

Joseph Warton (1722--1800)

An intriguingly early glimpse of the reaction against the landscape garden, Warton's poem, *The Enthusiast*, subtitled *The Lover of Nature*, rejects the artifice of a garden like Stowe and opts for the wilder countryside beyond the ha-ha. Warton was something of a radical in matters of literary as well as gardenist taste: his essays on Pope, published in instalments in 1756 and 1782, argued that the more exuberant genius of Thomas Gray's *The Bard* touched deeper chords of the imagination than Pope's poetry. The attitudes of *The Enthusiast* anticipate those literary skepticisms about English Augustanism; like Gray's bard, he claims to prefer 'some Pine-topt Precipice' to a landscape designed by William Kent. Ironically, Warton's sense of 'real' nature outside a garden is derived substantially from paintings, notably by artists like Salvator Rosa, and from landscapes like the gorge of the Anio, or Aniene, or Tivoli (Plate 78), both of which provided inspiration for the landscape garden.

From *The Enthusiast* (1744)

YE green-rob'd *Dryads*, oft' at dusky Eve
By wondering Shepherds seen, to Forests brown,
To unfrequented Meads, and pathless Wilds,
Lead me from Gardens deckt with Art's vain Pomps.
Can gilt Alcoves, can Marble-mimic Gods,
Parterres embroider'd, Obelisks, and Urns
Of high Relief; can the long, spreading Lake,
Or Vista lessening to the Sight; can *Stow*
With all her *Attic* Fanes, such Raptures raise,
As the Thrush-haunted Copse, where lightly leaps
The fearful Fawn the rustling Leaves along,
And the brisk Squirrel sports from Bough to Bough,
While from an hollow Oak the busy Bees
Hum drowsy Lullabies ? The Bards of old,
Fair Nature's Friends, sought such Retreats, to charm
Sweet *Echo* with their Songs; oft' too they met,
In Summer Evenings, near sequester'd Bow'rs,
Or Mountain-Nymph, or Muse, and eager learnt
The moral Strains she taught to mend Mankind.
As to a secret Grot *AEgeria* stole
With Patriot *Numa*, and in silent Night
Whisper'd him sacred Laws, he list'ning sat
Rapt with her virtuous Voice, old *Tyber* leant
Attentive on his Urn, and husht his Waves.

Rich in her weeping Country's Spoils *Versailles*
May boast a thousand Fountains, that can cast
The tortured Waters to the distant Heav'ns;
Yet let me choose some Pine-topt Precipice
Abrupt and shaggy, whence a foamy Stream,
Like *Anio*, tumbling roars; or some bleak Heath,
Where straggl'ing stand the mournful Juniper,
Or Yew-tree scath'd; while in clear Prospect round,
From the Grove's Bosom Spires emerge, and Smoak
In bluish Wreaths ascends, ripe Harvests wave,

Herds low, and Straw-rooft Cott's appear, and Streams
Beneath the Sun-beams twinkle --- The shrill Lark,
That wakes the Wood-man to his early Task,
Or love-sick *Philomel*, whose luscious Lays
Sooth lone Night-wanderers, the moaning Dove,
Pitied by listening Milkmaid, far excell
The deep mouth'd Viol, the Soul-lulling Lute,
And Battle-breathing Trumpet. Artful Sounds!
That please not like the Choristers of Air,
When first they hail th' Approach of laughing *May*.
[Can Kent design like Nature? Mark where Thames
Plenty and pleasure pours through Lincoln's meads;
Can the great artist, though with taste supreme
Endued, one beauty to this Eden add?
Though he, by rules unfetter'd, boldly scorns
Formality and Method, round and square
Disdaining, plans irregularly great.]
Creative *Titian*, can thy vivid Strokes,
Or thine, O graceful *Raphael*, dare to vie
With the rich Tints that paint the breathing Mead?
The thousand-colour'd Tulip, Violet's Bell
Snow-clad and meek, the Vermil-tinctur'd Rose,
And golden Crocus?

[*Note*: The lines above within square brackets were added in later editions.]