

SHAFTESBURY'S THEORY OF AESTHETICS IN ITS
RELATION TO EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
LITERARY CRITICISM

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PREFACE

The study of the great writers of the past sometimes brings only stirrings of racial memories, and pangs of nostalgia for the old days, but the most inspiring effect comes when we succeed in establishing a communion with the spirit of the past. In these instances, we feel a contact with the living mind of man as he faced the problems of existence through centuries of struggle and effort. Under the spell of this communication the figures of literature step forth from the page, and become more real than flesh and blood. Nor is it always the major writers of a period who best interpret the distinguishing characteristics of thought of their age. Some important developments of thought have found their best representatives in those writers who are usually classed as minor figures. Such was the case in the transition period between Classicism and Romanticism. This period lasted almost a century, but the most representative writer was probably Lord Shaftesbury, who combined in one mind both classical and romantic tendencies.

This study purposes to evaluate the theories

of aesthetics that were advanced by Shaftesbury, and to trace through them the spirit of romanticism in his literary criticism. For the suggestion of this subject, I am very grateful to Dr. L. M. Ellison. I am also indebted to him for his aid in re-creating the atmosphere of the eighteenth century, and for helping Shaftesbury emerge from the background. I am sure that I could never have completed my study without his encouraging interest.

I wish to express my appreciation, also, to Miss Mamie Walker, whose kindly advice has helped me over many difficult problems.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY EFFORT TO FORMULATE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF AESTHETICS

The full effects of the stimulation to scientific thought that grew out of the Baconian system of thought, and that was given further impetus by the discovery of the laws of gravitation and the theories of the philosophers, Locke and Voltaire, during the seventeenth century, were not felt in England until about the beginning of the eighteenth century. Men everywhere were thrilled by the intellectual achievements of the past two centuries, and it was a natural consequence that the dominant characteristic of the period called "The Enlightenment" was an almost implicit faith in the reasoning powers of man. With the enthusiasm natural to disciples of a new principle, the intellectuals of the eighteenth century proclaimed the supremacy of the human understanding. All existing institutions and theories were subjected to a relentless intellectual scrutiny, and those that could not stand an honest, rational examination were declared invalid. It was truly The Enlightenment-----the "Aufklärung" ---and reason held a higher place in man's esteem than ever before or since. Consequently, the Age of En-

lightment saw not only the collapse of many superstitions and beliefs, but also the beginnings of new principles in government, in religion and in society. Nor was this probing for first principles and this quest for truth limited to those fields; it was particularly noticeable in the new field of literary criticism, in which an effort was made, not only to criticise the literary works of the period according to category, but to find some means of forming a standard of taste, and of establishing some sort of objective criteria to aid in determining beauty.

Foremost among these pioneers of modern aesthetics was Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, who is generally conceded to be the most important, as well as the most plausible, of the Deists, whose aim was to rationalize religion. Shaftesbury's place in philosophy was assured by his belief that the individual possesses not only an innate sense of beauty for outward forms but an instinct which distinguishes between beauty and deformity of actions and sentiments, and which he called, for the first time in English Thought, "Conscience". Many of his attempts to analyze beauty were, of course, unfruitful, but nevertheless, they contributed a great deal to the youthful philosophy of aesthetics. A survey of the literary

criticism of the eighteenth century will reveal the development of many of his theories, but in order to understand their significance, it will be necessary to give a brief résumé of the history of aesthetics and its problems.

The philosophy of aesthetics, although inseparable from the main body of philosophy, did not begin to receive much attention from speculative thinkers until about the beginning of the eighteenth century. To be sure, the Ancients had developed a very fine art, but their interest was practical, centering on methods of artistic instruction, rather than on the nature of beauty itself. Such small contributions as were made were submerged in the larger interests of ancient philosophy, and although Graeco-Roman judgment of art was sure and true, the lack of a subjective feeling in the main body of classical philosophy hindered the development of a theory of art.

But even Christianity, with its emphasis on the subjective, its stress on the internal and its interest in the problems of the soul, failed to develop any theories of the beautiful, or of the imagination. This was partly due to the predominating spirit of Asceticism during the earlier centuries of Christianity.

and partly to the objectivistic influence of ancient philosophy. It was not until the Renaissance that any great interest was taken in the problems of aesthetics, and even then, the theories and the solution of problems were taken almost in their entirety from the Naturalistic philosophies of the Ancients.

These empirical views and theories of art, which were not all discarded until after the Enlightenment, included a belief in the existence of a positive standard of art. Both Christian and Pagan philosophies included a belief in the existence of an absolute truth, though, to be sure, their theories of means of discovering this truth differed radically. The thinkers of the eighteenth century inherited this concept, but their method of approach differed from their predecessors' by demanding a rational mode of investigation. They believed that by intellectual means, man might ultimately find not only the first principles of art, but the fundamental nature of beauty itself. Thus began the first speculations which materially contributed to the body of aesthetic thought. But to be able to rate the value of these contributions, it will be necessary to appraise briefly, the nature of the philosophy of aesthetics.

The philosophy of aesthetics, as it is revealed to-

day, does not consist merely of definitions and negations concerning art, but rather has the task of classification and systemization of the problems that arise from reflection upon art, and the criticism of errors that act as a stimulus to critical minds. It defines "art" as a "pure" or "lyrical intuition", as opposed to other forms of mental activity. This concept of art does not exist as an innate idea, but proves its existence by operating in the individual products of art which it generates, such as paintings, poetry, architecture, et cetera. In just such a manner does the whole philosophy of aesthetics operate in the judgments it has formed, and in the problems solved. As these judgments and problems make up the main body of aesthetics some acquaintance with them is necessary to form a concept of the nature of aesthetics. It is safe to say, that of this body, the most important questions have been those that concern the nature of beauty and of art, and the problems that arise from literary criticism involving the establishment of a **correct** taste. These have been the controversial center of critical thought for the past two centuries, but in the main, some grounds of agreement have been reached in nearly every case.

The nature of beauty is the keystone on which the

erection of the philosophy of aesthetics depends, as on the perception of the evanescent substance of beauty the whole situation rests. The naturalistic philosophy held that beauty belongs to the beautiful object itself, and is real and objective. This statement, however, is difficult to accept, because the nature of beauty depends largely on the character imputed to the work by the artist or by the spectator. It follows, therefore, that beauty is really dependent on the mind for its existence, and could not exist either in art or nature, except for our interference.

Closely bound up with the inquiry as to the nature of beauty is the quest for the true origin of "art". Conceding "art" to be "pure" or "lyrical intuition", as distinguished from other forms of mental activity, such as history, philosophy, natural science, or other utilitarian purposes, aesthetics maintains that as beauty exists only in the minds of those who perceive it, there are, of necessity, neither "artistic" objects, nor any objective criteria of beauty. Consequently, there can be no division of arts, since physical qualities do not enter into the question. A reader with any sense for literature and art, will find in a line of poetry at once the melody and images of music and

and painting, as well as the strength and unity of sculpture and architecture. The same thing is true of a great picture or symphony, which are not merely things for the eye and ear, but for the whole soul, recording themselves not only as color and line and harmony, but as speech and sound and sculptural strength. These qualities cannot be analyzed, however, for they elude us and melt into a unity, proving that art is one, and cannot be divided.

Closely associated with the theory of "artistic objects" is the problem of literary category or "kinds". This problem arose through the tendency of literary critics to classify literary works as to "kinds", based on physical characteristics,--- tragic, comic, lyric, et cetera. Allowing this classification to be convenient for publishers and readers, it is against the fundamental principles of aesthetics to permit criticism on this score. Some attempt to preserve this practice by basing the classification on philosophical theories was made by one school of literary criticism, when it established the precedent of classifying as lyric, epic, or dramatic. The objection to this was, that both epics and dramas are essentially lyrical, differing from each other only by degrees of objectification, and hence not subject to such classifi-

cation. Still other attempts were made to classify literature on the empirical basis of feelings, which designated types as "the sublime", "the comic", "the graceful", and so on through the gamut of emotions and impressions. Though these theories form some residue in the field of aesthetics, they have been long disregarded.

Another problem that evolved through the efforts of literary criticism to maintain standard was the question of the type of language that might be considered "poetic" or "artistic". This effort to restrict the use of language grew out of the legitimate distinction between styles. This distinction is to be treated, however, as merely a practical, didactic piece of pedagogical classification and not as a concept based on philosophical theories. For as language is a means of expression, and as expression is never logical but always affective, it cannot be subject to such divisions. Expression could not be "simple" in the sense of lacking elaboration, or "ornate" in the sense of containing extraneous matter; it is always adorned with itself. The philosophy of language is identical with that of poetry and art--- it passes beyond the physical to the realms of the mind, where it has its only existence.

Another problem which occupied the theorists among the literary critics of the Enlightenment was that of the establishment of an invariable standard of "taste." Their confidence in this possibility was due, beyond doubt, to their acceptance of a theory of objective absolute truth, which might be determined by scientific methods. The principle of this method was intellectualistic. Knowledge was accounted the greatest power of the mind, and by increasing knowledge man would not only become virtuous but would also acquire the correct rules for judging and creating art. Since the latter part of the eighteenth century this theory has been abandoned, and judgments or taste have become increasingly subjective, until now there is no universally accepted tenet of the validity of taste.

The solutions of the foregoing problems have been rather satisfactorily agreed upon, but there is one problem that arose to alarmingly increasing proportions during the eighteenth century, and which is still unsettled to the satisfaction of all. This is the problem of the Romantic conception of art, which asserts antithesis to the classic art and thus denies the unity of art. Romanticism upholds the primary importance of feeling, passion, and fancy, as being more appropriate

to the Modern age than the rationalistic literature of classicism after the French Manner. This reaction was in part justifiable since the literature of that period was shallow, unimaginative, unfeeling and deficient in a deep poetic sense; but Romanticism as a revolt against the Classicism that in its entirety stands for serenity and infinity of the artistic image, is of necessity a raw emotionalism that refuses to undergo purification and Catharsis. For this reason Romanticism has been called "disease", while classicism was called "health" and it is interesting to note that the seeds of this half insane emotionality of the Romanticists were sown in the literary criticism of the rational, healthy, eighteenth century.

All these theories and problems of aesthetics were in part worked out during the period of the eighteenth century by the introduction of rational evaluation and the application of natural laws to literary criticism. It is the purpose of this study to appraise the significance of the principles of aesthetics advanced by one of the most distinguished thinkers of the eighteenth century, Lord Shaftesbury, and to trace his influence in the literary criticism of the period.

Shaftesbury's theories of philosophy as a whole,

were both a direct refutation of the materialistic philosophy of Hobbes, which denies a positive moral standard, and an attempt to answer the all-engrossing question of the century, "How shall morality survive when the foundations of Christian theology are crumbling?" Shaftesbury and his school inherited a sort of pantheistic sentiment that "whatever is, is right," along with a provoking tendency to easy optimism which was apt to overlook the evidence of natural evil and moral wickedness, but, nevertheless, his theory that man possesses an innate sense of beauty and deformity, not only of externalities, but also of sentiments, thoughts and actions, was of tremendous importance in the philosophy of the period. To be sure, this sense of beauty, or "conscience" was a principle which could not be demonstrated, and which must be recognized only by a kind of intellectual instinct which probably went sorely against the grain of the more material minded. But its chief importance, which was to keep before the world the baffling question, "What is the origin of virtuous and artistic impulses?" cannot be underestimated. With Shaftesbury the impulses toward beauty and toward morality were one and the same, and it is from this point that we shall trace his theories of beauty.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RELATION OF SHAFTESBURY'S THEORY OF BEAUTY TO HIS PHILOSOPHY IN GENERAL

Shaftesbury's chief aim was to set forth a philosophy that would establish a reconciliation between the old and new in theology. He proposed to do this by banishing the supernatural and yet retain the divine in religion. There was a genuine need of some stabilizing doctrine, for the sceptical school that followed Hobbes was draining the life blood from the whole body of Christian religion and its system of morality. Shaftesbury and his school created God out of nature, one whose laws were embodied in the natural laws, as opposed to the supernatural phenomena of theology. Thus natural laws were not only right, as Hobbes and his followers declared, but divine, and man's proof of the divine order was in his instinctive recognition of the beauty of the universe. In this philosophy, divinity does not retire to a distant past or to a future world, but continues to irradiate the present, for nature itself is divine. Divinity and beauty, then, are evident in the actions and sentiments of man, who, as the chief work of nature,

must show the most conspicuous marks of divinity. Shaftesbury believed that by a cultivation of the natural instincts of man toward divinity, man might achieve that final consummation of religious experience, harmony between nature and man.

Shaftesbury's theory of an aesthetic sense was thus evolved in an effort to establish a moral system, but its significance is of none the less importance in the field of aesthetics. He believed that men are born with ideas of divinity or beauty and that the enthusiasm engendered as a consequence of this perception can not be avoided. He defines this sense as being "innate", or an "instinct", and later defined instinct as "that which Nature teaches, exclusive of Art, Culture or Discipline."¹ Since Nature itself shares the divinity of God, it follows that this capacity for finding the beautiful is of divine origin, and makes man share the divinity of nature. Not only does man perceive the beautiful in outward forms, but he is also able to discern the beauty or deformity of morals and manners. Neither can the soul or the mind escape the responsibilities of this

¹ Characteristics, Vol. II, p. 411.

faculty, but must continue to appraise and judge all that comes into its sphere of contact regardless of any desire to remain indifferent or neutral.

It feels the Soft and the Harsh, the Agreeable and Disagreeable, in the Affections, and finds a Foul and Fair, a Harmonious and a Dissonant, as really and truly here, as in any musical Numbers, or in the Outward Forms or Representations of sensible Things. Nor can it withhold its Admiration and Extasy, its Aversion and Scorn, any more in what relates to one than to the other of these Subjects. So that to deny the common and Natural Sense of a Sublime and Beautiful in Things, will appear an Affection merely, to anyone who considers duly of this Affair.²

Shaftesbury believed further that the heart is compelled to ally itself on the side of what is honest and natural, and hence beautiful, and to disapprove of what is dishonest, unnatural, and deformed. He believed that even the most hardened and obstinate of men is convinced of a standard of beauty and moral truth. The only difference between the moral sense and the aesthetic sense, according to Shaftesbury, lies in the objects to which they apply, ----beauty is good.

What is Beautiful is harmonious and proportionable; what is harmonious and proportionable is True;

² Characteristics, Vol. II, p. 29.

and what is at once both beautiful and true, is of consequence, agreeable and good.³

Allowing that beauty is good, which was the standard that Shaftesbury set, the reader is not a little puzzled in finding there any objective standard of beauty, unless he follows Shaftesbury through a devious maze of generalities.

That which is truly natural to each Creature is its Perfection and withal its Happiness, or Good.⁴

As the real good of any creature comes through the cultivation of the instincts and faculties designed to promote the harmony between man and nature, beauty is that which exemplifies nature's standard and which conforms to natural principles, both in form and sentiments. Shaftesbury's ideas of beauty and good, then, are utilitarian to a certain extent, since he believed that that which best promotes the interests of the species is true beauty.

'Tis impossible we can advance the least in any Relish or Tast of outward Symmetry and Order; without acknowledging that the proportionate and regular

³Characteristics, Vol. III, p. 183.

⁴Ibid., p. 213.

State, is the truly prosperous and natural in every Subject. The same Features which make Deformity, create Incommodiousness and Disease. And the same Shapes and Proportions which make Beauty afford Advantage by adapting to Activity and Use. Even in the imitative or designing Arts the Truth or Beauty of every Figure or Statue is measured from the Perfection of Nature, in her just adapting of every Limb and Proportion to the Activity, Strength, Dexterity, Life and Vigor of the Particular Species or Animal designed.

Thus Beauty and Truth are plainly joined with the notion of Utility and convenience, even in the Apprehension of every ingenious Artist, the Architect, the Statuary, or the Painter.⁵

Shaftesbury made a further application of this notion of utility and caused it to include not only the physical aspects of beauty but more intangible properties, such as conditions of the body, actions, and thoughts. The condition or action that contributes most to the real welfare of the body and soul is by nature the most beautiful. He praised health as "the inward beauty of the body,"⁶ and declared that virtue, which he often praised as the highest form of beauty, is the natural good of man.

We see then, not only that "Whatever is natural is right and divine", but that "whatever is natural is divine and beautiful" and that nature furnishes

⁵ Characteristics, Vol. III P. 180-181.

⁶ Ibid., P. 181

at once a moral standard and a standard of beauty. Shaftesbury intended the standard of beauty to be an objective measure, for he insisted that the quality of beauty belonged, not to the mind, but to the object or action itself. He recognized the difficulty of analyzing this quality, but attributed it to the fact that not one "beauty" alone is involved in judging an object, but a complicated number of "beauties", which, unless separated, can not be reduced to their essentials. Should this be done, however, in every case this beauty would be found to be the natural beauty of their own particular kind. He named some of these "charms" or "beauties" as "figure", "colour", "motion", and "sound", of which, he said the simplest is "figure". He admitted that there was no agreement as yet on this standard of beauty, but he maintained that the standard for each kind in nature is its particular "Good", and that the difficulty does not lie in the uncertainty of the standard but in the difficulty that arises through applying it. He ridiculed the idea that mere opinion is at the bottom of any judgment, and accounted for the differences that arise in individual evaluations by the fact that unless the standard is felt, there can be no agree-

ment. The standard, he felt, could be subject to no equivocation. "It (the Standard) is of Nature's Impression, naturally conceived, and by no Art or Counter-Nature to be eradicated or destroyed."⁷

Despite this belief in a positive standard of Beauty, Shaftesbury's speculations elsewhere led him almost to the threshold of the principle of subjective beauty. He stated many of the tenets that approached the subjective principle but somehow failed to apply them to beauty specifically. He declared that sensory impressions are variable, even to the extent that what is pain to one person may be pleasure to another, but he did not conceive this to mean that what is beauty to one person may be deformity to another, unless, as he tells us, one of the two should possess a "corrupt opinion". Again, he stated that thought is our only reality.

Thought we own pre-eminent, and confess the reallest of Beings; the only Existence of which we are made sure of, by being conscious. All else may be only Dream and Shadow. All which even Sense suggests maybe deceitful.

⁷ Characteristics, Vol. II, p. 42.

⁸ Ibid., p. 369.

Though clearly aware of the illusory quality of all sensations, Shaftesbury's theory of a natural standard halted his progress in applying this subjective theory to beauty.

Shaftesbury believed that the perception of beauty created the noblest and highest passions of man, since through this perception his relation to divinity is established. Beauty raises the imagination of men to partake of the divine inspiration which, by its power, leads him to seek some means of becoming a harmonious part of the universal harmony. Under the spell of this enthusiasm, every man pursues the ideal of beauty and harmony according to the capacities and inclinations of his nature. To the most highly developed soul, a single beauty is not sufficient, and such a one seeks a coalition of beauties that leads to the most perfect harmony conceivable, the good of mankind at large. Thus, beauty is made to attain a truly moral aspect.

Shaftesbury calls this quest for beauty "love" when it seeks beyond the physical aspects of beauty for that of inner proportions. He maintained that all beauty contains a moral part. Even those who admire beauty in the fair sex and who would be greatly amused to hear of a moral part in their amours, are, accord-

ing to Shaftesbury, in pursuit of this higher beauty.

Why else is the very air of Foolishness enough to cloy a lover, at first sight? Why does an Idiot-Look and Manner destroy the Effect of all those outward Charms, and rid the Fair-One of her Power; tho regularly armed, in all the Exactness of Feature and Complexion?⁹

He sums up the whole theory in these words.

We may infer that there is a power in Numbers, Harmony, Proportion and Beauty of every kind, which naturally captivates the Heart and raises the Imagination to an Opinion or Conceit of something Majestic and divine.¹⁰

Since without this imagination or inspiration, the perception of beauty would be in no wise differentiated from other sensual perceptions, its presence is of the utmost importance to man. Without its divine power, he could scarcely be said to exist except in an animal fashion and with no other enjoyment than the satisfaction of his coarsest appetites and passions. It may be said, then, that the ability to recognize beauty and deformity is the mark that distinguishes man from the lower order of animals. Shaftesbury believed that animals were capable of enjoying beauty only as it satisfied their appetites and physical needs.

⁹ Characteristics, Vol. I, p. 137.

¹⁰ Ibid, Vol. III, p. 30

Because of this lack, an animal is esteemed "good" if it conforms to the laws of its own kind and prospers physically. In this way it fits into the universal system and achieves the "good" possible of its kind. Man, alone, is accounted virtuous, and that only when he directs this enthusiasm for beauty to conform to the rules of what he conceives to be the nature of the universe. In this way he blends himself into the great pattern of the universe. It is, however, only by a cultivation of the sense of morals and beauty that he is able to catch the strains of divine harmony, and still, Shaftesbury believed that, the judgment of all who have cultivated this sense and beauty will reach the same objective. This again, is due to the belief in an incorruptible standard in Nature.

Harmony is Harmony by nature, let men judge ever so ridiculously of Musick. So is Symmetry and Proportion founded still in Nature, let Man's fancy prove ever so barbarous, or their Fashions ever so Gothic in their architecture, Sculpture, or whatever other designing Art. 'Tis the same case, where Life and Manners are concerned. Virtue has the same fixed Standard. The same Numbers, Harmony and Proportions will have place in Morals; and are discoverable in the Characters and Affections of Mankind; in which are laid the just Foundations of an Art and Science, superior to every other of human Practice and Comprehension.¹¹

¹¹ Characteristics, Vol. I, P. 353.

Shaftesbury believed that this conscious aspiration to put oneself into harmony with the divinity of nature was the highest ideal of the beauty seeking soul. He divided into three different ranks the beauty which man may covet or attain. The first and lowest rank he called "dead forms", including those objects of art or beauties of nature that have no reasoning power, or ability to execute, and, since there is no inner beauty possible in this case, are limited in their appeal and appeal to the senses alone. Second, in rank, he placed the "forms which form beauty", advancing as his criteria that it is not the beautiful object itself that we admire, but the beautifying process and this involves mind. Last, he placed the "Supreme and Sovereign Beauty" that is responsible for the second order, and manifests itself in that highest of all pleasures, sentimental feeling, or "virtuous Motions" as he called it. This brings up his theory of the beauty of sentimentality which he described as the "virtuous Motions which take place when mind joins in assent to the virtuous actions of a good disposition!" It is interesting, too, to note that virtue and divinity are interchangeable and occupy at once the position of the highest form of

beauty. As we have already seen that divinity is inherent in nature, we seem to be justified in assuming that virtue, or sentimentality, is also another manifestation of divinity. At any rate, Shaftesbury considered the sentimental manner and the sentimental pleasure the most natural of pleasures.

Shaftesbury did not distinguish between the perception of the three orders of beauty by any diminution or intensity of the enthusiasm engendered in the beholder. The classification of the three orders is certainly not made on an experimental basis, for he assures us that the inspiration and joy kindled in us in the presence of the beauties of nature, which he designated as a "dead form", are indications of the First Beauty which is the a priori of divinity.

In his theories of literary criticism which likewise should logically involve the first order of beauty, Shaftesbury continued to disregard this classification. He stressed rather the necessity of good taste and the dangers involved in neglecting the development of taste. As he was particularly anxious that the youth of England should be shielded from the examples of "Gothic art" which he thought would debase their standard of taste, he became interested in the problems of literary

criticism. It is in this field that this study pur-
poses to investigate his theories.

CHAPTER THREE

SHAFTESBURY'S THEORY OF TASTE AND ITS FUNCTION IN LIFE AND ART

Shaftesbury's chief merits as a philosopher come through his vindication of human nature from the assaults of the cynics and theologians of his day. The 'moral' or 'aesthetic sense', used to designate the natural tendency to virtue and beauty, works as a divine instinct and directs by its own authority, thus superseding the necessity of an appeal to the selfish instincts, and repudiating the doctrine of supernatural rewards and punishments. Shaftesbury believed that such doctrines are destructive to virtue. The removal of these as external motivations of conduct naturally thrusts the responsibility of action on internal guidance. As human nature shares in the divinity of nature, its organ of guidance is, of necessity, divine. Because of this primitive impulse toward the good and the beautiful, and away from the sordid and wicked, man, who is in accord with nature, leads a virtuous life, regardless of applause, rewards, or punishments.

Should one, who had the countenance of a gentleman ask me, "Why I would avoid being nasty, when nobody was present?" In the first place I should be

fully satisfied that he himself was a very nasty Gentleman who could ask this question, and that it would be a hard matter for me to make him ever conceive what true cleanliness was. However, I might, not withstanding this, be contented to give him a slight answer, and say, 'Twas because I had a Nose.' Should he trouble me further and ask again, 'What if I had a cold? Or what if naturally I had no such nice Smell? I might answer perhaps, 'That I cared as little to see myself nasty as that others should see me in that condition. But what if it were in the dark? Why even then, tho I had neither Nose, nor Eyes, my Sense of the Matter would still be the same, my Nature would rise at the Thought of what was sordid or if it did not, I should have a wretched Nature indeed, and hate myself for a Beast. Honour myself I never could; whilst I had no better a sense of what, in reality, I owed myself, and what became me, as a human Creature.¹

Shaftesbury declares that since man is naturally inclined to good and to beauty, there is no real conflict between interest and virtue. He believed that to be wicked was to be miserable, and to be virtuous was to control the means of prosperity and happiness. The innate sense of morals and of beauty was given us that we might choose the natural and the beautiful in actions, in sentiments and in objets d' art. And as Shaftesbury contended that the natural state is the truly prosperous for every creature, a pursuit of our ideals of beauty and virtue must advance our interests and all our misery comes from some unnatural passions and actions.

¹ Characteristics, Vol. I, pp. 124-125.

Shaftesbury's theory of an innate sense of beauty included a belief that the foundation of a right taste is inherent in the divine enthusiasm which accompanies the perception of beauty. Despite the fact that he believed that this inspiration lifts the imagination to heights of majesty that are indicative of divinity, he still regards as imperative, the careful cultivation of the "Taste" or "Relish", since on its proper direction the happiness of man depends. Indeed, man could never know happiness at all, had he no taste. Everything delightful and charming in the world depends on its pre-establishment.

Slender would be the Enjoyments of the Lover, the ambitious Man, the Warrior, or the Virtuoso, if in the Beauties which they admire and passionately pursue, there were no reference or regard to any higher Majesty or Grandeur, than what simply results from the particular Objects of their pursuits. I know not in reality, what we should do to find a seasoning to most of our pleasures in Life, were it not for the Taste or Relish, which is owing to this particular Passion,² and the Conceit or Imagination which supports it.

Although Shaftesbury believed the foundation of taste itself to be innate, he thought a well developed taste was "of Nature's growth," and was developed

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Characteristics, Vol. III pp. 31-32

only by use, practice, and culture, to any degree of perfection. As the development of taste is thus a conscious, rational process, it serves as an example of the eighteenth century's belief in the efficacy of reason, but with a significant difference. Shaftesbury believed that man should depend upon reason to solve the mysteries of the world and the problems of life as did the other important thinkers of the period, but whereas they looked on the intellect as a means of extending the bounds of knowledge, Shaftesbury regarded the reasoning powers of man more as an aid to developing and preserving the natural impulses and instincts of man that worked to his advantage, and to weeding out those that impeded him in attaining harmony. He believed that reason is a just and sure mentor, and, if man will but heed its guidance, the taste for external beauties that is usually the early taste, will be questioned until opinion and fancy are freed from the fluctuating standards of fashion and education. He could conceive of no good that is inconstant, and consequently he believed that a truly good taste is invariable in its standard.

'Tis we ourselves create and form our Taste.
 If we resolve to have it just, 'tis in our power.
 We may esteem and value, approve and disapprove, as

we would wish. For who would not rejoice to be always equal and consonant to himself, and have constantly that Opinion of things which is natural and proportionable? But who dares search Opinion to the bottom, or call in question his early and prepossessing Taste? Who is so just to himself, as to recall his Fancy from the Power of Fashion and Education to that of Reason? Could we, however, be thus courageous; we should soon settle in ourselves such an Opinion of Good as would secure to us an invariable, agreeable, and just Taste in life and manners.³

The principles of the invariable standard, Shaftesbury felt to be quite clearly and concisely set forth in the following questions. "Which is right: Which the unaffected carriage, or just Demeanor: And which the affected and false?"⁴ He apprehended no question of difficulty in distinguishing the unaffected and just demeanor from the affected. So far as Shaftesbury was concerned, the natural manner was the right, and the unaffected and "unnatural demeanor" was of course evidence of the worst of tastes. So far as the natural can be distinguished from the unnatural, the standard of taste is, just as is the standard of beauty, definite and objective, and based on the notions of utility. The whole theory of Taste rests on the existence of an inherent passion for

³ Characteristics, Vol. III, pp. 186-187

⁴ Ibid., Vol. III, p. 179

beauty that is natural to man and, therefore, divine. And as natural impulses and pssions promote the welfare of each kind, (according to Shaftesbury who recognized no natural or inherent ill,) taste, itself, is designed to help man choose that which will be truest to natural laws, and to exclude that which is unnatural and likely to work to his harm.

'Tis impossible we can advance the least in any Relish or Taste of outward Symmetry and Order; without acknowledging that the proportionate and regular State, is the truly prosperous and natural in every Subject. The same Features which make Deformity, create incommodiousness and Disease. And the same Shapes and Proportions which make Beauty, afford Advantage, by adapting to Activity and Use. Even in the imitative or designing Arts the Truth or Beauty of every Figure or Statue is measured from the Perfection of Nature, in her Activity, Strength, Dexterity, Life and Vigor of the particular Species or Animal Designed.

Thus Beauty and Truth are plainly joined with the Notion of Utility and Convenience, even in the Apprehension of every ingenious Artist, the Architect, the Statuary, or the Painter. 'Tis the same in the Physician's way, Natural Health that is just Proportion, Truth and regular Course of things in a Constitution. 'Tis the inward Beauty of the Body.⁵

Thus we see that Shaftesbury's theory of Taste refers again to his major tenet involving the divinity of Nature. The best taste is that which admires

⁵Characteristics, Vol. III, pp. 180-181

the prevailing order of things, because whatever is is both right and beautiful: therefore, it is only right that we admire it.

Shaftesbury intended that his concept of taste should conform to the general belief of his time in an objective, unalterable Truth, but we find more than a trace of subjectivity in his theory, although it is very doubtful if he himself ever realized its presence. This element of subjectivity creeps in through his belief that it is only when the beauty perceived is of the higher types that the passion aroused could be designated as "inspiration", which he distinguishes from mere "enthusiasm" or "vulgar enthusiasm" as "divine enthusiasm". This higher type of beauty is not an appeal to the senses, but to the mind. Taste, then, depends not on the sensory evidence of beauty, but on a more subjective basis. He declared that no matter what we please to imagine are our feelings about the "substantial solid part of beauty", if we should criticize our taste, we should find that what we most admire is the images which our imagination had presented to our mind, of such mysterious and illusive qualities as "a majestic air", "a spritely look", or "a soft and gentle grace",

while other passions of a lower sort were employed in other ways. Thus, the evidence of the senses is discounted, while that of thought, which he believed to be the only reality, is placed in authority. By the guidance of thought, then, he believed we might escape the consequences attendant on a false taste.

A false taste, Shaftesbury said, is governed by what immediately attracts the senses and which consequently fails to satisfy the thought and reason. This theory is based on the subjective element in his concept of beauty, and applies not only to a taste in art, but also to a taste in behavior and thought. Shaftesbury believed that such a taste being wholly unattended by those perceptions of divinity which come through true inspiration, would fail to develop in man that which is most important to him, a harmonious relationship with the natural order of things. For man's true place in nature is found only through the exercise of those faculties that distinguish him from other animals.

'Tis evident however from Reason itself, as well as from History and Experience, that nothing is more fatal, either to painting, architecture, or the other Arts, than this false Relish which is governed by what immediately strikes the sense, than by what

consequentially and by reflection pleases the mind and satisfies the Thought and Reason.⁶

Shaftesbury believed that it is not the object of art or the beauty of nature that gives us the "Conceit of something majestic and divine", but it is the evidence of mind behind these external beauties that appeals to us. For that reason, a taste that considers only the physical aspects of beauty has misplaced its ideal of beauty and of virtue. He offered the example of a man who placed his "Imagination of something Beautiful, Great and becoming in Things" on such subjects as richly ornamented plate, jewels, titles and precedencies. Because of the physical properties of the objects of his admiration, the passions raised by his opinion could be no other than avarice, pride, vanity, or ambition, and would result in perpetual fears of loss and disappointment. A taste based on such externalities could work only to the detriment of its possessor.

Chief among the causes of a false taste Shaftesbury places the disposition to sacrifice the natural taste for an imaginary private interest. Many noble Englishmen, having become dishonest in public office, have allowed their ideal of beauty to be lowered from

⁶ Characteristics, Vol. III, p. 390

a love of inward merit, honor, and character to such glittering ware as equipages, titles, staffs, and ribbons. Another illustration of the same situation is found in the artistic taste of those who allow mere sensual pleasure to determine their taste in art. The result is the acceptance of many barbarisms and consequently the forfeit of good taste, which ultimately results in loss of all pleasures.

I shall be weary of my pursuit and upon experience, find little Pleasure in the main, if my choice and judgment in it be from no other Rule than that single one, because I please. Grotesque and Monstrous Figures often please. Cruel Spectacles and Barbarities are also found to please, and in some Tempers, to please beyond all other Subjects. But is this Pleasure right?--- Do I not forever forfeit my good Relish?⁷

This perversion of taste might be thought excusable if the standard were not so plainly established. Shaftesbury believed that even the most stubborn and refractory of men have a clear conception of this standard and that it is only through a weak thought or a lack of judgment that man departs from the standard. Besides setting forth another example of his belief in an objective truth, this theory shows that Shaftesbury considers a lack

⁷ Characteristics, Vol. I, pp. 339-340

of judgment to be the greatest possible wrong that man is capable of, since by a corruption of taste he believed that we lose our happiness and our place in nature.

It has been the principal End of these volumes to assert the Reality of a Beauty and Charm in moral as well as Natural Subjects and to demonstrate the Reasonableness of a proportionate taste, and determinate choice, in Life and manners. The Standard of this kind and the noted Character of Moral Truth appear so firmly established in Nature itself; and so widely displayed through the intelligent world, that there is no Genius, Mind or thinking Principle, which, if I may say so, is not really conscious in the case..... 'Tis evident that whensoever the Mind, influenced by Passion or Humour, consents to any Action, Measure or Rule of Life contrary to this governing Standard and Primary measure of Intelligence, it can only through a weak thought, a scantiness of judgment, and a defect in the application of that unavoidable Impression and first Natural Rule of Honesty and Worth, against which whatever is advanced, will be of no other moment than to render a Life distracted, incoherent, full of Irresolution, Repentance and Self-disapprobation.⁸

By a false judgment or a misapplication of the standard of right and wrong that determines our choice, only a partial view of happiness is conceived. From this narrow conception results every unnatural and immoral action or thought and every instance of false relish of art. "Whatever takes from the Large-

⁸ Characteristics, Vol. III, pp. 303-304.

ness or Freedom of Thought, must of necessity detract from that first Relish, or Taste, on which Virtue and Worth depend."⁹

Among the chief forces that Shaftesbury considered as working against the freedom of thought and contributing to a narrowness of mind or fanaticism, are superstition, bigotry and vulgar enthusiasm. A love of material things, luxury, and intemperance, he also held detrimental but not so restraining as those ills resulting from fanaticism, for to the religious or political fanatic, freedom of mind, and liberty of thought and action, seem debauch, corruption, and sacrilege. It is from these shackles that Shaftesbury desires to free those of his countrymen whose taste is yet retrievable. These, he felt sure, were confined to the youth of the upper class whose taste had already been formed in exterior manners and behavior.

The means of reforming the taste of youth, as set forth by Shaftesbury, are somewhat indefinite. As we have already seen, he believed that every judgment should be made with the aid of reason, and that we

⁹ Characteristics Vol. III, p. 304.

should learn to like or to admire, since no judgment could be considered as an innate or instinctive process. Reason, however, merely discerns whether or not the beauty is superficial or whether it proves its reality by its appeal to the mind. As the joys of the intellect have naturally the highest place in man's pleasures, man should reform his taste to agree with nature and endeavor to be natural by seeking these joys alone. On the other hand, since in the intellectual appreciation of harmony, which is beauty, only those objects, actions, and sentiments that conform to the natural standard of beauty will be considered beautiful. From this, Shaftesbury concluded, that as nature is rarely in accord with fashion and custom, there is ample cause to suspect the taste unless it is often in conflict with the prevailing mode of the times. In case the taste is in agreement with the fashion, it is almost certain to be vulgar.

Shaftesbury believed that it would be impossible to reform this vulgar taste without the aid of criticism. "A legitimate and just Taste can neither be begotten, made, conceived, or produced without the antecedent Labour and Pains of Criticism." ¹⁰

¹⁰ Characteristics, Vol. III, pp. 164-165.

Criticism is, therefore, of the utmost importance because it alone provides any practical means of forming our judgments of religion, art or morality. The first practice in criticism, Shaftesbury thought should be destructive in purpose.

We are to work rather by the weaning than the engaging passions; since if we give way chiefly to Inclination, by having, applauding, and admiring what is great and good, we may possibly, it seems, in some high Objects of that kind, be so amused and extasied, as to lose ourselves and miss our proper mark, for want of a steady and settled aim. But being more sure and infallible in what relates to our Ill, we should begin, they tell us, by applying our aversion, on that side and raising Indignation against those meannesses of Opinion, and Sentiment which are the causes of our Subjection and Perplexity.¹¹

As criticism searches for truth, Shaftesbury believed that to criticize with any justness necessitated a knowledge of both poetic truth and historical truth. All beauty is truth, but poetic truth which is found in all true art, differentiates itself from historical truth by avoiding minuteness and singularity and conforming to the general standards of Nature rather than to a specific example. Historic truth is that which gives us our ideas of general truths by using specific examples. A critic, Shaftesbury maintained, must really understand both, but if

¹¹Characteristics, Vol. III, pp. 202-203

either were of necessity to be eliminated be believed we could best afford to lose historic truth.

Some considerable Wits have recommended the best Poems, as preferable to the best of Histories; and better teaching the truth of Characters, and Nature of Mankind.¹²

A true knowledge of poetic and historic truth could come only through a thorough acquaintance with chronology, natural philosophy and geography, Shaftesbury thought; so criticism itself depends on learning of a kind. In this theory Shaftesbury proves himself in sympathy with the other thinkers of the eighteenth century, for although taste is founded on an innate instinct, this instinct must be developed by critical reasoning, which in its turn depends upon knowledge. This did not mean, however, that Shaftesbury was in any way an advocate of any system of formal education or a follower of any school of philosophy. Rather, he advocated self-study, travel, and the intimate acquaintance of a few classic authors. He disapproved strongly of an extensive and indiscriminate reading, and he held pedantry in the utmost contempt.

¹²Characteristics, Vol. I, p. 145.

Shaftesbury believed that self-analysis, or, as he termed it, "homespun philosophy," was the first stage of critical progress. In order thoroughly to know oneself, he believed it was necessary to recognize that man's nature is composed of a warring duality, Reason, the inspector and auditor of the humours, and Appetite, who continually battles with Reason over the possession of the Will. By the practice of soliloquy, in which each faction may orally present its case, man may best determine his true course and protect his best interests. By this practice of self dissection, not only a knowledge of self is gained, but a knowledge of human nature, and in addition, one is enabled to preserve that invariable standard of conduct that Shaftesbury so earnestly recommended.

'Tis the known Province of Philosophy to teach us ourselves, keep us the selfsame persons, and so regulate our governing Fancys, Passions and Humours as to make us comprehensible to ourselves, and knowable by other Features than those of a bare countenance.¹³

This type of philosophy, Shaftesbury placed above all other science or knowledge and proposed to advance its study on the foundation of what is agreeable and

¹³Characteristics, Vol. I, p. 283.

polite in manners, as well as morals. The philosopher, he stated, carries good breeding a step higher than the virtuoso (which he defined as meaning the refined wit of the age,¹⁴ and included in it those gentlemen who are acquainted with civilizations of the world).

The accomplishment of breeding is to learn whatever is decent in company or beautiful in arts, and the sum of philosophy is to learn what is just in society, and beautiful in Nature and Order of the World.¹⁵

He declared that it is not only intellect that distinguishes the philosopher, but a heart and a resolution, thus turning again to his belief that the beauty of sentiments constitutes the highest order of beauty. He believed that a philosopher should aspire to a just taste, and carry in view the standard of beauty, which is harmony with mankind and society, according to his natural rank. Thus by following the precept, "Know Thyself," one is enabled to understand and, at the same time, perfect the taste by turning away from all that is unnatural in art, morals, and manners.

¹⁴ Characteristics, Vol. I, p. 283

¹⁵ Ibid, Vol. III. p. 161

Shaftesbury believed a knowledge of chronology and geography also essential in the formation of a just critical faculty. He believed that ignorance of these two subjects was responsible for many crudities in the taste of Englishmen, and he accused them of a contemptuous disregard of foreign and ancient cultures. He understood that they considered this a form of patriotism, but while he conceded that the greatest of human affections was the love of native land, he argued that love for country and countrymen should be extended to include the whole world and all mankind. By their patriotism the English people hinder their development of taste. A little interest in ancient civilizations would be enough to convince Englishmen of the striking parallels in the development of cultures, and would assist materially in developing their own taste. The early style in both Ancient Greece and Medieval England, he declared to be coarse and homespun; then it became pedantic; and until a very late stage of development, florid and figurative. With the height of classical development, the Grecian style grew natural and simple. Shaftesbury attributes this development to the fact that their poets did not con-

form to popular demands but abided by their standard of truth to nature. They drew the vulgar taste to conform to their own high standards. In England, Shaftesbury believed that the authors catered to the vulgar taste through the demands of the book seller and the printer, who chose the style that they believed most remunerative. This naturally did great harm to the developing of public taste which Shaftesbury believed would be naturally very good if not perverted by these book-makers. He cited the popularity of the Shakespearean plays as proof that the public was not so much at fault as the manners of the poets. England, he said, needed another Cervantes to destroy the monstrous Gothic style of the stage and of the literature.

Shaftesbury lamented that the British race still retained remnants of their barbarism, which was most visible in their taste, and he decried the fact that the youth of England drew all their taste of life from the stage and the literature that showed the effects of this barbaric taste.

Reforming this public taste, Shaftesbury thought to be the business of the professional critics, and forthwith he espoused this cause, with all the fer-

vous he possessed.

We presume not only to defend the cause of critics, but to declare open War against those indolent supine Authors, Performers, Readers, Auditors, Actors, or Spectators: who making their Humour alone the Rule of what is beautiful and agreeable and having no account to give of such their Humour or Odd Fancy, reject the criticizing or examining Art, by which alone they are able to discover the true Beauty and Worth of every Object.¹⁶

¹⁶Characteristics, Vol. III, p. 165.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SHAFTESBURY'S THEORY OF ART AS A BASIS OF LITERARY CRITICISM

Shaftesbury believed criticism to be the only instrument whereby a perverted taste might be reformed and an unformed taste might be properly directed. He believed, too, that those who had by pains and effort formed a correct taste, were under a moral obligation to those whose tastes were not so happily perfected. His burning desire was to correct the taste of his countrymen, and because of this he became profoundly interested in the developing school of literary criticism as the means most likely to achieve his purpose. It was in connection with his theories of literary criticism that he evolved his theories of art.

Although Shaftesbury believed that the standard of beauty is based on the principle of utility,---- in that he believed that what is natural is both the most useful and the most beautiful for the species concerned,----- and although he believed that nature itself is at once proof of our divinity and the source of all beauty, he thought that art should im-

prove upon nature by a strict conformation to what is most general, to the exclusion of individualistic details. The same thing that produces individuality in nature, will, if copied too closely, result in freakishness and monstrosities in art. In this connection, he recommends an acquaintance with "poetic truth" which considers the character of the whole race of man, rather than that of the individual. Unless poetic truth, with its just observance of natural laws, is visible in a work, it cannot be said to be true art. Shaftesbury criticizes literature and other forms of art, then, on the basis of the natural and the unnatural, and on the evidence of a knowledge of poetic and historical truth.

Now the variety of Nature is such, as to distinguish everything she forms, by a peculiar original character; which, if strictly observed, will make the Subject unlike to anything extant in the world besides. But this Effect the good Poet and Painter seek industriously to prevent. They hate minuteness and are afraid of singularity, which would make their Images, or Characters, appear capricious and fantastical. The mere Face painter, indeed, has little in common with the Poet: but like the mere Historian, copys what he sees, and minutely traces every Feature, and odd mark. 'Tis otherwise with the men of Invention and Design. 'Tis from the many Objects of Nature, and not from a particular one, that those Genius' form the Idea of their Work. Thus the best Artists are said to have been indefatigable in studying the best Statues as esteeming them a better Rule, than the perfectest human Bodys could afford. And thus

some considerable wits have recommended the best Poems, as preferable to the best of Historys, and better teaching the Truth of Characters, and Nature of Mankind.¹

In considering Shaftesbury's conception of art, it is necessary to recall his theory that enthusiasm or inspiration is that which identifies in our minds the presence of beauty. As he considered Nature to be divine and all her aspects evidence of harmony and beauty, he naturally believed the highest inspiration or the "divine enthusiasm" to be felt only when the object considered gave evidence of its harmony with Nature by symmetrical proportions. And that which is most symmetrical is at once the most beautiful and the most useful for the purpose for which it is designed.

The relation of his theory of art to his theory of beauty seems at first a trifle contradictory to the general tenor of his philosophy. In comparing the merits of the artistic and the natural, Shaftesbury affirmed that nature lacked the perfection and grace that art displayed. This, however, runs parallel to the generally accepted belief of the age

¹ Characteristics, Vol. I, pp. 145

that man's rational powers are superior to any other natural endowment, for Shaftesbury considered "Art" to mean the reflection and thought by which man raises the variableness of nature to its standard of perfection. He believed that it was by art alone that man was able to rise above the level of animals. He offered an example of his conception of art when he compared the bearing and deportment of a rustic with that of a cultured person of the same natural endowments. The rustic, he thought, no matter how graceful and comely by nature, cannot compare for a moment with the other. He applied this theory still further when he stated that among people of a liberal education, those who were trained in youth come nearer perfection than those whose training and education were neglected until later in life.

Shaftesbury believed, also, that it is not the physical aspects of the work of art that is admired, but the evidences of a mind behind the physical. This takes us back to his classification of beauty, in which he divided it into three classes, "dead forms", "the forming forms", and "the Supreme and Sovereign Beauty". The dead forms, which are in the lowest order,

include natural beauty and works of art, which Shaftesbury contended were admired not for themselves, but because of the art they displayed, which he defined as "the effect of mind". Mind itself, he argued, is no virtue of the being that possesses it, but is an evidence of the principle and source of all beauty, God in Nature, or Nature in God. Thus, Shaftesbury contended, Art is another instance of a divine inspiration, and resolves itself into the last and supreme order of beauty. "Architecture, Music, and all that is human Invention, resolves itself into this last Order."²

From this, Shaftesbury proceeded to one of his most important theories. Since Art is the evidence of the divine in man, no art is created without a divine inspiration. "A poet can do nothing without the imagination or supposition of divine inspiration."³

There are, of course, no means of determining when an inspiration is divine except through an examination of the works of art that are executed under its power, and these can be considered beautiful only when they call forth in the observer a kindred feeling

² Characteristics, Vol. II, p. 408.

³ Ibid., Vol. I, p. 51

of divine enthusiasm, which he describes as follows:

There is Power in Numbers, Harmony, Proportion, and Beauty of every kind, which naturally captivates the Heart, and raises the Imagination to an Opinion or Conceit of something majestic and divine.

Whatever this Subject may be in itself; we cannot help being transported with the thought of it. It inspires us with something more than ordinary and raises us above ourselves---Without this, we could not so much as admire a Poem, or a Picture; a Garden, or a Palace; a charming shape, or a fair Face.⁴

Here it becomes apparent that Shaftesbury's "divine inspiration" or "Imagination of something majestic and divine" corresponds in function to the "lyrical intuition" that has been more recently defined as "art". This "lyrical" or "pure intuition" is opposed to all other mental activity, and it must not only prove its existence by inspiring all works of art, but must arouse a similar feeling in the breasts of those who came in contact with a work of real art.

Shaftesbury recognized the fact that his "divine enthusiasm" should be both a causal and a resulting factor of all works of art, but he did not realize that art itself was anything so subjective.

⁴Characteristics, Vol. II, pp. 30-32

He believed firmly that there were certain rules by which art might be mastered. This belief grew out of the theory that the enthusiasm for beauty was aroused only when symmetry and harmony were attained, thus proving the relation of the piece in question with the harmony of nature.

In all the plastic Arts, or Works of Imitation "Whatsoever is drawn from Nature, with the intentions of raising in us the Imagination of the Natural Species or Object, according to real Beauty and Truth, should be comprised in certain complete Portions or Districts, which represent the correspondency or Union⁵ of each part of Nature, with entire Nature herself."

To achieve the effect of Harmony, Shaftesbury stresses unity of design. This is not to be conceived as a matter that concerns only the visible proportions grasped by the eye alone, but involves a knowledge of human nature or philosophy, and of moral and poetic truth, for harmony is achieved only by a yielding of details to the principal design, and this prohibits a strict copy of nature even while it entails a knowledge of natural laws.

A painter, if he has any Genius, Understands the Truth and Unity of Design; and knows he is even then unnatural, when he follows Nature too close, and strictly copys Life. For his Art allows him not to bring all Nature into his Piece, but a Part only.

⁵ Characteristics, Vol. III, p. 389.

However, his piece, if it be beautiful, and carries Truth, must be a whole by itself, complete, independent, and withal as great and comprehensive as he can make it. So that Particulars, on this occasion, must yield to the General Design; and all things be subservient to that which is principal, in order to form a certain Easiness of Sight; a simple, clear and united View, which would be broken and disturbed by the Expression of anything Peculiar or distinct.⁶

To determine whether a piece of art exhibits evidence of a knowledge of poetic and moral truth, it must be judged on the basis of "natural" or "unnatural", for a too strict adherence to one individual specimen of nature results in an unnatural and fantastic effect. Shaftesbury believed that facts were sometimes so unusual as to be highly unnatural, and therefore should be judged as deceit, while fabrications often contain poetic and moral truth because of their conformation to natural laws. For this reason, Shaftesbury believed that a cultivated taste rejected all art but that which seems of nature's formation, as truth alone is accounted as beauty.

Shaftesbury's theory that art should conform to nature is significant in that it establishes an objective criterion of beauty and at the same time places art, as well as beauty and taste, on a utilitarian basis.

⁶Characteristics, Vol. I, p. 142.

Thus Beauty and Truth are plainly joined with the Notion of Utility and Convenience, even to the apprehension of every ingenious Artist, the Architect, the Statuary, or the Painter.⁷

The theory of an objective criterion is contradictory to his theory that works of art are admired, not because of their physical appearance, but because of the evidence of mind behind the work, since it places art in a position where it must depend upon externalities for its discernment. As would be expected, Shaftesbury follows this naturalistic tenet with another equally objective. In common with the other thinkers of his age, he considered art not as a unity, but divided into several "Arts". He refers to them as the "Plastic Arts", and "Works of Imitation". In reviewing the history of art, he describes the establishment of the standard in poetry, and then in the other "Arts".

From Music, Poetry, Rhetoric, down to the simple prose of History, through all the Plastic Arts of Sculpture, Statuary, Painting, Architecture, and the rest; everything Muse-like, graceful and exquisite, was rewarded with the highest Honors.⁸

These theories from the naturalistic aesthetics

⁷Characteristics, Vol. III, p. 181

⁸Ibid, Vol. III. p. 139

were in harmony with the general beliefs of the times, and are not significant except as they show his relations to his period. His important contribution to the philosophic concept of art, came through his emphasis on the necessity of a "Divine inspiration" and on the subjective theory that art is not admired for anything except for the evidence of mind.

Since art is discerned only by the most refined of tastes, Shaftesbury considered it to the advantage of everyone, artist or layman, to support the institution of criticism, as it is only by means of criticism that the full development of art and good taste may be experienced and enjoyed.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CRITERION OF NATURE IN SHAFTESBURY'S THEORY OF LITERARY CRITICISM

Since Shaftesbury believed that the possession of a correct taste is absolutely essential to human happiness and welfare, and since he believed that this taste could be developed only by the practice of criticism, it follows that he considered the work of the critic to be of the highest importance. Art itself, he thought, could not exist without criticism, and for that reason he believed that the cause of artists and of critics were one, and that each group should support the other. The failure of literary men to welcome criticism could indicate only a feeling of inferior workmanship.

Nothing grieves the real Artist more than the Indifference of the Public, which suffers work to pass uncriticized. Nothing, on the other side, rejoices him more than the nice view and Inspection of the Accurate Examiner and Judge of Work. 'Tis the mean Genius, the slovenly Performer, who knowing nothing of true Workmanship, endeavors by the best outward Gloss and dazzling Show, to turn the Eye from a direct and steady Survey of his Piece.¹

¹ Characteristics, Vol. I, p. 235.

He stated his intention of devoting himself wholeheartedly to the cause of the critics, and declared that instead of being the destroyers of culture, they were the props and pillars of the building of art which without their support would undoubtedly crumble.

For this reason we presume not only to defend the Cause of Critics; but to declare open War against those indolent supine Authors, Performers, Readers, Auditors, Actors, or Spectators; who making their Humour alone the Rule of what is beautiful and agreeable, and having no account to give of such their Humour or odd Fancy, reject the criticizing or examining Art, by which alone they are able to discover the true Beauty and Worth of every Object.²

These authors often excuse themselves from criticism by asserting the right of an artist to be free from all rules and regulations and by asserting their art distinct from that of the critic, justifying themselves by the statement that no writer of any genius would stoop so low as to practice criticism. Shaftesbury, however, contended that every writer need not be a critic, but that every critic of literature is bound to show himself capable as a writer since his place as a critic depends on his ability to prove the principles he asserts. The best writers in history

² Characteristics, Vol. III, p. 165

he believed to practice self-criticism, and he denounced the writers of his own nation with withering comments for rejecting criticism. He declared that the pitiable condition of the public taste exemplified by the literature of the times was a result, not of a lack of knowledge, but of a lack of honesty on the part of the writers. The criticism contained in "The Rehearsal" and "The Art of Poetry" exhibited evidence that the writers themselves are plainly aware of the rules of art and that it is only a desire for easy popularity that leads them to such ignoble performances.

If in reality both critic and Poet, confessing the Justice of these Rules of Art, can afterwards in Practice, condemn and approve, perform and judge; in a quite different manner from what they acknowledge just and true: it plainly shows; that, tho perhaps we are not indigent in Wit; we want what is of more consequence and can alone raise Wit to any Dignity and Worth; even Plain Honesty, Manners, and a Sense of the Moral Truth on which Poetic Truth and Beauty must naturally depend.³

The English author, Shaftesbury asserted, wishes to be considered above the rules of art. He wishes to be thought all genius, in that he does not need to

³ Characteristics, Vol. III, PP. 281-282

study or labor to produce artistic work. Because of this conceit, he thinks it necessary to decry the judgments of critics and he, himself, writes of art in such a manner that the ordinary reader is too confused to dare to question the merits of his work. Thus, he not only hinders the development of a good taste in his countrymen but impedes his own progress in artistic development, because this lack of a demanding and critical taste naturally places limits on his art. The relation of author and reader offers a particularly vicious example of the "vicious circle" as the author does nothing to improve the taste of the public, who, in turn, demand from the author such absurd style and content, as to ruin the author's hope of ever meriting the title "artist".

In our Days the Audience makes the Poet, and the Bookseller the Author: with what Profit to the Public, or what Prospect of lasting Fame and Honour to the Writer, let anyone who has Judgment imagine.⁴

Shaftesbury compared the attitude of his contemporaries with that of the early poets of Greece, who did not comply with the demands of popular taste, but

⁴Characteristics, Vol. I, p. 264.

followed truth and nature. Upon these just proportions the taste of the whole nation was soon formed and their place was assured in the culture of the world. Shaftesbury thought that their naturalness and simplicity of style could not be attained by accident, but were rather the result of continued labor and polishing. Nor were the artists willing that any one should think their work the result of a happy chance, but were quick to acknowledge that pains and labor were responsible for their accomplishment. Shaftesbury believed that the reluctance to really labor and to admit the effort was one of the chief causes of the failure of Englishmen to produce any great artistic works.

As a means of correcting this false ideal in art, Shaftesbury directs to English authors a great deal of advice. The substance of this has already been set forth in connection with his theories of taste and art, but a brief résumé will be given here.

The skill of writing, according to Shaftesbury, is founded on knowledge, good sense, and the rules of art found in philosophy. He considered philosophy (knowledge of self) to be the most important and that the other two requisites naturally depended upon it, for, to Shaftesbury, knowledge of self contained the key

to all mysteries of human nature. Without this knowledge, no estimation of manners, morals or mind can be just. "He who deals in characters, must of necessity know his own; or he will know nothing."⁵ In order to facilitate this understanding of human nature, Shaftesbury advised the author to practice soliloquy and conversation with others, always with the view of analyzing each passion and sentiment, and appraising it at its true value and meaning.

Shaftesbury advised the writer to remember that he is never anything more than a copyist after Nature. He believed that it is the very nature of man to reject the unnatural in art as well as in morals and actions, and to turn to the natural with pleasure. Since he considers virtue (which he sometime uses interchangeably with 'sentimentality') and truth the most natural beauties in the world, he advised authors to search after truth and honesty. Truth he divided into three kinds: "Moral truth", "historical truth", and "poetic truth".

"Moral truth" includes of course, "Virtue", and Shaftesbury believed that a knowledge of moral truth is more essential to a writer than to a divine. The

⁵ Characteristics, Vol. I. p. 189

composer of religious discourses has the advantage of a legitimate right to use the supernatural, and may not be questioned by the rest of humanity; but the poet, or "genteel writer" must be perfect in moral science, for poetry must be as near as possible to moral perfection of Nature. He added that if sermons were restricted to those that were artistic in execution, it would be fatal for Christianity. Pastors might have a right to perform indifferently, but indifferent writers he declared to be as intolerable as mediocre fiddlers and painters.

Besides the "knowledge" and "good sense" that a close acquaintance with human nature must give, the writer must have the ideal of perfection in his mind when he attempts to write. Even though his intention is merely to satisfy popular demand, he will fail miserably unless he has this inspiration and feeling of beauty and harmony to sustain him.

Tho his Intention be to please the World, he must nevertheless be, in a manner, above it; and fix his Eye upon that Consummate Grace, that Beauty of Nature, and that perfection of Numbers, which the rest of Mankind, feeling only by the Effects whilst ignorant of the Cause, term the Je ne sais quois, the unintelligible, or the 'I know not what'; and suppose to be a kind of charm, or Enchantment of which the Artist himself can give no account.⁶

⁶Characteristics, Vol. I, p.332.

And what could this je ne sais quois refer to other than the "lyric intuition" that pervades all art, and which by obtaining recognition, proves at once the inspiration and worth of each individual work of art? Shaftesbury believed it to be the final and supreme requisite of a work of art and referred to it again and again.

Shaftesbury advised authors to test their inspiration by the standard of naturalness. He believed that since inspiration holds an element of divinity, the result of it should never be against natural conformations. He cited the instances of purported divinely executed paintings in the ancient churches of Europe, and stated that while he would have had no occasion to doubt the divine origin, had the work been as near perfection as that of Raphael, he could not but think it contradictory to all common sense that a heaven-guided pencil could be guilty of such lame performances. The same applies to any piece of art; if the piece is to be designated as "art", it must show evidence of divine inspiration, and divinity of any sort, submitting itself to the demands of a human art, would not sin against the art by expressing falsehood and error and unnatural

proportions. Because of this belief, Shaftesbury condemned the poets of his age for pretending to be guided by divine powers when their work gave ample evidence of ignorance and falseness to nature. He declared that so long as the medium of written language is used to express their thoughts, their work would be subject to the rules, and bound to the effects, of the elements of speech, the alphabet, and grammar. Because of this, he believed the reader to be always superior to the author, since there is no piece of literature written in human language that is above human criticism.

For if the Art of Writing be from the grammatical Rules of human Invention and Determination; if even these Rules are formed on casual Practice and various Use: there can be no Scripture but what must of necessity be subject to the Reader's narrow Scrutiny and strict Judgment, unless a Language and Grammar, different from any of human Structure, were delivered down from Heaven, and miraculously accommodated to human Service and Capacity.⁷

Since the author is bound to be subject to the criticism of the reader, Shaftesbury believed him to be of the second rank of mankind. He felt that a recognition of this inferiority was necessary, both

⁷ Characteristics, Vol. III, p. 229

to reader and author, to safeguard the taste of the reading public, and to serve the interest of all art.

Let the Reader withal consider, that when he unworthily resigns the place of Honour, and surrenders his Taste, or Judgment, to an Author of ever so great a name, or venerable Antiquity, and not to Reason, and Truth, at whatever hazard; he not only betrays himself, but withal the common cause of Author and reader; the Interest of Letters and Knowledge and the chief Liberty, Privilege and Prerogative of the rational part of mankind.⁸

Shaftesbury was not always satisfied with the rôle of partisan in the conflict arising over criticism. He not only defended the rights and needs of critics in general, but occasionally entered the mêlée himself, in order to deliver a few thrusts personally. Most of these were judgments based on his standard of Nature, and under his own classification of "poetic manners and truth". He condemned because it was unnatural; he commended because it was "like Nature's own".

All that is unnatural, Shaftesbury classed as "Gothic", or "Monstrous", and believed to be characteristic of the barbaric period of the Anglo-Saxon tribes, and sadly out of place in the eighteenth century, the Age of Reason.

⁸ Characteristics, Vol. III, p. 250

May not I be allowed to ask, 'Whether there remains not still among us noble Britons, Something of that original Barbarous and Gothic Relish, not wholly purged away; when, even at this hour, Romances and Gallantries of like sort, together with Works as monstrous of other kinds are current, and in Vogue, even with the people who constitute our reputed Polite World?' ⁹

Since the Gothic style could only be admired as a result of a false taste, a taste that finds pleasure in the outward manifestations of beauty, to the exclusion of the enjoyments of the mind, any contrivance that appeals only to sensory perceptions of beauty, is unnatural in that man's most natural good is found in pleasures of the mind and sentiments.

Chief among the unnatural devices of writers Shaftesbury placed the use of rhyme. He commended the success of the dramatic poets in eliminating this monstrous ornament, and deplored the false manner of other poets.

But so much are our British Poets taken up, in seeking out that Monstrous Ornament which we call Rhyme, that 'tis no wonder if other Ornaments, and real Graces are unthought of, and left un-attempted. However, since in some Parts of Poetry (especially in the Dramatic) we have been so happy as to triumph over this barbarous Taste; 'tis unaccountable that our Poets, who from this Privilege ought to undertake some further Refinements should remain still upon the same level as before.¹⁰

⁹Characteristics, Vol. III, p. 254

¹⁰Ibid, Vol. III, pp. 264-265

Shaftesbury advised, too, that the poet select his words carefully with an ear for their consonant sounds, since the English language is liable to unpleasant and shocking consonant sequences. He condemned the indiscriminate mixture of compounds of Greek and Latin origin and of monosyllabic-Teutonic words. His negations concerning all ornamentations seem to suggest a direct relationship with the Romantic's desire to do away with all so-called "poetic diction", and to establish in its stead the language and manner of every-day speech. His feeling of intellectual aristocracy places an impediment in the way of accepting this as a real resemblance, however, for instead of the language of every-day speech that included speech of the most humble people, Shaftesbury would probably include only the "Virtuosi" and the remainder of the "genteel" tribe. His slight contact with the "vulgar" class as he called it, had probably never impressed him, except as to their dangerous tendency toward enthusiasm, which leads to fanaticism, bigotry, et cetera, and which inevitably results in the "unnatural" in manners and actions.

Shaftesbury's attempts to criticize literary works on the basis of language, according to "simplicity", or "ornateness", could not be successful,

since the philosophy of language is not based on the physical, but on the effect on the mind, and as such is identical with art. It could not be ornate in the sense of containing ornaments that are extraneous or unnecessary, because what are judged to be ornaments are of necessity a vital and integral part of the whole, since expression, can be "adorned" only with itself.

Connected with Shaftesbury's effort to classify the type of language that might be called "artistic" in his classification of literature on an empirical basis of feeling. He gives some account of the natural evolution of styles from the first writings executed in the "miraculous" or "sublime" style. Later this solemn manner was adopted by the tragedians, and as it became more unnatural, comedy was originated as a means of control. Comedy may be divided into the "satiric" and the "comic", the "satiric" being the tool of the mean spirited man of low birth, while the "comic" is the tool of his better-natured neighbor. Later, as a higher standard of art developed, the simple style evolved. The tragic, the sublime, and the simple styles he believed to be properly the tools of the authors of great and noble natures. Greek criticism was de-

livered in the methodic method, but he considers this style unsuitable for an artist. None of these styles except the "comic" would be a successful means of criticism. The "simple" he condemned as not being suited to the as yet unformed public taste. The "sublime" furnishes subjects enough for criticism, but itself does not afford manner or means. The methodic he considered unnatural, just as any other dissection would be, and as practiced in his time, he thought it more tiring than the metre of an old ballad.

In this reference to "kinds", Shaftesbury does not attempt to establish any arbitrary rules of composition, or aesthetic criteria for judgment, but merely sanctions by use the practical and useful classification on the empirical basis of feeling. The classification itself is not detrimental to the interests of aesthetics, but is the attempt to criticize according to the "kind", as when people decide that a tragedy must have a certain kind of subject, a certain kind of characters and plot of a given length, and then when confronted by a piece of literature, ask only if it obeys the laws, before they condemn or praise. Shaftesbury is not always free from this false idea of criticism, although he introduces this criticism only indirectly.

For example, he scored the English dramatists for their habit of introducing comedy in the same piece with tragedy, not pronouncing his judgment openly, but with a veiled sarcasm that was probably the more appreciated because of its subtlety.

I Remember formerly when I was a Spectator in the French Theater, I found it the custom, at the end of every grave and solemn Tragedy, to introduce a comic Farce, or Miscellany, w hich they called The little Piece. We have indeed a Method still more extraordinary upon our own Stage. For we think it agreeable and just, to mix the Little Piece or Farce with the main Plot or Fable, thro every Act. This perhaps may be the rather chosen, because our Tragedy is so much deeper and bloodier than that of the French, and therefore needs more immediate Refreshment from the elegant way of Drollery and Burlesque--wit; which being thus closely interwoven with its opposite, make that most accomplished kind of Theatrical Miscellany, called by our Poets a Tragi-comedy.¹¹

In the foregoing passage we see, too, that Shaftesbury believed play-wrights should observe the rule of decorum, which prohibits the shedding of blood on the stage. He believed that a strict observance of this rule would eliminate some of the unnaturalness of the play-wright's art. He described the English stage as a shambles, or an arena, around which men and women gathered to view the spectacle of bloodshed. Such an unnatural pleasure could never be the effect of true art or even of ordinary human virtues.

¹¹Characteristics, Vol. III, pp. 67

In our newer Plays as well as in our older, in Comedy as well as Tragedy, the Stage presents a proper Scene of Uproar;-- Duels fought; Swords drawn, many of a side; Wounds given, and sometimes dressed too; the Surgeon called, and the Patient probed and tented upon the Spot. In our Tragedy, nothing is so common as Wheels, Racks, and Gibbets properly adorned; Executions decently performed. Headless Bodies and Bodiless Heads, exposed to view; Battles fought: Murders committed: and the Dead carried off in great numbers..... 'Such is our Politeness'.¹²

Shaftesbury believed that this disregard of decorum could result only in the nurturing of a false and perverted taste; and it was from such excesses of the stage that he longed to protect the tender minds of youth..

As a counter movement against unnaturalness in art, Shaftesbury recommended the simple style, where art is employed in destroying every token and appearance of order and in giving an extemporaneous air to what is written.

The Simple Manner which being the strictest imitation of Nature, should of right be the completest, in the Distribution of its Parts, and Symmetry of its, Whole, is yet so far from making any Ostentation of Method, that it conceals the artifice as much as possible: endeavoring only to express the effect of Art, under the appearance of the greatest, Ease and Negligence.¹³

¹²Characteristics, Vol. III, p. 256.

¹³Ibid, Vol. III. p. 257.

To obtain the effect of simplicity, Shaftesbury advised the author to eschew all forced expressions as unnatural. Instead of rhymed verse he recommended the unrhymed or blank verse as being the most natural style possible for poetry. However, he does not recommend Shakespeare's poetry for its physical qualities, since he considered it rude and unpolished. It owes its merit, he thought, to the force of its moral instruction.

Notwithstanding his natural Rudesness, his unpolished style, his antiquated Phrase and Wit, his want of Method and coherence, and his Deficiency in almost all the Graces and Ornaments in this kind of Writing; yet by the Justness of his Moral, the aptness of many of his Descriptions, and the plain and Natural Turn of several of his characters, he pleases his audience, and often gains their Ear, without a single Bribe from luxury or Vice.¹⁴

Shaftesbury believed that all appearances of fanaticism and enthusiasm should be avoided in literature as being harmful to the promulgation of liberty of thought. In its stead, he advised a cultivation of the feeling of good humor. He asserted that even religious writings should avoid enthusiasm and melancholy as unnatural to the divine spirit that

¹⁴Characteristics, Vol. I, p. 125

must be the inspiration of all art. He thought that the Bible itself is in many passages humorous and witty, and he saw in its humor evidence of its inspiration. He considered the style of Christ's quoted repartee and parables to be sharp, humorous, and witty, and he attributed the appeal of both the Jewish and Christian religions to be founded on the natural pleasantries and good humor displayed in the Bible.

Besides good humor, Shaftesbury believed that a piece of literature must contain something contributory to knowledge and thought, "else, wherefore written?" "Art for Art's sake" would never have found a supporter in the person of Shaftesbury, since his ideas in literature as art were strictly in harmony with his utilitarian concept of beauty.

Surely no Writing or Discourse, of any great moment, can seem other than enervated when neither strong Reason, nor Antiquity; nor the Records of Things, nor the natural History of Man, nor anything which can be called Knowledge, dare accompany it, except perhaps in some ridiculous Habit, which may give it an Air of Play and Dalliance.¹⁵

Besides this utilitarian concept of literature, Shaftesbury was responsible for the directing of an-

¹⁵Characteristics, Vol. II, p. 187

other important trend of eighteenth century literature. This was the disposition toward sentimentality which had its origin in Shaftesbury's belief that the most natural pleasures of man were the result of the activity of the affections. He declared this "exercise of Benignity and goodness" to be the most charming enjoyment known to man when the mind and soul were united in the movement. He believed that even the misfortune of affection yielded a greater satisfaction than sensual pleasures, and that we get a certain pleasure from sorrow if it is accompanied by a sense of virtue. He considered a tragedy that excited these passions to be the most moving of all literature, in that it afforded the greatest enjoyment in the way of thought and sentiment of anything that is based on illusion instead of reality.

We may observe, withal, in favor of the natural affections, that it is not only when Joy and Sprightliness are mixed with them, that they carry a real Enjoyment above that of the sensual kind. The very Disturbances which belong to natural Affection, though they may be thought wholly contrary to pleasure yield still a Contentment and Satisfaction greater than the Pleasures of indulged Sense. And where a Series or continued Succession of the tender and kind Affections can be carried on, even thro Fears, Horrors, Sorrows, Grief; the Emotions of the Soul is still agreeable. We continue pleased even with this melancholy Aspect or Sense of Virtue. Her Beauty supports itself under a Cloud, and in the midst of surrounding Calami-

ties. For thus, when by mere Illusion, as in a Tragedy, the Passions of this kind are skilfully excited in us; we prefer the Entertainment to any other of equal duration. We find ourselves, that the moving our Passions in this mournful way, the engaging them in behalf of merit and worth, and the exerting whatever we have of social Affection, and human Sympathy, is of the highest Delight; and affords a greater Enjoyment in the way of Thought and Sentiment, than anything besides can do in a way of Sense and common Appetite.¹⁶

This theory formed the basic principle of the new school of "sentimentalism" that was to become a great moral force in England, providing such a deluge of lachrymosal literature as to sweep away on its flood the greater part of its opposition as characterized by the remnants of the ironic intellectualism of the Restoration period. Its significance in connection with Shaftesbury is that it supplies another example of his theory of the relation of art and virtue. For, he reasoned, since man is virtuous by nature, and since he is also naturally moved to creative art, by the same inspiration that is inculcated by the perception of beauty, and since virtue itself is the supreme of all beauties, that which moved him to create should also cause him to admire virtue more than anything else.

¹⁶Characteristics, Vol. II, pp. 106-107

Art should, therefore, adopt the cause of virtue and morals, since the creative inspiration and the innate sense of beauty are one and the same.

CHAPTER SIX

SHAFESBURY'S RELATION TO THE CLASSICAL SCHOOL OF CRITICISM

The eighteenth century marked the beginning of an epoch in English literature in which the critic, the essayist, and the moralist play, for the first time, a prominent part. The development of these phases of literature was the result of three strongly marked tendencies, speculative, ethical, and aesthetic, which were inter-related and also involved in the controversy between the deists and the more orthodox supporters of theism. This controversy is curiously tempered by the seeming reluctance of either party to push matters to any extreme. The deists attack priestcraft, but wish to preserve theology, presupposed, of course, by natural religion; the adherents of the orthodox party admit the desirability of free thought and the necessity of rationalizing religion even while they condemn the deists as superficial theorists. The whole dispute was carried on rather indolently, and the deists, while generally felt to be somewhat menacing to the social order, were subjected to no persecution severer than ridicule and satire. This lack of active opposition operated as a restraining

force, and as the deists were not animated by any decided discontent with the prevailing social order, they had no desire to inflict serious injury. So, while some evidence of the controversy is found in all institutions and art of the century, and while literature reflects the struggle, there are in it no indications of any great amount of feeling or passion on either side.

This lack of feeling offers a very good example of the spirit of the century, since, in this respect, the literature conformed to the ideals of conduct and thinking most favored at that time, an inclination toward rationalism and a veering away from all enthusiasms as dangerous. Because of this standard, speculative questions were limited to an interest in the practical affairs of life. Even if man has no knowledge of who he is, whence he comes, or where he goes, he is still able to analyse human passions, discover the laws of conduct, and determine the forces of society with little regard to first principles and a priori concepts. Knowledge of human nature, and a vivid appreciation of the importance of an accepted moral standard, are the staple of the literature of the time.

With such a background, it was inevitable that the infant school of literary criticism that developed during this period, should be strongly classical in spirit---classical in that it stood for those ideals that are generally accepted as characterizing, an age of classicism, rationalism, and serenity, as opposed to emotionalism, and turbulence. The classical school was interested in many of the now antiquated problems of aesthetics, among them the question of objective standards of beauty and taste; the problem of the didactic purpose of art and the related theory of poetic justice; and the usefulness of criticism as to kinds, and to style. Their attitude toward romanticism was revealed contrastingly in the prevalent theories of sentimentality and their evaluations of the most underrated writer of first great age of romanticism, Shakespeare.

Shaftesbury's place in the literary criticism of his century cannot be estimated without a cursory examination of the representative critical theories of the period. With the purpose of fixing his relation to the classical school of criticism there will follow a comparison of his ideas with those best expressing the spirit of the time. In pursuing this plan, it will

be necessary to consider the theories of John Dennis, Joshua Reynolds, Joseph Addison, David Hume, and Edmund Burke. Since the whole philosophy of aesthetics is based on the perception of beauty, we will begin with a comparison of Shaftesbury's theory of beauty with that of Sir Joshua Reynolds.

As we know, Shaftesbury's theory of beauty was evolved in an effort to establish a moral philosophy. He considered the idea of beauty to be innate,-- and since nature itself is divine,---of divine origin and function. By its exercise, Shaftesbury believed man to be compelled to evaluate and appraise every object with which he came in contact, regardless of desire to avoid the appraisal, and also to feel that he was in some way allied to the cause of the good and beautiful against all that is deformed and ugly. Shaftesbury believed that what is good is beautiful, and since the good of each creature is determined by what is natural in it, then, what is natural not only best promotes the welfare of the creature but is also beautiful. Therefore, that which is most useful is at once the most natural and the most beautiful.

Shaftesbury intended this standard to work on an objective basis of naturalness. The quality of beauty

he considered as belonging to the action or the object, and capable of being analysed into different objective criteria, such as "figure" and "color". In spite of this, he approached very nearly to a declaration of a belief in a subjective standard when he declared all sensual impressions to be illusory, and thought to be the only reality. The true enjoyment of beauty he believed to be mental, as pleasures of the mind are the most natural to man; and he stated that unless the perception of beauty is accompanied by an enthusiasm or inspiration that lifts man to ideas of divinity, it is not real beauty.

It is this inspiration which corresponds closely to "lyrical intuition" that lifts man above beasts, and distinguishes his pleasures from mere sensualities.

The same standard of nature was used by Reynolds, but without its spiritual or moral implications. Reynolds believed that it is custom which gives us our ideas of beauty, and that the most beautiful form of any given species is the most general form. He based this principle on the belief that nature has a certain fixed or determinate form in each species toward which she is continually inclining; and although

no one form is ever quite perfect, all bear resemblance to the determinate form, so that our ideas of beauty are evolved from the general or determinate form of the species. Because of this tendency to revert to the general form, beauty is produced much more often than any one kind of deformity, and as we are more accustomed to beauty than to deformity, we may conclude that habit alone constitutes the criterion of beauty.

As we are then more accustomed to beauty than to deformity, we may conclude that to be the reason why we approve and admire it, as we approve and admire customs and fashions of dress for no other reason than that we are used to them; so that, though habit and custom cannot be said to be the cause of beauty, it is certainly the cause of our liking it. And I have no doubt but that, if we were more used to deformity than beauty, deformity would then lose the idea now annexed to it, and take that of beauty; as, if the whole world would agree that yes and no should change their meanings, yes would then deny, and no would affirm.¹

Certainly we see in Reynold's account of our ideas of beauty none of the idealism of Shaftesbury. He denied all spiritual implications of beauty in the assertion of this criteria.

¹ Sir Joshua Reynolds, "The Idea of Beauty", Readings in English Prose of the Eighteenth Century, p. 422.

We indeed say that the form and color of the European is preferable to that of the Ethiopian but I know of no other reason we have for it, but that we are more accustomed to it. It is absurd to say that beauty is possessed of attractive powers, which irresistibly seize the corresponding mind with love and admiration, since that argument is equally conclusive in the favor of the white and the black philosopher.²

In concluding his theory of beauty, Reynolds admitted that the idea of utility might influence the judgment in considering the beauty of a species, but he denied that usefulness, or "fitness to an end", had any effect on our judgments of individual cases, since our impressions of beauty are generally made before our understandings are able to judge of the utility. The principle of utility he believed to be useless in any attempt to discriminate between different species. From this he concluded that one species is equally as beautiful as another, and since the most beautiful individual of a species is that which preserves the invariable traits of the determinate type, general ideas and characteristics are more conducive to beauty than minute particularities and individuality. This line of reasoning is distinguished from Shaftesbury's by its analytical and psychological

² Sir Joshua Reynolds, "The Idea of Beauty", Readings in English Prose of the Eighteenth Century, p. 23

trends. It is plain that Shaftesbury's more naively stated theory of a natural standard of beauty is of a different origin, even while Shaftesbury agreed with Reynolds in the insistence on the general forms of nature as the most beautiful. The contrast is caused by the deistic tenet of the divinity of nature. It was in response to the demands of deism for a new moral creed, that Shaftesbury first evolved the distinguishing feature of his philosophy, "the innate idea of beauty", and while the standard of nature is generally accepted during the century, Shaftesbury alone attributed its authenticity to the workings of a divinity in nature that answered the innate quest of divinity in man. Reynold's theories are characteristic of the experimental type of aesthetics and of the rationalistic spirit of the age.

The most important work on the subject of "taste", is that of David Hume, "The Standard of Taste". In this essay he endeavored to determine the causes of the variation of tastes and to analyse the foundation of good taste. Hume's whole theory is developed on an empirical or practical basis. He placed no moral or spiritual significance in the functioning of taste, thus contrasting sharply with Shaftesbury's theory,

which is of immeasurable spiritual significance, since it invests taste with the authority to cultivate the innate seeds of divinity in man to its full fruition. Taste, with Hume, had no moral implication, but is founded solely on sensory evidence and applied primarily to externalities such as works of art, and natural beauties.

Hume admitted the possibility of a subjective element in the formation of taste, but did not consider it of sufficient validity to constitute a real test of judgment; and while Shaftesbury did not consciously formulate this tenet, there is good reason to attribute much the same belief to him. This supposition is based on his statement that all evidence of sensation is illusory and that thought is hence the only reality. He followed this by declaring that sensory impressions are not sources of beauty to the mind except as they stimulate the imagination. This pleasure of the mind Shaftesbury declared to be the only aim of a good taste, but confused the issue later by his insistence on an objective natural standard.

Hume believed that while the type of philosophy which advanced the theory of subjective standards of taste and beauty seemed reasonable enough on some

scores, in the end, the principle of natural equality of tastes must be disregarded. He accounted for the subjective element by attributing it to a misconception of the terms, "judgements" and "sentiments".

Judgments, which are aroused by opinions of a certain subject, he said to be a determination of the understanding and hence, liable to error, since they depend on the validity of something beyond themselves. Sentiments, which are aroused in the different people who come in contact with the same object, are all authentic because no sentiment depends on the real composition of the object. It only marks the relation between the object and the mind of the beholder, and since it is affective, is authentic. If one accepts the feelings in regard to art, as sentiments, there is no method of ascertaining real beauty or deformity of either objects or actions. Hume, however, was not content to accept this criterion and allow the matter to rest here, but declared that common sense prohibits the assertion of equality of tastes.

Whoever would assert an equality of genius and elegance between Ogilby and Milton, or Bunyan and Addison, would be thought to defend no less an extravagance than if he maintained a mole hill to be as high as Teneriffe, or a pond as extensive as the ocean. Though there may be found persons who give the

preference to the former authors, no one pays attention to such a taste, and we pronounce without scruple the sentiment of these pretended critics to be absurd and ridiculous.³

From this we see that his ideas of taste have at their foundation a definite objective standard, which he declared to be based on the rules of art. He believed that there are naturally some principles of praise and blame which act in all operations of human judgment. Certain objective qualities he believed to please, while others are destined to displease, and a failure to affect these sensations he thought to be the fault of the organ of perception rather than a legitimate variation from the standard of taste.

The function of taste was given a very different direction by these two philosophers. Shaftesbury believed a good taste to be one that drew man into a divine concord with nature by choosing always the most natural pleasures and objects of beauty. He held that the most natural pleasure possible to man is the enjoyment of noble sentiments and the evidence of the concurrence of noble mind, and that pleasures of physical sensation are hence unnatural. Since he believed that inspiration or divine enthusiasm accompanied only the perception of mental and senti-

mental beauties, it follows that the taste should be more or less easily directed. If one is inspired, the beauty is a natural one; if one is not inspired, but filled with a vulgar enthusiasm, beware of an unnatural or sensual taste. The problem of the laymen lies in distinguishing between enthusiasms, vulgar and divine.

Hume assigned no function to taste other than forming an aid in distinguishing the delicate and fine in flavors and in art. He believed a taste to be based on empirical principles. If a thing is pleasing, it is good even if it is at variance with the rules of criticism. Such a case, however, does not invalidate criticism in general, but rather the particular rules of criticism which denominate as a fault anything that pleases. "If they are found to please, they cannot be faults, let the pleasure which they produce be ever so unexpected and unaccountable."⁴ This statement is of a decidedly romantic tinge, and though it is at variance with most of Hume's other theories, which are in harmony with the classical school, it nevertheless shows the same general charac-

⁴ "The Standard of Taste", Readings in English prose of the Eighteenth Century, ed. Alden, p. 143

teristic of all his theories, the tendency to base his ideas on experience and practical observation.

Hume believed that the test of good taste was found by gauging one's reactions to the best examples of classic art. The principle of taste he believed to be universal; and though few men are qualified to criticize, the joint verdict of the critics should be accepted as the true standard of taste and beauty. This is strictly opposed to Shaftesbury's belief that each man should endeavor to develop his own power of criticism, and that the key to each verdict was to be found by the test of nature, the inspiration that accompanies true beauty.

In accounting for these differences in theories, it is impossible to ignore the fundamental differences of spirit in the two men; Shaftesbury, who propounded an optimistic, idealistic moral system, and Hume, whose sceptical intellectualism would allow not temporizing in matters metaphysical. Hume's aim was to analyse taste in a scientific, rational spirit and to account for it, not by revelation, or innate divinity, but by a normal functioning of everyday human nature.

The attempt to analyse art is a problem closely related to the quest for the standards of taste and

beauty. One of the most interesting theories of art is that advanced by John Dennis, the critic who most nearly represented the principles and ideals of theirm. Dennis was the most earnest of critics and was thoroughly alive to the importance of his function. His criticism is further distinguished throughout by evidence of an intense passion for Milton, the man, and Milton, the poet. Paradise Lost was his standard of literary attainment, and the Miltonic atmosphere of brimstone and gloom colored his judgments and influenced the direction of his speculation. Dennis believed, as Shaftesbury did, that the natural state is the beautiful state, but he conditioned his theory with theology, and adapted to his philosophy of aesthetics, the old testament version of the fall of man. He believed that all that is unnatural is unbeautiful, but he attributed the unnatural condition of man to his fall from the primitive state of sinlessness. He assigned the weakness, misery, and impotence of man to his lack of harmony with the Miltonic Jehovah. So he agreed with Shaftesbury in considering that since beauty has a natural standard, and art is based on this same standard, both beauty and art are manifestations of divinity. The two critics disagreed, however,

as to the function for which art is designed. Dennis believed art was designed by an Omnipotent Divinity to restore man to his natural state of a sinless existence, (and, must we not deduce from this, Primitivism?).

Shaftesbury believed the highest function of art is to turn the creative impulses toward shaping a life of harmony and virtue. He considered the greatest artist to be the one who best succeeded in achieving this natural harmony of thought, actions, and sentiments, and he considered that creative art, as we understand the term, is a diverted impulse of the same general nature, since it, too, depends upon the perception of beauty. He placed this type of art upon a lower level than the first, or the highest function, but he regarded it as a legitimate substitute, for he stated that each man, is inclined by nature, to pursue the ideal of beauty most suited to his nature.

Nor can the men of cooler Passions, and more deliberate Pursuits, withstand the Force of Beauty, in other subjects. Everyone is a Virtuoso, of a higher or lower degree; Everyone pursues a Grace and courts a Venus of one kind or another..... They who overlook the main Springs of Action, and despise the Thought of Numbers and Proportion in a Life at large, will in the mean Particulars of

it, be no less taken up, and engaged; as either in the Study of common Arts, or in the Care and Culture of mere Mechanic Beautys. The Models of Houses, Buildings, and their accompanying Ornaments; the Plans of Gardens and their Compartments; the ordering of Walks, Plantations, Avenues; and a thousand other Symmetrys, will succeed in the room of that happier and higher Symmetry and Order of a Mind. The Species of Fair, Noble, Handsome, will discover itself on a thousand Occasions, and in a thousand Subjects.⁵

As we have already learned, Shaftesbury defined art as the "effect of mind", or "the reflection and thought by which man raises the variableness of nature to its standard of perfection". Since he considered mind to be no virtue of its possessor, but an evidence of the divinity that shaped it, we may conclude that art is an evidence of man's divinity, depending in its execution and its appreciation on "the imagination which has been raised to an Opinion or Conceit of something majestic and divine." This theory that art must be inspired, or contain an element of "imagination", had the hearty concurrence of both Dennis and Addison.

Both of these critics agreed with Shaftesbury, too, in the acceptance of a utilitarian purpose of art. Shaftesbury believed that all art should have

⁵Characteristics, Vol. I, p. 138-139.

as its purpose some instruction or communication of knowledge, while Dennis declared that art should have two purposes, the subordinate end being pleasure, and the dominant, instruction. He believed further, that religious poetry is the highest and noblest form of art because it is the most instructive. Addison did not agree with Dennis as to the highest form of art, but he did believe that art should have a moral lesson.

The greatest modern critics have laid it down as a rule that an heroic poem should be founded upon some important precept of morality, adopted to the constitution of the country in which the poet writes. Homer and Virgil have formed their plans in this View.⁶

Acting on this principle, he recommended the "Ballad of Chevy Chase" as conforming to this purpose of art and imparting a moral lesson against civil war. This didactic conception of art was not limited to a few critics but was characteristic of the tendency of the age to substitute morals for feeling.

Closely allied to this theory of utility of art, is the principle of "poetic justice", which is one

⁶"The Ballad of Chevy Chase," Readings in English Prose of the Eighteenth Century, ed. Alden, p. 185.

concept of art that is peculiar to the earlier half of the eighteenth century alone. The reasoning that supported the monstrosity must have been as follows: Since it is the purpose of art to teach something useful, and preferably something with a moral or religious value, the author must be a friend to the virtuous and to the principle of virtue itself. In order to prove himself so, he should always take the side of the good and innocent. To accomplish this, the wicked must be punished and the innocent rewarded, or the piece will flout the idea of a divine justice. In theory, poetic justice was never openly credited by the abler critics, with the exception of Dennis, but it is significant that of the selected group of this study the two critics who were likewise playwrights, both sanctioned the principle by practice. The fact that Dennis is one of these two does not occasion the least surprise, but the case seems different with Addison. Dennis was probably inspired by his admiration of Milton to emulate that poet's stern Jehovah, and inexorably deal out justice -----even in literature. Poetic justice seems to be the last attenuation of the Miltonic account of the fall of man. One feels, however, that Addison knew

better than to commit himself to such a practice, and that his error resulted from a lack of feeling. Or perhaps his sense of morals got the best of him again.

There is no doubt that this principle was at variance with Shaftesbury's theories, although he did agree to the extent of saying that a poet must prove himself allied to the side of virtue. Virtue to Shaftesbury was an entirely different thing, however, from the thing generally accepted as virtue by the theists. Whereas it had to them practically the same general meaning that it carries today, of moral excellence, and rectitude, and chastity, to Shaftesbury, it connoted the highest type of human action, namely, a striving toward harmony with nature. And as Shaftesbury declared over and over that art should follow the general conformations of nature, avoiding all extravagances, since nature would not be mocked; and since the whole moral and spiritual significance of his theory of taste is directed against the prevailing concept of Christianity,---"Be good because you will be rewarded for it," -- it is evident that the principle of poetic justice did not, and could not find in him a supporter.

Another distinguishing feature of the classical

school of criticism was its acceptance of the naturalistic division of "arts". Shaftesbury accepted this classification unconsciously, as did everyone else of his day. Even Burke, whose theories as recorded in "The Sublime and Beautiful", late in the century, were far advanced from the earlier concepts of the period, referred casually to poetry as being the most moving of "arts".

Another example of an inherited naturalistic theory is found in the belief of the legitimacy of criticism as to literary "kinds", which amounted to a criticism on the basis of physical characteristics, such as style and form. Shaftesbury's attitude in this matter, too, is typical of the critical thought of his time. He condemned "tragi-comedy" and "Gothic style" with, not only the best, but the worst of his contemporaries. A few citations of the verdicts based on this anachronistic principle will serve to illustrate the position taken by the classical critics.

Addison's approval of "Paradise Lost" because Milton imitated the "Iliad" and the "Aeneid" is one of the best known examples of this sort of criticism. In this essay, Addison pointed out that Milton observed the classical rules of action, unity, and deco-

rum, although the poem might at first seem to defy these precepts by using a double plot. Addison assured his readers, however, that this was permissible, since Milton had the sub-plot run parallel to the main plot. He added that in this respect, Milton's handling of the double thread approached the skillfulness of Dryden.

In short, this is the same kind of beauty which the critics admire in "The Spanish Friar; or the Double Discovery," where the two different plots look like counterplots and copies of one another.⁷

Dennis' unfavorable criticism of Shakespeare on the grounds that "The Merry Wives of Windsor" betrayed a lack of unity and a serious tendency to flout decorum is hardly more startling than Addison's commendation of Milton. It must be said, however, in extenuation that these faults were common to the period. Hume himself rationalized the classical principles of criticism when he termed Pope the "ne plus ultra of justifiable refinement, Lucretius, of simplicity; Virgil and Racine, the happy medium between the two; Corneille and Congreve excessive in

⁷ "On Paradise Lost", English Prose of the Eighteenth Century, p. 333

Refinement, and Sophocles and Terence excessive in simplicity."⁸

In this particular, Shaftesbury was joined to the general opinion that the "simple" style is the most artistic and that all "ornamentation" is to be avoided. Rhyme he condemned as false ornamentation. These verdicts are opposed only by Burke, who approached the matter of words and language from a psychological standpoint, and was in this particular, as in others, ahead of his age. The theories of the desirability of simplicity and of the artificiality of rhyme have a legitimate existence in practical or didactic doctrines. And although they are considered erroneous from a philosophical viewpoint, they are to be interpreted here as indicating, in some degree, a revolt against the creed and spirit of the classicists.

There are some other indications of a romantic tendency in Shaftesbury's teachings. One of the strongest examples of this is found in his theory of sentimentality, in which he asserted the priority of feelings over reason. This principle is essentially the same as that later championed by Rousseau, and

⁸ Saintsbury, A History of English Criticism, p. 285

though it found support in Dennis and Addison, there is little evidence in the writings of Burke, Hume, and Reynolds to warrant any supposition of a like belief.

In that other "Shibboleth" of classicism, the attitude toward the preceding romantic period, Shaftesbury proved himself alligned with his age. Like most of the classicists, he professed a rather tempered admiration for Shakespeare, but one of the reasons he gave for his admiration strikes the modern reader as being rather ridiculous. The thing about Shakespeare's works that struck Shaftesbury as being most worthy of praise was not his genius for the portrayal of character, (although he does mention that), nor his versatility, nor any of the elements of genius that we are accustomed to attribute to Shakespeare, but with the true spirit of eighteenth century classicism he praised Shakespeare for his moral instruction!

....We have older Proofs of a right Disposition in our People toward the moral and instructive Way. Our old dramatick Poet (Shakespeare) may witness our good Ear and manly Relish.

Notwithstanding his natural Rudeness his unpolished Style, his antiquated Phrase and Wit, his want of Method and Coherence, and his Deficiency in

almost all the Graces and Ornaments of this kind of Writing; yet by the Justness of his moral, the Aptness of many of his Descriptions, and the plain and natural Turn of several of his characters, he pleases his Audience, and often gains their Ear, without a single Bribe from Luxury or Vice. That Piece of his, which appears to have most affected English Hearts, (Hamlet) and has perhaps been oftenest acted of any which have come upon our Stage, is almost one continued Moral.⁹

Addision's verdict upon Shakespeare was more severe than Shaftesbury's, for he condemned the style, without reference to any extenuating virtues. He found Shakespeare's plays, he said, defaced by "sounding phrases, hard metaphors and forced expressions."

Dennis was more in harmony with Shaftesbury for he, too, entertained a genuine fondness for the "swan of Avon". He made himself ridiculous, however, in his criticism of Shakespeare, by pointing out the most absurdly conceived qualities for praise and condemning him on the grounds of a lack of sentimentality and on the failure to observe the laws of poetic justice. He was united with Shaftesbury in his approval of Shakespeare as a moralist, particularly lauding him for his use of other themes than love. Both critics were agreed that the morals of an audience are in some danger of contamination from amorous plays, but the precept is best stated by Dennis.

Obscenity cannot be very dangerous, because it is rude and shocking, but Love is a passion; which is so agreeable to the movements of corrupted nature, that by seeing it livelily touched and often represented, an amorous disposition insensibly insinuates itself into the chastest Breast.¹⁰

From these points of similarity between Shaftesbury and the classicists in the application of the theories of literary criticism, it is evident that Shaftesbury's principles differed more in precept than in practice. Nevertheless the comparison has shown a great difference in the spiritual content of Shaftesbury's tenet in comparison with those of the other critics. This difference is caused by the fact that Shaftesbury was primarily interested in preserving the superstructure of theology and morality, and his theories of aesthetics were developed merely as a support for his moral system. Although there has been much adverse criticism of both his ethical and his aesthetic philosophy on the grounds that his optimism was the result of intellectual cowardice, and that he refused to look unpleasant facts in the face, his philosophy discharged a most important function---that of asserting the existence and value of an innate sense of beauty, or conscience. In the sphere

¹⁰"The Taste of Poetry", Critical Essays of the XVIIIth Century, p. 123.

of practical morals, he maintained a standard of taste for which there was a serious need; in the sphere of speculative morals he kept before the world the problem of the origin of our impulses toward beauty and virtue.

In a summary view of Shaftesbury's theory of aesthetics we must credit him with the following important contributions to the commonly accepted philosophy of beauty; first, an instinctive response to beauty which operates as an a priori concept and thus has its only proved existence in the works of art which it inspires; second, the identification of the creative impulse with the perception of beauty; third, the necessity of inspiration, or lyrical intuition in the creation and recognition of art; and fourth, the principle of monism that is illustrated in art, or the recognition of the relation of our creative impulses to the Creative Mind that is behind the mystery of the universe. Besides these consciously expressed principles, he approached very close to the discovery of the subjective quality of beauty; and though he was guilty of continuing in many of the errors that had existed for centuries in the field of aesthetics, his theories were the most advanced of his age.

The contempt of the Englishman for all that is indefinite and impalpable, often leads to the rejection of valuable theories and this seems, in the case of Shaftesbury, to have delayed the appreciation of his theories of aesthetics. It is certain that the very element which supplied the background and incentive for his most valuable principles, deism, was the cause of some subsequent neglect. There is no doubt, however, that Shaftesbury, through his interest in the problems of literary criticism, contributed a great deal toward the development of the modern philosophy of aesthetics.

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