The English Garden and National Identity

The Competing Styles of Garden Design, 1870–1914

ANNE HELMREICH

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, VIC 3166, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

http://www.cambridge.org

© Anne Helmreich 2002

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2002

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typefaces Bulmer 11.25/14 pt. and Lo-Type *System* QuarkXPress® [GH]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Helmreich, Anne
The English garden and national identity : the competing styles of garden design,
1870–1914 / Anne Helmreich.
p. cm. – (Modern architecture and cultural identity)
Includes bibliographical references (p.).
ISBN 0-521-59293-3
1. Gardens – England – Design – History – 19th century. 2. Gardens –
England – Design – History – 20th century. 3. Gardens, English – History – 19th century.
4. Gardens, English – History – 20th century. 5. Nationalism – England – History –
19th century. 6. Nationalism – England – History – 20th century. I. Title. II. Series.

SB466.G7 H45 2002
712′.6′0942 – dc21 2001043777

ISBN 0 521 59293 3 hardback

Contents

List of Illustrations — *page* xi
Acknowledgments — xv

Introduction — 1

Chapter 1. Janus-Faced England — 7
The English Nation at Midcentury: Industry, Horticulture, and Garden Design — 11
The Meanings of Gardens — 20
Janus-Faced England — 22
Challenging the Status Quo — 25
The Glory of the Garden — 31

Chapter 2. Re-Presenting the Countryside: William Robinson and the Wild Garden — 39
The Wild Garden (1870) and Contemporary Garden Practices — 39
The Wild Garden and Science — 51
The Wild Garden and Art — 54
Wild Gardens — 60

Chapter 3. Domesticating the Nation: The Cottage Garden — 66
The Cottage Garden as Design Source — 67
The Cottage Ideal — 72
Cottage Tourism — 78
Cottage Preservation — 80
Instituting Gardens — 83

Chapter 4. Ordering the Landscape: The Art Workers Guild and the Formal Garden — 91
The Art Workers Guild — 95

Writing the History of the Formal Garden in England 97
Designing the Formal Garden 110
New Gardens in the Old Style 116

Chapter 5. The Battle of the Styles and the Recounting of English Garden History 135
The First Wave 137
The Second Wave 138
The Third Wave 142
Writing Garden History 144

Chapter 6. Gertrude Jekyll: Transforming the Local into the National 155
Old West Surrey (1904) 156
The Gardens at Munstead Wood, 1883–c. 1892 164
Writing from Munstead Wood 172
Building Munstead Wood 176
The Gardens at Munstead Wood, c. 1892–1914 178

Chapter 7. Jekyll and Lutyens: Resolving the Debate 189
Orchards (1898) 192
Goddards (1898) 197
Deanery Garden (1901) 198
Upton Grey (1908) 202
Marsh Court (1901) 204
Little Thakeham (1902) 208
Folly Farm (1906, 1912) 210
Abbotswood (1901) 212
Hestercombe (1906) 216

Conclusion 223

Notes 233
Select Bibliography 263
Index 273

List of Illustrations

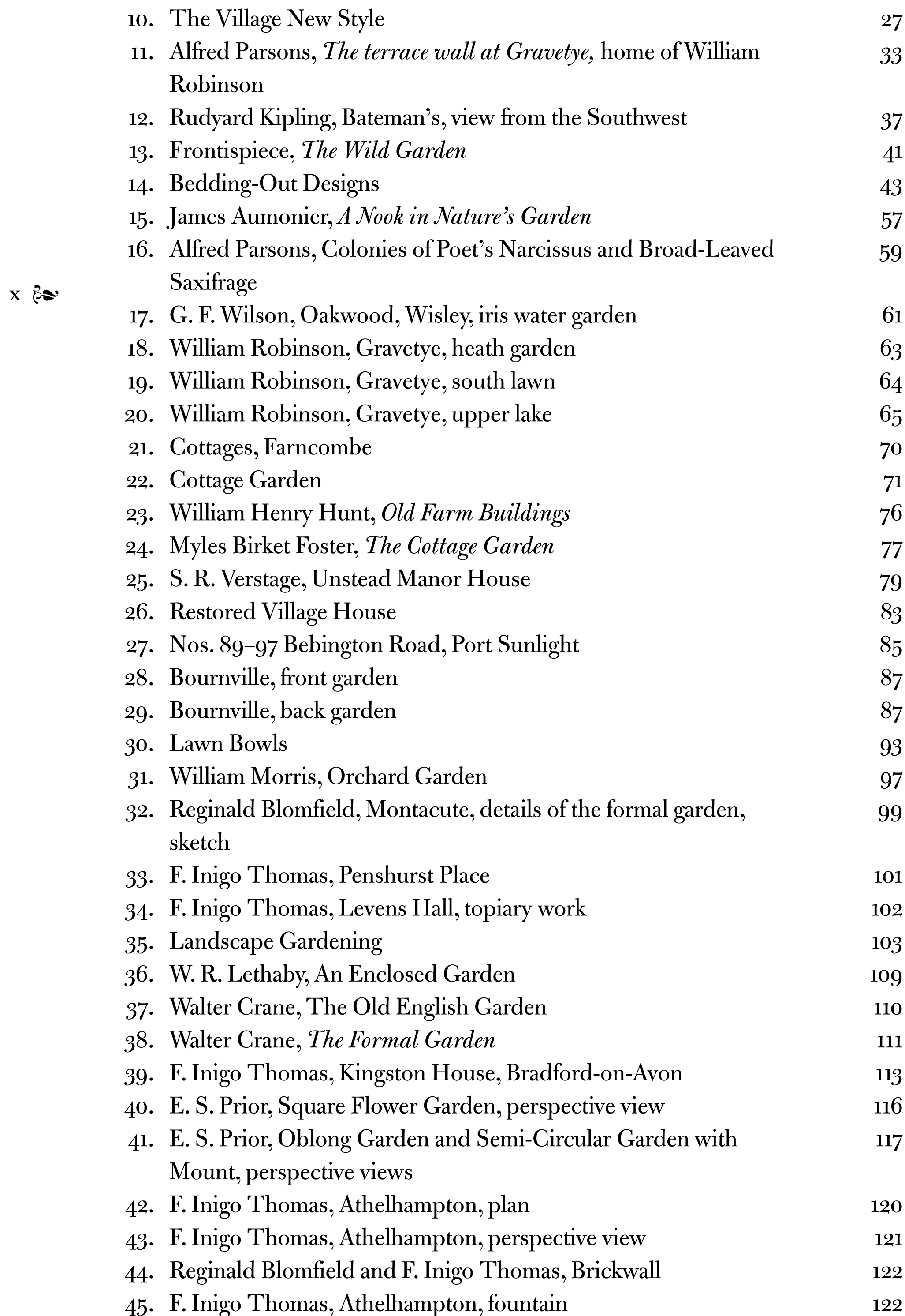
PLATES

Color plates follow page 124

I. Rudyard Kipling, Rose Garden, Bateman's, plan
II. Helen Allingham, *Unstead Farm, Godalming*
III. View from south terrace, Athelhampton
IV. Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll, Munstead Wood from the heath garden
V. Herbert Cowley, photograph of Munstead Wood, flower border
VI. Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll, Goddards, garden court
VII. Gertrude Jekyll, Upton Grey, wild garden
VIII. Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll, Hestercombe, Great Plat

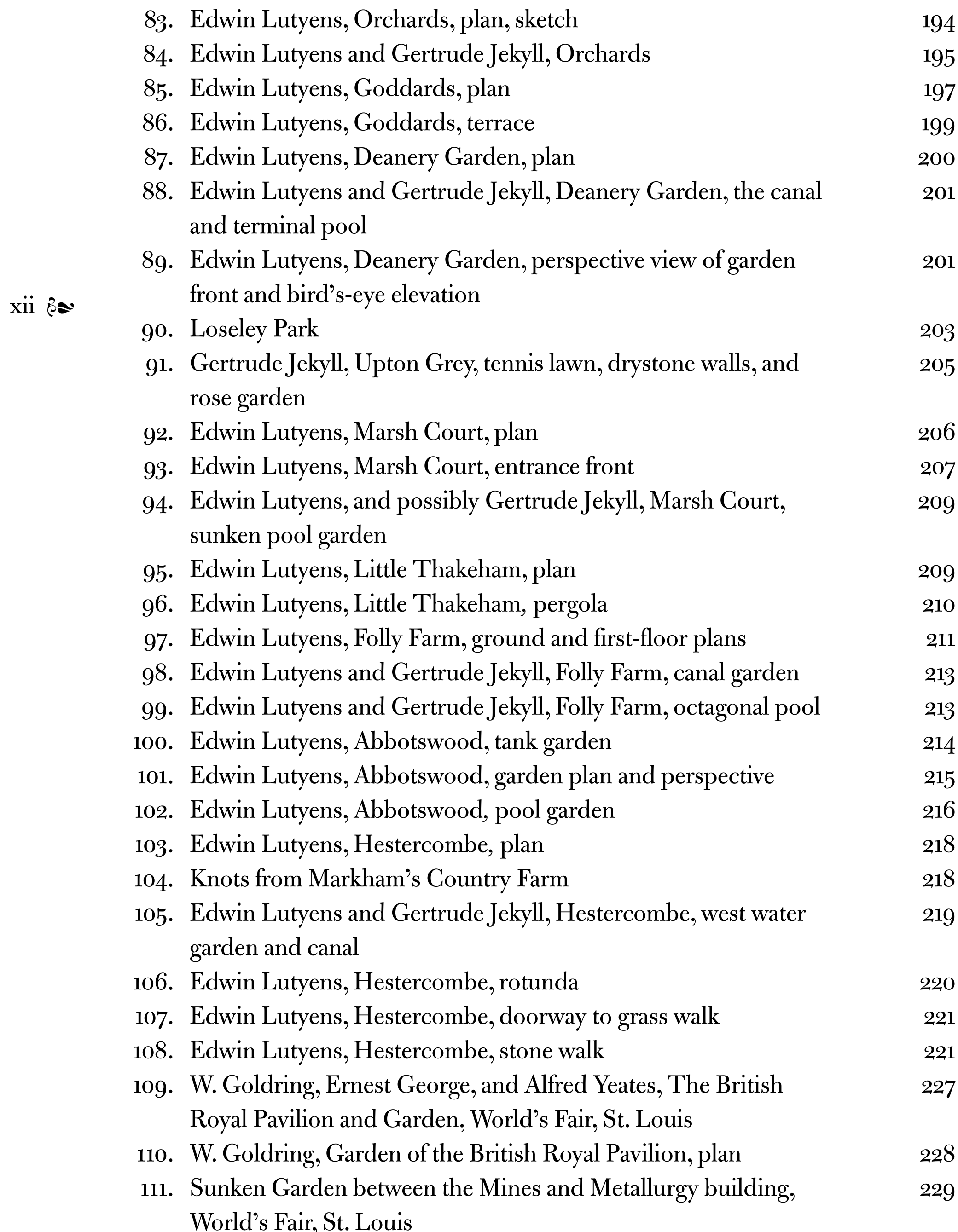
FIGURES

1. Joseph Nash, Louis Haghe, and David Roberts, Crystal Palace, Hyde Park, north transept 13
2. William Harrison's Chestnut Cottage, the gardenesque and the picturesque manner of planting 15
3. The Crystal Palace, Sydenham, plan 17
4. An Italian Garden 18
5. A French Garden 18
6. A Dutch Garden 19
7. An English Garden and Pleasure Ground 19
8. Royal Horticultural Society Gardens 21
9. The Village Old Style 26



10. The Village New Style 27
11. Alfred Parsons, *The terrace wall at Gravetye,* home of William Robinson 33
12. Rudyard Kipling, Bateman's, view from the Southwest 37
13. Frontispiece, *The Wild Garden* 41
14. Bedding-Out Designs 43
15. James Aumonier, *A Nook in Nature's Garden* 57
16. Alfred Parsons, Colonies of Poet's Narcissus and Broad-Leaved Saxifrage 59
17. G. F. Wilson, Oakwood, Wisley, iris water garden 61
18. William Robinson, Gravetye, heath garden 63
19. William Robinson, Gravetye, south lawn 64
20. William Robinson, Gravetye, upper lake 65
21. Cottages, Farncombe 70
22. Cottage Garden 71
23. William Henry Hunt, *Old Farm Buildings* 76
24. Myles Birket Foster, *The Cottage Garden* 77
25. S. R. Verstage, Unstead Manor House 79
26. Restored Village House 83
27. Nos. 89–97 Bebington Road, Port Sunlight 85
28. Bournville, front garden 87
29. Bournville, back garden 87
30. Lawn Bowls 93
31. William Morris, Orchard Garden 97
32. Reginald Blomfield, Montacute, details of the formal garden, sketch 99
33. F. Inigo Thomas, Penshurst Place 101
34. F. Inigo Thomas, Levens Hall, topiary work 102
35. Landscape Gardening 103
36. W. R. Lethaby, An Enclosed Garden 109
37. Walter Crane, The Old English Garden 110
38. Walter Crane, *The Formal Garden* 111
39. F. Inigo Thomas, Kingston House, Bradford-on-Avon 113
40. E. S. Prior, Square Flower Garden, perspective view 116
41. E. S. Prior, Oblong Garden and Semi-Circular Garden with Mount, perspective views 117
42. F. Inigo Thomas, Athelhampton, plan 120
43. F. Inigo Thomas, Athelhampton, perspective view 121
44. Reginald Blomfield and F. Inigo Thomas, Brickwall 122
45. F. Inigo Thomas, Athelhampton, fountain 122

46. Montacute, east court 123
47. F. Inigo Thomas, Rotherfield Hall, west front 124
48. Reginald Blomfield, Caythorpe Court, perspective view 125
49. Reginald Blomfield, Godinton, topiary plat 127
50. Reginald Blomfield, Godinton, formal pool 128
51. F. Inigo Thomas, Fishpond, Wrest 128
52. Reginald Blomfield, Moundsmere, sunken terrace, pool, and garden facade 129
53. Ernest Newton, Ardenrun, plan 130
54. Ernest Newton, Redcourt, plan 131
55. Ernest Newton, Scotman's Field, plan 132
56. Gerald Callcott Horsley, The Links, Hythe, plan 133
57. Gerald Callcott Horsley, The Links, Hythe, south elevation 133
58. E. S. Prior, Byron Cross, Byron Hill, plan 134
59. William Robinson, Shrubland, plan 141
60. Mervyn Macartney, Rosebank, plan 150
61. Thomas Mawson, Tirley Garth Court, house and flower border 151
62. C. E. Mallows, Tirley Garth Court and Gardens, plan 152
63. C. E. Mallows, Tirley Garth Court and Gardens, plan 153
64. C. E. Mallows, Tirley Garth Court, rose garden 154
65. Warwickshire Photographic Survey, Compton Wynyates 158
66. Gertrude Jekyll, Iron Spiral Candlesticks 159
67. Getrude Jekyll, *Beech Unstead Lane* 161
68. P. H. Emerson, *Furze-Cutting on a Suffolk Common* 162
69. Gertrude Jekyll, Cutting Heath-Turf 163
70. Gertrude Jekyll, Landscape Study 164
71. Gertrude Jekyll, Landscape Study 165
72. Gertrude Jekyll, Munstead Wood, plan 167
73. Gertrude Jekyll, Daffodils among Junipers Where Garden Joins Copse, Munstead Wood 169
74. Gertrude Jekyll, Rhododendrons Where the Copse and Garden Meet, Munstead Wood 171
75. Gertrude Jekyll, Munstead Wood, Grass Walks in the Copse 179
76. Gertrude Jekyll, Munstead Wood, flower border 182
77. Mingled style flower border 183
78. Gertrude Jekyll, A Roadside Cottage Garden 185
79. Gertrude Jekyll, Munstead Wood, tank garden 186
80. Mrs. Dominic Watson's Flower Border 187
81. Edwin Lutyens, Munstead Corner, perspective, sketch 191
82. Edwin Lutyens, Orchards, plan 193



83. Edwin Lutyens, Orchards, plan, sketch 194
84. Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll, Orchards 195
85. Edwin Lutyens, Goddards, plan 197
86. Edwin Lutyens, Goddards, terrace 199
87. Edwin Lutyens, Deanery Garden, plan 200
88. Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll, Deanery Garden, the canal and terminal pool 201
89. Edwin Lutyens, Deanery Garden, perspective view of garden front and bird's-eye elevation 201
90. Loseley Park 203
91. Gertrude Jekyll, Upton Grey, tennis lawn, drystone walls, and rose garden 205
92. Edwin Lutyens, Marsh Court, plan 206
93. Edwin Lutyens, Marsh Court, entrance front 207
94. Edwin Lutyens, and possibly Gertrude Jekyll, Marsh Court, sunken pool garden 209
95. Edwin Lutyens, Little Thakeham, plan 209
96. Edwin Lutyens, Little Thakeham, pergola 210
97. Edwin Lutyens, Folly Farm, ground and first-floor plans 211
98. Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll, Folly Farm, canal garden 213
99. Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll, Folly Farm, octagonal pool 213
100. Edwin Lutyens, Abbotswood, tank garden 214
101. Edwin Lutyens, Abbotswood, garden plan and perspective 215
102. Edwin Lutyens, Abbotswood, pool garden 216
103. Edwin Lutyens, Hestercombe, plan 218
104. Knots from Markham's Country Farm 218
105. Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll, Hestercombe, west water garden and canal 219
106. Edwin Lutyens, Hestercombe, rotunda 220
107. Edwin Lutyens, Hestercombe, doorway to grass walk 221
108. Edwin Lutyens, Hestercombe, stone walk 221
109. W. Goldring, Ernest George, and Alfred Yeates, The British Royal Pavilion and Garden, World's Fair, St. Louis 227
110. W. Goldring, Garden of the British Royal Pavilion, plan 228
111. Sunken Garden between the Mines and Metallurgy building, World's Fair, St. Louis 229

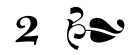
Introduction

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century and opening decades of the twentieth century, fiery debates about styles and forms of English gardens intersected with notions of national identity. The leading styles of garden design sought validity through recourse to the label *English,* and the garden was adopted as a symbol of national identity.

This study is grounded in the premise that gardenscapes do not communicate universal values irrespective of time or place, but that each culture endows garden forms with particular sets of meanings and, within that culture, those meanings, and therefore vehicles that express them, are contested and not fixed. The notion of "reading" the garden – treating garden features like semantic devices that can communicate to those familiar with their language – is both a historical practice and a productive mode of historical inquiry. The latter requires understanding, on the one hand, the vocabulary of the discipline and, on the other hand, the broader social, economic, and political context in which that syntax was deployed.[1] The researcher must work both diachronically and synchronically, investigating how the forms or syntax of the garden changed over time and how these changes were embedded in historical events. This study adopts such an approach, looking at changing garden styles during the period 1870–1914 as reflective of both internal debates within the discipline of garden design and broader debates within the culture at large. Briefly stated, varying garden styles can be understood, or "read," concomitantly as expressions of the competing professional agendas of different kinds of designers (such as gardeners or architects) and articulations, through the vehicle of nature, of competing visions of the nation.

Gardens addressed here are those typically associated with what is called the

small country house. Difficult to define, this house stands between the mansion and the cottage and is closest in sensibility to the villa, which J. C. Loudon defined as "nothing more than a park with a house of smaller size than that of the *mansion* and *demesne,* surrounded by a pleasure-ground, and with the usual gardens."[2] Architect Ernest Newton, reflecting in 1912 on the previous fifty years of house building, explained that interest in the "smallish house" rather than "country seats" or "noblemen's mansions" defined modern domestic architecture as did a revival of the art of garden design (referring to ornamental or pleasure grounds, distinguished from parkland or utilitarian spaces).[3]

The revival to which Newton referred encompassed a range of styles linked with nationalities – such as English, Italian, Japanese – that have been richly discussed by Brent Elliott in *Victorian Gardens* (1986) and David Ottewill in *The Edwardian Garden* (1989). The intent of this volume is not to replace these period overviews but rather to address the broader issue of the cultural context in which these styles emerged. What drove stylistic choices? How are artistic form and social, political, and economic change related? Concentrating on these questions gives rise to the issue of Englishness and garden styles that emerged to express desired perceptions of the nation.

For purposes of this study, the garden is considered not just in its physical manifestation, as a locus, but also in its represented form. This allows analysis, as W. J. T. Mitchell has advised, of how "landscape *circulates* as a medium of exchange, a site of visual appropriation, [and] a focus for the formation of identity."[4] During the period 1870–1914, publishing and the print media grew exponentially with the application of new industrial techniques to the business and craft of printing as well as reduced costs of raw materials. Writings about gardens, whether in horticulture or design journals, treatises, novels, literary journals, newspapers, or pamphlets, proliferated in this environment. Authors and publishers took advantage of new technologies of mass reproducing wood engravings and later, photographs, to issue relatively inexpensive, well-illustrated texts so that word and image, sometimes in concert and sometimes in opposition, constituted the meanings of gardens. Gardens thus became the concern of not just a small elite, who previously had most ready access to treatises and other print material related to gardens, but also a broad literary audience that extended into the respectable working classes.

A discourse, the garden also behaves as a myth, holding forth promises of harmony with nature. Myth is innocent, Roland Barthes claims, "not because its intentions are hidden . . . but because they are naturalized." The garden is a perfect example: seemingly without politics, its meanings are always described by its firsthand observers as obvious and commonplace. Of course, as Rudyard Kipling stated, "our England is a garden." But we should take heed of Barthes's warning that "the most natural object contains a political trace."[5] Thus it is useful to con-

ceive of the garden as embodying a collection of ideologies, sometimes contradictory, bundled together and put to numerous uses. At the turn of the century, the latter included counterbalancing fears of change, accentuating desires for an alternative way of life, harmonizing and smoothing over differences, or accentuating them. Through these processes, the garden became constitutive of national identity.

The question of what constitutes a nation is not answered easily, yet scholars make frequent recourse to the notion of a collective form of identity. Ernest Renan, in his essay "What Is a Nation" (1882), argued that "to have common glories in the past, a common will in the present; to have accomplished great things together, to wish to do so again, that is the essential condition of being a nation."[6] Max Weber rested the definition of the nation on the concept of shared values, sentiments, and "memories of a common political destiny."[7] Walker Connor has pointed out that "the nation is a self-defined rather than an other-defined grouping," to which one could add that in self-defining, the nation often sets itself apart from what are identified as Others.[8] John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith insist that nationalism is best understood as an ideological movement with both "political and cultural dimensions" that emerges out of a collective, unified drive for independence and depends on identification of a shared, distinctive culture and territory.[9]

The revolutions of the late eighteenth century, stemming out of philosophies of the Enlightenment, are therefore often argued to be the founding moments of nationalism. Nationalism burgeoned in nineteenth-century Europe, with its reaction against the forced internationalism of the Napoleonic Empire, revolutions for greater political equality, wars of territory, and colonial expansion. Nationalism is, in short, a specifically modern movement. Ernest Gellner situates the rise of nationalism at the point of transition from an agrarian to an industrial age, pointing out that industrialization – with its implicit demand for and reward of stabilization and standardization, and its ability to shrink distances metaphorically – concomitantly required and produced a cultural homogeneity bound up in nationalism.[10]

These definitions of national identity that point inexorably to the role of culture have been cited here intentionally. Although national identity has long been conceived as the result of political acts and pronouncements, Gellner and other scholars, such as Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm, have demonstrated that cultural practices are crucial in defining and shaping national identity. Gellner, for example, argued that "nationalism is a political principle which maintains that similarity of culture is the basic social bond" so that national communities, generally speaking, are defined "in terms of shared culture."[11] According to Anderson, nationalism or nation-ness are "cultural artefacts of a particular kind" emanating from the condition of the nation as "an imagined political commu-

nity."[12] He points to how cultural expressions, in particular print language, which possesses an inherent capacity for "generating imagined communities, building in effect *particular solidarities,*" create ties that bind communities. He has also called attention to how institutions – such as the map, the census, and the museum, which "profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its domain" – also produce national identity.[13] To this list can be added images, specifically landscape images that imagine the topography and scope of the nation and represent it back to itself.[14] As a category of landscape imagery, the garden had particular resonance as a means of imagining nation-ness. An enclosed space devoted to cultivation and display of plants, the garden mirrored the notion of nationhood as a bounded territory designated for a particular set of peoples.

The garden, in the period considered by this account, also functioned as an invented tradition: "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" and include such symbols as the national flag or anthem that signified membership in the exclusive club of nationhood. Invented traditions thus create a sense of community, as well as to "establish or legitimize institutions, status or relations of authority" and to instill "beliefs, value systems and conventions of behaviour."[15] The garden implied continuity with the past as well as membership within the exclusive club of Englishness, and it set in place value systems with significant ideological importance. Like many invented traditions, the garden and the act of gardening also served as means by which to manage the transitions and stresses inherent in modernity as well as establishing a community based on shared interests.

The role of invented traditions is like that of cultural nationalism as defined by John Hutchinson. Cultural nationalism denotes how society defines the nation through "its distinctive civilization, which is the product of its unique history, culture and geographical profile"; the activities of cultural nationalists include "naming rituals, the celebration of cultural uniqueness and the rejection of foreign practices," which create a sense of unity. Hutchinson concludes,

> cultural nationalists should be seen . . . as moral innovators who see, by "reviving" an ethnic historicist vision of the nation, to redirect traditionalists and modernists away from conflict and instead to unite them in the task of constructing an integrated distinctive and autonomous community, capable of competing in the modern world.[16]

Gerald Newman asserts that the eighteenth century proved the ideal breeding ground for English nationalism, given the existing bonds of people to the

land and to an increasingly unified culture and Protestant religion, the growth of the middle classes, the existence of a threatening enemy, the desire for order in a period of extreme change, and fear of imminent decline.[17] Yet some of these same factors, in particular the long-standing antagonism between France and Britain (the latter formed by the union of England and Scotland in 1707), created a sense of Britishness, according to Linda Colley, who argues that Great Britain "was an invention forged above all by war. Time and time again, war with France brought Britons, whether they hailed from Wales or Scotland or England, into confrontation with an obviously hostile Other and encouraged them to define themselves collectively against it." Patriotism was fueled by the rhetoric required to assemble, bind together, and activate a fighting force. Colley goes on to observe that Britishness existed as a sort of veneer, "superimposed over an array of internal differences"; and its presence waxed and waned as forces binding the different nations of England, Wales, and Scotland together appeared and disappeared.[18] Throughout the history of the United Kingdom, created in 1801 by the forced joining of Ireland to Britain, what Hugh Kearney has described as "ethnic politics" has been at work.[19] The tearing at the bonds linking the four nations of Britain continued apace into the nineteenth century, fueling the discourse that linked gardens and Englishness.

In the following discussion, Chapter 1 sets forth the historical context and considers the conflicting tropes – workshop of the world or green and pleasant land – by which England was characterized over the second half of the nineteenth century. Succeeding chapters address key episodes in the history of garden design from 1870 to the Great War, which put an end to a certain kind of garden making with the rising costs of labor and other economic reconfigurations. The period 1870–1914 was characterized by intense debates about garden design, which, at their most polarized, pitched informal against formal, peasant styles against aristocratic styles, and nature against architect. This book argues that these debates, and the design principles at stake, were indelibly shaped by the quest for a powerful English national identity.

The beginning of the controversy can be located in 1870, when William Robinson first published his treatise on the wild garden. Chapter 2 investigates Robinson's approach to garden design and how it was embedded in contemporary scientific and aesthetic practices as well as social concerns. To legitimize his aesthetic, Robinson turned to cottage gardens, considered in Chapter 3. The studied informality of cottage gardens, with their connotations of the amateur, are in marked contrast to formal gardens, yet both were promoted as essentially English and became ingredients in turn-of-the-century designs. Chapter 4 addresses the formal garden, a mode of design largely advocated by architects who cast aspersions on Robinson and his fellow landscape gardeners.

The tension between formalists and naturalists erupted into a battle of the styles, analyzed in Chapter 5 not just as a function of conflicting design principles but also as a product of history and its writing. This fiery debate signifies the high stakes faced by garden designers at the end of the nineteenth century. Yet certain critics at the time questioned the validity of the stylistic debate, because they believed a paradigmatic style had emerged, one that fused the formal and natural and thus acknowledged both existing modes of garden designs while rising above the brawl. To support their assertion, these critics pointed to the work of Gertrude Jekyll and Edwin Lutyens. Chapter 6 examines Jekyll's relationship to English rural culture as evidenced in her writings and garden design and analyzes how her work offered readers a national aesthetic based on local practices. Chapter 7 examines a selection of sites designed by Jekyll and Lutyens and establishes how the team drew on motifs already in circulation while also providing innovative solutions to design problems. This book demonstrates that in a period when artists, writers, musicians, politicians, and numerous others embarked on a search for English identity, the garden was an essential vessel for this voyage of discovery.