

ANTICIPATING ROMANTICISM: PHILOSOPHERS OF THE SCOTTISH
ENLIGHTENMENT AS LITERARY CRITICS
IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

THESIS

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I would like to dedicate this endeavor to:

Dad

For always believing in me

& Bob

For never giving up hope

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CHAPTER 1

PREPARATORY RUMINATIONS

Why are today's students taught that modern literary criticism began in the Romantic period when current scholarship maintains that the Scottish Enlightenment laid the foundation for the ideas that would come to fruition in the next century? This disparity structures what follows as an inquiry into pedagogy. During the course of this study, the condition of current literary criticism textbooks will be demonstrated and we will ask ourselves this question: Why have textbooks not caught up to current scholarship? This question is not only applicable to the eras under consideration; there has always been a struggle for teachers to give their students the most current knowledge. However, it is important to note that, in this case, even the newest textbooks do not contain knowledge that has been available to a studious researcher for a decade or more. And why is it important that this topic be included among the myriad that must be learned by incoming students? We simply cannot afford to be teaching incomplete information; in effect, a student must learn twice over when modern literary criticism began. It can only be more efficient to provide young, impressionable minds with the right data so that when they go on to conduct their own research they begin with as much correct background as educators can provide. In common instructional textbooks of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Romanticism is seen as the period in which the

development of “modern” literary criticism began to take hold. Little to no credence is given to the Enlightenment, specifically the Scottish Enlightenment, as a cornerstone upon which the thoughts of the Romantics were based; this misapplication of favor begs correction.

One of several current well-respected and widely used works on literary criticism is David Richter’s *The Critical Tradition*. In it, he deals with the eighteenth century critical problem by referring to the Abram’s map of critical theories. The Abram’s map explains that there was a shift between rhetorical theory, which, “Emphasized the relationship between the work of art and its audience,” and expressive theory, which, “stressed the relationship between the work of art and the audience,” that occurred during the late eighteenth century (2). He goes on to suggest that the Abram’s map is limited in its scope because it assumes a cohesive and immediate shift from one discipline to the other. He argues: “Not only did rhetorical criticism continue to be practiced throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but...one essential pattern of romantic criticism flourished during what is typically considered the neoclassical period” (9). In many ways, it is easy to agree with Richter’s assertions; that is, in many ways his assertions mirror my own.

However, his introduction to the subject of the eighteenth century is incomplete. The purpose of his limited arguments on the subject are offered *only* as proof that the Abram’s model is not an all-inclusive model of the inevitable overlap of genres. A certain level of detail is missing as far as education on the formation of modern literary and critical ideals, but it is evident that scholars are indeed striding forward into more complete historical accounts of this important age. If we must provide students with an

accounting of the origins of modern literary criticism, we cannot hope to encompass the Enlightenment's contribution in a few short sentences. For clarification's sake, we should show the Scottish contribution to the Enlightenment for what it truly was: a bridge between generations of philosophical thought on the subject of literary criticism. The philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment have been shown from all angles in a variety of secondary works; it is with the assistance of these secondary works as well as the scrutinization of numerous primary sources dealing with the nature of literature that this study will demonstrate the variance between eighteenth century scholarship and current teaching guidebooks.

The emphasis on *reason* that characterized the work of the philosophers in the Enlightenment fed the emotional movement that came to be known as Romanticism of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is in the Enlightenment era that we begin to see where our contemporary criticism draws its structure; we can see this in the questions that were being raised and the answers drawn from them. In the eighteenth century, modern literary criticism was just beginning to find its feet, albeit as a jumbled mess of a conceptual framework compared to current versions. The men who conceptualized such pervasive questions were philosophers as well as literary critics; for the purposes of this study, we will be dealing with the Scots in order to display their specific role in the origin and practice of literary criticism in the Enlightenment, but this should in no way downplay the function of other men and other nations in the midst of this grand intellectual stimulation. What will be noted is what it was about this part of the Enlightenment that made it so very Scottish; these men had something to say about the nature of literature and they had to overcome their perceived historic, political, and

social inferiority to say it with enough alacrity and sincerity to be taken seriously by anyone who would listen. Some of the greatest minds of the Enlightenment came out of Scotland; many of them taught the next generation of great minds by serving in the Kirk or in the universities.

Many of the theorists in this time period are referred to as neoclassicists, a discipline that lauds the virtues of: “Formal elegance and correctness, simplicity, dignity, restraint, order, and proportion,” which are taken to be, “universally and enduringly valid” (Merriam-Webster 803). While this may be true of some philosophers and theorists of the Enlightenment, this definition cannot possibly encompass what it meant to be an author and a critic in that era. The Romantics, with their, “Emphasis on individual heroism and on the exotic and the mysterious,” along with, “a new view of the artist as a supremely individual creator, whose creative spirit is more important than strict adherence to formal rules,” were placed as a sort of direct opposition to the neoclassicists (Merriam-Webster 964). However, the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment had a hand in both of these disciplines. They initiated many of the aesthetic tendencies that were to become prevalent in the next age, but they also had a deep respect for the classics and believed in discipline, elegance, and precision. Their theory became a stepping stone between the classics and the Romantics while still remaining distinctively Scottish and enlightened.

It helps to understand our more modern applications of literary criticism if we examine the period in which the philosophy of literature was being articulated as well as the similarities and differences between the Enlightenment and the Romantic periods in history. For instance,

Central to Enlightenment thought were the use and the celebration of reason, the power by which the individual understands the universe and improves the human condition. The goals of the rational individual were considered to be knowledge, freedom, and happiness (Merriam-Webster 379).

On the other hand, Romanticism was a reaction against the strict emphasis on reason, order and harmony of the Enlightenment: “Romanticism emphasized the individual, the subjective, the irrational, the imaginative, the personal, the spontaneous, the emotional, the visionary, and the transcendental” (Merriam-Webster 964). This dichotomy is evident in many aspects of aesthetics and rhetoric in these eras, as we will see in later chapters.

The Enlightenment was a movement grounded in ideas and punctuated by questioning, without which critical analysis would never have been possible. The concepts that characterized the pre-Enlightenment age allowed the philosophers of the Enlightenment, who became known as the *Literati*, to sustain the growth and progress of the period by providing, “Something against which to react” (Broadie 14). By reacting against the features of the pre-Enlightenment, philosophers vaulted themselves into an era that respected the reliance upon one’s own reason, the demystification of religion, the assumption and acceptance of a high level of tolerance, and free discussion in the public domain constantly challenging that concept of tolerance (5).

The *Literati* had many professions and many titles, such as economist, statesman, social theorist, and rhetorician, but none so important as the quality they all shared, which is their status as philosophers. We will see that they took their intellectual

responsibilities as philosophers and critics seriously; it is difficult to respect the classical tradition while at the same time endeavoring to divest oneself of the traditionalist yoke, but these men set out to do just that. Providing a thought process against which to react may seem to be an inherent occurrence in any age, but these philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment managed to bridge the ideals of several ages so seamlessly that scholars spent years simply arguing where one era ended and the other began.

CHAPTER 2

AESTHETICALLY SPEAKING

As was explained in the preceding chapter, aesthetics was one of the primary components that supplied the foundation for modern literary criticism. In the eighteenth century, philosophers felt it necessary to develop their own theories: the nature of beauty, the standards of good taste, the notion of the sublime, all of these topics are a part of the broader field of aesthetics. Aesthetics has its origins in the Greek word *aisthetikos*, meaning that which pertains to sense perception (Wilson 6). It is difficult to give a concrete definition to something that is grounded in the senses, but many philosophers have taken up the challenge during the Enlightenment. Aesthetics, though it is a useful term frequently employed by theorists when speaking about eighteenth century philosophy, was rarely used as a name for an approach to literary theory until later centuries. “The union of philosophy and literary and aesthetic criticism is evident in all the eminent minds of the century; in no case is it simply an accident; it is invariably based on a deep and intrinsically necessary union of the problems of the two fields of thought” (Cassirer 275). In other words, the fields of philosophy and literary criticism are so intertwined as to make them seem indistinguishable from one another; however, it is more accurate to say that criticism falls under the blanket of philosophical thought, but philosophy as a discipline deals with more than just literary criticism.

Part of literary criticism is defining what it is that “good” literature truly means. What makes us choose one book over another? A play over a piece of poetry? Or vice versa? These are all questions that needed to be addressed once we started to have enough literature around to pick and choose from. What conformed to accepted standards? Well, perhaps we should know what the standards are to which we want authors to conform. These are the questions that philosophers such as David Hume, Frances Hutcheson, Thomas Reid, and Lord Kames asked themselves. The eighteenth century approach to beauty, taste in literature, and the sublime set the stage for our own classifications in the more modern twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This was an era that helped us to know what it meant to have good taste in literature; it is worth delving into their beliefs, if for no other reason than to puzzle out how we have come to decide on the answers to these *same* questions in our own generations.

The Connoisseur’s Challenge

The philosophers of the Enlightenment approached the question of beauty as a means to extrapolate the standards of taste in literature. If beauty could be defined, one could use that same definition as a framework from which they could build more complex structures. Beauty is a topic that makes many people nervous; who is to say what is beautiful? This is especially true because the concept of physical beauty changes throughout the ages. Who qualifies as an authority on beauty? What is it about beauty that draws us like moths to the flame? Even in literature, it is an issue much discussed. Philosophically, beauty is an acceptable way of speaking about primary and secondary qualities. Primary qualities of objects include extension and mass, those qualities that

can be measured and accounted for by more than the opinion. Secondary qualities are a different matter; color and taste are examples of secondary qualities and even their existence can be called into question. Beauty is another quality that many have chosen to identify as a province of the senses. If this sense cannot be qualified, what is it about our sense of taste, both physical and mental, that can be categorized? In literature, the questions that can be asked have to do with the idea of greatness; what makes a novel (or poetry, or a play, etc.) beautiful?

Frances Hutcheson, in his essay, “A Sense of Beauty,” first argues for the *sense* of beauty, which we may understand as an internal sixth sense, separate but related to the first five senses of the body. In the interest of definition, he asserts that: “*Beauty* is taken for the idea raised in us, and a sense of beauty for our power of receiving this idea” (205-6). He uses common phrases such as a “good ear” for music and a “fine genius or taste” when speaking of literature and art to explain this higher degree of reception for the beautiful. He goes on to separate the concepts of absolute and relative beauty; that is, he talks of objects that are inherently beautiful, “Without comparison to any thing external, of which the object is supposed and imitation, or picture,” and objects that are comparatively beautiful, “Commonly considered as imitations or resemblances of something else” (209). He is also quick to add that beauty of an object is dependent upon a mind with which to perceive it. Without an outside perceiver, no object could be beautiful; it depends upon a mind to give it that distinction and a mind, he asserts, would seek uniformity rather than chaos.

Hutcheson’s definition of the beauty found in this world is dependent upon his phrase: “Uniformity amidst variety” (210). He describes many instances in nature where

this is true; in the animal kingdom, in mathematics, in science, and in musicianship, he concludes that both uniformity *and* variety are necessary to qualify objects or qualities as beautiful. To use one of his examples, “In the almost infinite multitude of leaves, fruit, seed, flowers of any one species, we often see a very great uniformity in the structure and situation of the smallest fibres. This is the beauty which charms an ingenious botanist” (213). He reasons that without a certain degree of uniformity, there would exist chaos; also, without variation, there would be no complexity at all and the world might become a very boring place. When both of these qualities are in evidence, there is beauty; without this harmony of seeming opposites, there is a dearth of beauty.

Those examples are of inherent beauty; on relative beauty, Hutcheson has something to say about the nature of poetry (and thus, literature). Relative beauty is based upon a conformity to an original. Hutcheson states that, “If there be any known idea as a standard, and rules to fix this image or idea by, we may make a beautiful imitation” (220). To make this beautiful imitation, however, he assures us that there need be no beauty in the original: “It is by resemblance that the similitudes, metaphors and allegories are made beautiful, whether either the subject or the things compared to it have beauty or not” (221). Beauty in literature is based upon its conformation to a set standard; however, it has also a great deal to do with how those standards are useful within the work itself. The archetypal perfect hero, for instance, may not be as beautiful as an inherently flawed hero character because the reader might be more able to relate to the character if he is more like a real person.

Hutcheson was not the only philosopher searching for a standard of beauty; Thomas Reid also tackles the notion in his essay, “Of Beauty.” It surprises him that one

word can be used to describe so many different kinds of beauty. His goal is to find the quality which exists in all types of beautiful images and objects that can truly be called beauty. He begins with two necessary ingredients towards our conception of the beautiful:

First, when they are perceived, or even imagined, they produce a certain agreeable emotion or feeling in the mind; and *secondly*, this agreeable emotion is accompanied with an opinion or belief of their having some perfection or excellence belonging to them (147).

Reid is saying, then, that the shared concept in all that is beautiful has to do with a perceived excellence in the subject. In this way, he differs from Hutcheson in that he posits the concept of beauty as something inherent in the subject matter: a tree is beautiful even if there is no mind there to give that beauty thought in action. Reid also asserts not only that a beautiful object produces an agreeable emotion in the spectator, thereby letting us know that what we are perceiving is indeed beautiful, the same object causes our minds to generate a judgment on the perfection of the object: this tree is beautiful not only because I have a good feeling when I perceive its beauty, I also judge this tree to be good. This is a value judgment that Reid says we automatically place upon objects or concepts we believe to carry the characteristics of beauty. This judgment can be looked upon, as well, as true or false (given the inherent nature of judgments). He does say, however, that we have reason to believe in our ability to conceive of beauty, and to recognize it; our value judgments are likely to be true.

Reid goes on to suggest that our conception of beauty can be separated into two categories: rational and instinctive. Sometimes we can look at an object and think it

beautiful; this is true of everyone, he says, but we may not be able to explain why we believe in the beauty of the object: “We know well how it affects our senses; but what it is in itself we know not” (151). That is instinctive knowledge of beauty. However, if we can look at something that is beautiful (or think of it, or hear it, or use any of our faculties to perceive it) and proceed to explain just what in this object strikes us as beautiful, if we can understand why we think the way that we do, that is rational knowledge of beauty, “Being grounded on some agreeable quality of the object which is distinctly conceived, and may be justified” (152).

Separate from the conception of beauty is the idea that, “Beauty itself may be distinguished into original and derived” (153). This is much like Hutcheson’s idea of inherent and relative beauty; in his examples of derived beauty, however, he cites good breeding as a prime example: “The beauty of good breeding, therefore, is not originally in the external behaviour in which it consists, but is derived from the qualities of mind which it expresses” (154). Thus, his terms derived beauty also encompasses inherent qualities which are shown through words and actions to be true. It has less to do with literature directly than Hutcheson’s analysis of relative beauty, but it does approach the same problem from a slightly different angle. For Reid, that which is real excellence pleases the good taste and shows itself by doing so to be beautiful.

Another way in which Reid agrees with Hutcheson is in the merging of regularity with variety to form that which is most beautiful. In Reid’s words, “Regularity, in all cases, expresses design and art: for nothing regular was ever the work of chance; and where regularity is joined with variety, it expresses design more strongly” (160). He assures the reader that perfection in each object, according to its use, grants the most

beauty and proceeds to explain his point through the use of various examples in the plant and animal kingdoms, coming finally to speak directly of the human race. Of our varied perfections he speaks at length; while still asserting the subjectivity of beauty in humans, he notes several categories that he thinks we can all agree upon such as expression and grace of form. He concludes his piece by allowing for the growth of our conceptual framework. In other words, as we grow older and (hopefully) wiser, we begin to see the world in new ways. One of the issues that might change with the passing of time is the way in which we see beauty; each type of knowledge is valid, but growth of the concept of beauty is inherent.

Henry Home, Lord Kames, in his essay entitled “Beauty,” deals with the concept in an altogether different manner than the other two philosophers we have mentioned so far. For Lord Kames, beauty is a faculty of only one of the senses, that of sight; he argues that beauty is a term that can be applied onto objects of sight alone and that it is a literary convention to apply the term “beauty” to objects of the other senses such as sound or thought. He maintains that since it is merely a figure of speech to refer to something as a beautiful thought or beautiful expression or beautiful discovery in math or science, he will not attend to these metaphorical terms at all. He begins by breaking down the beauty of sight into four distinct notions: “Colour, figure, size, and sometimes motion” (126). Each of these qualities in an object may be beautiful alone, but a combination of these properties can lead to an almost overwhelming sense of beauty from the object. For instance, “The beauty of the human figure is extraordinary, being a composition of numberless beauties arising from the parts and qualities of the object...all uniting in one complex perception, and striking the eye with combined force” (126).

There is an underlying assumption in Lord Kames' writing here: that beauty is a property that we place upon objects: "Which for its existence depends upon the percipient as much as upon the object perceived, cannot be an inherent property of either" (133). Within this notion is the idea that it takes a mind to apply the concept of "beautiful" onto objects. Without a mind to perceive either the intrinsic or the relative beauty of an object, the conception of beauty becomes meaningless. He argues beauty to be a perception in the mind based on observation of objects. When he separates intrinsic beauty from relative beauty, he agrees with Hutcheson and Reid, explaining moreover that in relative beauty, "The beauty of the effect...is transferred to the cause" (127). Intrinsic beauty is a sense perception, whereas relative beauty is an act of contemplation; we can see how this is closely allied with the ideals of the other philosophers mentioned above.

Beauty of an object, Kames says, causes emotions in the observer; therefore, beauty is not a passive quality, but instead an active one when evinced within an object. What are the emotions that are brought forth when a beautiful object is observed? He asserts, "All the various emotions of beauty maintain one general character of sweetness and gaiety" (126). In other words, the emotions manifest within our minds when viewing an object allows us to define it as beautiful (or not). This is an extremely subjective philosophy. It assumes the qualities that strike one person as beautiful could be the same as another person's, which would help to define the idea of beauty as a whole. Or, conversely, it does not even attend to the idea of overall beauty; instead, there is an assumption that beauty for one *is* beauty for all. This is not, however, a stance taken by all philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment.

David Hume, in his, “Of the Standard of Taste,” begins by positing the opinion that beauty is not a universal quality, but a very specific and particular one; that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so to speak, and that it changes depending on the person. This view, when confronted by Hume’s famous skepticism, does not hold water for long at all. He is convinced that, “Amidst all the variety and caprice of taste, there are certain general principles of approbation or blame, whose influence a careful eye may trace in all operations of the mind” (271). Hume wants the reader to know that there must be something about beauty that is the same in each object that is beautiful – a beauty that is universal because we all think of beauty in the same way. Like Lord Kames, Hume allies the sense of beauty with one of our other senses; unlike his cousin, Hume chooses a different sense – that of taste. Mental and bodily taste, he asserts, have a resemblance that can be useful in the search to understand beauty (273).

The differences we suffer in the pursuit of the beautiful are due to varying ranges of delicacy in taste; each man’s ability to recognize beauty can be honed by practice, almost as though acknowledging beauty were an art in itself. Hume allows that experience is a factor when discerning the beautiful; he says of the man first beginning to perceive what is beautiful, “Allow him to acquire experience in these objects, his feelings become exact and nice: He not only perceives the beauties and defects of each part, but marks the distinguishing species of each quality, and assigns it suitable praise or blame” (275). Not only should the perceiver be able to distinguish between what is beautiful and what is not; with practice, he should also be able to break down the reasoning behind his preferences. Hume also argues for several different types of beauty; degrees of excellence, if you will. Comparing these categories, he says, is necessary so that we may

understand which kind of beauty any perceived object possesses. It is a form of comparison, really. Work *a* is better than work *b*, but not as good as work *c*. Again, the more a critic practices these comparisons, the better that critic will be at ranking the beauty found in objects.

Hume decides, here, to describe the qualities of a good critic; the assumption is that if the critic meets the requirements set forth, he may be relied upon to accurately ascertain beauty. The criteria he sets forth are valid: a good critic has delicacy of taste, he has practiced the art of criticism, he is able to use just comparison, he is free from prejudice, and he has good sense. While we may not all agree on a standard of beauty, Hume says, we can certainly agree that these qualities, when employed, make a good critic. And good critics can give the public an overall opinion on what is and is not beautiful. Hume notes that while philosophy, theology, and science tend to be overthrown by new concepts, literature has continuing beauty. For instance, the *Iliad* is still a great work; time has not diminished its status.

Hume's philosophy of beauty in literature has a tragic flaw: it relies on myriad men of superior taste to do the work for the common man. It is difficult to argue with his account of what makes a good critic, but no conception of beauty has been enumerated, nor is one likely. Hume has not told us what is beautiful, he has not told us what to look for; instead, he has told us who we should look to for answers. It is difficult to compare his views with the others we have seen because of his ability to leave judgments of beauty open to interpretation. He is not trying to give us any answers; he is only trying to show us how to make ourselves into better critics.

Thomas Reid has a reply to Hume's philosophy of beauty and taste; namely, he is in opposition with Hume's argument that beauty is a sentiment or a feeling. In "Of Taste," Reid asserts that beauty is not a secondary quality, as Hume describes it, but is instead a primary quality of objects. This is a continuation of his argument in "On Beauty" that we covered earlier. He begins by noting the difference, "Between the agreeable sensation we feel, and the quality in the object which occasions it" (266). Since they both have the same name (taste), it is easy to misinterpret; however, one is the signifier and one is the signified. His argument hinges on the fact that there is a quality in objects that is noted by the careful observer and that it is this quality which produces the agreeable sensation within the mind. Even if the critic cannot explain precisely what it is in the object that produces the sensation, he is certainly able to recognize that there is something within the object that makes him describe it as beautiful.

Reid takes some times here to chastise those philosophers that believe only in personal sensations: "According to those philosophers, there is no heat in the fire...the heat being only in the person that feels [it]" (267). In defense of his position, he offers up the notions of language and common sense discussed above. He argues that many philosophers mistakenly internalize their conception of beauty; it may or may not be true that it is a mistake, but he certainly *has* to argue from this perspective due to his premises. Obviously, this is a reaction to Hume's notions discussed previously; Reid believes that language itself is on his side of the argument.

Reid goes on to propose that when a critic assesses an object and pronounces it beautiful, he is passing a judgment upon that object; good or bad, the point is that a statement about an object is an affirmation and an affirmation or a denial is a judgment.

He uses the poetry of Virgil as an example: if he said that the poetry is beautiful, then through ordinary language use, we can see that he is speaking of a quality of the poem. If he meant that the poem made him feel the quality of beauty, then he would have to phrase himself in a different way. Even ordinary language (Reid uses the term “common sense”) shows the critic applying a term because of a quality within an object. As Reid puts it, “No reason can be given why all mankind should express themselves thus, but that they believe what they say...Philosophers should be very cautious in opposing the common sense of mankind; for, when they do, they rarely miss going wrong” (270).

In summary, while there seems to be little agreement between the philosophers mentioned as to the true scope of the term “beauty,” the important issue is that this was an era in which these questions were being asked. The term is one usually associated with a sense, as in a “sense of beauty,” but it is possible, as we have seen, to interpret beauty in any way you like. Beauty and philosophy, as we have seen, are colliding with each other in an effort to gain some stability and understanding of both subjects; while this may not lead immediately to a coherent decision on the topic of beauty, it is certain that it led to discussion.

Many of the philosophers mentioned have chosen to leave open their interpretations of beauty; this can be taken as a negative, but in my view this tendency leaves the topic open to further scrutiny and interpretation. It is too easy to look at the works on beauty and find fault in their inability to properly define or dissect the concept of beauty. Perhaps this was not the goal at all. Instead, maybe the philosophers of this century chose to analyze beauty for its own sake; it is a concept, after all, and concepts are always going to be difficult to comprehend as a whole. The steps these men took

were the first steps towards a better understanding. It might be too much to ask that they find what they were looking for. Are we not still trying to answer the same questions about beauty after all these years?

The historian of aesthetics must not neglect or underestimate any of these unfinished, fluctuating, and ephemeral elements; for their very incompleteness shows perhaps most distinctly and immediately the growth of the philosophical consciousness of art and of the law governing the development of this consciousness (Cassirer 277).

At least the answers these men gave provide us with a starting point for our own views; to be sure, these answers were made use of in the Romantic period. Interpretations and perceptions of beauty and taste in the eighteenth century can be seen as the basis for many a work in the following era.

Transcendental Meditations

Writers in the Romantic era are credited with achieving the best use of the sublime in literature; however, the reality is that sublimity was an important topic for Enlightenment philosophers an era before the Romantics began writing Gothic novels. The idea of the sublime is built into the concept of aesthetics; where aesthetics is a more general quality of human experience, the sublime is specifically a quality in literature that was, “Associated with experiences of the awe-inspiring, the powerful, the enormous, the elevated, and for some the terrifying in art and especially nature” (Friday 9). Those authors that would place their readers outside of themselves through the use of words alone might employ the conceptual framework of the sublime to complete the process.

Many philosophers have elucidated this experience, this usage. After all, it is difficult to talk about eighteenth-century poetry or prose without allowing for the use of the sublime; it had become an invaluable resource for writers and readers alike: “The notion of the sublime was first and foremost conceived of as a quality of literature, and discussion of it was primarily confined to the context of poetic drama and rhetorical speech” (Friday, 9). Among others, George Campbell and Lord Kames have had something to say on this notion; these philosophers paved the way for the next generation of writers by explaining just what it was that the sublime did; not only that, what it was supposed to do.

Philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment found it a difficult task to define the sublime. It was like trying to describe the indescribable. And the problem in the eighteenth century is that so many authors had used the quality that some felt they did not have to define it; it was always already there. The usage of the sublime is more important than the definition. But it is in the defining that we find out what it is that we really mean to do, what it is that we really mean to say. So why do we use the sublime? To draw out the greatness in the world and put it on paper. To recreate a moment, even if we can only capture a part of it. Being grand, being great, being good at what you do is simply not enough; you have to know what words will terrify your audience, what words will shock them and bring them outside themselves. It is the words that are important. Words are the only medium that we have to express ourselves to a larger audience. Even plays and speeches are based on how the language is employed.

Once we understand how language works, we have the ability to recognize when we step over the boundary into the language of the sublime. It is difficult to define “sublime” because it is a concept which cannot be satisfactorily explained using the

language at our disposal. Not that this has deterred philosophers from doing so. The sublime is comprised of many ideas, each of which can be used for a variety of situations.

Thus, it is a very useful concept. Despite its changeability, I propose a working definition; the general characteristics of the sublime include language that is awe-inspiring, impressive, and majestic. It is not surprising to note that once we venture outside our everyday expressions as we do in literature, language becomes more vibrant, less ordered.

The sublime is a literary term; writers and philosophizers use awe-inspiring terminology to reach the sublime in their writing. For some writers, the sublime is that in nature which attracts us so much that we feel a sense of fear and wonder. This might include, for instance, massive chasms, mountainous peaks, or surging waterfalls. This fear and wonder found in nature can translate over for those issues that do not deal specifically with scenery as well. Literature is a medium in which each artist is striving to convey something meaningful; each artist's conception is different, requiring differing explanations but reaching for that same ultimate goal. Sublime language is language that tries to explain the unexplainable using only the words we already know; it requires us to use words in a different way than we do normally to achieve some sort of conceptual understanding. Sublime language paints a picture; when you are done, you can stand back and see the whole picture because you were there for its creation.

The sublime words are those that achieve these goals. It is up to the discerning writer to complete this transformation. Not sad, but morose. Not angry, but infuriated. Not happy, just ecstatic. Or go a step further. Stop telling, start showing. It is the description that matters. How do you describe a feeling? What does it feel like to stand

next to a waterfall? The roaring, pounding, vibrant, powerful, danger that ensues? The philosophers of this century understood how to do it, but possibly were more interested in how it was done. And they were some of the first to even recognize that it mattered.

Kant wrote *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* in 1764. While he is a German philosopher, he is important to the Scottish Enlightenment because many of the men of this movement took their cue from Kant. The sublime is beyond all calculation and certainly beyond all description; what is left but to *try* to describe the indescribable? After all, this is what philosophers do.

The philosopher that made the biggest impact on the subject of the sublime during the Scottish Enlightenment was George Campbell in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric*. He argued that sublime writing is addressed to the imagination. The argumentative nature of any type of rhetoric is noted and this nature coupled with impassioned speech allows the writer to display his vehemence of contention, or his art of persuasion. The writer or speaker, through the way in which he develops his craft, now has power over the audience. Campbell stated, “The imagination is addressed by exhibiting to it a lively and beautiful representation of a suitable object” (3). It is the art of description that has the most important goal; it is in description that the writer can affect his audience. The way an artist chooses to represent the object in question has a significant effect on the person to whom it is being described. He went further to define the sublime as, “Those great and noble images, which, in suitable colouring presented to the mind, do, as it were, distend the imagination with some vast conception, and quite ravish the soul” (3). The grandeur and eloquence necessary to fulfill these requirements seem impossible for the average writer or speaker. But this is what makes a work great, the ability to reach beyond the

normal bounds of language and draw comparison where none might have existed previously, to use description in a way that excites the passions of the audience. It was Campbell's contention that upon hearing descriptions of magnitude, the audience would perceive greatness and respond to it. Because he is primarily concerned with the effects of speech, as we will see in later chapters, he classifies the use of the sublime as one of the four effects of speech: the movement of the passions. It is a question of action and response, action on the part of the orator and the response of the audience to his impassioned speech.

Campbell also draws a distinction between the sublime and vehemence as they are, "Often confounded, the latter being considered as a species of the former" (6). The sublime is a descriptive tool; as such, it is possible to employ vehemence in its usage. This is why the two are often muddled. Campbell's argument for their separation is based on the fact that an orator can produce an argument full of vehemence that has no symbol associated with it; a symbol is necessary for observation of the sublime. Sublimity usually surfaces as metaphor and is grounded in the natural world. Nature is a prime subject for the sublime, as we will see when we reach the poetry of Ossian. It makes use of subjects we are already acquainted with to procure understanding. "Nothing contributes more to vivacity than striking resemblances in the imagery, which convey, besides, an additional pleasure of their own" (73). The symbolic nature of the sublime was a well-established practice – for instance, in Greek poetry and tragedy – before it was ever given the label of "sublime" writing.

Lord Kames (Henry Home), in *Elements of Criticism*, also speaks of the influence of Nature during his discourse on the sublime:

Nature hath not more remarkably distinguished us from other animals by an erect posture, than by a capacious and aspiring mind, attaching us to things great and elevated. The ocean, the sky, seize the attention, and make a deep impression: robes of state are made large and full to draw respect: we admire an elephant for its magnitude, notwithstanding its unwieldiness. (210)

It is natural, Kames argues, that we see the grandeur that already exists in the world; as a society, we appreciate large symbols. In them, we can see greatness and they evoke awe within us. Kames notes that grandeur and sublimity are associated with the objects in question, but also with the emotion that comes of viewing them. Thus, as Kames, notes, they have a double signification (211). Certain emotions can be grand in scale, courage and generosity numbering among them. These may have nothing to do with the natural world in that they describe inherently intangible feelings, but that does not detract from their sublimity.

In order to reach the sublime in writing, Kames suggests that the writer shun the unassuming and lowly in favor of all things majestic and impressive, “For the mind, elevated by an important object, cannot, without reluctance, be forc’d down to bestow any share of its attention upon trifles” (232). Once the audience has become used to the elements of the sublime in writing, in other words, it becomes much more difficult to ignore grandeur in the world. Kames also makes note of the possibility that the sublime may be falsified, a chance that Campbell, at least, had not noticed. He describes this false sublimity as bombast and extravagance; in this case, the writer has endeavored to reach the sublime in his writing and has failed utterly. Kames speaks of the sublime as a height to which a writer should aspire. If a work is suited to sublimity, it *should* endeavor to

aim for the sublime. Unfortunately, whether a work is suited to sublimity is an issue that Kames does not describe with any degree of accuracy.

The writings of Lord Kames and George Campbell helped to usher in the new century of aesthetic writing on sublimity. Grandeur and eloquence are prerequisites for Romantic writings, where the emphasis on nature is most obvious. However, we can see that these same concerns were prevalent during the Enlightenment. Perhaps the difference between the two ages of philosophic thought has to do with the preference during the age of the Enlightenment to use the sublime in their writing along with their inherent need to define the conception, whereas the Romantics appreciated sublimity for itself without feeling a need to define it because it fed their creative natures.

CHAPTER 3

RHETORIC: NOT JUST PRETTY WORDS

Rhetoric is about persuasion, chiefly how we employ language to effectively make an argument. Rhetoric, or the art of using language in an influential manner, had been a theme in previous centuries, but the topic was suddenly given new light during the era of the Scottish Enlightenment. Since our goal here is to better understand literary criticism, we must first come to understand rhetoric. This is because it is the application of rhetorical theory that yields criticism. The Romantics' literary desires centered on beauty and passion; this left the Enlightenment era's need for detailed definition of rhetoric abandoned by the wayside. Since many philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment such as George Campbell, Hugh Blair, Adam Smith and Thomas Reid were also men of the Kirk, and frequently held positions in universities, rhetoric was a concern to them all at one point or another. If you are a philosopher and you often must speak in front of groups, it becomes necessary to analyze what it is about the spoken word that affects people.

The concepts that must certainly be covered in any discussion about the way we use language for our own ends would include faculties of the mind, the emotions, and above all the passions. As we shall see, if the speaker employs language correctly, there is a lot of power involved in his ability to do so. Rhetoric is a beginning. To truly tell whether or not a work can be classified as "great," we must first understand what it means to use language in a

successful manner. To do this, let us start with several elements, such as a grasp of how to make an argument; how to employ linguistic models like metaphor and analogy; and some knowledge of how to say what we mean. These are the essential components of rhetoric. If we have met these requirements, then we can say we have begun to use language successfully. If someone manages to write a great work or give a rousing speech with no notion of rhetoric at all, then they have done themselves a disservice; think how much greater the work or how much more poignant the speech if that writer or orator had a notion of the knowledge that rhetoric grants.

Rhetoric, in the classical period of literary criticism, referred to the art of public speaking alone. In the eighteenth century, there was a movement to combine this view with poetry, art, history, and other disciplines to form the combination known as *rhetoric and belles lettres*. In this movement, works of literature were valued for their aesthetic qualities such as the beauty of the language used and its ability to inspire the imagination. Many philosophers presented lectures that gave this movement depth as they sought to explain their aims: to instruct the listener in the art of practicing and judging communication, both written and oral. The fact that rhetoric could be applied to many disciplines is obvious; after all, any subject must be taught and teaching requires a reliance upon communication. Studying rhetoric led philosophers of the enlightenment to realize that we must understand man's basic nature, be it mental or moral, in order to make sense of the way in which we use language. The fundamentals of rhetoric are built upon sensory experience, understanding, and reason; each of these issues is discussed at length by philosophers in this movement. How these issues are discussed is as important for those interested in language as what is discussed.

Alphabtamorphosis

How we use language is based upon how we *have used* language. This may seem to be a simple concept, but as we shall see, it has far-reaching consequences. For example, Adam Smith was interested in the idea of the formation of language; by knowing how we developed the language we use today, he postulated that we may be able to understand the basic structure of language-making. The time has come to deal with the hypothetical; no one of the generations involved recorded their steps in the original formation of language, so it is difficult to speak with any authority about this act as a process. In order to even approximate the genesis of language, we are forced to hypothesize. Adam Smith does so in his “Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages.” He posits two savages and proceeds to analyze their language, focusing on its grammatical and substantive use. It has been a subject of debate whether Smith meant the reader to assume that this language was created by the savages or if it had previously existed. In any case, it does not affect Smith’s analysis; he argues that any language would have first begun with the naming of objects, also known as ostensive definition. These proper names would also be applied to different objects that held many of the same properties: if the object in question was “fire,” it is safe to assume that no matter how many kinds of fire the savage viewed (a tiny flame or a roaring bonfire), the same word would be used (406). This general character is known as the noun, followed closely after by the concept of the adjective. An adjective is a general word that can be applied to many objects (green), but its primary purpose is to distinguish difference. When applied to a group of nouns, an adjective can single out a specific focus for attention; the green apple as opposed to the red one. Prepositions, Smith says, come next and further

separate the objects in question; words like *of*, *by*, *with*, and *above* explain objects in relation to each other. In this case, the green apple below the red apple.

All of these words would have been constructed specifically for their use as relational explanation; Smith argues that the abstraction of “green” and “below” would not have begun until much later in the formation of language. That is, “greenness” without an attached noun would probably not have been considered as early as “green” itself (408). However, adjectives do constitute a certain amount of abstraction and generality; after all, there are many types of green (lime green, forest green, etc.). The primary colors of red, blue and yellow probably were identified first, followed by the realization that there were more than three colors in the world and the subsequent division of colors. This is analogous to the formulation of all language use; first, you have several words to describe the world around you; soon, you realize that more words are needed to distinguish objects (or feelings, or ideas) from one another and you create them as needed. Language evolves from within as well; green has come to symbolize not only a color, but a feeling. Strange that such a simple word could transcend the physical, as is epitomized in the phrase “green with envy.”

The continuation of language, therefore, is based on necessity. Also, the ability of language to progress through time has to do with the need to describe objects in new ways, which should be obvious when we look at the way language has evolved thus far. In previous centuries, there was no word for “nanotechnology” or “car” or “cell phone” – slang terms can be treated in the same vein. Smith goes on to explain the probable order of formation for parts of speech including verbs and numerals, among others. His major emphasis throughout this section has to do with the concept of abstraction; the more concepts society finds to describe, the further we venture into the epistemological, the more new

descriptive words we will need. He also makes note of the conglomeration of languages that we employ today by being exposed to other cultures. Colloquialism does not always translate and leaves its traces upon our language; for instance, association with the French and Germans have added the words *bourgeoisie* and *doppelganger* to the English dictionary. In the same way that Smith describes linguistic genesis and its construction, rhetoricians began to analyze and reveal the underlying elements used in rhetorical discourse.

Letting Someone Else Have Your Way

George Campbell was a supremely important figure in the field of rhetoric; his depth of knowledge on the subject was obvious and this wealth is given to the audience in the form of a treatise known as *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. His observations on the sublime have been noted in the preceding chapter, and from this we can see that rhetoric and aesthetics are clearly linked. He not only made a significant impact towards description of the sublime, it is obvious from the title of his book that his primary goal was enumerating the “rules” of rhetoric as he saw them. To that purpose, he catalogs the goals of speech because, as he notes, every time a speech is made, the speaker intends to produce some effect from the listener and he will always have such a goal in mind. He states, “All the ends of speaking are reduced to four; every speech being intended to enlighten the understanding, to please the imagination, to move the passions, or to influence the will” (1). Sublimity would fall under the second of these four goals, being the ultimate means with which to please the imagination; however, the three remaining goals are certainly not given short shrift by Campbell and he undertakes to explain each one with the care we have already seen given to the sublime. Imagination is important, however, “To keep the imagination in check and to

regulate it deliberately, is the highest goal of philosophical criticism” (Cassirer 283). Thus, imagination cannot and will not be the only goal to which every orator should attain; simply one that has its uses. The first goal of speech-making that Campbell mentions, to enlighten the understanding, seems to me to be the goal of every teacher: “He proposes either to dispel ignorance or to vanquish error” (2). The spread of knowledge has always been the goal of teaching, and both qualities Campbell mentions may be found in many a professor’s lecture to his students. The third goal he mentions, the movement of the passions, may perhaps be the most important in terms of the proper application of speech; without passion or, “Vehemence of contention...[which] hath always been regarded as the supreme qualification in an orator,” the other three goals might not be achieved (4).

Impassioned speech gives the orator power, allowing him to enlighten his audience’s understanding, please their imagination, and influence their will more effectively because the audience will be more inclined to listen to an impassioned speech made by a man who truly believes in his subject than they would to a speech devoid of inflection. Vehemence, he claims, gives, “One man an ascendant over others, superior even to what despotism itself can bestow” (5). Unfortunately, wielded in the hands of an evil man, vehemence can override the truth of a situation by convincing an audience of its beliefs; history has given us ample evidence of this in the twentieth century. These concepts bring us to the fourth category, the influence of the will, which seems to most obviously encompass the realm of politics. Campbell speaks of proving an argument, agitating the soul, and touching the heart with this method of speech and it is indeed the goal behind all politics to meet these criteria, at least ostensibly. As Campbell says, “We not only touch the heart, but win it entirely to co-operate with our views” (5).

The order of these four goals is no accident, either. Campbell has carefully arranged his presentation to help the reader to more easily understand what he considers the basic notions of rhetoric; the idea is created in the mind and imagination gives it scope and grants the orator the way in which to present this idea to an audience. He employs impassioned speech when presenting the idea in order to capture the attention of his chosen listeners and subsequently exert his influence upon their will.

Adam Smith, in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, takes Campbell a step further, separating language itself into didactic and rhetorical: “Every discourse proposes either barely to relate some fact, or to prove some proposition. In the first the discourse is called a narrative one. The latter is the foundation of two sorts of discourse; the didactic and the rhetorical” (62). Narrative instruction, for Smith, directly relates to Campbell’s concept of enlightening the understanding. As far as proving a proposition, Smith argues that there are two ways in which to accomplish this feat: didactically, an orator shows his audience both sides of an issue, ostensibly without an attempt to influence in favor of one side or the other. Rhetorically, an argument is presented in favor of one particular side of an issue with little mention made of or credit given to opposing views. The intention of rhetoric is to reveal a bias without applying prejudice to opposing views.

Smith was perhaps more interested in the demonstrative uses of rhetoric; the passions and the imagination that Campbell spoke so highly of were less useful to Smith because he could not point directly to them. Smith was an economist first; cause and effect were what interested him about the human mind. When orators spoke of passion, it was almost impossible to pin down what made impassioned speeches work; to that end, Smith spoke of the elements of passion without actually mentioning the word at all. Instead, he spoke of

demonstrative eloquence of the orator, style, manner of description, and skill of the writer. All of these abilities, together, constituted a conceptual breakdown of passion. It is important to note that Smith was interested in the goals of the orator and the writer as *separate* entities; he understood that each rhetorical theme must be dealt with in a different manner. The speaker does not have the same job as the writer: his goals must change depending on his audience.

Though Smith did not agree with Campbell's ideas on the imagination and the passions, he certainly harmonized with Campbell on his fourth intention of rhetorical speech, influencing the will; for Smith, if rhetoric is used correctly, it cannot help but sway its audience towards the intended result: "The manner of Describing an object often makes it agreeable [sic] when there is nothing in the Object that is so" (65). Obviously, for Smith, the manner of describing the object in question is more important than the qualities of the object itself. The influence of the will, therefore, lies within the realm of rhetoric.

Responding to Rhetoric

Hugh Blair, in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, is interested in specific application of rhetorical speech. As we have seen, intention plays an important part in rhetorical discourse; the way an orator uses a word can be of supreme importance. This is not only true of individual words, but of speech in general. To that end, Blair has broken down the parts of speaking into six distinct sections:

The parts that compose a regular formal Oration, are these six; first, the Exordium or Introduction; secondly, the State, and the Division of the

Subject; thirdly, Narration, or Explication; fourthly, the Reasoning or Arguments; fifthly, the Pathetic Part; and lastly, the Conclusion. (157)

He goes on to describe each section in detail. The introduction prepares the audience for the topic at hand by providing a smooth transition; Blair notes that even though speeches sometimes forego an introduction in favor of getting directly to the subject matter, they can play an important role by quickly swaying the judgment of the audience. In addition to this goal, Blair describes a second goal of an introduction: “To raise the attention of the hearers; which may be effected, by giving them some hints of the importance, dignity, or novelty of the subject; or some favourable view of the clearness and precision with which we are to treat it; and of the brevity with which we are to discourse” (158). As far as the exposition of the subject is concerned, Blair emphasizes the importance of clarity. Along with expressing the subject, the orator can also prepare a division, explaining the order of distribution of the subject into parts. This type of sectioning does not always have to occur in every speech: “When the Discourse, perhaps, is to be short, or only one point is to be treated of; or when the Speaker does not choose to warn his hearers of the method he is to follow, or of the conclusion to which he seeks to bring them” (169). However, in many types of speech, especially those that would be considered educational, I would argue that this type of division and explanation of subjects is extremely important. In any case, a well informed audience is the result of such a discourse.

Blair then moves onto his third section of speech, narration or explication. As he asserts:

I put these two together, both because they fall nearly under the same rules, and because they commonly answer the same purpose; serving to illustrate the

cause, or the subject of which one treats, before proceeding to argue either on one side or the other; or to make any attempt for interesting the passions of the hearers. (174)

Again, clarity is of paramount importance for Blair. Explanation is the best definition for this portion of dialogue, as the orator endeavors to describe the previously stated subject in more exacting detail. And yet clarity is not the only quality which Blair holds in high regard in this section; conciseness and probability play important roles as well. The more the speech adheres to these exacting qualifications, the better and more well-received it is likely to be. The argumentative or reasoning section of an oration follows from the narration; the narration provides the subject, while the argument provides the orator with a point of view from which to make a case.

In whatever place, or on whatever subject one speaks, this beyond doubt is of the greatest consequence. For the great end for which men speak on any serious occasion, is to convince their hearers of something being either true, or right, or good; and, by means of this conviction, to influence their practice. (179)

Blair's argumentative oration may remind the reader of Campbell's category of speech entitled influencing the will; Blair obviously held this goal in the highest regard, while neither Campbell nor Smith placed any qualifications on the different roles of oration. Within the scope of an argument, Blair employed the same type of format the audience has been informed is useful for the speech itself; first, the orator must state the argument, followed by a disposition of the subject and proper explication. He goes further to explain that he cannot give the orator advice on what words will sway his intended audience, "For it

is one thing to discover the reasons that are most proper to convince men, and another, to manage those reasons with most advantage. The latter is all that Rhetoric can pretend to” (180). While the classical period scholars certainly attempted to provide their audience with the former, Blair must have been knowledgeable of the diversity of his audiences and, in keeping with that information, he knew the limitations of the more modern orator.

In his next section, the, “Pathetic; in which, if any where, Eloquence reigns, and exerts its power,” Blair chose to explain to his audience a subject with which the reader will be familiar: for Campbell, this would have been the impassioned segment of the speech (189). In oration that is intended to teach or to explain truths about the world, this is less important; Blair says that simple fact should suffice. However, when the intent of the orator is to persuade the audience, impassioned speech can be a wonderful tool to sway the audience. Passion here, unlike in Campbell’s conception, is a device which can be used in many different kinds of speech to obtain certain ends: “The most virtuous man, in treating of the most virtuous subject, seeks to touch the heart of him to whom he speaks; and makes no scruple to raise his indignation at injustice, or his pity to the distressed, though pity and indignation be passions” (189). Some types of speech are predisposed to the passions, Blair argues, and some are not, but this type of discourse can certainly be constructive and valuable when used wisely. The conclusion is the last part of speaking that we must take note of; it is difficult to describe accurately the goal of any specific conclusion, however, because of the multitude of discourses available to the orator.

We should endeavor to go off with a good grace; not to end with a languishing and drawling Sentence; but to close with dignity and spirit, that we may leave

the minds of the hearers warm; and dismiss them with a favourable impression of the Subject, and of the Speaker. (202)

With that, Blair takes his own advice and ends his lecture.

Throughout his explanation, Blair has provided his audience not only with the order and exposition of each section he deems necessary in an oration, he has also given rules with which to govern oneself while preparing it. Several rules per segment, in fact. For instance, rule one for the Introduction states: “The Introduction should be easy and natural. The subject must always suggest it. It must appear, as Cicero beautifully expresses it: ‘To have sprung up, of its own accord, from the matter which is under “consideration” [trans]’” (161). This seems to me to be particularly useful for any orator when preparing a speech, as some introductions can come across as stilted or they can seem to have nothing to do with the subject at all. This has the ability to ruin a good speech by losing the audience before you even get to the subject itself. These types of helpful hints can be found for each of Blair’s five sections of speech preparation; over the span of two lectures, he managed to explain what he considered to be the best methods of persuasion in speech without leaving out any other types of speech-making in the process. Blair’s opinion of good rhetoric and good rhetorical preparation are made obvious to the reader through his careful explication of the subject, though there is a certain amount of irony in the fact that it took two lectures to explain how to prepare one.

Each of the philosophers that we have dealt with in this chapter has had a rhetorical theory to espouse; each assumed that his audience would benefit from knowing more about language and how to use it properly. In previous chapters, I have stated that literary criticism is based upon literary theory; applied rhetoric is just that: literary theory. Discussion about

the nature of rhetoric, about how it is defined, what it does, and how to use it to further one's ends as an orator makes up a philosopher's theory of rhetoric. The application of this theory has lead, in the case of Hugh Blair, to describing the myriad ways in which to discourse on any subject in the most effective manner. If I were to apply these rules to a speech and weigh the ability of the speech to complete its goal - whatever that may be - against the theory, I have established myself as a critic. It is application of any and all issues philosophers have discussed above that defines a critique. Listening to a speech or reading a treatise is simply the way to become an audience, albeit a more educated one. A critic must hold said oration or novel to a pre-established standard and see how it measures up.

There are times when one philosopher does not agree with the statements that another makes about rhetoric. These types of disagreements, which we can see epitomized particularly in this and the preceding chapter, help critics to decide on their personal theories. Without dissent, the world would be a pretty boring place; certainly, the Enlightenment would never have come about. In any case, it is easy enough to see that these men were endeavoring to enumerate their theories in order to use them for critical discourses in the future.

CHAPTER 4

OCEANS OF OSSIAN

After all we have discussed with regard to theory, it becomes important to turn to the literature of the Scottish Enlightenment to receive an accurate accounting of *how* literary criticism was employed. Criticism is worth nothing if it is not applied, so we will scrutinize a literary work published in this century in an effort to understand how it is that philosophers used their theories. The application of a theory, we will see, is much like testing a hypothesis; a conclusion or a decision about the way to treat literature requires a test of its value upon a relevant subject. Only then can it be considered worthy of note in the philosophical realm. Sometimes when a literary theory is tested for veracity, it turns out that it is not practical as criticism; in such a case, the theory would have to be revised. The only way to find out if theory is practical is to try it out on specific literature and find out if it still holds true. In this vein, we will study a work of poetry and prose of this period, James Macpherson's *The Poems of Ossian*. It is perhaps one of the most well known works of literature to come out of eighteenth century Scotland.

This composition has unique character common to the Scottish Enlightenment; it presents a visual story with a strong emphasis on the Scottish countryside and is evocative in its representation of the fervor of its heyday. Many of the metaphors employed are vast and sweeping; the descriptions of landscape bring the sublime into

sharp relief. And throughout the work, we will look at the relevance of previously discussed forms of literary theory, with a special accent on aesthetics and rhetoric as ways to dissect texts of this nature along with a philosopher's stance on the work itself. With the help of Hugh Blair's dissertation I will prove that while Macpherson's work is often sighted as heralding the Romantic period, it is in fact a product of the previous era's theory and practices.

Macpherson: The Man, The Myth, The Legend

James Macpherson made a claim in 1760 that he had found the original poetry of Ossian. The name Ossian, or Oscan, is the anglicized form of the Gaelic name Oisín, son of Fion mac Cumhail, a poet and warrior of the fianna in the Fenian Cycle of Gaelic literature of the third century AD. Fion is a name Macpherson used, along with Fionn and Finn to refer to the "Fingal" of Gaelic tradition¹. This poetry was published in fragments from 1761 to 1773 and there is much controversy as to the veracity of Macpherson's claim of originality; however, this study is not meant to draw out Macpherson's authenticity². It has been generally acknowledged recently, following a study done by the Scottish Highland Society after Macpherson's death, that these "recovered" documents were not actually authentic, being a combination of ancient stories considerably doctored by Macpherson. This is not the view of all critics; however, many have argued that his claims of "finding" the poetry are not important; the true wealth lies in the story itself; it is in this view that we will discuss *Ossian*. The merit

¹ Please refer to the Index of names in Macpherson's text (pp 553-573).

² Please refer to Patrick Graham's "Essay on the Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian." Edinburgh: James Ballantyne & Co., 1807. or Edward Davies' "The Claims of Ossian Examined and Appreciated." Swansea: H. Griffith, 1825.

of the piece is literary; thus, we will be able to use the literary theory garnered in the eighteenth century to dissect it and determine its worth as epic poetry.

The stories given in its pages are extremely visual. The grand proportions of the work bring the Scottish landscape to life. This is nowhere more observable than in the insistence the author has in comparing his characters with the countryside: “The chief moves before in arms, like an angry ghost before a cloud; when meteors inclose [sic] him with fire; and the dark winds are before his hand” (67). Colors, sights, sounds, and even strength of character are shown through metaphors of the landscape. In this way, it is certainly dealing with the aesthetic of the sublime, with its use of terror and extremity to complete the picture of the scene. In fact, the terror *Ossian* evokes in the mind of the reader could suggest the beginnings of Gothic literature in the Romantic period, and yet, as we will see, it still remains, solidly, a work of the Scottish Enlightenment.

The themes in *Ossian* include nobility, self-sacrifice, depth of emotion, and respect for tradition and heredity. In contrast to these more positive subjects are topics of ghosts and severe loss that nevertheless tie in to the familial heritage that was so important to many Scots. This was true in the time of Fingal and Ossian, but it was no less true for the Scots of the Enlightenment. In Ossian’s era, the famous clans of the Scottish people were not yet formed, yet an astute reader can witness the importance of family in Ossian’s tales as he describes the deeds of his father, whom he has outlived, along with his own son. This sense of deep loss comes across in the description of Oscar’s death in *Temora*:

We saw Oscar leaning on his shield. We saw his blood around. Silence darkened on every hero’s face. Each turned his back and wept. The king

strove to hide his tears. His gray beard whistled in the wind. He bends his head over his son: and his words are mixed with sighs.

And art thou fallen, Oscar, in the midst of thy course?... When shall joy dwell at Selma? When shall the song of grief cease on Morven? (151)

These are strong warriors, yet they show a depth of emotion for their kin that seems out of place with those whose job it is to fight and sometimes die. For these men death is a continuation of life, but to live and die with honor is the ultimate goal; after all, if your name is not sung by the bards after you die, you might as well not have existed at all.

Oscar, however, does not have that worry. He is certainly a hero; the tenderness that the king shows for his son underscores the significance of familial ties and the brotherly ties are echoed in every other hero's remorse to see a fallen comrade.

Because of the aforesaid stress on family heritage, this unearthing of history has the flavor of regaining a bit of the past that might have been lost. At the very least, it is an acknowledgment of histories that had been passed down orally through generations of Scots. After 1745, there was deliberate effort to break up the clans and the Highlanders, which gives the "recovery" of these ancient texts a political aspect. This is probably why the authenticity of these texts ended up being such an important issue for men like Samuel Johnson, who did not believe for one instant that the poetry was authentic, and Hugh Blair, who staunchly maintained the works' legitimacy and Macpherson's honesty. It was a matter of pride; if Macpherson took these ancient stories and translated them for the benefit of the nation and its history, all to the good. If he was lying, if he was passing off his work as the work of the ancients, the Scottish people would have viewed this slight as a personal affront to their integrity.

Another question that may arise has to do with the possible change of tone and theme resulting from a translation; the original work was reportedly in Gaelic and the only view we may have is that of the Scottish interpretation. Actually, this is not entirely true; Macpherson supplied some of the “original” manuscripts in subsequent editions of his work; however, many Scotsmen could not read the Gaelic. Note my careful use of the word *some*; the entirety of the poems are not included. This led many scholars to doubt again the authenticity of the works, but for our purposes, the importance of these omissions have to do with careful textual interpretation. Without the original manuscripts, it become literally impossible for current scholars of Gaelic to reinterpret these texts. Macpherson has left us with only one analysis – his own.

In Macpherson’s preface to his work, there is a specific insistence on antiquity; he prefers that his work be viewed from the context of a textual account of the beginnings of the Scottish society and culture: “They were certainly composed before the establishment of clanship in the northern part of Scotland, which is itself very ancient” (5). These are not meant to be seen as purely fiction; the tales have been orally transmitted down through the ages and thus are bound to contain elaborations, but at the heart of the stories is a dollop of truth. It is an epic fiction if it is a fiction at all; as you will remember, this is not a point of contention that particularly pertains to our projection of its worth. The standard categories for evaluating an epic are the ideas, diction, and episodes that make up the story. These are eighteenth century critical terms. *Ossian* is presented as high art, as opposed to a work of popular culture, but the distinction between “high” and “low” art is an artificial one at best. It depends on what the critic values most: innate qualities of the work or expectations for the piece and what it “should” be. It is my belief that this is

a philosophical fallacy most commonly known as a false dilemma. In this argument there seem to be only two sides, but in reality it is possible to appreciate both the innate and the expected qualities. A philosopher or a critic can choose to enjoy many differences in a work, even if it is only with an eye towards making it better.

Blair to the Rescue

Hugh Blair, in his *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal*, employed the theories of aesthetic and rhetoric espoused during the eighteenth century. Part of the work is devoted to assuring Macpherson's legitimacy, but the rest is allocated to the work itself; issues that are discussed include the comparison of the poems to the classical mode of judgment and comparison to the theories of the Enlightenment. Because they are epic poems, it seems correct that both methods are used. Blair would be in error if he were to ignore the classical theories for this particular work because of its reference to antiquity. In fact, it is the willingness to use both types of judgment, instead of reliance upon classical doctrine alone, that characterizes the rise of Enlightenment criticism.

Blair admits to a fondness for ancient poetry that appears to rely on sublime qualities: "They promise some of the highest beauties of poetical writing. Irregular and unpolished we may expect the productions of uncultivated ages to be; but abounding, at the same time, with that enthusiasm, that vehemence and fire, which are the soul of poetry" (345). For this same reason, Blair is willing to overlook many of what other critics might consider coarse and unsophisticated description; this is to become a theme in his dissertation. He sees the period in which Ossian is composing his poems as one in

which Nature holds sway. In this, he certainly anticipates the Romantics; he appreciates the simplicity of this earlier time, but appreciate is perhaps too simple a word. Blair is enthralled by Ossian's descriptions of beauty: "Their passions have nothing to restrain them: their imagination has nothing to check it. They display themselves to one another without disguise: and converse and act in the uncovered simplicity of nature" (345). Even though translation has forced what was once poetry into the more forgiving prose narrative style, Blair sees the poetry within the prose. The scenery and the character depiction, for him, are portrayed in such a poetic light as to leave no doubt that these words, in whatever form, are nothing but poetry.

The first issue Blair takes note of is one we have seen in earlier chapters, that of linguistic formation; he reminds the reader that while this might have originally been poetry, it might also have been passed down in song. He makes the argument that all civilizations have, as a matter of course, passed down histories either through poetry or song, usually a combination of the two. Also, he notes the differences between that type of society – what he calls the first ages – and the society of his own time period:

As the world advances, the understanding gains ground upon the imagination; the understanding is more exercised; the imagination, less...Language advances from sterility to copiousness, and at the same time, from fervour and enthusiasm, to correctness and precision. Style becomes more chaste; but less animated. (346)

We see this same argument made in Adam Smith's "First Formation of Languages." The more language evolves, the more abstraction it contains. Blair makes an excellent point when he notices that Ossian's society was relatively simple; a hunter-gatherer does not

need words for art, for leisure. He is on the move, he has little time for anything else. While there were some agrarians, Blair notes, the majority had this nomadic way of life. Yes, it was simple, but that simplicity lead to great works based on what they did know, what they were involved with in an immediate way: nature, war, death, boisterous life, and singing the praises of those passed on. They only had basic terms for what they knew, but what they knew was beautiful, "Rise, winds of autumn, rise; blow upon the dark heath! streams of the mountains roar! howl, ye tempests, in the top of the oak! walk through broken clouds, O moon! show by intervals thy pale face!" (169).

This is the beginning of the peopling of the British Isles; Scotland is as yet uncultivated, but by no means uncultured. However, the culture that presents itself to our imagination is one of minimalism; as a result, "Very few general terms or abstract ideas, are to be met with in the whole collection of Ossian's works" (354). The ideas here are dualistic, not from the point of view of Ossian, but from Blair's later perspective; once you are beyond the bounds of antiquity and can see characteristics of several ages, it is much easier to make this comparison. Ossian is grounded in the physical world. The abstract has no meaning for him, and as Blair adds,

His ideas extended little farther than to the objects he saw around him. A public, a community, the universe, were conceptions beyond his sphere. Even a mountain, a sea, or a lake, which he had occasion to mention, though only in a simile, are for the most part particularized; it is the hill of Cromla, the storm of the sea of Malmor, or the reeds of the lake of Lego.

(354-5)

Abstraction in language comes as a consequence of societal development. It is a natural process, as Smith notes, and we cannot fault the early Scots for being less developed in their language; Ossian certainly managed to make the best of what he had available.

We must sidestep a little, here, into the realm of Aristotelian regulations for epic poetry because Blair could not help but continue to hold the classics in high regard despite living in an age that had defined its own new theories. As noted earlier in the chapter, the nature of the poetry itself demands to be held to both standards. Blair states:

The fundamental rules delivered by Aristotle concerning an epic poem, are these: That the action which is the ground work of the poem, should be one, compleat, and great; that it should be feigned, not merely historical; that it should be enlivened with characters and manners; and heightened by the marvellous. (358-9)

Blair began with the first requirement by adding to it; the action should be centered around one goal, but it must also be broken into a beginning, a middle, and an end. He believed that this poem fulfilled all of these characteristics, insisting that there is no deviation from the goal of saving Ireland from the Swaran, as difficulties are overcome and the eventual triumph is achieved. Blair also notes: “Not only is unity of subject matter maintained, but that of time and place also” (360).

With Aristotle’s second rule, we can see that historical accounts are not as interesting as those that take liberty with history. Blair cites Homer and his *Iliad* as examples; the subject is historical fact, yet the story itself is unverifiable. The adherence of Macpherson’s tale to this rule might serve to bring him out of the disparaging realm were other critics to take note. Regardless, the reader can see rather quickly that even if

Macpherson had been diligent in his authenticity, it is possible that the oral tradition may have stretched the details of the story over the years it had been passed from bard to bard.

The last two rules seem to go hand in hand; lively characterization may in fact enter into the marvellous all by itself. Or, as in the case of Ossian's poetry, the characterization is heightened by the magnificence of the overall depiction. Moreover, the magnificence that characterizes the descriptions of nature and the world around the characters is used, in turn, to describe the characters themselves. In this short treatment of the Aristotelian requirements, Blair shows his audience that Ossian and Macpherson succeed according to classical standards of epic poetry.

Blair returns quickly to his discussion of eighteenth century theory and its application. In previous chapters, the audience has been exposed to the depth of his knowledge on rhetoric and *belles lettres*, but he continued to evaluate *Ossian* by bringing in aesthetic subjects such as the sublime. In oration meant to persuade, the goals are admittedly different than in those works meant to entertain; so instead of cleaving solely to the regulations he had set out for oration, Blair had to speak of aesthetics as well. Instead of an ordered introduction, "He sets out with no formal proposition of his subject; but the subject naturally and easily unfolds itself; the poem opening in an animated manner, with the situation of Cuchullin" (360). Blair also openly admires Ossian for what we might now call smooth transitions between subjects, which would fall under his own category of introduction – if, in the beginning of each new subject, we saw a new need for introduction. This might be manipulating Blair's theories a bit, but one of the best parts about theory is that it *can* be manipulated to fit a new theme. *Ossian* also fits Campbell's requirements for pleasing the imagination and addressing the passions; Blair

argues: “The marvellous, it must be admitted, has always a great charm for the bulk of readers. It gratifies the imagination, and affords room for striking and sublime description,” and goes on to relate Ossian’s poetry directly, citing his use of ghosts, “because they gave his poems that solemn and marvellous cast, which suited his genius” (365). Obviously, according to Blair, these poems could stand up to the guidelines of rhetoric outlined by philosophers of his time.

The beautiful and the sublime are topics that come up over and over again in *Ossian*, and rightly so. This work is filled with sublimity and an excess of beauty; the issue of the beautiful here is not where beauty resides, but instead the definition of beauty and how the descriptions in this work coincide with those classifications. The descriptions of nature in *Ossian* would meet the qualifications of both absolute and relative beauty as discussed by Francis Hutcheson; a mountain can be shown to have its own beauty: “Dost thou not behold Malvina, a rock with its head of heath? Three aged firs bend from its face; green is the narrow plain at its feet; there the flower of the mountain grows, and shakes its white head in the breeze” (127). And relative beauty is actually more prevalent in Ossian’s works because of his frequent use of metaphor: “They flew like lightning over the heath. He slowly moved as a cloud of thunder when the sultry plain of summer is silent. His sword is before him as a sun-beam, terrible as the streaming meteor of night” (92). Also, to make use of Hutcheson’s qualifications outside the boundaries of metaphor, there is relative beauty in this work’s ability to conform to not only classical doctrine, but eighteenth century literary theory as well. Thus, it surpasses these views on beauty that Hutcheson sets forth.

Thomas Reid, however, argued for a perceived excellence in the subject as a notion of the beautiful; if we rely on Blair's contentions during his dissertation, we can see that he would obviously argue for the superior quality of Macpherson's work. His emphasis on rational vs. instinctive knowledge of beauty would not apply so much to the work itself as it would apply to each reader's reaction to the work. Blair has an extremely rational knowledge of the poems' beauty, but a first-time reader probably would not know why the work touched their soul; without careful study of the work, it might be difficult to describe.

In the works of Ossian, the concept of the sublime overwhelms most other aesthetic subjects. There is so much grandeur, so much that is awe-inspiring and terrifying, that it seems to be a quality throughout the whole epic as opposed to some works wherein the sublime can be observed in certain passages and is missing from others. The focus of this work is not sublimity, it is the recitation of history through the eyes of our narrator, but the audience might be fooled by the sheer number of magnificent images set forth in these works. It is as if Ossian (or Macpherson) wrung out every drop of beauty there was to be had in the entirety of Scotland and placed them on these pages. Blair drew the reader's attention to the sublime by arguing: "All the circumstances, indeed, of Ossian's composition, are favourable to the sublime, more perhaps than to any other species of beauty...amidst the rude scenes of nature, amidst rocks and torrents and whirlwinds and battles, dwells the sublime" (394). He then went on to specifically state occurrences within the works wherein sublime language could be found. As discussed in earlier chapters, the sublime is very difficult to define; a philosopher or a critic is often

forced to rely on examples to illustrate his argument. Blair is more than happy to do so with *Ossian*; it is suited to this task.

Whatever discovers human nature in its greatest elevation; whatever bespeaks a high effort of soul; or shews a mind superior to pleasures, to dangers, and to death, forms what may be called the moral or sentimental sublime. For this, Ossian is eminently distinguished. No poet maintains a higher tone of virtuous and noble sentiment, throughout all his works.

(395)

Blair draws the reader's attention to a specific figurehead for this type of sentimental sublime; that of Fingal. He embodies all that is good and just and honorable about humanity without possessing any of possible the numerous unpleasant qualities normally found in men of his position. He is a pillar of strength and a hero to all without being an unbelievable character; in this, it is possible, he is the most sublime. Then again, his story is being told by his son after he died, so there may be an understandable selfish reason why Ossian would portray Fingal in that manner.

Besides the moral and sentimental sublime, Blair notes that sublimity of description runs rampant within the poems. It is not even necessary to quote further from the works themselves; every one used thus far in this chapter should be sufficient to fill the need for examples of sublime description. Despite what philosophers of the Enlightenment might consider a limited vocabulary, *Ossian* is filled with descriptive fervor to rival any sublime writings in the next century and beyond.

CHAPTER 5

REEVALUATING EDUCATION

Current literary criticism textbooks fall short of delivering the whole truth about Enlightenment philosophers and their anticipation of the Romantic period. Modern scholars specifically concerned with this period in the history of literary criticism, however, *have* given Scottish philosophers credit for the intellectual achievements they pioneered. I believe that throughout the course of my work on this topic, I have sufficiently proved that Scottish philosophers of the Enlightenment have: (1) Applied their considerable knowledge of the study of literature to the fields of aesthetic and rhetoric, resulting in a collection of literary theory of the period; and (2) Used that theory in conjunction with eighteenth century literature itself, resulting in a collection of literary criticism. Further, I have argued that aforementioned “modern” literary criticism was indeed a part of the age of the Scottish Enlightenment and while these philosophers, whom we may call critics, did anticipate the Romantic era of literary criticism, their brand of criticism was particular to their own time.

Some may argue that Romanticism was simply emerging among these philosophers and critics in eighteenth century Scotland, but I would disagree. The Enlightenment was an intellectual revolution and *should* be held as distinct from the Romantic era of the next century. The subject of aesthetics, while not given a common

name until the nineteenth century, was obviously a contemporary issue during the previous age. The sublime was also being spoken of by Scottish philosophers and criticized in works of the Enlightenment, even the sublime in nature. The Romantics used these subjects during their time while casting aside other Enlightenment tendencies – those of purely intellectual bent, like the scientific method – in favor of a reliance upon one's own emotions. In these ways, critics of our own time have delineated the two periods.

In my undergraduate studies, I learned this information about the periods of the Enlightenment and the Romantics; I did not, however, realize that modern literary criticism began any earlier than the nineteenth century. I believe it is unfortunate that the texts used in undergraduate literature courses are giving out incorrect information to students; having been one myself, I admit to my unhappiness with the current situation and call for a change in the editions of these undergraduate readings. This is especially true because of the subject itself – the *foundation* of modern literary criticism. If we are to educate future generations of scholars, let us be as clear as possible where these ideas originated; not in the Romantic period, but further back in history. Let all students be enlightened.

In order to illustrate this dearth of information, I draw your attention to two readings commonly used in undergraduate courses: Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory, an Introduction* and Jonathan Culler's *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. The eighteenth century is barely mentioned in each of these works; Eagleton notes that, "The final decades of the eighteenth century witness a new division and demarcation of discourses, a radical reorganizing of what we might call the 'discursive formation' of

English society” (16). While this may seem like a nod to the work being done in the field of literary theory during the Enlightenment, it is completely overshadowed by the emphasis on the Romantic period as the age in which the word ‘literature’ is coined and properly defined. In the same way that aesthetics is a word applied to the thoughts of the eighteenth century philosophers even though it was not coined until the nineteenth century, we can see that literary criticism was going on even if Eagleton’s claim is true and ‘literature’ was not clearly defined at that time.

Culler also spends very little time on the eighteenth century, only referring to theorists in the later years as a part of the Romantic movement (21). He also argues that interpretation was not a part of pre-Romantic movements, “On the contrary, students memorized them, studied their grammar, identified their rhetorical figures and their structures of procedure or argument” (21). Works were supposedly used as particularly poor or fine examples of rhetoric. As the reader can see from previous chapters, this is simply not the whole truth. It is probable that these issues came up in the study of rhetoric, but critics of the time *applied* their theories about literature (or poetry, etc.) to those same works; this application falls under the heading of literary criticism.

There exist, also, the current textbooks primarily concerned with showing the reader, “How the major theoretical debates have shifted over the last half of the twentieth century” (Keesey 6). This is an admirable goal, but when referring to historical criticism it becomes necessary to explore the origins of the discipline. Keesey’s book seems to refer only accidentally to the eighteenth century, noting that few critics disagreed with Aristotle’s point of view until, “Well into the eighteenth century,” and that a shift in sentiment moving literary study into biographical and historical channels, “had its roots

in the eighteenth century but...did not become dominant until the nineteenth” (11). As we can see from the preceding chapters, this is an incomplete argument at best.

Scholastic accounts correspond with my arguments on the subject: “The history of literary criticism between the middle of the 18th century and the 1830’s is the period which most clearly raises all the fundamental issues of criticism that are still with us today” (Wellek 1). Thus, the later Enlightenment played a significant role in determining modern literary criticism. Wellek even argues that, “It is now the fashion to deny the existence of preromanticism and to minimize the revolutionary elements in these critics” (105). He does not believe that any of the Scottish criticism of the time could stand up to Dr. Samuel Johnson’s, but despite this negative slant, there is a positive aspect to his words: literary theory and criticism *were* occurring during this time period in Scotland. He mentions Hume, Lord Kames, Beattie, and other authors that have been a subject of our current study. He might not believe their contribution to the field was more impressive than that of Dr. Johnson, but the point remains that they did make a contribution to an era in literary criticism he describes as preromanticism.

In the *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Vol. 4: The Eighteenth Century*, we can see several articles which support my argument.

To a remarkable extent, how the history of criticism in any period is written has depended on the historian’s understanding of how criticism evolved from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth, while this evolution itself (and thus the eighteenth century from which it began) has been construed according to Romanticism’s own account of its nature and origins. (Patey 7)

Patey notes, also, that the terms ‘literature’ and ‘literary criticism’ are rarely found in this age. However, instead of using this lack as a strike against criticism in the Enlightenment, he realizes, as I do, that criticism was so new to the realm of academia that it simply had not yet been named. Another article in this collection argues that Blair’s lectures on rhetoric themselves had much to do with literary criticism; the idea that rhetoric and criticism are interrelated is one that I staunchly support. Blair, says Kennedy, “Emphasizes literary criticism from the beginning by introductory lectures on taste, criticism, the sublime, and beauty” (362). It is in this century of the first professors of literature and rhetoric, Kennedy argues, that rules are set forth to define great works on the basis of scholastic authority.

The work of these scholars should be enough to prove my contention; in arenas of further scholarship, I would offer up the rest of the Enlightenment. It is a huge movement spanning many countries and ways of life; German, French, English, and even American writers could factor into this field of study. Surely, many had interest in the subject; Dr. Johnson and Emmanuel Kant would be fascinating subjects for an in-depth study, for instance. I am assured that all Enlightenment philosophers and critics have had something to offer in the realm of literary criticism, but I have confined myself to the Scottish Enlightenment as a matter of brevity. If one were to tackle the whole of the Enlightenment, I do not doubt that an entire treatise could be spawned.

As it stands, I believe that this work should have had the effect of opening the reader’s eyes to the wealth of information available within the Scottish Enlightenment and the ability of our educational system to provide this scholarship to students. As we have seen, literary theory in the form of aesthetics and rhetoric along with literary

criticism epitomized in the poetry of Ossian allow for the emergence of a Pre-Romantic viewpoint on literary criticism. The Scots, perhaps because of the hardships they had to endure during this period in their history, revolutionized the way the philosophers and critics viewed literature in the Enlightenment and subsequent centuries. That, in itself, is sublime.

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VITA

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