

Chapter 1 : Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres by Hugh Blair

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Edited with a Critical Introduction by Harold F. Southern Illinois University Press, Between the date of their first publication and the last full edition before that here under review at least one hundred and thirty issues of this memorable course of lectures saw the light. Where English was spoken, Blair and rhetoric became almost synonymous; and in many another tongue translation brought similarly high repute. However, for reasons that will become apparent to him in a casual perusal of its content, such was not the case. Blair is often dry, even pedestrian. His reduction of the precepts of his Greek, Roman, and French progenitors is commonplace. Even his extensive illustrations of the best in style and organization for effect are wooden and monotonous. Moreover, his equivocation between a strict Neoclassical and a pre-Romantic position in questions of literary taste and in his aesthetic epistemology were predictably offensive to representatives of both positions. Of his contradictions and narrow range there was a hue and cry so long as his influence remained considerable. Yet, for reasons that are not far to seek, he prevailed over these objections and the more ingenious creations of rival rhetoricians so long his kind of rhetorical philosophy remained a staple in the education of the young. For he was among the leading citizens of the old Scots capital in some of its greatest days, a friend of Lord Kames, Hume, and Robertson, a familiar of Boswell, Dr. Johnson, and Adam Smith; and for forty years he gave himself to the local university, to the perpetuation of his kind. To it he allots a place and season. Where there is community there are special times and places for putting away dissent and self-scrutiny, for the rehearsal of whatever axioms lend it dignity, vitality, and a sense of purpose. If he fails to, none other can supply the lack. For that reason it was much beloved. Blair never loses sight of how rhetoric stems from and addresses itself to the will, does so even when—as transformed into image and fable in imaginative literature—its call is to perception, not action. And the will is a or the moral faculty. Without other evidence, it is possible to establish the intention of the good Scots dominie out of his choice of exemplary material from various levels of style and kinds of composition. No student could come away from a close perusal of his Rhetoric without some knowledge of the big shoulders he stood upon or the legacy of civilization—as old as Aristotle and immediate as the morning chapel or convocation—of which he was custodian. How great was the service performed with this endowing, the modern rationalist professors of speech or language are unlikely to recognize. However, it is still true that to know rhetoric is to know what it has accomplished and meant, not just what it can do and how it can be applied. More importantly, the influential citizen oblivious of the responsibilities that go with the powers of rhetoric is either at their mercy or unsafe with them in his keeping. It carries with it even when the general terms are kept quiet the inference of a way of life. The war on the older rhetoric waged in the last three quarters of a century is part of the wider war on memory, of the Jacobin hunger to abolish history and the values history has made and sustained which has been the most noteworthy characteristic of our era. The death of Reason is their objective. Control, not activation of the will, is their byword. For the cause their antistructures serve is a new one—sophisticated, conscious, malleable barbarism. It has a thousand respectable names but no more valid defenses than those advanced by its primordial champions in the councils of Pandemonium. Devils often change their names—but their natures, never. The sources of its authority in the hearts of pious men, though diminished, remain substantial. What sort of order will accompany the last sounding period of the old high rhetoric we are now in a position to foresee. Bradford — was professor of English at the University of Dallas. At the time of publication he was writing a life of the late Donald Davidson.

Chapter 2 : Lectures on rhetoric and belles lettres: By Hugh Blair, In three volumes. [pt.1]

Smith's lectures on belles lettres in ; and it was from student notes of Smith's last course in moral philosophy in that Loth-ian got his recently published manuscript of the lectures on rhetoric.

Major works[edit] Blair is best known for the publication of three major works: Blair, having long taken interest in the Celtic poetry of the Scottish Highlands , wrote a laudatory account of the poems of Ossian, the authenticity of which he maintained. The dissertation directly opposes assertions that the poems Macpherson claimed to be ancient and sublime were in fact written by several modern poets, or possibly even by Macpherson himself. After Dissertation appeared in every publication of the Ossian to give the work credibility. Sermons[edit] Blair published the first of his five volume series Sermons in It is a compilation of the sermons promoting practical Christian morality he delivered as a Presbyterian preacher. His success is credited to the ease with which the audience could follow his polite, organised style; a style that was translated easily into print. In many respects, Blair was socially conservative. He did not believe in radical change, as his teachings were safe and ultimately prepared for the upper classes. Blair also had liberal tendencies demonstrated in his rejection of Calvinistic doctrines such as original sin, total corruption, and damnation. Sermons focuses on questions of morality , rather than theology, and it emphasises patriotism, action in the public sphere, and moral virtue promoted by polite secular culture. Blair encourages people to improve their natural talents through hard work, but also to be content with their appointed stations in society. He urges people to play an active role in society, to enjoy the pleasures of life, to do good works, and to maintain faith in God. Each volume was met with the greatest success, as they were published in many European languages and went through several printings. Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres[edit] After retiring from his position as Chair of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at the University of Edinburgh in , Blair published his lectures for the first time, deeming it necessary because unauthorised copies of his work threatened the legacy of his teachings. Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres. Lectures is important not because it presents radical new theories. In fact, Blair himself admits that the work is a suffusion of his understanding of classical and modern theories of language. Lectures draws on the classic works of theorists such as Quintilian and Cicero combined with the modern works of Addison , Burke , and Lord Kames to become one of the first whole language guides. The intention of Lectures is to provide youth with a simple, organised guide on the value of rhetoric and belles lettres in the quest for upward mobility and social success. Blair believed that social cultivation, and most importantly the proper use of polite literature and effective writing, was the key to social success. Blair also acknowledged that a person must have virtue and personal character, as well as knowledge of literature to be an effective speaker or writer. While his lectures certainly provide ideas on how to compose texts, the focus increasing becomes the proper response to written literature. He supplies sample writings from contemporary literature to illustrate the qualities of writings so that students would identify, analyze, and imbibe those qualities. The anticipated result is that students will cultivate a proper taste, and will be able to appreciate the aesthetic qualities in fine language. Through exercise of the five senses, a person can have their taste refined and perfected. When combining exercise and reason, the critic develops taste-delicacy and correctness of taste. As well, Blair provides a critical examination of what he calls "the most distinguished species of composition, both in prose and verse " His analysis of the nature of taste is one of his most important contributions to compositional theories because taste, according to Blair, is foundational to rhetoric and necessary for successful written and spoken discourse. Blair argues that invention is the result of knowledge and cannot be aided by devices of invention as outlined by classic theorists. Though Blair rejects this traditional method of discourse, his work is still prescriptive in nature. It enjoyed tremendous success for nearly a century, as editions were published in numerous European languages. This work proved a best seller in Europe, for instance in Italy went through at least a dozen different editions, but the best remains that by Giambattista Bodoni in It was known in Italy as Ugone Blair. Influence[edit] Blair wrote in a time when print culture was flourishing and traditional rhetoric was falling out of favour. At this time, new money industrialists and merchants caused the middle class to rise and the English empire to grow. In particular, the ideas presented in

Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres were adapted in many prestigious institutions of learning and served as the guide on composition for many years. Sermons was criticised for its sentimentality and lack of doctrinal definiteness and it failed to adapt to changing tastes.

Chapter 3 : Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres : Adam Smith :

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ONE of the most distinguished privileges which Providence has conferred upon mankind, is the power of communicating their thoughts to one another. Destitute of this power, Reason would be a solitary, and, in some measure, an unavailing principle. Speech is the great instrument by which man becomes beneficial to man: Small are the advances which a single unassisted individual can make towards perfecting any of his powers. What we call human reason, is not the effort or ability of one, so much as it is the result of the reason of many, arising from lights mutually communicated, in consequence of discourse and writing. Whether the influence of the speaker, or the entertainment of the hearer, be consulted; whether utility or pleasure be the principal aim in view, we are prompted, by the strongest motives, to study how we may communicate our thoughts to one another with most advantage. In the language even of rude uncultivated tribes, we can trace some attention to the grace and force of those expressions which they used, when they sought to persuade or to affect. They were early sensible of a beauty in discourse, and endeavoured to give it certain decorations which experience had taught them it was capable of receiving, long before the study of those decorations was formed into a regular art. BUT, among nations in a civilized state, no art has been cultivated with more care, than that of language, style, and composition. The attention paid to it may, indeed, be assumed as one mark of the progress of society towards its most improved period. Hence we find, that in all the polished nations of Europe, this study has been treated as highly important, and has possessed a considerable place in every plan of liberal education. INDEED, when the arts of speech and writing are mentioned, I am sensible that prejudices against them are apt to rise in the minds of many. A sort of art is immediately thought of, that is ostentatious and deceitful; the minute and trifling study of words alone; the pomp of expression; the studied fallacies of rhetoric; ornament substituted in the room of use. We need not wonder, that under such imputations, all study of discourse as an art, should have suffered in the opinion of men of understanding: But sure it is equally possible to apply the principles of reason and good sense to this art, as to any other that is cultivated among men. I am under no temptation, for this purpose, of extolling their importance at the expense of any other department of science. On the contrary, the study of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres supposes and requires a proper acquaintance with the rest of the liberal arts. It embraces them all within its circle, and recommends them to the highest regard. The first care of all such as wish either to write with reputation, or to speak in public so as to command attention, must be, to extend their knowledge; to lay in a rich store of ideas relating to those subjects of which the occasions of life may call them to discourse or to write. It is indeed impossible to contrive an art, and very pernicious it were if it could be contrived, which should give the stamp of merit to any composition rich or splendid in expression, but barren or erroneous in thought. They are the wretched attempts towards an art of this kind which have so often disgraced oratory, and debased it below its true standard. The graces of composition have been employed to disguise or to supply the want of matter; and the temporary applause of the ignorant has been courted, instead of the lasting approbation of the discerning. But such imposture can never maintain its ground long. Knowledge and science must furnish the materials that form the body and substance of any valuable composition. Rhetoric serves to add the polish; and we know that none but firm and solid bodies can be polished well. OF those who peruse the following Lectures, some, by the profession to which they addict themselves, or in consequence of their prevailing inclination, may have the view of being employed in composition, or in public speaking. WITH respect to the former, such as may have occasion to communicate their sentiments to the Public, it is abundantly clear that some preparation of study is requisite for the end which they have in view. To speak or to write perspicuously and agreeably, with purity, with grace and strength, are attainments of the utmost consequence to all who purpose, either by speech or writing, to address the Public. For without being master of those attainments, no man can do justice to his own conceptions; but how rich soever he may be in knowledge and in good sense, will be able to avail himself less of those treasures, than such as possess not half his store, but who can display what they possess with

more propriety. Neither are these attainments of that kind for which we are indebted to nature merely. Nature has, indeed, conferred upon some a very favour able distinction in this respect, beyond others. WITH respect to the manner in which art can most effectually furnish assistance for such a purpose, there may be diversity of opinions. I by no means pretend to say that mere rhetorical rules, how just soever, are sufficient to form an orator. Supposing natural genius to be favourable, more by a great deal will depend upon private applica tion and study, than upon any system of in struction that is capable of being publicly communicated. But at the same time, though rules and instructions cannot do all that is requisite, they may, however, do much that is of real use. They cannot, it is true, inspire genius; but they can direct and assist it. They cannot remedy barren ness; but they may correct redundancy. They point out proper models for imitation. They bring into view the chief beauties that ought to be studied, and the principal faults that ought to be avoided; and thereby tend to enlighten taste, and to lead genius from unnatural deviations, into its proper chan nel. What would not avail for the produc tion of great excellencies, may at least serve to prevent the commission of considerable errors. For I must be allowed to say, that when we are employed, after a proper manner, in the study of composition, we are cultivating reason itself. True rhe toric and sound logic are very nearly allied. The study of arranging and expressing our thoughts with propriety, teaches to think, as well as to speak, accurately. By putting our sentiments into words, we always con ceive them more distinctly. Every one who has the slightest acquaintance with composi tion knows, that when he expresses himself ill on any subject, when his arrangement becomes loose, and his sentences turn feeble, the defects of his style can, almost on every occasion, be traced back to his indistinct conception of the subject: THE study of composition, important in itself at all times, has acquired additional importance from the taste and manners of the present age. It is an age wherein im provements, in every part of science, have been prosecuted with ardour. To all the liberal arts much attention has been paid; and to none more than to the beauty of lan guage, and the grace and elegance of every kind of writing. The public ear is become refined. It will not easily bear what is slo venly and incorrect. I WILL not deny that the love of minute elegance, and attention to inferior ornaments of composition, may at present have en grossed too great a degree of the public re gard. It is indeed my opinion, that we lean to this extreme; often more careful of po lishing style, than of storing it with thought. Yet hence arises a new reason for the study of just and proper composition. If it be re quisite not to be deficient in elegance or or nament in times when they are in such high estimation, it is still more requisite to attain the power of distinguishing false ornament from true, in order to prevent our being carried away by that torrent of false and fri volous taste, which never fails, when it is prevalent, to sweep along with it the raw and the ignorant. They who have never studied eloquence in its principles, nor have been trained to attend to the genuine and manly beauties of good writing, are always ready to be caught by the mere glare of lan guage; and when they come to speak in public, or to compose, have no other stan dard on which to form themselves, except what chances to be fashionable and popular, how corrupted soever, or erroneous, that may be. To them, rhetoric is not so much a practical art as a speculative science; and the same instructions which assist others in composing, will assist them in judging of, and relishing, the beauties of composition. Whatever en ables genius to execute well, will enable taste to criticise justly. WHEN we name criticising, prejudices may perhaps arise, of the same kind with those which I mentioned before with respect to rhetoric. As rhetoric has been sometimes thought to signify nothing more than the scholastic study of words, and phrases, and tropes, so criticism has been considered as merely the art of finding faults; as the fri gid application of certain technical terms, by means of which persons are taught to cavil and censure in a learned manner. But this is the criticism of pedants only. True criti cism 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 their 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 ad mire and to blame with judgment, and not to follow the crowd blindly. BUT I should be sorry if we could not rest the merit of such studies on somewhat of so lid and intrinsical use independent of appear ance and show. The exercise of taste and of sound criticism, is in truth one of the most improving employments of the understanding. To apply the principles of good sense to com position and discourse; to examine what is beautiful, and why it is so; to employ our selves in distinguishing accurately between the

specious and the solid, between affected and natural ornament, must certainly improve us not a little in the most valuable part of all philosophy, the philosophy of human nature. For such disquisitions are very intimately connected with the knowledge of our selves. They necessarily lead us to reflect on the operations of the imagination, and the movements of the heart; and increase our acquaintance with some of the most refined feelings which belong to our frame. In these they point out to man the improvement of his nature as an intelligent being; and his duties as the subject of moral obligation. Belles Lettres and criticism chiefly consider him as a Being endowed with those powers of taste and imagination, which were intended to embellish his mind, and to supply him with rational and useful entertainment. They open a field of investigation peculiar to themselves. All that relates to beauty, harmony, grandeur, and elegance; all that can soothe the mind, gratify the fancy, or move the affections, belongs to their province. They present human nature under a different aspect from that which it assumes to the view of other sciences. They bring to light various springs of action which without their aid might have passed unobserved; and which, though of a delicate nature, frequently exert a powerful influence on several departments of human life. SUCH studies have also this peculiar advantage, that they exercise our reason without fatiguing it. They lead to enquiries acute, but not painful; profound, but not dry nor abstruse. THE cultivation of taste is farther recommended by the happy effects which it naturally tends to produce on human life. The most busy man, in the most active sphere, cannot be always occupied by business. Men of serious professions cannot always be on the stretch of serious thought. Neither can the most gay and flourishing situations of fortune afford any man the power of filling all his hours with pleasure. Life must always languish in the hands of the idle. It will frequently languish even in the hands of the busy, if they have not some employment subsidiary to that which forms their main pursuit. How then shall these vacant spaces, those unemployed intervals, which, more or less, occur in the life of every one, be filled up? How can we contrive to dispose of them in any way that shall be more agreeable in itself, or more consonant to the dignity of the human mind, than in the entertainments of taste, and the study of polite literature? He who is so happy as to have acquired a relish for these, has always at hand an innocent and irreproachable amusement for his leisure hours, to save him from the danger of many a pernicious passion. He is not in hazard of being a burden to himself. PROVIDENCE seems plainly to have pointed out this useful purpose to which the pleasures of taste may be applied, by interposing them in a middle station between the pleasures of sense, and those of pure intellect. We were not designed to grovel always among objects so low as the former; nor are we capable of dwelling constantly in so high a region as the latter. The pleasures of taste refresh the mind after the toils of the intellect, and the labours of abstract study; and they gradually raise it above the attachments of sense, and prepare it for the enjoyments of virtue. SO consonant is this to experience, that in the education of youth, no object has in every age appeared more important to wise men, than to tincture them early with a relish for the entertainments of taste. The transition is commonly made with ease from these to the discharge of the higher and more important duties of life. Good hopes may be entertained of those whose minds have this liberal and elegant turn. Many virtues may be grafted upon it. THERE are indeed few good dispositions of any kind with which the improvement of taste is not more or less connected. A cultivated taste increases sensibility to all the tender and humane passions, by giving them frequent exercise; while it tends to weaken the more violent and fierce emotions. The elevated sentiments and high examples which poetry, eloquence and history are often bringing under our view, naturally tend to nourish in our minds public spirit, the love of glory, contempt of external fortune, and the admiration of what is truly illustrious and great. I WILL not go so far as to say that the improvement of taste and of virtue is the same; or that they may always be expected to coexist in an equal degree.

Chapter 4 : Hugh Blair, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres | Exam. Play.

Lectures on rhetoric and belles lettres: By Hugh Blair, In three volumes. Blair, Hugh, LECTURE V. BEAUTY, AND OTHER PLEASURES OF TASTE.

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On the contrary, the study of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres supposes and requires a proper acquaintance with the rest of the liberal arts. It embraces them all within its circle, and recommends them to the highest regard.

Chapter 7 : Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres

Page 1 of 4 Hugh Blair Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres () Lecture II: Taste (Excerpt from beginning of the chapter) THE nature of the present undertaking leads me to begin with some enquiries concerning Taste, as it is.

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