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Scottish Aesthetics and the Search for a Standard of Taste

The branch of philosophy now known as aesthetics developed under several different titles in eighteenth-century Scotland, and studies of aesthetic psychology (books on "taste," "genius," "rhetoric," "criticism," or "belles lettres") were closely connected with Scottish studies of the moral sentiments. As in moral psychology, Scottish writers were determined to develop what Hume has called the "science of man," attempting to develop aesthetic principles through an inductive analysis of human responses. Although they often cited Aristotle, Quintilian, and Longinus, they rejected to a man what William Duff called the "servile deference to antiquity."¹ "Criticism is founded wholly on experience," Hugh Blair remarked, "on the observation of such beauties as have been found to please mankind most generally."² For Blair, it was the students in his class at Edinburgh who provided fresh experimental data. For other Scottish critics and aestheticians, the data could be found in the responses of jurors to the speeches of successful lawyers; in the language used by servants to express their delight in Scottish ballads; or in those time-tested works of art that could be analyzed to demonstrate the bases of their lasting appeal. The range of observation and analysis was broad, but most Scottish writers could accept the language used by Alexander Gerard in defining a sound critical method: "it investigates those qualities in its objects which, from the invariable principles of human nature, must always please or displease; describes and distinguishes the sentiments which they in fact produce; and impartially regulates its most general conclusions according to real phenomena."³ Gerard's language was the language of contemporary science.

In that scientific spirit Scottish writers confronted a dizzying variety of aesthetic problems. There were, however, three persistent and related concerns that found expression in most of their Essays, Dissertations, and Inquiries: (1) the attempt to distinguish and explain different aesthetic/psychological effects; (2) the desire to

establish a standard of taste; (3) the awareness of how cultural/environmental factors influence creative genius. To the first of those concerns—aesthetic *effect*—Scottish writers brought those psychological skills that quickened their discussions of the moral sentiments, skills that were developed in the classrooms of Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Aberdeen. From the 1730s through the 1820s a series of influential Scottish professors (John Stevenson, Adam Smith, George Jardine, John Wilson) instilled in their students a psychological approach to literature, illustrating the faculties of the human mind by studying the style of those writers who had persuaded and/or entertained readers through the ages.⁴ As teachers and students Scottish aestheticians were, first of all, psychologists—to the extent that what was exciting in their writings was often almost buried in the apparatus and distinctions of faculty psychology. The psychological interest of their studies is apparent in the titles of some of their works: Hutcheson's *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), Gerard's *Essay on Taste* (1759), Beattie's *Essay on Poetry and Music, as They Affect the Mind* (1776).⁵

"As They Affect the Mind" was an important clause. Reading Newton, Locke, and Addison on colour, smell, and sound, Francis Hutcheson and Lord Kames were intrigued by the discovery that certain qualities of objects are "secondary qualities," the mind's own contribution to reality. David Hume and Archibald Alison studied the phenomenon of Thomas Blacklock—the blind Scottish poet who, through hearing conversations and poetic recitations, had come to associate qualities with *names* of colours, coming gradually to feel the same emotions at the use of those names that normal men feel at the perception/creation of the colours themselves. What evolved was what Kames called "a curious inquiry"—"Whether beauty be a primary or only a secondary quality of objects?"⁶ Is beauty, like colour, in the eye of the beholder?

Yes and No. Hutcheson's *Inquiry* was the first important Scottish study of aesthetic psychology, and Hutcheson was wary of the dangers of relativism. Defining beauty as an "idea raised in us," he inquired "what real quality" in external objects normally excites this idea.⁷ Influenced by both Shaftesbury and Locke, Hutcheson argued that men share an involuntary "sense of beauty"—an internal sense capable of receiving stimuli from without and of subsequently raising the idea of beauty in our minds. But Hutcheson believed that "original beauty" is excited by only *one* formal quality—the quality of uniformity amidst variety—as that uniformity is perceived in works of nature or

of art.⁸ Thus Hutcheson was able to combine an essentially subjectivistic aesthetic theory with a common standard of beauty, a "real quality." If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, it is in the eye of every normal human beholder as he encounters uniformity amidst variety in geometric figures, pleasure gardens, or poetic meter.

That center did not hold. In time Kames and Blair came to reject Hutcheson's standard of beauty as too narrow. Writing in the name of nature's "economy," Hume and Adam Smith attacked Hutcheson's notion of a separate aesthetic sense. The debt that these writers owed to Shaftesbury and Hutcheson was basic: the basic emphasis upon aesthetic response. But men's responses—and the objects that excited them—proved to be remarkably varied. As the century progressed Scottish aestheticians concerned themselves with a wide range of psychological effects—the effects of sublimity and novelty among them—an interest expressed earlier by both Hobbes and Locke, and shared in England in the eighteenth century by Addison, Burke, Collins, Warton, and Gray. By the end of the century Archibald Alison was willing to admit the relativistic implications of Hutcheson's *Inquiry*. Aesthetic responses, Alison believed, are the products of association of ideas. And individual associations, he admitted, are inevitably shaped by our personal experience and temper.

Alison was not the first to admit the vagaries of personal associations. Hutcheson, Hume, and Kames among others had studied that phenomenon before him. But the majority of eighteenth-century aestheticians tried hard to develop some objective standard of taste. For a number of reasons the search for such a standard was important to them. As philosophers and critics they felt the appeal of the quest that had been basic to Western philosophy—the search for some standard of evaluation, some permanence amidst apparent flux. And as eighteenth-century Scotsmen they shared their century's conviction that "taste" is a civilizing agent. In the larger Britain of which Scotland was a part, an increasingly wealthy and leisured middle class had turned to the fine arts with new excitement, aspiring to that cultured "use of riches" which Pope has praised in Bathurst and Boyle. The Man of Taste was now the middle-class *beau idéal*, and educated Scotsmen wished to foster that ideal in Scottish life. Kames's intention, as stated in the *Elements of Criticism* (1762), was to encourage Scottish interest in the arts, "an occupation that cannot fail to embellish . . . manners and to sweeten society."⁹ Hume and Smith served on the Criticism and Belles Lettres Committee of the Edinburgh Select Society; Gerard's *Essay on Taste* won the gold

medal offered by the Edinburgh Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Sciences, Manufactures and Agriculture; at Aberdeen George Campbell read the first draft of his *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776) to the Philosophical Society, whose members included James Beattie, John Gregory, and Thomas Reid. When, in the summer of 1761, Thomas Sheridan delivered lectures on "Eloquence and the English Tongue" at St. Paul's Chapel, Edinburgh, *The Scots Magazine* reported that the lectures were attended "by more than 300 gentlemen, the most eminent in this country for their rank and abilities."¹⁰ "In an age when works of genius and literature are so frequently the subjects of discourse," Hugh Blair observed, "when every one erects himself into a judge, and when we can hardly mingle in polite society without bearing some share in such discussions; studies of this kind . . . will appear to derive part of their importance from the use to which they may be applied in furnishing materials for those fashionable topics of discourse, and thereby enabling us to support a proper rank in social life."¹¹

But only *part* of their importance. Scottish concern with the fine arts and with the question of a standard of taste had developed from a motive other than the Scotsman's desire to cut a decent figure in society. Believing that aesthetic feelings are psychologically allied with moral feelings—"effects of the same cause, streams issuing from the same fountain," wrote Gerard¹²—Scottish thinkers recognized that relativism in aesthetic questions might lead to anarchy in moral matters. "A taste in the fine arts," Kames remarked, "goes hand in hand with the moral sense, to which indeed it is nearly allied: both of them discover what is right and what is wrong: fashion, temper, and education have an influence to vitiate both, or to preserve them pure and untainted: neither of them are arbitrary nor local, being rooted in human nature and governed by principles common to all men."¹³ If we once admit that there is no disputing about tastes, Kames warned, it must follow that "there is not such a thing as a *good* or a *bad*, a *right* or a *wrong*: that every man's taste is to himself an ultimate standard without appeal; and consequently that there is no ground of censure against any one, if such a one there be, who prefers Blackmore before Homer, selfishness before benevolence, or cowardice before magnanimity."¹⁴ Kames's problem was part of the Scottish habit of mixing morals with aesthetics—a habit that had developed through the writings of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Adam Smith. Shaftesbury had argued that men respond intuitively to harmony and/or deformity in human conduct, just as they respond to those qualities in

art: "the science of the virtuosi and that of virtue . . . become, in a manner, one and the same."¹⁵ In introducing Shaftesbury's thinking into Scotland, Hutcheson had claimed that our ideas of virtue and beauty are aroused through our internal moral sense and sense of beauty. Subsequently, Smith explained mankind's perception of both moral and artistic beauty in terms of the basic psychological principle of "sympathy." Thus, in the hands of Hutcheson or Smith, the Man of Taste became the Man of Feeling. Aesthetic issues merged with moral.

There were occasional objections to this mixing of morals and aesthetics. Campbell cited Smith's concept of sympathy as an example of the dangers of the spirit of system, "the dotage with which one is affected toward every appendage of a favourite system."¹⁶ Hume, Kames, Blair, Gerard, and Beattie noted that a just taste in the fine arts and a keen sense of virtue are not *always* joined in the same person. But most of the Scottish aestheticians agreed that art is an important force for moral instruction, operating more often through our sympathetic emotions than through our reason's grasp of moral principles.¹⁷ They agreed that mankind's pleasurable response to the perception of utility, propriety, or uniformity amidst variety is, in the end, part of the design of our benevolent creator, allowing men to value those qualities in their own conduct or to better understand the underlying plan of God's own work of art. Hume and Francis Jeffrey were exceptions, refusing speculation upon "final causes." But teleological assumptions—the belief in divine design and final causes—undercut the analytical method of most Scottish aestheticians, as they influenced most Scottish moralists.¹⁸ Even Alison, after admitting that our various associative responses are shaped by individual experience and temper, found in the very variety of potential stimuli further evidence of God's abundant goodness.

It was, then, both their cultural ambitions and philosophic needs that motivated eighteenth-century Scotsmen in their search for a standard of taste. And it was both empirical psychology and the still-potent concept of man's "General Nature" that led them to attempt to derive that standard from what Kames called "principles common to all men." The method employed, or suggested, was as follows: (1) to develop empirical laws of aesthetic response from inductive data gathered through introspection and observation; (2) to correlate those laws of aesthetic response with the psychological principles that had been developed in epistemology and moral psychology. If the aesthetic laws could be shown to be consistent with the psychological

principles developed in the other "sciences," then those laws were established on as secure a basis as the subject of aesthetics allowed. And any individual—no matter how eccentric his taste—could be shown how a specific work of nature or of art embodies qualities that generally trigger pleasurable responses. He could be brought, on reflection, to acknowledge that such works *should* be admired, even though he himself did not respond to them. Thus the standard of taste would be *potentially* universal, recognizable by all men through philosophical reflection, if not through immediate response.

The weakness of this method lay in the narrow basis of induction. Blair believed that the standard must be "those feelings and sentiments that are found, on the most extensive examination, to be the common sentiments and feelings of men." Yet he also believed that we should take into account only the sentiments of men who are "placed in such situations as are favourable to the proper exertions of taste." Hume, Kames, and Gerard were forced to make similar qualifications: leisure, long experience, and generous temper were necessary to turn raw sensibility into a significant response. Aristotle had argued, in a passage from the *Politics* that haunted the Enlightenment, that "we must look for the intentions of nature in things which retain their nature, and not in things which are corrupted." In the matter of aesthetic taste, however, the absence of corruption was not sufficient for several Scottish aestheticians. "It is only in the few who improve the rudiments of taste which *nature* has implanted, by *culture* well chosen and judiciously applied," Gerard believed, "that taste at length appears in . . . just proportions." As Kames admitted, such considerations excluded the greater part of mankind from inclusion in the search for a standard.¹⁹

The attempt to establish a standard of taste was complicated, and in some ways enriched, by the Scottish interest in "rude" societies and primitive literature. Lord Kames, writing in the 1760s, felt justified in claiming that "taste in the fine arts, as well as in morals, improves daily."²⁰ But taste was one thing, creative genius something else. In their speculations on the cultural conditions that encourage creativity in the arts, a number of the Scottish aestheticians concluded that the factors that foster creative genius are not the same as those that work for the improvement of taste. "If the advancing age of the world brings along with it more science and refinement," Hugh Blair noticed, "there belong, however, to its earlier periods, more vigour, more fire, more enthusiasm of genius."²¹ Scottish interest in

the world's "earlier periods" increased as the eighteenth century wore on, encouraging and encouraged by the general European and British phenomenon that we now call primitivism.

The primitivist movement was prompted by a number of the century's desires and excitements—among them a dissatisfaction with the complexities of civilized life, a hunger for the Longinian "sublime" in literature, and the accounts of primitive societies brought home to Europe by missionaries, merchants, and explorers. In English culture the movement found expression in a wide range of poetry, scholarship, and popular cant: Gray's "The Bard" and Old Norse translations, Collins' "Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands," Percy's *Reliques*, Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry*, Lowth's *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum*, and an interest in Stephen Duck and other working-class wonders. Both English and European writings influenced Scottish aestheticians, but their interest in primitive literature was primarily encouraged by the strong native Scottish tradition of sociological and anthropological study. Scottish historians, sociologists, and anthropologists—Gilbert Stuart, William Robertson, James Dunbar, Adam Ferguson, Lord Monboddo, Adam Smith, David Hume, John Millar—had been exploring the shaping effect of environment upon the cultures of both past and present peoples, developing a "natural or theoretical history of society" that Dugald Stewart thought to be "the peculiar glory of the latter half of the eighteenth century."²² This sociological/anthropological method was applied to literature in Thomas Blackwell's *Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (1735), William Duff's *Essay on Original Genius* (1767), Lord Kames's *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774), Hugh Blair's *Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian* (1763) and *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), as well as in the writings of Beattie, Smith, Alison, and Jeffrey.²³

Whether writing on Homer, Hebridean music, or Elizabethan wit, Scottish aestheticians and critics acknowledged that a just evaluation of works from the past involves, first, an understanding of the cultural environment within which those works were created. So Blackwell, early in the eighteenth century, inquired into the effect of manners, climate, politics, and the allegorical philosophy of Homeric times upon the author of the *Iliad*. So Jeffrey, early in the nineteenth century, discussed the evolution of European literature in terms of changing economic, religious, and political conditions.²⁴ And what were the conditions that apparently fostered creative genius in the

arts? For literature, at least, the conditions were not those of the eighteenth century—a century in which repressive standards of decorum, skeptical intelligence, and an inhibiting sense of past accomplishments conspired to quench creative fire. Blackwell believed that the condition of the poor and strolling bard was the happiest condition for poetic genius,²⁵ and the cult of the bard developed steadily in Scotland through James Macpherson's Ossianic fabrications (1760-63), David Herd's collection of "Heroic Ballads (1769), Beattie's *The Minstrel* (1771-74), Burns's persona of the heaven-taught plowman, and Walter Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805).

Except for Blake in England, latter eighteenth-century poets could not comfortably don full bardic dress. But Beattie suggested, in his *Essay on Poetry and Music*, that a modern poet might yet look to semi-primitive societies in his search for subject matter. Beattie's advice states a central problem of his century's literary theory and practice, in words that recall the neo-classical idea of General Nature and anticipate Wordsworth's later "Preface" to the *Lyrical Ballads*: "There is, in the progress of human society, as well as of human life, a period to which it is of great importance for the higher order of poets to attend . . . I mean, that wherein men are raised above savage life, and considerably improved by arts, government, and conversation; but not advanced so high in the ascent toward politeness as to have acquired the habit of disguising their thoughts and passions, and of reducing their behaviour to the uniformity of the mode . . . This is the period when the appetites, unperverted by luxury, the powers unenervated by effeminacy, and the thoughts disengaged from artificial restraint, will, in persons of similar dispositions and circumstances, operate in nearly the same way; and when, consequently, the characters of particular men will approach to the nature of poetical or general ideas, and, if well imitated, give pleasure to the whole, or at least to a great majority of mankind."²⁶

Burns was influenced by Beattie's suggestion, scribbling in his *Commonplace Book* the thought that it might be "some entertainment . . . to see how a ploughman thinks, and feels, under the pressure of Love, Ambition, Anxiety, Grief with the like cares and passions, which, however diversified by the Modes, and Manners of life, operate pretty much alike I believe, in all the Species."²⁷ When, in the early nineteenth century, Jeffrey encouraged Scott to try "a Highland story"—"there is no existing people so well adapted for the purposes of poetry"—Scott responded by depicting in a novel, *Waverley* (1814), "the ancient traditions and high spirit of a people,

who, living in a civilized age and country, retained so strong a tincture of manners belonging to an early period of society."²⁸ Scott's stated purpose was not purely antiquarian: he hoped to portray through Highland manners "those passions common to men in all stages of society."²⁹ Thus eighteenth-century moral, sociological, and aesthetic theories became the stuff of nineteenth-century novels.

But what of *real* primitive literature? The study of semi-primitive people *might* best reveal man's general nature, as well as the elements of a truly universal standard of taste. But the awareness of what was *peculiar* to different cultures—an awareness that had already found extreme expression in the ethnic theories of Herder—might foster relativism in aesthetics and in moral theory. And how were Christian moralists and loyal Hanoverians such as Blair and Beattie to justify their preference for a heathen, often violent literature? Blair was surprised and relieved to find that the meeting of lovers in the Ossianic "Oithona" was described with a delicacy that would be admired "in any poet of the most refined age."³⁰ But the conflict between literary and moral standards could not be easily resolved. Beattie admitted that the early stages of society provide more fertile subjects for Epic and Tragedy than do more polished, Christian centuries—"but for supplying the means of real happiness here, and of eternal felicity hereafter, every man of reflection, unless blinded by hypothesis, or by prejudice, must give the preference to the latter."³¹ Beattie had no doubt where his general preference lay: what had been gained through modern civilization more than compensated for the inevitable poetic loss. But some Scottish writers regretted the sacrifice of primitive energy to progress and refinement. And in a country where that primitive energy had recently erupted in political rebellion—where nostalgia for native Scottish culture often undercut the causes of enlightenment and post-Union progress—primitivist theories were a confusing mix.³² Late Enlightenment delight in the work of Burns and Scott was, in part, delight born of frustration. Poetry and novels were not, after all, so serious a thing as philosophy. And for men such as Henry Mackenzie, Dugald Stewart, and Francis Jeffrey, the Kilmarnock *Poems* (1786) and *Waverley* provided those primitivist pleasures that the public philosophy of enlightened Scotland had never been able to integrate fully into its criticism of life.

In the end, however, it was associationist psychology that brought the Scottish search for a standard of taste to its inconclusive conclusion. In his early *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) Hume had

argued that men's notions of beauty and deformity, like their notions of virtue and vice, develop from subjective responses. Where Hutcheson had used associationist psychology only to explain eccentricities in taste, Hume gave that psychology a central place in his study of aesthetic experience.³³ But Hume, like Kames, both advanced associationism and stopped short of a radically subjective aesthetic theory that would leave him on a level with his cook. In his later essay "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757) he chose not to develop a detailed associationist aesthetic. Admitting that men differ in associational responses, Hume argued that a standard of taste might be established by analyzing those works which are admired by critics of experienced and impartial judgment—or, if those critics differ, by analyzing works that have survived the test of time. Perhaps, as Norman Kemp Smith has suggested, the relativistic aspect of Hume's thinking in morals and aesthetics was an aspect to which the much-maligned Hume "was not concerned to draw special attention."³⁴

But if associationism clearly raised problems for mid-century writers on moral and aesthetic response, it was championed by writers whose principal concern was with creative genius. In *An Essay on Original Genius* William Duff defined original genius as an unusually subtle, vivid, and comprehensive power of associative imagination—the power that enabled Newton to construct a comprehensive system in physics, the same power that enabled Shakespeare to create a cast of "preternatural" creatures in *The Tempest*. Alexander Gerard, in his *Essay on Genius* (1774), cited with approval the associationism of Hume's *Treatise* and Kames's *Elements*, arguing that "in this operation of the imagination, its associating power, we shall, on a careful examination, discover the origin of genius." In that same associative activity, he noted, we also discover the cause of men's various associative responses: "Every profession or way of life renders a correspondent set of ideas familiar to a person; and in consequence of this, the same object frequently leads different persons into totally different tracks of thinking." Any perception, Gerard argued, "will suggest a thousand different ideas to as many different persons, according to the different associating principles or combinations of principles by which they are affected."³⁵

It remained for the Rev. Archibald Alison to give a detailed and coherent exposition of the most subjective elements in Scottish eighteenth-century aesthetics. In his *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790) Alison was careful to distinguish aesthetic

emotions from the ordinary moral sentiments. The "emotions of taste" are the product of a process of associative imagination, while our everyday feelings of loathing and love are more direct. With that distinction he freed "taste" from its earlier connection with the "moral sense," and was himself free to develop fully the relativistic implications of associationist aesthetics. Nothing in nature or in art, he argued, is of itself sublime or beautiful. The terms *sublime* and *beautiful* should be understood as describing the emotions that men feel when contemplating works of nature or of art. These "emotions of taste" are not produced directly by qualities intrinsic in landscape, sculpture, poetry, or music. A mountain storm or landscape by Lorrain moves *aesthetically* only (1) by suggesting some aspect of sentient life that is capable of raising a "simple emotion" of pity, melancholy, gaiety, or awe; (2) then by triggering a train of associated thoughts that are colored by that simple emotion. The consequent and complex aesthetic emotions—the "emotions of taste"—are eventually aroused through that process of associative activity which the work of art or nature has first prompted.

Alison's associationist theories were favorably discussed in Dugald Stewart's popular *Philosophical Essays* (1810). And when, in that same year, Alison's book was published in a second and enlarged edition, Francis Jeffrey wrote a long, commendatory article in the *Edinburgh Review*.³⁶ In his review Jeffrey discussed the eighteenth-century debate about the standard of taste, referring indirectly to Burke, Hogarth, Hutcheson, Hume, and other writers. "If things are not beautiful in themselves," Jeffrey concluded, "but only as they serve to suggest interesting conceptions to the mind, then everything which does . . . suggest such a conception to any individual *is beautiful* to that individual; and it is not only quite true that there is no room for disputing about tastes, but that all tastes are equally just and correct, in so far as each individual speaks only of his own emotions." That conclusion, at first reading, seemed to strip the critic of his basic role. But Jeffrey—adapting ideas earlier expressed by Beattie, Alison, and Stewart—defined a working standard for applied criticism. Although all private tastes may be equally correct, an artist must be careful to employ "only such objects as are the *natural* signs and *inseparable* concomitants of emotions of which the greater part of mankind are susceptible."³⁷

Theoretically, Jeffrey's appeal to "affections that belong to our universal nature" salvaged a common-sense standard from the welter of subjective responses. But, in practice, our common human nature

proved to be a vague referent. It could serve as a means of explaining the enduring appeal of great works from the past. But what group's associational responses could be taken to represent our common human nature in the early nineteenth century? Reviewing works of Wordsworth, Scott, and Keats at a specific moment in Britain's cultural development, Jeffrey sometimes spoke for a limited consensus. In effect, he equated "our universal nature" with the range of associative response to be expected among middle-class readers in Edinburgh, London, and Bristol. That appeal was not, of itself, a damnable maneuver. Jeffrey might have stated publicly what he privately believed—that the urban middle class contained more readers of wide associational sympathies than did any other group then available as referent. But the ambition to develop what Hume had called the "science of man" persisted in nineteenth-century Scotland. And Scotsmen still expected in a scientific aesthetic some criterion of taste that could be verified by reference to our "universal nature"—some laws of response that any open-minded reader could be led to acknowledge, whatever eccentricities in taste his personality or culture has imposed upon him. On occasion, as in his Alison review, Jeffrey echoed the rhetoric of that scientific aesthetic. In reviewing poetry and novels, however, his awareness of the factors contributing to relativism forced him to appeal, as his safest guide, to what men of his own class and education felt and thought.

Associationist psychology, employed in the *Edinburgh* and *Blackwood's Magazine*, continued to play an important part in Scottish criticism. The sociological approach to the study of art, as practiced in Scotland from Blackwell to Jeffrey, was adopted by Continental critics. But no nineteenth-century Scottish aesthete was able to resolve the conflict within Scottish aesthetics—the conflict between an increasingly relativistic psychological/sociological approach to art and the desire to establish a standard of taste on the basis of our common human nature. Because of its conflicting insights and ambitions the Scottish tradition of aesthetic inquiry lost its vigor in the early nineteenth-century. But much had already been accomplished. Although earlier writers—Quintilian, Erasmus, Hobbes, and Dryden among them—had studied art from a psychological or environmental perspective, it was only in the eighteenth century that those perspectives redefined aesthetic questions for most thinking men. The focus of critical attention shifted from the formal qualities of art to the effect of art upon its audience, despite the attempt by Hutcheson and others to maintain a subject-object balance. *Enthusiasm* and *in-*

spiration became once more respectable terms, free of Scriblerian contempt, at least when used in reference to creative genius. The concept of "General Nature" was transformed from a metaphysical ideal into a psychological, inductively-developed norm. These changes were gradual, not always fully intended or admitted by the writers involved, whose opinions on individual issues and artists were often surprisingly conservative. But the changes were real: the aesthetic world into which Coleridge was born, and against which he partially rebelled, was not that of Pope and Boileau. It was a world of empirical psychology, complex sociological/historical perspectives, and relativism barely held at bay—a world shaped in part through works that had been written in Scotland.

NOTES

1. William Duff, *An Essay on Original Genius* (1767; reprint ed. New York: Garland, 1970), p. 254. The Scottish rejection of rhetorical rules in favor of comparative study of belles lettres was analogous to the rejection of *a priori* reasoning in questions on the moral sentiments. "It is evident," Hume wrote, "that none of the rules of composition are fixed by reasonings *a priori*, or can be esteemed abstract conclusions of the understanding, from comparing those habitudes and relations of ideas, which are eternal and immutable. Their foundation is the same with that of all the practical sciences, experience; nor are they anything but general observations, concerning what has been universally found to please in all countries and in all ages" ("Of the Standard of Taste," *The Philosophical Works*, ed. T.H. Green and T.H. Grose [1882; reprint ed. Darmstadt: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1964], III, 269). The attempt to establish rules without regard to practice, Adam Smith complained, had produced the endless divisions and sub-divisions of ancient and modern rhetorical systems: "They are generally a very silly set of books and not at all instructive" (*Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. John M. Lothian [Carbondale and Edwardsville, Illinois: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1963], p. 23).
2. Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783; reprint ed. Carbondale and Edwardsville, Illinois: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1965), I, 37.
3. Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Taste*, 2nd ed. (1764; reprint ed. New York: Garland, 1970), p. 181. Lord Kames's "plan," as he explained it in the Introduction to his *Elements of Criticism* (1762), was "to ascend gradually to principles, from facts and experiments, instead of beginning with the former, handled abstractedly, and descending to the latter" (*Elements of Criticism*, 6th ed. [1785; reprint ed. New York: Garland, 1972], I, 13). The methodology of experimental science shaped Scottish thinking on aesthetics throughout the eighteenth century. In his *Philosophical Essays* (1810) Dugald Stewart could still voice the lingering assumptions and ambitions of his predecessors: "It is scarcely necessary for me to remark, that it is not by reasoning *a priori* that we can hope to make any progress in ascertaining and separating the respective effects of the various ingredients which may be thus blended in the composition of Beauty. In analyzing these, we must proceed on the same general principles by which we are guided in investigating the physical and chemical properties of materia. substances; that is, we must have recourse to a series of observations and experiments on beautiful objects of various kinds; attending diligently to the agreeable or the disagreeable effects we experience, in the case of these diversified combinations" ("On Taste," *The Works of Dugald Stewart* [Cambridge: Hilliard and Brown, 1829], IV, 329).
4. George Jardine is representative of this tradition. Succeeding Adam Smith as Professor of Logic and Rhetoric at Glasgow University (1787-1824), he transmitted the ideals and methodology of Smith's generation to those younger Scottish men of letters, including

- Francis Jeffrey and John Wilson ("Christopher North"), who would dominate British periodical criticism in the early nineteenth century. Jardine's procedure was to lead his students through "the elements of the science of mind, with an analysis of the different intellectual powers, in the order of their connection and dependence—the theory of language, as illustrative of human thought,—the principles of taste and composition" (Jardine, *Outlines of Philosophical Education* [Glasgow: Anderson, 1818], v).
5. Beattie's *Essay on Poetry and Music* was written in 1762, but not published until 1776.
 6. Kames, *Elements*, I, 207.
 7. See Treatise I ("Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design") of Hutcheson's *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, 2nd ed. (1726; reprint ed. New York: Garland, 1971).
 8. Hutcheson did distinguish what he called original or absolute beauty (the idea of uniformity amidst variety) from comparative or relative beauty (the idea of just imitation), a distinction subsequently adopted by Kames in his *Elements of Criticism*. Hutcheson's thinking was probably influenced by the reading of Addison's *Spectator* paper No. 416: see Clarence D. Thorpe, "Addison and Hutcheson on the Imagination," *ELH*, 2 (November 1935), 215-34.
 9. Kames, *Elements*, II, 502, note.
 10. *Scots Magazine*, July 1761, p. 390.
 11. Blair, *Lectures*, I, 9. Among educated eighteenth-century Scotsmen the dialects of Scottish speech were themselves a daily source of embarrassment. "And now, in Scotland," Beattie complained, "there is no such thing as a standard of the native tongue; nothing passes for good language, but what is believed to be English; every county thinks its own speech preferable to its neighbour's, without entertaining any partiality for that of the chief town: and the populace of Edinburgh speaks a dialect not more intelligible, nor less disagreeable, to a native of Buchan, than the dialect of Buchan is to a native of Edinburgh" ("Essay on Laughter and Ludicrous Composition," *Essays* [1776; reprint ed. New York: Garland, 1971], p. 625). Blair, Hume, and Beattie compiled lists of "Scotticisms" to be avoided, and several Scottish urban clubs sought to Anglicize Scottish speech—a form of speech that, Smollett lamented, "certainly gives a clownish air even to sentiments of the greatest dignity and decorum" (*The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* ["Matthew Bramble to Dr. Lewis, 8 August"]).
 12. Gerard, *Essay on Taste*, p. 191.
 13. Kames, *Elements*, I, 6.
 14. Kames, *Elements*, II, 488.
 15. Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), I, 217 ("Advice to an Author," part 3, sect. 3).
 16. George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1808 ed.; reprint ed. Carbondale and Edwardsville, Illinois: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1963), p. 124.
 17. For a concise survey of this prevalent attitude, see A.M. Kinghorn, "Literary Aesthetics and the Sympathetic Emotions—a Main Trend in Eighteenth-Century Scottish Criticism," *Studies in Scottish Literature*, I (July 1963), 35-47.
 18. For examples, see Hutcheson's Preface to the *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*; Kames's *Elements*, I, 5 and II, 250; Blair's *Lectures*, II, 478, 495; Gerard's *Essay on Taste*, pp. 94, 187; Beattie's *Essays*, pp. 485, 584; Duff's *Essay*, p. 4; Archibald Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (Edinburgh, 1790), pp. 114, 399-400.
 19. Kames, *Elements*, I, 6; Blair, *Lectures*, II, 250 and I, 32; Gerard, *Essay on Taste*, p. 97. The clearest discussion of Kames's dilemma, a discussion that illuminates the problems of several Scottish writers, is Audrás Horn's "Kames and the Anthropological Approach to Criticism," *PQ*, 44 (April 1965), 211-33.
 20. Kames, *Elements*, II, 176.
 21. Blair, *Lectures*, II, 254.
 22. Dugald Stewart, "Dissertation Exhibiting a General View of the Progress of Metaphysical, Ethical, and Political Philosophy," *Works*, VI, 65.
 23. The same method was applied to linguistic problems in Smith's "Dissertation on the Origin of Languages," appended to the 3rd ed. (1767) of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and in Lord Monboddo's *Of the Origin and Progress of Language* (1773-92).
 24. See Jeffrey's review of Madame de Staël's *De la Littérature considérée dans Ses Rapports avec les Institutions Sociales* in the *Edinburgh Review*, 21 (February 1813), Art. 1, 1-50.

25. See Thomas Blackwell, *Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (1735; reprint ed. New York: Garland, 1970), pp. 103-16.
26. Beattie, "Essay on Poetry and Music," *Essays*, p. 394.
27. Robert Burns, *Commonplace Book*, ed. James Cameron Ewing and Davidson Cook (London: Centaur Press, 1965), p. 1.
28. *Edinburg's Review*, 16 (August 1810), Art. 1, 280; Walter Scott, "General Preface to the Waverley Novels," *The Works of Walter Scott* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1912), I, xx.
29. Scott, "Waverley," *Works*, I, 4-5 (chp. 1).
30. Hugh Blair, *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian*, 2nd ed. (1765; reprint ed. New York: Garland, 1970), p. 80.
31. Beattie, "Essay on Poetry and Music," *Essays*, p. 397.
32. The same cross-currents in Scottish culture affected the revival of Scottish vernacular poetry. See John Butt, "The Revival of Vernacular Scottish Poetry in the Eighteenth Century," in *From Sensibility to Romanticism*, ed. Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 219-37.
33. For a clear discussion of early eighteenth-century associationism, see Martin Kallich, "The Associationist Criticism of Francis Hutcheson and David Hume," *SP*, 43 (January 1946), 644-67.
34. Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume* (London: Macmillan, 1949), p. 200.
35. Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Genius* (1774; reprint ed. New York: Garland, 1970), pp. 14, 130, 196. In the Advertisement for this *Essay* Gerard claimed that most of the book had been completed by 1758. He may have wished to counter the idea that his *Essay* was indebted to Duff's *Essay on Original Genius* (1767).
36. *Edinburgh Review*, 18 (May 1811), Art. 1, 1-46. This review, in revised form, was the article on "Beauty" that Jeffrey contributed to the Supplement of the 1824 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, an article subsequently published in the 1841 ed. of the *Encyclopaedia* and included in Jeffrey's *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review* (1843). In revising his review for the *Encyclopaedia*, Jeffrey criticized more closely Alison's claim that the free play of associative imagination is the essence of aesthetic response.
37. *Edinburgh Review*, 18 (May 1811), Art. 1, 43. Jeffrey had encountered similar distinctions between universal and peculiar associations in Beattie's letters, Alison's *Essays*, and Stewart's essay "On Taste": see *Edinburgh Review*, 10 (April 1807), Art. 12, 174 and *Edinburgh Review*, 17 (November 1810), Art. 9, 206-7. Jeffrey, Alison, and Stewart were regular members of the Edinburgh Friday Club, and this distinction may have evolved in their conversations on associationist aesthetics.