

SCOTTISH ENLIGHTENMENT PHILOSOPHY AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF WINE RHETORIC

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Abstract. Modern wine rhetoric embodies all of the persuasive communication skills developed by wine professionals as they navigate their field by learning new wine trends and experiencing different restaurant environments. The rhetorical skills they develop are reflective of Scottish Enlightenment theories on Taste and beauty. Though these fields do not usually intersect in formal education, exploring wine rhetoric through the lens of Scottish Enlightenment reveals the purposeful methodology behind their practice of persuasive communication. This article situates Enlightenment rhetoric in the current conversation of wine by illuminating today's wine rhetorical practice as indebted to Enlightenment rhetorical theory and strategy.

Keywords: rhetoric, Scottish Enlightenment, taste, wine, wine discourse, beauty

INTRODUCTION

Wine rhetoric encompasses the unique discourse, vocabulary, and tastes of sommeliers, restaurateurs, and other wine professionals. While today's wine rhetoric is developed through wine professionals' knowledge of the latest trends and individual experiences in the industry, wine rhetorical strategies are directly reflective of Scottish Enlightenment theories on *Taste* and *Beauty*. In fact, Enlightenment rhetorical theory - especially when it comes to a *Standard of Taste* - seems to have laid the foundation for wine rhetoric to exist as a legitimate form of persuasive communication.

However, one obvious disconnect is the fact that most wine professionals are likely not scholars of rhetoric and therefore do not

consciously base their rhetorical strategies on Enlightenment theories. But, though wine rhetoric might not be individually developed with Enlightenment theory in mind, there is a definite need to explore wine rhetoric through the lens of Scottish Enlightenment to show that the archival, communal, and cultural practice of wine discourse is not merely a random fusion of wine professionals' opinions and industry jargon - but instead a purposeful, classic form of persuasive communication. To display - and academically explain - the nature of wine rhetoric, a theoretical framework of Scottish Enlightenment rhetoric is vital. This article situates Enlightenment rhetoric in the current conversation of wine by illuminating today's wine rhetorical practice as indebted to Enlightenment rhetorical theory and strategy.

THE STANDARD OF TASTE

In some ways, the concept of Taste is simple. Hugh Blair defines Taste as "The power of receiving pleasure from the beauties of nature and of art" (1783, 955). Surrounded by beauty, we are constantly subjected to the possibility of pleasure by merely existing in a world that provides it. But Blair and other Enlightenment rhetoricians complicate the concept of beauty by attaching it to a Standard of Taste, a universal sense of beauty born from community culture and upheld by self-proclaimed Taste authorities. These authorities, according to Blair, use "natural sensibility to beauty" and apply educated reasoning to uphold (and, oftentimes, to establish) a Standard of Taste for their communities to measure beauty against (1783, 957). By applying "reason and good sense" to our natural inclinations towards beauty, we can develop a "power" fueled by beauty and "improved understanding" (Blair 1783, 957).

Other eighteenth-century rhetoricians seem to agree the drive to hold this power is what sets Taste authorities apart. David Hume asserts that elements of Taste are universal and establishes that the ability to acknowledge the standards of Taste and measure beauty

against these standards is common for everyone. However, Hume also believed “few are qualified to give judgement on any work of art, or establish their own sentiment as the standard of beauty” (1757, 837). Like Blair, Hume argues that, though the principles we use to measure Taste are innate, our ability to effectively critique pleasure comes from a separate, special authority developed from sophisticated, practical experiences and specialized education. In the Enlightenment period, this authority - especially in the field of rhetoric - was the key to establishing oneself as an effective persuader. By his definition, it would seem that Hugh believes a universal Standard of Taste to measure beauty against can only be developed by the experts.

However, Hume also argues that Taste, as a general disposition, is “too obvious not to have fallen under every one’s observation” (1757, 830). In this sense, Taste encompasses a natural ability to distinguish between good and bad, high quality and low quality. Especially in contexts of a shared community, we understand a common idea about what social conventions dictate good and bad. Hume evidences this argument by pointing out our reactions when situations that “depart widely” from our standard of Taste occur (1757, 830). For example, in wine culture, these situations would involve tasting off-putting wine - spoiled wine, faulty wine, wine that is too hot or too cold, cheap wine that is tasteless or too sweet, etc. One does not have to be an expert in the field to have a basic standard of Taste for what counts as bad wine. Therefore, as evidenced by Hume, there must be some natural inclination towards a standard of Taste because, when we experience violations of Taste, we are merciless.

BEAUTY AND POWER

These seemingly contradictory arguments complicate the idea of beauty even more. Are we naturally drawn towards beauty because of our innate sense of Taste, or are we only able to truly see beauty

if we are guided towards it by a self-proclaimed authority? This question resounds in the conversations of modern wine consumers - some who swear by the expertise of wine professionals and others who are curious if wine rhetoric is merely a ploy to market expensive wine. Hume would argue that delicacy - “the source of all the finest and most innocent enjoyments” - is the distinctive element separating the layperson’s sense of taste and the learned authority’s Standard of Taste (1757, 835)¹. But Blair might agree with both sides of the argument, asserting that, while a universal taste might be built on everyone’s subjective opinions, upholding the Standard of Taste allows certain people a position of power.

Blair echoes Hume’s argument that experts on Taste are distinguished by their sense of delicacy, but he also clearly associates their authority with power over the Standard of Taste itself - power sustained by a passion for Taste. In other words, Taste experts do not work towards a single achievement, but instead continuously feed their passion in order to maintain their power, “as the goodness of the palate is not tried by strong flavors, but by a mixture of ingredients where (...) we remain sensible of each” (Blair 1783, 958). Blair’s arguments certainly do not debunk Hume’s; it is clear that sophistication, education, and perhaps even natural talent all contribute to a sense of delicacy that allows one to develop an expertise on Taste. But the power derived from an authority over the Standard of Taste is not solely indebted to natural ability nor extensive practice, just as beauty does not exist because of the beholder but instead exists on its own and merely relies on the beholder for affirmation. But even beauty - despite our attempts to conventionalize, standardize, and define it - holds its own rhetorical power. And if a Standard of Taste is our way of quantifying beauty, then the Scottish rhetors of the eighteenth century and the wine professionals of today are in need of a system of methods to prolong their power and drive their audiences towards the sublime².

CAMPBELL'S METHODS

Generally, a rhetor's purpose is to effectively convince her audience of an argument through persuasive communication. Each individual purpose varies depending on the audience, the subject, and the argument itself - which is true for both Enlightenment rhetors and modern wine professionals. While each situation varies, a wine professional's typical goal is to enhance an audience's pleasure from wine through persuasive tactics. A perfect methodology to serve as a framework for these tactics is reflected in Book I of George Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric*. In Chapter V, Campbell describes four tribes of evidence: experience, analogy, testimony, and calculation of chances. These four elements, according to Campbell, form the "foundation" of all persuasive communication (1776, 923).

Experience is listed first perhaps because it is often the first type of evidence an audience considers. Plus, if executed effectively, it can be the easiest rhetorical tactic to employ. Campbell defines experience as "the tendency of the mind to associate ideas under the notion of causes, effects, or adjuncts" (1776, 916). Experience is made up of multiple examples of situations, giving it credibility in the eyes of individuals who have an abundance of it. Employing this tribe allows the audience to draw from their own memories in order to "discover resemblances" in new situations (Campbell 1776, 916). Furthermore, Campbell points out that "by experience we not only decide concerning the future from the past, but concerning things uncommon from things familiar which resemble them" (1776, 917). This makes audience experience an incredibly useful tool for rhetors with new ideas, such as wine professionals who discuss new wines with their audience.

Its usefulness is what makes experience one of the most common tribes of evidence used by wine professionals, as it is often used as a jumping-off point in their arguments. Aaron Meskin and Jon Robson discuss this phenomenon in "Taste and Acquaintance." They argue that experience is the simplest method of achieving persuasion involving Taste, as "we would not know what

[something] tastes like without tasting it” (Meskin and Robson 2015, 128). Unlike some other subjects of beauty, the act of tasting cannot be truly achieved by persuasion alone. Knowledge of elements such as color and sound do not require “first-hand perceptual experience” the way Taste does (Meskin and Robson 2015, 128). By having an audience experience (or by having an audience who has already experienced) an aspect of Taste, the rhetorician can use the audience’s experience to convince them of her argument. In wine rhetorical practice, convincing an audience to receive pleasure from a wine they have already received pleasure from would require little convincing altogether. For this reason, Campbell defines experience as the “foundation” of all reasoning (1776, 918).

Analogy, Campbell’s second tribe, is “hinted” at in his discussion on experience and is “founded on some remote similitude” because, in cases where the audience has not experienced taste, the rhetorician relies on analogy to convince them of an argument (1776, 918). Campbell calls this “indirect experience,” and Meskin and Robson call it “sensory substitution” (1776, 918; 2015, 130). Campbell says that “like effects sometimes proceed from objects which faintly resemble, but not near so frequently as from objects which have been a more perfect likeness” (1776, 918). This persuasive tactic, while not as simple as persuasion through experience, would require the rhetor to articulate comparisons based on her audience’s experiences.

Not only is analogy part of an ideal framework for wine rhetoric, but it is also one of the leading skills formally taught in wine education. Within wine are countless flavors and aromas, and wine professionals learn a plethora of terms to describe them. These descriptive terms - adjectives like *tropical*, *floral*, *herbal*, and *earthy* - are generally not associated with elements chemically present in the wine, but with elements resembling the wine’s character (Puckette and Hammack 2015, 16). In the Deductive Tasting Method for wine professionals, analogy of key terms with wine characteristics founds two of the most important steps, smelling and tasting (Court of Master Sommeliers 2020). These analogies allow wine professionals

to concisely explain their methodology to their audience. Though the audience has not experienced a specific wine first-hand, the analogy of the wine to something they have tasted - comparing Albariño with light, citrus flavors, for example - allows them the indirect experience of the wine.

Testimony is the tribe that truly tests a rhetor's persuasion skill. While based on experience, testimony as a successful rhetorical strategy relies on the *eunoia* of the relationship between the rhetor and the audience. Without this bond, the rhetor will have no credibility, for "on testimony in concurrence with memory is founded the much more extensive experience which is not originally one's own, but derived from others" (Campbell 1776, 919). The rhetor's credibility - or, more blatantly, the audience's perception of the rhetor's credibility - determines the persuasive hold over the audience. Only when an audience has no reason to doubt the rhetor's credibility can testimony be an effective rhetorical strategy.

Campbell, Meskin, and Robson all agree that testimony is a rhetorical tactic based on lack of doubt in the credibility of the rhetor. Meskin and Robson admit that testimony, or "taste-imony" in regards to matters of Taste, does not always lead to knowledge, but

"Still, if we accept the assumption that taste-imony in these instances typically carries some epistemic value, it is difficult to see on what basis we could deny the further claim that, given the right circumstances, such testimony can serve as a source of gustatory knowledge" (2015, 132).

Testimony is based on credibility. Experience is based on memory - persuading an audience through experience depends on the quality of their memory of the experience. But testimony depends entirely on the *ethos* of the rhetor and how well she displays this credibility. Since many wine professionals seek careers that are "predicated on the assumption that their testimony about taste is of epistemic value," developing rhetorical skills related to this tribe of evidence is imperative for success (Meskin and Robson 2015, 132).

Calculation of chances, Campbell's last subdivision of reasoning, reflects the importance of the rhetor's confidence in herself. This subdivision, when combined with one or more of the others, can enhance the effectiveness of an argument. But on its own, calculation of chances involves a last-resort situation in which neither experience, analogy, nor testimony have much persuasive value. Campbell's explanation of chance is unique because of its almost negative connotations. While he believes that conducting a calculation of chances shows smart rhetorical thinking and planning, he notes that chance is not a skill that can be altered by individuals. Chance is not based on trial as the other tribes are; it is, instead, merely a necessary assessment of one's possible successful outcomes in order to prepare accordingly for surprising outcomes.

In these situations, wine professionals rely on their knowledge of wine to make the best argument at the opportune moment. Some might categorize this as situational while others might categorize it as kairotic. Adrienne and Keith Lehrer assert that knowledge of the appropriate language surrounding wine is especially important in situations like these. When someone can use the best fitting language to describe wine, then the chances of persuading an audience - regardless of the audience's level of experience with the wine - increase. When it comes to asserting authority on a standard of Taste, Lehrer and Lehrer say, "De gustibus non est disputandum" (2016, 763). The audience's subjective opinion of wine makes the ultimate final decision of persuasive success. When conducting a calculation of chances, rhetors must have the self-confidence to know that they have the best knowledge and skills necessary to please their audiences.

MODERN TASTE

Currently, wine rhetoric is still modeled after Enlightenment rhetoric's methodology and definition of a Standard of Taste. While wine professionals likely do not formally study the art of rhetoric,

their methodology for developing and using rhetoric must employ Enlightenment theories of Taste in order for them to maintain authority as wine experts. The answer to gaining authority lies in the belief of Taste as a faculty of human nature - more specifically, an improvable faculty. Blair insinuates that authorities gain their expertise through improving their Taste. He argues that Taste, though an “internal” sense, is “capable of being guided and enlightened by reason” (Blair 1783, 960). Wine professionals, like everyone, begin with a natural sense of Taste, but their personal desire to improve this faculty leads them towards an acquired sense of Taste which could eventually allow them to be authorities on the standards of Taste in their field. Simply put: scholars who nurture their internal sense of Taste gain the ability to develop themselves as authorities on the standards of Taste.

Blair’s ultimate conclusion is that one’s development from innate sense of good taste to authoritative sense of acquired Taste intertwines with their personal journey towards self-understanding:

“To apply the principles of good sense to composition and discourse; to examine what is beautiful, and why it is so; to employ ourselves in distinguishing accurately between the specious and the solid, between affected and natural ornament, must certainly improve us not a little in the most valuable part of all philosophy, the philosophy of human nature. For such disquisitions are very intimately connected with the knowledge of ourselves” (1783, 953).

Blair argues that the learning we do when acquiring the taste of our subjects involves a self-exploration of our imaginations. This exploration results in deeper learning about ourselves through our education of our subject. Furthermore, Blair insinuates that self-understanding is not merely a side effect of Taste acquisition, but instead an intimate connection that occurs naturally and, possibly, purposefully rather than as the result of. Perhaps self-exploration happens automatically when one begins to extensively study wine; but perhaps the aspiring professional’s innate desire for self-exploration fuels a passion for wine study.

Overall, wine rhetoric finds itself, like Taste, at the intersection of multiple binaries. The language we use to describe wine is both authentic and artificial at the same time. The skills we use are both innate and acquired. The exigency of our argument is strong because of the power that rhetoric has over an audience's sense of Taste and arbitrary because of the objectivity of this subject. The ultimate goal of the wine rhetor is to enhance the audience's pleasure derived from wine, yet the pleasurable outcome lies solely in the relationship between the drink and the audience. Furthermore, the wine professional's purpose and the rhetor's purpose are exactly the same: to guide their audience towards the "sublime," as Campbell puts it (1776, 903). If rhetoric can "ravish the soul" of the audience through the precise, strategic power of the rhetor, then wine can also affect the drinker this way (Campbell 1776, 903). In fact, wine professionals and wine lovers alike might argue that wine has already been "ravishing the soul" of its audience for centuries.

Many scholars believe that Taste and rhetoric are synonymous - especially in eighteenth-century contexts. Both concepts involve creating truths based on extensive learning of language, context, and audience. Moreover, both entities seek to establish a standard by which we measure pleasure against. The similarities between rhetoricians and wine professionals are endless, and both of their passions are derived in pursuit of the sublime. For wine professionals, Enlightenment theory illuminates their paths to success. As for those of us in the audience, we should consider ourselves fortunate that Taste - and wine - reflect the most important intersection: curiosity and pleasure. Our subject allows us to delve into our curiosity while falling back on the inevitable pleasure we gain not from Taste but from simply tasting.

NOTES

1. Hume argues: "When the critic has no delicacy, he judges without any distinction and is only affected by the grosser and more palpable qualities of the object. The finer touches pass unnoticed and disregarded" (1757, 837).

2. *Sublimity* in rhetoric is defined as: “A kind of eminence or excellence of discourse . . . the source of distinction of the very greatest [rhetors] and the means by which they have given eternal life to their own fame” (Longinus 1554, 347).

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