

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06708-9 - A Letter to H. Repton, Esq., on the Application of the Practice as Well as the Principles of Landscape-Painting to Landscape-Gardening: Intended as a Supplement to the Essay on the Picturesque

Uvedale Price

Excerpt

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A

LETTER

TO

UVEDALE PRICE, Esq.

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A.

LETTER, &c.

SIR,

¶ AM much obliged by your attention, in having directed your bookseller to fend me an early copy of your ingenious work. It has been my companion during a long journey, and has furnished me with entertainment, similar to that which I have occasionally had the honour to experience, from your animated conversation on the subject. In the general principles and theory of the art, which you have considered with so much attention, I flatter myself that we agree; and that our difference of opinion relates only to the propriety, or, perhaps, possibility, of reducing them to practice.

B 2

I am

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[4]

I am obliged both to Mr. Knight, and to yourself, for mentioning my name as an exception* to the tasteless herd of Mr. Brown's followers. But while you are pleased to allow me some of the qualities necessary to my profession, you suppose me deficient in others, and therefore strongly recommend the study of "what the higher " artists have done, both in their pictures " and drawings:" a branch of knowledge which I have always considered to be not less essential to my profession than hydraulics or surveying; and without which I should never have presumed to arrogate to myself, the title of "*Landscape Gardener*," which you observe is, "*a title of no small pretension.*"

* Should the new system of improving, "by neglect and " accident," ever prevail so far as to render this beautiful kingdom one huge picturesque forest, I doubt whether such mention of my name may not be attributed to the same delicate motives which you so ingeniously assign in excuse for Mr. Mason's praise of Brown.

It

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[5]

It is difficult to define GOOD TASTE in any of the polite arts; and amongst the respective professors of them, I am sorry to observe that it is seldom allowed in a rival; while those who are not professors, but, being free from the business or dissipation of life, have found leisure to excel in any one of these arts, generally find time also to cultivate the others; and because there really does exist some affinity betwixt them, they are apt to suppose it still greater.*

During the pleasant hours we passed together amidst the romantic scenery of the Wye, I do remember my acknowledging that an enthusiasm for the picturesque, had

* Thus *Music* and *Poetry* are often coupled together, although very few instances occur in which they are made to assimilate; because the melody of an air is seldom adapted either to the rhyme or measure of the verse. In like manner, *Poetry* and *Painting* are often joined; but the canvas rarely embodies those figurative personages to advantage, which the poet's enthusiasm presents to the reader's imagination.

originally

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[6]

originally led me to fancy greater affinity betwixt *Painting* and *Gardening*, than I found to exist after more mature consideration, and more practical experience; because, *in whatever relates to man, propriety and convenience are not less objects of good taste, than picturesque effect*; and a beautiful garden scene is not more defective because it would not look well on canvas, than a didactic poem because it neither furnishes a subject for the painter or the musician. There are a thousand scenes in nature to delight the eye, besides those which may be copied as pictures; and indeed one of the keenest observers of picturesque scenery (Mr. Gilpin), has often regretted that few are capable of being so represented, without considerable license and alteration.

If therefore the painter's landscape be indispensable to the perfection of gardening,

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[7]

ing, it would surely be far better to paint it on canvas at the end of an avenue, as they do in Holland, than to sacrifice the health, cheerfulness, and comfort of a country residence, to the wild but pleasing scenery of a painter's imagination.

There is no exercise so pleasing to the inquisitive mind, as that of deducing theories and systems from favourite opinions: I was therefore peculiarly interested and gratified by your ingenious distinction betwixt the beautiful and the picturesque; but I cannot admit the propriety of its application to landscape gardening; because beauty, and not "picturesqueness," is the chief object of modern improvement: for although some nurserymen, or labourers in the kitchen garden, may have badly copied Mr. Brown's manner, yet the unprejudiced eye will discover innumerable beauties in the works
of

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[8]

of that great self-taught master: and since you have so judiciously marked the distinction betwixt the *beautiful* and the *picturesque*, they will perhaps discover, that, where the habitation and convenience of man can be improved by *beauty*, “*picture-resplendence*” may be transferred to the ragged gipfy, with whom “the wild ass, the Pomeranian dog, and shaggy goat” are more in harmony, than “the fleck-coated horse,” or the dappled deer,* which have never till lately been discovered, when “in groups, to be meagre and spotty.”

Amidst the severity of your satire on Mr. Brown and his followers, I cannot be ignorant that many pages are directly pointed at my opinions; although with more delicacy than your friend Mr. Knight

* The continual moving and lively agitation observable in herds of deer, is one of the circumstances which painting cannot represent; but it is not less an object of beauty and cheerfulness in park scenery.

has

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[9]

has shewn, in the attempt to make me an object of ridicule, by misquoting my unpublished MSS.

It is the misfortune of every liberal art to find amongst its professors some men of uncouth manners; and since my profession has more frequently been practised by mere day labourers, and persons of no education, it is the more difficult to give it that rank amongst the polite arts, which I conceive it ought to hold. Yet it is now become my duty to support its respectability, since you attack the very existence of that profession, at the head of which, both you and Mr. Knight have the goodness to say that I am deservedly placed.

Your new theory of deducing *landscape gardening* from *painting* is so plausible, that, like many other philosophic theories, it may captivate and mislead, unless duly examined by the test of experience and practice.

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[10]

practice. I cannot help feeling great affinity betwixt deducing gardening from the painter's studies of wild nature, and deducing government from the uncontrouled opinions of man in a savage state. The neatness, simplicity, and elegance of English gardening, have acquired the approbation of the present century, as the happy medium betwixt the wildness of nature and the stiffness of art; in the same manner as the English constitution is the happy medium betwixt the liberty of savages, and the restraint of despotic government; and so long as we enjoy the benefit of these middle degrees betwixt extremes of each, let experiments of untried theoretical improvement be made in some other country.

So far I have endeavoured to defend Mr. Brown with respect to the general principle of improvement. But it is necessary