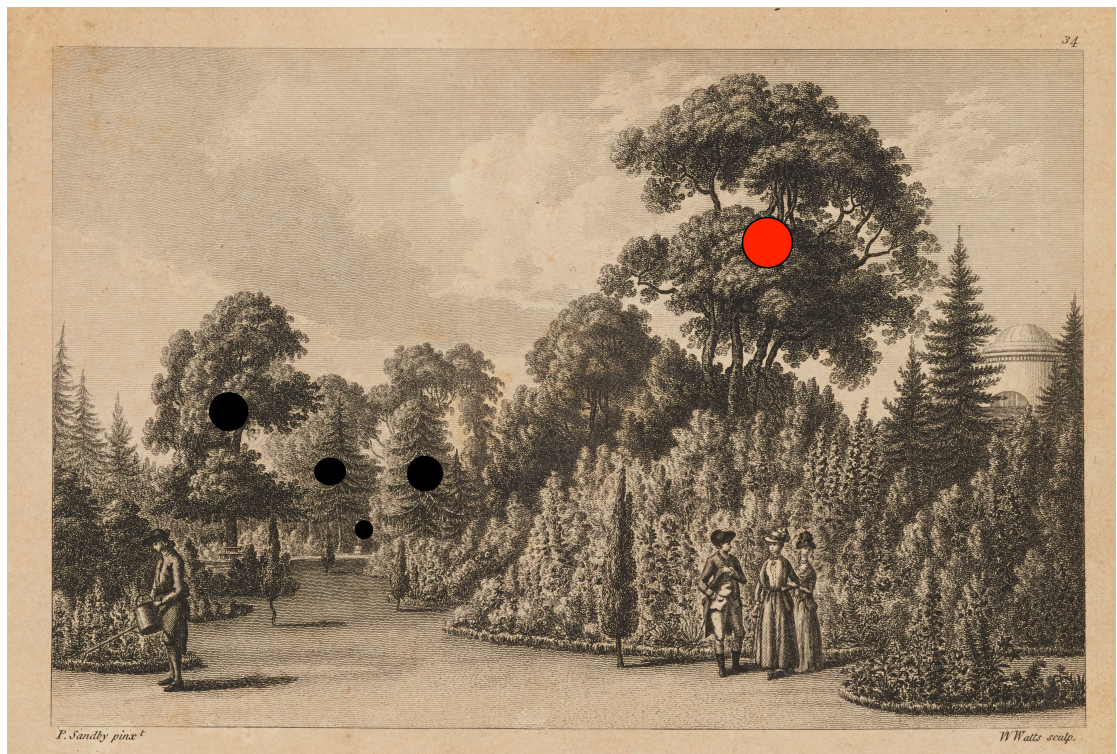


Fig. 23. View from the Temple of Flora, with black dots that accord to the blank circles of Fig. 20. The red dot is a slight anomaly, explained in a footnote to the above text



Fig. 24. Claude Lorrain, *Landscape with Hagar and the Angel*, Oil on Canvas Mounted on Wood, 52.2 x 42.3 cm, 1646 (National Gallery, London)



Fig. 26. 1785 *Plan with Views*. Blue = View from the Bust of Cowley. Red = View from the Grotto. Black = View from the Temple of Flora and View from the Statue of Hebe. Purple = View from the Bower. Green = View from the Conservatory.



Fig. 27. Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Cupid and Psyche*, Oil on Canvas, 1789



Fig. 28. Giuseppe Maria Crespi, *Cupid and Psyche*, Oil on Canvas, 1707-09

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