Uvedale Price (1747ˉ1829)

It was to Price that Knight dedicated and addressed *The Landscape,* which appeared a few months before Price's *Essay on the Picturesque.* There was much in common between the two friends and they shared an enthusiasm for picturesque gardening and its inspiration from painting. What separates them may be gathered, as Humphry Repton suggested, from their respective gardens: Knight's Downton Vale (Plate 97) realized his cherished visions of Rosa in an `awful precipice' and the `wild but pleasant horrors' of its valley; Price's place at Foxley (Plate 98), although romantically situated, admitted `some little sacrifice of picturesque beauty to neatness, near the house'. Price was accordingly more flexible than his friend. He was also more committed to making the picturesque aesthetic precise and definite. He chose to distinguish it from Burke's categories of the beautiful and the sublime, as the extracts here show, but this argument was not without its awkwardnesses; one reason that he encountered difficulties was because, unlike Knight's *Analytical Inquiry,* he chose to find the quality of beauty or the picturesque or sublime in the object rather than in the spectator's eye and imagination.

from *An Essay on the Picturesque* (1794)

We are therefore to profit by the experience contained in pictures, but not to content ourselves with that experience only; nor are we to consider even those of the highest class as absolute and infallible standards, but as the best and only ones we have; as compositions, which, like those of the great classical authors, have been consecrated by long uninterrupted admiration, and which therefore have a similar claim to influence our judgment, and to form our taste in all that is within their province. These are the reasons for studying *copies* of nature, though the *original* is before us, that we may not lose the benefit of what is of such great moment in all arts and sciences, the accumulated experience of past ages; and, with respect to the art of improving, we may look upon pictures as a set of experiments of the different ways in which trees, buildings, water, &c. may be disposed, grouped, and accompanied in the most beautiful and striking manner, and in every style, from the most simple and rural to the grandest and most ornamental: many of those objects, that are scarcely marked as they lie scattered over the face of nature, when brought together in the compass of a small space of canvas, are forcibly impressed upon the eye, which by that means learns how to separate, to select, and combine ...

No one, I believe, has yet been daring enough to improve a picture of Claude, or at least to acknowledge it; but I do not think it extravagant to suppose that a man, thoroughly persuaded, from his own taste, and from the authority of such a writer as Mr. Walpole, that an art, unknown to every age and climate, that of creating landscapes, had advanced with master-steps to vigorous perfection; that enough had been done to establish such a school of landscape as cannot be found in the rest of the globe; and that Milton's description of Paradise seems to have been copied from some piece of modern gardening; --- that such a man, full of enthusiasm for this new art, and with little veneration for that of painting, should chuse to shew the world what Claude might have been, had he had the advantage of seeing the works of Mr. Brown. The only difference he would make between improving a picture and a real scene, would be that of employing a painter instead of a gardener.

What would more immediately strike him would be the total want of that leading feature of all modern improvements, the clump; and of course he would order several of them to be placed in the most conspicuous spots, with, perhaps, here and there a patch of larches, as forming a strong contrast, in shape and colour, to the Scotch firs. --- His eye, which had been used to see even the natural groupes of trees in improved places made as separate and clump-like as possible, would be shocked to see those of Claude, some quite surrounded, some half concealed by bushes and thickets; others standing alone, but, by means of those thickets, or of detached trees, connected with other groupes of various sizes and shapes. All this rubbish must be cleared away, the ground made every where quite smooth and level, and each groupe left

upon the grass perfectly distinct and separate. --- Having been accustomed to whiten all distant buildings, those of Claude, from the effect of his soft vapoury atmosphere, would appear to him too indistinct; the painter of course would be ordered to give them a smarter appearance, which might possibly be communicated to the nearer buildings also. --- Few modern houses or ornamental buildings are so placed among trees, and partially hid by them, as to conceal much of the skill of the architect, or the expence of the possessor; but in Claude, not only ruins, but temples and palaces, are often so mixed with trees, that the tops over-hang their balustrades, and the luxuriant branches shoot between the openings of their magnificent columns and porticos: as he would not suffer his own buildings to be so masked, neither would he those of Claude; and these luxuriant boughs, and all that obstructed a full view of them, the painter would be told to expunge, and carefully to restore the ornaments they had hid. --- The last finishing both to places and pictures is water: in Claude it partakes of the general softness and dressed appearance of his scenes, and the accompaniments have, perhaps, less of rudeness, than in any other master; yet, compared with those of a piece of made water, or of an improved river, his banks are perfectly savage; parts of them covered with trees and bushes that hang over the water; and near the edge of it tussucks of rushes, large stones, and stumps; the ground sometimes smooth, sometimes broken and abrupt, and seldom keeping, for a long space, the same level from the water: no curves that answer each other; no resemblance, in short, to what he had been used to admire; a few strokes of the painter's brush would reduce the bank on each side to one level, to one green; would make curve answer curve, without bush or tree to hinder the eye from enjoying the uniform smoothness and verdure, and from pursuing, without interruption, the continued sweep of these serpentine lines; --- a little cleaning and polishing of the fore-ground would give the last touches of improvement, and complete the picture.

There is not a person in the smallest degree conversant with painting, who would not, at the same time, be shocked and diverted at the black spots and the white spots, --- the naked water, --- the naked buildings, --- the scattered unconnected groupes of trees, and all the gross and glaring violations of every principle of the art; and yet this, without any exaggeration, is the method in which many scenes, worthy of Claude's pencil, have been improved. Is it then possible to imagine that the beauties of imitation should be so distinct from those of reality, nay, so completely at variance, that what disgraces and makes a picture ridiculous, should become ornamental when applied to nature ? ...

IT seems to me, that the neglect, which prevails in the works of modern improvers, of all that is picturesque, is owing to their exclusive attention to high polish and flowing lines, the charms of which they are so engaged in contemplating, as to make them overlook two of the most fruitful sources of human pleasure; the first, that great and universal source of pleasure, variety, whose power is independent of beauty, but without which even beauty itself soon ceases to please; the other, intricacy, a quality which, though distinct from variety, is so connected and blended with it, that the one can hardly exist without the other.

According to the idea I have formed of it, intricacy in landscape might be defined, that disposition of objects which, by a partial and uncertain concealment, excites and nourishes curiosity. Variety can hardly require a definition, though, from the practice of many layers-out of ground, one might suppose it did. Upon the whole, it appears to me, that as intricacy in the disposition, and variety in the forms, the tints, and the lights and shadows of objects, are the great characteristics of picturesque scenery; so monotony and baldness are the greatest defects of improved places ...

PICTURESQUENESS, therefore, appears to hold a station between beauty and sublimity; and on that account, perhaps, is more frequently and more happily blended with them both than they are with each other. It is, however, perfectly distinct from either; and first, with respect to beauty, it is evident, from all that has been said, that they are founded on very opposite qualities; the one on smoothness, the other on roughness; --- the one on gradual, the other on sudden variation; --- the one on ideas of youth and freshness, the other on that of age, and even of decay ...

These are the principal circumstances by which the picturesque is separated from the beautiful. It is equally distinct from the sublime; for though there are some qualities common to them both, yet they differ in many essential points, and proceed from very different causes. In the first place, greatness of dimension is a powerful cause of the sublime; the picturesque has no connection with dimension of

any kind (in which it differs from the beautiful also) and is as often found in the smallest as in the largest objects. --- The sublime being founded on principles of awe and terror, never descends to any thing light or playful; the picturesque, whose characteristics are intricacy and variety, is equally adapted to the grandest and to the gayest scenery. --- Infinity is one of the most efficient causes of the sublime; the boundless ocean, for that reason, inspires awful sensations: to give it picturesqueness you must destroy that cause of its sublimity; for it is on the shape and disposition of its boundaries that the picturesque in great measure must depend.

Uniformity (which is so great an enemy to the picturesque) is not only compatible with the sublime, but often the cause of it. That general equal gloom which is spread over all nature before a storm, with the stillness so nobly described by Shakespear, is in the highest degree sublime. The picturesque requires greater variety, and does not shew itself till the dreadful thunder has rent the region, has tossed the clouds into a thousand towering forms, and opened (as it were) the recesses of the sky. A blaze of light unmixed with shade, on the same principles, tends to the sublime only: Milton has placed light, in its most glorious brightness, as an inaccessible barrier round the throne of the Almighty:

For God is light,
And never but in unapproached light
Dwelt from eternity.

And such is the power he has given even to its diminished splendor,

That the brightest seraphim
Approach not, but with both wings veil their eyes.

In one place, indeed, he has introduced very picturesque circumstances in his sublime representation of the deity; but it is of the deity in wrath, --- it is when from the weakness and narrowness of our conceptions we give the names and the effects of our passions to the all-perfect Creator:

And clouds began
To darken all the hill, and smoke to roll
In dusky wreaths reluctant flames, the sign
Of wrath awk'd.

In general, however, where the glory, power, or majesty of God are represented, he has avoided that variety of form and of colouring which might take off from simple and uniform grandeur, and has encompassed the divine essence with unapproached light, or with the majesty of darkness.

Again, (if we descend to earth) a perpendicular rock of vast bulk and height, though bare and unbroken, --- a deep chasm under the same circumstances, are objects that produce awful sensations; but without some variety and intricacy, either in themselves or their accompaniments, they will not be picturesque. --- Lastly, a most essential difference between the two characters is, that the sublime by its solemnity takes off from the loveliness of beauty, whereas the picturesque renders it more captivating.

According to Mr. Burke, the passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature,* when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended with some degree of horror: the sublime also, being founded on ideas of pain and terror, like them operates by stretching the fibres beyond their natural tone. The passion excited by beauty is love and complacency; it acts by relaxing the fibres somewhat below their natural tone, and this is accompanied by an inward sense of melting and languor.

Whether this account of the effects of sublimity and beauty be strictly philosophical, has, I believe, been questioned, but whether the fibres, in such cases, are really stretched or relaxed, it presents a lively image

of the sensations often produced by love and astonishment. To pursue the same train of ideas, I may add, that the effect of the picturesque is curiosity; an effect which, though less splendid and powerful, has a more general influence; it neither relaxes nor violently stretches the fibres, but by its active agency keeps them to their full tone, and thus, when mixed with either of the other characters, corrects the langour of beauty, or the horror of sublimity. But as the nature of every corrective must be to take off from the peculiar effect of what it is to correct, so does the picturesque when united to either of the others. It is the coquetry of nature; it makes beauty more amusing, more varied, more playful, but also,

> "Less winning soft, less amiably mild."

Again, by its variety, its intricacy, its partial concealments, it excites that active curiosity which gives play to the mind, loosening those iron bonds with which astonishment chains up its faculties.

Where characters, however distinct in their nature, are perpetually mixed together in such various degrees and manners, it is not always easy to draw the exact line of separation: I think, however, we may conclude, that where an object, or a set of objects, is without smoothness or grandeur, but from its intricacy, its sudden and irregular deviations, its variety of forms, tints, and lights and shadows, is interesting to a cultivated eye, it is simply picturesque; such, for instance, are the rough banks that often enclose a bye-road or a hollow lane: Imagine the size of these banks and the space between them to be increased till the lane becomes a deep dell, --- the coves large caverns, --- the peeping stones hanging rocks, so that the whole may impress an idea of awe and grandeur; --- the sublime will then be mixed with the picturesque, though the scale only, not the style of the scenery, would be changed. On the other hand, if parts of the banks were smooth and gently sloping, --- or the middle space a soft close-bitten turf, --- or if a gentle stream passed between them, whose clear unbroken surface reflected all their varieties, --- the beautiful and the picturesque, by means of that softness and smoothness, would then be united.