I N T E R L U D E.

Bookseller. YOUR verses, Mr. Botanist, consist of *pure description,* I hope there is *sense* in the notes.

Poet. I am only a flower-painter, or occasionally attempt a landskip;[1] and leave the human figure with the subjects of history to abler artists.

B. It is well to know what subjects are within the limits of your pencil;[2] many have failed of success from the want of this self-knowledge. But pray tell me, what is the essential difference between Poetry and Prose? is it solely the melody or measure of the language?

P. I think not solely; for some prose has its melody, and even measure. And good verses, well spoken in a language unknown to the hearer, are not easily to be distinguished from good prose.

B. Is it the sublimity, beauty, or novelty of the sentiments?

P. Not so; for sublime sentiments are often better expressed in prose. Thus when Warwick in one of the plays of Shakespear, is left wounded on the field after the loss of the battle, and his friend says to him, "Oh, could you but fly!" what can be more sublime than his answer, "Why then, I would not fly."[3] No measure of verse, I imagine, could add dignity to this sentiment. And it would be easy to select examples of the beautiful or new from prose writers, which I suppose no measure of verse could improve.

B. In what then consists the essential difference between Poetry and Prose?

P. Next to the measure of the language, the principal distinction appears to me to consist in this: that Poetry admits of but few words expressive of very abstracted ideas, whereas Prose abounds with them. And as our ideas derived from visible objects are more distinct than those derived from the objects of our other senses, the words expressive of these ideas belonging to vision make up the principal part of poetic language. That is, the Poet writes princi-

pally to the eye, the Prose-writer use more abstracted terms. Mr. Pope has written a bad verse in the Windsor Forest:

"And Kennet swift for silver Eels *renown'd.*"[4]

The word renown'd does not present the idea of a visible object to the mind, and is thence prosaic. But change this line thus,

"And Kennet swift, where silver Graylings *play.*"

and it becomes poetry, because the scenery is then brought before the eye.

B. This may be done in prose.

P. And when it is done in a single word, it animates the prose; so it is more agreeable to read in Mr. Gibbon's History, "Germany was at this time *over-shadowed* with extensive forests;"[5] than Germany was at this time *full* of extensive forests. But where this mode of expression occurs too frequently, the prose approaches to poetry: and in graver works, where we expect to be instructed rather than amused, it becomes tedious and impertinent. Some parts of Mr. Burke's[6] eloquent orations become intricate and enervated by superfluity of poetic ornament; which quantity of ornament would have been agreeable in a poem, where much ornament is expected.

B. Is then the office of Poetry only to amuse?

P. The Muses are young ladies, we expect to see them dressed; though not like some modern beauties with so much gauze and feather, that "the Lady herself is the least part of her."[7] There are however didactic pieces of poetry, which are much admired, as the Georgics of Virgil,[8] Mason's English Garden,[9] Hayley's Epistles;[10] nevertheless Science is best delivered in Prose, as its mode of reasoning is from stricter analogies than metaphors or similes.

B. Do not Personifications and Allegories distinguish poetry?

P. These are other arts of bringing objects before the eye; or of expressing sentiments in the language of vision; and are indeed better suited to the pen than the pencil.

B. That is strange, when you have just said they are used to bring their objects before the eye.

P. In poetry the personification or allegoric figure is generally indistinct, and therefore does not strike us so forcibly as to make us attend to its improbability; but in painting, the figures being all

much more distinct, their improbability becomes apparent, and seizes our attention to it. Thus the person of Concealment is very indistinct, and therefore does not compel us to attend to its improbability, in the following beautiful lines of Shakespear:

" —— She never told her love;
But let Concealment, like a worm i' th' bud,
Feed on her damask cheek."—[11]

But in these lines below the person of Reason obtrudes itself into our company, and becomes disagreeable by its distinctness, and consequent improbability.

"To Reason I flew, and intreated her aid,
Who paused on my case, and each circumstance weigh'd;
Then gravely reply'd in return to my prayer,
That Hebe was fairest of all that were fair.
That's a truth, reply'd I, I've no need to be taught,
I came to you, Reason, to find out a fault.
If that's all, says Reason, return as you came,
To find fault with Hebe would forfeit my name."[12]

Allegoric figures are on this account in general less manageable in painting and in statuary than in poetry: and can seldom be introduced in the two former arts in company with natural figures, as is evident from the ridiculous effect of many of the paintings of Rubens in the Luxemburgh gallery;[13] and for this reason, because their improbability becomes more striking, when there are the figures of real persons by their side to compare them with.

Mrs. Angelica Kauffman,[14] well apprised of this circumstance, has introduced no mortal figures amongst her Cupids and her Graces. And the great Roubiliac,[15] in his unrivalled monument of Time and Fame struggling for the trophy of General Fleming,[16] has only hung up a medallion of the head of the hero of the piece. There are however some allegoric figures, which we have so often heard described or seen delineated, that we almost forget that they do not exist in common life; and hence view them without astonishment; as the figures of the heathen mythology, of angels, devils, death and time; and almost believe them to be realities, even when they are mixed with representations of the natural forms of man. Whence I conclude, that a certain degree of probability is necessary to prevent us from revolting with distaste from unnatural images; unless we are otherwise so much interested in the contemplation of them as not to perceive their improbability.

B. Is this reasoning about degrees of probability just?—When Sir Joshua Reynolds,[17] who is unequalled both in theory and practice of his art, and who is a great master of the pen as well as the pencil, has asserted in a discourse delivered to the Royal Academy, December 11, 1786, that "the higher styles of painting, like the higher kinds of the Drama, do not aim at any thing like deception; or have any expectation, that the spectators should think the events there represented are really passing before them." And he then accuses Mr. Fielding of bad judgement, when he attempts to compliment Mr. Garrick in one of his novels,[18] by introducing an ignorant man, mistaking the representation of a scene in Hamlet for a reality; and

thinks, because he was an ignorant man, he was less liable to make such a mistake.

P. It is a metaphysical question, and requires more attention than Sir Joshua has bestowed upon it.—You will allow, that we are perfectly deceived in our dreams; and that even in our waking reveries, we are often so much absorbed in the contemplation of what passes in our imaginations, that for a while we do not attend to the lapse of time or to our own locality; and thus suffer a similar kind of deception as in our dreams. That is, we believe things present before our eyes, which are not so.

There are two circumstances, which contribute to this compleat deception in our dreams. First, because in sleep the organs of sense are closed or inert, and hence the trains of ideas associated in our imaginations are never interrupted or dissevered by the irritations of external objects, and can not therefore be contrasted with our sensations. On this account, though we are affected with a variety of passions in our dreams, as anger, love, joy; yet we never experience surprize.—For surprize is only produced when any external irritations suddenly obtrude themselves, and dissever our passing trains of ideas.

Secondly, because in sleep there is a total suspension of our voluntary power, both over the muscles of our bodies, and the ideas of our minds; for we neither walk about, nor reason in compleat sleep. Hence, as the trains of ideas are passing in our imaginations in dreams, we cannot compare them with our previous knowledge of things, as we do in our waking hours; for this is a voluntary exertion; and thus we cannot perceive their incongruity.

Thus we are deprived in sleep of the only two means by which we can distinguish the trains of ideas passing in our imaginations, from those excited by our sensations; and are led by their vivacity to believe them to belong to the latter. For the vivacity of these trains of ideas, passing in the imagination, is greatly increased by the causes above-mentioned; that is, by their not being disturbed or dissevered either by the appulses[19] of external bodies, as in surprize; or by our voluntary exertions in comparing them with our previous knowledge of things, as in reasoning upon them.

B. Now to apply.

P. When by the art of the Painter or Poet a train of ideas is suggested to our imaginations, which interests us so much by the pain or pleasure it affords, that we cease to attend to the irritations of common external objects, and cease also to use any voluntary efforts to compare these interesting trains of ideas with our previous knowledge of things, a compleat reverie is produced: during which time, however short, if it be but for a moment, the objects themselves appear to exist before us. This, I think, has been called by an ingenious critic "the ideal presence" of such objects. (Elements of Criticism by Lord Kaimes).[20] And in respect to the compliment intended by Mr. Fielding to Mr. Garrick, it would seem that an ignorant Rustic at the play of Hamlet, who has some previous belief in the appearance of Ghosts, would sooner be liable to fall into reverie, and continue it longer, than who possessed more know-

ledge of the real nature of things, and had a greater facility of exercising his reason.

B. It must require great art in the Painter or Poet to produce this kind of deception?[21]

P. The matter must be interesting from its sublimity, beauty, or novelty; this is the scientific part; and the art consists in bringing these distinctly before the eye, so as to produce (as above-mentioned) the ideal presence of the object, in which the great Shakespear particularly excells.

B. Then it is not of any consequence whether the representations correspond with nature?

P. Not if they so much interest the reader or spectator as to induce the reverie above described. Nature may be seen in the marketplace, or at the card-table; but we expect something more than this in the play-house or picture-room. The further the artis[t] recedes from nature, the greater novelty he is likely to produce; if he rises above nature, he produces the sublime; and beauty is probably a selection and new combination of her most agreeable parts. Yourself will be sensible of the truth of this doctrine by recollecting over

in your mind the works of three of our celebrated artists. Sir Joshua Reynolds has introduced sublimity even into its protraits; we admire the representation of persons, whose reality we should have passed by unnoticed. Mrs. Angela Kauffman attracts our eyes with beauty, which I suppose no where exists; certainly few Grecian faces are seen in this country. And the daring pencil of Fuseli[22] transports us beyond the boundaries of nature, and ravishes us with the charm of the most interesting novelty. And Shakespear, who excells in all these together, so far captivates the spectator, as to make him unmindful of every kind of violation of Time, Place, or Existence. As at the first appearance of the Ghost of Hamlet, "his ear must be dull as the fat weed, which roots itself on Lethe's brink,"[23] who can attend to the improbability of the exhibition. So in many scenes of the Tempest[24] we perpetually believe the action passing before our eyes, and relapse with somewhat of distaste into common life at the intervals of the representation.

B. I suppose a poet of less ability would find such great machinery difficult and cumbersome to manage?

P. Just so, we should be shocked at the apparent improbabilities. As in the gardens of a Scicilian nobleman, described in Mr. Brydone's[25] and in Mr. Swinburn's[26] travels, there are said to be six hundred statues of imaginary monsters, which so disgust the spectators, that the state had once a serious design of destroying them; and yet the very

improbable monsters in Ovid's Metamorphoses[27] have entertained the world for many centuries.

B. The monsters in your Botanic Garden, I hope, are of the latter kind?

P. The candid reader must determine.

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[1] Alternate spelling of landscape.

[2] A pencil or a fine tapered paintbrush as a symbol of artistic skill or style.

[3] Slightly misquoted from *Henry VI Part 3*, 5.2.34–5:

> Somerset: […] Ah, could'st thou fly—
> Warwick: Why, then, I would not fly.

The lines are actually in verse.

[4] Alexander Pope (1688–1744), *Windsor Forest* (1713), line 329: "The *Kennet* swift, for silver Eels renown'd". The river Kennet, a tributary of the Thames, is described among other rivers in this passage of the poem.

[5] Edward Gibbon (1737–1794), *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (6 vols., 1776–1788). ED refers to a passage in Vol. 1, Ch. 9: "In the time of Cæsar, the rein deer, as well as the elk, and the wild bull, was a native of the Hercynian forest, which then overshadowed a great part of Germany and Poland."

[6] Edmund Burke (1729/30–1797), author and politician who, as well as being famous for his ornate and dramatic speeches, wrote *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), and opposed both French and British radicalism in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).

[7] Ovid (43 BCE–17 CE), *Remedia Amoris* (lines 343–44): "Auferimur cultu; gemmis auroque teguntur / Omnia; pars minima est ipsa puella sui"; "We are won by dress; all is concealed by gems and gold; a woman is the least part of herself" (trans. J. H. Mozley, Loeb Classical Library).

[8] Virgil (70–19 BCE) composed his four-book poem *Georgics* over the years 36–29 BCE. It gives instruction on agriculture (including keeping cattle and bees) and presents the farmer's life as ideal.

[9] William Mason (1725–1797), poet and garden designer, published his poem *The English Garden* in four books over the years 1772 to 1781. It is a poem on landscape, art, and gardening, based on Virgil's *Georgics*. ED published an "Inscription for the Monument of the Rev. W. Mason" in the *Poetical Register for 1801* (1802), p. 139.

[10] William Hayley (1745–1820), poet and biographer, is best known for his poetry (most successfully, *The Triumphs of Temper* (1781)), his biographies of Milton (1796) and Cowper (1803), and his patronage of William Blake (1757–1827). ED met Hayley when he visited Derby in 1781, and wrote commendatory verses for *The Botanic Garden*, printed in Volume 1, *The Economy of Vegetation*, 1795, 1799 (see Appendix 1.5). ED refers to Hayley's series of poems, *A Poetical Epistle to an Eminent Painter* (George Romney) (1778); *An Essay on History; in Three Epistles to Edward Gibbon, Esq.* (1780); *An Essay on Epic Poetry, in Five Epistles to the Revd. Mr. Mason* (1782); and *An Essay on Sculpture: in a series of Epistles to John Flaxman* (1800).

[11] *Twelfth Night,* 2.4.122–24.

[12] From a song attributed to John West, first Earl de la Warr (1693–1766), politician and army officer. It was included in several collections of song lyrics, the earliest of which appears to be *The Merry Man's Companion* (1750, p. 107).

[13] Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), a leading figure of Baroque art, painted a cycle of 24 allegorical paintings on the life of Marie de Médicis (1573–1642), queen of France. She commissioned the paintings in 1622 and they were produced 1622–1625. They were displayed in the galleries of her recently built Luxembourg Palace. Many of the paintings depict allegorical personifications and classical gods and goddesses alongside the historical personages.

[14] Painter Angelica Kauffman (1741–1807) was born in Switzerland and spent many years in Italy before and after living in England from 1766 to 1782. She was one of the founders of the Royal Academy of Arts in 1768. As well as portrait and history painting, she depicted subjects from mythology and literature, and often chose sentimental themes. Her designs were used, and her style widely imitated, in the decorative arts. She collaborated with printmakers to reproduce and market her work. ED owned "4 or 5 prints of graces" by Kauffman (see King-Hele, ed., *Letters* 77-5). One of ED's fellow Lunar Society members, Matthew Boulton (1728–1809), reproduced a number of her classical pictures in a process called "mechanical painting": transferring an aquatint print to canvas then retouching by hand. (Aquatint is a method of etching on metal plates, through a porous ground of particles of resin, for an effect that imitates watercolour.) ED refers to Kauffman as "Mrs.": after an unfortunate 1767 marriage and quick separation, in 1781 she married Antonio Pietro Zucchi (1726–1795), a Venetian painter working in London, but arranged to keep her own name and wealth.

[15] Louis-François Roubiliac (1702–1762) was a French sculptor trained in the late Baroque mode who moved to England in 1730. He is best known for his portrait sculptures (of subjects from Isaac Newton to Alexander Pope) and monuments. His monuments to General Fleming (1754) and to General Wade (1750) in Westminster Abbey are both striking for their

dramatic composition. James Fleming (d. 1751) was a Major General; his monument features life-size renditions of Minerva and Hercules with a medallion portrait of Fleming above them. George Wade (1673–1748) was a Field Marshal; his monument shows Fame holding back Time, with a medallion portrait of Wade at their feet.

[16] 1791, 1794, 1799: "General Wade,"

[17] Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792) was President of the Royal Academy of Arts from its founding in 1768 until 1792. His *Discourses on Art* are publications of the addresses he gave at the Royal Academy Schools from 1769 through 1790. They were published individually after being delivered, then the first seven were published together in 1788, and all fifteen were collected, along with other writings, in 1797. ED refers to *A Discourse, Delivered to the Students of the Royal Academy on the Distribution of the Prizes, December 11, 1786*, the thirteenth discourse, published individually in 1786. The passage ED refers to is as follows: "The lower kind of Comedy, or Farce, like the inferior style of Painting, the more naturally it is represented, the better; but the higher, appears to me to aim no more at imitation, so far as it belongs to any thing like deception; or have any expectation that the spectators should think the events there represented, are really passing before them, than Raffaelle in his Cartoons, or Poussin in his Sacraments, expected you were to believe, even for a moment, that what they exhibited were real figures" (pp. 18–19). The Cartoons (c. 1515–1516) of Raphael (1483–1520) were a series of ten (seven surviving) large watercolors of biblical subjects which were designs for tapestries. The series *Seven Sacraments* (1648) by Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665) depicts the origins of the Christian sacraments, with an emphasis on the emotion of the individuals involved.

[18] Henry Fielding (1707–1754), known for originating the English comic novel. David Garrick (1717–1779), actor and playwright, was a major force in eighteenth-century English drama and manager of the Drury Lane theatre from 1747 to 1776. One of Reynolds's well-known paintings is *David Garrick Between Tragedy and Comedy* (1761). Reynolds writes in his 1786 *Discourse*, "Raffaelle is praised for naturalness and deception, which he certainly has not accomplished, and as certainly never intended; and our late great actor, Garrick, has been as ignorantly praised by his friend Fielding; who doubtless imagined he had hit upon an ingenious device, by introducing in one of his Novels, (otherwise a work of the highest merit,) an ignorant man, mistaking Garrick's representation of a scene in Hamlet, for reality. A very little reflection will convince us, that there is not one circumstance in the whole scene that is of the nature of deception. The merit and excellence of Shakespear, and of Garrick, when they were engaged in such scenes, is of a different and much higher kind. But what adds to the falsity of this intended compliment, is, that the best stage

representation, appears even more unnatural to a person of such a character, who is supposed never to have seen a play before, than it does to those who have had a habit of allowing for those necessary deviations from nature which the Art requires" (pp. 19–20). The episode Reynolds refers to is from Book 8, Chapter 5 of Fielding's *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (1749).

[19] An energetic motion toward or against something.

[20] Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696–1782), judge and writer, published *Elements of Criticism* in three volumes in 1762. He describes "ideal presence" and distinguishes it from "real presence" in the chapter on "Emotions and Passions."

[21] In 1789, this and the following two remarks from the Bookseller do not end with question marks but rather with periods.

[22] Henry Fuseli (1741–1825) was a painter, writer, translator, and an ordained Zwinglian minister. Born in Zürich, he moved to England in 1764 and, apart from spending much of the 1770s in Rome, lived in London for the rest of his life. Among his best-known works are his illustrations of Shakespeare and *The Nightmare* (1782). *The Nightmare* features in *LOTP* III:51–78. ED met Fuseli on a trip to London in 1781 (*Life* 173). Fuseli was part of the Joseph Johnson circle and put ED in touch with Johnson in 1784 to discuss publishing *The Botanic Garden* (see King-Hele, ed., *Letters* 84-10). Fuseli designed several illustrations for ED's books: *The Fertilization of Egypt*, engraved by William Blake (1757–1827) and the frontispiece *Flora attired by the Elements*, for *The Economy of Vegetation*; *Tornado*, also engraved by Blake, for the 1795 edition of *The Economy of Vegetation*; and the frontispiece and three other illustrations for *The Temple of Nature* (1803).

[23] *Hamlet*, 1.5.39–40, spoken by the Ghost: "And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed / That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf".

[24] Play by Shakespeare, known for its elements of spectacle and magic.

[25] Patrick Brydone (1736–1818), Scottish traveller and author, visited Naples, Sicily, and Malta in the summer of 1770 and published *A Tour through Sicily and Malta* in 1773. Its observations on volcanoes and electricity earned Brydone election to the Royal Society. In Letter 22 of *A Tour*, he describes the palace of the Prince of Palagonia: "The amazing crowd of statues that surround his house, appear at a distance like a little army drawn up for its defence; but when you get amongst them, and every one assumes his true likeness, you imagine you have got into the regions of delusion and enchantment; for of all that immense group, there is not one made to represent any one object in nature; nor is the absurdity of the wretched imagination that created them less astonishing than its wonderful fertility. It would require a volume to describe the whole, and a sad volume indeed it would make. He has put the heads of men to the bodies of every sort of animal, and the heads of every other

animal to the bodies of men. Sometimes he makes a compound of five or six animals that have no sort of resemblance in nature" (Vol. 2, pp. 54–5). Brydone attests that the number of these statues "amount already to 600" (Vol. 2, p. 56). He does not mention any local disapproval; Brydone himself seems rather fascinated and amused, and opines that the prince "is perfectly innocent, and troubles nobody by the indulgence of his frenzy; on the contrary he gives bread to a vast number of statuaries and other workmen" (Vol. 2, p. 55).

[26] Henry Swinburne (1743–1803) is the author of works including *Travels through Spain in the Years 1775 and 1776* (1779) and *The Courts of Europe at the Close of the Last Century* (most notably describing the French court at the time of the Revolution) published posthumously in 1841. From 1777 to 1779, he and his family traveled in Naples and Sicily, and after a brief return to England, went back to Italy in 1780–1781. His *Travels in the Two Sicilies, 1777–1780* was published 1783–1785. (Sicily and the Mezzogiorno, or southern mainland Italy, are traditionally called the Two Sicilies, because they had, over their history, often been united.) In the first chapter on "Environs of Palermo," in Section 29, Swinburne describes the villa of Palagonia. Its "avenue three hundred yards long, not of cypresses, elms, or orange trees, but of monsters" leads to "a circular court before the house, crowded with stone and marble beings, not to be found in any books of zoology. Men, monsters and animals line the battlements of the mansion, and stand so thick, and in such menacing attitudes, that it would not be safe to approach in a windy day" (Vol. 2, pp. 214–15). Swinburne does not mention the state intending to destroy them but does remark that the statues "are luckily all made of so soft and perishable a stone, that we need be under no apprehensions of this collection passing to posterity as a monument of the taste of the eighteenth century. Many enormous noses and preposterous limbs have already crumbled to dust" (Vol. 2, p. 214). He does not indicate the number of statues but says the owner "had squandered away forty thousand pounds sterling in these creations; his family has often wanted clothes and victuals, while the prince was lavishing his revenue in providing a dinner in stone for non-entities" (Vol. 2, p. 216).

[27] *Metamorphoses*, composed c. 2–8 CE by Roman poet Ovid (43 BCE–17 CE), a collection of myths with an emphasis on shape-changing.