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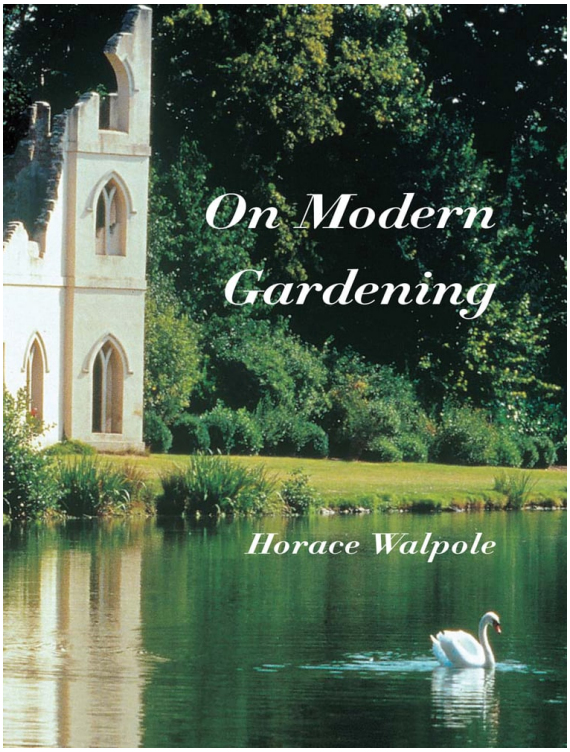

On Modern Gardening

Horace Walpole

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- Walpole's brilliant, hugely influential and highly partial, essay on English gardens and landscape architecture history - an attempt to argue the superiority of everything English

"'Walpole's achievement has to be saluted all the more when it is realized that single-handedly he determined (or distorted) the writing of landscape architecture history to this day' John Dixon Hunt in Greater Perfection: the practice of garden theory"

By a mile, this is the most brilliant and most influential essay ever written on English garden history. For two centuries it mapped the whole landscape of the subject. However, the author was partial in the highest degree. Horace Walpole believed in progress, in modernisation, and the superiority of everything English to almost everything that had gone before. He had a special dislike of Baroque gardens, as exemplified by Versailles, which for him symbolised absolutism, tyranny, and the oppression of nature.

Horace Walpole was partial in the highest degree. As the son of England's first Whig prime minister (Sir Robert Walpole) it would be surprising if he were otherwise. The essay's title gives the first clue: Horace Walpole believed in progress, in modernisation and the superiority of everything English to almost everything that had gone before. He had a special dislike of Baroque gardens, as exemplified by Versailles, which for him symbolised absolutism, tyranny and the oppression of nature. He celebrated such quintessential English innovations as the ha-ha, and the triumph of the English style under Kent and Capability Brown Tom Turner, Professor of Garden History, University of Greenwich.

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