

# UNIVERSITY *of* DETROIT

EXCERPT from the GRADUATE BULLETIN, 1935 - 1937

Page Nine



*Use of Theses and Thesis Materials.* The University of Detroit always encourages, and even urges, the use of theses, thesis materials, and term papers submitted to instructors or departments of the University in in partial fulfillment of the requirements for credit or degrees. Such use may be oral (before meetings or conventions) or through publication (periodicals, monographs, or books.) However, as such theses, thesis materials, and term papers become the property of the University once they are submitted, --- it is expected that the permission of the University be secured for such oral or printed use, and a suitable credit line arranged. This permission, and arrangement of credit line, should also be observed in the case of the publication of materials which the student intends to use later in partial fulfillment of the requirements for credit or degrees. Failure to observe such courtesy may be followed by the withdrawal of the credit or degree.

Application for the use of materials and arrangements mentioned must be made with the Graduate Office of the University of Detroit.

THE UNIVERSITY OF DETROIT

BLAIR'S RHETORIC IN RELATION TO  
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY AESTHETICS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY

117229

SIMON EDWARD BABEL

DETROIT, MICHIGAN

March, 1943

TEN  
B 115

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS OF BLAIR'S <u>RHETORIC</u> . . . . .	4
III. BLAIR'S CONCEPT OF BEAUTY . . . . .	19
IV. BLAIR'S CONCEPT OF THE SUBLIME . . . . .	28
V. BLAIR'S CONCEPT OF IMITATION . . . . .	35
VI. BLAIR'S CONCEPT OF TASTE . . . . .	41
VII. APPLICATIONS OF BLAIR'S CONCEPTS AND PARTICULAR LITERARY FORMS . . . . .	51
VIII. CONCLUSION . . . . .	62
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	67

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Hugh Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres<sup>1</sup> is a celebrated work which belongs to the realm of rhetoric. It was used widely as a guide and text in rhetorical study and intellectual discipline during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Blair's Rhetoric is a corpus of principles and opinions about literature which forms a suitable and desirable subject for rhetorical study. However, its point of view is one frequently assumed in literary criticism, namely, the rhetorical point of view, and its importance as a document in the history of eighteenth century literary criticism was undoubtedly great.

It is my purpose to view Blair's Rhetoric as a document in the history of literary criticism and as a representative eighteenth century treatment of literary problems. Most of the literary criticism of the eighteenth century revolves around the age's concept of Beauty, Sublimity, Imitation and Taste. If one can come to a knowledge of what the eighteenth century meant by these terms, understanding of their position in regard to literary criticism will follow.

1. Hugh Blair, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres. In succeeding references to Blair's work throughout this study, it will be referred to simply as Rhetoric. It will be understood that such references will be to Blair's Rhetoric in the edition noted in the bibliography.



Hence the specific purpose of this paper will be to consider Blair's Rhetoric as a representative treatment of literary matters against the background of eighteenth century thought and literary theory, to examine Blair's understanding and treatment of Beauty, Sublimity, Imitation and Taste, and to distinguish Blair's treatment of these terms and concepts for the purpose of discovering eighteenth century notions.

In order to accomplish these purposes effectively, it will be necessary to give the background of the term rhetoric and to show its relation to criticism and other matters involved in the eighteenth century discussions of literary problems. It will be necessary to examine the meaning of the term rhetoric and the problems involved in literary criticism. Blair's ideas will be examined in order to make understandable what the eighteenth century was doing with the rhetorical tradition of the ancients, and to find the influences shaping eighteenth century literary notions in order to find the problems regarded as chiefly important at this time.

It will be necessary to deal with Blair's notion and concept of Beauty. His treatment of the term in relation to eighteenth century notions will be considered. There will be an attempt to find what he meant by this term in order to get nearer to the solution of the critical problems of the time. Likewise, Sublimity, Imitation and Taste respectively will be treated in the same manner as Beauty.

In conclusion, on the basis of the matters considered, we should be able to come to some evaluation of the worth of

this eighteenth century development. We can determine how Blair represented this movement and whether or not he made valuable contributions to it. Eighteenth century literary criticism lacks definition. This failure of clarity in direction in eighteenth century criticism is partly due to the nature of some of its concepts. They are of a kind which defy clear-cut delineation. However, these concepts are of value and the fact must be faced that historically they were the factors shaping literary ideals. Blair's Rhetoric was an attempt to explain and organize these concepts into a single position or attitude toward literature, and, as such, this work deserves the study and attention of the student of literature.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS OF BLAIR'S RHETORIC

The Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres of Dr. Hugh Blair was first published at Edinburgh in 1783. One may not rest content with the bald circumstances of the title of this work, its author, and its time of publication; for it is only through a consideration of the historical backgrounds of the subject matter, the special status of this kind of study at the time of the publication of this work, and the special kind of treatment which the author gives his matter, that the significance of the work may be judged.

The term "rhetoric" is a very old one and has signified many different things at different times. For the ancient Greeks it had reference, in its primary significance, to the art of oratory. It is in this sense that we find it frequently used by ancient writers. However, since oratory had so many elements in common with other departments of life and letters, it is not surprising that the ancients eventually came to include within the term nearly the whole field of education, and particularly the whole matter of language and literature study. It is not without reason then that the ancients thought it necessary for one who would master this subject to study with care everything connected with the object proposed, the convincing and persuading of the hearer or reader. Thus rhetoricians introduced into their systems



treatises on law, morals, aesthetics and other related subjects on the ground that no one could write or speak well on these subjects without properly understanding them.

Aristotle's definition of the term rhetoric as; "the art of inventing whatever is persuasive in discourse",<sup>1</sup> had no small share in encouraging the mastery of language and literary study. Since this definition implies the controlling or influencing of the wills of others, it opened a field of great speculation with respect to ways and means of producing this effect. It is in this connection that rhetorical study came to include the judging, sifting and criticizing of literary compositions;<sup>2</sup> in the first instance, we may suppose, for the purpose of judging of their convincing or persuading effect, in the course of time, for the purpose of judging their absolute literary value. So it was, then, that in its very early stages, the study of rhetoric came to include a department of language and literature study corresponding to the modern concept of literary criticism. In early rhetorical treatises may be found discussions of style, of philosophical problems, and of aesthetic matters, all readily comprehended within the term literary criticism.

Thus we find Longinus treats of the sublime style, a rhetorical conception, which Monk<sup>3</sup> points out did not origi-

1. W. Rhys Roberts, Greek Rhetoric and Literary Criticism, p. 23.

2. W. R. Roberts, op.cit., 50-51.

3. Samuel H. Monk, The Sublime in XVIII - Century England, 10-11.



nate with Longinus but which was current in ancient rhetoric. Monk says; "the idea that rhetoric is an instrument of emotional transport was dominant among the ancients, and the grand style, the purpose of which was to move, was an integral part of their rhetoric."<sup>4</sup> Other ancients too wrote on various phases of rhetoric definitely including problems of literary criticism. Demetrius wrote On Style. Dionysius of Halicarnassus wrote On Literary Composition. Cicero, writing on The Training of the Orator, gives a threefold function to oratory, namely to teach conciliate and to move. Quintilian in The Institutes of Oratory had broadened the field of oratory to include not only the study of rhetoric and literary criticism as such, but the general education of the youth.

It was the literary aspect of these notions in the rhetorical tradition of the ancients that was the chief concern of the eighteenth century. The ideas of the ancients on style, the ornate, the sublime, beauty, imitation and the pathetic among others were to serve primarily as an influence in criticism and later in aesthetic theory.

Rhetoric for the eighteenth century then was, more or less, an art of Literature or Criticism, Campbell's Philosophy of Rhetoric which appeared in 1776, reduces all the ends of speaking to four. They were: "to enlighten the understanding, to please the imagination, to move the passions or to influence the will"<sup>5</sup> Implicit in these four statements

4. S. H. Monk, op. cit., 11.

5. George Campbell, Philosophy of Rhetoric, p. 23.

are most of the notions of the ancients regarding sublimity, beauty, the power of conciliating, of transporting, the pathetic and other ideas which involved literary criticism.

Saintsbury praises this work as the most important treatise on "New Rhetoric" that the eighteenth century produced.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly enough Campbell retains many of the rules of ancient rhetoric but frees himself from a too rigid meaning of the term. Perhaps, I should say, a meaning of the term that had taken on disrespect even among the ancients because of the importance given to technique and the utter disregard for substance. In doing this Campbell was following a typical eighteenth century custom and as Henn remarks, "like every age it found in its predecessors precisely what it wished to find."<sup>7</sup>

Saintsbury finds that Campbell uses the term eloquence as a synonym for rhetoric.<sup>8</sup> For Campbell eloquence was, "the art or talent by which the discourse is adapted to its end." This was paraphrasing the ancient definition that we should speak in such a manner as to attain the end for which we speak. If we define rhetoric as the persuasive use of language it is easy to reconcile the fact that Campbell like the ancients saw the intimate relation between rhetoric and eloquence.

Dr. Campbell presents an interesting relationship be-

6. George Saintsbury, A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe. II, 470.

7. T. R. Henn, Longinus and English Criticism, p. 21.

8. George Saintsbury, op. cit., II, 470.



tween rhetoric and criticism. He says, "the earliest assistance and direction that can be obtained in the rhetorical art, by which men operate on the minds of others, arises from the consciousness a man has of what operates on his own mind, aided by the sympathetic feelings, and by the practical experience of mankind which individuals, even in the rudest state of society, are capable of acquiring. The next step is to observe and discriminate by proper appellations, the different attempts, whether modes of arguing or forms of speech, that have been employed for the purposes of explaining, convincing, pleasing, moving and persuading. Here we have the beginning of the critical science."<sup>9</sup>

It is criticism, therefore, that has developed the rules and principles of rhetoric. He would not have us conclude that the rules of rhetoric are arbitrary. They are derived from a careful examination of the great works which have been admired as beautiful in every age.

We have here to do with criticism, only so far as it pertains to the works of literature. The rules of good writing having been deduced in the manner described above, the eighteenth century thought it the business of the critic to employ them as a standard, by a judicious comparison with which he may distinguish what is beautiful and what is faulty in every performance. But this judicious comparison implies the existence in the human mind of a faculty capable of forming opinions respecting the literary value of a work. Such

9. George Campbell, op. cit., 19-20.



a faculty does exist, said the eighteenth century. It extends to all creations of nature and art. This faculty is "Taste".

This introduced into the literary criticism of the century what appeared to be a very disturbing problem. As Hooker says,

the attempt to define and arrive at a standard of taste lies at the heart of the aesthetic inquiries that were being carried on in eighteenth century England. That such inquiries by examining certain fundamental assumptions of traditional aesthetics, exerted an influence on the theory and practice of literary criticism, is a commonplace. But why and how this influence was felt has not been examined. Its importance can be gauged by the fact that within a period of twenty years several of the ablest minds in England and Scotland, including Burke, Hume, Hogarth, Kames, Reynolds and Gerard, most of them interested in literary criticism, were focused upon the problem of "Taste".<sup>10</sup>

According to Saintsbury, the inquiries in aesthetic contributed, "to the freeing of criticism from the shackles in which it had lain so long".<sup>11</sup> Bosker pictures the investigation of taste as occupying "an intermediate position between the extreme devotees of reason and the precursors of a new critical outlook".<sup>12</sup> Hooker thinks there is much to be said for both accounts, but they are too general to give a clear account of what was happening.<sup>13</sup> A more suggestive idea is presented by

10. Edward N. Hooker, "The Discussions of Taste from 1750 to 1770, and the New Trends in Literary Criticism," Publication Modern Language Association, XLIX (June, 1934), 577

11. George Saintsbury, op. cit., III, 164

12. Aisso Bosker, Literary Criticism in the Age of Johnson, 142

13. E. N. Hooker, loc. cit., 578

Bosanquet, who observed that Shaftesbury and Lord Kames, among others were interested; "in the adjustment of modern aesthetic feeling, always comparatively speaking somewhat Romantic, to the classical tradition, represented at first by conventional conceptions of Aristotle and of Greek beauty, and then, as criticism deepened, by something nearer the real Aristotle and real Greek art and poetry".<sup>14</sup>

In the midst of all this speculation we must not lose sight of the fact that the age was still genuinely interested in rhetoric. Monk observes that, "this interest was manifest due to the fact that around the seventeen-sixties there were published and sold several works whose systems of oratory were derived directly from the rhetoricians".<sup>15</sup> A System of Oratory by John Ward<sup>16</sup> in 1759 is a work derived from such a source. He talks about sublime sentiments, thoughts and styles. The book is composed of lectures delivered at Gresham College during Wards tenure of a professorship, from about 1720-1758. There is nothing in the lectures that has not been said before. Another work was Lectures Concerning Oratory.<sup>17</sup> It drew on the rhetoricians both for style and content. A controversy concerning the authorship of an article on Eloquence which was published in the Bee<sup>18</sup> in 1759 gives another phase of

14. Bernard Bosanquet, A History of Aesthetic p. 181.

15. S. H. Monk, op. cit., p. 107

16. John Ward, A System of Oratory

17. John Lanson, Lectures Concerning Oratory

18. Oliver Goldsmith, "Of Eloquence", The Bee pp. 195-198.



the interest in rhetoric and aesthetic. It treats the relationship of the pathetic with eloquence and the pathetic with the sublime. The Art of Poetry on a New Plan<sup>19</sup> published in 1762 and dubiously attributed to John Newberry is a work which discusses at length the merit of Longinus, the sublimity of the Bible, Homer, Milton, of epic, tragedy and ode but, says Monk, "nothing new can be learned from it".<sup>20</sup> Daniel Webb, another minor author is concerned with the distinction between the sublime and the beautiful. He sought to predicate of poetry what he knew of music. He called them "sister arts". He conceived the idea that in music we are transported by sudden transitions and that music is capable of arousing terror. It is associated with sublimity in its suspense from note to note, and the cumulative effect of tones, serves, as does a series of images in poetry, "to exalt us above ourselves".<sup>21</sup>

It has seemed advisable to touch upon a few of these minor works in order not to lose sight of the varied interests of the time and particularly to avoid giving the impression that the longer treatises are typical of all speculation during the period. Space does not permit the discussion, nor is it of importance at this point to consider other works of

19. John Newberry, The Art of Poetry on a New Plan

20. S. H. Monk, op. cit. p. 107.

21. Daniel Webb, Observations on the Correspondence between Poetry and Music 8, 9, 16 and 25.



a major or minor importance. We shall have to touch upon them later in studying Blair's particular notions in order to judge whether or not he was giving a representative eighteenth century treatment to the matters under consideration. It would not be possible to discuss at length, in any instance, the wealth of material which is available. As Monk observes, "so rich is the decade of the seventeen-sixties in critical and aesthetic documents that one is rather embarrassed by a superfluity of material to which to refer".<sup>22</sup> It is against such a background of rhetorical tradition and aesthetic confusion that Dr. Blair's work on rhetoric emerges. His career as a rhetorician is influenced greatly by the interest of the time in aesthetic theory. The investigation by critics of the century into the aesthetic notions implicit in the ancient rhetorical tradition had a great part in shaping Blair's attitude toward the whole field of literary matters.

He was a member of the distinguished literary circle flourishing at Edinburgh throughout the century. He was also a member with Hume, A. Carlyle, Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, Robertson and others of the famous Poker Club.

It was Blair who first read lectures on rhetoric in the University of Edinburgh beginning in 1759. A year later he was chosen as professor of rhetoric by the magistrates and town council of Edinburgh. In 1762 his majesty erected and endowed a Profession of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the

22. S. H. Monk, op. cit. 107

University and Blair was appointed first Regius Professor. These appointments indicate the general estimate of Blair's merit as a rhetorician and critic.

Saintsbury says,

that Blair is to be particularly commended for accepting to the full the important truth that, "rhetoric" in modern times really means "criticism"; and for doing all he can to destroy the notion, authorized too far by ancient critics, and encouraged by those of the Renaissance, that Tropes and Figures are not possibly useful classifications and names, but fill a real arsenal of weapons, a real cabinet of reagents, by the employment of which the practitioner can refute or convince or delight, as the case may be.<sup>23</sup>

Blair views rhetoric in a twofold manner as, a speculative science and a practical art. As a science it investigates, analyzes and defines the principles of good composition. As an art, it enables us to apply these principles, or to express our thoughts in a fitting manner.<sup>24</sup>

From the study of rhetoric he saw two great advantages; first it enables us to discern faults and beauties in the composition of others; secondly, it teaches us how to express and embellish our own thoughts, so as to produce the most forcible expressions. "Whatever enables genius to execute well, will enable taste to criticize justly."<sup>25</sup>

"He concerned himself with the practical side of rhetoric and composition," says Henn, "and he enables us to understand

23. George Saintsbury, op. cit., II, 463.

24. Rhetoric, p. 13

25. Rhetoric, p. 13

more clearly the union between rhetoric and criticism."<sup>26</sup>

Blair admits that at times rhetoric and criticism have been badly managed so that they have tended "toward corruption rather than to the improvement of good taste and eloquence". But, he says, "it is equally possible to apply the principles of reason and good sense to this art".<sup>27</sup> He chose, therefore, "to substitute the application of these principles in the place of an artificial and scholastic rhetoric; in an endeavor to explode false ornament, to direct attention more toward substance than show, to recommend good sense as the foundation of all good composition, and simplicity as essential to all true ornament."<sup>28</sup>

Thus Blair attaches great significance to the study of genuine rhetoric for he believed that "writing and discourse are objects entitled to the highest attention"<sup>29</sup> because they enable us "to express our thoughts with propriety and eloquence".<sup>30</sup> He observes also that "this study has possessed a considerable place in the plan of liberal education in all the polished nations of Europe".<sup>31</sup> He points out further "a fundamental principle among the ancients; that

26. T. R. Henn, op. cit., p. 107

27. Rhetoric, p.10

28. Ibid., p. 10

29. Ibid., p. 9

30. Ibid., p. 10

31. Ibid., p. 10



the orator ought to be an accomplished scholar".<sup>32</sup> This, of course, because "the study of rhetoric supposes and requires a proper acquaintance with the rest of the liberal arts"<sup>33</sup> and it is intimately connected with the improvement of our intellectual powers. He realizes that mere rhetorical rules cannot form an orator but they can assist and point out the proper modes of 'imitation' and improve 'taste'.

Though Blair's notions on rhetoric were current in eighteenth century treatises, it is not in rhetoric but in criticism that he approaches the real problems of literary interests.

"Criticism is the application of taste and good sense to the several fine arts."<sup>34</sup> As was noted above a distinction must be made between what is beautiful from what is faulty. It should form rules concerning the various kinds of beauty in works of genius. This seems to express Campbell's<sup>35</sup> thought on the development of the critical art, and as he pointed out criticism is an art founded on experience.

As rhetoric has been sometimes thought to signify nothing more than the scholastic study of words, phrases and tropes so criticism has been considered merely as the art of finding faults; as the frigid application of certain technical terms by means of which persons are taught to cavil and censure in a learned manner.<sup>36</sup>

32. Rhetoric, p. 10

33. Ibid., p. 10

34. Ibid., p. 27

35. George Campbell, op. cit., p. 20

36. Rhetoric, p. 13

But, he says,

this is the criticism of pedants only. True criticism is a liberal and humane art. It is the offspring of good sense and refined taste. It aims at acquiring a just discernment of the real merit of authors. It promotes a lively relish of beauties, while it preserves us from that blind and implicit veneration which would confound their beauties and faults in our esteem. It teaches us in a word to admire and blame with judgment.<sup>37</sup>

The notion that the critics duty is to point out the beautiful rather than the faulty is a view frequently stated in the critical literature of the time. Bosker says,

this may have been suggested to the pseudo-classic critics by Horace's Ars Poetica, but the development of this new conception was largely due to the influence of Longinus, which apart from a few occasional references may be said to have begun in the year 1674, after the appearance of Boileau's translation.<sup>38</sup>

Monk develops another interesting thought regarding the influence of Longinus on the literary criticism of the century. He finds that thought Longinus is well within the tradition of ancient rhetoric when he treats the sublime style as emotive in purpose,

the subject he wrote on was an old question in rhetoric, and he might easily have repeated the old formulae and illustrated the old figures that were conventionally regarded as being conducive to sublimity; he might have done this and no more. But he was at the same time rhetorician and critic, and as a critic he saw more deeply into the nature of art than did most of his fellows. His critical intuitions found their way into his treatise, where they lay dormant until they became in a

37. Rhetoric, p. 13

38. A. Bosker, op. cit., p. 18



later age and among a modern race, an influence in criticism and aesthetic theory.<sup>39</sup>

It was Longinus's notions on sublimity that was of chief interest. The implications in literary criticism developing from the idea of the sublime style and from sublimity itself were at once heightened by the new interest in Longinus. It is easy to distinguish between them, as Monk points out, for "to write on sublimity is to write on aesthetic while to write on the sublime style is to write on rhetoric".<sup>40</sup>

Though Longinus did not consider emotion as absolutely necessary to sublimity, he nevertheless, as Monk observes "habitually associates the two,"<sup>41</sup> "since the orator's task was to persuade by affecting the emotions of his audience as well as by convincing their reason".<sup>42</sup> The point of departure for the eighteenth century was the presence of emotion in art and the importance of Longinus' purely conventional and rhetorical ideas on the relation between the sublime and the pathetic becomes increasingly evident as the quantity of aesthetic speculation increases."<sup>43</sup>

From what has been said it is evident that the eighteenth

39. S. H. Monk, op. cit., 12

40. Ibid., p. 12

41. Ibid., p. 14

42. Ibid., p. 14. Monk quotes Longinus as his authority for this statement. Dionysius Longinus, On the Sublime translated from the Greek by Wm. Smith D.D. Fourth Edition - London 1770 pp. 25-27.

43. S. H. Monk, op. cit., 14



century concept of literary criticism is founded largely on Longinus. The attempt to find and establish some kind of standards or principles in Beauty, Sublimity and Imitation developed the critical notions on Taste. Beauty was given additional importance in the new method of criticism which made investigations to find a standard for beauty.

These four points are chiefly involved in the Longinian discussions. Since Blair like other writers of the century was directly influenced by these notions we shall examine his work to see what he did with them. This will bring us to the heart of his concepts on the chief literary problems of the century.

### CHAPTER III

#### BLAIR'S CONCEPT OF BEAUTY

Many attempts had been made to discover in what the beautiful consists; what quality it is, which all beautiful objects possess, and which is the foundation of the 'agreeable sensations' they produce. In particular, uniformity amidst variety had been insisted upon as this fundamental quality. But Blair maintains that no theory has been advanced on this subject which is not open to objection. It seems, according to Blair's view of the matter, as it, the various objects called beautiful, are so by virtue not of any one principle common to all, but of several different principles likely to be found in each beautiful object. Consequently it is not easy to isolate Blair's concept of the beautiful. No work has been done in this field and it is for this reason particularly, as well as for the fact that Blair is an important figure in eighteenth century literary criticism that some notion of his concept of the beautiful should be of interest.

It is my purpose then to present what I conceive to be his notion of the beautiful and to establish my presentation by a careful examination of the text.

Blair defined beauty as a combination of qualities which do not afford the imagination as much pleasure as sublimity, and render an 'agreeable sensation' not through impassioned vehement, or elevated language but rather by means of a gentle,

calm and serene emotion, perceived chiefly through the intellect.<sup>1</sup>

We must think here of the imagination as a faculty which receives impressions communicated to it by the senses, and selecting parts of the different conceptions, combines them into new wholes of its own creation. The process by which the emotions, mentioned in the definition, affect the intellect is that whenever a beautiful object is presented to the mind a train of thought is immediately awakened similar in character to the object exciting it. It is true that the sublime and the beautiful both excite the imagination, but the emotions aroused by the qualities of beauty and sublimity are of a different kind from each other.

Blair sought to define beauty by distinguishing it from sublimity. Beauty, he thinks, does not afford the imagination so great a pleasure as sublimity. The emotions it arouses are easily distinguished from those of sublimity. It is calmer and more gentle, and is calculated, not so much to elevate the mind as to produce in it an 'agreeable serenity'.<sup>2</sup> "Sublimity raises a feeling too violent to be lasting," he says, "the pleasure arising from beauty admits of longer duration."<sup>3</sup> Beauty is, by far, a more general means of producing pleasure because "the feelings which beautiful objects

1. Rhetoric, pp. 49-50

2. Ibid., p. 50

3. Ibid., p. 50



produce differ considerably, not in degree only, but also in kind from one another."

Hence, no word in the language is used in a more vague signification than beauty. It is applied to almost every external object which pleases the eye or ear; to a great number of graces of writing; to many dispositions of the mind; nay, to several objects of mere abstract science.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, Blair shows the confusion which prevailed around the idea of beauty. He too, I believe, would have liked to find a fitting solution to the problem which so many others had attempted to answer. Namely, what is the fundamental quality of beauty? He evades the question but proposes to select several classes of objects in which beauty appears and to give the separate principles of beauty in each of them.<sup>5</sup>

The first of these is color. He treats color first because it affords what he calls, 'the simplest instance of beauty'. He attributes the pleasure we receive from the beauty of color to the structure of the eye which is able to receive more pleasure from some modifications of the rays of light than others. Yet, he observes, we find some peculiarities belonging to color which, in the estimation of all, enhance their beauty. They must be delicate rather than strong. If the colors are strong and vivid, they must be mingled and contrasted with each other, the strength and glare of each being thus subdued. This constitutes the charm of variegated flowers. The association of ideas may often

4. Rhetoric, p. 50

5. Ibid., p. 50

contribute to the pleasure received. "Green, for instance, may appear more beautiful from being connected in our minds with rural scenes; white, from its being a type of innocence; and blue, from its association with the serenity of the sky."<sup>6</sup>

These various traits then are found to characterize the beautiful colors which nature everywhere employs to render her works attractive, and which art finds it extremely difficult to imitate. The feathers of birds, the floral creations, the sunset sky and any blending of delicate shades present "the highest instances of beauty of coloring and have accordingly been the favorite subject of poetical descriptions in all countries".<sup>7</sup>

Another source of the beautiful is figure. Blair divides the foundation of beauty in figure between regularity and variety. Regular figures such as circles, squares and triangles are, as a general rule, beautiful. He contends that the mind unconsciously connects with well-proportioned forms the idea of practical adaptations to some useful end. He warns that regularity, as used here, does not involve the idea of sameness, which would tire and disgust the eye; on the contrary, variety is generally united with it in the most attractive works of nature.<sup>8</sup>

Gradual variation in the parts uniting to form a whole seems to be one of the commonest sources of natural beauty in figures, says Blair. There is generally a constant change

6. Rhetoric, pp. 50-51

7. Ibid., p. 51

8. Ibid., p. 51



of direction in the outline, but it is so gradual that we find it difficult to determine its beginning or end. Curves change their direction at every point and hence afford the commonest instances of gradual variation. Circular figures are, therefore, Blair thinks, generally more beautiful than those bounded by straight lines. In this respect Blair cites Mr. Hogarth,<sup>9</sup> who he says makes beauty of figures consist chiefly in the preponderance of two curves, which he calls, the line of beauty and the line of grace. "The one is a waving line, or curve bending backwards and forwards, somewhat in the form of the letter S."<sup>10</sup>

Motion is another source of beauty. Here Blair again stresses the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime. Motion, he maintains, is an element of beauty only when it is gentle in character. When very swift or forcible, it becomes sublime. "The motion of a bird gliding through the air or of a placid brook is beautiful; that of the lightning as it darts from heaven, or a mighty river rushing against its banks is sublime."<sup>11</sup> Blair observes further that "the sensations of the sublime and beautiful are not always distinguished by very distinct boundaries; but are capable, in several instances, of approaching toward each other".<sup>12</sup>

9. Wm. Hogarth, Analysis of Beauty

10. Rhetoric, p. 51

11. Ibid., p. 52

12. Ibid., p. 52



Other things being equal, therefore, bodies in motion are more attractive than those at rest and those that move in an 'undulating waving direction' please us more than those that move in straight lines. This fact is readily accounted for by the close adherence of Blair's theory on motion to that of Mr. Hogarth's principle.

Such are three of the leading elements of beauty, possessed in different measures, by the various creations of nature and art. Some objects, he notes, combine them all and thereby become attractive in the highest degree. Thus in flowers and birds, "we are entertained at once with color, regularity of form, unity in variety, delicacy and at times motion".<sup>13</sup> Different sensations are produced by each of these qualities, yet they "blend in one general perception of beauty, which we ascribe to the whole object as its cause, for beauty". This is an important idea with Blair because beauty "is always conceived by us as something residing in the object which raises the pleasant sensation".<sup>14</sup>

On the basis of combining the various elements of beauty into one whole Blair proceeds to discuss the beauty of the human countenance, moral beauty, beauty of design or art and beauty as applied to writing or discourse.

In his analysis of the human countenance he observes that it is more complicated than that belonging to most

13. Rhetoric, p. 52

14. Ibid., pp. 52-53

natural objects. It depends at once on color or complexion; on figure or outline; and on unity of design, that is, the adaptation of its various parts to the purpose for which they were formed. The chief beauty of countenance, however, lies in what is called its expression or the idea it conveys respecting the qualities of mind.<sup>15</sup>

From the observation of beauty in the human countenance it would appear that Blair is led quite naturally to a consideration of the moral qualities of beauty. He states that there are two classes of moral qualities. There is a moral beauty as well as a moral sublimity. The latter he describes as characterizing great and heroic acts, self sacrifice, fearlessness and patriotism. The moral beautiful belongs to the gentler virtues, affability, generosity, compassion and the like. The emotion they excite resembles that produced by beautiful external objects. We cannot help to observe how consistent Blair has been in drawing the relationship between beauty and sublimity nor to note the importance of the fact that beauty must reside in the natural objects.<sup>16</sup>

There remains another source of beauty which is found in design. This is due chiefly, Blair observes, to the skillful combination of parts in a whole, or adaptations of means to an end. The pleasure arising from the sense of design is entirely distinct from that produced by color, figure, motion

15. Rhetoric, p. 53

16. Ibid., pp. 52-53



or any of the causes previously mentioned. Thus, in a watch, Blair points out,

we recognize beauty in the exterior, by reason either of the color or regularity of shape; but the pleasure produced by the examination of the internal machinery arises entirely from our consciousness of design, our appreciation of the skill with which so many complicated pieces are united for one useful purpose.<sup>17</sup>

Blair spends considerable time on this source of beauty because he feels that it has an influence in the formation of many of our opinions. In it we find the foundation of the beauty which we see in the proportions of doors, arches, pillars and the like. Blair believes that no matter how fine the ornaments of a building may be, they lose most of their attraction, unless, either in appearance or reality, they lead to some useful end.<sup>18</sup>

He points out under design that the composer must be constantly aware of this principle. In a poem, an history, an oration, or any other literary work, unity of design and an adjustment of the parts in one symmetrical whole, are as essential to effect as in architecture and other arts. He believes that the finest descriptions and the most elegant figures lose all their beauty, or rather become actual deformities, unless connected with the subject, and consistent with the leading design of the writer. Let the object proposed, therefore, be constantly kept in view, he warns, and nothing foreign to it, however beautiful in itself, be intro-

17. Rhetoric, p. 54

18. Ibid., p. 54



duced to distract the attention.<sup>19</sup>

In particular Blair suggests that in beauty of writing we must avoid using the term, as many have done, to designate any type of work or style that pleases. He gives the term a more limited meaning. It is not to be applied to what is impassioned, sparkling or vehement, but only to that which raises in the reader a gentle, placid emotion, similar to that produced by the contemplation of beauty in natural objects.<sup>20</sup>

In conclusion then it has been shown that Blair did not see fit to state a fundamental quality of beauty common to all beautiful objects. Nor did he accept those that were suggested because he felt that they were inadequate. Consequently he placed himself in a position that permitted him to give a free and complete discussion to beauty.

Blair's beauty was next to sublimity a means of giving the greatest pleasure to taste. It extends to all objects except those of an elevated character. It does not like sublimity exclude ornament or require plainness of words, nor is it necessarily confined to occasional passages. It may characterize an author's work throughout. The emotions aroused by beauty are calm. It is meant not so much to 'elevate' as to produce an 'agreeable serenity'.

19. Rhetoric, p. 54

20. Ibid., p. 55

## CHAPTER IV

### BLAIR'S CONCEPT OF THE SUBLIME

The term sublimity or grandeur, for Blair makes no distinction between these terms, is applied to great and noble objects which arouse strong emotions and produce a sort of "internal elevation".<sup>1</sup> The emotion, though pleasing, is of a serious character, and when awakened in the highest degree, may be designated as severe, solemn and awful; being thus readily distinguishable from the "gay and brisk" feelings produced by the beautiful.<sup>2</sup>

Blair contends that the principal source of the sublime is might or power in a state of active exertion.<sup>3</sup> "Hence the grandeur of earthquakes and volcanoes; of great conflagrations; of the stormy ocean and mightly torrents; of lightning, tempests and all violent commotions of the elements."<sup>4</sup> The calm stream which confines itself to its banks is a beautiful object; but, when it rushes with the impetuosity and sound of a torrent, it becomes sublime.<sup>5</sup>

The simplest form in which sublimity develops, he be-

1. Rhetoric, p. 32

2. Ibid., p. 32

3. Ibid., p. 33

4. Ibid., p. 33

5. Ibid., p. 33

lieves, is vastness. Wide extended plains, to which the eye sees no limit; the firmament of heaven or the boundless expanse of ocean all furnish familiar examples of this.

Though all vastness produces the impression of sublimity, he thinks that this impression is less vivid in objects extended in length or breadth than in such as are vast by reason of their height or depth. A boundless plain is an object of grandeur but a high mountain to which we look up or an awful precipice from which we contemplate objects beneath is still greater. Thus, though all vastness is an important element in Blair's sublime, he would not have us infer from what has been said about vastness of extent, that it is the "foundation of all sublimity".<sup>6</sup>

The solemn and the terrible are also important elements in his sublime. Darkness solitude and silence, which have a tendency to fill the mind with awe, contribute much toward sublimity. It is interesting in this connection to note the anticipation of English Romantic notions in Blair's sublime when he observes that; "it is not the gay landscape, the flowery field, or the flourishing city that produces the emotion of grandeur; but the hoary mountain, and the solitary lake; the aged forest and the torrent falling down a precipice".<sup>7</sup>

Obscurity is another source of the sublime. He believes that when things are invisible and the imagination is given a free hand the obscurity and uncertainty fill the mind with

6. Rhetoric, p. 32

7. Ibid., p. 33



indescribable awe. Thus he finds that descriptions of supernatural beings are characterized by sublimity, though the ideas they give are confused and indistinct. He attributes this sublimity to their superior power, the obscurity with which they are veiled and the awe they awaken in the mind.<sup>8</sup>

No ideas, it is plain says Blair, are so sublime as those taken from the Supreme Being; the most unknown, but the greatest of all objects; the infinity of whose nature, and the eternity of whose duration, joined with the omnipotence of His power, though they surpass our conceptions, yet exalt them to the highest.<sup>9</sup>

He considers disorder too as a means of frequently producing sublimity. If we gaze at things strictly regular in their outline and methodical in the arrangement of their parts, he thinks, we feel a sense of confinement incompatible with mental expression. He grants that such 'exact proportion' may often enter into the beautiful but does not have a place in the sublime. "A great mass of rocks thrown together by the hand of nature with wildness and confusion, strike the mind with more grandeur, than if they had been adjusted to one another with the most accurate symmetry."<sup>10</sup>

Besides the objects mentioned above as conducive to sublimity, Blair includes one more class of sublime objects which produce what he chooses to call "the moral or sentimental"<sup>11</sup> sublime. They consist of the great and heroic

8. Rhetoric, p. 34

9. Ibid., pp. 34-35

10. Ibid., p. 35

11. Ibid., p. 35

feelings and acts of men. When in an extremely critical position, a person forgets all selfish interests and is controlled by highly unselfish principles, we have an instance of the moral sublime.

The most fruitful sources of moral sublimity, it would seem, are these: firmness in the cause of truth and justice; generous self-sacrifice in behalf of another; fearlessness in the face of danger and great patriotism. We may classify these under the name of "magnanimity or heroism. They produce an effect extremely similar to what is produced by the view of grand objects in nature; filling the mind with admiration and elevating it above itself."<sup>12</sup>

After enumerating a variety of instances where the sublime is found, Blair asks, as he did concerning beauty, whether or not there is a fundamental quality in which all these objects agree and which is the cause of their producing the sublime emotion. Here as in the case of beauty he declines to commit himself definitely as to its nature.

He rejects Burk's<sup>13</sup> too restricted view of the sublime though he acknowledges his indebtedness to him for several ideas on sublimity. Blair says,

the author of a Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful, to whom we are indebted for several ingenious and original thoughts upon this subject,

12. Rhetoric, p. 35

13. Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful



proposes a formal theory upon this foundation, that terror is the source of the sublime, and that no objects have this character but such as produce impressions of pain and danger. It is indeed true, that many terrible objects are highly sublime; and that grandeur does not refuse an alliance with the idea of danger. But though this is very properly illustrated by the author, (many of whose sentiments on that head I have adopted,) yet he seems to stretch his theory too far, when he represents the sublime as consisting wholly in modes of danger, or of pain.<sup>14</sup>

Blair proceeds to point out further that

in many grand objects, there is no coincidence with terror at all; as in the magnificent prospect of wide extended plains, and of the starry firmament; or in the moral dispositions and sentiments, which we view with high admiration; and in many painful and terrible objects also, it is clear there is no sort of grandeur.<sup>15</sup>

Blair goes so far as to say that, if there is any fundamental quality in which all these objects agree and which is the cause of their producing the sublime emotion, he is "inclined to think that mighty power or force whether accompanied with terror or not, whether employed in protecting or alarming, has a better title, than anything that has yet been mentioned, to be the fundamental quality of the sublime".<sup>16</sup> But he closes this discussion by saying that "even this does not seem sufficient on which to found a general theory"<sup>17</sup> and though this has not been possible he hopes that by the discussion of these objects he has given a proper foundation

14. Rhetoric, p. 37

15. Ibid., p. 37

16. Ibid., p. 37

17. Ibid., p. 37



for discussing the sublime in writing.

We find then, that for a literary composition to possess sublimity, it is necessary that the subject be sublime. A scene or natural object must be one which, if exhibited to us in reality, would inspire us with thoughts of the elevated, awful and magnificent character that has been described. This excludes what is merely beautiful, gay or elegant.<sup>18</sup>

To give effect to the description of a sublime object, Blair would employ a clear, concise, strong and simple style. This, he says, will follow if the author has a "lively impression" of his subject. If his own enthusiasm is not awakened, he cannot hope to excite emotion in others. All forced attempts have just the opposite effect from what is intended.<sup>19</sup>

He points out also that conciseness is one of the most important essentials of sublimity in writing. The greatest thoughts must be presented in the fewest words. He calls our attention to the illustrations from Homer and Ossian. If they are examined we shall find that they were chosen, Blair thinks, because no words are introduced unless they are essential to the idea.

Simplicity is no less essential to sublimity than conciseness. Blair would have the words employed not only few but plain. High-flown and turgid expressions must be avoided no less carefully than mean, low and trivial ones. Ornament,

18. Rhetoric, p. 39

19. Ibid., p. 39

however conducive to beauty of style is here out of place. Nothing, Blair observes is more mistaken than to suppose that magnificent words, accumulated epithets, and swelling expression constitute elevation.

Blair illustrates these thoughts by calling our attention to what Longinus and other critics have observed regarding sublimity. Longinus and all critics from his time to the present have concurred in attributing the highest sublimity to the verse in Genesis which describes the creation of light.<sup>20</sup> "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light."

We shall find then that the passages generally accounted sublime by Blair are, for the most part, descriptions of the natural objects he has mentioned which are capable of producing the emotions of sublimity, or in other words of what is vast, mighty, magnificent, obscure, dark, solemn, loud, pathetic or terrible. It is with these elements that Blair fashions his sublime.

20. Rhetoric, p. 40

## CHAPTER V

### BLAIR'S CONCEPT OF IMITATION

Before we proceed with the consideration of Blair's ideas on Imitation and Taste we will be aided greatly if we keep in mind the fact that Beauty and Sublimity have been considered as qualities residing in objects judged to be beautiful or sublime, as the case may be. These qualities have the power of producing 'agreeable sensations' in the instance of beauty and 'internal elevation' in the instance of Sublimity. Imitation and Taste are to be considered quite differently. We will treat Imitation as a process of producing beauty and sublimity and Taste as a faculty for appreciating beauty and sublimity.

Perhaps it will help us here to understand Blair's thought on Imitation and the distinction made between Imitation and Description, if we recall the chaos in literary criticism brought about by the various interpretations of Aristotle's idea that 'art imitates nature'. This resulted in certain ideas implicit in this phrase becoming fundamental in eighteenth century theories on Imitation.

In this connection Blair points out that,

it is usual among critical writers, to speak of discourse as the chief of all the imitative or mimetic arts; they compare it with painting and with sculpture, and in many respects prefer it justly before them. This style was first introduced by Aristotle in his poetics; and, since his time, has acquired a general currency among modern authors.<sup>1</sup>

1. Rhetoric, p. 56



Blair takes exception to this position because he believes that this manner of speaking is not accurate. He says,

neither discourse in general or poetry in particular, can be called altogether imitative arts. We must distinguish between Imitation and Description which are ideas that should not be confounded. Imitation is performed by means of somewhat that has a natural likeness and resemblance to the thing imitated, and of consequence is understood by all; such are statues and pictures. Description, again, is raising in the mind the conception of an object by means of some arbitrary or instituted symbols, understood only by those who agree in the institution of them; such are words and writing.<sup>2</sup>

So to treat of the power of Imitation through writing and discourse Blair was forced to free himself from his too narrow meaning of Imitation by distinguishing it from Description. Having made the distinction he does not hesitate to agree that "there is nothing in the moral or natural world, but what can be set before the mind in colors very strong and lively,"<sup>3</sup> and this "by the use of words and writing".<sup>4</sup>

Blair gives another basis for his distinction between Imitation and Description. He says,

words have no natural resemblance to the ideas or objects which they are employed to signify; but a statue or a picture has a natural likeness to the original. And therefore Imitation and Description differ considerably in their nature from each other.<sup>5</sup>

A work of art then reproduces its original, not as it is in itself, but as it appears to the senses.

2. Rhetoric, pp. 56-57.

3. Ibid., p. 56

4. Ibid., p. 56

5. Ibid., p. 57

Art address itself not to the abstract reason but to the sensibility and image making faculty; it is concerned with outward appearance; it employs illusions; its world is not that which is revealed by pure thought; it sees truth, but in its concrete manifestations not as an abstract idea. Art does not attempt to embody the objective reality of things, but only their sensible appearances.<sup>6</sup>

Aristotle's theory of Imitation may be considered in connection with Blair's because it seems that Blair was doing something with Aristotle's notions of Imitation. It might be interesting to attempt to judge of the full significance of this, but for the purposes of this study it will be merely noted that there are certain Aristotelian notions in Blair's theory.

Blair's Imitation was a source of pleasure. It was the work of a faculty of taste in this relationship to receive pleasure from the reproductions of nature by comparing the copy with the original. Thus he finds the closer the resemblance the copy bears to the original the greater pleasure does it afford.<sup>7</sup> We are pleased, therefore, when Imitation recalls the original ideas of beauty and sublimity. Nor is this less true even though the object copied be destitute of beauty or is repulsive. Hence we may endure in Imitation, Blair believes, what in life we would turn away from in horror.

He believes that eloquence and poetry afford the greatest

6. Samuel H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art (Butcher uses as a source for this statement, "The Eshmuler Aristotelische Forschungen, II 145-158)

7. Rhetoric, p. 55



pleasure to taste and the imagination<sup>8</sup> because "they have a greater capacity of Imitation and Description than is possessed by any other art".<sup>9</sup> Words and writing have the greatest power for recalling the images of real objects and awakening, by representations similar emotions to those which are raised by the original.<sup>10</sup>

Blair makes an exception to his theory on Imitation in a footnote on lecture five.<sup>11</sup> He contends that poetry is certainly descriptive rather than imitative "in the execution of particular parts,"<sup>12</sup> but admits that "there is a qualified sense in which poetry, in general may be called an imitative art".<sup>13</sup> It is in the continuation of this footnote which follows here that we get our best idea of the close relationship between Blair and Aristotle and it brings forth to some degree the indebtedness of the century to Aristotle for its theories of Imitation. "The subject of the poet," says Blair, following Alexander Gerard,<sup>14</sup>

is intended to be an imitation, not of things really existing, but of the course of nature; that is, a feigned representation of such events, or such scenes, as though they never had a being, yet might have existed;

8. Rhetoric, p. 56

9. Ibid., p. 56

10. Ibid., p. 56

11. Ibid., p. 57

12. Ibid., p. 57

13. Ibid., p. 57

14. Alexander Gerard, An Essay on Taste appendix



and which, therefore, by their probability, bear a resemblance to nature.<sup>15</sup>

Here the use of the term "nature" must be used as Aristotle intended. To Aristotle nature was not the outward world of created things, it is the creative force.<sup>16</sup> "It was probably in this sense," says Blair, "that Aristotle termed poetry a mimetic art. How far either the imitation or the description which poetry employs is superior to the imitative power of music and painting is well shown by Mr. Harris, in his treatise on music, painting and poetry."<sup>17</sup> Here Blair points out the advantages mentioned in this treatise. The painter is confined to one scene whereas the writer may present a series or continuity of action. The painter or sculpture can only depict objects as they appear to the eye and can very imperfectly delineate character and sentiments, which are the noblest subjects of imitation and description. He summarizes the footnote by observing that writing and discourse have a high superiority above all other imitative arts.

It is evident that Blair does not accept to the full - Aristotle's theory of Imitation as Gerard had done. This was not due to a lack of knowledge of Aristotle's theory because it seems Gerard had caught the full meaning of Aristotle's concept and Blair was all too familiar with Gerard's Essay.<sup>18</sup> Blair's reason for not accepting Aristotle's theory entirely is

15. Rhetoric, p. 57 footnote.

16. Wm. Turner. op. cit., p. 144

17. Rhetoric, p. 57. see footnote.

18. A. Bosker, op. cit., p. 160

explained somewhat in this passage.

As far, indeed, as the poet introduces into his work persons actually speaking; and by the words which he puts into their mouths, represents the discourse which they might be supposed to hold; so far his art may more accurately be called imitative; and this is the case in all dramatic composition. But in narrative or descriptive works, it can with no propriety be called so. Who, for instance, would call Virgil's description of a tempest, in the first Aeneid, an Imitation of a storm? If we heard of the Imitation of a battle, we might naturally think of some mock fight, or representation of a battle on the stage, but would never apprehend, that it meant one of Homer's descriptions in the Iliad.<sup>19</sup>

As a general interpretation of Blair's concept of Imitation this study has indicated that both the eighteenth century speculation on Imitation and the Aristotelian notions in the ancient rhetorical tradition were powerful influences shaping Blair's notions.

Specifically it has shown that Imitation and Description are different means of effecting the same end. That is, they recall, by external signs, the ideas of things we do not see. "Whether we consider poetry in particular, and discourse in general, as imitative or descriptive; it is evident, that their whole power in recalling the impressions of real objects, is derived from the significancy of words."<sup>20</sup>

19. Rhetoric, p. 57

20. Ibid., p. 57



## CHAPTER VI

### BLAIR'S CONCEPT AND NOTION OF TASTE

Blair's theory of taste is intimately associated with his ideas on beauty, sublimity and imitation. Imitation was a source of pleasure to taste and taste was the power of receiving pleasure from the sublime and beautiful in nature and art. In attempting to explain the nature of taste he asks, "whether it is to be considered as an internal sense or as an exaction of reason"?<sup>1</sup>

He perceives taste to be 'ultimately founded on a certain natural and instinctive sensibility to beauty',<sup>2</sup> nevertheless he insists that reason has much to do in the operation of taste. To illustrate this point he observes that 'the greater part of the productions of genius are no other than imitations of nature; representations of the characters, actions or manners of men';<sup>3</sup> and though the pleasure derived from such imitations is founded on taste, it is the work of reason to judge whether or not the objects presented are beautiful, by comparing the copy with the original.

In the operation of taste, then, two different elements seem to have a share; first a natural susceptibility or sensi-

1. Rhetoric, p. 16.

2. Ibid., p. 19

3. Ibid., p. 19



tiveness to pleasurable emotions arising from the contemplation of beauty and sublimity; and, secondly, a sound judgment, to enable this faculty, with or without consciousness of such assistance, to appreciate what is beautiful and sublime and admire it intelligently. To the exercise of this faculty, however, in its perfection, a good heart is no less essential than a sound head. Not only are the moral beauties superior to all others, but their influence is exerted, in a greater or less degree, on many objects of taste with which they are connected. The affections, characters, and actions of men, certainly afford genius the noblest subjects; and of these there can be no due appreciation by critics whose minds are actuated by motives and principles which conflict with those which they respectively contemplate or describe. Thus the highest beauties of writing are necessarily lost on the selfish and hard-hearted man.<sup>4</sup>

Having based taste on a 'natural and instinctive sensibility' to the beauties of art and nature, he finds taste to be common to all men. Even children, he notes, manifest this in a fondness for regular bodies, pictures and a love of whatever is new and marvelous, and in their imitations of all kinds. In like manner, the most ignorant are delighted with ballads and tales; the simplest are struck with the beauties of earth and sky; even savages, by their ornaments, their songs, and their rude eloquence, show that along with reason and speech they have received the faculty of appreciating beauty. Blair concludes, therefore, that the principles of taste are deeply

4. Rhetoric, p. 20

and universally implanted in the minds of men.<sup>5</sup>

Though taste is common to all men, he goes on to show, that, they by no means possess it in the same degree. There are some who hardly receive any sensible impressions even from the most striking objects; others are capable of appreciating only the coarsest kind of beauties, while the remaining group receive pleasurable emotions to the highest degree. Here, he thinks, there seems to be a greater difference between men as respects taste, than in point of common sense, reason or judgment. Nature, he believes, makes little distinction among men concerning 'the distribution of talents' which are necessary for man's well being; whereas those that are concerned with the ornamental part of life she bestows sparingly, and requires a higher culture 'for bringing them to perfection'.<sup>6</sup>

This difference in the degrees of taste possessed by men is owing in great measure, as we have seen, to nature; which has endowed some with more sensitive organs than others, and thus made them capable of greater intellectual enjoyment. But, interestingly enough, Blair holds that education has even more to do with the formation of taste than nature; a fact which becomes obvious when we compare barbarous with enlightened nations in this respect, or contrast such individuals of the latter who have paid attention to liberal studies with the uncultivated and vulgar. Blair finds, then, that we at once perceive an almost incredible difference in the degree of taste which they

5. Rhetoric, pp. 16-17

6. Ibid., pp. 17-18



respectively possess, a difference attributable to nothing but the education of the faculty in the one case and the neglect in the other.

Hence it follows that taste is a very improvable faculty; and, he observes, in the case of this, as well as all the mental and bodily powers, exercise is to be regarded as the great source of health and strength. He thinks that by frequent attention to beautiful objects and approved models the critic will in due time be able to point out the 'several excellencies and blemishes' of what he peruses. Bosker calls out attention to a rather interesting point of view in this connection. He shows that Blair conceived the critic's duty was to admire as well as to blame.

If reason might prompt him to be on the look-out for deviations from established principles, 'taste' will prevent him from paying too strict attention to them. This 'beauty-blemish' theory, as it has been called by Professor Saintsbury, was often resorted to by the critics of Dryden's time and especially by the Augustans. Instead of judging exclusively by faults, they had insisted on a more appreciative sort of criticism which attempted to find out the merits rather than the defects. Blair's definition of taste as 'the power of receiving pleasure from the beauties of nature and of art' proves that he shares this view.<sup>7</sup>

Blair then recommends diligent study and the close attention to models of style as the correct means to the full appreciation of the great works of literature. For one slightly acquainted with the productions of genius sees no more in them than in commonplace compositions; their merits are lost to him; he is

7. Bosker, op. cit., p. 160



equally blind to their excellencies and defects. His taste, however, becomes cultivated in proportion as his acquaintance with works of this character is extended. He is gradually enabled to form judgments and to give satisfactory reasons for them.<sup>8</sup>

It is interesting to see that, even though Blair considers taste primarily a natural gift, there must be a close relationship between taste and reason. If we judge correctly from what he has said, we may draw the conclusion that the rational faculty permits training and taste, in so far as it involves the rational faculty would also be susceptible to training. We are pleased through our natural sensibility to impressions of the beautiful, aided, as we shall see, by the imagination; but an exertion of reason is first required to inform us whether or not the objects presented are beautiful. Hence he points out that by the application of reason and good sense to the productions of genius we have a considerable source of improvement of taste.

In reading such a poem as the Aeneid, therefore, Blair finds that much of our gratification arises from the way in which the story is conducted: having a proper connection between its parts; from the fidelity of the characters to nature; the spirit with which they are maintained; and the appropriateness of the style to the sentiments expressed. A poem thus conducted is enjoyed by the mind, through the joint operation of taste and the imagination; but the former faculty, without

8. Rhetoric, p. 18

the guidance of reason, could form no opinion of the story, would be at loss to know whether it was properly conducted, and would therefore fail to receive pleasure from it. Hence 'spurious beauties, such as unnatural characters, forced sentiments, affected style, may please for a little; but they please only because their opposition to nature and to good sense has not been examined. Once show how nature might have been more justly imitated or represented; how the writer might have managed his subject with greater advantage; the illusion will presently be dissipated, and these false beauties will please no more.'<sup>9</sup>

Two things, then, are necessary to obtain a refined taste. Frequent exercise and the application of reason and good sense to the objects of taste will produce the required result. 'Taste in its perfect state is the result both of nature and art. It supposes our natural sense of beauty to be refined by frequent attention to the most beautiful objects and at the same time to be guided and improved by the light of understanding.'<sup>10</sup>

When taste is brought to its highest degree of perfection it is reducible to two characteristics: delicacy which enables the critic to discover beauties that lie hidden from the vulgar eye, and correctness which enables the critic to trace the principles from which beauties derive their power of pleasing. Delicacy has more to do with feeling; correctness, more to do with reason and judgment. Of the critics distinguished by delicacy Longinus is mentioned, of those possessing a high

9. Rhetoric, p. 19

10. Ibid., p. 20



degree of correctness, Aristotle and Swift. These two qualities, though quite distinct, to a certain extent imply each other. No taste can be 'exquisitely delicate' without being correct, or thoroughly correct without being delicate. Still one or the other characteristic predominates.<sup>11</sup>

Thus far Blair has considered taste in its sound and healthy state. He proposes next to observe how it is subject to caprice, and whether or not in the midst of these changes we may distinguish a true from a false taste. He calls our attention to the fact that many choose to think of the faculty of taste as something quite arbitrary; that it is not grounded on invariable principles, is ascertainable by no standard, and is dependent exclusively on the changing fancy of the hour; and that therefore, all inquiries concerning its operations are useless.

In view of such facts as these, he can readily see why it is natural to fall back on the proverb that, 'there is no disputing about tastes'; and to conclude that, as long as there is so great a diversity, all standards and tests must be arbitrary and consequently worthless. But he immediately shows the absurdity of this position; for he observes that if this principle is applied to taste in its figurative sense, it is equivalent to the general proposition that, as regards the perceptions of sense, by which some things appear agreeable and others disagreeable, there is no such thing as good or bad, right or wrong; that every man's taste is to him a

11. Rhetoric, pp. 20-21



standard without appeal and that we can not, therefore, properly censure even those who prefer the very weak poets to Milton.<sup>12</sup>

Blair concedes that tastes admit of variety; but only when exercised on different things. If men disagree on the same subject, 'when one condemns as ugly what another admires as beautiful,' then we no longer have diversity of opinion he says, but direct opposition; and one must be right and the other wrong, 'unless we allow the absurd position that all tastes are equally good'. Hence we need a standard of taste to point out why one is wrong and the other is right.<sup>13</sup>

Blair sets out to inquire what this standard is, to which, in such opposition of tastes, we may have recourse. He observes that the term implies something established as a rule or model of such undoubted authority as to be the test of other things of the same kind. Thus when we say a standard weight or measure, we mean one appointed by law to regulate all other weights and measures.

In attempting to establish this standard of taste, he would have us observe that whenever an imitation of any natural object is aimed at, as for instance, when a description of a landscape or a portraiture of human character is attempted, fidelity to nature is the proper criterion of the truly beautiful, and we may lay down the proposition that nature is our standard. In such cases, reason can readily compare the copy with the original; and approve or condemn, as it finds the

12. Rhetoric, pp. 21-22

13. Ibid., p. 23

peculiarities of the object imitated more or less truthfully represented.<sup>14</sup>

However, he finds that this standard is not applicable in many cases and therefore seeks something, "that can be rendered more clear and precise to be the standard of taste."<sup>15</sup> This search would end abruptly were he to find any person possessed of all the mental powers in full perfection, of senses always exquisite and true, and particularly of sound and unerring judgment; for his opinions in matters of taste would beyond doubt constitute an unexceptionable standard for all others. But he is aware of the fact that as long as human nature is liable to imperfections and error, there can be no such living criterion. Where, then, he asks, can we find the required standard? He answers in the concurrent tastes of the majority of mankind. What most men agree in admiring, therefore, must be considered beautiful; and his taste alone can be esteemed true which coincides with the general sentiments of men.<sup>16</sup>

When Blair speaks of the concurrent tastes of men as the universal standard, it should be understood that he means the tastes of men placed in situations favorable to the proper development of this faculty. Such loose notions as may be entertained during ages of ignorance and darkness, or among rude and uncivilized nations, carry with them no authority. By the common sentiments of men therefore, he means the concurrent

14. Rhetoric, p. 24

15. Ibid., p. 23

16. Ibid., p. 24

opinions "of refined men in civilized nations, by whom the arts are cultivated, works of genius are freely discussed and taste is improved by science and philosophy".<sup>17</sup>

We conclude then, from Blair's notion of taste that it is by no means an arbitrary principle, subject to the whim of each individual, and which admits of no criterion for determining whether it be true or false.

Its foundation is the same in all human minds. It is built upon sentiment and perceptions which belong to our nature; and which, in general, operate with the same uniformity as our intellectual principles. When these sentiments are perverted by ignorance and prejudice, they are capable of being rectified by reason. Their sound and natural state is ultimately determined, by comparing them with the general taste of mankind. In every composition, therefore, what interests the imagination, and touches the heart, pleases all ages and all nations.<sup>18</sup>

17. Rhetoric, p. 25

18. Ibid., p. 26



## CHAPTER VII

### APPLICATIONS OF BLAIR'S NOTIONS TO PARTICULAR LITERARY FORMS

Having treated the general matters and theory of Blair's work it remains for us to now turn to a consideration of the application Blair makes of these concepts to particular literary forms. I have chosen to deal with oratory, the epic, tragedy, comedy and lyric poetry because Blair is particularly interested in these types or forms of literary composition.

Oratory was used by Blair in a rather general sense which covers 'eloquence' in all its forms. This is evident from his definition of eloquence. It was "the art of speaking in such a manner as to attain the end for which we speak".<sup>1</sup> In a large sense he views it as "the art of persuasion"<sup>2</sup> which brings forth the rhetorical tone of his notion of eloquence.

It is interesting to note the distinction he makes between convincing and persuading because it illustrates definitely the importance he places on the passions in eloquence. "Conviction," he points out, "affects the understanding only, persuasion the will and practice. It is the business of the philosopher to convince me of truth; it is the business of the orator to persuade me to act agreeably to it, by engaging my affections on

1. Rhetoric, p. 261

2. Ibid., p. 262

its side."<sup>3</sup> In order to persuade, therefore, the orator must "address himself to the passions, point to the fancy and touch the heart".<sup>4</sup>

High eloquence then must appeal to the passions. "It is," says Blair, "the offspring of passion."<sup>5</sup> By passion he meant that state of mind in which it is agitated and fired by some object it has in view. "A man may convince and even persuade others to act, by mere reason and argument. But that degree of eloquence which gains the admiration of mankind and properly denominates one an orator, is never found without warmth and passion."<sup>6</sup> This is the application of Blair's sublime to eloquence. The true sublime, as he has mentioned, arouses strong emotions and produces what he calls a sort of internal elevation.

Like taste eloquence requires both natural genius and much improvement from art.<sup>7</sup> To be a good orator one must possess the qualities of a good critic, a sound judgment, a good heart and he must understand the affections, characters and actions of men. As the highest qualities of good writing are necessarily lost on the selfish and hard-hearted man, so too, he believes, the orator must possess the moral qualities which will enable him to select whatever will persuade man to act according to his nature. This in essence is demanding in the orator what

3. Rhetoric, p. 262

4. Ibid., p. 262

5. Ibid., p. 263

6. Ibid., p. 264

7. Ibid., p. 264

Blair has called the moral sublimity.

Considering the pathetic part of the discourse Blair believes, if there is anywhere that eloquence reigns and exerts its power, it is in the pathetic. He contends that we should not do as the ancients in creating and investigating the nature of each passion. This, he thinks will not help us because we are indebted to nature and to "a certain strong and happy sensibility of mind"<sup>8</sup> for the proper functioning of our emotions.

We must consider whether the subject admits of the pathetic. This too is the case with sublimity. Both must exist in the subject. He maintains that "to every emotion or passion, nature has adapted a set of corresponding objects, and without setting these before the mind, it is not in the power of an orator to raise that emotion".<sup>9</sup> He points out that if one speaks in the abstract he may touch the audience by appealing only to their reason or conscience. However, when he describes "the tenderness and kindness of my friend; he must set before me the distress suffered by the person for whom he would interest me, then and not till then, my heart begins to be touched, my gratitude or my compassion begins to flow".<sup>10</sup> "Every passion," he says, "is most strongly excited by sensation; as anger, by the feeling of an injury, or the presence of the injurer. Next to the influence of sense is memory and next to memory is imagination."<sup>11</sup>

8. Rhetoric, p. 264

9. Ibid., p. 360

10. Ibid., p. 360

11. Ibid., p. 360



This whole treatment is very similar to Blair's discussion of attaining the sublime in writing and the ways in which beautiful and sublime objects affect the senses and imagination.<sup>12</sup>

Again as with sublimity, the emotions of the speaker must be aroused if he wishes to move his hearers. "The internal emotion of the speaker adds a pathos to his words, his looks, his gestures and his whole manner, which exerts a power almost irresistible over those who hear him."<sup>13</sup> All forced attempts at becoming pathetic when we are not moved ourselves leave us open to ridicule.

Similarly as with sublimity it is necessary to use the proper language of the passions or we shall produce the same result as is produced when we labor for sublimity with a bad choice of words. We get either frigidity or bombast. If we observe the language of one "who is under the power of real or strong passion; we shall always find his language unaffected and simple. It may be animated, indeed, with bold and strong figures, but it will have no ornament or finery."<sup>14</sup>

Blair warns never to attempt prolonging the pathetic. "Warm emotions are too violent to be lasting."<sup>15</sup> He suggests here as he has done so many times in treating the sublime that we cannot sustain a strong passionate tone and that we must be

12. Rhetoric, pp. 44-45

13. Ibid., p. 360

14. Ibid., p. 361

15. Ibid., p. 361

careful in making the transition from strong emotions to the calmer strain of the beautiful.

We find a striking application of what Blair calls the moral sublimity in this passage where he suggests the necessary requirements of truly great orators.

The sentiments and dispositions particularly requisite for them to cultivate are the following: love of justice and order, and indignation at insolence and oppression; the love of honesty and truth, and detestation of fraud, meanness and corruption; magnanimity of spirit; the love of liberty, of their country, and the public; zeal for all great and noble designs, and reverence for all worthy and heroic characters.<sup>16</sup>

Regarding imitation, Blair says, "this high power which eloquence and poetry possess, of supplying taste and the imagination with such a wide circle of pleasures, they derive from their having a greater capacity of imitation and description than is possessed by any other art."<sup>17</sup> We must be careful, however, to imitate only the best for "even in the most finished models we can select, it must not be forgotten, that there are always some things improper for imitation".<sup>18</sup> Following the ideas developed on imitation he cautions against a too servile imitation. "One ought never to attach himself too closely to any single model."<sup>19</sup> Let the orator select from several the best ideas of each.

The two highest kinds of poetical writing for Blair are

16. Rhetoric, p. 380

17. Ibid., p. 56

18. Ibid., p. 382

19. Ibid., p. 382



the epic and the dramatic. The epic is the most dignified of poetic works. Blair conceives the epic "to be the recital of some illustrious enterprise in a poetical form".<sup>20</sup> This is a somewhat general definition but typical of what Blair has done with beauty, sublimity, taste and imitation. He contends that "it is absurd to attempt defining and limiting where nature has fixed no standard but leaves scope for beauties of many different kinds".<sup>21</sup>

Blair is consistent with his idea on imitation being a true copy of some original found in nature when he states the work of the epic poet.

As it is the business of an epic poet to copy after nature and to form a probable and interesting tale, he must study to give all his personages proper and well-supported characters, such as display the features of human nature. It is by no means necessary, that all his actors be morally good; imperfect, nay, vicious characters, may find a proper place; though the nature of epic poetry seems to require, that the principal figures exhibited should be such as tend to raise admiration and love, rather than hatred or contempt.<sup>22</sup>

The second part of this quotation follows Blair's thought that imitation need not be only of good acts or characters. The real test rests in the similarity between the copy and the original.

Tragedy unlike epic poetry introduces real characters who are speaking and acting. In this respect it affords a direct imitation of human manners and actions. This is the substance

20. Rhetoric, p. 472

21. Ibid., p. 472

22. Ibid., p. 478



of which Blair fashions his idea of true imitation. Hence "no kind of writing has so much power, when happily executed to raise the strongest emotions. It is, or ought to be, a mirror in which we behold ourselves and the evils to which we are exposed; a faithful copy of human passions".<sup>23</sup>

Tragedy differs from comedy in that it is concerned with the grave and serious. It is a more dignified entertainment than comedy. It is built upon high passions, virtues, crimes and sufferings of mankind. "Love and admiration of virtuous characters, compassion for the injured and the distressed and indignation against the authors of their sufferings, are the sentiments most generally excited by tragedy."<sup>24</sup> This is another example of the moral sublime which we also found in eloquence and epic poetry. The moral sublime seems to underlie what Blair might call all forms of high composition.

Tragedy demands a stricter imitation of the life and actions of men because "the end which it pursues is not so much to elevate the imagination as to affect the heart; and the heart always judges more nicely than the imagination of what is probable. Passion can be raised only by making the impressions of nature and of truth upon the mind".<sup>25</sup> Blair sums up a lengthy discussion on the unities of time, place and action by contending that "in general the nearer a poet can bring the dramatic

23. Rhetoric, p. 507

24. Ibid., p. 507

25. Ibid., p. 508

representation, in all its circumstances to an imitation of nature and real life, the impression which he makes on us will always be the more perfect".<sup>26</sup>

Probability is essential in dramatic composition to obtain imitation. "It makes the observance of the dramatic unities to be of consequence, as far as they can be observed without sacrificing more material beauties."<sup>27</sup> "No one ever imagines himself to be at Athens or Rome when a Greek or Roman subject is presented on the stage. He knows the whole to be an imitation only; but he requires that imitation to be conducted with skill and verisimilitude."<sup>28</sup>

Tragedy affords the best medium for attaining the sublime. Blair calls it "the region of passion. We come to it expecting to be moved."<sup>29</sup> He believes the poet must have great genius to execute well the interplay of personages and he must be especially judicious in giving to each person the sentiments which are properly suited to the character. We come to tragedy expecting to be moved and if the poet fails in developing the pathetic part of the story we remain cold and are disappointed.

Blair insists that the language be suited to the purpose at hand. This is particularly true when he speaks of the need for simple language in addressing the passions. We found this in eloquence and epic and now again as quoted here.

26. Rhetoric, p. 518

27. Ibid., p. 519

28. Ibid., p. 519

29. Ibid., p. 522



If we attend to the language that is spoken by persons under the influence of real passion we shall find it always plain and simple; abounding indeed with those figures which express a disturbed and impetuous state of mind, such as interrogations, exclamations and apostrophes; but never employing those which belong to the mere embellishment and parade of speech. We never meet with any subtlety or refinement in the sentiments of real passion. The thoughts which passion suggests are always plain and obvious ones, arising directly from its object. Passion never reasons nor speculates till its ardor begins to cool.<sup>30</sup>

This illustrates an interesting point regarding taste for Blair says, "we may speculate and argue concerning propriety of conduct in a tragedy, or an epic poem. Just reasonings on the subject will correct the caprice of unenlightened taste and establish principles for judging what deserves praise. But at the same time these reasonings appeal always in the last resort to feeling".<sup>31</sup>

Comedy is distinguished from tragedy, in that, it does not use the strong emotions of pity and terror but rather brings up for ridicule the follies and vices. We must observe the unities here as well as in tragedy in order "to bring the imitations as near as possible to probability".<sup>32</sup> The characters and sentiments employed in comedy are the great foundation upon which the whole beauty of comedy rests. In this respect it does not rise to the great heights of tragedy because the emotions aroused by the beautiful in no way compare with the sublime

30. Rhetoric, p. 523

31. Ibid., p. 24

32. Ibid., p. 534



qualities of tragic characters or sentiments.

"Lyric poetry," says Blair, "is a species of poetical composition which possesses much dignity."<sup>33</sup> It is intended to be sung or accompanied with music. Since "music and song naturally add to the warmth of poetry they tend to transport in a higher degree both the person who sings and the person who hears."<sup>34</sup> Hence the ode may reach the "sublime and noble or it may descend to the pleasant and the gay".<sup>35</sup> It is in the pleasant and the gay where we find the beautiful.

Odes may be classified as sacred, heroic, moral, philosophical, festive and amorous. Within this range Blair finds a great capacity for expressing both the sublime and the beautiful. Blair does not tolerate bringing together extremes of beauty and sublimity. He complains of the difficulty of composing odes, therefore, because the poet tends "to deliver himself to real warmth of genius" without restraint. He gets up into the clouds; becomes so abrupt in his transition, so eccentric and irregular in his emotions and of course so obscure, that we essay in vain to follow him, or to partake of his raptures.<sup>36</sup>

Horace is the outstanding writer of odes, says Blair, because he has correctness, harmony and happy expression. "He has descended from Pindaric rapture to a more moderate degree

33. Rhetoric, p. 443

34. Ibid., p. 443

35. Ibid., p. 443

36. Ibid., p. 444

of elevation and joins connected thought and good sense with the highest beauties of poetry."<sup>37</sup>

Thus examples abound illustrating how Blair applied his notions to particular literary forms. The conclusions to be drawn from the examples cited above illustrate that Blair's ideas of what constituted value in these literary forms were built upon his notions of Beauty, Sublimity, Imitation and Taste. For his examples of the most beautiful and sublime writings are powerful in their effect because; they rise naturally from the subject, they are dictated by imagination or passion and they come from a mind warmed by the object it would describe.

37. Rhetoric, p. 446

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

It has been shown that the term rhetoric, even among the ancients, was no longer used in its primary significance to include oratory alone. This broadening of the term opened a field of speculation with respect to achieving persuasive discourse. As a result of this investigation there was left by the ancients a wealth of material which has made itself felt, to a greater or less degree, in the literary study of every age.

In this material the eighteenth century found inspiration for producing numerous works which kept alive a genuine interest in rhetoric throughout the century. Implicit in this rhetorical tradition of the ancients were many aesthetic notions into which eighteenth century critics eagerly sought an investigation. Consequently we find not only works on rhetoric as such but a tendency toward extending its meaning to include critical studies on Sublimity, Beauty, Taste, Imitation, Pleasures of the Imagination and other aesthetic ideas.

This interest in literary criticism developed chiefly from the study of Longinus's Sublime. Hence it is to be expected that there should be a rhetorical approach to the art of literary criticism. The passions were of importance in rhetoric and the rhetorical values of the pathetic and the sublime gave impetus to the study of the aesthetic value of emotions.



Blair caught the spirit of this development. He was concerned with the practical side of rhetoric and literary criticism. He enables us to understand more clearly the union between rhetoric and criticism. He was opposed to the trifling study of words alone, the pomp of expression and the studied fallacies of rhetoric. Admitting that rhetoric and literary criticism have been at times badly managed he saw in them great merit when properly directed. He chose, therefore, to establish a genuine rhetoric and criticism by directing attention more toward substance than show.

As a matter of form Blair's literary notions may be defined as a body of more or less substantial and complete theses. The truth of this characterization is brought out by a cursory perusal of his work. They are a number of essays varying in length and importance. Nearly everyone is a fine example of literary criticism. Each presents a pretty complete thesis or central idea and each has been more or less widely read and accepted.

Though these theses cover a wealth of material which could easily be extended and elaborated, Blair's notions on Beauty, Sublimity, Imitation and Taste are the fundamentals which give the key to his position. These concepts form the bases for his treatment of literary matters. An understanding of these notions give us the essence of his position.

Beauty is a combination of qualities which do not afford the imagination as an intense a pleasure as sublimity. Beauty is not a single quality, therefore, which all beautiful ob-

jects possess. Beautiful objects are so by virtue of several qualities likely to be found in each beautiful object. The emotions aroused by beautiful objects are long lasting while those aroused by sublimity are short lived. Beauty is a more general means of producing pleasure because it extends to color, figure, motion, design and in fact, to all objects except those of an elevated character.

Sublimity on the other hand lies in intensity. It is always an excellence in language as well as the result of a highly emotional state. Though the emotions may be delightful it is altogether of a serious character attended by a degree of awfulness and solemnity. This would make it easily distinguishable from the emotions aroused by beautiful objects. Vastness, the solemn, the terrible, solitude, obscurity and darkness all contribute toward sublimity. A simple style; clear, strong, and concise produces the quality of sublimity in description.

Imitation is a means of effecting Beauty and Sublimity. It is performed by producing a natural likeness and resemblance of the thing imitated. Description is used in a higher sense as a means of raising in the mind the conception of an object by means of some arbitrary or instituted symbols.

Blair's theory of Taste is intimately associated with his ideas on Beauty, Sublimity and Imitation. Imitation was a source of pleasure to Taste and Taste was the power of receiving pleasure from the sublime and beautiful in nature and art.



Thus far we have drawn some general conclusions and summarized quite briefly the four leading notions of Blair's literary criticism. It now remains for us to turn our attention to some specific ideas we have gained concerning these notions.

Blair's ideas of Beauty and Sublimity are fundamentally objective but certainly contain subjective and impressimistic elements. Beauty and Sublimity afford the imagination pleasure in such a way that when the imagination receives impressions communicated to it by the senses it selects parts of the different conceptions and combines them into new wholes of its own creation. Whenever a beautiful or sublime object is presented a train of thought is immediately awakened similar in character to the object exciting it. Though the emotions aroused may differ, it seems to be a matter of degree of difference. For the emotions proceed progressively from the more calm and serene in Beauty to the violent in Sublimity.

Blair's Beauty is somewhat relative. It may be applied to a number of objects which please the eye or ear. He denies all theories proposing a fundamental quality of Beauty but sees Beauty in combinations of these fundamental qualities that have been proposed. The perception of Beauty is dependent on the individual taste and the more refined the taste the greater will be the realization and enjoyment of Beauty.

Sublimity, on the other hand is more of an absolute quality. Only strong emotions and great and noble objects



produce the internal elevation which is characteristic of it. It is to be found in intensity alone expressed in pure and simple language. No one ever fails to recognize it or resist its power.

Imitation and Description, though Blair chooses to make a distinction between are particularly alike in that they are the means of producing the ideas of things. They may be considered in some degree as different means of effecting the same end. The process of producing Beauty and Sublimity is alike but the materials may differ.

Taste is an attitude toward the beautiful and sublime. Something which is to a great extent, instinctive and which is possessed by all but may be trained to different degrees. It frequently seems to extend beyond the limiting standards of Rationalism and neo-classicism. There is an individualistic element present and in this respect it contributes towards a subjective and impressionistic attitude toward Beauty and Sublimity. It was an attempt to modify the rigidity of the rules. It was another indication that Blair was moving toward a greater emphasis on the subject rather than the object and thus may be said to be anticipating the Romantic position.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Babcock, R. W. The Idea of Taste in the Eighteenth Century. Publication of the Modern Language Association, L. pp. 922-26, 1935.
- Blair, Hugh. Lectures on Rhetoric and belles Lettres. Edited by Abraham Mills. Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1873.
- Bosanquet, Bernard. A History of Aesthetic. London: Allen and Company, 1917.
- Bosker, Aisso. Literary Criticism in the Age of Johnson. Groningen and Hague: J. B. Wolters, 1930.
- Burke, Edmund. A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful. Volume I. Boston: Lettle, Brown and Company, 1865.
- Butcher, Samuel Henry. Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art. Fourth Edition. New York: Macmillan Company, 1920.
- Campbell, George. Philosophy of Rhetoric. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1885.
- Gerard, Alexander. An Essay on Taste. Second Edition. Edinburgh: 1764.
- Goldsmith, Oliver. Of Eloquence. The Bee, pp. 195-198. London: 1759.
- Gosse, Edmund. History of Eighteenth Century Literature. London and New York: Macmillan: 1898.
- Henn, T. R. Longinus and English Criticism. London: Cambridge University Press, 1934.
- Hogarth, William. Analysis of Beauty. London: 1753.
- Home, Henry (Lord Kames). Elements of Criticism. Edited by Abraham Mills. New York: Mason Brothers, 1865.
- Hooker, Edward N. The Discussion of Taste from 1750 to 1770 and the New Trends in Literary Criticism. Publication of the Modern Language Association. XLIX June pp. 577-92. 1934

- Lanson, John. Lectures Concerning Oratory. Dublin: 1759.
- Longinus, Dionysius, On the Sublime. tr. by William Smith D. D. Fourth Edition. London: 1770.
- Lovejoy, Arthur O. Nature an Aesthetic Norm. Modern Language Notes, XLII, pp. 444-50. 1927.
- Mills, A. Outlines of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres. New York: Robert D. Collins. 1854.
- Monk, Samuel H. The Sublime in XVIII Century England. New York: Modern Language Association of America. 1935.
- McKeon, Richard. Literary Criticism and the Concept of Imitation in Antiquity. Modern Philology XXXIV. pp. 1-35. 1936.
- (Newberry, John) The Art of Poetry on a New Plan. Dublin: 1770
- Quintilian, Marcus Fabius. Institutio Oratorio. tr. H. E. Bell, Loeb Classical Library. London and New York: 1922.
- Roberts, W. Rhys. Greek Rhetoric and Literary Criticism. New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1928.
- Saintsbury, George. A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe. Volume 2 Edinburgh and London: Wm. Blackwood and Sons Ltd. 1928.
- Turner, William. A History of Philosophy. New York: Ginn and Company, 1903.
- Vines, Sherard. The Course of English Classicism. New York: Harcourt Brothers Company, 1930.
- Ward, John. A System of Oratory. London: 1759.
- Webb, Daniel. Observations on the Correspondence between Poetry and Music. London: 1769.