

A “delightful Paradise”: The Leasowes Cult

Image: Title page from vol. I of James Dodsley’s 1765 edition of Shenstone’s works. His brother, Robert Dodsley (1703-1764), was instrumental in creating the cult of Shenstone. He was responsible for selecting and introducing what became a three-volume work devoted to Shenstone’s writings and the landscape he created at the Leasowes. From *The Works in Verse and Prose of William Shenstone, Esq.*, Vol. I, Second Edition (London, J Dodsley, 1765).

From 1754 Dodsley spent several weeks of several summers staying with Shenstone. This was partly for pleasure and partly for collaborative literary work. In 1758 Dodsley introduced his friend Joseph Spence to Shenstone. This Spence was he who had (like Dodsley) been a friend of Pope, and practised and wrote on gardening. Following his first visit to the Leasowes, Spence wrote to Shenstone:

“...thank you...for all the Pleasure...[at] your delightful Paradise...If...you would favour me with the natural History, how, and why, and in what Order, you laid out every Part of your Gardens, it would...be...of particular Use to me, as a Guide and Assistant in many Things, and particularly in those two great Articles of Vistos and Cascades. I would beg...a more lively Account of a Place, that is so much every Body’s Favourite.

P.S. Could you send me a Receipt how to build a Root House? In my wild Abbey-Grounds, I have a Place...for one...but we have neither any Gentleman or Artist here, who understands any Thing of that Stile of Architecture. (*Select Letters Between*, pp.239-242)

Spence had a house at Byfleet in Surrey, where he gardened, but here he is referring to

Durham, to where he would retire. Perhaps the furthest recorded memorial to Shenstone and the Leasowes was that at Ermonville, thirty miles north of Paris, on which the then-owner, having seen the Leasowes, praised its ‘exquisite simplicity’. (Graves, *Recollection*, p.190)