The publication history of Hugh Blair's Lectures on rhetoric and belles lettres in the British Isles, 1765-1820

Abstract
This dissertation is a publication history of Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (London, 1783) in the British Isles, from 1765 to 1820. Hugh Blair's Lectures had a formative impact upon the late eighteenth-century development of English language writing instruction in Scottish universities. The book also worked to foster a critical capacity in its readers, and acted as a style guide of sorts during the early nineteenth-century explosion of literacy in Britain. Between 1765 and 1820, the Lectures were composed, published, possibly pirated, abridged, and republished, before they lapsed into the public domain and were finally legally reprinted on a massive scale by many producers. This project charts the nature of the work's immense popularity, measures the commercial factors that encouraged its reproduction, and catalogues the many iterations of the text that emanated from publishing operations throughout England, Scotland, and Ireland between 1765 and 1820. Such a study raises specific methodological questions about how we should understand the literary curation of important Scottish Enlightenment texts, and general questions about the related academic histories of the fields of Rhetoric and English Literature.

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Upon retirement, Blair published several of his lectures in Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres. In 1783 Blair was one of the founder members of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. He served as its Literary President from 1789 to 1796. As an adherer to Scottish common sense realism, Blair's theories are founded in the belief that the principles of rhetoric evolve from the principles of nature. Blair's definition of taste reflects this sentiment: "The power of receiving pleasure from the beauties of nature and art: (15). His analysis of the nature of taste is one of his most important contributions to compositional theories because taste, according to Blair, is foundational to rhetoric and necessary for successful written and spoken discourse. Blair, Hugh. Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres. 2 vols. London: Printed for W. Strahan, T. Cadell, and W. Creech, 1783. 2 vols. Edinburgh and London: Archibald Constable and Co., 1820. Collier, John Payne. “The Poetical and Literary Character of the Late John Philip Kemble,” New Monthly Magazine 36 (February 1832), 174–83. Higgons, Bevil. Historical and Critical Remarks on Bishop Burnet's History of his Own Time. London: Printed for P. Meighan, 1725. Historical Manuscripts Commission. Lectures. Rhetoric and belles lettres. By. Hugh blair, D.D. f.r.s., Professor of rhetoric and belles lettres in the university and minister of the high church, of edinburgh. 8TO a J&emofv of tjc Stumor's mic. To which are added, Copious Questions; and an Analysis of each Lecture, By abraham mills, Teacher of rhetoric and belles lettres. Stercotgp 2£ntbetstti?, CEollesc anfc School lEtoftfoit. PUBLISHED BY.