GILPIN WILLIAM

A DIALOGUE UPON THE GARDENS OF THE RIGHT HONOROUBLE THE LORD VISCOUNT COBHAM AT STOW IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

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Содержание

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INTRODUCTION

Stowe is certainly the most documented of all English Augustan gardens,[1] and William Gilpin's *Dialogue* probably one of the most important accounts of it. He was at Stowe in 1747 and published his record of that visit anonymously the following year.[2] The *Dialogue* reached a second edition, with some slight

[1] Before 1753 there was no guide to any English garden except Stowe; by then the Stowe guidebook had gone through sixteen editions (one in French) plus two pirated editions, the *Dialogue* itself which mentions the guidebook on p. 17, and two sets of engraved views. For a modern account of Stowe see Christopher Hussey, *English Gardens and Landscapes, 1700-1750* (London: Country Life, 1967), pp. 89-113. As a companion piece to this facsimile of *Dialogue*, ARS plans to publish in its 1976-77 series a facsimile of the *Beauties of Stowe* (1750), with an introduction by George Clarke.

[2] Gilpin's authorship is argued by William D. Templeman, *The Life and Works of William Gilpin (1724-1804), Illinois Studies in Language and Literature*, XXIV. 3-4

alterations in the text, in 1749 and a third in 1751, when the dialogue was transformed into narrative.

The *Dialogue* recommends itself both to the historian of the English landscape movement, in which Stowe was a prime exhibit, and to the student of the later vogue for the picturesque, in which Gilpin was a major participant. His account of Cobham's gardens illuminates some of the connections between the cult of the picturesque that Gilpin fostered with his publications of the 1780s and the earlier eighteenth-century invocation of pictures in gardens.

Perhaps in no other art form were the tensions and transformations in the arts more conspicuous than in landscape gardening. Gilpin is especially rewarding in his instinctive attention to these shifting patterns; although the dialogue form is not very skillfully handled, it yet allows some play between the rival attitudes. Thus his characters attend to both the emblematic and the expressive garden;[3] to both its celebration of public worth and its commendation of private virtue. While Gilpin seems sufficiently and indeed sharply aware of set-piece views in the gardens, the three-dimensional pictures contrived among the natural and architectural features, he also reveals himself as sensitive towards the more fluid psychological patterns, what one might term the *kinema* of landscape response. Above all, his

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(Urbana, 1939), pp. 34-5.

[3] The distinction is made by Thomas Whately, *Observations on Modern Gardening*, 5th ed. (London, 1793), pp. 154-5.

obvious delight in the landscape garden and appreciation of it vie with an equally strong admiration for scenery outside gardens altogether.

At the time of Gilpin's visit, Lord Cobham's gardens were substantially as they are represented in the engravings published in 1739 by the widow of Charles Bridgeman, one of Stowe's designers. In the year of Gilpin's visit work had just started in the northeast part of the grounds upon the natural glade that came to be known as the Grecian Valley.[4] Whether it is the work of Lancelot ("Capability") Brown, who was then a gardener at Stowe, or only prophetic of it, the Grecian Valley was a hint of the less architectural, the more carefully "natural" gardens of the next decades. Although Gilpin would presumably have seen little of this most advanced example of gardening style, he would still have observed what were, in the terms customarily invoked, formal and informal ingredients at Stowe. From the Rotunda, for example, he looked over the (now vanished) Queen's Pool, "laid out with all the Decorations of Art" (p. 15), including the oblong canal itself and various statues; the first body of water encountered beside the Lake Pavillions (p. 4) was octagonally shaped and bore an obelisk at its centre. Yet elsewhere there was frequent occasion to praise prospects that obviously seemed much less artificial.

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[4] The Grecian Valley is seen first on Bickham's engraved plan of 1753. This and other plans of Stowe are reproduced by George Clarke, "The Gardens of Stowe," *Apollo* (June, 1973), pp. 558-65.

If there is any distinction between the two participants in the *Dialogue*, it is certainly between the one's taste for the evidence of art and the other's penchant for natural beauties. If their opposition is not very conspicuously maintained by Gilpin, it is surely because his own loyalties were divided and were to be reconciled only with some subtlety and ingenuity later in his career. Callophilus, who cites Pope's balanced instructions on the mixture of art and nature (p. 26), is more inclined to appreciate these elements in the garden where Nature's defective compositions have been improved; the love of beauty that his name announces is of beauty methodized, though without exceeding "a probable Nature" (p. 6). On the other hand, his enthusiastic companion, Polypthon, directs his eponymous ill-will mostly against the decorations of art: the "hewn Stone" of Dido's Cave particularly offends him (p. 14), and he "cannot very much admire" the canal below the Rotunda (p. 15). Yet he seems to share Callophilus' notions about "mending" nature (p. 23), and it is he who proposes a landscape that, substituting farm-houses for temples (p. 45), approximates most clearly to that prettiest of eighteenth-century landscape ideas, the *ferme ornèe*. Polypthon's predilection for scenery outside gardens seems equally compromised by his ready assent to Callophilus' praise of the carefully studied contrasts in Stowe gardens: so that he may turn from the less agreeable vista down the Queen's Pool and look instead over Home Park, earlier noted for its "rural scene" (p. 8), and now admired as a natural field – though the

cattle prominent in Rigaud's drawings[5] are not mentioned.

But what is artless for Polypthon is studied by his companion in terms of art: "the Field is *formed* by that Semi-circle of Trees into a very grand Theatre" (p. 15, *my italics*), and his eye registers an architectural feature – Vanbrugh's Pyramid – as the apt centre of that field of vision. This particular exchange at the Rotunda suggests that the usual modern discussion of landscape gardens in terms of their diminishing formality or escalating informality is less Gilpin's concern than the mind's involvement with the various landscapes. Callophilus and Polypthon can apparently both contemplate the same scene from the Rotunda, southwest towards Kent's Temple of Venus and Vanbrugh's Pyramid, yet adjudge its artifice differently. What is evidently at work in Gilpin's record of this garden is the mental experience of it, and in his case the ambiguities of his visual response.

The complicated geometry that began on Bridgeman's drawing board[6] and then was transferred to shape the grounds is certainly a survival of the old-fashioned French style in gardens. Its presence is registered by Gilpin, who allows Callophilus to note how the Gibbs building, like many other objects at Stowe designed to be seen along a variety of axes, "has its Use … in several Prospects" (p. 8). But the psychology of the viewer has at least equal weight in Gilpin with the many-faceted object

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[5] See Peter Willis, "Jacques Rigaud's Drawings of Stowe in the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 6 (1972), 85-98.

[6] See George Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 560.

viewed from different positions.[7] And in those circumstances the presence of formal or informal designs upon the ground or the drawing-board matters less than the variety of objects and scenes within a garden and even, as at the Rotunda, the variety of viewpoint and interpretation within one vista.

Variety had, of course, always been essential to the English garden and is a special feature of Stowe, as Pope implies in the *Epistle to Burlington* and as the writer of the appendix to Defoe's Tour of 1742 explicitly stated.[8] What we have in Gilpin's *Dialogue* is both valuable evidence of response to garden structures, the visitor's rather than the designer's or client's account, and some hints of how the idea of variety, itself a painterly term, presented itself to Gilpin in the days before his picturesque tours.

Gilpin's path through the gardens at Stowe is recorded in the *Dialogue* as a journal of the mind's responses: the *Advertisement* (p. iv) prepares the reader for this with its insistence upon the role memory has played in its composition. The varieties of mental experience are sometimes registered by the dialogue form; more often the two visitors share responses which correspond to the

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[7] On this topic see two essays by Ronald Paulson: "Hogarth and the English garden: visual and verbal structures," *Encounters, Essays on Literature and the Visual Arts*, ed. John Dixon Hunt (London: Studio Vista, 1971), and "The Pictorial Circuit and related structures in eighteenth-century England," *The Varied Pattern*, ed. Peter Hughes and David Williams (Toronto: Hakkert, 1971).

[8] "There is more Variety in this Garden, than can be found in any other of the same Size in *England*, or perhaps in *Europe*" (p. 290).

changes of Stowe's scenes. This is most amusingly illustrated by the "impertinent Hedge" that suddenly blocks their view (p. 11); Callophilus' ingenious explanation, a curious parallel to Sterne's blank page in *Tristram Shandy*, is that thereby the visitor's "Attention" is kept awake (p. 12). More strenuous is their intellectual involvement with the monuments, statues, and inscriptions in the Elysian Fields (pp. 19ff), emblems that provoke in Callophilus "a Variety of grand Ideas" (p. 29). Yet, as the text of the third edition makes precisely clear (p. 11), in face of the same objects his companion is more fascinated than he with the formal elements of an art – contrasts in landscape textures, style of inscriptions (p. 30), or unadmirable workmanship in bas-reliefs (p. 37). The "Subject[s] for … Rapsody" (p. 30) that Polypthon mocks were an essential aspect of any Augustan garden, and six pages later they divert even Polypthon himself into moralizing. But his stronger inclination is to ignore the iconographical problems of the Saxon busts (p. 44) and gaze "into the Country" where his companion solicitously directs his attention to the elegant woods (p. 45).

The *Dialogue* allows these and related distinctions to emerge, even though it does not grapple with their implications. As Callophilus explains, there should be a grand terrace for strangers, and the shade of a "close vista" for friends (p. 31). Stowe provided both, just as it catered to the propensity for retirement – the Hermitage, the Temple of Friendship, or the Temple of Sleep – as well as for the obligations of public life – the

Temple of British Worthies, the gothic Temple of Liberty. The most emblematic items in the gardens, upon which Callophilus predictably expatiates because they were designed to be easily "read," are in the public places, where they firmly control the visitors' mental reactions and leave less scope for the private and enthusiastic reveries of Polypthon. It is a fair assumption that most visitors to the Temples of Liberty or Ancient and Modern Virtue would have understood their meanings just as Callophilus did (pp. 40 and 19-21).

But the aesthetic taste of Polypthon for the forms and shapes rather than the meanings of landscape betrays a potential for less controlled and more private rhapsodies. His quest "after beautiful Objects" (p. 24) takes him as much to the northern parts of Great Britain as to gardens like Stowe, and is obviously prophetic of Gilpin's own picturesque travels. Like Warton's *Enthusiast or the Lover of Nature* (1740), Polypthon rejects "gardens deck'd with art's vain pomps." This is because he is fascinated with the more radical landscapes of solely formal elements – the serpentine windings of the river at Stirling (p. 44) or what has been called the abstract garden[9] that comes to fruition only in the decades after Gilpin's visit under the management of "Capability" Brown. But the fact that Polypthon finds sufficient abstract patterns to engage his attention at Stowe suggests that the Brownian mode was already latent among the richnesses of the Buckinghamshire gardens.

[9] Derek Clifford, *A History of Garden Design* (London: Faber, 1962), pp. 138-9.

The "rejection" of Stowe by Polypthon as by Warton also signals their desire to indulge the enthusiastic fit. His very first reaction upon arrival at Stowe is an "Exclamation" that expresses *his* expectations of aesthetic delight (p. 2). Although his companion is equally susceptible and is accused by Polypthon of being an "Enthusiast" (p. 49) and in the third edition of the *Dialogue* (p. 12) determines himself to "indulge the thrilling Transport," it seems to be Polypthon whom Gilpin intends to characterize by expressive as opposed to explanatory outbursts as they proceed round the gardens. And it is he who concludes their visit (p. 58) with a catalogue of the various human moods for which the gardens cater, rather more extravagant in its expressive fervour than Callophilus' traditional identification of the passions on faces of other visitors (p. 51).

Gilpin's attention to his characters' intellectual and emotional reactions illuminates the roles of poetry and painting that have always been associated with the rise of the English landscape garden.[10] If Milton's description of the Garden of Eden, so frequently invoked by eighteenth-century gardenists, implied an informal structure for designers to emulate, it equally encouraged associationist activity in gardens. The visual reminders of literary

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[10] "Poetry, Painting, and Gardening, or the Science of Landscape, will forever by men of taste be deemed Three Sisters, or the *Three New Graces* who dress and adorn nature": MS. annotation to William Mason's *Satirical Poems*, published in an edition of the relevant poems by Paget Toynbee (Oxford: Clarendon, 1926), p. 43. For an anthology of similar comments see *The Genius of the Place: The English Landscape Garden 1620-1820*, ed. John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis (London: Elek, 1975).

texts at Stowe —*Il Pastor Fido* (pp. 2ff) or Spenser (pp. 6-7) – which are sometimes accompanied by inscriptions which articulate the "dumb poetry" of the decorations (e.g., p. 13) serve mainly to provoke the imagination of visitors. Sometimes, as at the Hermitage, Stowe's designers force specific associations upon the mind; elsewhere they are content to manipulate the feelings in such a way as to stimulate merely general fancies to which the visitor himself must put whatever name he wishes. It is consistent with Gilpin's attempt to identify Polypthon with the less public aspects of Stowe that it is he who twice formulates his own responses to a scene: the quotations from Milton (pp. 10 and 52-3) may both describe the formal features of landscape, but they are also expressive of his emotional reactions.

Pictures, too, provided associationist focus when recalled in a garden: the most obvious instance being the probable allusion to Claude at Stourhead.[11] Yet the actual influence of pictures on landscape gardens has been generally exaggerated.[12] Where they were perhaps a force seems to have been in articulating the mental and emotional reaction of visitors. When Walpole praises William Kent for realizing in gardens "the compositions of the greatest masters in painting",[13] I suspect that he is in part

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[11] See Kenneth Woodbridge, *Landscape and Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), plates 2a, 2b, and 3.

[12] On this see Derek Clifford, *op. cit.*, pp. 140 and 158.

[13] I. W. U. Chase, *Horace Walpole: Gardenist. An edition of Walpole's 'The History of the Modern Taste in Gardening' with an estimate of Walpole's contribution to landscape architecture* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1943), p. 26.

rationalizing his own associationalist instinct, when at Hagley he was reminded of Sadeler's prints or of the Samaritan woman in a picture by Nicolas Poussin. Allusions to pictures were a means of focusing evanescent mood.

Gilpin, too, organizes his characters' responses in pictorial focus. The *Advertisement* again alerts the reader to these studied painterly aims. Once inside the gardens Callophilus sees pictures everywhere: variously disposed objects "make a most delightful Picture" (p. 14), while on at least three occasions in the first half-dozen pages the ruins, prospects, and "Claro-obscuro" of trees are discussed in terms that suggest how his habits of vision have been educated in front of painted or engraved landscapes which in their turn are recalled to provide a suitable vocabulary for his experiences.[14] Even Polypthon invokes the syntax of painting (pp. 25 and 41) to formulate his reactions to scenery.

It is in these painterly preconceptions of the characters and in Polypthon's account of Scottish scenery (pp. 23-4) that hints of Gilpin's later career are announced: the second edition of the *Dialogue* even talks of his "Observations" on Stowe, a term that became a standard ingredient in the titles of his picturesque tours. The education of sight by the study of paintings and prints was clarified and expounded in the *Essay on Prints*, written at least by 1758 and published ten years later. The picturesque tours themselves were started in the 1770s and published from

[14] This is an apt example of the psychological theory of sight proposed by E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (New York: Pantheon, 1961).

1782 onwards. In them Gilpin refines and enlarges upon the methods and ideas of his Stowe *Dialogue*. The adjudication between a taste for natural beauties (what his *Three Essays* term the "correct knowledge of objects" [15]) and the inclination to adjust them according to painterly criteria (in 1792 termed "scenes of fancy") is more sophisticated and consistent. He still delights in the variety of a landscape; but the roughness that Stowe only occasionally allowed becomes one of his guiding rules in appraising scenery.

Perhaps the most significant items in the *Dialogue* for readers of Gilpin's later writings will be his psychological emphasis and his attention to verbal and visual associations. Although his picturesque tours never entirely neglected the topographical obligation to describe actual localities, it is increasingly an imaginative response to landscape that is his concern.[16] In the *Dialogue* he explained how a good imagination will "improve" upon the sight of a grand object, just as Burke a few years later was to discuss the essential vagueness of the sublime and its appeal to the private sensibility. Polypthon's reactions at Stowe suggest something of this potential in contradistinction to Callophilus' ability to read the message of each temple or vista. What Gilpin displays in 1748 is more intricately adumbrated in

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[15] *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape* (London, 1792), p. 49.

[16] Carl Paul Barbier, *William Gilpin, His Drawings, Teaching and Theory of the Picturesque* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 71, 106 and 139.

the *Three Essays* of 1792: a scene may strike "us beyond the power of thought … and every mental operation is suspended. In this pause of intellect, this deliquirium of the soul, an enthusiastic sensation of pleasure over spreads it …".[17] As the final pages of *Dialogue* suggest, that experience was also available in the gardens of Stowe.

But the more mature imagination in Gilpin is tempted simultaneously in two directions, which perhaps explains why one contemporary was moved to commend the published tours for being "the Ne plus ultra of the pen and pencil united." [18] At Stowe he is attentive to the expressive potential of scenery and its associations ("The Eye naturally loves Liberty" [p. 54]), which are best expounded in the written commentary. But he also delights in the shapes and forms of scenery, the abstract qualities of the Stowe landscape that please the eye rather than the mind's eye. These are best recorded in his watercolours and the illustrations which become a main feature of his later books.

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[17] *Op. cit.*, p. 49.

[18] Cited by Templeman, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The facsimile of [William Gilpin's] *A Dialogue Upon The Gardens … At Stow* (1748) is reproduced from a copy (Shelf Mark: 577.e.26[3]) in the British Library. The total type-page (p. 7) measures 156 x 94 mm.

A DIALOGUE UPON THE Gardens *of the Right Honourable the* Lord Viscount Cobham, *&c*

Polypthon was a Gentleman engaged in a way of Life, that excused him two Months in the Year from Business; which Time he used generally to spend in visiting what was curious in the several Counties around him. As he had long promised his Friend *Callophilus* to pass away his Vacancy, at some time or other, in *Buckinghamshire*, he determined upon it this Year; and accordingly paid him a Visit at * * *. *Stow* was one of the first Places where his Curiosity carried him; and indeed he had scarce got his Foot within the Garden-door, before he broke out into the following Exclamation.

Why, here is a View that gives me a kind of Earnest of what my Expectation is raised to!

It is a very fine one indeed (replied *Callophilus*:) I do not wonder it should catch your Sight: The old Ruin upon the left of the Canal, the Opening to the Pyramid, the View towards the House, the River, the beautiful Disposition of the Trees on the other side of it, and that venerable old Temple, make a fine Variety of Objects. But your Eye is so taken up with Views at a distance, that you neglect something here at hand very well worth your notice. What do you think of these two Pavilions?

Polypth. Why really they are light, genteel Buildings enough. I like these rough Paintings too; they are done in a very free, masterly Manner. Pray, Sir, do you know the Stories?

Calloph. They are both taken from *Pastor Fido*; the disconsolate Nymph there, poor *Dorinda*, had long been in love with *Sylvio*, a wild Hunter, of barbarous Manners, in whose Breast she had no reason to believe she had raised an answering Passion. As she was roving in the Woods, she accidentally met his Dog, and saw her beloved Hunter himself at a distance hollowing, and running after it. She immediately calls the Hound to her, and hides it amongst the Bushes. *Sylvio* comes up to her, and enquires very eagerly after his Dog: The poor Nymph puts him off, and tries all her Art to inspire him with Love, but to no purpose; the cold Youth was quite insensible, and his Thoughts could admit no other Object but his Dog. Almost despairing, she at length hopes to bribe his Affections, and lets him know she has his Dog, which she will return if he will promise to love her, and give her a Kiss; *Sylvio* is overjoyed at the Proposal, and promises to give her ten thousand Kisses. *Dorinda* upon this brings the Dog: but alas! see there the Success of all her Pains: the Youth transported at the Sight of his Dog, throws his Arms round its Neck, and lavishes upon it those Kisses and Endearments, in the very Sight of the poor afflicted Lady, which she had been flattering herself would have fallen to her share. – On this other Wall Disdain and Love have taken different Sides; the Youth is warm, and the Nymph is coy: Poor *Myrtillo* had long loved *Amarillis*; the Lady was

engaged to another, and rejected his Passion. Gladly would he only have spoke his Grief, but the cruel fair One absolutely forbid him her Presence. At length a Scheme was laid by **Corisca**, the young Lover's Confidant, which was to gain him Admission into his dear *Amarillis*'s Company. The Lady is enticed into the Fields with some of *Corisca*'s Companions, (who were let into the Plot) to play at Blindman's Buff, where *Myrtillo* was to surprize her. See there he stands hesitating what use to make of so favourable an Opportunity, which Love has put into his Hands. – If you have satisfied your Curiosity here, let us walk towards the Temple of *Venus*. But hold: we had better first go down towards that Wilderness, and take a View of the Lake.

Polypth. Upon my Word here is a noble Piece of Water!

Calloph. Not many Years ago I remember it only a Marsh: it surprized me prodigiously when I first saw it floated in this manner with a Lake. Observe, pray, what a fine Effect that old Ruin has at the Head of it: Its Ornaments too, the Cascade, the Trees and Shrubs, half concealing, and half discovering the ragged View, and the Obelisk rising beyond if, are Objects happily disposed.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.