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978-1-108-06678-5 - An Essay upon Prints: Containing Remarks upon the
Principles of Picturesque Beauty
William Gilpin
Frontmatter
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From the middle of the eighteenth century, with the growth of travel at home and abroad and the increase in leisure for the wealthier classes, the arts became the subject of more widespread appreciation and discussion. The rapid expansion of book and periodical publishing in this area both reflected and encouraged interest in art and art history among the wider reading public. This series throws light on the development of visual culture and aesthetics. It covers topics from the Grand Tour to the great exhibitions of the nineteenth century, and includes art criticism and biography.

An Essay upon Prints

Clergyman, schoolmaster and writer on aesthetics, William Gilpin (1724–1804) is best known for his works on the picturesque. His approach as a teacher was enlightened: during his time as headmaster of Cheam School, his aim was to prepare his pupils for life. Moving in 1777 to become vicar of Boldre, Hampshire, where he remained for the rest of his life, he was able to endow two schools there with income from his successful writings. This knowledgeable appraisal of the print as an art form, and of its foremost practitioners, was first published anonymously in 1768 to positive reviews. It defines picturesque as ‘a term expressive of that peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture’. Gilpin further developed and explored the concept in his volumes of *Observations* on various parts of Britain, which are also reissued in this series.

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An Essay upon Prints

*Containing Remarks upon
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WILLIAM GILPIN



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A N
 E S S A Y
 U P O N
 P R I N T S,
 C O N T A I N I N G
 Remarks upon the Principles of pic-
 turesque Beauty,
 T H E
 Different Kinds of Prints,
 A N D T H E
 Characters of the most noted Masters;
 I L L U S T R A T E D B Y
 Criticisms upon particular Pieces;
 To which are added,
 Some Cautions that may be useful in
 collecting Prints

*Artificumque manus inter se, operumque labores
 Miramur. Æn. 1. 459.*

L O N D O N:

Printed for J. ROBSON, Bookseller to the
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 in New Bond Street.

M D C C L X V I I I.

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[i]

T H E
P R E F A C E.

*NOTwithstanding the following work,
a few additions excepted, hath lain
by the author at least fifteen years, it
is very far from being so perfect, as he
could have wished: any new lights
therefore, and information, he will be
glad to receive, through the hands of*
a 2 *his*

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ii The P R E F A C E.

his bookseller. In many things he fears he may have passed wrong judgments; and in some points, he hath not had all the means of information, which he could have desired: for as he hath taken nothing upon trust, with regard to the characters of masters, he sometimes wanted the opportunity he wished for, of consulting their works.

Since his work was printed, the author hath seen a Dictionary of engravers, ancient and modern, in three volumes, published by F. BASAN, engraver at Paris; which seems to be accurate; and might in some points have been of service to him. It contains a very numerous catalogue of engravers, the more eminent of whom only
are

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The P R E F A C E. iii

are taken notice of in the following pages. Of modern prints the author hath purposely said little; declining generally to give his opinion of living artists.

He thought it necessary to introduce his work by a few observations on the principles of painting, as far as those principles can be applied to prints. As these observations are not always new, he hath endeavoured, at least, to make them concise.

In his account of artists he hath paid some attention to chronology; but has, in many cases, purposely neglected it, with a view of bringing those masters together, whose manners are alike.

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iv The P R E F A C E.

The chapter containing criticisms on particular prints, is an addition to his original plan. He was advised to insert something of this kind, as an illustration of his principles.

N. B. When the figures on the *right side* are spoken of, those are meant, which are *opposite* to the spectator's right : and so of the *left*.

Explanation

[1]

Explanation of Terms.

Composition, in its *large* sense, means a picture in general : in its *limited* one, the art of grouping figures, and combining the parts of a picture. In this latter sense it is synonymous with *disposition*.

Design, in its strict sense, applied chiefly to *drawing* : in its more enlarged one, defined page 3. In its most enlarged one, sometimes taken for a picture in general.

A whole : The idea of *one* object, which a picture should give in its comprehensive view.

a 4

Expression :

2 *Explanation of Terms.*

Expression : its strict meaning defined page 24 : but it often means the force, by which objects of *any* kind are represented.

Effect arises chiefly from the management of light ; but the word is sometimes applied to the general view of a picture.

Spirit, in its strict sense, defined p. 34. but it is sometimes taken in a more enlarged one, and means the *general* effect of a masterly performance.

Manner, synonymous with *execution*.

Picturesque : a term expressive of that peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture.

Picturesque

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Explanation of Terms. 3

Picturesque grace: an agreeable form given, in a picture, to a clownish figure.

Repose, or *quietness* applied to a picture, when the *whole* is harmonious; when nothing glares either in the light, shade, or colouring.

To *keep down*, *take down*, or *bring down*, signify throwing a degree of shade upon glaring light.

A middle tint, a medium between a strong light, and strong shade: the phrase is not at all expressive of colour.

Catching lights: strong lights, which strike upon some particular parts of an object, the rest of which is in shadow.

Studies

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4 *Explanation of Terms.*

Studies, the scetched ideas of a painter,
not wrought into a whole.

Freedom, the result of quick execu-
tion.

Extremities, hands and feet.

Air, expresses chiefly the graceful
action of the head; but often
means a graceful attitude.

Contrast, the opposition of one part
to another.

T H E

T H E
C O N T E N T S.

C H A P. I.

*The principles of painting considered,
as far as they relate to prints.*

C H A P. II.

*Observations on the different kinds
of prints.*

C H A P. III.

Characters of the most noted masters.

C H A P. IV.

Remarks on particular prints.

C H A P. V.

Cautions in collecting prints.