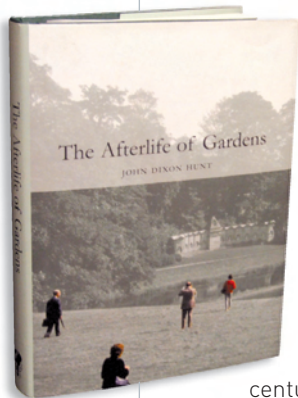


Books in Brief

The Afterlife of Gardens

by John Dixon Hunt



The Afterlife with which Professor Dixon Hunt deals consists not in the physical changes that gardens may undergo in the years after their creation but rather in the way they are used and visited. In the course of what may be several centuries, owners and visitors come to great gardens (including public squares, cemeteries, sculpture gardens, and so on) carrying different assumptions about what they expect from them.

The author explores these changing perceptions, and sees them as relevant even to lost gardens such as Yuanming Yuan in China, which live on in the way they are studied. So far as decayed gardens are concerned, he believes we restore too much. It is impossible to restore the mindset with which they were created.

This intricately argued book (almost impossible to describe without oversimplifying) deals with cyberspace as well as with the author's favourite 18th century and he stresses that response to gardens is visceral as well as intellectual. Choosing his words with typical care, he writes of how "Sir Henry Wotton's albeit brief commentary on a late sixteenth-century Italian garden reveals how transport in both its senses - motion and emotion - guides his reactions."

Reaktion Books. 254 pages. £25.00. ISBN 1-86189-218-7.

The Naming of Names

by Anna Pavord

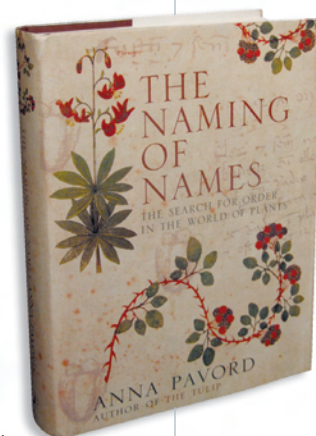
Up to 300BC, when Theophrastus compiled a list of 500 plants known to the Greeks, there was no system for naming the trees, shrubs or herbs that people used in carpentry, cooking and medicine. Local common names, then as now, did not always refer to the same plant. Pliny, writing in the 1st century AD, mentioned 800 plants, and included ornamental ones. Over the centuries, the names in his Natural History became what Pavord calls "a special botanical language, a kind of Latin Esperanto". When Pliny died, botanical illustration was just beginning to be used as an aid for distinguishing one plant from another, but on the nomenclature side, there was little progress until the 13th century.

Although the word "botany" did not come along until 1696, serious study of plants began in the 15th century and led to organised naming in the late 16th - by which time illustration had also taken a step forward and moved towards greater accuracy with the invention of the herbarium containing dried, pressed plants.

Anna Pavord undertook some scary journeys when writing this book, as well as a huge amount of work in libraries. Her pleasure in her research shines through what could have been a desiccated subject, making this an enjoyable, as well as a most interesting read.

Credit must also go to the picture researcher, Heather Vickers. Finding visual material for early periods is never easy and it is good that her splendid efforts here were recently rewarded with the Longmans/History Today Prize for picture research.

Bloomsbury. 472 pages. £30.00. ISBN 0-7475-7952-0.



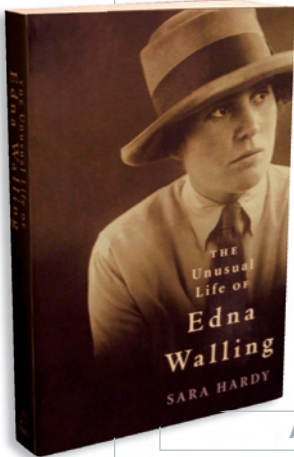
Books in Brief

Central Park, An American Masterpiece

by Sara Cedar Miller

Central Park in New York, according to this book, is not only "the most important public space in the United States" but also "the most important work of American art of the nineteenth century". The author glosses over why and how, in that case, it became the no-go area it did in the 1970s, but otherwise she deals comprehensively with how Olmsted and Vaux's Greensward Plan won the competition to design a park on this site and with what has happened to it since, right up to Christo's saffron banners. The illustrations, both those recently taken by the author and the archive ones, explore the extraordinary variety of the overall design and the richness of the sculpture.

Abrams, New York. 256 pages. \$45.00. ISBN 0-8109-3936-0.



The Unusual Life of Edna Walling

by Sara Hardy

Edna Walling (1895-1973) was not only the best-known female garden designer in Australia in the 1920s and '30s, she was the first of either sex to market her work actively. Through regular journalism as well as her garden practice, she promoted her belief that gardens should complement the style of the house, having perhaps an Italian-style sunken garden or pergola and Jekyll-like flowers if the architecture was European, and native plants in an informal setting round an Australian house.

Walling was a great self-publicist, but remained a very private person, perhaps because of her sexuality. With little archive material to work with, the author has chosen to write more a novel (think "My Brilliant Career as a Garden Designer") than a conventional biography.

Allen & Unwin, Australia. 304 pages. £19.99 in UK. ISBN 1-74114-229-6.

Gradski Perijovi Hrvatske

by Bojana and Mladen Šćitaroci

Mladen and Bojana Scitaroci have devoted their lives to recording Croatia's crumbling manor houses and the gardens attached to them. Now this husband-and-wife team have joined up with various colleagues to consider public parks in that country's towns, spas and tourist resorts – Split and Lipik, for instance.

The sites are described in the context of public parks of the same period in other parts of the Hapsburg Empire and in other European countries, including England. Maksimir Park in Zagreb, for instance, "can be compared with the best-known European landscaped-romantic parks of the nineteenth century, such as the Englischer Garten in Munich..., London's Regent's Park..., or the Bois de Boulogne in Paris."

Most readers will have to rely on the abstracts of the text in Italian, German and English, but the picture captions are comprehensible and the theme important. Given the way that modern tourism is ruining the towns along Croatia's coast, it can only be a matter of time before her inland heritage also comes under pressure. The authors lament the way many once-splendid parks have deteriorated. Let us hope their valuable book does not record too many that are going to disappear completely.

Scitaroci, Zagreb. 265 pages. ISBN 953-97121-3-0.

