

A TASTEFUL COLLABORATION: BELLETRISTIC RHETORIC AND
WOMEN'S RHETORICAL ARTS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH LITERATURE

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Introduction: The Recovery Project: Investigating the Rhetorical Goals, Modes, and Strategies of Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers

In her trailblazing project *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity Through the Renaissance*, Cheryl Glenn unravels the traditional historical narrative that rhetoric is “*exclusively* upper-class, male, agonistic, and public” (2). Her recovery work creates new patterns in the tapestry of rhetorical history as she weaves together the voices of women who have been excluded from the dominant narrative. As she invites more scholars across disciplines to engage in this recovery work, she explains that the process requires more than simply adding token women’s voices into the same linear rhetorical history. Instead, women’s rhetorical recovery requires that scholars redefine and enlarge traditional understandings of rhetoric. The recovery of women’s voices, as seen in Glenn’s project as well as studies by Jane Donawerth, Andrea Lunsford, and others¹ seeks to identify specific women as key figures in rhetorical history, to draw attention to previously undervalued rhetorical modes, and to re-write traditional rhetorical theories. These scholars often highlight modes of discourse such as collaboration, silence, and listening as effective communication strategies that are often gendered feminine because they have received less prominence in the history of rhetoric than masculine rhetoric. For instance, Cheryl Glenn and Krista Ratcliffe’s collaborative work *Silence and Listening as Rhetorical Arts* examines the power of previously marginalized rhetorical modes such as silence and listening. Glenn and Ratcliffe trace these forms of rhetoric in the works of women from

¹ Also see Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald’s *Available Means: An Anthology of Women’s Rhetorics*, Karen A. Foss and Sonja K. Foss’s *Women Speak: The Eloquence of Women’s Lives*, and Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch’s *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition and Literacy Studies* as examples of women’s rhetorical recovery.

Aspasia (470-400 BC) to Christine de Pizan (1364-1430) and in contexts as diverse as South Africa, Israel, and America. Though the understanding or strategic use of these rhetorical modes is by no means static throughout history, among cultures, or within the works of different rhetoricians, Glenn and Ratcliffe establish them as trans-historical categories that can be used to identify women's rhetoric. My project responds to the call for more interdisciplinary work that further theorizes women's uses of these modes within the larger tradition.

While literary scholars have explored the acts of reading and writing among nineteenth-century women as dynamic processes in personal and social development,² I underscore one particularly neglected, yet complementary identity of the literary woman—that of rhetorical critic. *A Tasteful Collaboration: Belletristic Rhetoric and Women's Rhetorical Arts in Nineteenth-century British Literature* argues that writers Anna Jameson, Christina Rossetti, and Vernon Lee extend an understanding of belletristic rhetoric, specifically as laid out by Hugh Blair (as discussed in chapter 1), as a means of approaching literary and aesthetic theories and addressing social concerns. I argue that these women's writings advance eighteenth-century concepts of taste to legitimize their qualifications as critics and their voices in the construction of femininity. Using and retheorizing tenets of belletristic rhetoric, these writers not only argue for women's place alongside men's in public speaking, but they also enrich the tradition as they bring attention to modes of women's rhetoric. I also examine these women's adept rhetorical strategies in revising

² See Kate Flint's *The Woman Reader (1837-1914)*, Catherine Golden's *Image of the Woman Reader in Victorian British and American Fiction*, Jennifer Phegley's *The Proper Woman Reader*, and Deirdre David's *The Victorian Novel* as examples of scholarship on literary women readers and writers.

men's aesthetic philosophies and repurposing traditional visual imagery of arts and botanical imagery to critique oppressive representations of women and to illustrate women's rhetorical styles. In turn, their contributions to women's rhetoric revive the belletristic tradition itself from its state of neglect and disapprobation within rhetorical studies.

By reframing literary women within the rhetorical tradition, I follow Glenn's historiographic methodology in reconstructing history through the nuancing of well-established theories. I specifically reconstruct the history of nineteenth-century belletristic rhetoric (the study of aesthetic qualities in language) by identifying women whose engagement in literary and aesthetic criticism positions them as credible theorists of taste. Rather than taking a broad historical approach to recovery as Glenn does, I have selected belletristic rhetoric because of its pronounced legacy within the nineteenth century and its association with the development of literary studies.

Stephen Carr recounts the "commonplace" assumption that Hugh Blair's treatise *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) had the most "lasting influence on the development of writing instruction" throughout the nineteenth century (75). In his study, Carr details how Blair's work was widely disseminated and adapted for various purposes not only among the British but across the world. He suggests that the text's vast circulation and varied uses invite critics to make "revisionary arguments about its historical impact and importance" (76). As I use Blair's *Lectures* as a key text in establishing the features of belletristic rhetoric, I acknowledge, as does Carr, that his influential work is not simply a "stable authoritative text with clear lines of genealogical descent" but rather a "textual field with fairly fluid boundaries, a discourse that across the range of its reproductions was

differentially mobilized, packaged, and reappropriated to suit quite varied purposes” (77). Therefore, in reconstructing belletristic rhetoric by including literary women’s voices, I do not propose that the theories of taste I identify within these women’s literary works are direct descendants of Blair’s theories or that these women would have necessarily understood Blair’s work in the same way at different times during the nineteenth century. However, I do argue that Blair’s synthesis of belletristic rhetoric provides an influential paradigm for understanding taste as his lectures became a classic in rhetorical and literary education that “flourished for almost a century” (85).

In establishing women’s voices within the belletristic tradition alongside Blair, my methodology echoes that of Linda Ferreira-Buckley and Lois Agnew who trace the development of rhetorical concepts such as *belles lettres* and *sensus communis* throughout the nineteenth century by establishing conceptual relationships between rhetorical figures such as Blair and other scholars such as John Ruskin and Matthew Arnold. In the end, such scholarship reconstructs the historical narrative by showing the relationships between these thinkers through their social goals. For instance, Ferreira-Buckley suggests belletristic rhetoric as advanced by Blair influenced English literary education and the specific cultural ideals found in Ruskin’s and Arnold’s works. In the same way, I reconstruct the history of nineteenth-century belletristic rhetoric by relating women writers’ discussions of taste to Blair’s. In doing so, I challenge the accusations that belletristic rhetoric watered down the power of civic rhetoric and show that it was an inviting entry for women’s rhetorical theories and goals.

Women's Literary and Rhetorical Recovery Overview

Much of the early important recovery work in literary studies has attempted to create a distinct woman's tradition as separate from the dominant male tradition. For instance, feminist literary critics of the 1980s and 1990s such as Anne Mellor, Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar have given women writers their own history, re-writing the gendered narrative in movements such as Romanticism, revising the literary canon, and re-examining the representation of women within literature.³ Rhetorical scholars recovering women rhetoricians also wish to re-write histories plagued with gender bias. They are interested in validating the often unrecognized "forms, strategies, and goals used by many women as 'rhetorical'" (Lunsford 6). Glenn's *Rhetoric Retold* and Lunsford's *Reclaiming Rhetorica* do not explicitly designate a woman's rhetorical history that is separate from men's, but both seek to revise the story emphasizing women's available means of persuasion. In all recovery work, literary and rhetorical scholars seek to place women's contributions to society in a more valued position within a larger historical narrative.

Still, many scholars are cautious about setting up an essentialist framework that classifies all women under the same set of beliefs and attributes or creating a false binary that dissociates the writing of women from the writing of men rather than seeing them in dialogue with one another. As I draw upon this rich history of feminist recovery, I realize that the identification of women's rhetoric as a category may invite skepticism about the distinctions of "woman" as separate from "man"; however, many scholars have effectively

³ See Anne Mellor's *Romanticism and Gender*, Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own*, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*.

demonstrated methods of recovery that see the ideas of “womanhood” as a useful category while still being diverse and set in dialogue with their male counterparts. Donawerth, for instance, in *Rhetorical Theory by Women before 1900*, reclaims rhetoric performed by women by focusing on specific rhetorical moments, arguing that “groups of women have certain goals for communication, and these seem to arise under certain historical circumstances” (xix). She advises that part of a feminist recovery of rhetoric involves seeing the “multiplicity and diversity” in the story rather than limiting the tradition to one narrative (xviii). Her theoretical approach implies that even in looking at women’s contributions to a specific historical exigency, it is important to recognize the diversity within those perspectives rather than reading women’s voices as a homogenously separate tradition from men’s.

Anne Mellor’s work *Romanticism and Gender* also demonstrates strategies for integrating women’s voices into the larger historical context of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Britain. Mellor’s method proposes separate “masculine” and “feminine” forms of “Romanticism.” Even though she makes this distinction, she recognizes that both the male and female writers of the time were engaged in a dialogue surrounding the same historical and cultural events. She juxtaposes the voices of multiple male and female writers (e.g. William Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy Wordsworth) in an effort to create a richer, more nuanced, diverse understanding of the period.

Nancy Struever models an interdisciplinary approach to literature by juxtaposing late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century women writers’ voices with their male counterparts. For instance, in “The Conversable World: Eighteenth-Century Transformations of the Relation of Rhetoric and Truth,” Struever argues that Jane Austen

uses her novels to dramatize David Hume’s rhetorical theory that taste as displayed through conversation could be “socially redemptive” (240). She reads Austen’s novels as arguments that the ability to converse well and display proper taste is more than a simple interest in style but rather a “serious and central preoccupation” that leads to social “edification” (246). Her approach to reading literature as rhetorical theory largely influences my own method in this project.

There are several benefits of reading women in dialogue with their male counterparts rather than creating an entirely separate tradition. Fiona Price asserts that this strategy counteracts the danger that a woman’s tradition will be cast as secondary and inferior to a primary male tradition (6). Secondly, she notes that putting women’s voices back into the debates surrounding a particular tradition like belletristic rhetoric actually guards against essentializing women (7). Just as different men presented different definitions and perspectives on the rhetoric of taste, women did as well.

The rhetorical modes I discuss are not primarily women’s strategies either, though they have been claimed by women’s rhetoric simply because like women, these modes have been subjugated to an inferior position within rhetorical history (Lunsford 6). I will identify how rhetoricians have found value in rhetorical modes such as conversation and collaboration as a means of complicating the primacy of what Lunsford calls the “traditional, competitive, agonistic, and linear mode of rhetorical discourse” (6). Though rhetorical modes such as listening or strategies such as revising may have been delimited as inferior, this project examines them as active and generative rhetorical endeavors.

Rhetorical Modes: Conversation, Collaboration, Empathetic Listening, and Silence

Women writers often claimed the rhetorical power of undervalued rhetorical modes such as conversation, collaboration, empathetic listening, and silence. Conversational rhetoric, though often described as primarily a women's rhetorical form, was celebrated by many eighteenth century male writers. As Struever notes, eighteenth-century rhetoricians such as David Hume saw conversation as a means of social improvement (240). He believed that "the more we converse, the more we learn principles of humanity and universal moral sentiment (240). Hume even acknowledged women as the "female sovereigns" in the art of conversation, yet this distinction allowed him to justify the division between women as sovereigns in intimate conversations versus public letters, thus reifying a hierarchical structure that relegated women and the mode of personal conversation to a less prominent place in society (Struever 241).

Donawerth elevates the status of conversational rhetoric, arguing that contemporary theory "would have benefited from a strand that concentrated on dialogism, collaboration, and consensus during communication" (*Conversational Rhetoric* 144). She emphasizes how women theorize conversation:

[They] put forward conversation as a model for all discourse, urging speaking and writing that is collaborative, not antagonistic in relation to the audience, seeking consensus, not domination as the goal of communication, advising best practices for domestic rhetoric, [and] developing an art of listening. (16)

Though her argument assumes that women's conversational rhetoric died off in the nineteenth-century due to women's engagement in writing prescriptive rhetorical handbooks, I extend her observations to the nineteenth-century literary women whose

various genres, such as literary criticism, poetry, fiction, and non-fiction, contributed to the theorization of conversational rhetoric.

Collaboration, as an extension of conversational rhetoric, has resurfaced in contemporary scholarship, illustrating its importance to the larger tradition. In the “Afterword” to Andrea Lunsford’s *Reclaiming Rhetorica*, Annette Kolodny argues that the integration of women’s rhetoric in dialogue with traditional masculine rhetoric helps scholars see that effective language does not necessarily equate to coercive language (320). Instead, she identifies women’s rhetorical strategies as those which offer a collaboration between speaker and listener to “create a shared community in their audiences” (320). As Holly Laird remarks in *Women Coauthors*, the inconsistent use of the term “collaboration” produces confusion, depending on its function in rhetorical theory or literary theory (269). In literary studies such as Lorraine Mary York’s *Rethinking Women’s Collaborative Writing*, the act of collaboration is primarily found in the act of writing together or “co-authorship” (3). Bette Lynn London’s *Writing Double: Women’s Literary Partnerships* looks at more “explicit” forms of collaboration while still acknowledging the “wide range of collaborative practices that fall short of full and equal coauthorship” (9). These works sensibly limit their scope as they are incipient collections of literary women’s collaborations. While there is value in such limitation, I draw more readily from a rhetorical theorization of collaboration that includes both the speaker or writer and the listener or critic. Donawerth describes this type of collaboration as a “group coming to a consensus” (“Authorial Ethos” 113). Through this definition, I recognize the critic (an important actor in belletristic rhetoric) as a partner in the collaborative process. I also discuss the collaboration of ideas within theories. For

instance, the collaboration of Genius and Taste in Blair's belletristic theory provides a paradigm for literary collaborations that include the creators and the editors.

More recently, listening and silence as rhetorical modes have been radically re-theorized in works such as Krista Ratcliffe's *Rhetorical Listening*, Glenn's *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* along with their collaborative work *Silence and Listening as Rhetorical Arts*. Ratcliffe identifies the act of listening within conversation as a rhetorical move often associated with the feminine in scholarship because it subordinates women to the role of listener under the male speaker. However, she argues that rhetorical listening can be an empowering stance that opens up effective dialogue and "negotiate[s] troubled identifications in order to facilitate cross-cultural communication about any topic" (17). Rhetorical listening positions the listener as an active receiver rather than a combatant. Effective rhetorical listening can create an atmosphere in which two parties can more effectively reason with one another through the process of identification rather than maintaining a combative stance, which often distances parties rather than aiding effective communication. This form of listening invites empathy rather than debate. Glenn argues that silence can also be empowering even though it has "long been considered a lamentable essence of femininity, a trope for oppression, passivity, emptiness, stupidity, or obedience" (2). While she acknowledges that not all silences are equally as potent, it is a rhetorical mode that "merits serious investigation" within rhetoric studies (2).

Scholars explain that these modes, which have been claimed by the field of women's rhetoric, are powerful tools for solving problems peacefully. Jenny R. Redfern describes the Italian medieval writer Christine de Pisan's approach to peaceful rhetoric in her work *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* (1405). As Pisan instructs women in the necessary ways to

achieve virtue, she campaigns for an increased “respect for the image of womanhood” which includes the demand for equality in education (76). Redfern observes that Pisan contributes more widely to rhetorical history as she challenges a traditional understanding of rhetoric as war or persuasion and redefines rhetoric as “the skill of peacemaking” and a “better means of settling differences” (91).⁴

Rhetorical Strategies: Revising Philosophies and Repurposing Imagery

As these women writers advance various rhetorical modes as important means of communication, they also revise prominent male theories and repurpose visual imagery in order to redefine their roles as women in society. Glenn explains that historically, women’s writing was often considered “derivative, defective, muted, and other” because it was simply a revision or translation of a man’s work (146). She challenges this assumption by revealing the genius in Margaret Roper’s skillful rhetorical translation work, noting that it was a “careful balance of linguistic daring and confidence...expressed in her addition, expansion, or reversal of phrases, clauses, and ideas and in her doublings and couplings of Erasmus’s singular words” (*Rhetoric Retold* 148). In other words, the ability of a female writer to amplify, explain, or edit another’s ideas gave her a power of creating new ideas with which to influence others. In *Translation, Authorship, and the Victorian Professional Woman*, Lesa Scholl argues that translation allowed women writers to take part in the cultural issues of the day. Scholl reveals a general assumption that literary translation was

⁴ The field of composition studies has presented an engaging examination of peaceful rhetoric or “irenic” rhetoric as “female” though it has existed throughout the rhetorical tradition. See Robert Connor’s chapter “Gender Influence: Composition-Rhetoric as Irenic Rhetoric” in *Composition-Rhetoric* for a more in depth exploration.

a passive and submissive activity, yet she consistently illustrates how the active process of translation empowered women to influence public ideas.

Nineteenth-century women writers, highly influenced by the rhetorical theory of the eighteenth century, employ this power of translating key Enlightenment ideas for their own goals and purposes. Throughout each chapter, I emphasize how each author repurposes Blair's theories of taste and genius as well as the sublime and beautiful in order to give women more agency as critics and creators. I also examine how these women writers revise the aesthetic philosophies of male writers such as Edmund Burke, John Ruskin, and Walter Pater in order to challenge gender constructs that were limiting to women.

In the process of translating men's aesthetic theories, women demonstrated active participation in the development of rhetorical philosophy despite their exclusion from more formal rhetorical education, public speaking, and certain forms of persuasive writing such as preaching, politics and law (Donawerth, "Poaching," 243). Donawerth draws upon Michel de Certeau's theory of "poaching" the property of others to show how women writers manipulated ideology even without a formal place in the public sphere. Each of the authors examined in this dissertation practices a type of "poaching" as she appropriates the tenets of eighteenth century belletristic rhetoric as synthesized by Hugh Blair. Blair's rhetoric, including theories on taste, aesthetics, creativity, and dialogue, among others provides an adaptable rhetorical pattern for the writers I investigate. Through translation of Blair's themes, these writers situate themselves in the larger rhetorical tradition and legitimize their place as authorities on taste.

In order to revise certain male philosophies, women writers often repurposed visual imagery that traditionally denigrated women. Because the images of art and nature were so often incorporated into discussions of gender and taste, women chose to reclaim them in order to critique limitations placed on women and showcase their rhetorical style. Peter de Bolla in *The Education of the Eye* posits that the eighteenth century ushered in a unique “culture of visibility” in which the public attached cultural significance to aesthetic objects specifically in their writing and criticism in three areas—paintings, gardens, and architecture (7-8). Women drew upon the cultural and rhetorical significance of art (paintings) and nature (gardens) because these symbols possess definite associations with ideas of womanhood. Arabella Lyon explains the linguistic contributions of modern rhetorical theorist Susanne Langer to argue that women manipulate symbols to create and share meaning (271). This manipulation or repurposing, as I call it, is a key rhetorical strategy in social reform. Langer says of symbols in *Feeling and Form* that they are “vehicles for the conceptions of objects...It is the conceptions, not things, that symbols directly mean” (60-61). The nineteenth-century women writers I look at manipulate symbols, anticipating the era of modern rhetoric when theorists such as I.A. Richards in *Philosophy of Rhetoric* and Kenneth Burke in *A Rhetoric of Motives* develop the idea of metaphor as much more than a literary device; it is the means of communication, understanding, and creation of ideas. For instance, the garden as a rhetorical metaphor or symbol for a woman was not merely a means for patriarchal culture to inscribe women as weak and passive; it also allowed women to actively comment upon and define the roles of women through a malleable vehicle of ideas rather than a fixed code.

The symbol of a flower commonly represented a woman as delicate, passive, beautiful, and existing for the pleasure of others. Sam George examines floral motifs in eighteenth century literature in order to explain the relationship authors saw between “images of cultivation and growth and those of luxuriant decay” (210). He argues that “cultivation” was “connected with Enlightenment progress” but “femininity” was associated with “overconsumption” and “decay” (210). “Linguistic conventions were already in place whereby flowers were emblems of purity, beauty and fragility—the so-called female virtues—and whose ephemeral beauty was associated with the female body,” especially the weakness of the body (217). He provides examples of writers such as Pope and Swift who used images of “variegated” and “exotic” flowers to show the “contrarities” and defections found in women (211).

George expands his survey by looking at a woman who repurposed floral imagery to challenge repressive gender representations. Mary Wollstonecraft, George reveals, “appropriate[d] and invert[ed] these conventional cultivation metaphors, substituting images of enlightened growth for those of luxuriant decay in order to demonstrate society’s neglect of women’s educational potential” (212). In *Vindications of the Rights of Women* (1792), Wollstonecraft repurposes botanical imagery in order to shift blame away from the woman’s behavior and onto a society that consigned women to objects of “male desire,” inhibiting them from growing as they might (212). In *Women, Literature, and the Domesticated Landscape*, Judith W. Page and Elise L. Smith also outline Mary Wollstonecraft’s rhetorical strategies in shifting the focus on passive femininity in botanical imagery to active citizenship by using the metaphor of cultivation and gardening (2).

Many other women writers continued to appropriate the image of woman as flower, garden, or object in nature in order to create their own interpretations of womanhood. Page and Smith show that traditionally women's aesthetic accomplishments in the garden were seen as ornaments and displays of their femininity, marriageability, and aptitude for successful homemaking (79-83). However, women challenged this assumption and proved that they were capable of being active within and beyond their domestic roles in cultural debates about gender, class, and education. In order to do so, they strategically repurposed "subject matter of gardens and plants to educate their audience" (1). In the garden, the women become the gardeners rather than the plants and flowers, a visual strategy that positioned women as active agents in education and the cultivation of society. Wollstonecraft along with other writers such as Jane Austen, Charlotte Smith, and Jane Taylor used the garden as a site to teach and to reveal character, promoting the education of the mind and moral fortitude (116-125). They critiqued an environment that enforced passivity or artificial growth, arguing that they would be stronger if provided fertile education.

In addition to symbolizing women, the garden and the flower have been imbued with the ideas of eloquence based largely upon Henry Peacham's Renaissance precursor to belletristic rhetoric, *The Garden of Eloquence* (1593). In his work, various features and categories of style are associated with flowers that build an entire garden of communication. Through this tradition of associating ideas of eloquence with gardens, women could repurpose botanical imagery to represent their own eloquence. Their use of the botanical imagery as a trope for women's eloquence helped them actively engage in the modification of cultural notions regarding women's place in the public sphere.

The discussions of gardening in the nineteenth-century also related to the rhetorical practices of proper arrangement. In *The Garden in Victorian Literature*, Michael Waters recounts various debates that dominated literature about gardening, debates that echo the discussions of taste in rhetoric. For instance, Waters recounts that the mid-Victorian gardeners especially were aware of the “necessity of some artifice” or some shape and design while maintaining a proper naturalness that would not invite “excess and extravagance” (10). Similarly, Blair outlines the importance of stylistic choices and formal arrangements but emphasizes the excess of ornamentation that would obscure a natural quality. Suspicion was directed toward unnatural, hothouse, and bright flowers, and the specific practice of bedding, all of which imposed upon a natural, pleasing “diversity” (Waters 35). Jameson’s depiction of fictional female speakers as trees and flowers, Rossetti’s picture of women as godlike gardeners, and Lee’s illustration of woman’s aesthetic development through floral imagery provide eclectic examples of repurposing botanical imagery to challenge assumptions and establish women as adept rhetorical agents rather than figures for display.

Along with the repurposing of imagery associated with flowers, gardens, and scenes of nature, these women writers interrogated patriarchal stereotypes associated with women and art. Women’s decorative arts such as illustration, needlework, lacework, or small floral paintings were often categorized as “female” or “amateur” art in comparison to the high art produced by men of genius. Antonia Losano’s *The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature* and Roberta White’s *A Studio of One’s Own* explain that painting was perfectly acceptable if seen as an amateur accomplishment, primarily performed and displayed in the home, critiqued not as artwork, but as a demonstration of one’s marriageability,

femininity, and ability to be a successful ornament of the home. Losano notes that female amateur art was “debarred from the masculine world” and considered unoriginal, and thus mere copies of genius, yet still necessary for a proper woman’s cultivation (23-24). She describes the efforts of women to “effect a reevaluation and recuperation of these art forms” as significant demonstrations of women’s rhetorical abilities (121). The women writers I examine integrate images of what would be considered “amateur” women’s artwork into their illustrations and stories, but they use these examples to illustrate women’s creative aptitude and their rhetorical skill. All three writers display their own artistic creativity in the construction of their texts as well. Jameson’s illustrations, Rossetti’s sonnets, and Lee’s ekphrastic writing all demonstrate different art forms that allowed them to comment on the expectations of women in society, gender stereotypes, and the negative results of women’s objectification.

Just as women’s artwork was relegated to a lower status than that of men’s, women’s art criticism, while playing a large role in society, was often dismissed because of gender hierarchies. Clarissa Campbell Orr notes in *Women in the Victorian Art World* that there were more influential women involved in art criticism than the traditional historical record indicates. Meaghan Clarke in her work *Critical Voices: Women and Art Criticism in Britain, 1880-1905* shows the proliferation of women art critics at the end of the century especially. Hilary Fraser adds that women’s recovery in art criticism can also look to the substantial contribution women made within their fiction. In “Woman and the Art of Fiction,” she notes that because “women’s writing about art in fiction is often less ideologically circumscribed than their formal art historical writing,” women found opportunities to express their views more openly in literature (82). Fraser argues, for

instance, that Vernon Lee's art criticism lies in both her non-fiction and her fiction, both forms addressing different issues relating to the life of a female critic (82). In looking at Jameson, Rossetti, and Lee, I examine multiple ways in which women performed art criticism which also functions as gender criticism and rhetorical criticism.

Challenges in Feminist Studies

But is women's recovered rhetoric necessarily feminist if it appropriates strategies and even symbolic language that could be used to reaffirm a woman's secondary or inferior position within a masculine tradition? Talia Schaffer confronts this problem in a similar study that recovers women's voices in dialogue with men's during a specific historical moment, the age of aestheticism. In *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes*, Schaffer shows how female aesthetes have been neglected in a historical purview that has relegated their contributions as "inferior and crude" (6). Schaffer finds it an important feminist move to reexamine the valuable contributions women made to the aesthetic movement (6). She is cautious not to define the women themselves as overtly feminist in the same way as some would see the more political female figures who represented the New Woman of the time (6). She explains the difficulty in defining feminist roles because some definitions would be all inclusive, relating feminism to anyone interested in women, an approach she sees as too broad. However, she agrees that limiting definitions of feminism to contributions made only in public, political movements would possibly exclude certain women who privately used aesthetic theories to complicate traditional stereotypes of women even though they may not have considered their work overtly political (5). Instead of trying to define what ideas or specific figures accord with one form of feminism, Schaffer sees feminist rhetoric within certain strategies and approaches. She offers a nuanced understanding of how

women contributed to feminism through the “competing notions of identity, which would take into account their positions as ‘Angels in the House’ while still being cosmopolitan and innovative” (5).

In my own analysis of women writers, I see these women contributing to feminist studies because their strategies and approaches were used to define their identities and challenge certain social norms relating to gender. Just as the *fin de siècle* female authors likely differed in ideology even within their particular historical moment, it is important not to depend on similarity of opinion to categorize feminist strategies. C. M. Sutherland and Rebecca Sutcliff in *The Changing Traditions: Women in the History of Rhetoric* remind scholars that women such as Mary Astell, a seventeenth century activist for women’s education, would not share the same values or argue from the same premises of political liberalism and individualism as scholars do today (17). Similarly, each of the writers I explore would most likely profess contrasting beliefs regarding religion, class, and even understandings of femininity and women’s roles in society; some of their conclusions about women’s rhetorical practices, too, would likely conflict with contemporary feminist thought. However, each writer draws upon a set of rhetorical strategies to address similar problems they felt limited women from their full potential.

Outline

To summarize, I re-read nineteenth-century women’s writing by introducing these writers into the larger rhetorical tradition, specifically their contributions to the discussions of taste which dominated eighteenth century rhetoric and influenced much of the nineteenth-century. I reclaim three important nineteenth-century female authors as

rhetorical theorists who represent a diversity of perspective while employing comparable rhetorical strategies and approaching similar social issues confronting women.

My first chapter surveys the concept of “taste” as defined by Hugh Blair in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1787). Its emphasis on literary criticism and reception, while often derided as elitist or passive rather than socially generative, has been re-evaluated in scholarship that places his theories as an extension of the classical tradition, linking taste to public virtue and criticism to the epideictic tradition. I explain how his theory of taste as natural, yet improved by education and dialogue, creates a collaborative, consensus-forming rhetoric, one open to multiple points of view. Within his aesthetic theories of taste, Blair offers a more rhetorical and flexible understanding of the sublime and the beautiful, designing a system that, while still gendered, is more easily manipulated by women writers than Edmund Burke’s aesthetic theories. Finally, because his theory associates a simple style with morality, it allows women to critique expectations that they exist as decorative and ornamental. I close this chapter relating the scholarship that analyzes Wollstonecraft’s debt to belletristic rhetoric in order to warrant my own exploration of women writers who build upon belletristic rhetoric for feminist goals.

After outlining Blair’s theory, I turn to the nineteenth-century art critic Anna Jameson in chapter two. I examine *Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical, and Historical* (1832) as a demonstration of Jameson’s rhetorical abilities. She theorizes rhetoric on three different levels. On one level, she is the rhetor, translating and revising the conduct book genre into a form that is not merely didactic but actually invites readers’ active participation. On another level, she is a literary critic, drawing upon belletristic standards. Jameson uses her fictional character Alda to dramatize the act of literary criticism,

responding to multiple Shakespearean critics of her day. Finally, she is an epideictic rhetor. She highlights and praises the multiplicity of rhetorical strategies found in the examples of Shakespeare's women.

Through the dialogic framework in the introduction to *Characteristics*, Jameson emphasizes the importance of making judgments through collaboration. She employs images of nature, especially trees, to symbolize Shakespeare's female characters' rhetorical styles. As an artist, Jameson uses her illustrations and images of women's artwork to challenge traditional notions of femininity. Through all of these strategies in her appropriation of belletristic rhetoric, Jameson advocates for women's roles in public and private spaces as well as a reevaluation of women's differences and multiplicity, diverging from a normative, prescriptive understanding of womanhood as found in conduct books.

In chapter three, I examine Christina Rossetti's contributions to rhetoric in her early novella *Maude: A Story for Girls* (1850, 1897) and her poem "The Lowest Room" (1864). Rossetti, like Jameson, uses fictional characters to illustrate forms of women's rhetoric that she finds valuable. In *Maude*, Rossetti illustrates Blair's rhetorical ideas of Genius (creativity) and Taste (criticism) through the collaboration of her female poet, Maude, and the female editor or critic, Agnes. Rossetti, influenced by the Tractarian Doctrine of reserve, overcomes the challenge of the woman poet on display by legitimizing Maude's creative work through the poet's renunciation of herself and the tasteful preservation of her legacy through Agnes.

In "The Lowest Room," Rossetti illustrates Blair's aesthetic ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful, categories based more on complementary moral principles than gender binaries. She uses the sisters' dialogues to challenge the assumption that violent rhetoric is

more powerful than the silent, active listener. Rossetti sanctions woman's creativity and rhetorical forms by imparting feminine power to the images of God the Father and Christ. Through prose and verse, Rossetti reconciles her faith, feminism, and aesthetic sensibilities as she promotes women's collaboration and empathetic listening.

In my final chapter, I look at Vernon Lee's aesthetic criticism in *Laurus Nobilis: Chapters on Art and Life* (1910) and *The Beautiful: An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics* (1913) as well as her novel *Miss Brown* (1884) as late nineteenth and early twentieth century adaptations of belletristic rhetoric. Lee's works show her adept revision of dominant aesthetic theories as disseminated by John Ruskin and Walter Pater. Her theories reconcile beliefs in the subjectivity of art with art's civic function. She describes the development of taste in art as a means to social and physical health, much like Blair. I propose that Lee creates an aesthetic criticism built upon a system of health characterized by movement, satisfaction, and empathy rather than gender or sexuality. Her novel cautions against a decadence that is lethargic, consumptive, and controlling through the objectification of women's bodies. Despite the dystopic ending of *Miss Brown*, Lee emphasizes throughout that good taste produces empathy, which improves the health of society as a whole.

Throughout these chapters, I argue that these women writers' appropriation of belletristic rhetoric allows them to be more socially engaged with ideas that affect their practical lives. Their end goals—bringing women into the public sphere, challenging gender binaries, and promoting empathy and social wellness—illustrate the ways in which belletristic rhetoric can truly be seen as an active, socially powerful resource rather than as a passive rhetoric intended to preserve an elite status quo.

Chapter I

Civic Belletrism:

Hugh Blair's Model for Women Writers

...the exercise of taste is, in its native tendency, moral and purifying...

–Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783)

No other eighteenth century work in rhetoric or *belles lettres* surpassed the proliferation of Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783). Stephen Carr explains that charting the circulation of Blair's work is an enormous task simply because it went through so many revisions, editions, and translations that it is nearly impossible to track all of its possible forms. In his index, Carr lists at least 283 versions, 110 abridgements, and 61 translations, not including the many primers and educational texts incorporating Blair's *Lectures* (78-79). In comparison to the forty-three versions of George Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776), eighty reprints of Lord Kames's *Elements of Criticism* (1762), and seventy-five versions of Richard Whately's *Elements of Rhetoric* (1828), Blair's work, by far, reached the widest circulation (79). In addition to its prodigious availability, as Linda Ferreira-Buckley argues, it was Blair's synthesis of *belles lettres* that instigated literary studies in England and offered the growing middle class a means of social advancement and of integrating moral reform within that criticism (90).

Douglas Ehninger and James Golden note, however, that few books which have been so widely read and influential as Hugh Blair's *Lectures* have been as "generally damned by the critics" (12). Just as Blair found himself on the margins of British society as a Scottish preacher, so too his lectures have been condemned as a prescription for social climbing, a

capitulation to the superiority of English culture, and a distancing of rhetoric from its political agency. Many would find the eighteenth century Scottish rhetorical theorist one of the least likely candidates for aiding the development of women's rhetorical forms.

While I acknowledge that Blair's work cannot be completely divorced from allegations of class and gender bias or from his emphases on correctness regarding taste in polite society, I argue that his work did provide a framework amenable to women's voices. When linked to the belletristic tradition, these women's works might also invite skepticism regarding class motivations and accusations of weak rhetorical efficacy. Although my work does little to exonerate any writer from class motivations, I do argue that the belletristic rhetoric offered great rhetorical agency to women and largely supported women's varied rhetorical styles and choices. Victorian women writers drew upon a belletristic understanding that linked taste with certain ideals of morality in order to define and defend their positions as women in society. These women writers constructed civic arguments concerning the social values of equality, education, empathy, diversity, and moderation based upon the principles and practice of criticism established by the widely accepted belletristic tradition. Before exploring the more socially constructive contributions of nineteenth-century women writers to rhetorical theory, I address the initial criticisms targeting Blair's belletristic rhetoric.

"Taste" is the concept at the heart of belletristic rhetoric. Blair defines it in his *Lectures* as "the power of receiving pleasures from the beauties of nature and of art" (10). Within cultural, literary, and rhetorical criticism, the eighteenth century idea of "taste" is fraught with ambivalent and outright negative connotations. The cultural critic Pierre Bourdieu, for instance, theorizes taste in terms of its materialist and market functions. In

his work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Bourdieu dismisses a Kantian disinterest which proposes an aesthetic judgment detached from any material value and personal advancement associated with a work of art. Instead, Bourdieu identifies the exercise of taste as a means of cultural positioning. He argues that while historically taste has been seen as a “gift of nature,” the accrument of taste in actuality is merely “the product of upbringing and education” (1). This upbringing and education depend primarily on an individual’s economic and social conditions, and taste becomes merely a manner of distinguishing oneself within society. Bourdieu emphasizes the economic advantage of taste in “Forms of Capital,” insisting that taste and culture “can be acquired, to a varying extent, depending on the period, the society and the social class” and “yields profits of distinction for its owner” (“Forms of Capital” 283). In this sense, culture and taste function more for self-promotion than for reform. This cultural critique of “taste” has marked eighteenth century rhetoric with a highly unfavorable reputation in regard to its social influence.

Literary scholar Marjorie Garson echoes Bourdieu’s emphasis on the class function of taste. In *Moral Taste: Aesthetics, Subjectivity, and Social Power in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, she underscores how the middle class legitimized the vulgarity of consumption by spiritualizing it through the discourse of taste and morality. She criticizes writers of the period for appropriating the discourse of taste without accomplishing truly productive moral changes in society. Instead, she argues that these writers adapted the discourse of taste and morality in a way that increased limitations for women. For instance, a woman of good taste was not supposed to be “seen” or to “display” herself, yet she was required to “perform” and “show” her taste in order to be identified as a suitable wife (73). This

paradox left women without any real end for their abilities other than securing a husband. Though Garson argues that the middle class did appropriate the ideal of taste for their own social purposes, she does not see their appropriation as socially beneficial; she agrees with Bourdieu that the idea of “natural taste” served as a euphemism to disguise class distinctions and further reify social hierarchies and gender inequality (26).

Often, literary scholars, too, frame Blair’s reputation in contrast to the famous Scot Robert Burns in order to show the pernicious effects of eighteenth century belletristic rhetoric upon the development of true literary culture. Burns becomes the representative voice of the passionate “vernacular poets,” who resisted the superiority and “Anglicizing” of critics such as Blair (McIlvanney 26). Liam McIlvanney says that “readings posit Blair as the representative of a Scottish critical establishment that...threatened to vitiate [Burns’] work by encouraging a conformity to polite Anglocentric norms” (26). In other words, Blair’s seeming rejection of his poetic national heritage implicates him in cultural imperialism rather than positioning him as a spokesperson for the marginalized Scottish voices. Dottie Broaddus extends Blair’s association with literary cultural imperialism across the Atlantic, arguing that his immense popularity in America owed itself to what she calls his “Federalist ethos” (40). She explains:

Blair became popular in America precisely because his rhetorical theory demonstrated how to make practicable those values already present in an elitist Federalist-Unitarian culture that held contempt for democratic, egalitarian, pluralist notions, a culture whose existence depended on establishing its hegemony over the minds and emotions of the masses. (48)

She contends that John Adams and other members of the elite political classes along with schools such as Harvard embraced Blair's rhetoric in order to establish themselves as cultural progenitors and authorities and to legitimize their superiority in society (40).

Rhetorical historian Thomas P. Miller furthers the criticism of Blair in *The Formation of College English: Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the British Cultural Provinces*. He argues that class distinction remained the impetus behind the educational turn toward "taste" in the study of belletristic rhetoric (230). Even though the discipline of college English originated from those outside of the major academies, it was promoted by those who sought social mobility within the hegemonic culture. Miller indicts Blair, explaining that his "course taught provincials how to distinguish themselves by making tasteful distinctions" in literature and writing, implying that such courses taught little else (230). Blair's emphasis upon the individual as a "critical observer" rather than "political agent," as Miller differentiates, created a rhetoric in which one could move into society rather than actually changing it (230). This rhetorical shift in education, Miller argues, watered down a classical civic rhetoric that invited the development of citizens who actively engaged in shaping better societies. In addition, Blair's rhetoric of taste based on *sensus communis*, or the general agreement of the people, was limited to the civilized English society, only negligibly representing the other British Isles (Bowers 388).

In examining Blair's influence, historians of rhetoric often deprecatingly view this shift in eighteenth century belletristic rhetoric as a critical point of departure from transformative rhetoric that promoted civic values. Winifred Bryan Horner argues in *Nineteenth-Century Scottish Rhetoric* that many of the unsuccessful trends in composition such as the emphasis on correctness are a direct offshoot of belletrism that steered

rhetoric, in general, away from a classical emphasis on “civic issues and informed judgments” (186). Lynee Lewis Gaillet and Elizabeth Tasker claim that the nineteenth-century is often accused of being a “rhetorical wasteland...defined by its current-traditional approach to writing instruction,” the product of an emphasis on taste as a measure of social status (74). In their recovery of women’s rhetorics, they call upon scholars to re-examine the nineteenth-century for fruitful forms of women’s civic rhetoric specifically relating to issues such as abolition, preaching, suffrage, education, and social reform (74). They attempt to distance this recovery of women’s rhetoric from the influences of eighteenth century belletristic rhetoric which they decry with its emphasis on reception versus production and civic usefulness as well as its neglect of women rhetoricians within the tradition (74). Thus cast by several fields of scholarship, Blair would not seem the spokesperson for a more democratic and inclusive rhetoric of taste.

Redeeming Blair: The Historical Contexts of Belletristic Rhetoric

While these critiques are noteworthy in seeking to reform ineffective pedagogical and cultural approaches to rhetoric and composition, they also cater to a widespread assumption that belletristic rhetoric is diametrically opposed to civic rhetoric, failing to recognize it as a potential means of engaging in civic activity. While it would be irresponsible to completely avoid these criticisms of belletristic rhetoric and its legacy, to dismiss the entire movement and Blair’s work as socially unproductive would be to ignore important narratives within history that embraced women’s rhetoric and welcomed marginalized voices. As I look at Blair’s belletristic theory as one available means for women to promote collaborative and empathetic rhetoric, I enter into a relatively recent critical discussion describing Blair’s rhetorical theory as more inclusive, active, and

civically engaged than previous critics have suggested. These scholars understand a socially constructive belletristic rhetoric in its context and through a lens that eschews strict binaries (productive vs receptive, civic vs. literary, etc.). They offer a richer understanding of belletristic rhetoric through a careful examination of its place within rhetorical history and a closer look into the principles that guide it.

The false dichotomy between civic rhetoric and receptive rhetoric has largely been constructed based upon a bias toward one prevailing characteristic of classical rhetoric—argument. This emphasis fails to take into consideration a more complex history of classical rhetoric:

the foundation for these negative characterizations of belletristic theories often depends upon emphasizing those elements of ancient rhetorical theory that are grounded in agonistic oratory aimed at resolving immediate public problems and then sharply juxtaposing those elements with the eighteenth century's interest in cultivating an internal sensibility. (Agnew, *Outward Visible Propriety* 87)

Rather than maintaining this binary between “agonistic oratory” and “internal sensibility,” Agnew encourages scholars to examine the historical precedents for belletristic rhetoric in order to see multiple narratives in the classical tradition (87).

In its long history of theorization, the principle of “taste” has been consistently linked to social morality. Walter Bate outlines this historical theorization of taste in his foundational work *From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England*. He explains that classical rhetorical theory links man's reason and moral nature (19). According to Aristotle, the primary means of maintaining a moral standard within society was through a sense of decorum (taste), often guided by literature and poetry (19).

Neo-Classical developments drawing upon Longinus extended the idea of taste to the senses and imagination, emphasizing the elements of boldness and grandeur which influence the passions (47). As taste was further theorized by eighteenth century thinkers such as Richard Cumberland and the Earl of Shaftesbury, it maintained its link to cultural morality, building upon the theories of their classical predecessors (50). Even though thinkers such as Shaftesbury and John Locke may have disagreed whether taste was innate or received through experiences, both of these influential “common sense” philosophers believed that taste should be promoted for the well-being of social morality (101).

Belletristic rhetoric can also be seen as an offshoot of the classical tradition of epideictic rhetoric, also known as the rhetoric of praise or blame. As the third branch of Aristotle’s rhetorical triad, following judicial and deliberative, epideictic rhetoric, Laurent Pernot explains, was initially seen as the least important of the three but grew in importance over time (7-28). The thrust of Pernot’s argument positions epideictic rhetoric as possessing a clear civic role. He states that “[e]pideictic rhetoric’s chief function is a social one” in that it “gives shape to the representations and common beliefs of the group...renders explicitly, and justifies, accepted values; and on occasion it even offers lessons in new values” (x). Jeffrey Walker explains the social function of epideictic rhetoric:

the distinction between the *epideiktikon* and the *pragmatikon* comes down to this: the *epideiktikon* is the rhetoric of belief and desire; the *pragmatikon* the rhetoric of practical civic business, a rhetoric that necessarily depends on and appeals to the beliefs/desires that epideictic cultivates. (10)

He argues, in other words, that pragmatic rhetoric is not effective apart from epideictic rhetoric. Belletrism clearly follows this tradition. Stephen J. McKenna explains that Adam Smith, in theorizing rhetoric and *belles lettres*, utilizes the epideictic praise of literary examples in order to make arguments regarding ethics and moral sensibilities (57). In looking at *belles lettres*, critics such as Smith and Blair demonstrate how literary critique could act to express common beliefs and articulate the values they believed society should embrace.

The belletristic rhetoricians of the eighteenth century never saw the rhetoric of taste as divorced from the engagement of citizens in society. Barbara Warnick helps establish the historical alliance between “taste” and civic engagement in *The Sixth Canon: Belletristic Rhetorical Theory and Its French Antecedents*. In her work, she notes that the three primary critical senses involved in belletristic rhetoric— “propriety, sublimity, and taste”—originated from French Belletrism which was influenced by classical rhetoric (5-6). She describes how François Fénelon, a key figure in the seventeenth century French belletristic movement that preceded Scottish belletristic rhetoric, drew upon Plato and Augustine whose theories of “ideal discourse” directly related to the “moral reform of the audience” (63). Fénelon was one of the earliest belletristic rhetoricians who saw the relationship between social order and aesthetic criteria in eloquent speech such as proportion, harmony, and symmetry (57). His understanding of aesthetics and rhetoric later influenced eighteenth-century rhetoricians such as Campbell and Blair (58-71).

The concept of eloquence in general was rarely separated from social values. According to Thora Ilin Bayer, the seventeenth century Italian rhetorician Giambattista Vico emphasized the importance of eloquence in human affairs as he integrated into his

own pedagogy of public rhetoric examples from Cicero and others to demonstrate that linguistic eloquence was important in moving audiences (1134). He drew upon a tradition of Stoic philosophers who believed that common sense or *sensus communis* was a guide for human conduct inextricably tied to propriety and taste (1138). Rather than presenting this sense of taste or decorum as something that made one superior and pompous, Vico's purpose was to create an "awareness of the commonality all have with each other as human beings" and to know how to act in social situations in ways that most benefit others (1139).

Blair's motivation for advancing a rhetoric of taste follows these historical precedents that bridge classical civic rhetoric and the idea of eloquence. John Waite Bowers explains that Blair's synthesis of oratory and literature simply follows Fénelon's *Dialogues on Eloquence* (1717), which makes no distinction between oratory and poetry (385). Bowers argues that "Blair combines the arts of persuasion and of portrayal into an art of eloquence to which a single set of philosophical tenets and practical precepts is applicable" (386). In other words, both the speaker and the critic must understand and abide by the same set of principles regarding taste and social morality in order to influence society most effectively. Such an understanding challenges a cut and dried binary between civic and critical rhetoric.

Many writers believed the very principles of belletristic rhetoric in the development of taste provided principles for a better society. Robert Jones highlights the contributions of Lord Shaftesbury who championed taste as a "civic-humanist" means for improving society against a "sordid" and "commercial" marketplace mentality that promoted excessive "luxury and despotism" (19). Proper training in taste, according to Shaftesbury, would

produce individuals and societies with refined moral character and social values as opposed to crude consumerist wants. Agnew further illumines the civic minded nature of belletristic rhetoric, arguing that the tradition called for the rhetor to “positively shape the community’s values” (*Art of Common Sense* 16). She argues that Blair's rhetoric draws upon the classical and stoic emphasis on developing character and strong social relationships (*Outward Visible Propriety* 87). She includes Cicero in the number of classical rhetoricians who believed that public and private virtue could be developed through the cultivation of aesthetic sensibility, showing once again that Blair’s commitment to aesthetic criticism and social improvement merely echoed the historical tradition (87). Agnew responds to Miller, saying that Blair’s theories naturally fit within the larger rhetorical tradition and that he saw the concept of taste and literary criticism more in line with a “Christian-Stoic” perspective “that goes beyond the material aims of indoctrinating students into the demands of polite society” (89).

Critics may note that regardless of the historical precedents connecting belletristic rhetoric and civic rhetoric, the legacy following Blair crippled the social footing of *belles lettres*, placing undo emphasis on taste so that its civic connections were lost. However, in looking at the influence of belletristic rhetoric, Linda Ferreira-Buckley in *The Influence of Hugh Blair’s Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres on Victorian Education* argues that while there may have been a shift from the “creative to a critical” in rhetoric, proponents of transmitting taste to society still associated taste with “deep-seated values and character” rather than mere cultural status (45). For instance, she cites John Ruskin as an example of one major Victorian writer who, though much of his writing focused on the development of proper aesthetic taste, was equally concerned with the education of “civic character” that

would produce a “citizen who can lead a happy, moral, productive life” (151). Matthew Arnold, too, she argues, passionately championed a “humanistic critical education as the only means of effecting social change” (186). She explains throughout her work that belletristic rhetoric influenced the rise of literary education in Victorian society, and thinkers such as Ruskin and Arnold sought to improve society through critical literary pursuits. In fact, she maintains that Blair, rather than Arnold, was the instigator of literary studies in England (90). Many of the Victorian reformers of education saw literary studies as more than a means to establish oneself in society; they saw it as a “corrective to the popular utilitarian agenda” of the age which they believed threatened to sever the rich history of cultural values passed from generation to generation through literary studies (104-132). Ferreira-Buckley reminds her audience that the epideictic tradition in rhetorical theory can be found in much of the nonfiction Victorian prose which encouraged citizens to create a “disposition” or a “feeling” in order to be prepared to “act at the appropriate moment, rather than to act immediately” (244). The goal in this Victorian extension of epideictic and belletristic rhetoric was “consensus” concerning shared values, a result that could unite and improve society (244).

Even though the history of rhetorical theory clearly shows a link between taste and citizenship, belletristic rhetoric may still come under scrutiny when presented as a means for marginalized voices to engage in productive, transformative rhetoric. For instance, while linking ideas of taste to civic life through the example of Ruskin, Ferreira-Buckley limits the degree to which theorists such as Ruskin were actually interested in improving class relations as she notes that he was “not interested in an education that helped social mobility” and was primarily concerned with a wealthy audience (170-4). Though Ruskin

scholars may argue his intent, and indeed, one prevailing summary cannot adequately cover the changes in his own philosophy over his lengthy career, Ferreira-Buckley's argument concerning Ruskin reiterates the challenges of seeing belletristic rhetoric as an advantageous and creative tool for a marginalized woman's social rhetoric that sought to confront and to reform certain oppressive structures and attitudes in society rather than maintaining the status quo. Blair's ideas of taste, while fitting within a historical tradition of rhetoric, could simply legitimize upper class, masculine norms that did little to invite women into the larger dialogue.

Several scholars reject this conclusion, suggesting that the very idea of "taste" being central to belletristic rhetoric did offer women's voices a place within the larger conversation. Jones argues in *Gender and the Formation of Taste* that the debates regarding the ideal of taste at the end of the eighteenth century largely included women in the growing middle class. While seeing taste, as Bourdieu does, as a means of entrance into culture, Jones also shows how it was the key to shaping that culture. He proposes that within the period of revolutionizing debates surrounding "taste," the "cultural role of women was radically altered," showing the importance of this discussion to practical concerns for women (80). His work claims that many writers used the concept of taste to define ideals of femininity, for better or worse.

Fiona Price asks scholars to move beyond simply examining women writers in opposition to male writers and to observe how women negotiated the gendered associations with taste. She argues that because gender played such a key role in the criticism of taste, women writers found this moment in rhetorical theory a particularly inviting "point of entry" into social dialogue (7). Though previous scholarship privileged

male writers and ignored women's forms of engagement (such as devotionals, novels, romances, Gothic fiction, and children's literature), Price situates Romantic era literary women as rhetoricians alongside their eighteenth century male counterparts (2). Price examines Anna L. Barbauld's essay "Thoughts on the Devotional Taste on Sects and Establishments" as a work theorizing key ideas of aesthetic taste—the sublime and beautiful (27). Barbauld theorizes religious devotion as a type of sublime aesthetic pleasure. She differentiates the religious sublime pleasure from a philosophical sublime in the tradition of Edmund Burke and the Romantics because the philosophical sublime existed primarily within a masculine purview and alienated individuals from a personal relationship with God (27-41). In another example, Price explains how Charlotte Smith's poetry glorified a feminized aesthetic viewpoint in ways that successfully used *belles lettres* to "encourage humanity" and address issues of consumerism and economic inequality (96-102). Because women were gaining access to education in *belles lettres*, and because gender was a significant factor in taste, Price proposes that these women's perspectives were vitally important within the "complex debate concerning taste and citizenship" (7-9).

Her work is limited to the early Romantic women writers, but it lays the foundation for the work I do in examining women throughout the nineteenth-century who continued to theorize taste while addressing gender issues in society. I continue Price's argument by connecting women's explorations of taste to specific principles in Blair's belletristic rhetoric, largely delineated by Herman Cohen. These features afford a useful paradigm for the development of women's rhetorical theory.

Tenets of Belletristic Rhetoric: A Paradigm for Women's Rhetoric

"Natural" Taste

Cohen describes Blair's rhetorical theory as essentially an amalgamation of other eighteenth century scholars such as Edmund Burke, Henry Home Kames, David Hume, Joshua Reynolds and others who agreed that "taste was an innate but precisely improvable talent" (265). Cohen explains that though there is little difference between Blair's definition of taste and Burke's, Blair chooses to emphasize the term "nature" as "the medium" of taste, rather than "imagination" as emphasized by Burke (266). The term "nature," like "taste" is fraught with ambiguity, and Garson labels the expression "natural taste" an oxymoron because it is always a "cultural construct" (9). Even as a cultural construct, Blair's theorization of "natural taste" provides a helpful structure for identifying shared cultural values. Blair identifies the properties of taste as those which are found in "nature," or the physical universe. He further defines "natural" in contrast to "artificial" and selects the descriptors simplicity and moderation as properties of taste. By grounding natural taste in the physical universe and contrasting good taste with what is artificial, Blair constructs a concept useful to women's goals.

First, Blair indicates that those possessing good taste for what is beautiful will possess an affinity for the laws of nature, as revealed by the physical universe (though he does later say that these laws can be understood through reason). A taste based on observed laws in the physical universe makes it theoretically more democratic and accessible. In this first half of Blair's understanding of taste, he aligns himself with the empiricists and common sense philosophers of the day who promoted an epistemology based on intuitive sense perception of the natural world that would result in universal

conclusions. Blair explains that the power to receive beauties (taste) is a result of objects in nature that “strike us intuitively, and make a strong impression when we are unable to assign the reasons of our being pleased” (20). He universalizes this reception of beauty saying that it “sometimes strike[s] in the same manner the philosopher and the peasant; the boy and the man” (20). In this example, Blair implies a standard for taste that is accessible to all, not just those with privilege. He continues to explain that the physical universe provides the structure for the laws of nature, by which any individual can sense the beauties of order, proportion, harmony, newness, grandness, and sprightliness (20). Because Blair aligns morality and taste so closely, his work suggests that if anyone, from the philosopher to the peasant, can appreciate beauties and the laws of nature, then principles of morality, springing forth from these laws of the physical world, are not owned by the elite few who design artificial rules to follow.

The small shift Blair makes from positioning taste solely in imagination (as Burke does) to positioning it in the perception of nature is significant because the imagination was traditionally assigned only to the masculine domain. Jacqueline Labbe explains that a Romantic imagination as a medium for understanding and generalizing larger perspectives belonged primarily to the masculine realm whereas the feminine realm might be able to recognize “details” and “specificity” but had no imaginative mastery over the perspective (xi-xvii). In art as well, Antonia Losano claims that a man’s imaginative art could be considered original and a result of genius while women were “related to the role of copyists” (24). However, as Blair shifts the medium of taste from a masculine “imagination,” and places it in an intuitive response to “nature,” he creates a more accessible construct of taste.

Second, in addition to understanding “natural taste” in relation to an intuitive response to the physical universe, Blair also associated “natural taste” with the qualities of simplicity and moderation. Based on these qualities of both taste and morality, women could redefine the expectations of femininity. Blair emphasizes nature’s simplicity as opposed to artificial and elaborate adornment. He eschews a rhetoric that is characterized by its showiness and excess while he privileges a rhetoric characterized by substance and moderation (3). Blair condemns the preoccupation with artificiality in rhetoric as he says that the “love of minute elegance, and attention to inferior ornaments of composition, may at present have engrossed too great a degree of the public regard” (9). True eloquence requires one to make a fitting arrangement of ornament that does not overshadow substance. Without such moderation, an individual can get swept away by any display of false taste (9). As I discuss at the end of this chapter, Mary Wollstonecraft gravitated to the association of natural taste and the idea of simple adornment. She applies this standard of taste to arguments against oppressive expectations of femininity—those which encouraged elaborate adornment or false attitudes simply to win a husband. The authors I examine in the following chapters, too, create arguments concerning women supported by this rhetorical understanding of taste as evidenced in the standards of simplicity and moderation.

These two principles of taste allowed women to engage in more public discussions of economics as well, a field from which they were often excluded. Agnew proposes that eighteenth century rhetoricians defined social morality upon the ideas of moderation proposed by philosophers such as Seneca, showing how the “pursuit of virtue leads people to pursue moderation in the possessions they acquire” (*Outward Visible Propriety* 89). It

was through this investment in simplicity that eighteenth-century theorists sought “to preserve order in the midst of increasing consumption” (89). Mark Longaker further argues that Blair’s promotion of simplicity and moderation as tasteful rhetorical values echoes his sense of morality in larger economic and political environments. He explains that Blair “proposes...the practice of a virtuous rhetorical style can offset economic excesses” (180). He “invoke[s] the civic political tradition and its emphasis on citizen virtue as a means of ensuring that individuals would not succumb to the cruelty and greed that may corrupt their souls or infect their markets” (Longaker 180). In other words, if men were not trained to identify what was prudent and substantial and let the fashionable tastes of society carry them along at whim, the society would be characterized by unfettered individualism and greed. Longaker’s argument connecting Blair’s rhetorical style to economics is based on the premise that style is necessarily related to economic and political positions. Therefore, one who values moderation and substance as social values will employ a speech that reflects such values and vice versa. Rather than casting Blair as simply an elitist or a middle class social climber, Longaker recognizes Blair’s decorous rhetoric as a means of inviting community agreement, which could deter the propagation of an individualism that was greedy, showy, and morally corrupt. Longaker ties Blair to the classic civic tradition through his sermons that “agonized over the corrupting potential of luxury” and the effects of commercialism and self-indulgence that would destroy a virtuous society (183). He says that Blair’s theory “repeats a narrative that is central to the civic political tradition: good eloquence, freedom, and virtue all coexist and mutually support one another until luxury and monarchy corrupt the delicate balance, and decline ensues” (184).

Women's discussions of taste and the need for moderation and simplicity reveal a clear alignment between belletristic rhetoric and civic engagement. Sarah Bilston writes in "Queen of the Garden" that "the performance of gardening and reading and writing about it were political acts" and that "the garden's claim to 'natural' status works to depoliticize the activities of the women who operate in it" (10). While this claim may appear disempowering for women, the "depoliticization" of their "political" acts through aesthetic imagery relating to taste gave these women writers the opportunity to make social commentary within a public venue. For example, chapter four in this dissertation examines in detail the works of Vernon Lee, who advanced discourses of taste and aesthetics and prized a morality based on simplicity and naturalness, in order to promote justice and equality for women. Her application of moderation in taste enabled her to develop a social and economic critique that emphasized a national morality based on the health of individuals and communities as opposed to decadent consumption.

"Educated" Taste

Though Blair grounds his theory of taste in nature, he argues that taste is improvable and requires education. Successful critics, he proposes, develop taste through an education that provides exposure to many forms of beauty. Linda Ferreira-Buckley and Michael Halloran, in their introduction to Blair's *Lectures*, state that one of the two means of improving taste, according to Blair, was the "frequent exercise in the study of beautiful objects" (xxxix). For nineteenth-century writers, this "frequent exercise" and "study" was primarily developed through a broad, liberal education. Ferreira-Buckley argues as she traces the influence of belletristic rhetoric on Victorian education that the emphasis on *belles lettres* attracted the middle class as a starting point in their push for educational

reform as they saw that language, dressed in extensive reason and experience, possessed the power to define values and character for the entire nation (153). For art critics such as Ruskin, education extended beyond acquiring knowledge (153). He reiterates Blair's theory, indicating that studying what is beautiful gives greater insights into one's nature and one's role in society (153). As Blair and Ruskin might agree, this "refining of one's soul" through an education in aesthetic appreciation would naturally lead to a civic engagement benefitting society at large (153). Finer tuned judgments about what is aesthetically pleasing would lead to finer tuned social judgments for a more harmonious society. These critics all proposed that an educated taste was necessary to a moral society.

Just as belletristic rhetoric offered an entry point for women, it also offered a basis on which women could argue for a better education. Throughout the nineteenth century, women demanded more access to education with an end goal extending beyond marriage. While upper and middle class women were expected to be educated in taste through drawing and painting, their education was considered a means for becoming a better homemaker and attractive wife rather than for self-improvement or the ability to be instrumental in society at large. In *Educating Women: Cultural Conflict and Victorian Literature*, Laura Green argues that novelists attempted to subvert oppressive gender norms by highlighting "women's intellectual ambitions," even though they "continued to thread those ambitions through the needle's eye of a plot of courtship and marriage" (xi). Women writers, while still using the marriage plot, crafted fictional accounts of women developing taste through education as a process aiding the whole of their lives and society. In so doing, they could legitimize their education for civic purposes according to Blair's model of rhetorical taste.

A proper education in taste, as Blair defines it, includes reading and studying classics and developing a sophisticated criticism of art and literature. Though Green does not expressly link George Eliot to Blair, she illustrates how *Middlemarch* satirizes an education of taste that equates women's taste with mere "accomplishment" in the pursuit of marriage (83). Eliot shows that a good education empowers a woman as an individual within a marriage as she scripts the most successful unions to feature "equality of intellectual interests and expectations between husband and wife" (85). Anna Jameson, as discussed in chapter two, demonstrates her expertise in taste through her fictional character Alda's adept criticism of classical Shakespearean literature. Rather than being a peripheral educational attainment to make her a more attractive marriage prospect, her literary studies establish her as an intelligent authority in her own right among other male Shakespearean critics. Blair's rhetorical model elevates taste above accomplishment and display and supports these women's literary arguments concerning a woman's access to equal intellectual education.

Empathy/Sympathy Through Reasoned Dialogue

As outlined so far in this chapter, Blair's taste is based on the rules of nature and an educated mind. Cohen concludes that Blair believes taste is constructed through agreement of mankind in general. While most would be skeptical of Blair's universalizing taste in relation to "mankind in general," I focus more on the idea that taste requires reasoned dialogue to achieve a type of consensus. Blair's understanding that dialogue is important in reaching an understanding of taste complements women's rhetorical emphasis on collaboration and empathy over argumentation. Ferreira-Buckley and Halloran explain that Blair's means of improving taste is found in "reasoned discourse about the beauties of

nature and art" (xxxix). This important concept of dialogue in the development of taste links taste back to classic civic rhetoric when one considers the way in which Plato reasoned and presented his ideas by means of interactive conversations in his *Dialogues*. Rather than seeing "taste" as an arbitrary or arbitrated concept, Blair's emphasis on reasoned dialogue gives value to the term's indeterminacy. Reasoned dialogue builds upon the social values of sympathy and empathy, the understanding of different perspectives and experiences. Blair's theory also implies the importance of collaboration as a rhetorical practice, the negotiation of these different perspectives to establish agreement or consensus.

Sympathy was at the heart of eighteenth century rhetoric. Bate notes that "the concept of sympathy became a guiding principle" in rhetorical theory throughout the eighteenth century as it indicated moral insight and effective communication (133). Rhetoricians such as Adam Smith believed that sympathy was vital for effective communication. The term sympathy, in eighteenth century thought, often encapsulates concepts that we more regularly divide into the separate categories of sympathy and empathy. "Sympathy," the ability to understand another, differs slightly from "empathy," the ability to feel with another. According to D. Rae Greiner, a contemporary understanding of empathy often receives more credibility than sympathy because of its "democratic" qualities in that it allows one to feel "*with* rather than *for* others [emphasis added]" (420). She argues that sympathy, however, is equally as valuable as empathy, serving an important role in understanding others while preserving difference that does not read another in one's own image. She claims that while sympathy is often equated with "prudery" and "political conservatism," as a response to looking down on someone less

fortunate, it should be seen positively as a process of rhetorical understanding that does not require one to artificially claim a full knowledge or exchange of feelings with another (419).

The eighteenth century concept of “sympathy” often intertwined these separated notions, illustrating how difference and understanding could exist together. Agnew accentuates this understanding of sympathy in Smith’s work, noting that he believed “people come to mutual understanding when they are able to identify with each other” and that “the act of criticism leads the rhetor and audience toward a higher moral purpose that transcends the immediate discursive goals of the moment” (*Art of Common Sense* 20). In other words, reasoned dialogue, according to Smith, allows two parties to understand each other more fully through the process of identification, which serves a higher good than mere persuasion of one party by the other.⁵

While not explicitly expounding sympathy in the same way Smith’s work does, Blair’s *Lectures* still illustrate the importance of sympathy within the development of taste. The very process of developing taste through reasoned dialogue invites the need for sympathy, or understanding another. For one, Blair notes that disagreement on taste does not necessarily imply contradictions in standards. He presents the example of one man preferring Virgil’s elegance and tenderness whereas he prefers Homer’s simplicity (19). Within a reasoned dialogue about taste, he can understand or sympathize with the other’s perspective, feelings, and values without embracing the same conclusion. At the same time, the two parties realize that there still remains a standard in nature that unites them in a

⁵ Smith’s ideas foreshadow the modern rhetorical theory of Kenneth Burke in his well-known theorization of “identification” as the key to rhetoric in his work *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950).

shared feeling that elegance, tenderness, and simplicity are all rhetorical values. In the process of disagreeing, understanding, and finding commonality, the discipline of dialogue develops taste and establishes a pattern for effective communication that fosters human relationships.

The necessity of reasoned discourse in the improvement of taste as well as the sense of sympathy that accompanies such discourse creates a natural outlet for women's rhetorical theory. The idea of sympathy was especially important for women. Christina Rossetti, for instance, as chapter three explains in detail, creates a dialogue between two sisters in the poem "The Lowest Room," in which each evaluates literature with different conclusions. Their rhetorical dialogue, including respectful listening, enables the older sister to enhance her perspective, rather than changing it altogether.

Fluidity

Beyond the key tenets of taste found in Blair's *Lectures*—it is natural, improvable, and developed through reasoned dialogue—women also found his source beneficial to their own rhetorical theorizing because it allowed for multiplicity and diversity in application. Carr concludes in his detailed research into the circulation of Blair's *Lectures* that the text often served "varied purposes" and supported "diverse uses and values" (75). Rather than being a fixture of correct speech, associated with current-traditional rhetoric and "correct writing," his work proved adaptable and amenable to multiple exigencies. Though the text acted as an authority that informed middle class writers concerning general definitions and principles of taste, it also contributed to various interpretations and uses of taste for different end goals. The women writers I examine not only draw upon

Blair's *Lectures*, but they also re-theorize belletristic rhetoric, developing their own versions of it for their feminist goals.

Within his lectures, Blair refuses static definitions for many of his terms, allowing his work to be interpreted in multiple ways. For instance, along with the idea of "taste," Blair theorizes the rhetorical use of the "sublime" and "beautiful" in ways that do not fix the terms as rigid binaries. At times, Blair's *Lectures* reproduce categorical differences between the aesthetic concepts of the sublime and the beautiful as seen in Burke's *The Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757); however, Blair's belletristic rhetoric frames the two aesthetic categories as more complementary. His work avoids Burke's notorious distinction between the masculine sublime, a result of terror, and the feminine beautiful, a result of pleasure. Blair equates both aesthetic sensibilities with the moral and social qualities of human nature in general, choosing to distinguish the two classifications by degree rather than gender (45). He even admits that the two are "not distinguished by very distant boundaries" but flow into one another (47).

Blair's delineation of the sublime and the beautiful, used as complementary effects in harmony with each other, provided women a means of legitimizing their own sublime emotional experiences while simultaneously privileging beautiful aesthetic engagements. Though Burke is most often called upon as the source of nineteenth-century adaptation of the sublime and beautiful, Melissa Ianetta posits that "defining the sublime experience solely in terms of its aesthetic heritage, and thus obscuring its rhetorical foundations, suppresses those facets of the sublime which were the particular province of women writers in the nineteenth-century" (401). Ianetta suggests that Blair's authority in rhetoric allows his version of the sublime to be a viable alternative for understanding how women

chose to “appropriate, revise, and circulate dominant rhetorical paradigms of sublimity” based more on morality than terror (405). Blair equates the sublime with social values such as “magnanimity,” “heroism,” and “affections” of the mind (29, 40). He fuses the sublime and beautiful as co-equal partners in rhetorical production, and as Ianetta further argues, his theory “collapses the gendered binary outlined in Burke,” thus making his theorization more accessible to women writers (409).

Mary Wollstonecraft in the Belletristic Tradition

This chapter has explained that the principles of Blair’s taste as well as its fluidity offers an adaptable model for women writers. Scholarship has already linked Blair with eighteenth century women writers, most notably Mary Wollstonecraft, whose work is a prototype for that of later nineteenth-century feminist writers. Julia Allen and Christine M. Skolnik both identify Mary Wollstonecraft as a professional literary critic practicing within the same tradition as Blair. Allen compares Wollstonecraft’s style to Blair’s, showing that both found passion and reason necessary to effective writing, and both promoted simplicity over ornamentation (327-8). Allen explains that Wollstonecraft revises Blair’s theory of style for women’s issues as she turns “adornment” into a specifically feminist issue (330). Skolnik also claims that Wollstonecraft’s “knowledge of rhetorical theory” positions her “squarely in the tradition of eighteenth-century rhetoric and *belles lettres*” (206). Skolnik argues that while scholars have often “disparaged Mary Wollstonecraft’s prose style,” there is evidence that it actually adopts features of the eloquence promoted by Blair (206). Such a rhetorical move on Wollstonecraft’s part allows her to position herself within the eighteenth century civic discourse on revolution and individual rights alongside other writers such as Edmund Burke. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), according to

Skolnik, represents Wollstonecraft's strategic use of belletristic rhetoric to enter larger civic discourses relating to social injustices specifically as a lower-middle class, female writer, rather than as a man of "privilege and leisure" (207).

Wollstonecraft mentions in *Vindication* that she wishes to use her own style to "persuade by the force of...arguments" (26). Through this statement, she elevates the importance of substance over effect. She does not care to "dazzle by the elegance of...language" (26). Like Blair, she censures a falsely adorned style and prefers simplicity and straightforwardness (26). Both Allen and Skolnik maintain that Wollstonecraft, while sometimes accused of imitating or "miming" Blair's "manly" rhetoric, manages to undermine the gendered bias in belletristic rhetoric. She distances eloquence from a primarily male purview by performing the style as a woman, tacitly challenging its association as a masculine form.

Belletristic rhetoric is not merely a prescription for style; it also provides a pattern for critiquing style and the virtues associated with it. Wollstonecraft reveals her "knowledge" of belletristic rhetoric in her rhetorical critique that builds upon standards from Blair's principles of taste (it is natural, educated, and reasoned.) She establishes that good taste is found in the "natural" working of the physical universe and seen in "natural" simplicity versus artificial adornment. Her botanical imagery illustrates the appalling state of women, when taken out of their "natural" environment and planted as "flowers...in too rich a soil" that effectively destroys their "strength and usefulness" and stunts their "maturity" for the sake of display without substance (23). Her argument assumes that women, like men, naturally respond to the beauties of nature and will themselves produce true beauty through qualities such as strength and usefulness.

She continues to repeat Blair's condemnation of artificiality and excess adornment in language as she critiques the style of prevalent conduct books that "vitiates the taste" with their "pretty superlatives" and "create a kind of sickly delicacy that turns away from simple unadorned truth" (26). Like Blair, Wollstonecraft advances the necessity of education for improving taste. She bemoans the "false system of education" available to women that has not allowed natural taste to mature (23). Indeed, the heart of Wollstonecraft's argument is the need for improvement in women's education, so that they might be seen as rational creatures alongside men.

As seen in Wollstonecraft's and Blair's rhetorical criticism, belletristic rhetoric extends beyond a mere critique of style and imbricates style with moral ideals; therefore, a critique on style is inherently a critique on social values. Skolnik identifies specific ways in which Wollstonecraft attacks Burke's "ornamental" style, "artificial" sensibilities, and excesses, qualities that indicate his lack of reasoned judgment (214). By exposing the falseness of Burke's sentiments through critiquing his style, Wollstonecraft effectively uncloaks his "ethical bankruptcy," according to Skolnik (214). Through her manipulation of language and imagery, she critiques an embellished style which is indicative of moral failure. In her appropriation of the belletristic tradition for women's issues, Wollstonecraft stands as a progenitor of the Victorian woman writers who further extend the tradition and advance women's rhetorical theory.

Conclusion

Though Blair's belletristic rhetoric has drawn the ire of cultural, literary, and rhetorical scholars such as Bourdieu, Garson, and Miller for being elitist and less civically inclined, scholars such as Agnew and Ferreira-Buckley successfully challenge these

accusations against belletristic rhetoric and argue that the bond between eloquence and morality has long existed in the rhetorical tradition and in civic rhetoric. Jones and Price further establish that the eighteenth century discussions of “taste,” the key idea in belletristic rhetoric, actually provided women, who were expected to be models of taste, an important voice in the larger rhetorical tradition.

I have extended this scholarship throughout this chapter by explaining how even the tenets of Blair’s rhetoric offer women a valuable paradigm for making their own arguments concerning their roles in society. Blair’s emphasis on the natural qualities of true taste places the medium of taste in the physical universe, accessible to men and women in all positions of life. Because women were so often associated with the landscape of the physical world, they could employ floral metaphors to make arguments regarding their authority on eloquence. Blair’s insistence that natural taste is devoid of artificial spectacles and excess adornment assists women’s rhetorical and moral arguments against the expectations that women display themselves for the pleasure of men. In addition, women could extend conversations of taste to the larger public sphere concerning economic issues as taste was inextricably linked to ideas of simplicity and moderation.

As Blair argues that natural taste needed a literary education in order to be improved, women capitalized on this argument, justifying their need for an education that would benefit them as individuals who could be productive in society. Within Blair’s delineation of an appropriate education in taste, he indicates that reasoned dialogue is important for making sympathetic judgments. This feature of his rhetorical model privileges a civic rhetoric based on collaborative community dialogue, a rhetorical strategy

often employed and valorized by women. Reasoned dialogue contributes to moral society built upon sympathy and empathy rather than disagreement.

Finally, the fluidity of Blair's rhetorical model invites women to re-theorize belletristic rhetoric for multiple purposes. Eighteenth century writer Mary Wollstonecraft has already been studied as a rhetor who strategically employed Blair's rhetorical theory to promote feminist agendas. In subsequent chapters, I expand upon this study by examining the writers Anna Jameson, Christina Rossetti, and Vernon Lee. As they insert themselves within the larger rhetorical tradition, they are able to legitimize multiple and public options for women's voices, to challenge assumptions about women's inferiority, and to promote social health and virtue.

Chapter II

Shakespeare's Rhetorical Heroines:

Anna Jameson's Rhetorical Recovery

How can you be content to be in the world like tulips in a garden, to make a fine show, and be good for nothing? –Mary Astell, A Serious Proposal to the Ladies (1694)

While eighteenth-century rhetoricians such as Blair theorized “taste” with regard to the improvement of the individual and larger society, the term represented a double bind for eighteenth and nineteenth-century women. On one hand, women were encouraged to display “taste” through various accomplishments in order to “make a fine show,” as Astell says, so that they might secure good husbands. On the other hand, as Marjorie Garson argues throughout her study *Moral Taste: Aesthetics, Subjectivity, and Social Power in the Nineteenth-century Novel*, a woman could not make a public display of herself and still be considered in good taste. In performing this balancing act, a woman developed “taste,” less in relation to larger social goals and more in conjunction with her ability to secure a position as a future wife in the home, out of the public eye (Jones 123-4). Women writers often challenged such a limited and gendered purview of taste. This chapter examines the challenge raised to traditional female education of “taste” by the feminist forerunner Anna Brownwell Jameson (1794-1860). Through Jameson’s investments in art history and literary criticism, she significantly contributes to the rhetorical tradition, illustrating how a woman’s education in taste could meaningfully extend women’s influence in the public sphere.

Throughout her life, Jameson played no small role in championing women's education. When Anna Murphy was only eleven or twelve, she assumed the education of her sisters and continued work as a governess from 1810-1825. After a troublesome marriage to Robert Jameson, the blossoming literary and art critic continued to educate herself as a female travel writer, producing works such as *Visits and Sketches at Home and Abroad* (1834) and *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (1838). Judith Johnston's pivotal scholarship *Anna Jameson: Victorian, Feminist, Woman of Letters* examines the sundry genres of Jameson's work, such as her travel writing in addition to her art history and Shakespearean criticism, as an opus dedicated to advancing women's issues. Kimberly van Esveld Adams also looks specifically at Jameson's contributions to feminist education in her art, most notably *Sacred and Legendary Art* (1848-64) and *Legends of the Madonna* (1852). Though Jameson's work has been studied diversely, she has yet to be looked at in depth as a rhetorical theorist. I argue that her literary criticism, a work promoting women's liberal education, acts as a piece of rhetorical theory, building upon the writing of her predecessors, such as Astell and Wollstonecraft, who enhanced women's rhetorical theory while engaging substantively with their contemporary male counterparts in the larger rhetorical tradition.

Jameson's literary criticism in her work *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical, and Historical* (1832), known later as *Shakespeare's Heroines*, contributes to several strands of rhetorical theory, not the least of which is the belletristic tradition advanced by Hugh Blair. Jameson appropriates methods and standards of criticism seen in Blair's *Lectures* in order to expose the inefficacy of women's education in the early nineteenth century and inconsistent views regarding women. She adeptly revisits classical and contemporary

eighteenth-century rhetoric in ways that privilege women's rhetorical modes such as conversation, listening, imaginative expression, and silence. Jameson's works not only highlight these important rhetorical modes, but they also show Jameson's strategic repurposing of aesthetic tropes related to nature and art in order to illustrate the various rhetorical proficiencies of women speakers. As discussed in the introduction, these tropes of nature and art are notably tied to ideas of femininity, but Jameson subverts many of the more objectifying and limiting uses of such imagery. In addition, in the wake of British reform movements of the 1830s, Jameson seizes upon the burgeoning higher education movement for women to advocate for the improvement of women's education and authority outside of the home, while still providing instruction in feminine propriety, avoiding a one-size-fits-all prescription as was common in the conduct books of the day. Through her criticism, she demonstrates that a woman's education produces an end goal much more expansive, critical, and socially beneficial than simply being an attractive partner to a potential husband. Revisiting Jameson the literary critic as Jameson the rhetorician, therefore, far from underplaying the former, emphasizes the importance of literary criticism as a key repository of rhetorical theory.

This chapter outlines three specific ways in which Jameson furthers women's rhetoric through belletristic criticism and engagement with various Enlightenment ideas. First, Jameson adapts the conduct book genre in her work *Characteristics of Women*, creating a more sophisticated hybrid genre that combines a traditional form of instruction for women's taste with substantial literary criticism. The visual rhetoric in her illustrations supports her progressive approach to female education, and it encourages less prescriptive guidelines and more active engagement for the purpose of self-improvement. Second,

Jameson demonstrates the importance of respectful conversation and collaboration as rhetorical modes beneficial to both men and women, echoing Blair's call that reasoned dialogue is necessary in the development of taste. Finally, Jameson identifies diverse rhetorical strategies embodied by the female characters in Shakespeare's work. Through these means of literary criticism and epideictic praise, she builds an argument that women should be recognized for their various rhetorical abilities in public as well as in private.

Function of "Taste"

Johnston faults Hugh Blair for perpetuating an idealized masculinity tied with the man of letters (16). Johnston explains that women could not access the benefits that "professional recognition [would] bring" in the study of belletristic rhetoric because they would most likely be confined to the role of "amateur" critics regardless of the reality that women were actually highly successful in many fields of public writing during the nineteenth-century (16). But Jameson successfully exercises the same principles and practices described in Blair's *Lectures* to reframe the position of women in society. Both Blair and Jameson see the product of successful criticism as the moral improvement of society, and though critics such as Johnston blame figures like Blair for increasing the divide between men and women as professionals and amateurs, his rhetorical system actually aids Jameson in her own process of forwarding the position of women in society.

Blair and Jameson both recognize that the development of taste should promote individual growth and social improvement. In a summary of the function of *belles lettres* in Blair's treatise, Linda Ferreira-Buckley and Michael Halloran explain that Blair believed beauty in language has the power "to delight and move, to create experiences and shape perceptions" (xli). In other words, Blair believes that the study of beauty in literature

enhances one's personal life by sharing in someone else's perspective. In *Characteristics of Women*, Jameson echoes Blair's definition of taste— "the power of receiving pleasure from the beauties of nature and art" (*Lectures* 10). She explains that her purpose in writing a book that explores the female characters in Shakespeare's plays is for no other purpose than the "pleasure it has given me, in the new and various views of human nature it has opened to me, in the beautiful and soothing images it has placed before me, in the exercise and improvement of my own faculties" (48). She continues to say that she hopes such criticism will effectively "soften the heart" of her readers "by images and examples of the kindly and generous affections" that can inspire good action rather than demanding it in strict rules as a traditional conduct book might (53). In effect, she uses much of the same language as Blair to express how the study of beauty could affect an individual.

Both also assert that "taste," based on honest expression and simplicity, rather than elaborate show or false adornment, inspires moral character and action. Blair expresses that he "should be sorry if we could not rest the merit of such studies on somewhat of a solid and intrinsic [*sic*] use independent of appearance and show" (11). Even though critics such as Thomas Miller understand Blair's influence as that which mostly helped "provincials...distinguish themselves" (230), Blair actually denounces the use of *belles lettres* solely for the purpose of participating in "polite society" and supporting a "proper rank in social life" (11). Cheri L. Hoeckley says that Jameson too desired that her female readers gain more than status; she wanted them to "learn from Shakespeare's plays how to make virtuous decisions, to act with courage, as well as with sympathy, to develop appropriate passions, and to learn to let 'conscience and affection' replace 'vanity and expediency'" (23). The "vanity and expediency" Jameson refers to here is likely in reference

to the false development of taste for the low purpose of practically securing oneself in society (with a suitable husband) through an artificial display of accomplishments. Instead, Jameson sees that women better benefit society if they know how to make good decisions with courage and sympathy for others. Blair and Jameson both reject a mere practical, expedient use of beauty. Blair decries “appearance and show” as Jameson does “vanity”; both see that the study of beautiful language can inspire internal character. Blair does not say that the study of beautiful language will make someone more virtuous; however, he argues that it prepares the mind and the senses for the “enjoyments of virtue” because it directs the mind to various attributes such as “harmony, grandeur and elegance” that can “move the affections” toward virtuous responses (12-14). Similarly, Jameson indicates that the study of Shakespeare’s women and their rhetoric as examples inspires virtue, courage, sympathy, and appropriate passions.

Women and the Conduct Book Tradition

Blair’s and Jameson’s ideas about “taste” spoke directly to a larger dialogue regarding taste found in the genre of the conduct book. Like other female writers, Jameson debated ideas of taste through her subversion of the conduct book genre, which often recycled repressive ideologies regarding women’s education. In *Rhetoric Retold*, Cheryl Glenn posits that alongside the celebration of humanism and civic virtue in various ages such as the Renaissance, there existed a concurrent view that women were inferior to men and made primarily to be helpmates to men (118-126). These assumptions distanced women from prominence in the larger rhetorical tradition, circumscribing their sphere of influence. Many held the prevailing sentiment that if women were provided an education in

rhetorical learning and taste, the end goal should be a profitable marriage and tranquil domestic life, which would perhaps tangentially aid general societal improvement (127).

The conduct book often betrayed the inconsistencies between humanist cultural values and restrictive expectations for women.⁶ Gail Turley Houston argues that “nineteenth-century conduct books acted as primers explicating and inculcating the Victorians’ legal definition of gender,” a definition related primarily to a woman’s legal position as a wife (159). Ingrid Tague further states that conduct books combined “detailed prescriptions for behavior” with a “moralizing tone,” linking taste with strict external codes of morality (23).

Glenn argues that in almost every age, women countered these restrictive ideologies. Sixteenth century rhetorician Margaret Roper, for instance, insisted that “a woman’s intellectual accomplishment was considered an end in itself” just as it might be for a man (144). If a man’s education promoted civic virtue, a woman’s education, likewise, “prepared her to patronize further humanistic studies and to be virtuous” without specifically tying that virtue to a woman’s role within a marriage (144). Through an appeal to the shared humanistic values of society, Roper challenged her audience to reconceptualize the position of women within that society and argued that a woman’s rhetorical skills could extend to the public good. Later in the Restoration, addressing similar concerns about women’s education, Mary Astell, renowned for her public

⁶ A range of conduct books flourished between the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries, many of which were used by women like Hannah More or Maria Edgeworth to promote more egalitarian ideas or to critique expressions of repressive patriarchy. However, the tradition of conduct book writing played a key role in defining that nineteenth-century ideal of the separation of spheres. As I refer to the conduct book tradition, I am referring to this latter influence.

eloquence, wrote *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694), which urged women to improve their minds so as to be useful to their societies. She argued that conversation, a skill in which many of her contemporaries would claim women were more naturally proficient, should be considered as equal to if not better than public speaking, a sphere of rhetoric dominated by men (Glenn 111). Like Roper, Astell constructed her argument based upon shared social humanistic values. She saw that women's rhetorical training was just as useful to society as a whole as a man's. In the process, she also elevated a rhetorical mode that had been culturally designated as feminine and lesser. Astell's argument regarding women's proficiency in conversation invites scholars to recognize the important influence of women within the larger rhetorical tradition and to embrace every available means of persuasion, including those which may have been seen as inferior because they are associated with women.

At the end of the eighteenth century, reformers still battled the recurring opinion that the ultimate end of any woman's education was a suitable marriage. Laura Green writes that for most of the eighteenth century "it had been taken for granted that an education consisting of decorative 'accomplishments' was best suited to girls of the comfortable classes, and this education, such as it was, ended with marriage" (9). More accurately, though, the ultimate end of a middle class woman's education would be the procurement of a suitable *man*, the quality of the marriage being consigned to a lesser degree of concern.

Many nineteenth-century advocates for women's education, following their predecessors, resisted this desideratum as the primary impulse for education. Mary Wollstonecraft states in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* that "If all the faculties of

woman's mind are only to be cultivated as they respect her dependence on man; if, when she obtains a husband she has arrived at her goal" then her life and duties remain barely "above the animal kingdom. . ." (50). Her indictment not only appeals to the Enlightenment belief in the rationality of humankind in general, but also insinuates that women could be crippled as the assumed moral accountants in the home if given over to the base instincts of the animal kingdom and not educated for their own benefit.

In Wollstonecraft's appeal to Enlightenment values to critique the prevailing state of women's education, she demonstrates how women could strategically utilize the very systems of social thought that produced gender discrimination. As Jane Donawerth explains, women were largely involved in the process Michel de Certeau terms "poaching" as the means used to "appropriate and respond to a tradition of rhetoric that by fiat excluded women from rhetorical education, public speaking, and persuasive writing" ("Poaching" 243). Donawerth examines the ways in which women such as Maria Edgeworth, Eliza Farrar, and Frances Willard employed parody, performance, and collage to indicate both their capacity to apprehend Enlightenment theories and their aptitude in revising them. She explains specifically how Edgeworth dwells on the function of taste for women through her educational theories. In parodying the techniques of conduct books and handbooks, Edgeworth illustrates how women could successfully engage in a generic discourse while still criticizing the limits it placed on women by underscoring its self-contradictions (245).

Female writers found it necessary to combat many of the restrictive views as well as the off-putting tones contained in conduct books by appealing to rhetorical standards of taste. Wollstonecraft, for instance, decries one of the most infamous conduct manuals of

her day, *Dr. James Fordyce's Sermons to Young Women* (1766), which offered didactic and chauvinistic instruction for the proper woman as she prepared to be a wife. Wollstonecraft assesses it as a "most sentimental rant" in which Fordyce "details his opinions respecting the female character, and the behavior which women ought to assume to render her lovely" (119). To bolster her argument, Wollstonecraft bases her evaluation on her knowledge of rhetoric. She accuses Fordyce's sermons of lacking the quality of refined feeling essential to taste. His work is a "display of cold, artificial feelings," as opposed to a more natural (or honest and simple) sentiment, which would be advocated by treatises of taste such as Blair's *Lectures* (120). In Fordyce's sentimental style of "love-like phrases" and "pumped up passion," Wollstonecraft says that he has "equally sinned against sense and taste" (120). She corrects Fordyce's style not out of pedantry, but because of the direct link she perceives in the relationship of language and taste to morality. If women are taught with "the language of truth and soberness," Wollstonecraft argues, they will simultaneously be "taught to respect themselves as rational creatures" (120).

Wollstonecraft continues to construct a charge against conduct manuals at large, whose authors "have contributed to vitiate the taste and enervate the understanding of many...fellow-creatures" (122). Here, Wollstonecraft directly equates taste with the outcome of critical understanding. She encourages women readers to be critical participants in their own development, demonstrating "true grace" which "arises from some kind of independence of mind" (122). Wollstonecraft argues that a conduct manual, which provides detailed instructions for the behavior, dress, and manner of women, really only serves to "create a kind of sickly delicacy that turns away from simple unadorned truth" (26). It is a "deluge of false sentiments and over-stretched feelings, stifling the

natural emotions of the heart” because it does not invite women to actively engage in their own reason (26). In opposition to artificial rules, she advises that women be “taught to respect themselves as rational creatures” (26). As Wollstonecraft situates herself within the belletristic tradition, understanding tasteful writing as that which is unadorned and simple, she establishes her authority as a rhetorical critic and discredits Fordyce, who claims to be an Enlightenment expert in taste.

In addition to creating limitations in women’s education, the conduct book genre mirrored larger problems creeping into rhetorical education. As James Murphy outlines in *A Short History of Writing Instruction*, rhetorical training often required that young scholars merely imitate models of writing with “little attempt to explore or critique” (182). As women advocated for educational approaches that required more critical thinking rather than copying, they were actually engaging not only in a small argument concerning women and conduct books, but also in a larger ideological understanding of effective education and rhetoric. Though I have argued that Miller reductively casts the belletrists, like Blair, as those whose work strove to maintain an elitist culture “to distinguish between the politely educated and the merely literate” in order to “limit access to political expression” (128), his work helpfully identifies ways in which the teaching of taste in general education regrettably emphasized imitation of style or following elaborate rules without any genuine concern for the rhetorical situation or content. He says this method of learning led to what is now known as “current-traditional” rhetoric, a composition system of correctness rather than productive engagement (239). An education with too heavy an emphasis on correctness and style, without purpose, Miller implies, distances citizens from being productive members of society. Even though conduct books and this style of belletristic

instruction could discourage critical thought when whittled down to artificial rules and prescriptions, Miller's conclusion fails to address adequately how the rhetoric of taste could also engage the active, critical individual within society.

Jameson's work exemplifies how both the conduct book format and a belletristic system of examining literature engaged active thinkers to make conscious rhetorical choices. Hoeckley explains that Jameson's work "can be read as a conduct manual, illustrating character traits that Jameson believed female education ought to instill in Victorian women," but she explains that it can also "be read as a critical work, producing original readings of Shakespeare through a focus on his female characters" (9). Jameson's "hybrid genre," as Hoeckley describes it, "underscores Jameson's contribution to conversations about literature, art, women, intellectual activity, and the public sphere" (9). Jameson's strategies follow the rhetorical work of writers such as Wollstonecraft, who, as Gary Kelly succinctly states, used the genres of women's writing to "emancipate its readers from the intellectual and cultural subordination usually associated with and reproduced by such writing" (112). Like Wollstonecraft's treatise, Jameson's critical work, in performing functions beyond a traditional conduct book, encourages female readers to be more engaged participants in a critical education. Hoeckley says that the hybrid genre enabled Jameson to expand the end goal of the conduct book advice beyond marriage. Jameson is able "to explore, and ultimately, to demonstrate, how Victorian women might creatively and properly move from the household and enter the public sphere—a sphere that many Victorians viewed as a masculine domain, but one that Jameson viewed as deeply in need of female influence" (Hoeckley 9).

Through her character Alda, Jameson criticizes the current state of female education. Alda decries “the condition of women in society” which “is false in itself, and injurious to them” and “is founded in mistaken principles” (49). This system, she explains, is based on the uncritical role women were expected to follow in response to “essays on morality, and treatises on education” (49). Jameson proposes a method of instruction through which women become active readers, empowered to make good decisions for themselves. Jameson says that her method of educating women “illustrate[s] certain positions by examples, and leave[s]...readers to deduce the moral themselves and draw their own inferences” (5). Her method expects more of women than many other conduct books did. For her, effective education requires a woman’s thoughtfulness and reasoning, providing women with the chance to evaluate and critique rather than to absorb and imitate. Jameson’s first appeal to active reasoning asks readers to contemplate the rhetorical message created by the drawings and illustrations that accompany her texts.

Conduct Book Illustrations

On the dedication page of *Characteristics of Women* in its original 1832 publication format, Jameson’s own artwork symbolically enacts the work’s hybridity and promises unconventional ideas through conventional means (see fig 1). First, one’s attention may be drawn to the dedication



Fig. 1. Dedication Page. Anna Jameson; *Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical, And Historical*; (London: Saunders and Otley, 1832). Hathi Trust Digital Library. Web. 25 July 2015.

etched in a font style imitating needlework, a common artistic pastime prescribed to women as a means of developing taste. It reads: “To Fanny Kemble this little work is Dedicated.” Hoeckley reveals that by dedicating her work to the well-known Shakespearean actress Fanny Kemble, Jameson “acknowledge[s] a long-standing friendship” between two women who both produced works of interpretation on Shakespeare (33). The Kemble women, as professional and public women, acted as representatives for women who desired to earn economic independence and to maintain public visibility (32). The dedication makes a feminist move in acknowledging the value of women’s taste, not just in the home or personal accomplishments as represented by the needlepoint font, but also in public forms of theater and literary criticism as represented by the recipient of the dedication.

Michele Martinez explains that Jameson was known for these types of rhetorical moves, valuing the role of prominent women in order to inspire other “women to higher achievement, while attempting to reform and cultivate English middle-class taste” (625). For instance, in her collection *Memoirs and Essays Illustrative of Art, Literature, and Social Morals* (1846), Jameson chooses to accompany her description of architecture inspired by Homer’s writing with a translation of Penelope’s speech from Homer’s *Odyssey* as translated by her “sister” poet, Elizabeth Barrett (Martinez 626). Martinez argues that Jameson’s choice of translator reveals her commitment to the voices of women in scholarship. Similarly, by dedicating her Shakespearean criticism to a female Shakespearean critic, and more notably, a Shakespearean actress, Jameson begins her revision of socially acceptable forms of women’s taste.

The artistic imagery in the dedicatory sketch, too, suggests Jameson's artful playing with boundaries. An extraordinarily large stalk of flowers spreading out into a vine partially encloses the figure of a woman sitting on the ground beneath it. As mentioned in the introduction, Judith Page and Elise Smith detail how women writers and artists often used the imagery or subject matter of gardens and plants to enter into a discussion regarding both gender and education. Jameson's floral image acts alongside the text as an additional commentary on how the author views women's education. In one sense, the floral imagery can be read as a conservative floral code reifying the image of a woman as a plant— "delicate, ornamental, wholesome, pure" (Waters 135). Waters notes that the code has been so internalized that even "feminists" may "unwittingly perpetuate it" (136). Arguably, though, feminist writers consciously appropriate the imagery as Wollstonecraft does in *Vindication*, not to emphasize the delicacy of women's natures, but to emphasize the "false system of education" that renders a "barren blooming" of a woman's intellectual capabilities (23).

Jameson, like Wollstonecraft, charges the imagery with new meaning. The plant that is rooted in the bottom left hand corner blooms as a natural border, swirling into luxuriant vines across the top and trailing off without completing a full arch on the right hand side, leaving the bottom right hand corner, the corner to which the woman is directed, open and uncontained. This image, if associated with women and women's education, underscores much of what Jameson values in what she calls a natural or unforced system of education that is not artificially constructed or stifling to women. Page and Smith identify the image of a garden arbor as symbolic of dreams and escape though it still acts as a location for women's proper activities such as sewing, reading, eating, or hosting tea parties (32). The

woman under this imaginative arbor that seems to sprout directly from the planted roots of a flower is engaged in dreaming and possible escapism, but in none of the other proper activities. Instead, she sits with her back facing the reader as she looks off into the sea. Her position indicates both leisure, as she sits with her bare feet folded restfully under her dress, and also strain as she bends her neck and body forward in the direction of the boat she sees at a distance. She is not simply a domestic woman under the arbor.

This image illustrates Roberta White's theory of the woman artist's liminality. In *A Studio of One's Own: Fictional Women Painters and the Art of Fiction*, White contends that women artists often occupied a liminal space in society—the existence between her role as “Angel in the House” and a free agent in the public (249). She reads the depiction of women artists near the sea as seen in works such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, among other works, as reinforcing the message of woman's “marginality...in society” (20). White draws upon Carolyn Heilbrun's characterization of “liminality” as “threshold” in order to explain how images of the sea can illustrate both the “exclusion from or unwillingness to participate in the body politic” as well as the possibility of “crossing a threshold” in order to “enter the mainstream of culture and art” (20). If applied to Jameson's work, White's theory of imagery relating to women and the sea allows readers to interpret the position of the woman as one on the threshold of marginality and society. The woman in Jameson's picture sits on the shore looking out beyond the margins to a space that does not enclose. Through the entire construction of her dedication, Jameson represents a woman as situated between traditional feminine taste, as illustrated by the floral artwork and needlepoint script, and a more expansive taste that extends beyond the margins of a traditional conduct book.

In order to highlight the significance of this reading of Jameson's dedication page, it is helpful to look at the illustrations for another prominent conduct book published a few years later by Sarah Stickney Ellis entitled *The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (1839). On the title page for Ellis's work, the central figure of a woman, illuminated in her pure, white dress, is surrounded by her three children, one girl embracing her, another girl holding up a small flower to her attention, and a boy flipping through a picture book of flowers (see fig. 2). Two men in the background look on, gesturing with approving countenances. In this scene, the woman is contentedly the honored subject of a domestic interior environment in which her accomplishments in art and nature and her gracefulness and purity enable her to please men and teach her children. This illustration finely summarizes a traditional goal for a woman's development in taste, quite contrary to Jameson's solitary woman looking out into the unexplored distance.

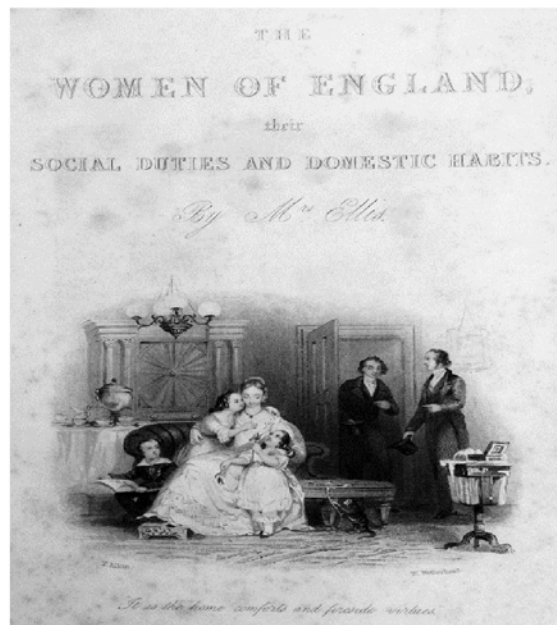


Fig. 2. Title Page by T. Allom from Sarah Stickney Ellis; *The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits*. (London: Fisher, Son, & Co, 1839). L. Tom Perry Special Collections at Harold B. Lee Library, BYU online. Web. 25 July 2015.



Fig. 3. Observation by T. Allom. From Sarah Stickney Ellis; *The Daughters of England*. (London: Fisher, Son, and Co, 1845). British Library Online. Web. 25 July 2015.

Another illustration accompanying Jameson's introduction, called "A Scene in a Library," again highlights how Jameson's rhetoric contrasts with other contemporary conduct books like another of Ellis's works, *Daughters of England: Their Position in Society, Character and Responsibilities* (1842). Thomas Allom's illustration, entitled "Observation" in *Daughters*, depicts the ideal setting for a woman's instruction in taste (fig. 3). In the scene, four young women sit in a parlor, backs facing the open door to the garden. One sits quietly at the piano while the other three appear to be observing the details of some plants they have gathered in their aprons, the eldest sweetly teaching the other two eager learners as she lightly points to the small branch of flowers she holds in her hand. The scene accurately captures the interests of the time for women and children to learn about botany and miniatures in order to understand and appreciate the larger world in the confines of a smaller space. Though Page and Smith identify many ways in which botanical studies enabled women to broaden their horizons and enter fields of science (53-76), this image links the study of the small plants to an understanding of education as it relates to a limited, feminine domestic space.

In Jameson's illustration, her fictional character, Alda, performs her own observation. She is standing over a large book with the names of the Shakespearean characters—Portia and Imogen—written in large print (see fig. 4). Interestingly, the male in the picture, Medon, who converses with Alda throughout the introduction, sits in the chair



Scene—A Library.

MEDON—ALDA.

ALDA.

You will not listen to me?

Fig. 4. A Scene in a Library. Anna Jameson; *Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical, And Historical*; (London: Saunders and Otley, 1832). Hathi Trust Digital Library. Web. 25 July 2015.

beneath her. Alda's figure stands looking down on his, giving her a position of power within the image. Alda's finger forcefully points to the words on the page giving the impression that she is instructing Medon. Because the image appears before the reader becomes situated in their conversation, Jameson has set up the text to imply that it is not merely a text of instruction for women, but for men as well. Medon's casual and somewhat standoffish body language, with his arms and legs crossed, indicate what Jameson may see as potential resistance. Whereas the educational conversation in Allom's "Observation" appears graceful and carefree, Jameson opens up her educational treatise with a struggle to communicate. The very first line following the image consists of Alda speaking to Medon, exclaiming, "You will not listen to me?" Though the work, as a whole, is very much addressed to women, both this image and the initial line indicate that Jameson speaks to multiple audiences through her work and explores a form of education in which men and women should be equal learners if a woman is given the voice to express her own knowledge. This image introduces readers to key modes of women's rhetoric that Jameson theorizes—conversation and listening.

Conversation and Listening

Neither Jameson nor Blair viewed the critical process as a solitary experience. Active learning requires an embrace of dialogue and flexibility in the growth of one's understanding rather than a rigid adherence to rules stunting effective taste. Though Blair does assert a sense of taste that is common to all people, he still insists that the true development of taste demands "frequent exercise" (11) as well as a society that invites "free discussion of works of genius" and "diversity in feeling," with room for "discussion and debate" (19). In much of the conversation in the introduction to her work, Jameson

illustrates the rhetorical power of dialogue—the active speech and listening necessary to understand ideas and collaborate in meaning making.

Conversation as a rhetorical art, while always a part of the rhetorical tradition hailing back to Plato's *Dialogues*, emerged as a prominent rhetorical form in the eighteenth century. Nancy Struever argues that the nineteenth-century association of taste with conversation recalls the rhetorical theory developed by men such as David Hume, who said that the more we converse, the more we learn principles of humanity and universal moral sentiment (240). Blair, too, incorporates Hume's theory into his own understanding of how individuals develop taste. He states that because there is no one standard of taste, but rather a diversity of taste among different people, reasoned conversation is necessary to unite and educate minds (17-19). Donawerth proposes in *Conversational Rhetoric* that the primary theorization of conversation as rhetoric can be found in women's writing from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries. It was only in the middle of the nineteenth-century, she says, when women began to write rhetoric textbooks, that these theories of "conversation-based discourse gradually disappeared" (2). Donawerth perhaps overstates the diminishment of women's contributions to conversational rhetoric, but her argument shows how important it is to trace the tradition of conversational rhetoric in the genres women chose to use such as "defenses of women's education" and "conduct books" (12). Jameson's work particularly underscores the educational values of collaboration and listening as elements of effective rhetorical conversation.

She draws upon a tradition of women's conversational rhetoric in the style of *Characteristics of Women*, which is framed as a dialogue between two characters. Within the text, Jameson includes a footnote mentioning the writer "Mrs. Marcet" as an example of

a woman's attainments. Hoeckley elaborates on this footnote, explaining that Jane Marcet, a prominent science writer, published the work *Conversations on Chemistry* (1810), a text in which intensive lectures in chemistry are imbedded within the conversations of women instructors and pupils (68). Such a popular text showcasing female attainments through conversation no doubt influenced Jameson's own writing.

Jameson explores a method of rhetorical conversation that invite women into the classical tradition. Johnston claims that Jameson's use of the dialogue between her two fictional characters Alda and Medon "draws on the authority of a classical masculine discourse" (79). The pattern in many ways follows the dialogic forms of rhetoric employed by classical rhetoricians with questions leading to a process of discovery. In constructing a dialogue between Alda and Medon, Jameson draws women speakers into a classical rhetorical practice. Jameson's opening dialogue invites collaboration and consensus upon ideas rather than being focused on winning an argument. Johnston notes that Jameson constructs a unique dialogue, one not purely confrontational, but one in which the two characters come to a point "of one accord; indignantly refuting together the notion of inferiority in Shakespeare's women" (82). In this way, Jameson connects strands of classical conversation and women's rhetoric.

Jameson prefers dialogue in which consensus is gained by evaluating alternative, not necessarily contradictory premises for judgment and evaluation. For instance, Medon is at first skeptical that Alda's focused examination of Shakespeare's women will be successfully accepted by the public. He reminds her that most critics believe Shakespeare's women are inferior to men and that these critics have already "tamely refuted" any counter proposition (56). Alda acknowledges the critics' perspective, but she shifts the onus for the

inferior characterization onto society. Here Alda, rather than refuting Medon's claim, refutes his implied premise that women's less memorable effect results from their intrinsic inferiority. She offers an alternative causality, explaining that because the women possess a "limited sphere of action" and thus limited experiences and opportunities for expression, the reader may initially find that the "the outward distinctions of character and passion" appear "less striking and less strong" than in Shakespeare's male characters (57). Her reasoning prompts a re-evaluation of women's rhetorical competence in light of their societal restrictions.

Medon counters her argument, addressing perhaps one of the more infamous Shakespearean women, arguing that her potency still falls short when compared to her masculine counterparts. He insists that Lady MacBeth's "vigour," "courage" and "cruelty" could not possibly overshadow that of Richard III's (58). Alda, however, deflects Medon's argument by exposing the flaws not in his conclusion, but in his method of argumentation. She does not attempt to prove that Lady Macbeth should be considered "more" vigorous, courageous, or cruel than Richard III. Instead, she directs Medon to look at Lady Macbeth as "a woman," and judge her according to the power of her womanhood. Whereas Richard III proclaims he has no pity, love, or fear, Lady Macbeth, Alda claims, possesses a "singular hold upon our fancy" because she, while being cruel, can still demonstrate pity, love, and fear, which makes her an even more complex, "terrible," "credible," and "intelligible" character (58). Through conversation, she does not necessarily change Medon's opinion about the superiority or inferiority of male or female characters. She does drive him to admit that her use of "argument, and sentiment, and logic, and poetry" makes a "very plausible case" for studying the "additional excellence" of Shakespeare's women on their

own terms (60). In constructing this exchange, Jameson compels readers to recognize that an indirect, non-confrontational rhetorical approach to argumentation, often gendered as feminine, can be equally as effective as an agonistic approach.

In order to get to this point, though, Alda must overcome the barriers to being heard. Her dialogue requires non-combative, serious listening, with respect for the other individual. The scene opens, as mentioned, with Alda asking Medon, “You will not listen to me?” (47). Twice, Medon teases Alda that with “humility” and the “deference” of a gentleman he will listen to her declaim “the virtues of her own sex” (47-8). Alda, sensing the disingenuousness of his posture toward her, refuses to move forward in conversation until he “listens” to her which she requests three times. By listening, Alda does not simply mean hearing what the other says; she demands that the listening be performed, like the dialogue, by “reasonable beings” (48). She puts much weight on this type of listening because she does not intend for them to be speaking at each other; instead, she desires that they speak with each other. Medon prods her with jests that women try to find fault in men, and he will listen to her in keeping with that understanding. Still, she does not accept this attitude as productive listening. She says that both of them must withhold prejudices and stereotypes that pit men against women. She desires that her argument not create “competition or comparison” between the sexes (49). She does not wish to look at women in order to discredit men; she wants to look at them for their own merits. It is only when Medon takes a serious interest in asking her questions about her rhetorical choices—why she chose her examples, why she avoided certain strategies like satire, etc.—that she feels his more active engagement and willingness to listen to her analysis. Through this fictional

exchange, Jameson presents her theory of effective dialogue in listening through example rather than explication.

Cheryl Glenn and Krista Ratcliffe have brought listening as a rhetorical mode to the forefront of women's rhetorical theory. They explain that listening well invites individuals and communities to "productively discern and implement actions that are more ethical," especially when "all parties agree to engage in rhetorical situations" that include "respectful speaking" and "rhetorical listening" (3). Ratcliffe identifies rhetorical listening as opposed to non-rhetorical listening as a "stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to *any* person, text, or culture" (17). In order for Medon to fully consider a different perspective, he must signify to Alda that he is open to her reasoning. Ratcliffe explains that true rhetorical listening allows one to "negotiate troubled identifications in order to facilitate" communication (21). Because Shakespearean criticism had been mostly a man's domain, Alda faces the challenge to her argument in light of her identification as a female Shakespearean scholar. Once Medon overcomes the barrier of this identification, he is able to listen effectively. Glenn and Ratcliffe cite Julie Jung, who explains that rhetorical listening is a "response that challenges listeners to engage their emotions and ask questions" rather than just hear what the other person is saying (*Silence and Listening* 8). Medon indicates to Alda that he has adopted the stance of rhetorical listener once he begins to ask her the more serious questions regarding the methods of her scholarship rather than commenting upon her position as a woman.

Effective rhetorical listening does not necessarily effect agreement. Alda's approach to literary and rhetorical criticism, defining her own standards, opens up the possibility for readers to form quite various perspectives based on different standards and different

interpretations. Alda does not seem concerned that her listeners embrace her conclusions as correct or as truth; rather, she sees the importance of engaging the mind and challenging people to reconsider depictions and stereotypes of women. Medon confronts her with this problem that not everyone will judge the characters as she does. Alda simply responds that this “problem” is really one of the best and most fruitful parts of criticism. She favors collaborative dialogue in which individuals form independent opinions. Her goal in conversation is not to form a monolithic opinion, but to invite examination of self and one’s values and prejudices just as Blair proposes in his discussions of taste. She explains:

We hear Shakespeare's men and women discussed, praised and dispraised, liked, disliked, as real human beings; and in forming our opinions of them, we are influenced by our own characters, habits of thought, prejudices, feelings, impulses, just as we are influenced with regard to our acquaintances and associates (55).

In effect, she is saying that in evaluating literary rhetoric, one does not have to worry about hurting others’ feelings or defending oneself as one might in praising and critiquing real people. By doing so, critical readers can examine what they value and why more honestly. From such exercise in critical thinking, they might, perhaps, correct certain impressions that remain as prejudices in real life. The result, then, of such rhetorical criticism is not universal acceptance and agreement of the same standard or evaluation, but introspective self-improvement for the betterment of social relationships.

Jameson’s Enlightenment Frameworks

Jameson legitimizes her theories pertaining to the rhetorical modes of conversation and listening by establishing her ethos as a knowledgeable Enlightenment critic and participant in the larger rhetorical tradition. She establishes her credibility as a

Shakespearean scholar by situating her analyses in the context of criticisms by other notable Shakespearean scholars. She then justifies her approach to literary criticism through the goals and principles found in Blair's belletristic rhetoric while organizing her analysis according to specific Enlightenment classification systems. As she assesses the fictional women, Jameson employs her own form of classical epideictic rhetoric, praising Shakespeare's heroines in order to accentuate their virtues and rhetorical strengths. Within her analysis, she draws upon classical rhetoric by highlighting women as effective orators in public scenes within Shakespeare's plays. Many of the scenes she analyzes place women in prominent public places, especially the courtroom, implicitly arguing for women's competence in judicial rhetoric. As she revises these multiple strands of traditional rhetoric, she not only establishes her ethos, but she also, as Hoeckley asserts, presents a "gender commentary" that is "incisive, provocative, and frequently rhetorically adept" (83).

As several scholars such as Nina Auerbach, Judith Johnston, and Cheri Larsen Hoeckley point out, Jameson's work is engaged within the larger conversation of the traditionally male dominated Shakespearean criticism. Throughout *Characteristics of Women*, Jameson establishes her own ethos as a critic by demonstrating the depth of knowledge she has in the tradition of Shakespearean criticism, acknowledging and at times refuting the criticism of significant figures such as Augustus von Schlegel, Samuel Johnson, William Richardson, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Hazlitt.⁷ By engaging with these

⁷ Hugh Blair is never mentioned or referenced obliquely in Jameson's work; however, he was a notable contributor to Shakespearean scholarship. In 1753, he had anonymously published an eight volume edition of Shakespeare's works which was, in effect, a collaboration of many Shakespearean critics. He notes in his preface that his goal was not

critics, Jameson establishes herself as a female authoritative voice on Shakespeare, and she illustrates how the process of literary and rhetorical criticism can be an avenue for challenging and shaping the roles of women in society. Because much of the criticism she addresses either neglects or downplays the role of the women in Shakespeare's works, Jameson offers new readings and new voices to these fictional characters and thus gives more voice to women in her own society.

Jameson also reveals her association with the belletristic tradition as she identifies the social function of literary criticism. She argues that her form of literary criticism, akin to belletristic rhetoric in that it examines characters' patterns and styles of speech, produces individuals who can actively challenge and correct false assumptions. Blair describes belletristic learning as a form of leisurely pleasure that keeps the mind from being "idle" while increasing "sensibility to all the tender and humane passions" and weakening "the more violent and fierce emotions" (13-15). Jameson's arguments for this type of active rhetorical education clearly reflect Blair's. Her character Alda claims that literary studies allow women to "take leisure" to "examine" and to "analyze" and finally to "correct...impressions" when necessary (14). Jameson believes that thoughtful criticism will leave "good impressions...on [the] mind" and "[dispose] the heart to virtue" (16). Jameson's goal in this analysis is to correct false assumptions that certain types of expression or public scenes are unfit for a virtuous woman. The detailed critical work Jameson does invites readers to judge women's rhetoric less hastily and see through examples a better impression of true virtue. The characters, Portia, Isabella, Juliet, and

to put various voices "in a posture of defense one against another" but rather to unite "all their efforts to rescue so inimitable an author" (qtd. in Vickers 467).

Hermione, all demonstrate various styles of eloquence that fit a specific context. She thus prompts readers to consider appropriateness and virtue in light of rhetorical situations rather than universal codes of behavior.

Jameson's criticism also develops Blair's emphasis on a natural versus artificial style in the definition of taste. The development of taste or critical judgment requires simple and honest expression of feelings and intuition rather than artifice designed to deceive and manipulate. Blair opens his lectures, as he says, to "explode false ornament" and "recommend good sense as a foundation for all good composition" (4). "Simplicity," he says, is "essential" to good taste (5). Though Blair continually skirts a definitive list of rules for his concept of "taste," he lists the effects of a tasteful composition. It "interests the imagination," "touches the heart," and "pleases all ages and all nations" (42). Blair, as Jameson later does, uses Shakespeare to exemplify concretely an understanding of what he sees as "natural taste." He accuses Shakespeare's works of containing blemishes such as "grotesque mixtures of Tragedy and Comedy," "strained thoughts," and "affected witticisms" (48). In each of these examples, Blair points to something that feels forced, false, or disjointed to himself as a reader, ultimately not accomplishing the goal of connecting the writer and the reader. However, Shakespeare is a rhetorical master, according to Blair, because of the qualities in his writing that truly connect to the audience including the "representations of characters," "the liveliness of his descriptions," the "force of his sentiments," and "the natural language of passion" (48).

Jameson builds upon this foundation in her own criticism of taste and identifies specific examples of Shakespeare's fictional women, whose speeches are effective and affective in their displays of argument, natural sentiment, and passion both within the play

and upon the reader. She counters negative criticism of certain characters such as Juliet and Hermione, explaining that their effusive passion or excessive reserve of passion, respectively, is only an expression of natural character. Any amendments to their characters to make them more properly “ladylike” would be false and forced, thereby lacking taste. Through this criticism, Jameson eschews conduct book education that teaches women to practice artificial behavior.

In addition to building her criticism upon a belletristic understanding of taste in both its purpose and its expression, Jameson’s language bridges the concepts of another strand of eighteenth century rhetoric with belletristic rhetoric. James Golden explains that the principles found in faculty psychology, specifically relating to reason, heavily influenced the belletristic tradition (125). In her organizational scheme, Jameson employs a similar language of the human “faculties” to that of George Campbell’s in his work *Philosophy of Rhetoric*. Campbell outlines his system of four categorical uses of rhetoric: “to enlighten the understanding, to please the imagination, to move the passions, or to influence the will” (902). Jameson’s organization of fictional female characters understands these various faculties and rhetorical effects as important to her rhetorical theory.⁸ She begins with the women of intellect, such as Portia and Isabella, who communicate both to enlighten understanding and to move the will of others; she then turns to characters of passion and imagination, such as Juliet and Helena, who are able to compose striking images and associative thoughts through speeches infused with imagery; finally, she looks at

⁸ Jameson actually builds her two volumes upon four categories: intellect, imagination and passions, affections, and historical women. I have chosen to look at the first three categories of fictional heroines rather than her discussion on historical characters.

characters of the “affections,” such as Hermione, whose passions are more subdued on the surface, but majestically sublime in expression and moral quality (200).

Jameson’s Liberating Essentialism

Despite being such a strong proponent of women’s issues such as women’s work, education, and property rights, Jameson chose to classify these women and praise them according to certain virtues, which implicates her in a type of essentialism. Her understanding of woman’s “essential virtues” may invite suspicion by feminist thinkers following Judith Butler who notably articulates the theory of gender performativity versus gender essentialism (Hoeckley 20).⁹ Hoeckley proposes, however, that Jameson “anticipates some later notions of performativity” even while espousing women’s essential virtues (20). Other scholars address the complexity of Jameson’s essentialism with different conclusions. Johnston, for instance, defines Jameson’s feminism as both “bourgeois and egalitarian,” accepting both Jameson’s loyalties to middle class norms and also her resistance to them (8).

Alison Booth argues that it is valuable to look at how Jameson manages to “sidestep those irresolvable disagreements over constructed or essential difference” by “presenting a collection of exemplary women” (257). Although Booth critically questions the use of these “collections” insofar as they acted to reinforce gender norms, she recognizes that the practice of “recovery” is important to giving voice to that which has been neglected (258). Booth examines Jameson primarily as a “compiler of historical narratives of and for women” and as one who provides an “instructive model for recuperating feminist foremothers” (259). Hoeckley adds to the argument that Jameson’s form of essentialism

⁹ See Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990)

can be “liberating, rather than limiting” because women’s nature gives them “license for a variety of activities that would typically be suspect in domestic ideology’s accounts of appropriate femininity” (21). For example, as Jameson discusses Shakespeare’s character Rosalind, who disguises herself by cross-dressing in the forest, Jameson praises the character’s quick, feminine wit and playful disguise as a form of intelligence that was appropriate to its need and context without stripping Rosalind of any feminine quality (77). In addition, Jameson’s form of essentialism can be liberating because it “suggests a range of appropriate femininities” (Hoeckley 26). It is this recovery of women’s voices and diversity of appropriate femininities that I argue makes Jameson’s approach to literary scholarship a valuable contribution to feminist rhetorical theory.

Though Jameson adheres to a theory of essential feminine virtues, she still censures the myth of binary womanhood, a societal ideology that categorized a woman as perfect or irretrievably fallen. Jameson’s classification and appraisal defies this polarized ideology and crafts more complex evaluations of women. Alda identifies this destructive myth, arguing that many of the historical representations of females take a reductionist position claiming that a woman is either a villain, one “without modesty or pity,” or a pure “angel of benevolence” (55). This categorization strategy ignores the complexities that exist outside these two limiting extremes. She argues that the women in Shakespeare’s work represent “real, natural women” who are “affectionate, thinking beings, and moral agents” rather than hollow figures or types (21). Chroniclers of women too often rely on a one-sided portrait that captures one end of the binary, impressing upon readers a flat analysis, without the nuances of “motives” (21). A woman, known primarily for “the mischief [she has] done or caused,” according to Alda, without any recording of her motivation and character, does not

allow the reader to know “the whole, instead of a part” (21). Shakespeare, on the other hand, crafts women as whole, individual, complex beings rather than mere figures of good or evil.

If Jameson saw women as more complex than fellow critics did, why did she need a classification system at all? Jameson addresses this potential question through her fictional characters’ dialogue. While Medon credits Alda’s fine eye in discovering various “shades of character” within the diverse and complex women Shakespeare constructs, he questions her purpose in using any categorization of women at all. Alda, realizing that the categories in and of themselves are constructed, still sees their usefulness in highlighting specific rhetorical features of the fictional women. In developing a classification system to organize Alda’s literary analysis, Jameson legitimizes her own authority among other Enlightenment thinkers. Her deliberate choice of the categories intellect, imagination/passion, and affections establishes her authority within the modern rhetorical tradition of her time, specifically as her system reflects Campbell’s categories. However, in using the classification system, she does not prescribe an arbitrary morality based on the virtues she extols; instead, she widens the opportunities for women to practice forms of eloquence best suited to their rhetorical situation.

Jameson’s Literary Analysis

Before beginning her in depth analysis, Alda confronts Medon’s particular prejudice against women rhetors in the courtroom. He exclaims: “How I hate political women!” (66). Alda identifies the undergirding premise of Medon’s statement that women are not truly “capable of comprehending the principles of legislation, or of feeling an interest in the government and welfare of their country” (67). Medon also insists that women in court

often betray a false and disgusting display of reason. In response, Alda rejects Medon's accusation against women's feelings and interest in public affairs, arguing that women's sympathies and patriotism can be equal to or even greater than men's. She then postulates that the root of the problem Medon observes is not the inferiority of women but their lack of necessary education. She establishes a compelling argument that a woman's "natural" emotional sensibilities qualify them for understanding the heart of court cases. If women were granted the type of rhetorical reasoning to guide their emotions, they might prove even more valuable to their public societies and legal systems. Alda concludes that a better education might prepare women "with a view to their future destination as the mothers and nurses of legislators and statesmen" (68). Though she does not state that women should be educated for positions as legislators and statesmen, possibly because such an argument might alienate contemporary audiences, Jameson implies that women should be better educated for the public good (68). Through her literary analysis of each character, Jameson moves beyond identifying the problem in women's education; she actually provides women readers a rhetorical education through Shakespearean models.

Portia: Intellectual Composure

Portia, in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, is the first example of intellect. Portia's eloquence does not result in the moving of her immediate audience's will, as she unsuccessfully pleads with her antagonist Shylock to change his mind in Antonio's case. The greater purpose in showcasing Portia's eloquence is in bringing to light an understanding of true mercy and true justice as opposed to corrupt vengeance, a higher and nobler purpose than simply winning a case. Jameson describes Portia's intellectual style as that guided by "poetical imagination" (77). In other words, she is able to finely

construct her speech in ways that clearly impress the minds of the play's audience with noble sentiments. In the context of her rhetorical situation, Portia poses as a male lawyer to argue for Antonio's defense and mercy in light of accusations of his debt to the Jewish moneylender, Shylock. Jameson praises not only Portia's magnificent plea for mercy over retributive justice, but also her shrewdness in response to Shylock's unwillingness to bend. Jameson expertly layers two forms of classical rhetoric to make her point. Her style of belletristic criticism, praising Portia, recalls the epideictic tradition. While Portia performs a type of judicial rhetoric in court, the more compelling rhetoric is actually Jameson's epideictic praise of the virtues Portia's speech exudes.

Jameson uses floral imagery to describe Portia's "intellectual powers" and to express the essence of her rhetorical effect. Jameson describes Portia's intellect as the "attar of roses," which is "rich and concentrated" (77). In other words, it leaves a strong impression in its precise and powerful pleading. Jameson compares Portia's style to "the orange-tree, hung at once with golden fruit and luxuriant flowers, which has expanded into bloom and fragrance beneath favouring skies, and has been nursed into beauty by the sunshine and the dews of heaven" (99). This description empowers Portia as a woman because she is a sturdy tree, and her "fruit" or benefit to society lies in her words and character. We know that this fruit must be her speech because Jameson later says, "Portia's eulogy on mercy is a piece of heavenly rhetoric; it falls on the ear with a solemn, measured harmony; it is the voice of a descended angel addressing an inferior nature" (101). Just as the fruit of the tree was nursed by "sunshine" and "dews of heaven," so, too, her rhetoric is filled with heavenly solemnity and harmony.

She immediately establishes herself as a reliable speaker as she attempts to convince Shylock through moral reasoning of the benefits of mercy over a cruel form of justice. Her style, Jameson implies, draws upon all the nuances of rhetorical delivery. She uses “strong expressions” accompanied by pauses for the “reflections she interposes” and perfectly times her “delays and circumlocution” to allow the development of any “latent feeling of commiseration” (82). Her demeanor, as part of her rhetorical persona, betrays a “calm self-command” in the courtroom, without any hint of breaking down or betraying her disguise (101). Jameson describes her appeals to Shylock’s mercy as a “matchless piece of eloquence” filled with “solemn pathos” (82).

Its ineffectiveness on Shylock does not indicate any deficiency in her style; instead, Jameson indicates that it serves to expose the unmitigated avarice in Shylock’s hardened heart. It also justifies Portia’s “noble motives” when she resorts to threatening the unmerciful Shylock, forcing him to give up all he has or be accused of plotting a murder based on religious contempt. Jameson implies that Shakespeare persuades the audience of Portia’s right to levy such an accusation against Shylock because he refuses justice and determinedly seeks revenge. Jameson extols Portia as a representative of a woman rhetor in the blending and proportioning of “the moral, intellectual, and sentient faculties” so that they are in “harmony with all outward aspects and influences” (92). In other words, a woman does not forsake her supposed feminine grace by using her rhetorical skill in a public setting as Portia does. Again, without overtly advocating for women’s place in the courtroom, Jameson shows that a refined presence in the public, such as Portia displays (even though in disguise), is fitting for a woman and beneficial in promoting social morality.

Jameson's description of Portia's deportment finely matches the critical judgment Blair outlines in his *Lectures for the Speaker of the Bar*. He says that in such a scene, the speaker must learn to avoid a "high vehement tone" in order to convince the audience to accept what is "just and true" (257). Blair describes how limited and precise, how "sober and chastened" a Speaker of the Bar must be in comparison to a Speaker of the Popular Assemblies (257). Portia's "rich and concentrated" and self-controlled demonstration perfectly illustrates the type of rhetorical stance Blair suggests for a tasteful speaker. Blair summarizes: "Eloquence suited to the Bar...is of the calm and temperate kind, and connected with close reasoning" (265). It is this very description that characterizes Portia in the courtroom.

Isabella: Sublime Moral Conviction

After examining Portia's controlled and incisive rhetorical style in public argument, Jameson offers an alternate model of women's public rhetoric in her examination of Isabella in *Measure for Measure*. Unlike Portia, Isabella performs a style of persuasion more impromptu and passionate. Jameson claims that on first glance, the differences between Isabella and Portia would lead one to conclude that they were not composed of the same qualities, and yet she argues that the mixture of the same qualities is present, simply in a different combination (97). She commends Isabella for exemplifying the same "depth of reflection and persuasive eloquence" as Portia but for different needs and circumstances (98). While both Portia and Isabella exhibit grace and composure alongside fine reasoning, Isabella does so with a different effusion of forcefulness and expression because of her personal, moral involvement.

Jameson compares Isabella's speech to Portia's speech with side by side excerpts showing that Portia's rhetoric is more refined and structured while Isabella's "pleadings are poured from the abundance of her heart in broken sentences" (101). The description of Isabella's rhetorical style illustrates the concept of the cooperation between the beautiful and the sublime. To understand Isabella's complex rhetorical style, Jameson must emphasize what she recognizes as sublime rhetoric. She describes Isabella's rhetorical presence as being akin to a tree, a "graceful cedar, towering on some alpine cliff, unbowed and unscathed amid the storm" (99). This description, far from painting Isabella as a delicate flower, as may seem a more obvious choice in light of her virginity and modesty, allows her moral fortitude and convictions as well as her passionate outbursts to be seen as an effective, rather than a flawed sublime rhetorical strategy. Jameson draws upon this language of the moral sublime, claiming that Isabella's deportment is "elevated" through "religious principle" (76).

To grasp the precision of Jameson's imagery, it is important to remember Blair's theory of the sublime and the beautiful. Blair states that "sublime objects" create an "admiration and expansion of the mind" and "[raise] the mind much above its ordinary state" (55). Blair infuses every description of sublime objects with divine or moral import, implying the correlation between elevated thoughts and moral character. Jameson's description of Isabella as a sublime object—the graceful cedar on an alpine cliff—complements her sense of moral conviction. The imagery exemplifies Blair's concept of beauty merging into a sublime through his analogy of the stream. He says a "stream that runs within its banks, is a beautiful object; but when it rushes down with the impetuosity and noise of a torrent, it presently becomes a sublime one" (57). In highlighting Isabella's

passionate speech, her rushing impetuosity, Jameson legitimizes this particular variation of women's rhetoric as an effective means of persuasion and communicating. Jameson's emphasis on the sublime and beautiful features of Isabella's rhetoric create her argument that sublime, impassioned speech based on moral convictions is a legitimate expression of proper, feminine beauty.

Most Shakespearean critics did not identify Isabella as a sublime orator. Jameson actually confronts several narrow attitudes toward her found in Shakespearean criticism. First, she criticizes "Johnson and the rest of the black-letter crew" for being silent concerning Isabella (107). In choosing not to recognize Isabella in their criticism, they silence a powerful example of women's rhetoric, according to Jameson. They do not acknowledge that her passionate bursts of appeal to virtue can indeed be a form of well-reasoned dialogue. Though she does not name her fellow female critic in the text, Jameson obliquely refers to Charlotte Lennox and her judgment of Isabella's character. Jonathan Bate notes in *The Genius of Shakespeare* that Lennox found Isabella to be "anything but noble" and describes her as a "coarse vixen," the description Jameson alludes to in her text (300). In Isabella's struggle to uphold the virtues of justice, mercy, and purity, she is caught in the middle of a battle in her own conscience between right and wrong, which, according to Lennox, should be resolved in a more modest rhetorical form. In response to Claudio's insistence that Isabella sleep with Angelo, Isabella responds in passionate refusal in order to express the degree of evil she finds in the suggestion. In her short, passionate pleading style she arraigns him:

O, you beast! O faithless coward, O dishonest wretch,

Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice?

Is't not a kind of incest to take life
 From thine own sister's shame? What should I think?
 Heaven shield my mother played my father fair,
 For such a warped slip of wilderness
 Ne'er issued from his blood. Take my defiance,
 Die, perish! (qtd. in *Characteristics of Women* 107).

Bate says that Lennox believed it was Isabella's Christian duty to stand behind her brother and win sympathy for his life (301). He quotes Lennox as saying that Isabella should have chosen "mild expostulations, wise reasoning, and gentle rebukes" (301). In other words, even if Isabella disagreed with her brother's reasoning, she should have responded in a gentler, more sympathetic way. Instead, her prudishness, according to Lennox, gets in the way of her Christian duty and womanly reasoning. Jameson finds these judgments repulsive and instead praises Isabella's rhetorical choices, commending her as "ever consistent in her pure and upright simplicity" (108). Through her praise of Isabella, Jameson refigures the image of a pure woman based on the rhetorical expression of her convictions rather than upon a false code of femininity.

Though the ambiguity created by Isabella's silence at the end of the play has caused scholars to debate whether or not she ultimately wants to marry the Duke or if she simply resigns herself to feminine submission, Jameson chooses to read the ending as a suitable reward rather than punishment for Isabella's rhetorical choices. She sees that Isabella's position as Duchess of Vienna lends her the most appropriate sphere in which she can more usefully enact rhetorical skills to promote social morality. Jameson says that it is in this position rather than her position in the convent that Isabella's affections, intellect, and

principle find access to a “wider range of usefulness and benevolence, of trial and action” (109). She interprets Isabella’s original place “in the convent” as that “which may stand...poetically for any narrow and obscure situation in which such a woman might be placed” (109). The convent limited Isabella from more extensive influence as a moral authority in society. In this way, Jameson advocates for the public usefulness of women even in her own society, who, like Isabella, possess character and a rhetorical style that display a sincere commitment to virtue.

Juliet: Poetic Passion

As Jameson turns to the category of imagination and passion, she lingers on a character probably most familiar to the public, Juliet from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. She praises Juliet’s speech for its strength in impressing images of abstract ideas into the minds of the audience. In Juliet “every sentiment” of natural feelings or passions is clothed in “the richest imagery” (142). This imagery allows Juliet’s feelings to be “reflected from her mind to ours” (142). Jameson’s analysis invites a serious consideration of women’s strengths in communicating emotions through poetry. Jameson uses Juliet to show that individuals process passions best when those experiences are expressed through the poetic expression of another. She explains, “Passion, when we contemplate it through the medium of imagination, is like a ray of light transmitted through a prism; we can calmly, and with undazzled eye, study its complicated nature, and analyze its variety of tints” (15). It is more difficult to understand passions through one’s immediate experiences because passion, she says, as seen “through our own feelings and experiences, is like the same ray transmitted through a lens—blinding, burning, consuming where it falls” (15). Ultimately, to understand the human condition and the human passions, poetic expression of common

human experiences is the best means by which critical thinkers can study emotions. As Lois Agnew notes, Blair believed that the study of emotive language, as expressed through imaginative speech, “has a role to play in leading people to a higher moral and social purpose” (172). Jameson’s analysis selects Juliet as one of the highest representatives of emotive language in imaginative literature as a means of studying and valuing the human condition.

Rather than reviewing Juliet as the object of Romeo’s desire according to traditional readings, Jameson reappraises Juliet as a poet in her own right. Jameson levies praise upon Juliet for the poetical quality of her eloquence due in large part to the power of her imagination. It is as if she “speaks in pictures,” Jameson observes (142). Through this rhetorical skill, Juliet is able to reflect her thoughts from her own mind to her audience so that those listening can identify with the passion she feels. Jameson is careful to point out that the poetic quality created by her imaginative expression is not “mere adornment” but is rather part of “its essence,” an important condition in truly rhetorical speech (142).

In the context of eighteenth century rhetorical theory, imagination grew in prominence as an important faculty in the process of communication. Francis Bacon, for instance, believed that it was the aid of the imagination that allowed reason to operate and will to decide (Wallace 26). However, Bacon distrusted imagination as a power over reason. A “helpful imagination” was one that rendered logical argument attractive and pleasing”; expression and creativity were not its ultimate or highest ends (26). Rhetoricians such as Campbell, however, gave more prestige to the role of imagination in and of itself. For Campbell, the rhetorical effect of “sublime” speech, according to Phil Dolph, is “divorced from practical concerns...it evokes an instantaneous and pleasurable response”

(107). As mentioned in chapter one, imaginative perspective was most often considered part of the masculine realm of experience. Jameson, however, showcases it through a fictional woman. She combines Burke's theory that taste develops through the medium of the imagination and Blair's theory that taste develops through the medium of nature, and reinterprets Juliet as a standard, whose taste is both natural (innate) and displayed through her control of imaginative language. She also advances Campbell's theorization of rhetoric which allows the end of communication to extend beyond the communication of ideas and to include "sentiments, passions, dispositions, and purposes" (905). She elevates for women this opening in rhetoric in which their articulate expression of passions is a quality not to be neglected or repressed.

As Jameson engages eighteenth and nineteenth-century discourses on the imagination through her analysis of Juliet, she also addresses the relationship between the sublime and the beautiful in rhetoric. She describes Juliet as a "willow" tree, employing adjectives associated with beauty such as "fair," "soft" and "flexible" with leaves that "tremble" (142). The willow tree, as a symbol throughout Celtic and British literature, according to Alisoun Gardner-Medwin, would have been recognized by audiences as a symbol of mourning, often associated with the loss of love (6). In addition, the tree's proximity to water connects it with the idea of tears, thus the expression the "weeping willow" (7). The picture of a beautiful, melancholic woman seems, at first, a reversal of the strength and power Jameson has so far ascribed to the fictional women rhetors. However, Jameson's continued description adds a sublime strength and power to this willow tree. She describes the passions, which have "taken possession of Juliet's whole soul" as the "force, the rapidity, the resistless violence of the torrent" beneath the willow (147). The

figurative and effusive speech by which Juliet expresses her emotions echoes the sublime forces of nature. Juliet's beauty and melancholy do not suggest a feminine weakness but a great force of strength.

Jameson endows Juliet with the gift of sublime speech, a rhetorical feat lauded by Enlightenment thinkers and rhetorical theorists. Her choice to combine the beautiful and sublime in the character of Juliet, in many ways, follows Blair's theorization of the rhetorical sublime more suited to women's rhetorical theory. Ianetta suggests that Blair removes the sublime from its masculinist aesthetic associated with "rugged strength" and instead defines sublimity as that which "penetrate[s] [the heart] with noble sentiments...and tender passions" (408). She offers Blair's sermon entitled "Woman," published in *Ladies Companion* (1839), as textual evidence that Blair believed that women, through their combined strength and gentleness, possess a "natural oratorical ability" and can access "that highest level of expression, the sublime," a conclusion others of that time might be hesitant to make (410). Jameson argues that Shakespeare has endowed Juliet with a unique oratorical ability, capable of moving the passions of her audiences, because of the possession of her feminine strength and tenderness, rather than despite it.

Hermione: The Pathos of Silence

In Jameson's final classification, she examines the "affections," through Imogen, Desdemona, and Hermione (*A Winter's Tale*)—characters endowed with a more subdued passion and emotion in their rhetorical displays. Jameson says that characters identified by "affection" are those whose passions are not "the most striking and interesting," in whom there is less "marked expression" or "vivid colour," so there seems less to "captivate and interest" readers (200). The term "affection" throughout the text is often related to both

rhetorical expression and moral quality. For instance, Medon describes “affection” as that genuine expression that counters “rivalry and jealousy” (70). It is characterized by “force and simplicity” as well as “self-conviction” (70). Alda describes affection as “passive fortitude,” “piety,” and “pure strength” (71). Though affection may not be as interesting as the poetic passion expressed in Juliet, Jameson finds it important to examine the powerful rhetorical effect of “profound feelings” expressed in “subdued harmony” (200). These are the passions that Jameson says “lie hidden like the ocean springs” as the artist (Shakespeare) “patiently unravels” the “most delicate fibres” with only a “few graceful touches” in order to provoke sympathy in the attentive reader’s heart (201). In rendering her analysis of affection last, Jameson invites readers to consider this undervalued and overlooked, yet poignant form of woman’s rhetoric.

Jameson first identifies what she sees as the moral quality of affection. She praises the women for being “gentle, beautiful, and innocent...models of conjugal submission, truth and tenderness” (201). Yet Jameson is not necessarily elevating these particular qualities as universal standards for women. Instead, she sees these characteristics as powerful rhetorical responses women use to cope with devastating personal situations. Each of these women is a “[victim] of the unfounded jealousy of their husbands,” yet their strength is expressed in their subdued rhetoric which ultimately establishes them as stronger than their violent male counterparts (201). Jameson lauds the unconventional rhetorical power of subdued expression, specifically demonstrated by Hermione’s dignified silences which prove to have a profound impact upon audiences.

Hermione’s moral character is first established in her composed court appeal. When the innocent heroine falls victim to a jealous husband, his accusations of infidelity force her

to stand in defense before the court. Jameson notes that Hermione's responses when first accused are short and pointed, illustrating the "composure of her temper" though she is affected by the injurious allegations (205). Jameson contrasts Hermione with Leontes, who is characterized by uncontrolled rage. She describes his speech as profuse and long-winded as it "heaps insult upon insult" (205). Yet Hermione, as Jameson notes, does not "give way to tears and feminine complaints" (205). Rather than using traditional rhetorical arts of reason to persuade the court of her innocence, her eloquence is an expression of simplicity and moral appeal. Jameson excerpts this quote from her speech:

If powers divine
Behold our human action (as they do),
I doubt not, then, but innocence shall make
False accusation blush, and tyranny
Tremble at patience. (qtd. in *Characteristics of Women* 206)

Hermione does not defend herself, but trusts that truth will prevail. Jameson describes her style in this speech as an "earnest," "eloquent," and even "chilling" justification of personal blamelessness (206). Her silence isn't literal silence; instead, she silences the argument by appealing to a larger authority than herself in the "powers divine" (206). She sees no need to carry out a defense of herself if "innocence" and "patience" will triumph over "false accusation" and "tyranny" in the end (206).

Jameson corrects critics who claim that Hermione's sixteen-year silence and unexpected presence at the end of the play are "unfeeling" and lack the natural compassion and sympathy a virtuous wife would have shown to a repentant husband (207). The critics argued that a woman of feeling would have revealed herself to her penitent husband much

sooner than sixteen years, but Jameson exonerates Hermione from this accusation, explaining how the character's rhetorical response of silence is the most fitting moral response to such a "cruel injury" (207). Because the wound of allegation against her purity would "sink deep--almost incurably" in a woman of noble character, Jameson explains that "violent anger" or "desire for vengeance" could not have been as just a response as silence (207-209). As Jameson continues to explain, Hermione's long silence of sixteen years and triumphal entry of sorts is the most fitting rhetorical choice to emphasize justice. A "premature reconciliation," she notes, would be "inconsistent with the character" (209). Even in this revealing scene, Jameson notes the power of Hermione's silence:

It appears to me that her silence during the whole of this scene (except where she invokes a blessing on her daughter's head) is in the finest taste as a poetical beauty, besides being an admirable trait of character...any words put into her mouth must, I think have injured the solemn and profound pathos of the situation. (211)

Here, Jameson is not simply commenting on Hermione's character and defending its virtue; she is commending her rhetorical silence as a truly effective means of "pathos" and "poetical beauty," that which has perhaps more power to move audiences to embrace the virtues of truth and patience than any speech could. Silence gives Hermione control over the situation and the audience. She justly disciplines her husband, permitting time for him to agonize over the effects of his ill treatment. She also illustrates her power to maintain "perfect command over her own feelings" (209).

Jameson's examination of Hermione's rhetoric complements Blair's rhetorical theory. Blair argues that an excess of words will often "[relax] the tension of the mind" and negate a sublime effect upon the audience (36). Hermione illustrates how one can maintain

effective tension through scarce speech and silences. Her example also emphasizes the power women can gain rhetorically in the choice of silence rather than merely being silenced. Jameson's work here prefigures Glenn's examination of women's silences in her study *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*. Glenn proposes that "silence may well be the most undervalued and *under*-understood traditionally feminine site and concomitant rhetorical art" (2). She notes how often silence is seen as a "lamentable essence of femininity, a trope for oppression, passivity, emptiness, stupidity, or obedience" (2). However, she states that silence is often powerful "when it signifies ...stoicism" (18). This is the type of power Jameson attributes to Hermione. Indeed, Hermione controls the tension of the entire scene and never forsakes her sense of self-command.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that Jameson establishes herself as a female rhetor and an innovative rhetorical theorist. As a champion of women's education, Jameson re-envisions the conduct book genre as training for women that challenges limitations to women's spheres of influence and subverts restrictive norms associated with femininity. Jameson reveals that the development of taste through literary criticism offers women more than accrument of accomplishments for display; it provides a much needed source of rhetorical education. She eschews artificial taste and proposes that women have access to varied expressions of genuine, effective expression. She encourages women to develop taste in order to enhance their personal lives and promote social improvement.

From her illustrations, to her dialogic framework, to her analysis of Shakespeare's women in *Characteristics of Women*, she pushes the boundaries of early Victorian middle class female education. Her illustrations, in contrast to other conduct books, support the

expansion of women's sphere of influence, inviting women beyond the domestic sphere and into the public. She also envisions an education that would not separate men and women or put them in opposition to one another. Through the frame of dialogue between her fictional characters, Alda and Medon, Jameson shows the effectiveness of collaborative dialogue, conversations in which men and women can learn from each other. Jameson does not just suggest the potential for equality between men and women, she proves her equal aptitude by situating herself in conversation with prominent male thinkers in the Enlightenment, Shakespearean criticism, and the rhetorical tradition. She adeptly employs rhetorical strategies, classification processes, and analytic techniques that illustrate her competence and any woman's potential to engage profitably in larger social dialogues. Finally, Jameson performs an intriguing feminist recovery through her categorization and analysis of Shakespeare's female characters. In her analysis of Portia's intellectual composure in the courtroom, Isabella's sublime moral conviction, Juliet's poetic passion, and Hermione's pathos of silence, Jameson substantiates women's place in public roles and revalues forms of women's rhetoric that have been traditionally labeled as feminine weaknesses.

Contemporary rhetorical recoveries found in excellent compilations such as Glenn's *Rhetoric Retold*, Lunsford's *Reclaiming Rhetorica*, and Donawerth's *Rhetorical Theory by Women before 1900*, along with several others, argue for continued work in recovering women's voices in the history of rhetoric. Jameson most definitely fits within these lists of women rhetoricians and among her contemporaries such as Blair and Campbell. Her work represents a specific moment in nineteenth-century rhetorical history in which woman's rhetorical theory naturally grew out of what might be determined a more mainstream

tradition. In addition, Anna Jameson is not just another figure to include within a compendium of women who articulated clear rhetorical theories. She is a unique female rhetorical theorist in that she has offered through her analysis of fictional female characters' rhetoric an engaging prototype of women's recovery as well.

Chapter III

A Powerful Beauty and Reserved Sublime:

Christina Rossetti's Rhetorical Aesthetic

But nature's common works, by genius dress'd,

With art selected, and with taste express'd;

Where sympathy with terror is combin'd,

To move, to melt, and elevate the mind.

--Richard Payne Knight, *Landscape, A Poem* (1794)

In the poem by Richard Payne Knight (1750-1824), rhetorical effect—the moving, melting, and elevating of the mind—depends not only upon genius, but also upon taste in the expression of genius. In the short stanza above, Knight depicts the features of what this chapter discusses as a “rhetorical aesthetic.” Often, aesthetic theory concerns itself with beauty for its own sake, in the way sublime or beautiful objects stimulate an individual response of pleasure or displeasure. The rhetorical aesthetic, on the other hand, adds a social and communicative dimension to aesthetic theory. In this chapter, I use the term rhetorical aesthetic to describe how theories of the sublime and the beautiful contribute to an understanding of communication, specifically through the processes of critical taste and creative genius. As Hugh Blair proposes, the study of both rhetorical processes invites better communication. He states the purpose for the study of *belles lettres*, saying,

Whether the influence of the speaker, or the entertainment of the hearer, be consulted; whether utility or pleasure be the principal aim in view, we are

prompted...to study how we may communicate our thoughts to one another with most advantage. (3)

In his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), Hugh Blair develops the theory that aesthetics, the principles concerned with the appreciation of beauty, play a pivotal role in the rhetorical process. He purports that the working of the sublime and the beautiful in art and language is able “to delight and move, to create experiences and shape perceptions” (Ferreira-Buckley and Michael Halloran xli). It is within Blair’s model of rhetorical aesthetics that I re-examine the nineteenth-century poet Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) as a key female rhetorical theorist who extends the aesthetic and social elements of belletristic rhetoric through her Tractarian religious framework, while theorizing women’s rhetorical modes such as collaboration, listening, and silence. After reviewing recoveries that bind together Rossetti’s religious and feminist compulsions and establishing her within the context of an aesthetic tradition from the Romantics to Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites, I analyze the specific rhetorical insights emerging from her narrative prose and poetry in *Maude: Prose and Verse* (1850, 1897) and “The Lowest Room,” published in *Macmillan’s Magazine* (1864). In the first text, I show how Rossetti theorizes the collaborative relationship between women’s genius (or creative production) and taste while in the second work, I explain how Rossetti challenges the gendered binary between the sublime and the beautiful, proposing a collaborative working of the moral sublime and divine beauty as a rhetorical ideal.

Tractarian Influences: Analogy and Reserve

Though scholarship has yet to explore Rossetti as a female rhetorical theorist, many scholars have established the relationship between her feminist contributions to literature

and her religious influences. Recent criticism on the poet has positioned her as a religious feminist and aesthetically complex writer in the Victorian period. Without access to the pulpit or an oratorical platform, women like Rossetti found alternative means for disseminating arguments and considerations, especially concerning theology and rhetoric. Rossetti developed her theology not through sermons or tracts, but through her fiction and non-fiction literary works.

In certain examinations of Rossetti as a religious spokeswoman, recent scholarship reveals how she strategically uses her writing to position herself in religious roles primarily dominated by men. In *Christina Rossetti: Faith, Gender, and Time* (1999), Diana D'Amico explains that Rossetti "as a poet...employs the language of preacher, psalmist, Christian disciple, and even the language of the priest during Holy Communion" (15). In choosing such a voice, Rossetti "reaches beyond herself and beyond the feminine sphere of her time" (15). In *Christina Rossetti's Feminist Theology* (2002), Lynda Palazzo explores the underlying theological messages in Rossetti's devotional texts, showcasing the poet's propensity for circulating spiritual ideas to the public in the midst of a society in which women were "unfit to study theology or preach in church" (ix). Palazzo notes that Rossetti's concern with these issues extended beyond her private life and that she "was actively concerned with controversial issues in her theology, including questions of gender, and was particularly concerned with methods of biblical interpretation which gave women meaningful access to the scriptures..." (2). Mary Arseneau furthers these ideas in her work *Recovering Christina Rossetti: Female Community and Incarnational Poetics* (2004), arguing that Rossetti's distinctive form of feminist engagement was intricately entwined with her religious and aesthetic sensibilities. Arseneau offers detailed evidence to argue that

Rossetti's poetic expression and feminist sensibilities are supported by her "religious impulses" (2).

Even with her conservative moral and social sensibilities, Rossetti faced the up-hill struggle against societal attitudes toward women, specifically concerning their spiritual role. In the mid-nineteenth century, as Queen Victoria represented woman as keeper of the domestic sphere as well as intellectual and moral leader within the home, authors, as Laura Green writes, grappled with a "conflict between indebtedness and opposition to the values of domestic ideology as they attempt[ed] to locate the intellectually ambitious woman in relation to those values" (23). Coventry Patmore's famous image of the domestic woman in his poem "Angel in the House" (1854) constructed an ideal woman as the meek and self-sacrificing wife. In addition, John Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) positioned man as creator while woman maintained the lesser role of ordering and arranging the home (Green 23). Palazzo says in regard to Rossetti that "women in particular were the victims of a moral and social ethic which exalted their spirituality and domestic virtues, only to trap them inexorably within pre-existing, stereotyped patriarchal roles and moral categories" (xii). These "patriarchal roles" and "moral categories" confined women to voiceless representations of a male dictated propriety. Palazzo's description of the theological scene in which Rossetti wrote illustrates Robert Jones's outline of the social restrictions placed on women. Certain codes required women to exercise taste in humanizing, moderating, and softening problems in society while maintaining a passive and private invisibility (Jones 207). Jones maintains that women could "embody the aesthetic, but not define it"; they were "expected to display accomplishments...yet were not expected to be able to comment critically on what they achieved" (207). However, I

propose that Rossetti's understanding of Tractarian doctrines helps her challenge the assumption that modesty and reserve were repressive feminine qualities that silenced critical thought.

Rossetti's rhetorical ideas owe much to her assent to Tractarian doctrines, according to Arseneau and Dinah Roe. Rossetti understood propriety, not in strict accordance with social restrictions, but in line with religious decorum. Tractarianism, the theology espoused by the leaders of the Oxford Movement, most notably John Henry Newman and John Keble, developed in response to these leaders' disappointment in the liberalism of the Church of England that largely denied their rich Catholic heritage (Schlossberg). Roe explains that Rossetti was specifically drawn to two defining principles of the movement—the importance of symbolism or analogy and the doctrine of reserve (14). The construct of analogy proposes that because “divinity inheres in earthly design,” extended metaphors drawn from the physical universe make it possible to understand the intimate relationship between God and humanity (14). Rossetti's poetry and devotional works often employ analogies in ways that purposefully illustrate the intimate connection between God and the feminine.

Extending the importance of analogy, the doctrine of reserve “is the idea that nature exists as a codified expression of a God too divine and powerful for human perception” (Roe 13). In other words, though analogy allows a close observer to understand the divine, the concept of reserve emphasizes the incomprehensible nature of the divine. To elaborate, the physical creation, as seen through analogy, is an expression of God. Seen through reserve, it is reminder of God's hidden nature. “Renunciation, modesty, and detachment,” values that emerge from this view of God's character, become the “hallmarks of Rossetti's

poetic style,” according to Arseneau (67). This doctrine allows Rossetti to reverse the repressive connotations of feminine modesty and elevate the choice as divine. My analysis of Rossetti’s prose and poetry rests on Arseneau’s assertion that Rossetti’s adherence to the Tractarianism concept of “reserve” should not be interpreted merely as a sign of sexual repression or silence, but rather as a deliberate rhetorical choice that allows a woman of genius to maintain expressive control even as she “divert[s] attention from herself” to “avoid display” (78).

Aesthetic Influences: The Romantics, Ruskin, Pre-Raphaelites

In addition to religious influences, Rossetti’s aesthetic criticism, often expressed by fictional characters, responds to the Burkean-Romantic aesthetic of the solitary genius and the Ruskinian and Pre-Raphaelite moral aesthetic. Though the mid-nineteenth-century aesthetic theorists touted significantly different ways of viewing art, the art culture was not immune to the significant impact of Edmund Burke’s gendered aesthetic categories of the sublime and the beautiful. It is useful to review the impact of his work and the various ways women writers, as aesthetic critics, responded to the problems his theories created relating to gender. Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) notoriously establishes a gendered aesthetic hierarchy that privileged the masculine sublime over the feminine beautiful. This hierarchy impacted all of society. Tim Fulford explains in *Romanticism and Masculinity* that Burke’s aesthetic theories extended his influence to the gendered states of social and political power (31). Burke’s sublime, characterized by terror, pain, obscurity, and grandeur, Fulford says, carried a “patriarchal power” to which others must submit (31). God, too, exists as primarily an “object of power” in Burke’s *Enquiry*, one to be feared rather than sought out for love and compassion, those

qualities attributed to the beautiful and feminine (33). Even though Fulford explains that Burke saw the “feminine beautiful [as] a useful addition to the masculine sublime,” Burke’s system privileged patriarchal control through feminine subjugation rather than cooperation (33).

In *Romantic Visibilities: Landscape, Gender, and Romanticism*, Jacqueline Labbe describes how the Romantic aesthetic, reaching its zenith at the turn of the nineteenth-century, further emphasized Burke’s binary. She explains that the Romantic aesthetic ideology expressed itself in what she called the “prospect view” or the ability to discern, assess, and even control a scene, whether literally as in the viewing of a landscape or metaphorically as in the contemplation of philosophical ideas. The prospect view encompassed a specific process of seeing the literal world and ideas that privileged masculine ownership (4). Labbe defines the “feminine view” as the “disenfranchised perspective” because rather than being able to see landscape as a whole, a woman was limited to the perspective of small, beautiful details, indicating an inability on the part of a woman to reason and make larger generalizations (5). Labbe further notes that the “prospect view” was achieved as a male “rite-of-passage” into adulthood (37). Thus, perspectives of children and women were classified as the more immature perspective.

Women inherited the double problem, not only of being represented as limited in perspective, but also of being trapped within the male perspective, as a part of the ownership of men. Labbe explains, “Women’s putative inability to generalize, their attention to detail, their very status as observed objects—part of the accomplished gentleman’s landscape—disqualified them from a point of view at least partially dependent on female willingness to be viewed” (5). Within the framework of a Romantic aesthetic,

then, women were beautiful objects and only capable of understanding beautiful objects. Reason, higher level thoughts, and sublime emotions were relegated to the masculine realm. Because of these aesthetic philosophies, women were excluded from participation in higher forms of criticism, limiting their positions and devaluing the processes of intricate observation. The social implications of Burkean and Romantic aesthetic theories explain the social codes women attempted to correct through alternate aesthetic discourses.

There is overwhelming evidence that women writers found ways to subvert this gendered hierarchy through their own aesthetic categorizations. Anne Mellor's *Romanticism and Gender*, for instance, has been instrumental in explaining how women reclaimed their voices within the aesthetic dialogue in several ways, including heralding women's voices of reason and domesticating the sublime. Women writers also offered many ways to reconstruct the nature of the sublime. Labbe mentions Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck, for instance, who in her work "The Theory and Classification of Beauty and Deformity" (1815), integrates both passive and active elements of sublime allowing for "the peaceful co-existence, even interconnectedness, of the masculine and the feminine" (qtd. in Labbe 50-51). Barbara Claire Freeman also argues in *The Feminine Sublime* that women writers through the twentieth century actively responded to misogynist aesthetics by creating what she theorizes throughout her study as the "feminine sublime." Rossetti, within this tradition of women writers, responds with her own critique of aesthetics that re-evaluates gender codes. Her rhetorical aesthetic, following Blair's belletristic principles, challenges the Romantic aesthetic ideals of masculine superiority, divinity, perspective, individuality, and power.

By the mid-nineteenth-century, aesthetic theorists shifted emphasis from the supremacy of the sublime aesthetic to the examination of beautiful details, which they claimed contained the essence of morality. The leading Victorian art critic John Ruskin responded to the Romantic categories of the sublime and beautiful in an attempt to collapse the divide between the two, though as George Landow argues throughout *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*, the art critic was unable to resist the classification inherited from his Romantic predecessors. While Ruskin elevated the role of the beautiful, Landow maintains that Ruskin still needed a name to describe the opposite of beauty in order to categorize artistic sensations of “violent emotion, of asymmetry, of the awesome, the terrible, and the vast” (*Theories of John Ruskin*). Alison Smith says that Ruskin’s decision to accept the sublime as a category relating to awe and terror became problematic. She explains that he sought to understand the sublime through his theological understanding of God’s righteous moral judgment which created conflict with his development of sublime “horror” (*Sublime in Crisis*). Still, Ruskin exists as a leading example of Victorian attempts to reconcile the differences between the beautiful and the sublime through moral and theological considerations, a strategy Rossetti employs in her own way as she builds upon the idea of a moral sublime, articulated helpfully through rhetorical explorations of aesthetics.

Ruskin’s aesthetic ideology illustrates an indebtedness to the influence of Blair’s belletristic rhetoric. Linda Ferreira-Buckley notes that Ruskin studied under Monsal Dale, who was a disciple of Blair and studied Blair’s sermons during his own education (143). Additionally, Ruskin’s educational ideology aligned with that of Blair in that he believed education did not merely concern acquiring knowledge, but also, as Ferreira-Buckley

states, “refining one’s soul by gaining an insight into nature” (153). Ruskin, like Blair, believed that an understanding of art would improve the lives of any social class (174). Lois Agnew further maintains that Ruskin developed several ideas Blair proposed, including the proposition that beauty leads people to virtue (*Art of Common Sense* 200). So, while Rossetti’s work clearly falls in line with Ruskin’s principles, more has yet to be said about the larger influence belletristic rhetoric plays in the understanding of Victorian aesthetics and morality.

One cannot discuss Rossetti’s aesthetic contexts without mentioning the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, to which she was intimately connected through her brothers William and Dante Gabriel, the leaders of the movement. Rather than embracing the nobility of obscurity and vastness associated with the Romantic concept of sublime, the Pre-Raphaelites prized the details of symbolism in their painting and poetry. Smith notes that Pre-Raphaelite painters set out “to valorize the familiar and every day in a spirit of reaction to the artificiality and elitism of the Romantic sublime, which they felt had descended into pictorial cliché” (*Sublime in Crisis*). She indicates that the Pre-Raphaelite emphasis on the symbolism of details subsumed the idea of the sublime. They believed that the “eternal truths” or “transcendence” once found in the sublime aesthetic now resided in details. Rossetti, in line with the Pre-Raphaelite tradition, presents the concept of sublime as distinct from Burke’s as she capitalizes on symbolism to reveal transcendent truths.

Rossetti’s Influences & Belletristic Rhetoric

As scholars have established, Christina Rossetti’s writing and feminist strategies largely respond to the eighteenth and nineteenth aesthetic traditions through the framework of her Tractarian sensibilities. Little has been done to connect these influences

to Rossetti's participation in the rhetorical tradition. What I identify as Rossetti's rhetorical aesthetic allows her to respond to aesthetic traditions by establishing a rhetorical vector within her religious beliefs. The tradition of belletristic rhetoric with its emphasis on taste (the critical ability to receive pleasures and judge them appropriately) theorizes aesthetic experiences of the sublime and beautiful by attaching them to rhetorical processes and outcomes which should, according to Blair, improve individual and social morality.

Rossetti's theories of taste and religious leanings integrate with many of Blair's principles while still creating her own feminist imprint upon the belletristic tradition.

The doctrine of reserve contains some parallels with belletristic principles. This connection is important in understanding how Rossetti's writing offers rhetorical insights within her development of theological underpinnings. Little scholarship has recognized a significant link between Tractarian theology and belletristic rhetoric; however, one scholar Tomoko Takiguchi, in his chapter "Revising the Poetics of Sensibility," notes the similarity between one of the Tractarian leaders, Keble, and belletristic rhetoric's spokesperson, Blair. He observes:

Keble's idea of Reserve is close to what Hugh Blair...articulated in his sermon on sensibility in the late-eighteenth century. According to Blair, delicacy of taste, which is a virtue of the ideal person, depends upon how perfect the innate sensibility of each person is; a person with finer sensibility can see beauty in nature that is hidden from the vulgar eye. (179)

Takiguchi's clarification of the doctrine of reserve, or the hidden expression of the divine, coincides with rhetorical principle Blair describes as the "delicacy of taste." Rhetorical acuity, according to Blair, includes the ability to make fine, nuanced judgments. Only the

trained eye will be able to analyze the subtleties of beauty in nature, and only the studied ear will pick out the intricacies of a well-crafted speech. In the same way, in the Tractarian tradition, only the devoted disciple will observe the subtle nuances of God as seen in creation.

Blair's stress on simplicity and distaste for excessive ornamentation and display on the part of the speaker also give rhetorical import to the Tractarian concept of reserve. Though Blair would differ from the Tractarians as they emphasized veiled communication whereas Blair promoted a general perspicuity of ideas, both expressed the need for a posture of reserve. The Tractarians emphasized a posture of reticence and modesty in both expressing and accessing divine truths. Similarly, Blair refers to such a posture as propriety, or wise conduct, that would correct forced expression or artificial taste.¹⁰

Blair's connection to Burkean aesthetics has been explored in more depth than the connection to Tractarianism. Melissa Ianetta asserts that Blair's *Lectures* offered nineteenth-century writers a slightly less psychological and more rhetorical framework for understanding the sublime and beautiful (401). Ianetta does not deny the prominent influence of Burkean aesthetic theories but argues that works such as Blair's contained alternate aesthetic schemes which were likely equally as accessible and familiar to the Victorian writers. While drawing clear distinctions between the aesthetic categories of the sublime and beautiful, Blair, unlike Burke, eschews the emphasis on gendered differences that creates a division of power between the two categories and instead explains the roles of each in complementing one another to form a unified whole. Ianetta argues that as

¹⁰ See Blair's Sermon LXXX on "Religious Conduct" p.550.

Blair's work "collapses the gendered binary outlined in Burke," his schema becomes a more accessible starting point for women writers (409).

Blair's rhetorical theory aligns well with Tractarian doctrines of analogy and reserve, provides an alternative aesthetic paradigm to Burke's sublime and beautiful, and proposes an interconnection between style and morality. Further, it provides a useful paradigm through which Rossetti constructs her own rhetorical theory in her prose and verse.

Maude and Agnes: Genius and Taste

Blair categorizes the aesthetic responses to the sublime and the beautiful as subcategories under the larger umbrella of Taste. His subjugation of these aesthetic responses may initially appear to strip them of their creative agency, but I propose Blair's system is more complex and dynamic. Whereas he uses the expressions sublime and beautiful as descriptors of taste, he develops the larger headings of "Genius" and "Taste" to describe the rhetorical counterpoints. The higher order categories represent rhetoric's dual function as composition (Genius) and reception (Taste). The terms genius and taste are infused with similar characteristics as those attached to the sublime and beautiful. For instance, genius and the sublime share characteristics such as grandeur and passion while taste and beauty might be described as softening and delicate. The rhetorical terms, though, maintain a hierarchical position relative to the aesthetic terms. After Blair explicates the higher order rhetorical concepts (Genius and Taste) in his *Lectures*, he further develops the aesthetic subcategories of taste, the sublime and the beautiful.

In contrast, the Burkean-Romantic aesthetic scheme identifies genius as a result, and thus a subcategory, of the Sublime. Mellor notes the practical impact of this choice. She

argues that identifying genius as a result of the sublime experience became an “attempt to reassign the all-creating powers of a nature gendered as female to the masculine poetic imagination” (20). Thus, Burke effectively strips creative powers from the female realm. The mere construct of Blair’s categorization, privileging rhetoric over aesthetic, opposes a Romantic categorization that privileges the masculine aesthetic experience. Blair’s system allows writers such as Rossetti to challenge some of the problems with assumed gender binaries found in Burke’s scheme.

In a reversal of competing Romantic schemes, Blair presents poetic genius as an inventive process, but it is not a result of maturity achieved through sublime experience. Even though Barbara Warnick argues that the belletristic movement ignored instruction in invention (6), Blair still invests the idea of genius with inventive power. He asserts that genius is the “inventive or creative” outworking of an individual (23). Unlike taste, the central theme of his lectures, genius does not “rest in mere sensibility to beauty where it is perceived”; but rather, it is involved in the production of “new beauties” as well as the exhibition of them in a way that could strongly “impress the minds of others” (23). Despite his assertions that genius is the higher power, he continues to say that “the improvement of Taste will serve both to forward and to correct the operations of Genius” (24). In other words, genius is a rhetorical expression which may emerge first but needs the refining and finishing power of taste, an equally important part of the rhetorical process. He develops this point through examples of what he calls “the infancy of arts” in which “Genius may be bold and strong,” while “Taste is neither very delicate, nor very correct” (24). He specifically cites Homer and Shakespeare as proofs that though their writings were “admirable,” exhibiting “great vigour” and “warmth,” they lacked experience that would rid

them of “instances of rudeness and indelicacy, which the more refined Taste of later writers...would have taught them to avoid” (24). He further says that such expressions of genius illustrate that such works had “not yet attained...full growth” (24). Here, he introduces the theme of his work: Taste. Rather than seeing the “finishing” process of taste as an infantile and feminized preoccupation in relation to the more masculine creative process, he argues that taste matures the writing.

Rossetti’s rhetorical aesthetic embraces this relationship between genius and taste as collaborative elements of the rhetorical process. Her early novella *Maude: Prose & Verse* (1850, 1906), published posthumously but written when the poet was only nineteen, illustrates her budding understanding of genius and taste. The story, a combination of narrative and poetry as the title indicates, traces the young life of the protagonist Maude Foster, already a talented poet at the age of fifteen when the story opens. Maude develops close bonds with her cousin Agnes, which is important in the development of her poetic career. Throughout the story, Maude struggles to legitimize her desire to write and perform her poetry with her convictions regarding modesty and reserve. In creating this conflict for a protagonist who is a female writer/artist while enveloping her in a cast of supporting females, Rossetti legitimizes a woman’s expression of genius through female tasteful collaboration.

The story is most often read as an autobiographical expression of Rossetti’s psychological struggles as a female poet. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, for instance, claim that through Maude, Rossetti confesses her guilt concerning her own poetic aspirations, believing that “the ambitious, competitive, self-absorbed and self-assertive poet—must die, and be replaced by either the wife, the nun, or most likely, the kindly

useful spinster” (552). In her introductory essay, “Maude: On Sisterhood and a Woman’s Thoughts about Women,” Elaine Showalter summarizes the various approaches scholars have taken to reading the work autobiographically, claiming that the story illustrates for Rossetti “the problem of the woman artist” (viii). Showalter proposes that the story “accentuates the tensions” felt in society “between creativity and femininity” (xvi). Even Rossetti’s brother William Michael Rossetti, in his prefatory note to the published work, claims that his “sister’s main object in delineating Maude was to exhibit what she regarded as defects in her own character” (Showalter 3).

Despite these readings that assume Rossetti failed to reconcile her creativity with her religious and feminine sensibilities, Arseneau opens up the text to a sustained critical reevaluation. She argues that the story draws upon Rossetti’s adherence to the Tractarian principle of reserve so that Maude’s death at the end is not a capitulation to the plight of a woman author but an enactment of a religious poet’s “reticence” and “modesty” (67). Embracing the woman’s expressive tradition employed by other women poets of the nineteenth-century such as Letitia Elizabeth Landon would be problematic for Maude (68). Maude chooses a different poetic tradition that more readily identifies itself with the Tractarian view of God and his veiled means of displaying himself to his creation (67-69). Arseneau claims that understanding Maude’s struggle in this poem, according to Rossetti’s religious persuasions, actually reveals that the protagonist may see “the self-silencing as liberating, artistically controlled,” and “generative of a dedicated and sustaining art” (72). Extending Arseneau’s conclusion that Rossetti equated reserve with artistic control, I argue that she rejects the idea of the Romantic solitary genius in favor of a collaboration between genius and taste.

The narrative's gradual shift of Maude from a fiery, impulsive artist to a reticent and modest writer by no means negates her clear rhetorical genius; rather it illustrates Rossetti's more extensive understanding of powerful writing. At a young age, Maude shows an aesthetic predilection for bold and passionate writing, more traditional characteristics of genius. Blair explains that "Genius frequently exerts itself with great vigour, and executes with much warmth" (24). Even Rossetti's initial description of Maude invites readers to perceive the young woman as full of artistic energy as she is surrounded in a "chaos of stationery" (7). The very first poem, a sonnet, reflects her passionate genius:

Yes, I too could face death and never shrink:
 But it is harder to bear hated life;
 To strive with hands and knees weary of strife;
 To drag the heavy chain whose every link
 Galls to the bone; to stand upon the brink
 Of the deep grave, nor drowse, though it be rife
 With sleep; to hold with steady hand the knife,
 Nor strike home: this is courage, as I think.
 Surely to suffer is more than to do:
 To do is quickly done; to suffer is
 Longer and fuller of heart-sicknesses;
 Each day's experience testifies of this:
 Good deeds are many, but good lives are few;
 Thousands taste the full cup; who drains the lees? (qtd. in Rossetti, *Maude* 10)

The poem possesses much of the Romantic sublime's effusion and emotion. She describes bravery and courage in an individual who "drag[s] the heavy chain of life" that "galls to the bone" (4-5). She compares the "heart-sicknesses" of her daily suffering to the battle of great heroes (11). In her closing lines, she seeks for "good lives" rather than "good deeds" and positions herself and her sufferings alongside one who "drains the lees" (15-16).

The form and content of the poem show Maude's ambition to stand among poetic greats. The last line, in particular, is reminiscent of the line in Tennyson's "Ulysses" (1842) in which he reflects on the times the ancient hero "suffered greatly" but chooses to "drink life to the lees" (lines 6-8). The fifteen-year-old displays her precociousness in her imitation of the great Victorian poet who was named Poet Laureate the year Rossetti wrote the novella. The form of the sonnet, too, asks readers to consider Maude's implicit placement of herself within a great legacy of poetic geniuses from Dante to Keats.¹¹ Antony H. Harrison argues that the intertextuality of her poetry, including an homage to form, "direct[s] her reader away from the apparently simple surface meanings of her poems and toward historically layered literary statements and traditions," a "consideration...which complicates, amplifies, and reifies the meanings of her verse" (11). By invoking not only the sonnet tradition, but also a contemporary poet's personal revision of Homeric tales, Rossetti places Maude within several contexts of genius, also establishing Rossetti's own critical literary taste.

Despite Maude's ambition and talent, she struggles internally with her desire to self-display. Rossetti does not disparage the female artist's creative gifts, but she does use

¹¹ Antony Harrison details Christina Rossetti's influences, including Dante and Keats, in his book *Christina Rossetti in Context*. Additionally, he includes Maude in a tradition of notable female poetesses such as Charlotte Smith and Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Maude's struggle to question the desire of display. Maude's guilt leads to her refusal to take Communion as penance for her attitude, illustrating her moral dilemma. Because the meaning of Maude is "war" or "battle," Arseneau interprets the protagonist as an embodiment of the conflict between fame, femininity, and faith (68).

Maude's dilemma may have less to do with her creative potential and more to do with her unrefined genius. The concept of "war" or "battle" in association with Maude's name could also relate to her early rhetorical style. Longinus in "On the Sublime," describes a type of rhetorical sublimity found in works of Demosthenes and Cicero, saying that "Demosthenes burns and ravages; he has violence, rapidity, strength, and force" while "Cicero...is like a spreading conflagration" (qtd. in Bizzell and Herzberg 354). If Rossetti draws upon Blair and equates style with moral character, this characterization of Maude's genius as warlike stands in contrast to the character of a relational, reserved divinity, according to Tractarian ideology.

Arseneau claims that Maude does eventually find "resolution...not in choice between the two aspirations," her creativity and faith, but "in a reconceptualization of the intimate connections between them" (68). In other words, she makes peace with her religious and poetic leanings. Again, extending Arseneau's conclusion to a rhetorical critique of Maude's life, I suggest she finds resolution through the collaboration between her genius and her cousin Agnes's rhetorical taste. Agnes, from the beginning, eschews any sense of her own creative genius, but she exhibits an astute taste or critical judgment. When all the girls decide to play a game of *bouts-rimés* where each girl submits a poem constructed with the same rhyming words, Agnes's poem reveals her deep revulsion toward writing while Maude is eager to win and secure commendation. Agnes's taste does not stand in

opposition to Maude's genius, though. She never rebukes or corrects Maude's poetic endeavors. Instead, from early on, she encourages Maude's poetic abilities and acts as the tasteful mediator between Maude and her audiences. For instance, when Agnes asks Maude for a poem to deliver to their friend Miss Savage, Maude flippantly offers the sonnet she wrote for the party. Realizing that the particular sonnet as a gift would not be in good taste because it could unnecessarily offend the recipient, Agnes suggests that Maude write another more fitting work for that particular audience. Their relationship suggests that Agnes's taste guides Maude's expression of genius.

At the end of the story, Agnes acts as the critical arbiter of taste. At this point, Maude has made her second confession concerning the vanity of display in her poetic achievements, but rather than having renounced her poetic vocation, she embraces it. She no longer feels guilt over her ability, and she still produces verse for her cousin Agnes to read, illustrating that she has come to terms with her own creativity and production as a positive outlet of expression and communication rather than personal display. She has also recognized the importance of a tasteful critic who oversees her works. Being on the brink of death after an accident, Maude entrusts her entire *oeuvre* to Agnes. She asks that Agnes "examine the verses" and "look over everything" in order to "destroy what [she] evidently never intended to be seen" (114). In this request, Maude rests heavily upon Agnes's taste and discrimination because she offers no other specific directions for how Agnes should proceed. Agnes becomes central to the story of Maude's genius as the preserver of her cousin's poetic legacy. Agnes's role in the destruction and preservation of Maude's work allows the poet's legacy to be built upon what taste would dictate to be the most refined and meaningful of the works.

Though Agnes's burning much of Maude's work may at first appear as an impediment to the poet's legacy, it actually reveals a thoughtful process of selection and collaboration. Maude, fearful that that she might cause her mother pain if all her works were exposed, asks Agnes to make a careful selection of the poems that would most please her mother (114). The narrator notes that Agnes acts "with scrupulous anxiety to carry out her friend's wishes" (115-6). Though "astonished at the variety of Maude's compositions," Agnes retains only what she feels Maude would be pleased to share with the general public (116). She refuses to open the "locked book" that contained the "records of folly, sin, vanity" as well as Maude's "penitence" in those private writings that Maude specifically asked Agnes not to share (116). Agnes then disposes of those that were "mere fragments...half-effaced pencil scrawls...and some full of incomprehensible abbreviations" (116). Though it "cost her a pang" to destroy so much of Maude's varied writings, Agnes believes she is carrying out her assigned role—to peruse, to destroy, to select, and to disseminate—based on Maude's implicit trust in her taste and her own respect for the wishes of the creator (116). Maude and Agnes model what Blair describes as the relationship between writers of genius and critics of taste. The "instances of rudeness and indelicacy" that Blair attributes to raw genius (*Lectures* 24) such as those found in some of Maude's works, are refined by taste, as seen in Agnes's selection.

The end of the narrative solidifies the process of collaboration. Agnes lays a tress of Maude's hair alongside a lock of Magdalen's hair on the paper in which she copies Maude's verses. Magdalen, Maude's friend who joined the Sisterhood in the story, has not literally "died" (as Maude has) but has renounced the world by joining a convent. In merging the two women's locks of hair, Agnes indicates that both have given their lives for God's sake,

in two vocations that are meaningful to others whether through inspirational works or inspirational words. Maude's renunciation and the passing of her poems into another's judgment does not erase her genius. Rather it is the primary means by which her genius is eventually redeemed and read by others. Arseneau claims that the "resolution to Maude's conflict can be found in Tractarian aesthetics: by diverting attention from herself, she can avoid display; and by veiling and expressing herself through symbol, she can...rise above the self" (81). The resolution, in the context of the poems preserved, also offers a picture of Rossetti's rhetorical aesthetic in relation to genius and taste. Poetry's effect is not linear in that genius begets personal glory. Instead, she reconceives the rhetorical process as cyclical, a process in which genius, tempered by taste and modesty, results in beauty through the redemption of the work after death.

Rossetti's work illustrates collaboration as a key process in her exploration of rhetorical aesthetics. She balances sublime genius in Maude with the tasteful beauty of simplicity found in Agnes through their relationship as female cousins in the co-production of a rhetorically meaningful legacy. In creating this relationship between two women of Genius and Taste, Rossetti negates the necessary binary between masculine and feminine forms in the process of aesthetic creation. If Maude and Agnes are viewed as rhetorical collaborators, representing genius and taste, Maude's death is not the silencing of female poetic genius. Instead, her genius is enhanced through the legacy preserved by her discerning cousin.

In her development of rhetorical collaboration through the two fictional women, Rossetti offers a unique perspective on collaboration as a woman's rhetorical mode.

According to most literary scholarship on collaboration, such as Lorraine York's *Rethinking*

Women's Collaborative Writing, collaboration indicates the presence of multiple *authors*. In Rossetti's narrative, Maude is the primary author with Agnes acting as an editor, not quite a literary collaboration. However, their relationship does model what Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede call a "dialogic collaboration" in which "single-authored texts comprise a plurality of voices" (133-5). Donawerth's definition is similar; she describes collaboration as that which is demonstrated through "dialogic" process or the "interplay of multiple voices in writing" ("Authorial Ethos" 107). This form of collaborative voice, Donawerth says, is "imagined and constructed rather than...a result of multiple authors" (107).

The problem remains, though, whether Agnes actually has a voice in Maude's texts. Their collaboration relies on multiplicity in the construction of rhetorical work rather than in the voice. In *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius*, Jack Stillinger asserts that all works are "necessarily the product of multiple authorship" (7). He includes conversation, copyediting, and other practices as pieces in the collaborative process. Jill Ehnenn challenges such a broad definition of collaboration, claiming that his work ignores intentional collaboration and the importance of "gender and sexuality" in the theorization of collaborations (7). As I mentioned in the introduction, I agree with Ehnenn that a more limited definition of collaboration is often helpful, yet Stillinger's inclusive description of what counts as collaboration and his critique of the "solitary genius" supports my reading of collaboration in Rossetti's *Maude*. Maude, when she views herself as a "solitary genius," struggles with guilt because of her desire to display her creativity. In bringing alongside Agnes as a tasteful collaborator, Maude no longer feels the guilt from her creative drives. The collaboration of genius and taste affords her the modesty she needs to adhere to her Tractarian beliefs.

In addition, the collaboration between the two *females* illustrates how Stillinger's work might be applied to gendered collaborations. Showalter argues that Rossetti addresses the problem of the female poet in patriarchal Victorian society by creating a context in which "mothers, sisters, aunts, and female cousins and friends are at the centre" (xvii). Maude writes "her poems for, and about, other women" (xvii). This picture of female collaboration in a community rejects a Burkean understanding of genius as derived from a man's solitary, sublime experience. Frances Ferguson in *Solitude and the Sublime* explains Burke's belief that the effect of the sublime would be to produce a "commitment to self and self-preservation" (8). Once the sublime becomes familiar or shared, "communal assent robs the sublime of its singularity" (47). Rossetti dissolves this myth, which is perpetuated by a Burkean-Romantic aesthetic, showing that true genius thrives in community, specifically female community. Maude's genius finds maturity and posterity in her commitment to a community of women just as the distribution of Maude's poetry among her family members and female friends preserves her poetic work in the end.

Rossetti's rhetorical aesthetic draws much more from Blair, whose rhetoric of taste depends upon shared values of community that would correct the imperfections of a singular sublime. Agnes's role as tasteful arbiter does not diminish any of the intensity of Maude's works; instead by preserving a few powerful pieces, Agnes refines the effect of Maude's distinctive voice and genius rather than indiscriminately releasing all her scraps and sketches. Rossetti illustrates that the communal aspect of sublime genius and delicate taste, as represented through women, creates the legacy for works of art to flourish.

“The Lowest Room”: Sublime and Beautiful

In *Maude*, Rossetti re-theorizes Blair’s rhetorical aesthetics, representing a fruitful collaboration between genius and taste through a Tractarian lens that values reserve. In her poem “The Lowest Room,” Rossetti re-theorizes the aesthetic concepts of the sublime and beautiful as Blair’s subcategories of taste. These subcategories perform different functions within her rhetorical aesthetic than they do in Burke’s. Integrating ideas from Blair’s rhetorical sublime and her religious understanding of the divine, Rossetti distances the concept of the sublime from terror and masculinity and infuses it with a divine morality, shaping her own version of the *moral sublime*, a feeling of elevation that provokes noble deeds and thoughts. The subcategory of the beautiful—that which is gentle and mild—rather than playing a subordinate role to the moral sublime, acts in such a way to stir, enhance, and correct the sublime, so that the two are intricately linked. Rossetti emphasizes the collaboration between the two degrees of aesthetic sense by positioning Christ as a figure who embodies the perfect blend of the sublime and beautiful.

Rossetti’s understanding of these rhetorical aesthetic subcategories reiterates Blair’s descriptions of the aesthetic functions of sublime and beautiful as subcategories of taste. For an individual with good taste, the sublime produces “a sort of internal elevation and expansion” of the mind, raising it “above its ordinary state” and filling “it with a degree of wonder and astonishment...” (26). Many of the characteristics Blair ascribes to the sublime correspond to the Burkean-Romantic conception. Blair says, for instance, “nothing is more sublime than power and strength” as well as “darkness, solitude, and silence” and “obscurity” (27). However, Blair disagrees with Burke that “terror is the source of the Sublime” (27). He complicates sublimity by describing a moral or “sentimental sublime,” an

expression of “magnanimity or heroism” (29). In this way, the aesthetic response becomes implicated in moral functions of society, rather than simply an isolated, personal experience. He explains that sublime writing will have as its focus a sublime object “described with strength, with conciseness, and simplicity” (33). He uses as his example the “Sacred Scriptures” as “that which afford us the highest instances of the Sublime. The descriptions of the Deity, in them are wonderfully noble; both from the grandeur of the object, and the manner of representing it” (34). To summarize, the rhetorical sublime is categorized by power and strength, magnanimity and heroism and expressed with concision and simplicity.

Blair defines the aesthetic category “beautiful” as that which “next to Sublimity, affords, beyond doubt, the highest pleasure to the imagination” (45). Again, many similarities exist between a Burkean-Romantic understanding of the beautiful and Blair’s description of the beautiful aesthetic as the “calmer kind” and the “more gentle and soothing” quality that produces “agreeable serenity” (45). In describing the beautiful, Blair does not construct a clear divide between it and the sublime; instead, he describes both according to degrees of moral or aesthetic qualities, so that one can fluidly change into another. For instance, he says, “it is proper to observe, that the sensations of Sublime and Beautiful are not always distinguished by very distant boundaries; but are capable, in several instances, of approaching towards each other. Thus, a smooth running stream, is one of the most beautiful objects in nature: as it swells gradually into a great river, the Beautiful, by degrees, is lost in the Sublime” (47). This image stresses the degrees and fluidity between the two categories rather than their binaries. As with the sublime, he attaches a moral quality to beauty, claiming that the virtues associated with beauty are

“social virtues” such as “compassion, mildness, friendship, and generosity” which complement the moral sublime categories: heroism, magnanimity, contempt of pleasures, and contempt of death. Blair explains that beautiful writing will exhibit “grace” and “proportion of parts” in such a way that creates “serenity” rather than “agitation” (78). In sum, the beautiful is characterized as calm and gentle, generous and compassionate, and expressed with proportion and serenity.

As Blair describes the sublime and beautiful without setting up a strict binary, he also explains his understanding of constructed gender categories within the English language. He claims that the English language allows poets to add effect through the use of gender to personify objects; however, he also asserts that gender has nothing inherently to do with the mere qualities of words such as “good, great, soft, hard” (79). In making this distinction, he clearly exposes the construct of gender in language rather than implying in any way that the correlations are intrinsic. A focus on the moral sublime, a spectrum of the sublime and beautiful, and the acknowledgments of gender constructs in language allow his theory to be flexible for Rossetti in building her rhetorical aesthetic.

Rossetti’s poem “The Lowest Room” (1864), originally titled “A Fight over the Body of Homer,” is most often read by critics as a statement concerning women’s roles in the nineteenth-century as well as an autobiographical reading of Rossetti’s personal struggle in reconciling her desire for achievement and the religious call of renunciation. The poem is a dialogue between an older sister longing for the more heroic days of Homer and her younger sister, content with the beauties of the present time. The older sister bemoans the lack of opportunities for women to perform meaningful work in society, while the younger sister embraces the feminine domestic duties of the nineteenth-century, her needlework

and gardening. In the end, the older sister ostensibly learns from the younger sister to embrace a lifestyle of submission and self-denial.

In her biography of Christina Rossetti, Jan Marsh argues that in the final lines, the older sister professes her self-resignation awhile actually conveying a “repress[ed] discontent” (182). Marsh claims that the image reveals Rossetti’s struggle with the conflict “between self-realizing ‘masculine’ ambition, and self-denying ‘feminine’ submission” (183). Though “outwardly” Rossetti may have been “satisfied with the lowest place,” in “her heart, and in her art, she cherished a heroic secret self” (183). In other words, the two wrestling forces portrayed in the poem, according to Marsh, are never resolved compatibly.

While critics such as Marsh cast Rossetti as the older sister who has reluctantly embraced renunciation, Palazzo invites readers to see the author in the younger sister who is “searching the scriptures for a figure who can better satisfy her spiritual need” (20). Because of Rossetti’s emphasis on nature as a means of understanding God, Palazzo notes the possibility that the younger sister reflects Rossetti’s spiritual sensitivity while the older sister reflects the more Tractarian influence of reserve. Reading the two sisters as compatible rather than opposing forces supports my reading of the collaborative feature of Rossetti’s rhetorical aesthetic. The two sisters create a dialectical understanding of the sublime and beautiful, resulting in a collaboration of taste.

Like Maude and Agnes, who illustrated genius and taste, the older sister and the younger sister in “The Lowest Room” illustrate the qualities of the sublime and beautiful. The younger sister’s taste for the “beautiful” softens her older sister’s misdirected taste for the Romantic “sublime.” Rather than discrediting the taste of the older, the younger employs a form of dialogic reasoning that helps temper and refine the older sister’s taste

for a sublime characterized by violence into a taste for a moral sublime tempered by beauty. In her representation of this rhetorical aesthetic, the younger sister illustrates key rhetorical practices associated with women—empathetic listening and collaborative meaning-making. The older sister’s renunciation at the end can be seen, like Maude’s death in the end of the novella, not as a surrender to expectations for women, but as a progression to a more complex rhetorical taste.

Both sisters are coded with different forms of aesthetic taste. The older sister’s familiarity and critical response to Homer indicates her literary education. In *Moral Taste*, Marjorie Garson notes that a woman revealed taste (and class) in her appropriate judgment of literary works. She claims that “novelistic heroines who demonstrate their taste through their literary and artistic pursuits are characterized by their ardour and receptivity” (17). Specifically, Garson explains that society believed if a woman could appreciate an author such as Shakespeare, she would likely also show “a reverence for masculine genius, dignity, modesty, tact, and the ability to join gracefully in intelligent conversation” (40). With the rise of women readers in the mid-nineteenth-century and the proliferation of reading material, many in society believed that an education in literary taste would stave off morally reprehensible ideas that might disrupt the home. Such literary taste, Jennifer Phegley asserts in *Educating the Proper Woman Reader*, might alleviate fears that women’s reading practices would “infect” the family (5).

Ironically, the older sister’s literary taste extends beyond demonstrating a woman’s respectability. Homer’s epics move her to become dissatisfied with her domestic position. The beginning of the poem establishes the conflict for the older sister:

So yesterday I read the acts

Of Hector and each clangorous king

With wrathful great Aeacides: --

Old Homer leaves a sting. (21-24)

The older sister does not just reverence masculine genius; she desires to possess Homer's rhetorical power. Though she displays her proper middle class taste in her favorable evaluation of the classic, she regrets that she, as a woman, cannot move others through a sublime effect very much associated with the Burkean-Romantic masculine sublime of terror. She expands upon her dilemma in the following passage:

He stirs my sluggish pulse like wine,

He melts me like the wind of spice,

Strong as strong Ajax' red right hand,

And grand like Juno's eyes.

I cannot melt the sons of men,

I cannot fire and tempest-toss: --

Besides, those days were golden days,

Whilst these are days of dross. (29-36)

Homer's rhetorical ability to "stir [her] sluggish pulse like wine" and to "melt [her] like the wind of spice" provokes in her a longing for the ability to use words and expression in the same way, to stir sublime passions in others. She bemoans that she "cannot melt the sons of men" (33). She expresses her feelings of rhetorical uselessness, saying:

Oh better then be slave or wife

Than fritter now blank life away:

Then night had holiness of night,

And day was sacred day.
 The princess laboured at her loom,
 Mistress and handmaiden alike;
 Beneath their needles grew the field
 With warriors armed to strike. (69-76)

She nostalgically wishes for a time when women had rhetorical power. Constance Hasset interprets the loom as a rhetorical instrument by which Helen in the *Iliad* “weaves” stories of battles, preserving the noble legacy (100). The image of the “mistress and handmaiden alike” creating a piece of needlework filled with the legends of warriors contrasts with a more decorative pastime of needlework which many Victorian critics such as Dinah Maria Mulock “viewed...as a useless escape from doing better things” (Ledbetter 5). Though women were not warriors in Homer’s epic, their labor, represented by the woman’s work at the loom and perhaps women’s physical labor from the womb, contributed to the legacy of this golden age.

The older sister believes her problem is one of access to the sublime tradition belonging to another age and a different gender, but her problem lies in a faulty conceptualization of the sublime delineated by a Romantic aesthetic that is associated with war and terror. The older sister describes the Homeric golden days, saying:

Then men were men of might and right,
 Sheer might, at least, and weighty swords;
 Then men in open blood and fire
 Bore witness to their words. (41-44)

She begins by calling these great men those “of might and right,” praising their moral nobility. She then amends the statement, saying that perhaps their power was due more to just “sheer might,” conceding that despite their valor and sublimity, their strength and terror were more important than their morality. In the expression “weighty swords,” Rossetti draws attention to the image of battle in the picture of a sword. The “s” at the beginning of “swords” potentially disrupts an alternative alliterative phrase: “weighty words.” The sublime effect is created primarily through “might” and “swords.” Only in “open blood and fire” did men eventually bear “witness to their words” (44). Courage was defined by bloodshed, and the sword was more powerful than the word.

Rossetti uses the younger sister to challenge the value of such violent rhetoric and offer an alternative solution that would place less emphasis upon violence and gender binaries and more upon a moral sublime and the strength of reserved beauty. Rossetti codes the younger sister as one with inherent good taste through the woman’s engagement with the flowers in the garden. While the older sister’s taste is revealed in her reading and understanding of ancient literature, the younger sister’s comes through a sense of nature and arrangement. Because both ideas can be associated with belletristic rhetoric, they do not necessarily reflect two opposing tastes. The older sister, while being attuned to sublime aesthetics, seems to lack the subtler understanding of arrangement and beauty that her sister displays in her gardening. She relates her own observation of the younger sister’s taste in the following passage:

I chose a book to read and dream:

Yet half the while with furtive eyes

Marked how she made her choice of flowers

Intuitively wise,
 And ranged them with instinctive taste
 Which all my books had failed to teach;
 Fresh rose herself, and daintier
 Than blossom of the peach. (209-216)

Because the younger sister possesses the skill of arranging flowers “with instinctive taste,” she plays a role in relation to her older sister akin to the relationship between Agnes and Maude in Rossetti’s earlier story. The younger sister’s emphasis on beauty refines the creative energies of her older sister. She is not disconnected from the sublime, though, as she advocates a moral sublime, which, like Blair’s, eschews sublimity based on terror.

In response to her older sister’s claim that the present days “are stunted from heroic growth” (106), the younger proposes that they both have access to a moral sublime based on noble character rather than violent deeds. She reveals that rather than limiting women, a moral sublime offers women more agency to live fulfilling, meaningful lives. The moral sublime still elevates the mind, but through noble character rather than through violence. In attaching principles of reserve to this sublime, she invests strength in meekness rather than war. She emphasizes that instead of craving others’ power, women must recognize that power lies, as she says, “In our own hands for gain or loss” (109-110). She explains to her sister that it is the work that they do, small though it may appear, that will enable them to “[a]ttain heroic strength” (116). By equating their mundane daily duties to heroic strength, she reverses an understanding of this quality most often associated with masculinity and war. She grants that there is wisdom in reading Homer, but she condemns the hero her sister loves because of his moral failures. She accuses Achilles of being “less

than man” because of his “rage” and “sloth” (127-8). Her criticism implies that the moral virtues of patience and diligence, the opposite of rage and sloth, are more heroic.

Hassett observes that the younger sister consistently expresses “the opinion that Homeric men were repellently barbarous,” but Hassett concludes that the younger sister simply prefers the modern nineteenth-century world along with “the conventional strategies for celebrating domestic joy” and the ideal Christian home (97-8). According to such a reading, the younger sister acts as a preserver of traditional gendered aesthetic binaries, embodying the feminine, soft, gentle “beautiful” in opposition to the harsh, grand, masculine sublime that intrigues the older sister. However, looking again at the younger sister’s responses through a rhetorical lens, we can see how she also deflects aesthetic binaries as she corrects her older sister’s taste using a subtler fusion of the sublime and beautiful while illuminating principles of a woman’s rhetoric that give a woman the power to move and influence others.

The younger sister acknowledges the greatness of Homer, but suggests an example of the sublime that is greater:

Homer, tho’ greater than his gods,
 With rough-hewn virtues was sufficed
 And rough-hewn men: but what are such
 To us who learn of Christ? (153-6)

In her appreciation for a powerful, non-violent rhetoric and disdain for the barbaric, she draws attention to another model of heroic virtue, Christ. Homer is an example of “rough-hewn” virtues, but Christ represents a gentle, yet heroic strength, an image of the moral sublime. The younger sister’s critique of Homer echoes Blair’s critique of Homer. Blair

contends that while Homer was a great genius, a developed taste would have corrected the faults of “rudeness and indelicacy” in his ancient texts (24). Blair believed that the writing from that period had “not yet attained its full growth” (24).

Using her religious influences, Rossetti is able to further an understanding of Blair’s representation of taste as that which corrects the faults of rudeness and indelicacy. Christ, as the center of many biblical symbols, represents the moral sublime. He appropriates characteristics of the sublime and the beautiful, becoming the source of a harmonious blending of aesthetics. Palazzo explains that Rossetti “is attempting to reconstruct feminine God-language, by using metaphors, preferably scriptural ones, with which to debate woman’s relationship with God” (21). In Rossetti’s poem, the younger sister is cast as a female Christ figure. For instance, the description of the younger sister draws upon the image of Christ as the vine. She is described “like a vine which full of fruit / Doth cling and lean and climb toward heaven” (250-251). While the illustration possesses feminine connotations—viewing a woman as a plant that bears fruit—Rossetti’s choice of the word “vine” connotes an intimacy with Christ, not just womanhood. The younger sister is both the vine and the gardener paralleling the scriptural imagery in which Christ states, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman,” or gardener (*King James Version* John 15.1).

The representation of Christ as the vine in both this Scripture passage and other poems by Rossetti illustrates the simplicity and strength Blair describes of the sublime. The construction of this verse, in its crisp, concise imagery, parallels the sentence structure Blair identifies as most sublime. Blair quotes Longinus’s explication of the verse “God said, let there be light; and there was light” as an example of the “true Sublime” which produces

“its effect with the utmost speed and facility” (257). There is no superficial ornament, but the power of the statement is clear, precise, and moving. Like this statement, Christ’s statement, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman” possesses strength and clarity in its combination of two simple sentences and sharp imagery. Rossetti’s familiarity with this Scripture passage is seen in the line from another of her poems entitled “Christian and Jew” in which she exclaims, “Sap of the Royal Vine it stirs like wine / In all both less and chief” (37-38). Christ, the “Royal Vine,” sublimely “stirs like wine” just as Homer stirs the older sister with the feeling of sublime.

The images of Christ and the Father possess traces of the beautiful aesthetic as they are associated with fruit and gardens. From her allusions to the scripture, Rossetti merges the sublime and beautiful through a feminine divine standard of virtue that is nurturing and supportive, as seen in the picture of the supportive vine holding up the branches and the gardener tending to his garden. Another of Rossetti’s poems, “I Know You Not,” illustrates this juxtaposition of sublime and beautiful in its poetic structure. In speaking again of Christ, “the Vine with living fruit,” she describes him as “Stronger than Lebanon, Thou Root; / Sweeter than clustered grapes, Thou Vine” (1, 5-6). The sentence structure is concise, yet calming, a mixture of Blair’s sublime and beautiful. The imagery is both grand in the image of the strong trees of Lebanon and beautiful in the sweet cluster of grapes. Because the younger sister, dressed in the imagery of vine and gardener, is a Christ-like figure, she represents an inner strength and beauty that is more powerful than the harsh rhetoric of Homer.

As the younger sister illustrates Rossetti’s rhetorical aesthetic, she also illustrates the power of women’s rhetorical modes associated with this aesthetic. Her gentle

responses effectively impress her older sister's memory. We can read the older sister's reflection on her sister's rhetorical choices:

The much-moved pathos of her voice,
 Her almost tearful eyes, her cheek
 Grown pale, confessed the strength of love
 Which only made her speak:
 For mild she was, of few soft words,
 Most gentle, easy to be led,
 Content to listen when I spoke
 And reverence what I said. (157-164)

The younger sister is a mild speaker and respectful listener. She leaves an impression more powerful than Homer's tales. It is the younger sister's silent listening, "few soft words," and gentleness of expression that have the power to influence. The older sister witnesses the younger sister's "strength of love" through the "much-moved pathos of her voice" and the words which powerfully "rebuked [the older sister's] secret self" (157, 167). The younger sister's power to move and to pierce her older sister's heart derives from a strength tempered by the "beautiful" characteristics of her "mild," "gentle," and "soft" words. The older sister's response concedes Blair's assertion that the moral sublime, the cooperation of the sublime and beautiful through divine elements, will elevate the mind and move the heart (29).

The younger sister extends an understanding of non-violent rhetoric in the form of listening and silence. Feminist rhetorical scholars Cheryl Glenn and Krista Ratcliffe argue that "silence has long been gendered 'feminine'" negatively "as a lamentable sense of

weakness” (4). Both scholars argue that silence and listening can be read as more powerful, rhetorical acts than have been previously understood. The younger sister represents the figure of Christ as her rhetorical model of silence. According to the tradition of the passion which inspired much of Rossetti’s writing, Christ powerfully remains silent at his own trial in the face of accusation, causing amazement from those who witnessed His response. His silence even leads to the governor’s declaring that he found “no guilt in Him” (John 18.38).

Rossetti’s poem “It is Not Death, O Christ, To Die for Thee” responds to the death of Christ and the call for his disciples to follow him. In it, she re-iterates the power of silence. She writes “Nor is that silence of a silent land / Which speaks Thy praise so all may understand...Death is not death, and therefore do I hope: Nor silence silence; and I therefore sing / A very humble hopeful quiet psalm” (2-3, 10-11). In these lines, she recognizes that what appears to be silent (the land) is actually what speaks the praise of Christ; she sees that silence of death cannot silence her hope or her own singing. In both of these instances, silence is rhetorically effective, drawing out an emotive response. The younger sister’s silence, too, through listening to and reverencing her older sister, moves the older sister more than any argument or debate. Her respectful listening melts the heart of her older sister, inducing her to lay down a stance of defense and to consider the greater sublime.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that Rossetti strategically combines religious, feminist, and rhetorical theories in her development of a rhetorical aesthetic, which I have defined as the study of beauty as it relates to communication. As a devout Christian, Rossetti draws upon tenets of Tractarianism, specifically the doctrines of reserve and analogy, in order to

show that modesty and reticence are not necessarily restrictions upon women; they offer a woman rhetorical agency.

I have also explained how we can read Blair's conceptualization of Genius (creativity) and Taste (criticism) as complementary and collaborative and reject the gender binaries in Edmund Burke's aesthetics, which notoriously categorize the sublime as masculine and the beautiful as feminine. As subcategories of taste in Blair's system, the sublime and beautiful are both derived from moral qualities instead of terror and weakness as they are in Burke's aesthetic.

Rossetti furthers Blair's theorization of genius and taste in her short story, *Maude*, using his schema to promote an illustration of female collaboration that is more effective than the solitary genius. She also furthers Blair's theorization of the Sublime and Beautiful in her poem "The Lowest Room," purporting that a gentle silence and respectful listening can be more rhetorically effective than a violent rhetoric. She gives her theories ethos by placing the divine as central to a rhetorical aesthetic. Casting Christ as the standard of the sublime and the beautiful allows Rossetti to theorize aesthetic qualities as divine rather than gendered—fluid and collaborative rather than distinct. Though scholarship notes the tension between the ideas of Rossetti's religion and her feminist impulses, her rhetorical aesthetic, built upon the principles of belletristic rhetoric, helps us see her works as her own collaboration of faith and feminism.

Chapter IV:

Empathic Health or Dystopian Decadence:

Vernon Lee's Bodily Aesthetic

Art...a many-sided and active delight in the wholeness of things, is a great restorer of health and rest to the energies distracted by our turbulent modern movements...The satisfaction of the art-instinct is now one of the most pressing of social needs.

–Havelock Ellis, *The New Spirit* (1890)

In the previous chapter, I use the term “rhetorical aesthetic” to describe the social and communicative dimension of aesthetic theory. Rossetti illustrates the correlation between aesthetics and social interactions, and her rhetorical aesthetic fits with an accepted mid-Victorian philosophy that art should serve a moral function. As the nineteenth-century progressed, the key actors in the Aesthetic movement began to embrace the subjective and amoral quality of art captured by the credo—*L’art pour l’art* or Art for Art’s Sake. However, as the quotation above by Havelock Ellis reveals, many aesthetic theorists in the *fin-de-siècle* remained involved in a form of social engagement through art. Rather than defining morality in terms of religious ideals, there was a move to express morality in terms of physical sensations or physical health, literally within the individual as well as metaphorically within the larger “body” of society.¹²

¹² Walter Pater, for instance, a prominent leader of the Aesthetic movement, understood a relationship between physical health and spiritual and aesthetic longings, though he advocated a separation between art and traditional social morality. See R.M. Seiler’s *Walter Pater: The Critical Heritage* p. 297.

This chapter specifically illuminates how Vernon Lee (1856-1935) builds a rhetorical aesthetic by juxtaposing subjective aesthetic reception with her concern for the health of individuals and society. She emphasizes how the body in its composition and receptive responses is an indicator of individual health, a prerequisite for improving social health. I look specifically at her nonfiction works *Laurus Nobilis: Chapters on Art and Life* (1910) and *The Beautiful: An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics* (1913) paired with her three volume novel *Miss Brown* (1884) as texts that contribute to this bodily aesthetic. Lee's aesthetic theories act as an extension of Blair's rhetorical theory, which constructs the critical receiver as one who pursues activity rather than passive consumption. Lee suggests that aesthetic reception requires movement and satisfaction. In contrast, she shows that aesthetic deficiency and degeneracy is demonstrated in lethargy and consumption. Through these ideas of her bodily aesthetic, Lee contributes to women's rhetorical theory as she promotes individual and societal wellness through the process of collaboration and the development of empathy while disrupting normative gendered constructs of health.

Art for Society's Sake

Violet Paget assumed the pseudonym Vernon Lee and entered London aesthetic society at the height of the "art for art's sake" movement yet was often perceived as an outsider. Lee was born in France to British expatriates, and while she wrote for English audiences, she spent much of her life in Italy. Lee, though a part of the British aesthetic culture, felt marginalized on several levels. Stefano Evangelista explains that Lee had a "troubled relation with the gender of aestheticism," largely identified by the "emergent male homosexual subculture" (91). She "occupied a doubly marginalized position" as a

woman and a lesbian (91). Even more so, Lee established herself as an outsider, becoming “one of the first dandy-aesthete-bashers in history,” according to Dennis Denisoff, due in large part to her negative depiction of recognizable aesthetes in her novel *Miss Brown*. She disdained much of the decadent aesthetic movement, which she believed had “perverted the nature of art by reducing it to hedonism—art not for art’s sake...but for pleasure’s sake, self-indulgence, affectation, and ultimately moral corruption” (Colby 97).

Though Lee embraced the prevailing aesthetic sentiment that art is subjective and amoral, she maintained a position that related aesthetics to social reform. Scholars such as Christa Zorn present Vernon Lee as an anomalous aesthete, in a “category of her own” because her criticism negotiated a disinterested formalism and an “aesthetic that emphasized a socially responsible appreciation of art and beauty” (xviii). The attempts to define her as either social reformer or aesthete threaten to leave her in a tenuous position in the history of artistic and literary criticism, but the aesthetic culture as a whole was not a binary.

Aesthetes such as Lee attempted to harmonize the current aesthetic trends with some sense of social morality disassociated from religious faith. Vineta Colby describes the contemporary scene as one in which “traditional values were under constant examination and revision and where science had challenged the very foundations of religious faith,” an atmosphere that posed a serious quandary regarding any connection between morality and art (95). Despite rejecting an aesthetic moralism that believed art expressed moral truths, Lee still believed in the “purifying effect of art on the individual” (xxv). To reconcile this seeming contradiction between the amoral and moral quality of art, I emphasize what Lee and others were rejecting and how they were replacing a Victorian morality built upon

sensus communis with a morality based on the subjective taste of an individual and the wellness of the body.

The rampant increase of industry, consumerism, and materialism at the end of the century disillusioned many artists who no longer felt that society could determine standards of taste. Lois Agnew argues that later writers, beginning with Matthew Arnold and culminating with Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater, and Vernon Lee, gradually distanced themselves from the idea of *sensus communis*, or the idea that standards of taste could be shared throughout the community as a means of improving society (*Art of Common Sense* 278-87). Instead, these writers found solace in the belief that their own individual, subjective taste could provide a retreat from society's ills. Agnew argues that these writers did not completely discard the "search for *sensus communis*" in that they still felt society could be improved even if they ultimately distrusted and rejected standards derived from the divine or the larger community (*Outward Visible Propriety* 155).

This departure from traditional morality reveals more a distaste for social norms than a distaste for the rhetorical function of art. Agnew asserts that Pater, also one of Lee's greatest influences, "can be seen as part of a long tradition extending through the belletristic rhetoricians of the eighteenth century backward to Cicero and Isocrates, that perceives expression to possess a socially redemptive power" ("Walter Pater" 261). In other words, nineteenth-century aestheticism was not as divorced from classical rhetoric as it may initially appear. Agnew notes that Lee, like Pater, "rejected the notion of collectively negotiating values" yet still attempted to reconcile subjectivity and social concern within her aesthetic theory ("Art of Common Sense" 326). Colby confirms that Lee herself "had no problem reconciling her convictions about pure beauty and perfect form

with her earnest belief in humanitarianism and the moral obligation of the educated and affluent to work for social reform” (152).

Lee was not an anomaly or in a category of her own in her development of a social, yet subjective aesthetic. Eileen Cleere, in her study *The Sanitary Arts*, proposes a method for examining certain trends in aesthetic criticism related to the body at the end of the century. She looks specifically at the intersections of aesthetic discourse and scientific discourse relating to art and health in order to highlight an often overlooked, yet prevalent discourse of aesthetic social reform. This juxtaposition of what others have heretofore seen as unrelated disciplines, she says, enriches aestheticism’s historical narrative (167). Though Cleere does not include Lee in her study, Lee’s aesthetic theories reflect what Cleere identifies as the parallels between the dialogue regarding health and sanitation reform and the conversations regarding “taste” and “art-instinct” (165). Cleere explains that the link between art and health exposes the “inherently social” features of aesthetic theory at the time (165). She identifies artists and writers such as Wyke Bayliss, George Eliot, and Robert Edis who were part of “redefining taste as a mechanism of public health and social justice” (9). While health and sanitation reforms were far from being entirely revolutionary and reformist and, in fact, could be troublingly linked to the end of the century eugenics projects, these reform movements still provided the opportunity for writers such as Lee to develop theories directed toward the improvement of a diseased society, effected by the plague of gross consumerism.¹³

¹³ Vernon Lee may be equally complicit in a social reform movement that reified hierarchies of class and social status. Cleere draws upon the theories of Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* to argue that much of the discourse surrounding sanitation reform and public health “allowed the modern state to gain control of both individual and social bodies,

Rhetorical Theory: Body and Health

Before looking more closely at Lee's aesthetic and ethical theories related to the health of the body, I review the concepts of health and body played throughout the history of rhetoric in order to situate Lee's theories within the larger tradition. In Plato's *Gorgias*, Socrates asserts that if there is value in rhetoric it is found in the health of the soul, which is the greatest good of mankind (Bizzell and Herzberg 83). The link between the body, mind, and spirit within the process of rhetorical production was inseparable as seen in the very structure of the Athenian gymnasium, which was a space for physical exercise and philosophical discussion. The school in Lyceum was commonly called the Peripatetic, a name associated with Aristotle's habit of walking and lecturing simultaneously (Lynch 73). In addition to associating bodily exercise with mental exercise, classical rhetoricians including Quintilian and Cicero developed the importance of the fifth canon of rhetoric—delivery—in association with the movement of the body. This emphasis on delivery and the specific movements of the body surfaced again in the eighteenth century elocutionary movement, most notably represented by eighteenth century rhetorician and actor Thomas Sheridan.

Though the role of physical health and movement played a large role in rhetorical theory, it is less emphasized in what is considered to be the more passive, receptive tradition of belletristic rhetoric. However, Blair's understanding and description of "taste," the receiving pleasure from beauty, cannot be separated from the activity of the body and

disciplining through the dissemination of public health laws that discriminated, disproportionately, against the poor and against women" (2).

mind. His ideas concerning a noble individual and a moral society create a foundation for Lee's aesthetic theories.

Blair: Body and Health

Blair argues that the study of *belles lettres* encourages activity rather than passivity for the necessity of a healthy individual life. One key theme in Blair's lectures is movement in mind and body. He claims that in the "great law of our nature...exercise is the chief source of improvement in all our faculties" holding "both in our bodily, and in our mental powers" (23). "Life," he adds, "must always languish in the hands of the idle" (8). Here Blair contends that the idleness or non-movement of an individual, whether mind or body, contributes to a weaker, languishing life. Further, an *active* critical engagement during leisure and pleasure hours keeps an individual from "being a burden to himself" (8). In other words, an individual squelches his own freedom of movement and growth if he is not actively developing taste. Blair clearly emphasizes the difference between an idle pastime and a productive *activity* that enriches the life of an individual in the very selection of his words. In describing the process of developing taste, he reminds readers of the importance of movement in the "frequent exercise" and "proper exertions" of taste (8, 18).

He notes that though taste is a form of common sense, it rises to its perfection based on the healthiness of the individual. He argues that the "inequality of Taste among men is owing, without doubt, in part, to the different frame of their natures; to nicer organs, and finer internal powers" (22). The selection of the words "frame" and "organs" indicates that there is an element of an individual's physical and mental makeup that lends one to a finer grasp of taste. Though Blair does emphasize the social aspect of Taste being "a most improvable faculty" through education and cultivation, he still underlines the importance

of a physical state of being that lends itself to this education and cultivation. He explains that healthy bodily senses, adequately trained and educated, produce the refinement and skill necessary to appreciate pleasures in all their intricacies. For example, "Touch becomes infinitely more exquisite in men whose employment requires them to examine the polish of bodies"; those who "deal in microscopical observation...acquire surprising accuracy of sight in discerning the minutest objects"; and those who "practice in attending to different flavours and tastes of liquors, wonderfully [improve] the power of distinguishing them, and of tracing their composition" (25). In each of these examples, Blair implies a certain natural functioning of these bodily organs that education and exercise refines.

Blair extends the concept of movement beyond the individual and to the society as a whole. While Blair notes that it is incumbent that the individual improve himself through active engagement in literary criticism, he explains that the individual and society function within a symbiotic relationship. The freedom of movement and growth in society is vital to the individual activity, and individual exercise in taste creates the flourishing society. The nation, as a body itself, requires freedom and movement in order to prevent social disorder. Blair argues that taste can develop only in a society where arts are cultivated and where there is free discussion of works of genius (19). Bodily and mental movement is equally as important as the free movement of ideas. Stagnation in the form of artificial consensus keeps the nation's body from moving and growing. Religion, government, and popular sentiment can, as Blair says, "warp the proper operation of Taste" and can "bear down" upon or stifle the "productions of great merit" (19). The image of "bearing down" parallels the pitfall for an individual who stops moving and becomes a "burden" to himself.

While Blair's argument cannot be completely dissociated from critiques of its elitism and nationalistic myopia, its refusal to determine one controlling standard of judgment still makes it amenable for other writers to find more egalitarian goals associated with Taste. For instance, Blair says that "the diversity of Tastes which prevails among mankind, does not in every case imply corruption of Taste, or oblige us to seek for some standard in order to determine who are in the right" (33). Though there may be diversity, Blair still argues that the core principles of taste will be the same. He uses bodily senses to illustrate. Just as no one would "maintain that sugar was bitter and tobacco was sweet" unless he be "diseased," no one will fall far off from accurate judgment if he maintains health as well as constant exercise and improvement (37).

Lee: Healthy, Receptive Body

Lee furthers the concept of a bodily aesthetic based on the health of an individual. In her works *Laurus Nobilis* and *The Beautiful: An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics* Lee delineates the concept of "health" in the whole person. First, she rejects the proposition of normative health being masculine and identifies a "spiritual" health in bodily movement as opposed to sexual functions. Second, she theorizes that satisfaction and empathy will be the natural outworking of a healthy bodily aesthetic. Finally, she criticizes a masculine decadence, characterized by consumption and control, which she associates with degeneracy in the body.

Spiritual Health in Movement

In *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Novels*, Pamela Gilbert notes that the concept of health in mid-Victorian England was largely gendered. Normative health was active and masculine; women's health was defined by sexual purity and moral purity

within the domestic realm (2). Toward the end of the century, traditional notions of sexual identity were breaking down as the homosexual aesthete and “masculine” New Woman entered the scene. Lee’s aesthetic theories and fiction reflect this rise of woman’s athletic engagement and concern with physical fitness in the *fin-de-siècle*. She specifically fuses activity and spirituality into a genderless healthy body capable of aesthetic appreciation. In *Laurus Nobilis* Lee shifts morality and spirituality away from a woman’s sexual role and explains that an individual’s health and growth are dependent upon activity of the mind and body, demonstrated by “the preference for aesthetic pleasures” (11).

Lee compares aesthetic development to athletic training. The noble individual is active and must work diligently to discipline the body for the cause of aesthetic perceptiveness. To get the most out of beauty, she says, “the individual must undergo a course of self-training, of self-initiation, which in its turn elicits and improves some of the highest qualities of his soul” (17). This proposal easily parallels Blair’s statement that taste is improved by “frequent exercise” (12). She says that the “active nature of aesthetic appreciation” is a result of “a favourable reaction of the body’s chemistry” or a sense of balance within (*The Beautiful* 129). Like Blair, her language counters the common perception that appreciation and reception are simply passive. A healthy body is thus equivalent to a healthy spirit. The cause of ignobility is lack of movement or a lethargic, wearied approach to aesthetics. She says that individuals “coming to art for pleasure when they are too weary for looking, listening, or thinking” will inevitably gravitate toward lower art forms that create no real satisfaction (*Laurus Nobilis* 21). She expresses her ideas in an analogy between sports and aesthetic appreciation:

[G]reat art makes, by coincidence, the same demands as noble thinking and acting. For, even all noble sports develop muscle, develop eye, skill, quickness and pluck in bodily movement...so also the appreciation of noble kinds of art implies the acquisition of habits of accuracy, or patience, or respectfulness, and suspension of judgment, or the preference of future good over present, of harmony and clearness, of sympathy...judgment and kindly fairness. (21)

In this list, Lee provides a glimpse into the effects of a disciplined aesthetic body, one that has clear benefits for self and society such as “respectfulness” and “suspension of judgment.” In this association of physical health with aesthetic acuity, Lee does not distinguish between a “masculine” health related to activity and sport¹⁴ and a “feminine” health related to domestic morals such as “patience” and “respectfulness.” Instead, she shows how normative health synthesizes spirituality, physicality, and aesthetics.

Aesthetic appreciation was more than just instinctual. She differentiates “physiological” pleasures from true “aesthetic” pleasure, explaining that “in the case of beauty, it is not merely our physical but our spiritual life which is suddenly rendered more vigorous” (15-16). There is the sense in this passage that Lee creates a type of spirituality associated with movement and the body, while still elevated from pure bodily instincts. She explains more clearly the effect that aesthetic appreciation will have in creating the healthy individual, saying, “We do not merely breathe better and digest better, though that is no small gain, but we seem to understand better” (16). She sees this spiritual life as a holistic health, defined by vigor and energy of body, mind, and spirit.

¹⁴ For a more detailed explanation of a health that is gendered as masculine, see Bruce Haley’s exploration of health and the concept of a healthy man in his work *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture*.

Lee's theory of a spiritual health based in the body echoes many of Matthew Arnold's views on the social benefit of literary criticism that he proposes in *Culture and Anarchy* (1867-8). Specifically, in his chapter "Sweetness and Light," Arnold supports his propositions by alluding to the traditions of the ancient Greeks who sought to perfect the whole self, including the body and mind, for the ultimate purpose of forming fine character. Linda Ferreira-Buckley identifies both classical rhetoric and belletristic rhetoric as traditions that Arnold extends in his goal to "move others toward the appreciation of the true and beautiful" in order to develop the whole self for the good of society (199). In similar ways, I argue, Lee's theories extend both classical and belletristic rhetorical traditions.

While Lee did not embrace the same religious motivations as Blair, both connected the process of developing taste to functions of improving or redeeming society. As James Golden and Edward Corbett note, Blair believed that development of fine taste enables one to be rhetorically effective in conveying ideas for "the purpose of redeeming man from his degenerate state" (16). The process of reception and aesthetic judgment strengthens rhetoric for the purpose of social morality. Lee argues that there is a correspondence between the "development of the aesthetic faculties" and the "development of the altruistic instincts" (11). Not only that, but she sees that in the "development of a sense of aesthetic harmony" there is a corresponding "sense of the higher harmonies of universal life" (11).

Health: Satisfaction and Empathy

After establishing a new normative spiritual body aesthetic based on movement, Lee identifies the outcomes of health: satisfaction and empathy. The idea of satisfaction does not indicate complacency, but rather movement in balance. She mentions the idea of

“satisfaction” in her work *The Beautiful*, as she elaborates upon what she calls the “aesthetic imperative” (101). She says that this imperative for life is the desire to “contemplate shapes...with sensuous, intellectual and empathic satisfaction” (101). Here she underscores satisfaction and empathy as the key ethical effects of aesthetics.

Many scholars trace Lee’s theorization of empathy back to her relationships with Kit Anstruther-Thomson. The two would spend long periods of time in art museums, and Lee recorded the physical actions Kit demonstrated in response to the artwork. Colby explains that while Lee’s scientific method was tenuous at best, the women’s work still made large contributions to aesthetics and psychology.¹⁵ Jill Ehnenn traces the common psychological conclusions that their collaboration was simply an “example of repressed perverse desire” (69). Rather than reading the women’s approach to aesthetic reception as pathological, Ehnenn examines it from a queer theory framework and suggests that their work “subtly transgress[es] sex/gender ideology” in framing the normative body as other than male (73). She identifies their “pleasure of looking” as a “lesbian scopophilia,” which allows the perceiving body and the viewed body a sense of pleasure, a sensation associated with normative health rather than a distorted sexuality (71). In normalizing this empathetic exchange of pleasure through viewing, she allows for sensual pleasure in viewing while still criticizing the practice of objectification.

This reading of Lee’s work offers significant understanding of the rhetorical concept of empathy as the interaction between artwork/speaker and receiver. Diana Maltz explains

¹⁵ Lee characterized her experiments with Kit as “over-hasty” discoveries and retracted their initial conclusion “that the body reacted to art by unconsciously imitating the form implicit in the work” (157). Still, her observations of the bodily engagement with art continued to fascinate Lee and played a large role in her connection between empathy and movement (157).

that Lee and Anstruther-Thomson "posited a 'beauty of health' contingent on their belief that a work of art exists to improve the viewer's physical experience of life" (215). In other words, mutual satisfaction is a result of the object fulfilling its function to improve the physical life of the viewer and the viewer receiving a satisfaction from the pleasure of viewing. Ehnenn argues that for Lee, this enhanced experience of life requires a "way of being in the world that is empathic, reciprocal and interdependent" (72). Through this understanding of empathy, Lee further theorizes the rhetorical mode of collaboration. As Ehnenn argues, "Like Lee's view of friendship, writing, and collaborative writing among friends, the concept of aesthetic empathy hinges on the merging of boundaries" (71). An aesthetic appreciation of another work of art or a person allows for a form of collaboration, blurring the boundaries of the sharp rhetorical division between speaker and receiver (72).

Lee's theorization of the concept of empathy, while placing her within the emergent fields of psychology, also places her concept as an extension of the eighteenth-century tradition as she merges social theories and physiological theories into her use of the term "empathy." In her article "Evocations of Sympathy," Evelyn Forget succinctly outlines the extensive use of the term sympathy in the eighteenth century. Social theorists, rhetoricians, and philosophers such as Lord Kames, David Hume, Francis Hutcheson, and Adam Smith saw sympathy as the center of society, often acting as an "imaginative exchange with another human being" so that one might be able to feel how another feels (284). Smith in particular believed that sympathy would "evoke" a sense of "interdependence" between individuals, an idea that Lee greatly enlarges upon (284). Forget observes in her research that the term crossed "disciplinary boundaries" allowing "medicine to enrich social discourse" (283). Eighteenth-century physiologists, for instance, often used the term

sympathy in relation to literal bodily functions and believed that “somatic communication was allied to the social sympathy that philosophers used to explain the fellow-feeling between human beings” (295). Social theorists and physiologists believed that the practice of “sympathy” allowed “society to cohere” (295). Forget argues that the term “sympathy” was used pejoratively at times only to indicate an imbalanced relationship, lacking a “symmetric relationship between the minds of two equals” (288). Sympathy was not intended to be the “influence of those of greater mental powers over weaker individuals” (288). Similarly, Lee criticizes a controlling objectification of bodies for self-pleasure at the subject’s expense.

Lee emphasizes that nobility within an individual requires that one should “*give oneself*” (*The Beautiful* 23). She saw satisfaction through the giving of oneself as the highest pleasure of beauty. This idea most likely influenced her interests in socialism, pacifism, and the plight of the poor in society.¹⁶ She best articulates the summary of this social ethic based on aesthetic discernment and health when she says that the development of empathy contributes to “the greatest desiderata of spiritual life, viz. intensity, purposefulness and harmony; and such perceptive and empathic activities cannot fail to raise the present level of existence” (150).

Though Lee developed a sense of morality through the idea of a healthy body, many critics accuse Lee of inconsistencies between her moral fervor and her sensual and sensational literary expression. Maxwell says that “[a]s a critic she may have wanted to reject morbidity and decadence and embrace ‘health,’” but “her own strong creative

¹⁶ See Pulham and Maxwell’s collection *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics* for a more complete account of Lee’s socialist and philanthropic leanings.

impulses appear not to have allowed her the easy separation of material such a categorization would imply” (38). In other words, critics accuse Lee of perpetuating the same moral disease of sensual decadence she claimed to combat. In a review of her novel in the *Spectator*, she was accused of a “degrading fleshliness,” an accusation that shocked Lee into private contemplation that perhaps, though she had set out to do good and promote a social ethic, she may have indeed produced what others called an immoral book because she was “colour blind about the data” (qtd in Colby 110).¹⁷ However, the critique of Lee’s attraction to sensuality and fleshliness misses the heart of Lee’s construct of health.

Disease: Lethargy, Consumption, Control

Lee never rejected sensual experiences as morally degrading; she rejected a sensual desire characterized by lethargy and consumption as opposed to movement and satisfaction. The diseased body chooses to control bodies rather than relate to them through empathetic responses. Denisoff clarifies that moral “health” for Lee had less to do with social codes of morality and more to do with the way the body works. He says that her writing was a rejection of “an unsympathetic, masculine Decadence of contemporary England” characterized by its “excess, waste, and contamination” (75). While Denisoff positions her rejection of Decadence in the realm of economic criticism, if seen in relation to the actual physical body, Decadent Aestheticism illustrated what Lee saw as unhealthy because it chose to overfeed and overstimulate self, consuming more than it needed, resulting in a lethargy and waste that polluted society rather than revitalizing it. In

¹⁷ Colby explains in an endnote that Vernon Lee’s initial shock and regret regarding her novel changes to ambivalence in a letter written to Frances Power Cobbe several months later. Lee actually admits that she is glad she wrote the novel and accuses the public’s debased imagination for the readings of her book that implicate her in immoral fancies.

addition, Lee accuses Decadents of an “attempt to reduce man’s relations with the great world-power Beauty to mere intellectual dilettantism and sensual superfiness” (12). In other words, she derides a superficial interest in the arts—a dilettantism—that failed to encourage a serious, concerted effort to appreciate beauty. She also shows skepticism toward a “sensual superfiness,” a state of being that would indicate a delicate and weak body, easily overpowered and unable to maintain a harmony and balance within itself. Such decadence led not only to corrupt individual morals, but also to failed social relationships.

In her novel, Lee underscores the relational aspect of a bodily aesthetic by criticizing an emphasis on selfish consumption, marked by overfeeding and a drive to control. Denisoff argues that the heroine in *Miss Brown* becomes aware that her own difficulties to adjust to society stem from the masculine “desire to possess and control” (81). As an articulation of a more feminine Decadence, Lee, according to Joseph Bristow, writes the essay “On Friendship,” in which she understands that in a healthy relationship, “two people can consume each other for fuel” (119). It is not merely consumption of beauty that Lee denigrates; it is a consumption that lacks balance and mutual benefit. She sees that healthy relationships and society require a type of symbiotic feeding in order to energize life and movement.

Lee differentiates between viewing for pleasure and objectification for personal consumption, though the two activities may seem synonymous. Empathy provides the distinction; there must be benefit to both parties. In *Laurus Nobilis*, she writes that “art can teach us to seek our own pleasure without injuring others” (39). Her sensitivity toward a power that could inflict pain is illustrated, Kristin Mahoney claims, by her “sensitivity to the suffering of animals in her writings on vivisection, her critique of the objectification of

women in aestheticism, and her pacifism” as well as her “questioning the privileging of the subject in consumer practices like collecting” (59). These practices give Lee cause for concern because the privileging of one individual over another or even the privileging of the collector over the work of art disrupts the mutual benefit an empathetic exchange might engender. Lee never argues against the act of looking at art or looking at bodies as a form of communication. However, healthy rhetorical exchange only happens through active, empathetic responses, where one does not control the other and neither is silent.

Aesthetic Health and Disease Lee’s *Miss Brown*

Though her later nonfiction works more explicitly articulate Lee’s theories of health and bodily aesthetics, her early novel *Miss Brown* forecasts these incipient ideas through a vivid rhetorical dystopia. Lee illustrates her developing theories effectively by means of *ekphrasis*, the description of a work of art and imaginative reflection upon a potential narrative within that artwork (Heffernan 301-2). A term originating from Greek rhetoric, *ekphrasis* gives voice to the work of art. James Heffernan explains that the ekphrastic tradition often employs the “rhetorical technique of envoicing a silent object” (302). One of the most recognized examples of *ekphrasis* in the English language is Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” which develops an entire narrative from the object and allows an otherwise silent object to speak. This literary strategy serves Lee’s purposes in two significant ways.

First, in describing her main characters as works of art, she blurs the lines between literature, artwork, and bodies. The lack of distinction among these forms allows readers to understand how her theorization of empathy in relation to inanimate artworks (like paintings or poems) extends to individual people. Benjamin Morgan calls Lee’s understanding of empathy “motional empathy,” not at all related to “ethical or altruistic

engagement” but rather the “science of pleasurable sense perception” primarily in relation to objective works of art and not people (36). The “motional empathy” Morgan describes is akin to Victorian formalism, which Rachel Teukolsky explains “might be described as an aesthetic judgment or style emphasizing elements of shape, color, line, facture, or composition, as opposed to qualities of narrative, morality, politics, or social distinction” (8). Maxwell denies the claim that Lee’s art is pure formalism, stating that for Lee, artistic appreciation is a moral act (13). I propose a convergence of both views; Lee’s use of *ekphrasis* in *Miss Brown* promotes a relational empathy through a motional empathy. The act of “looking” at another individual, while employing formalism as a descriptive strategy, also suggests some type of ethical relationship. In all her works, Lee describes a reader feeling into the words of a novel, a spectator feeling into the movement of a painting, or a person feeling into the emotions of another; she argues that such “stimulation” should lead to “sympathetic understanding” (72).

Lee also uses *ekphrasis* as a strategically feminist move. Often, a man’s description of women as art has been seen as a controlling form of objectification, in which the man sees the woman as an object of sexual desire. Losano’s work assumes that *ekphrasis* “is traditionally about controlling a female image” (13), yet Lee’s work proposes that the motivation determines whether *ekphrasis* is used as a form of taste or control. Lee’s narrative does not deny that men might still wield power over women; however, she repurposes ekphrastic descriptions of characters to move away from sexual objectification. Instead, she uses ekphrastic art as she would to critique a work of art; she makes judgments concerning the characters’ aesthetic sensibilities and thus their spiritual health. She also brings the “body” of Anne to life through *ekphrasis*, during the period in which the

protagonist grows as an aesthetic critic and writer. She employs descriptions to give voice to Anne's inner life that others cannot see to draw empathy from the reader to the protagonist.

Miss Brown begins from the perspective of the wealthy and restless painter-poet, Walter Hamlin, who suffers from a melancholy that leads to his lethargic state. He is inspired by the young Anne Brown, a servant girl he meets in Italy, and determines that she should develop her aesthetic sensibilities at a progressive girls' school in Germany before she moves to London as his aesthetic project and muse. Anne's experience through travel and education offers her the freedom of movement, both in body and in mind, away from the controlling gaze of Hamlin. However, once Anne is introduced into London aesthetes' society and becomes an instant celebrity, her growth is stifled under the influence of the superficiality and decadence within Hamlin's group of friends. The unhealthy environment squelches her aesthetic development because she fails to find a true spirit of empathy and collaboration that promotes growth and health. Hamlin's friends encourage his decline into excessive consumption, and in the end, Anne abandons her goals for further education and social reform in an attempt to redeem Hamlin, an attempt which ultimately fails and makes her aesthetic development useless.

Anne: Movement and Aesthetic Taste

In the initial descriptions of Anne, Lee constructs the pictures of health and aesthetic receptiveness, not based on normative gender, but rather using artistic expression relating to movement. Anne's body is problematic because it lacks movement and a sense of fluidity, as illustrated by the fixed control of Hamlin's observation over her body. Anne is like a statue whose "complexion was of a uniform opaque pallor" (1: 24). The "uniformity,"

“opacity” and “pallor” of her complexion all indicate stillness as well as the lack of movement in color and light. The narrative continues to describe Anne: “cheek and chin and forehead of Parisian marble, scarcely stained a dull red in the lips, and hair of dull wrought-iron, and eyes of some mysterious greyish-blue, slate-tinted onyx: a beautiful and somber idol of the heathen” (1: 24). The description of Anne, while indicating lack of energy, suggests that she is on the brink of coming alive in a recreation of the Pygmalion myth. Despite her body’s motionlessness, there are hints of aesthetic coloring, especially in her eyes—one of her aesthetic sensory organs—the “mysterious greyish-blue, slate-tinted onyx” (1:24). These nuances of color, like the “greyish-blue,” mark her as a true beauty, according to Alison Matthews, who explains that aesthetes believed these types of “indiscriminate colors” were “felt by the soul and were therefore more artistic” (182). Through this ekphrastic description, Lee reveals Anne’s aesthetic “soul” to the readers, and suggests Anne’s potential to acquire the power of aesthetic perception for herself.

Anne’s aesthetic appearance, indicating her potential for growth, is juxtaposed with her limited experiences as a literary critic. She has only “vague reminiscences” of the books she had read and the music she had heard; she can give only “slight descriptions” of the villas and bathing places she had visited (1: 133). None of her literary or aesthetic experiences have provided any substantial satisfaction, indicating that her taste has not developed enough for the nuances to be imprinted in her mind. Lee explains in *The Handling of Words* that the “efficacy of all writing depends no more on the Writer than on the Reader, without whose active response...Literary Art cannot take place” (vii-viii). In other words, all the beauty that Anne had thus far experienced was ineffective unless she could develop her active receptive abilities. Lee continues that the purpose for such literary

or aesthetic “stimulation” is “sympathetic understanding,” which was vital to improving societal relationships (*The Handling of Words* 72). In the narrative, then, Anne must obtain an aesthetic education in order to stimulate life within her body and develop more active receptive abilities. Without such growth, she cannot possess that “sympathetic understanding” needed to improve society.

As Anne travels abroad to receive her education, the movement of her body and mind awakens her energy as an independent individual. Lee crafts a period in Anne’s life of aesthetic growth that elevates Anne’s perceptive ability, giving her more agency as a critic and social reformer. Hamlin sends Anne to Mrs. Simson’s school in Germany because at this school “a young woman might develop there into whatever pleasant thing nature intended” (1: 199). This style of education echoes a belletristic understanding of developing a critical judgment expressed in Blair’s statement that taste “is built upon the sentiments and perceptions which belong to our nature” (19). In an environment of freedom, Blair would say that natural responses will be more correct and accurate, especially when they are developed through discourse. This environment, for Anne, provides her with a freedom to move out from under Hamlin’s direct gaze that has previously frozen her into an unmoving statue. Hamlin’s controlling presence in Anne’s life disappears in favor of her own burgeoning thoughts. Lee adeptly illustrates Anne’s growth as the narrative perceptively shifts to privilege Anne’s perspective, giving her more agency over her thoughts. This narrative technique, along with commentary on the growth of her mind, allows Lee to illustrate Anne’s fledgling state of self-realization and beginnings of aesthetic taste.

In Book I, the narration describes Anne’s growth as dependent on Hamlin: “It was a satisfaction, also, to notice how, little by little, whatever ideals seemed to bud in Anne

Brown's mind, were connected with [Hamlin], or at least with the things which he presented to her imagination" (1: 131). However, at the end of Book II, Anne begins to realize her own lack of independent thinking: "Her head felt hollow, she seemed to be informed about her feelings rather than to experience them, her own words sounded as if through a whispering-gallery" (1: 202). The description of Anne's development at the school indicates that she begins to grow and bloom inside even though her body retains vestiges of its frozen state. For instance, as she develops imperfect relationships with the other girls at the school, her aloofness invites the girls to remark upon her reserve, saying that "Anne Brown remained surrounded by a sort of moral moat, alone, isolated, impregnable in a kind of moral fortress" (1: 217). Despite this seeming lack of movement outside of herself, there is an internal growth as "a drama—nay a whole life-poem—was incessantly going on within her" (1: 218). Lee uses literary aesthetics to describe the type of movement and growth within Anne. Lee would later write in *The Handling of Words* (1923) that "Literary Art" was indeed a "living phenomenon" (viii). A "drama" or a "life-poem," far from being an inactive work of art, represents the living form that was taking shape in Anne.

In addition to her movement in place and movement in mind, the narrator says that Anne "lived" and "moved" through the revelations she read in Hamlin's letters recounting his travels in London, Italy, Greece, and Egypt (1:220). Though she was not physically moving alongside of him, her mind moved with him. The narrative says that his letters became her "soul's food" (1: 221). Because she is not directly under the oppressive gaze of Hamlin, she experiences a type of inward and mental travel through his letters to her, a type of movement that nourishes her and makes her come alive. Their interactions

illustrate Blair's idea of mutual, "free discussion of works of genius" that develop one's taste (19). Anne becomes an active receiver through this free discussion of works of genius. Hamlin's physical absence also allows her to make her own unmediated critical judgments, granting her more agency as an aesthetic critic.

As Anne becomes a more active literary and aesthetic critic, her potential for creative production increases as well. Lee rarely dissociates the activities of production and reception; instead, she illustrates the equal value of both rhetorical processes and parallels Blair's belletristic tradition that carefully theorizes Taste and Genius as complementary rhetorical activities. Hamlin recognizes the beauty in Anne's critical awareness and production as he begins to "read out some of the metaphors of Anne's to his friends," acknowledging their merit (1: 225). As Anne becomes "more deeply versed in poetry and poetical and picturesque history," she responds in turn with her own productions of genius that illustrate the growth of her aesthetic acuity (1: 226). The composite of aesthetic knowledge from studying "Greek lyricism, Oriental mysticism, French aestheticism" and "things medieval and pseudo-medieval" lays the foundation for Anne to become an aesthetic critic and empowers her with a voice she did not use before (1: 226).

Her discussions with Hamlin, the movement of ideas between the two, even once she first arrives in London, continue to feed her soul. Lee illustrates the necessity of a movement of ideas built upon collaboration. The narrative says that "Anne had never felt so happy in all her life" as she stays in Hamlin's studio "talking over abstract questions...like equals" (1: 281). Through this mutual interaction in the development of aesthetic criticism, the continued movement of Anne's mind allows her that sense of "satisfaction" or

happiness through empathy and collaboration that Lee proposes is the result of a healthy state of being.

In this first half of the novel as Anne develops into a capable aesthetic critic, Lee tacitly challenges the normative discourse regarding the ultimate purpose of women's aesthetic education and the normative understandings of health. As scholars such as Marjorie Garson note, aesthetic education was an important part of cultivation for middle and upper class women, especially for the purpose of securing a good match and preparing for one's domestic role as wife and mother (73). Laura Green suggests that traditionally, a fictional woman's "narrative trajectory" may include her "aspirations toward intellectual, artistic, or philanthropic achievement," but her "aspirations will ultimately be resolved in an appropriate marriage" (xi). Anne, on the other hand, has no need of securing Hamlin as a suitor as he has already promised himself to her. Her efforts to improve her aesthetic sensibilities and growing desire to engage in social philanthropy lead her to identify an alternative purpose for developing of aesthetic ability, one not defined by sexuality, but rather by her humanity. Lee argues that Anne's healthy state as seen in her aesthetic growth should not be gendered masculine. "Masculine women, mere men in disguise," she says, "they are not" (2:309). Neither should her healthy state of being be attributed to a type of sexual purity, gendered feminine. She says that Anne was like "women without woman's instincts and wants, sexless—woman made not for man but for humankind" (2: 309). Positioning aesthetic development outside of sex and gender roles allows Lee to develop a more egalitarian promotion of education.

Hamlin: Lethargy and Consumption

Lee uses the latter half of the novel to warn against moral corruption, which she sees as related to individual bodies lacking movement and social interactions lacking empathy. Though Hamlin and Anne enjoy a healthy exchange of conversation after her initial move to London, the decadent culture and Hamlin's controlling nature begin to suppress Anne's burgeoning aesthetic judgment and social ethic. Without the successful collaboration between individuals, Anne's individual growth becomes stunted and ultimately ineffective. As he introduces Anne to London society, Hamlin stifles her growth in two specific ways. First, his own lethargy and ennui prevent his own growth and successful collaboration with Anne as he becomes motivated by envy and popular opinion. Second, his desire to control and possess Anne, freezing her aesthetically in his sight as merely a picture and dismissing her development of aesthetic criticism, effectively distorts her judgment and causes the beginnings of her inner life and movement to become trapped, ultimately squelching Anne's efforts at social reform.

To understand Hamlin's role in Anne's story, we must understand how Lee employs ekphrastic description to identify his problematic body. At the beginning of the novel, Lee introduces her judgment of him in terms of color as she does Anne. In this description, Lee differentiates between a truly beautiful aesthetic potential and a dangerous proclivity toward degeneracy and stagnation. The narrator describes Hamlin as one who "had never been your splash-of-scarlet and dash-of-orange-and-skyblue, lust-and-terror kind of lyrist," a description that distances him from the fiery Romantics as well as from the masses (1: 4). Matthews writes that primary colors like red were associated by Victorian aesthetes with a more primitive aesthetic while they claimed visual superiority in being able to distinguish

those “colors that could not quite be described” (179). Lee describes Hamlin’s entrance into the arts as beginning with “a quiet concentration of colour, physical and moral, which had made his earliest verses affect one like so many old church windows, deep flecks of jewel lustre set in quaint stiff little frames, with a great deal of lead between, and supreme indifference to anatomy and perspective (1: 4-5). Lee indicates that these “jewel” tones were associated with a religious morality as indicated by their being found in “church windows.” Her description implies that his early work was not truly aesthetic; it was oppressed by “stiff little frames,” and enclosed by “great deal of lead” (1: 5). In this type of art associated with religious morality, there is little concentration on “anatomy” and “perspective.” (1: 5). In other words, this overtly religious aesthetic lacks the beauty found in the balance and harmony of the body, as most stained glass distorts the look of the body. Neither did it produce in its viewers a sense of depth and perspective to train the eye for critical judgment. Lee’s description of Hamlin’s aesthetic development parallels Anne’s; both possess latent potential that requires movement and refinement.

Hamlin, in his ventures into poetry, shows more refinement because his poems require an active and acute appreciation of detail, which is important in displaying true taste. He embraces the subtlety of color that distinguishes a keen from an untrained eye. His sensibility to fine details indicates he is a man of taste. Blair explains that an individual with “Delicacy of Taste...sees distinctions and differences where others see none” and “the most latent beauty does not escape him” (14). Lee identifies Hamlin’s sensitivity with his “original genius” (4).

The problem for Hamlin comes when he stops growing. Lee notes that lack of movement and activity can turn refined subtlety into idle pallor. The narrative continues,

linking his aesthetic to himself as a person: “in his poetry, and in his reality as a man, it struck him that he had little by little got paler and paler, colours turning gradually to tints, and tints to shadows; pleasure, pain, hope, despair, all reduced gradually to a delicate penumbra, a diaphanous intellectual pallor” (1: 4-5). Though Hamlin had grasped nuance and subtlety, establishing him as a man of taste, Lee indicates that with the additive of gray, he had begun to lose sight of color altogether within the shadow or “penumbra” of intellectual “pallor” (1: 5). In losing sight of color, Hamlin loses sight of distinctive emotions and feelings associated with the balanced body— “pleasure, pain, hope, despair” (1:5) His emotional stagnation clearly relates to the health of his body as her choice of the term “intellectual pallor” indicates a sickliness of both the mind and a physical self (1:5). Such a sickliness, in turn, affects his social relationships.

Throughout the rest of the novel, Lee parallels aesthetic deficiency with declining health in order to express her distaste for the state of Decadent society. Perusing the portrait gallery in Hamlin’s home, Anne notices that the images of Hamlin’s ancestors are “indifferently painted and vapid” (2: 51). She is struck particularly by the similarities between Hamlin and the “vapid” painting of his great-uncle Mordaunt, whose face is sickly with the traces of opium addiction (2: 51). Just as she feels no connection to these portraits, she begins to lose her connection and empathic relationship with Hamlin.

Hamlin’s lack of empathy toward Anne is directly related to his lethargy as well as his consumptive and controlling behavior. Hamlin’s first form of control is over Anne’s body. In the beginning of the novel, Hamlin is not shy about viewing Anne simply as a piece of art:

He was interested in Anne Brown, but not in the whole of Anne Brown. He wished to see more of her, but to see more only of her superb physical appearance...As to anything there might be, intellectual or moral, behind the beautiful and dramatic creature, he did not care in the least, and would much rather have seen nothing of it.

(1: 51)

He stifles her inner aesthetic growth. There is no mutual, collaborative benefit to their relationship. Denisoff notes that “the key to the heroine's difficulties lies in her growing awareness that the man's motivations are based on both a desire to possess and control,” which is equally “as disreputable as the inaction of dandy-aesthetes” (1: 81). In other words, both enforced passivity and possessive control indicate his moral corruption.

Hamlin recognizes his desire to control her body. He knows that “she was a personality, something much more than a mere form,” but refuses to treat her as such. In addition to viewing her as a piece of art, Hamlin sees her as a botanical figure and draws on standard Victorian floral imagery to represent her educational needs, yet he frames it in terms of the aesthetic education he wants to provide for her. He describes her as a “magnificent blossom” or a “rare plant of beauty” needing to be “cherished” and “nursed into perfection, till it burst out in maturity of splendor” (1: 118). As early evidence of Hamlin’s controlling nature, the narrator says that he “never doubted for a second that either Anne Brown must bloom for him and by him, must be his most precious possession and his most precious loan to the world—or that Anne Brown must be simply and deliberately buried under a bushel” (1: 120). In both these aesthetic depictions of Anne, the reader sees that Hamlin’s benevolence is tainted with ulterior motives. His metaphors repeat the patriarchal narrative of men as gardeners producing passive women as beauties

to behold and control for their own pleasure. Because Lee is chronicling Hamlin's fall from taste, she in effect critiques both his objectification of Anne as art and his appropriation of this patriarchal imagery as acts of bad taste.

Only after Anne is educated does she recognize the degree to which Hamlin's lack of empathy stunts her growth. At her first aesthete social gathering, Anne begins to feel "completely Hamlin's property" (1: 304). She accompanies Hamlin and is repulsed by the dress Hamlin has constructed for her to wear. The dress makes her feel as if she were only a "live picture" (1: 304). By designing her dress and representing her as his model, Hamlin not only takes control of her body, but he also suppresses any sense of her own creative control and denies her any opportunities to collaborate in aesthetic decisions. With all the eyes at the party staring at her, she becomes disgusted with the hideousness of her display and begins to feel "alone, numb, unreal" (1: 305). Their freezing stares, rather than inviting any mutual reciprocation, reinforce Anne's immobility.

Lee is not condemning the practice of viewing others aesthetically; as I've already shown, she uses aesthetic descriptions to convey the health and aesthetic potential of an individual. However, Lee believed in an empathetic response between a viewer and the artwork as the most natural and satisfying response. Joseph Bristow notes that Lee's concept of empathy begins with her explanation that "as the spectator responds to art" an inner empathy or mimicry of that artwork's movements "ensures that the point where the one begins and the other ends is rendered indistinct" (134). He continues to say that in developing this understanding of a spectator's empathetic response to art, Lee builds an aesthetic theory that embraces "the cooperative structures" of society including "collaboration, dialogue and friendship" (135). She sees collaboration and friendship as

necessarily extending from a refined practice of aesthetic reception. Hamlin's views of Anne as artwork and botanical figure lack any empathy and invite no collaborative response.

Not only does Hamlin control Anne's body through his objectification of her figure, but he also targets her mind. His own passivity shuts down Anne's attempts at active critical judgment. Though Hamlin has offered Anne an aesthetic education and has been the source of her internal aesthetic growth, he effectively crushes her display of criticism when he rejects her assessment of his own literary production. He passes along to her a set of newly written poems and asks her to select the ones she thinks are the best and those she thinks should not be published. He tantalizes her with the initial commendation that she is the one "person whom I trust and respect" and "love most in all the world" (2: 85). It is through this praise and trust in her criticism that Anne for the first time feels his expression of love. Yet once she sorts the good from the bad according to her refined critical judgment, she presents them to Hamlin, and he reveals that he has already consulted the aesthetic counsel of his peers. The poem Anne loves best for its gentle realism, "The Ballad of the Ferns," which relates the simple processes in life such as marriage or women taking care of children, is the very poem Hamlin's friends deride and the one he chooses to leave out of publication. Though Anne tries to convince him that there is true beauty in a poem that reveals natural and simple truths, she realizes that Hamlin is more swayed by the poems his aesthete friends admire, those she assesses as "false" and "diseased" (2: 83). She encourages Hamlin to pursue a beauty that is "bolder, simpler, and more healthy" (2: 84). Within a framework of belletristic rhetoric, Anne's judgment can be validated as more tasteful than Hamlin's. In addition, Lee validates Anne's

taste because the poem she admires reflects the sense of empathy Lee promotes. Anne expresses her belief that “there is much more poetry in people who love each other respectably...than in all the nasty situations which modern poets write about” (2: 76). In this statement, she indicates her understanding that health and beauty are also tied to healthy relationships.

Anne’s studies position her as a valid critic of Hamlin’s work, and she momentarily feels a sense of self-worth in being able to help Hamlin identify the beauty that is healthy and socially beneficial. However, even though Hamlin initially encourages the display of Anne’s critical judgment, he succumbs to the pressure of his friends’ opinions. Once he is fully persuaded by his aesthete circle to publish only the morbid poems, he speaks “sharply, brutally” toward Anne “as if to bring home to Anne the unreliableness of her judgment.” (2: 98). Anne begins to realize only at this point that Hamlin’s critical and aesthetic judgment has been affected by false opinion. Because he is “vain” and “professionally jealous” and “afraid of judgment” as well as “avid of the praise, of his own inferiors” he lacks a healthier sense of taste and is devoid of any natural “strong likings, enthusiasms, or aspirations...” (2: 131). Hamlin’s capitulation to the prevailing “popular sentiment” of these unhealthy critics, including Lewis and Madame Elaguine, echoes what Blair notes as the cause for corrupted social taste in general. Blair argues that corrupt taste stems from “envy,” an emotion or response in direct opposition to collaboration (19). Because Hamlin’s motivation lies in personal praise and success rather than internal satisfaction from the beauties of pleasures, his taste is effectively corrupted.

By limiting her body, mind, and aesthetic sensibilities, he limits the satisfaction she might gain as an empathetic human in society. More and more, in the company of the

aesthetes, Anne feels the predicament of her body. She feels useless and motionless. She expresses her desire to be useful in terms of physical movement and relationships; she wants to be “perpetually active in something, to be always trying to understand, and sympathise” (2: 134). Though Anne’s inner aesthetic growth is important, it is not enough. The narrative continues to say, “For, alone with her own thoughts, Anne was beginning to experience an intolerable sense of isolation, an intolerable sense of impotence” (2:135). The inability to act in a socially beneficial way, despite Anne’s access to aesthetic pleasures, limits the power of her aesthetic gains.

Anne’s itch to be active leads her to the inception of her first social project driven by her aesthetic empathy. In *British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes*, Diana Maltz notes that there was a growing number of British aesthetes involved in what she calls “missionary aestheticism,” a movement carried out by those who believed in the effects of beauty to transform environments. The missionary aesthetes believed in bringing that beauty to those they considered needy, much in the same way as Blair saw *belles lettres* and Matthew Arnold saw literary criticism as means of beauty that could reform society. Anne illustrates a type of missionary aestheticism as she seeks to improve the aesthetic and living conditions of the poor in a slum called Cold Fremley. Zorn notes that Lee’s exposure to the industrial landscape where she witnessed the “slums of Newcastle” prompted her to seek ways of bringing social reform through aesthetic appreciation, which most likely influenced her depiction of Cold Fremley (133).

Anne’s critical judgment allows her to assess the landscape of Cold Fremley with her aesthetic eye, reading it as a picture. When she learns that there is an entire sector of society in which women with illegitimate children are forced to live in grotesque cabins

like "sties," plagued with illness and disease, she is moved to aid them, especially as she learns how their unaesthetic, stagnant living conditions create perpetual illness and disease (2:162). She sees "the wide river, between its low sedgy banks of boggy green; the reddish storm sunset reflected in clotted flame-coloured masses in its thick grey waters; the moon rising, a spectral crescent on the blue evening sky" and she hears "the quail of the frogs, the cries of the water-fowl. . ." (2:162). Lee uses aesthetic imagery to illustrate the nature of the place and to reveal how Anne's aesthetic sensibilities lead her to empathize with the people who live in such an unhealthy place where life is stagnant. The very aesthetic descriptions "boggy green," "clotted," "thick grey waters" clearly reflect the lack of movement, an echo of Hamlin's increasingly grey color palette at the beginning of the novel. The effect of the place, as she remembers this picture in her memory, incites a visceral reaction, making her dizzy and physically sick. Her response illustrates what Morgan calls "motional empathy," those movements of the body that respond in reaction to the form of the aesthetic object (33). In this scene, the motional empathy extends to Anne's ethical and altruistic empathy. It is Anne's empathetic, bodily response that drives her physical reaction and her desire to change the conditions for these people. She begins to see the potential of redeeming the world through beauty. Anne is unsuccessful in her social project, though, because Hamlin, the proprietor of the area, sees only the unaesthetic depiction of the slum as material for a striking poem, a production that would only benefit his own career.

Lee shows that the problem with unhealthy bodies and unhealthy responses like Hamlin's is actually a communal problem, the faulty interrelationships between those of undeveloped taste. Hamlin's community of friends and companions infects the state of his

taste and health. Edmund Lewis, the aesthete friend Anne grows to despise, is instrumental in swaying Hamlin toward the morbid. Lewis, at one point, entertains the adolescent, virgin daughters of the vicar of Wotton, showing off his nude drawings of women in order to shock them. Anne sees nothing morally wrong in the pictures themselves and has studied anatomy, enabling her to criticize the images from a formal perspective. Still, she realizes that Lewis is simply taking advantage of the girls' ignorance for his own consumption of morbid pleasure and control over their reactions (2:147). Lewis's appeals to sensuality do not result in empathy but exploitation. He provides nothing in terms of beneficial aesthetic training for these young women, yet he wields a power over them because of his control of sexual images. When Anne confronts Hamlin, he admits casually, with no remorse, that "It wasn't good taste, certainly" (2:151). Anne reacts incredulously in her own thoughts: "Good taste! Is there nothing higher than taste in the world?" (2:151). Because Anne is not disturbed by the drawings, it is obvious she is disturbed more by the result of sharing the drawings, one that emphasizes sexual control. Neither the manipulative "pleasure" that Lewis gains from the experience nor the naïve, embarrassed "pleasure" that the girls receive result in a sense of mutual appreciation and harmony.

Hamlin's Russian cousin and lover, Madame Elaguine, also illustrates the dangers of a consumptive nature in which the body is never satisfied and continues to prey upon others, infecting the whole society. Madame Elaguine exercises an infectious power over Hamlin's body, and she feeds off of others without empathy, draining them of any energy. Anne notices that after much time spent with the woman, Hamlin possesses a "half physical, half spiritual...vague helpless, half-stupefied look," which leads Anne to believe he has let other substances--opium, alcohol, and even Madame Elaguine herself—take control

of his body, draining him of what energy and vitality he had left (3:178). Madame Elaguine, the Gothic vampire, represents the consumptive nature of the Decadent society.¹⁸ Denisoff claims that Lee feared an “economic exploitation” that “if left unchecked” would “ultimately destroy feminine Decadence marked by aesthetic, emotional, and historical sensitivity” (89). Lee’s concerns echo Blair’s fears that “cruelty and greed...may corrupt [citizens’] souls or infect their markets” (Longaker 180). Blair responded to “the problem of consumptive excess” with the corrective of his rhetorical theory (180). Longaker explains that Blair believed taste would “instill a sense of civic or citizenly virtue...suitable to a healthy commercial society” (181). Like Blair, whose civic virtues of “moderation” and “toleration” are embedded within his rhetorical theory of taste (181), Lee promoted health, defined by satisfaction and empathy as opposed to the vampiric consumption that destroyed both the health of individuals and entire societies.

In the dystopic ending, Anne forsakes the desire for health she sought and relinquishes her potential for further aesthetic development and social reform. She chastises herself for having been “selfish” in “preserving her own soul from infection” and “of keeping her own soul strong and active” rather than taking care of Hamlin (3:270). She convinces herself that she had “selfishly thought of the world’s miseries, which she could not prevent, instead of thinking of Hamlin, whom she might have saved” (3:270). Finally, she scolds herself for indulging “in dreams of liberty” in going off to Girton, where she hoped to expand her mind (3:270). Lee ironically employs the traditional trope of a

¹⁸ Lee was familiar with the works of Karl Marx and sympathized with socialism later in her life. She may have drawn from his critique of consumer society in *Capital: Critique of Political Economy* (1867), in which he employs the metaphor of the vampire, representing a capitalistic state defined by greed that is never satisfied.

marriage concluding a novel to create an unsatisfying ending. Anne comes to the conclusion that it was an “inevitable necessity” to marry Hamlin, and she must forsake any sense of “happiness” found in “independence, the activity, the serenity, the possibility of a life of noble companionship” (3:277). The very benefits of taste I have been describing in Lee’s system of ethics—activity or movement, serenity or satisfaction, and noble companionship or empathetic relationships—Anne denies herself. She denies herself the instinct “of superior soul energy,” which she claims in the moment is “the birthright of men,” reversing the progress of an unsexed and ungendered bodily health (3:279). Yet she struggles against these social codes. The novel relates that she “had a very strong sense that marriage without love was a mere legalized form of prostitution” and the “idea sickened her whole soul” (3:280).

In many ways, Lee’s depiction of morality as health implicates the society as being thoroughly unhealthy because of the prevailing gendered norms that kept women inactive—limiting her according to her sexuality and stifling her health. Though aesthetic response may be subjective and internal, the function of health was collaborative and empathetic, shared socially. Lee’s novel is a call for a community effort to reverse the cultural norms that limit women’s freedom and development of taste. She urges an aesthetic rhetoric built upon freedom of movement—movement of the individual and movement of ideas and a healthy internal balance. Ultimately, Lee’s search for her version of *sensus communis* could only be found in an aesthetic of health and empathy divorced from restrictive ideals that tie aesthetics, taste, and morality to gender and sexuality.

Conclusion:

Throughout this chapter, I have asserted that Lee, through her non-fiction, constructs a rhetorical aesthetic based on what she identifies as the genderless and sexless healthy activities of the body. The relationship she draws between health and taste extends throughout the rhetorical tradition, featuring prominently in Blair's rhetorical theory. As an aesthete, Lee rejected Victorian morality and standards of aesthetics, but in her zeal to reform society, she sought a source or standard for morality outside of religion and found it in the social discourses on health. She articulates that the key concepts of movement, bodily satisfaction, and empathy (the physical feeling into another) define a standard of spiritual health. She contrasts these ideals with the unhealthy body which is lethargic, consumptive, and controlling.

I have presented her novel *Miss Brown* as a narrative dystopia that illustrates the dangers for women who find themselves in an unhealthy society. Lee uses the first half of the novel to demonstrate through the protagonist, Anne Brown, how movement increases one's aesthetic perception and translates into empathy that can be employed for the good of relationships and society. Like Jameson and Rossetti, Lee promotes collaboration and empathy through her concept of aesthetic health.

However, in the second half of the novel, Lee warns about the destructive consequences of lethargy and complacency, which turn into an insatiable desire to consume, corrupting society. This chapter asserts that Lee's bodily aesthetic creatively transforms belletristic rhetoric into an appropriate theory for her time.

Coda: Further Acquiring Taste

This project began with a simple interest in images of art and flowers in British women's writing. The proliferation of these images prompted me to ask how these writers were using the images rhetorically. I decided to examine how the idea of taste, associated with arts and gardens, fit within a strand of rhetorical theory, and I discovered a recent revival of interest in Hugh Blair's synthesis of eighteenth century taste in his work *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*.

As I explain in my introduction, critics have levied accusations against Blair's theory of taste for being elitist, passive, misogynist, and culturally irrelevant, inviting skepticism regarding the validity of using his theory in a project examining women's rhetoric. However, scholars such as Lois Agnew, Linda Ferreira-Buckley, and S. Michael Halloran have worked to redeem Blair's reputation and re-establish the civic function of taste. Their studies position Blair's theorization of taste within the history of classical rhetoric and explore his influence on Victorian education, confirming it as a socially beneficial scheme.

Little scholarship in this revitalization of belletristic rhetoric, though, has associated it with women's rhetoric, despite the many deliberations about women's "taste" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As I looked for a connection between Blair and women's writing, I found in Herman Cohen's outline of Blair's theory of taste the roots of women's rhetoric. Cohen's description of Blair's taste as natural, improvable through education, and established through reasoned dialogue triggered associations in my mind with women's rhetorical strategies, goals, and modes. I began to see how Blair's theory of taste might inform women's depictions of nature, their calls for better education, and their embrace of collaboration and empathy in conversation. This dissertation grew into a cross-

disciplinary recovery project with four major goals: to illustrate a fruitful method of interdisciplinary research by examining women's literature as a repository for rhetorical theory; to recover prominent nineteenth-century literary women as competent rhetors and rhetorical theorists; to extend the theorization of women's rhetorical goals, modes, and strategies; and to suggest that critical taste, performed through literary and aesthetic criticism, offers a powerful means of social engagement as opposed to a mere preservation of elite culture.

A project of this scope naturally presents limitations. One of the largest omissions in this dissertation is a discussion of class and nationality. While I examine these writers with the assumption that all were middle-upper class, white British female writers, the project does not explore other identities of nationality. For instance, Anna Jameson, though named a British writer, was born in Dublin and her father was an Irish miniature painter. She also travelled extensively throughout the continent and to Canada, experiences that no doubt shaped her perspectives on aesthetics, style, and women's roles. Christina Rossetti's father was an Italian painter, and her family embraced Italian culture in literature, art, and politics. Vernon Lee, as noted in chapter four, was born in France and spent the majority of her life on the continent rather than in England, remaining in Italy for the longest stretch of her life. Though I briefly mention Giambattista Vico's theorization of *sensus communis*, a more sustained look at Italian, Irish, and other national rhetorical trends would add depth to this project.

My focus on middle-upper class white women leaves out a discussion of lower class women or women of varying ethnic backgrounds. While looking at conversation, collaboration, listening, and silence as productive modes of rhetoric within these women's

class settings, I acknowledge that such modes may be theorized in radically different ways from another class perspective. It would be interesting to examine how the designator “natural” in terms of taste relating to the physical universe or to physical bodies would change depending upon a change in geography or body composition. For instance, Jean Rhys’s post-colonial text *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) speaks back to the assumed “naturalness” of British domesticity in Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and constructs an alternative “natural” environment in the protagonist’s Jamaican home. How might such authors theorize taste and women’s form of communication? How might their floral symbolism and use of art differ based on different cultural codes?

Pedagogically, this project suggests one way of approaching the issue of “style” in a composition or literature class beyond identification or imitation of rhetorical strategies. This study has prompted me to think how I might ask students to think about literary style as a possible reflection of values. From the various writing styles across the disciplines to the images and speeches in media, a discussion of style can reveal what various communities value and how that style affects how we relate to one another. Looking at the issues of style as related to gender or other power structures can help students see that coded language has definite societal effects as it did in the nineteenth-century. The theory of the sublime positioned creative genius in the masculine realm, and this theory revealed itself in practical limitations on women’s forms of expression. On the other end, as active critics of taste and style, we can use that knowledge to positively shape society and promote habits of open-mindedness, critical thinking, and empathy in other relationships.

Overall, this project calls for continued reappraisal of assumptions concerning codes of gender and ethics. Each of the women in this dissertation repurposed language and

imagery to challenge gender binaries and oppressive views of women, and such strategies offer valuable models for a visual culture. I also propose continued recovery of women's rhetoric from varied sources. Collaboration, listening, and silence remain undervalued forms of rhetoric, and the more we explore diverse theorizations of these modes, the more material we will have to feature them prominently within rhetorical theory and practice. Hugh Blair encouraged the free exchange of ideas and active critical thinking; this work also invites scholars to continue discussing aesthetics and taste, rather than dismissing belletristic rhetoric as an unfortunate split from truly productive civic rhetoric. Finally, my dissertation invites scholars to perform more interdisciplinary work, specifically in the fruitful collaboration of rhetorical and literary scholarship.

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ABSTRACT

A TASTEFUL COLLABORATION: BELLETRISTIC RHETORIC AND WOMEN'S RHETORICAL ARTS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH LITERATURE

By Mary Elizabeth McCulley, Ph.D., 2016
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"A Tasteful Collaboration: Belletristic Rhetoric and Women's Rhetorical Arts in Nineteenth-Century British Literature" reclaims the prominent nineteenth-century literary women Anna Jameson, Christina Rossetti, and Vernon Lee as key contributors to rhetorical theory. This dissertation examines how eighteenth-century rhetorical theory, specifically belletristic rhetoric as defined by Hugh Blair, provides a paradigm for advancing women's rhetorical goals, modes, and strategies. While belletristic rhetoric has been denigrated as a departure from effective, civic rhetoric, this project extends the work of scholars such as Lois Agnew, Linda Ferreira-Buckley, and S. Michael Halloran by positioning Blair's work as a continuation of classical rhetoric as seen in its goals to improve the individual and influence social morality. Working within the assumption that active critical reception (or taste) is equally as important as composition in the rhetorical process, these women writers legitimize their roles as rhetorical theorists and critics by demonstrating their authority on taste. Jameson, Rossetti, and Lee enrich the rhetorical tradition by highlighting the value of women's rhetorical modes that scholars Jane Donawerth, Cheryl Glenn, and Krista Radcliff have identified as conversation, collaboration, listening, and silence. This work also examines these women's adept rhetorical strategies in translating, "poaching," and revising men's aesthetic philosophies as well as repurposing the traditional visual imagery of arts and botanical imagery to illustrate women's rhetorical capabilities.

This dissertation contributes to an interdisciplinary study of literature and rhetoric, suggesting innovative approaches to studying nineteenth-century women's literature while enhancing the still emerging field of women's rhetoric. Furthermore, the project advances the field of visual rhetoric as it analyzes how literary women produced visual art as part of the rhetorical function of the text, developed theories regarding a rhetorical aesthetic, and employed rhetorical uses of *ekphrasis* and visual metaphors as part of their arguments about women in society. Overall, my dissertation concludes that these nineteenth-century literary women revitalize the historical reputation of belletristic rhetoric and establish themselves as female rhetors in their own right within the larger rhetorical tradition.