

The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature

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picturesque

a term which came into fashion in the late 18th cent., principally to describe a certain kind of scenery. Writers on the picturesque include W. Gilpin, W. Mason, William Payne Knight (1750-1824, who published *The Landscape* in 1794), Uvedale Price (1747-1829, who published *Essays on the Picturesque*, 1794), and the landscape gardener Humphry Repton (1752-1818). The impact of these writers on the sensibility and vocabulary of writers of the 19th cent. was considerable. The "picturesque", as defined by Price, was a new aesthetic category, to be added to Burke's recently established categories of the sublime and the beautiful; its attributes were roughness and irregularity, and its most complete exponent in terms of painting was Salvator Rosa; Mrs Radcliffe's works dwell frequently on the picturesque, and J. Austen and many of her characters were familiar with the works of Gilpin. The entertaining aesthetic disputes of Price and Knight are satirized in Peacock's *Headlong Hall*, and Combe's adventures of Dr Syntax are aimed at the movement in general and Gilpin in particular. The development of the picturesque movement into Romanticism is a subject of much complexity and literary interest.