

Richard Payne Knight (1750--1824)

Though Gilpin could admire Brown's improvements (see p. 339), he obviously preferred the 'varied surface' and roughness of picturesque scenery. In this he was at one with Knight, whose poem, *The Landscape*, expounds extreme picturesque doctrine in 'fiction's flowery dress'. But unlike Gilpin, Knight found Brown's designs dull and vapid; they could not live up to his visual education in the schools of Claude, the Dutch landscapists and, above all, Salvator Rosa. This is vividly demonstrated (and with more point than the verses) by the engravings of two contrasted scenes (Plates 96a and 96b) published with the poem. Brown, and more especially Brown's facile imitators, lost any chance of intricacy and mystery in their landscapes; instead they relied upon such clichés as the belt of trees around an estate, tidy clumps of trees among smooth lawns and mechanically serpentine lines. Yet Knight resists Chambers' Chinese solutions to this problem of boredom, preferring to make scenery interesting by a proper manipulation of indigenous items. Knight's *Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste*, eleven years later, makes clear what his verses only imply: that the picturesque is in effect a theory of association, a function of the imagination, albeit rather a mechanical one. Hence the advocates of picturesque landscapes may be seen as re-affirming the long-established principle that a garden must answer mental variety. *The Landscape* suggested this through the conventional invocation of nymphs and dryads, who could find no sanctuary among Brown's bare and tidy scenes; these spirits of the wild were a method of alluding to our thoughts and feelings among landscape, just as their presence in scenes by Claude or Poussin alerts a viewer to myth and *genius loci*. But another mode was to describe the mind's reactions, its associations, as such novelists as Sterne or such philosophers as Alison had done by the time Knight published his second work. It is this version of the picturesque, as a stimulation of minds 'richly stored', that occupies Knight in the prose extract.

from The Landscape, A Didactic Poem (1794)

Component parts in all the eye requires:
One formal mass for ever palls and tires.
To make the Landscape grateful to the sight,
Three points of distance always should unite;
And howsoe'er the view may be confin'd,
Three mark'd divisions we shall always find:
Not more, where Claude extends his prospect
O'er Rome's Campania to the Tyrrhene tide,
(Where tow'rs and temples, mould'ring to decay,
In pearly air appear to die away.
And the soft distance, melting from the eye,
Dissolves its forms into the azure sky),
Than where, confin'd to some sequester'd rill,
Meek Hobbima presents the village mill: ---
Not more, where great Salvator's mountains rise,
And hide their craggy summits in the skies;
While tow'ring clouds in whirling eddies roll,
And bursting thunders seem to shake the pole;
Than in the ivy'd cottage of Ostade,
Waterloe's copse, or Rysdael's low cascade.

Though oft o'erlook'd, the parts which are most near
Are ever found of most importance here;
For though in nature oft the wand'ring eye
Roams to the distant fields, and skirts the sky,
Where curiosity its look invites,
And space, not beauty, spreads out its delights;

Yet in the picture all delusions fly,
And nature's genuine charms we there descry;
The composition rang'd in order true,
Brings every object fairly to the view;
And, as the field of vision is confin'd,
Shews all its parts collected to the mind.

Hence let us learn, in real scenes, to trace
The true ingredients of the painter's grace;
To lop redundant parts, the coarse refine,
Open the crowded, and the scanty join.
But, ah! in vain: --- See yon fantastic band,
With charts, pedometers, and rules in hand,
Advance triumphant, and alike lay waste
The forms of nature, and the works of taste!
T'improve, adorn, and polish, they profess;
But shave the goddess, whom they come to dress;
Level each broken bank and shaggy mound,
And fashion all to one unvaried round;
One even round, that ever gently flows,
Nor forms abrupt, nor broken colours knows;
But, wrapt all o'er in everlasting green,
Makes one dull, vapid, smooth, and tranquil scene.

Arise, great poet [i.e. Virgil], and again deplore
The fav'rite reeds that deck'd thy Mincius' shore!
Protect the branches, that in Haemus shed
Their grateful shadows o'er thy aching head;
Shav'd to the brink, our brooks are taught to flow
Where no obtruding leaves or branches grow;
While clumps of shrubs bespot each winding vale,
Open alike to ev'ry gleam and gale;
Each secret haunt, and deep recess display'd,
And intricacy banish'd with its shade.

Hence, hence! thou haggard fiend, however call'd,
Thin, meagre genius of the bare and bald;
Thy spade and mattock here at length lay down,
And follow to the tomb thy fav'rite Brown:
Thy fav'rite Brown, whose innovating hand
First dealt thy curses o'er this fertile land;
First taught the walk in formal spires to move,
And from their haunts the secret Dryads drove;
With clumps bespotted o'er the mountain's side,
And bade the stream 'twixt banks close shaven glide;
Banish'd the thickets of high-bow'ring wood,
Which hung, reflected, o'er the glassy flood;
Where screen'd and shelter'd from the heats of day,
Oft on the moss-grown stone repos'd I lay,
And tranquil view'd the limpid stream below,
Brown with o'erhanging shade, in circling eddies flow . . .

OFT when I've seen some lonely mansion stand,
Fresh from th' improver's desolating hand,

'Midst shaven lawns, that far around it creep
In one eternal undulating sweep;
And scatter'd clumps, that nod at one another,
Each stiffly waving to its formal brother;
Tir'd with th' extensive scene, so dull and bare,
To Heav'n devoutly I've address'd my pray'r, ---
Again the moss-grown terraces to raise,
And spread the labyrinth's perplexing maze;
Replace in even lines the ductile yew,
And plant again the ancient avenue.
Some features then, at least, we should obtain,
To mark this flat, insipid, waving plain;
Some vary'd tints and forms would intervene,
To break this uniform, eternal green.

E'en the trimm'd hedges, that inclos'd the field,
Some consolation to the eye might yield;
But even these are studiously remov'd,
And clumps and bareness only are approv'd.
Though the old system against nature stood,
At least in this, 'twas negatively good: ---
Inclos'd by walls, and terraces, and mounds,
Its mischiefs were confin'd to narrow bounds;
Just round the house, in formal angles trac'd,
It mov'd responsive to the builder's taste;
Walls answer'd walls, and alleys, long and thin,
Mimick'd the endless passages within.

But kings of yew, and goddesses of lead,
Could never far their baneful influence spread;
Coop'd in the garden's safe and narrow bounds,
They never dar'd invade the open grounds;
Where still the roving ox, or browsing deer,
From such prim despots kept the country clear;
While uncorrupted still, on every side,
The ancient forest rose in savage pride;
And in its native dignity display'd
Each hanging wood and ever verdant glade;
Where ev'ry shaggy shrub and spreading tree
Proclaim'd the seat of native liberty;
In loose and vary'd groups unheeded thrown,
And never taught the planter's care to own
Some, tow'ring upwards, spread their arms in state;
And others, bending low, appear'd to wait:
While scatter'd thorns, brows'd by the goat and deer,
Rose all around, and let no lines appear.

Such groups did Claude's light pencil often trace,
The foreground of some classic scene to grace;
Such, humble Waterloe, to nature true,
Beside the copse, or village pasture drew.
But ah! how different is the formal lump
Which the improver plants, and calls a clump!
Break, break, ye nymphs, the fence that guards it round!

With browsing cattle, all its forms confound!
As chance or fate will have it, let it grow; ---
Here spiring high; --- there cut, or trampled low.
No apter ornament can taste provide
T' embellish beauty, or defect to hide;
If train'd with care and undiscover'd skill,
Its just department in the scene to fill;
But with reserve and caution be it seen,
Nor e'er surrounded by the shaven green;
But in the foreground boldly let it rise,
Or join'd with other features meet the eyes:
The distant mansion, seen beneath its shade,
Is often advantageously display'd: ---
But here, once more, ye rural muses, weep
The ivy'd balustrades, and terrace steep;
Walls, mellow'd into harmony by time,
O'er which fantastic creepers us'd to climb;
While statues, labyrinths, and alleys, pent
Within their bounds, at least were innocent!
Our modern taste, alas! no limit knows: ---
O'er hill, o'er dale. Through woods and fields it flows;
Spreading o'er all its unprolific spawn,
In never-ending sheets of vapid dawn.

True composition all extremes rejects,
And just proportions still, of all, selects;
Wood, water, lawn, in just gradation joins,
And each with artful negligence combines:
But still in level, or slow-rising ground,
The wood should always be form th' exterior bound;
Not as a belt, encircling the domain,
Which the tir'd eye attempts to trace in vain;
But as a bolder outline to the scene
Than the unbroken turf's smooth even green.
But if some distant hill o'er all arise,
And mix its azure colours with the skies;
Or some near mountain its rough summits shew,
And bound with broken crags the Alpine view;
Or rise, with even slope and gradual swell,
Like the broad cone, or wide-extended bell; ---
Never attempt, presumptuous, to o'erspread
With starv'd plantations its bleak, barren head:
Nature herself the rash design withstands,
And guards her wilds from innovating hands;
Which, if successful, only would disgrace
Her giant limbs with fripp'ry, fringe, and lace . . .

The cover'd seat, that shelters from the storm,
May oft a feature in the Landscape form;
Whether compos'd of native stumps and roots,
It spreads the creeper's rich fantastic shoots;
Or, rais'd with stones, irregularly pil'd,
It seems some cavern, desolate and wild:

But still of dress and ornament beware;
And hide each formal trace of art with care:
Let clust'ring ivy o'er its sides be spread,
And moss and weeds grow scatter'd o'er its head.

The stately arch, high-rais'd with massive stone;
The pond'rous flag, that forms a bridge alone;
The prostrate tree, or rudely propt-up beam,
That leads the path across the foaming stream;
May each the scene with diff'rent beauty grace,
If shewn with judgment in its proper place.
But false refinement vainly strives to please,
Within the thin, fragile bridge of the Chinese;
Light and fantastical, yet stiff and prim,
The child of barren fancy turn'd to whim . . .

The quarry long neglected, and o'ergrown
With thorns, that hang o'er mould'ring beds of stone,
May oft the place of nat'ral rocks supply, And frame the verdant
picture to the eye; Or, closing round the solitary seat,
Charm with the simple scene of calm retreat.

Large stems of trees, and branches spreading wide,
May oft adorn the scenes which they divide;
For pond'rous masses, and deep shadows near,
Will shew the distant scene more bright and clear;
And forms distinctly mark'd, at once supply
A scale of magnitude and harmony;
From which receding gradually away,
The tints grow fainter and the lines decay.

The same effects may also be display'd
Through the high vaulted arch or colonnade: ---
But harsh and cold the builder's work appears,
Till soften'd down by long revolving years;
Till time and weather have conjointly spread
Their mould'ring hues and mosses o'er its head.

Bless'd is the man, in whose sequester'd glade,
Some ancient abbey's walls diffuse their shade;
With mould'ring windows pierc'd, and turrets crown'd,
And pinnacles with clinging ivy bound.

Bless'd too is he, who, 'midst his tufted trees,
Some ruin'd castle's lofty towers sees;
Imbosom'd high upon the mountain's brow,
Or nodding o'er the stream that glides below.

Nor yet unenvy'd, to whose humbler lot
Falls the retir'd and antiquated cot; ---
Its roof with weeds and mosses cover'd o'er,
And honeysuckles climbing round the door;
While mantling vines along its walls are spread,
And clust'ring ivy decks the chimney's head.

from *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (1805)

As all the pleasures of intellect arise from the association of ideas, the more the materials of association are multiplied, the more will the sphere of these pleasures be enlarged. To a mind richly stored, almost every object of nature or art, that presents itself to the senses, either excites fresh trains and combinations of ideas, or vivifies and strengthens those which existed before: so that recollection enhances enjoyment, and enjoyment brightens recollection. Every insect, plant, or fossil, which the peasant treads upon unheeded, is, to the naturalist and philosopher, a subject of curious inquiry and speculation, --- first, as to its structure, formation, or means of existence or propagation; --- and then, as to its comparative degree, or mode of connection with others of the same or different kinds; and the respective ranks and situations, which they all severally hold in the graduated system of created beings. To the eye of the uninformed observer, the sublime spectacle of the heavens presents nothing but a blue vault bespangled with twinkling fires: but, to the learned and enlightened, it displays unnumbered worlds, distributed through the boundless variety of unmeasurable space; and peopled, perhaps, with different orders of intelligent beings, ascending, in an uninterrupted scale of gradation from the lowest dregs of animated matter to the incomprehensible throne of Omnipotence itself ...

To descend into a still lower and more confined sphere, let us apply this principle to the subjects of our present inquiry; and we shall find that much of the pleasure, which we receive from painting, sculpture, music, poetry, &c., arises from our associating other ideas with those immediately excited by them. Hence the productions of these arts are never thoroughly enjoyed but by persons, whose minds are enriched by a variety of kindred and corresponding imagery; the extent and compass of which, allowing for different degrees of sensibility, and habits of attention, will form the scale of such enjoyment. Nor are the gratifications, which such persons receive from these arts limited to their mere productions, but extended to every object in nature or circumstance in society, that is at all connected with them: for, by such connection, it will be enabled to excite similar or associated trains of ideas, in minds so enriched, and consequently to afford them similar pleasures.

Of this description are the objects and circumstances called *picturesque*: for, except in the instances, before explained, of pleasing effects of colour, light, and shadow, they afford no pleasure, but to persons conversant with the art of painting, and sufficiently skilled in it to distinguish, and be really delighted with its real excellences. To all others, how acute soever may be their discernment, or how exquisite soever their sensibility, it is utterly imperceptible: consequently there must be some properties in the fine productions of this art, which, by the association of ideas, communicate the power of pleasing to certain objects and circumstances of its imitation, which are therefore called picturesque

...

The sensual pleasure arising from viewing objects and compositions, which we call picturesque, may be felt equally by all mankind in proportion to the correctness and sensibility of their organs of sight; for it is wholly independent of their being picturesque, or *after the manner of painters*. But this very relation to painting, expressed by the word *picturesque*, is that, which affords the whole pleasure derived from association; which can, therefore, only be felt by persons, who have correspondent ideas to associate; that is, by persons in a certain degree conversant with that art. Such persons being in the habit of viewing, and receiving pleasure from fine pictures, will naturally feel pleasure in viewing those objects in nature, which have called forth those powers of imitation and embellishment; and those combinations and circumstances of objects, which have guided those powers in their happiest exertions. The objects recall to the mind the imitations, which skill, taste, and genius have produced; and these again recall to the mind the objects themselves, and show them through an improved medium - the feeling and discernment of a great artist.

By thus comparing nature and art, both the eye and the intellect acquire a higher relish for the productions of each; and the ideas, excited by both, are invigorated, as well as refined, by being thus associated and contrasted. The pleasures of vision acquire a wider range, and find endless gratifications, at once exquisite and innocent, in all the variety of productions, whether animal, vegetable, or mineral, which nature has scattered over the earth. All display beauty in some combinations or others; and when that beauty has been selected, imitated, and embellished by art, those, who before overlooked or neglected it, discern at once all its charms through this

discriminating medium; and when the sentiment, which it excited, was new to them, they called those appearances of things, which excited it, by a new name, *picturesque*: --- a word, that is now become extremely common and familiar in our own tongue; and which, like all other foreign words, that are become so, is very frequently employed improperly.

The skilful painter, like the skilful poet, passes slightly over those parts of his subject, which neither the compass of his art, nor the nature of his materials, allow him to represent with advantage; and employs all his labour and attention upon those, which he can adorn and embellish. These are the *picturesque* parts; that is, those which nature has formed in the style and manner appropriate to painting; and the eye, that has been accustomed to see these happily displayed and embellished by art, will relish them more in nature; as a person conversant with the writings of Theocritus and Virgil will relish pastoral scenery more than one unacquainted with such poetry. The spectator, having his mind enriched with the embellishments of the painter and the poet, applies them, by the spontaneous association of ideas, to the natural objects presented to his eye, which thus acquire ideal and imaginary beauties; that is, beauties, which are not felt by the organic sense of vision; but by the intellect and imagination through that sense.