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Embracing Hugh Blair
Rhetoric, Faith and Citizenship
in 19th Century Mexico



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Embracing Hugh Blair Rhetoric, Faith and Citizenship in 19th Century Mexico

Brian Connaughton

Abstract. - This is a study of the key role of Hugh Blair, a Scottish Enlightened scholar and minister, in the understanding and teaching of rhetoric in a quarrelsome 19th-Century Mexico. His role as a master of multiple rhetorical forms, including legal prose, literary production and the sermon, emphasized effective communication to a broadening public audience in an age of expanding citizenship. First his Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, and then several selections of his sermons, were introduced in Spanish to the Mexican public. Somewhat surprisingly, his works were highly celebrated and widely recommended, by persons on the whole political spectrum, with virtually no discussion of Blair's political concerns or religious faith. His approach was useful, it was made clear, in a more fluid society aimed at modernization, but simultaneously contained a top-down view of life in society which seriously restricted sensitivity to the voice of common people. This article discusses his general acclaim and those limitations within the context of local and Atlantic history, taking into account the critical views of some of the numerous authors who have studied Blair's work and his enormous influence during the 19th century. In the perspectives offered, his impact can be judged more critically in terms of an undoubtedly changing Mexican political culture, but one simultaneously opening and closing admission to effective citizenship.

Keywords: Latin America, Sermon, Christianity, Civilization, Primitivism.

Resumen. - Este es un estudio del papel clave de Hugh Blair, un ilustrado académico y ministro escocés, en el entendimiento y la enseñanza de la retórica en el México contencioso del siglo XIX. Su papel como maestro de múltiples formas retóricas, incluida la prosa legal, la producción literaria y el sermón, enfatizó la comunicación efectiva a un público creciente en una era de ciudadanía en expansión. Primero, sus conferencias sobre Retórica y Bellas Letras, y luego varias selecciones de sus sermones, fueron presentadas al público mexicano en español. Por sorprendente que parezca, sus obras fueron muy celebradas y ampliamente recomendadas por personas de todo

el espectro político, prácticamente sin discusión de las preocupaciones políticas o la fe religiosa de Blair. Su enfoque fue útil, quedó claro, en una sociedad más fluida dirigida a la modernización, pero al mismo tiempo contenía una visión de arriba hacia abajo de la vida en sociedad que restringía sensibilidad a la voz del pueblo común. Este artículo analiza la aclamación general y esas limitaciones en el contexto de la historia local y atlántica, teniendo en cuenta las opiniones críticas de algunos de los numerosos autores que han estudiado la obra de Blair y su enorme influencia durante el siglo XIX. En las perspectivas ofrecidas, su impacto puede juzgarse más críticamente en términos de una cultura política mexicana cambiante, indudablemente, pero una que al mismo tiempo abría y restringía admisión a la ciudadanía efectiva.

Palabras clave: América Latina, sermón, cristianismo, civilización, primitivismo.

Introduction

Hugh Blair was a British rhetorician and preacher known in Latin America as Hugo Blair, whose printed lectures and sermons became stock references and guides in order to pose a new and better way to order ideas, compose texts for oral or written presentation and also expound on the word of God to an enlightened public. Blair was an 18th century Scottish enlightened intellectual, associate of David Hume and Adam Smith, whose works seem to have moved into Spanish America beginning about Independence time.¹ His influence was grounded in a new standard of good taste, exact thinking, equilibrium and the appropriate development of genres of expression. His work attracted attention in the press, was used in schooling, in civil oratory, prose, poetry and even in sermons despite Blair's Presbyterian faith and life as a priest of the Church of Scotland. His earliest and broadest impact was due to his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, initially published in 1783. They were translated in Spain, published there in 1798-1801, frequently reedited in the following years, and had a growing public in New Spain beginning in 1803.² In Mexico, his sway was later enhanced by the work of Miguel Santa María, who translated a selection of his sermons into Spanish and published them in three series in Mexico between 1831 and 1833. This influence was alive and well into the 1850s and even stretches into the latter part of the century. José Gómez de la

¹ On his friendship and association with Hume and Smith, see Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005 (edited with an "Introduction" by Linda Ferreira-Buckley/S. Michael Halloran), pp. XXXIII, XXXV, XL and XLVII.

² Hugh Blair, *Lecciones sobre la retórica y las bellas letras*, Madrid: En la Oficina de Don Antonio Cruzado, 1798-1801 (translated by José Luis Munárriz, 4 tomes).

Cortina, focusing on his sermons but with a clear reference to his general rhetorical influence, wrote in 1835:

“if this new kind of preaching made the eloquence of the pulpit vary entirely in England, introducing the lessons of evangelical morality instead of incomprehensible and extravagant metaphysical discussions; their progress was greater in Scotland, where the sermons of Hugo Blair are regarded as so many other models, and together with his rhetorical lessons, they spread the taste of beautiful, healthy and wise literature.”³

In 1842 Carlos María de Bustamante wrote that the news broke in Mexico on July 11th, 1837, that Miguel Santa María, Mexico’s envoy to Spain had died in Madrid. Bustamante reminded his reading public of Santa María’s “patriotism and great wisdom”, and immediately tied this to his translation of sermons by Hugo Blair.⁴ A decade later, in 1852, General José María Tornel would state that Santa María “did religion and morals a service by translating the sermons of Hugo Blair, which today are in the hands of everyone”.⁵

In the great *Diccionario universal de historia y de geografía*, where Spanish and Mexican intellectuals worked together for years to produce an indispensable multi-volume reference guide at mid-century, Blair received a substantial entry as a distinguished “sacred orator and critic” who had taught at Saint Andrews and later at the University of Edinburgh. His sermons were said to have produced a “revolution in eloquence in the pulpit”. His published lectures were notably accredited with “broad acceptance” among the reading public.⁶ Blair’s Mexican translator, the liberal politician and author Santa María, was covered in a much longer piece which put emphasis on his political and diplomatic life, culminating in a praiseworthy paragraph on his cultural contribution to Mexico as a practicing member of the literati. His translation

³ José Gómez de la Cortina, “Sermones o discursos de filosofía moral y cristiana del Dr. Hugo Blair. Traducidos del Inglés al castellano por M. S.,-Mexico. — Juicio crítico de esta traducción”: *Revista mexicana. Periódico científico y literario*, 1: 2 (1835), pp. 122-127, quote on pp. 123-124.

⁴ Carlos María de Bustamante, *El gabinete mexicano durante el segundo periodo de D. Anastasio Bustamante, hasta la entrega del mando al Exmo. Señor Presidente Interino D. Antonio López de Santa-Anna y Continuación del Cuadro Histórico de la Revolución Mexicana*, Mexico City: Imprenta de José María Lara, 1842, tome 1, p. 26.

⁵ José María Tornel y Mendivil, *Breve reseña histórica de los acontecimientos más notables de la nación mexicana, desde el año de 1821 hasta nuestros días*, Mexico City: Imprenta de Cumplido, 1852, p. 52.

⁶ *Diccionario universal de historia y de geografía: obra dada a luz en España por una sociedad de literatos distinguidos, y refundida y aumentada considerablemente para su publicacion en Mexico con noticias históricas, geográficas, estadísticas y biográficas sobre las Americas en general y especialmente sobre la República Mexicana*, por D. Lucas Alamán, D. José María Andrade, D. José María Basoco et al., Mexico City: Librería de Andrade, 1853, vol. 1, p. 609.

of Blair's sermons figures here, and rounds out references to publications which together, it stated, would project his fame into the future.⁷

This study is concerned with the astonishing reception of Blair's civil and religious oratorical work in Mexico, across national and ideological boundaries, and beyond Church affiliations, within the context of a similar reception throughout the Americas.

Mexico

Blair's Lectures played an important role in Spain from the end of the 18th century.⁸ Before 1820 this work had spread to America, where it became of prominent importance in Argentina and Chile, and gradually it would make its impact in Colombia Peru, Brazil, and other countries.⁹ It was also becoming increasingly relevant to teaching programs in the United States.¹⁰

Mexico, nonetheless, appears precocious in its appreciation of Blair when compared with other parts of the disintegrating Iberian empires in the New World. In the *Gazeta de México* (edited by Manuel Antonio Valdés y Murguía), the following announcement appeared on September 13th, 1803:

"Lecciones sobre la Retórica y Bellas Letras by Hugo Blair [...] fruit of the study of all the ancient and modern Rhetoricians and Critics, places its author in the most distinguished place among those who have given rules on literary composition, men of taste agreeing to prefer it to the others of their class, and to estimate it as the most classical and complete on eloquence and poetry. It gathers the solidity of the principles, the pleasant ease of the style, the attractive variety of the examples, and the most judicious analyses of the best works in each genre. The Preacher, the Lawyer, the public man, the Poet, and the lover of educated literature will find in it maxims that direct them in the

⁷ Alamán et. al, *Diccionario universal de historia y de*, 1855, vol. 6, pp. 801-803.

⁸ Don Paul Abbott, "The influence of Blair's Lectures in Spain": *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 7: 3 (1989), pp. 275-289.

⁹ Hernán Francisco Pas, *Literatura, prensa periódica y público lector en los procesos de nacionalización de la cultura en Argentina y en Chile (1828-1863)*, Buenos Aires: 2010 (unpublished doctoral thesis, Universidad Nacional de La Plata); Bernardo Subercaseaux, "La prensa, los libros y la lectura en las primeras décadas del siglo XIX": *Mapocho*, 73 (2013), pp. 21-41; Iván Jaksic / Sol Serrano, "In the Service of the Nation. The Establishment and Consolidation of the Universidad de Chile, 1842-79": *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 70: 1 (1990), pp. 139-171; Sol Serrano / Iván Jaksic, "El poder de las palabras. La iglesia y el estado liberal ante la difusión de la escritura en el Chile del siglo XIX": *Historia*, 33 (2000), pp. 435-460; Javier Ocampo López, "El Maestro José Félix de Restrepo, el educador de la Generación de Independencia de Colombia": *Rhela*, 14 (2010), pp. 9-60; Luis Monguió, "Para la historia de las ideas estéticas en el Perú. Noticia del Aguinaldo para el año de 1834": *Cahiers du monde hispanique et luso-brésilien*, 8 (1967), pp. 9-30.

¹⁰ Linda Ferreira-Buckley / S. Michael Halloran, "Introduction": Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, pp. XV-LIV.

application of their talents, and observations that orient them in the choice of the authors they propose as models.”¹¹

By 1806, references to Blair’s *Lecciones*, which centered on civil discourse including legal and literary styles, were appearing repeatedly in passages of *El Diario de México* as an argumentative source, or as a sought-after work in a still book-hungry country.¹² Blair was associated with perfecting human faculties by means of interactive speech, and through sharing reasoned knowledge.¹³

On November 8th, 1806, the *Diario* announced that a recent shipment of Blair’s *Lecciones*, or *Lectures*, was immediately sold out. War in the Atlantic would impede the further arrivals in the near future. Due to the outstanding importance of the work “for the pulpit and forum speakers”¹⁴, the *Diario de México* hoped to collect enough money in upfront subscriptions to publish a Mexican edition of *Lecciones*. After the announcement, it went on to offer more information on Blair and his work.¹⁵

By September of 1807 he was being cited as a source for determining the epochs of good taste or enlightenment in literature history.¹⁶ The following month an article on university reform in Spain promoted the idea that Blair’s *Lecciones*, along with works by Johann Gottlieb Heineccius, Domingo Cavalari and Adam Smith might be adopted in all universities, both in Spain and the New World.¹⁷

In 1808 political and military affairs tended to crowd out literary concerns in the public life of New Spain as the monarchy reeled from Napoleonic occupation of the peninsula. Searching for Blair’s influence becomes a little more difficult in the ensuing years. He was, however, cited to blast José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi in an interchange between Lizardi and one of his

¹¹ *Gazeta de México*, September 13th, 1803, p. 356.

¹² *Diario de México*, January 23rd, 1806, pp. 89-92, especially p. 90; *ibidem*, March 12nd, 1806, pp. 281-284; *ibidem*, June 8th, 1806, pp. 157-160; *Diario de México*, June 25th, 1808, p. 610.

¹³ *Ibidem*, July 25th, 1806, pp. 349-352, especially pp. 349-350. Other mentions appear in: October 4th, 1806, pp. 137-140 and October 5th, 1806, pp. 141-144.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, November 8th, 1806, pp. 277-284, quote on pp. 277-283.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, December 30th, 1806, pp. 491-494. Vogeley, after carefully analyzing the introduction of *Lecciones* to Mexico through the *Diario de México*, pinpointed the issue in which readers were informed that the lack of sufficient inscriptions had made a local edition impossible. See Nancy Vogeley, “Mexican Readings of Hugh Blair’s ‘Rhetoric’”: *Dieciocho: Hispanic Enlightenment*, 21: 2 (1998), p. 153. In *Diario de México*, February 17th, 1807, p. 189: “Only a very small number of subscribers have been assembled for the Blair reprint”.

¹⁶ *Diario de México*, September 25th, 1807, p. 98.

¹⁷ Article “Universidades de España”, *Diario de México*, October 28th, 1807, pp. 261-262.

critics, in 1814. Lizardi considered that Blair was quoted by his opponent “with more violence than a stake [driven] by force of mallet”. In his opinion, his critic cited Blair only to exhibit knowledge he did not possess.¹⁸ By the end of the absolutist six years of 1814-1820, however, things started to pick up once again for Blair in Mexico. The Seminario Palafoxiano, in Puebla, received a document on public instruction from the liberal Cortes in Spain, elaborated in 1820 and meant to go into operation as of 1821, which stated that Blair’s *Lecciones* should be used in courses on rhetoric for students of law,¹⁹ and by 1826 the state legislature of Puebla mandated that students demonstrate knowledge of Blair’s *Lecciones* to become lawyers.²⁰ When the Puebla legislature founded its Academia Teórico Práctica de Jurisprudencia in 1833, Blair’s *Lecciones*, apparently in the compendium version of 1815, were the basis for the course.²¹ The Querétaro Legislature also moved forward on juridical education, creating on October 7th, 1827 a law degree to be studied at the Colegio of San Ignacio y San Francisco Javier. Blair would be the basis for the study of rhetoric by the students.²²

Mexican newspapers continued to make announcements concerning Blair’s work in the 1820s. His influence had been until then primarily in civil discourse. In 1831, however, *El Fénix de la Libertad* celebrated something new, and an exclusively Mexican contribution to the spread of Blair’s influence: Miguel Santa María had just published in Spanish a number of Blair’s sermons. This had not been done previously, despite the ample voicing of praise for his *Lecciones*, wherein divine oratory was carefully considered as

¹⁸ Anónimo, Auto de Inquisición contra el suplemento del Pensador del lunes 17 de enero de 1814. Celebrado en una cafetería, en forma de diálogo entre un Arquitecto y un Petimetre, Mexico City: Imprenta de Manuel Antonio Valdés, 1814; “Apología al papel titulado: Auto de Inquisición etc.”, *El pensador*, Suplemento al Pensador, February 12nd, 1814, quote on p. 24.

¹⁹ Alejandro G. Escobedo Rojas, “El Seminario Palafoxiano de la Puebla de los Ángeles. Su mundo jurídico en los albores del Estado mexicano”: Oscar Cruz Barney / Héctor Fix-Fierro / Elisa Speckman Guerra (eds.), *Los abogados y la formación del Estado Mexicano*, Mexico City: IJ/IIH-UNAM / Ilustre y Nacional Colegio de Abogados de México, 2013, pp. 83-107, quote on . 88-89.

²⁰ “Mayo 20, 1826: Número 47”, Primer Congreso Constitucional, Colección de los decretos y órdenes mas importantes que espidió el primer congreso constitucional del estado de Puebla en los años de 1826, 1827 y 1828, Puebla: Imprenta del Gobierno, 1828, p. 63.

²¹ Humberto Morales Moreno, “La formación de los abogados y sus vínculos con el Estado (Puebla, 1745-1861)”: Cruz Barney et al., *Los abogados y la formación*, pp. 109-128, especially pp. 118-121.

²² Alejandro Montoya Prado, “La transición del orden jurídico. Entre la Colonia y la República en los procesos criminales en Querétaro (1830-1849)”: *Signos Históricos*, 26 (2011), pp. 16-42, especially pp. 25-26.

only one of many uses of rhetoric.²³ Midway through 1832, *El Registro Oficial* published an article sent from Toluca, suggesting it was important to publish all of Blair's sermons in Spanish because of their orientation to morality and the support they would provide for the "betterment of our customs". The sermons were singled out as a "classic work that so distinguishes English literature". If Blair's *Lecciones* had provided "a code of good taste", the sermons had enriched this legacy by giving "a practical example in which he has subjected himself to the strict rules that he had established". Mexico's "nascent institutions" required works like these, in the opinion of the correspondent from Toluca. While not wishing to exaggerate Mexico's moral deficit, the author wanted to be very clear:

"[i]n a republican country, where all are called to exercise power, it is necessary to procure by all means that the hands to which it is entrusted do not demean it with acts repugnant to sound morals; and that those who obey, not only discern in performing [their] important electoral functions the true merit of the candidates, not confusing the hypocrite with one who is truly virtuous, but provide, with the usual exercise of good deeds, a mass of resistance to arbitrary and unjust measures. [...] In a barbarous country the greatest talents are eclipsed, because [...] a people who have not savored the pleasures of the spirit cannot provide it."²⁴

It was necessary for the press to go beyond publishing the "poison of political controversies". The correspondent from Toluca called on Santa María to keep translating Blair's sermons, and on all concerned individuals, political authorities, and especially parents (*padres de familia*) to support this important activity to foster "the culture of the spirit" in Mexico. These sermons could substitute or alternate with the "pious readings that are ordinarily used in private society to give a boost to religious devotion". Their emphasis on morality was outstanding, inciting listeners to better their ways. Their pointed aim to "banish idleness and its disastrous consequences, and to fix the characters of true freedom and its opposition to vice" commanded respect.

In March of 1833, *El Fénix de la Libertad* also published an article from Toluca in which it became clear that the shortened *Compendio* of *Lecciones* by Blair continued to build its national audience in Mexico. It was being used there to teach rhetoric in the *Instituto Literario*.²⁵ In May, *El Fénix de la Libertad* celebrated the simultaneous appearance of another set of sermons by

²³ *El Fénix de la Libertad*, December 21st, 1831, p. 24. For a few mentions of Blair in Mexican newspapers of the 1820s: *El Farol*, May 5, 1822, p. 246: note 22 on Blair, regarding the use of ridicule and its dangers in debate; *El Sol*, October 30th, 1824, p. 552: announcing the one-volume *Compendio* of Blair for sale; *El Sol*, September 10th, 1826, p. 1814: sale of a volume of Blair's *Lecciones*.

²⁴ In "Parte No Oficial. Interior", *El Registro Oficial*, June 9th, 1832, pp. 242-243.

²⁵ *El Fénix de la Libertad*, March 24th, 1833. The article on education, dated March 19th, with an educational proposal by Wenceslao de la Barquera, pp. 3-4.

Blair: “[t]he second series of Sermons or discourses of moral and Christian philosophy by Dr. Hugo Blair, is as good as the first published by the same editor[...]. The new publication was worthy of “[a]ll praise in the literary and in the moral order”. Blair’s writing was done with “precision and clarity, and with incontestable reasoning force.” *El Fénix* continued:

“Blair did not preach a morality that by force of austerity is presented as impracticable, but rather the maxims of eternal justice sanctioned in the human heart. When speaking of mysteries, he is not satisfied with sterile contemplations, but teaches practicable maxims for the use of society.”

El Fénix de la Libertad expressed its support of Santa María’s efforts to obtain money by way of subscriptions to print a separate edition to be gratuitously delivered to schools and handed out among the poor.²⁶ *La Antorcha* brought to bear Blair’s sermons in the midst of a debate in its newspaper in one of its May issues.²⁷ By June Santa María published a third series of Blair’s sermons.²⁸ Shortly after, in 1834, a Mexican edition of Blair’s *Lecciones* was finally published -the only such edition in Latin America.²⁹ The interest in the civil oratory of Blair remained vibrant even as his contribution to spiritual and moral rhetoric grew.

Between 1835 and 1839, in addition to an early and extensive comment in *Revista Mexicana*, there were few mentions of Blair in Mexican newspapers.³⁰ In 1839, however, in two different reports on educational activities in Zacatecas, Blair figures prominently as a teaching source for literary taste.³¹ In the early 1840s Blair was a fairly frequent reference in *El Siglo Diez y Nueve* to discuss topics such as the ethical duties of governments and the governed, teaching at the Instituto Literario de Zacatecas, or in regard to satire, poetic style or the intricacies of theater oratory.³² And in August of 1845 *El Siglo Diez y Nueve* published a government document on educational reform which

²⁶ *El Fénix de la Libertad*, May 13th, 1833, p. 4.

²⁷ *La Antorcha*. Periódico religioso, político y literario, May 16th, 1833, p.183.

²⁸ Hugo Blair, *Sermones, ó discursos de filosofía moral y christiana del doctor Hugo Blair, traducidos del inglés al castellano por M.S., Tercera Serie*, Mexico City: Miguel González, 1833.

²⁹ Vogeley, “Mexican Readings”, p. 163; Margarita Alegría de la Colina, “De la poética de lo sublime en el romanticismo mexicano”: Jorge A. Ruedas de la Serna (ed.), *De la perfecta expression. Preceptistas iberoamericanos, siglo XIX*, Mexico City: UNAM, 1998, pp. 137-150, especially pp. 137, 140 and 150. Hugo Blair, *Lecciones sobre la retórica y las bellas letras*, Mexico City: Imprenta de Galván a cargo de Mariano Arévalo, 1834 (3 tomes).

³⁰ Gómez de la Cortina, “Sermones o discursos”, pp. 122-127.

³¹ *Diario del Gobierno*, July 28th, 1839, p. 334; *Diario del Gobierno*, September 23rd, 1839, p. 91.

³² *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, January 12nd, 1843, p. 2; *ibidem*, September 30th, 1844, p. 2; *ibidem*, April 27th, 1844, pp. 2-3; *ibidem*, November 7th, 1844, p. 4. *ibidem*, November 7th, 1845, p. 4; *ibidem*, June 1th, 1846, p. 2.

called for the use of “classical works” for the teaching of rhetoric, such as Charles de Rollin, Hugo Blair and Antonio de Capmany, but not beginning too early in the educational process.³³ There were other mentions of Blair in newspapers of 1845, in which a favorable reading was persistent.³⁴ It is clear that his influence on effective expression in multiple genres was strong and broad.

Tellingly, a spate of references to Blair’s sermons appeared during the war with the United States, in 1847, and shortly after. In December of that year *El Monitor Republicano*, a liberal newspaper, announced the sale of the three series of sermons translated by Miguel Santa María, in two different bookshops, at the modest price of two pesos, praising Santa María profusely, and suggesting the need for a wide circulation. The price requested, “does not cover its costs; but the desire that they circulate from hand to hand among all Mexicans; because of the materials they contain, forces its owner to experience this loss”.³⁵ Mexico, as evident in many patriotic speeches following upon the Mexican-American war, was experiencing a severe crisis in relation to national destinies.³⁶ The strongly ethical emphasis of Blair’s sermons must have had a receptive audience in this context, especially since he was already widely accredited as a source for fine literary taste.

In February of 1848 *El Monitor Republicano* was again announcing the sale of the sermons.³⁷ It praised the sacred oratory of Blair which grounded religious ethics in civic realities.³⁸ In June of 1848, *El Siglo Diez y Nueve* was also offering the collected sermons for sale.³⁹ *El Observador Católico*, of June 3rd, 1848, included a mention of Blair in a scathing comment on public writers

³³ *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, August 28th, 1845, pp. 2-3. See also in this regard: *El Monitor Constitucional*, August 20th, 1845, p. 3.

³⁴ In the article “Meléndez Valdés. Juicio crítico de su obra” *El Museo Mexicano*, January 1th, 1845 (pp. 289-294), Blair, *Lecciones*, is brought up (pp. 290-292). On the last page it becomes clear that the criticism expressed is against Munárriz the translator. *El Monitor Republicano*, February 14th, 1846, dealing with the principle of imitation, refers to Blair “to whom the theory of fine letters owes such excellent observations”. Cfr., *Diario Oficial*, April 17th, 1846, p. 4: the issue announces the sale of Blair’s *Compendio*.

³⁵ *El Monitor Republicano*, December 11st, 1847, p.4.

³⁶ Brian Connaughton, “Entre la palabra hablada y la palabra escrita. La cultura política nacional en el foro de la Alameda, 1827-1854”: Brian Connaughton, *Entre la voz de Dios y el llamado de la patria. Religión, identidad y ciudadanía en México, siglo XIX*, Mexico City: FCE / UAM, 2010, pp. 247-279.

³⁷ *El Monitor Republicano*, February 29th, 1848, p. 4: the issue also points up the translation by the “illustrious Mexican” Santa María.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, February 4th, 1849, pp. 2-3.

³⁹ *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, June 17th, 1848, p. 2. The issue announces the sale, referring to the sermons in a virtual panegyric.

who resisted criticism of their works, noting that the Scotsman and other great writers engaged freely in critical comment.⁴⁰

By December of 1848, the conservative *El Universal* was promoting the sale of Blair's sermons.⁴¹ It continued doing so during 1849, as would the liberal *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*.⁴² There were other mentions of Blair, his works and his ideas, and a particularly incisive reference to the importance of Blair's thinking on religion in times of adversity both in this and other publications.⁴³ The liberal newspapers *El Monitor Republicano* and *El Siglo Diez y Nueve* continued their positive references to the influence of Blair's religious oratory in 1850.⁴⁴ And of course it is apparent that Blair's general influence on civic rhetoric and clear thinking remained strong in the Humanities, since *Lecciones* continued to appear as a constant reference.⁴⁵ When the conservative *El Universal* published in 1852 the prospectus of an *Enciclopedia portátil, nacional y extranjera*, Blair figured in the "[l]ist of the authors whose works

⁴⁰ *El Observador Católico*, March 25th-September 30th, 1848. Article "Reforma del clero", *ibidem*, June 3rd, 1848, pp. 253-264, quote on p. 256.

⁴¹ *El Universal: periódico independiente*, December 31st, 1848, p. 4.

⁴² *Ibidem*, January 1st, 1849, p. 4; *ibidem*, January 2nd, 1849, p. 4; *ibidem*, January 4th, 1849, p. 4. *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, November 25th, 1849, p. 642; *ibidem*, November 3rd, 1849, p. 558, announces the publication in *El Album Mexicano* of an "exceedingly moral" article by Blair. See "Todas las cosas contribuyen al bien de los justos" *El Album Mexicano*, 1849, pp. 410-416. This is one of his sermons.

⁴³ *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, April 22nd, 1849, pp. 446-447, publishes *Memorias de Ultratumba* by François-René de Chateaubriand, tome 3, where the author refers to Blair as being perceived as "an annoying French-style critic" and already little read; *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, December 23rd, 1849, p.754, announcing Blair's *Lectures in English*, 1834, 1 tome, as well as *Lecciones*, 1834, 3 tomes, which is the Mexican edition; *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, December 8th, 1849, p. 694 announcing the publication in *El Album Mexicano* of an article by Blair, translated from English, on the influence of religion upon facing adversity. See note 42.

⁴⁴ *El Monitor Republicano*, October 6th, 1850, p. 2 reproduces, in the section *Variedades*, the patriotic discourse of Ignacio Esteva in Veracruz on September 16th 1850. Esteva states that since independence "Morality, aided by religious instruction, has taken a nobler flight", since "it is studied in the works of Bossuet and Fénelon, as in those of Locke, Pascal and Blair"; *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, December 6th, 1850, pp. 2-3, Blair is cited in "Discurso sobre la elocuencia cristiana, leído en el Liceo Hidalgo el 30 de noviembre de 1850, por el socio titular Francisco Granados Maldonado, al terminar su periodo de presidente".

⁴⁵ *El Universal: periódico independiente*, November 14th, 1851, pp. 2-3. The issue presents a report of the Literary Institute of Zacatecas where it is specified that everything in the first volume of Blair's *Lessons* has been covered, although there has been a backlog in history; *Variedades*. "La poesía y el cariño conyugal", in which an aspiring poet possessed the *Manual of Literature* of Antonio Gil and Zárate, the *Lessons* of Blair, and the "Diccionario de la Rima", *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, May 7th, 1851, p. 406; *El Zurriago*, October 30th, 1851, p. 180, resorts to Blair's *Lessons* to highlight a translation by Munárriz of a translation from Latin.

must for now compose in whole or in part the Encyclopedia”.⁴⁶ El Universal offered the Mexican edition of Blair’s Lectures for sale in three volumes in December of 1852.⁴⁷ In another El Universal piece of 1854, Blair was cited as a recognized source for critical thinking.⁴⁸ By 1855 El Siglo Diez y Nueve and El Universal were publishing the government’s educational plan for the career of Philosophy at the national university, and Gómez Hermosilla and Blair were to be the basis for teaching the principles of literature during the first six months.⁴⁹ Inside and outside of the religious sphere, Blair was a constant reference for appropriate rhetoric in the age of republican government. Blair had tied rhetoric closely to belles lettres and a punctilious definition of the distinct genres of oral and written expression. As El Zurriago would state in 1839:

“if belles lettres are the key to science, this is the complement and perfection of those. Grammar, eloquence, poetry, history, in a word, all parts of literature, would be defective if the sciences did not perfect them, it must be noted that the ones that necessarily need this assistance, are the didactic works in matter of rhetoric, poetics and history; to excel in any of these branches, and even to progress in them, both philosophy and literature are needed.”⁵⁰

Blair’s name figured consequently among those of other distinguished authors to obtain quick legitimacy in this world of literary improvement. Even endeavors such as teaching English through prominent writers in that language, or for the teaching of political economy in Mexico sought approval by referring to Blair.⁵¹ Knowledge of Blair could also be stirred in students through awards on occasion, as happened in November of 1856 when his writing on civic oratory was the coveted prize.⁵²

⁴⁶ El Universal: periódico independiente, January 1st, 1852, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, December 25th, 1852, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, April 20th, 1854, pp. 2-3. The piece is announced as having been sent to the newspaper (remitido).

⁴⁹ El Siglo Diez y Nueve, January 16th, 1855, p.1, in which Teodosio Lares presents the General Plan of Studies of the University. In Philosophy, the principles of literature would be based on Hermosilla and Blair; El Universal: periódico político y literario, January 18th, 1855, p. 1, also publishing the same General Plan of Studies.

⁵⁰ El Zurriago, September 3rd, 1839, p. 11.

⁵¹ El Siglo Diez y Nueve, December 6th, 1855, p. 4. Ibidem, September 9th, 1856, p. 2: in an article dedicated to “Political Economy in the Republic”, Blair is brought up, specifically in the sermons published by Santa María to establish the need for the comparison of human experiences that political economy performs. El Republicano. Periódico del pueblo, August 28th, 1856, pp. 3-4, repeats the same information regarding Blair and the elaboration of a political economy text.

⁵² El Monitor Republicano, November 17th, 1856, pp. 2-3: the Colegio Nacional of San Ildefonso publishes the distribution of prizes in which the English language prize was the “Retórica de Hugo Blair” and the “[H]istoria de México por Clavijero”.

Apparently not even the heady political climate of the late 1850s, loaded with confrontation, could entirely demote Blair from the high esteem he was awarded by Mexicans on different ends of the political spectrum. The periodical *La Cruz* would mention Blair as a recognized literary authority in May of 1856. This was a clear reference to *Lecciones*.⁵³ Even Clemente de Jesús Munguía, who frequently is cited as representing a recalcitrant voice at Mexico's mid-nineteenth century, was familiar with Blair's writings and recommended them for advanced students.⁵⁴ In his *Estudios oratorios* of 1841, Munguía writes that Blair's *Lecciones* on civil and literary discourse were undoubtedly important, if indeed a little too elevated for teaching young students:

“[i]t cannot be denied that Doctor Hugo Blair deals with many issues in a rather philosophical and profound way [...] Some treatises such as those of Blair, [Carlos Batteux] Bateux, [Jean Sifrein] Maury and others, are undoubtedly useful for those who already have some kind of instruction, but not for young people who are not yet initiated in the subject.”⁵⁵

In *Del pensamiento y su enunciación* of 1852 Munguía took into account Cicero, Quintillian, Capmany, Blair, Condillac and Gómez Hermosilla in grappling with the definition of rhetoric.⁵⁶ Munguía continued, further on, to quote from Gómez Hermosilla, perhaps his major source for knowledge of Blair:

“The purpose of popular elocution, says Blair, is persuasion; and this must be based on conviction. Evidence and reasons must be the basis of our discourses, if we do not want to be mere declaimers. We must engage ardently on that side of the cause we embrace, and explain as much as possible our own feelings, and not feigned ones. Thoughts must be meditated beforehand more than words. A clear method and order must be sought. The expression must be fervent and animated; but although vehemence may sometimes come well, it must be kept in check and restrained by certain

⁵³ “Recuerdos de una fiesta cristiana. La Invención de la Santa Cruz”, *La Cruz*, May 1st, 1856, pp. 209-213: on p. 213 the piece highlights an inscription which “neither Blair nor Hermosilla would scorn”.

⁵⁴ For a highly critical appraisal of Munguía, see David Brading, “Ultramontane Intransigence and the Mexican Reform. Clemente de Jesús Munguía”: Austen Ivereigh (ed.), *The Politics of Religion in an Age of Revival. Studies in Nineteenth-Century Europe and Latin America*, London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2000, pp. 115-142.

⁵⁵ Clemente de Jesús Munguía, *Estudios oratorios u observaciones críticas sobre algunos discursos de los oradores más clásicos antiguos y modernos*, Morelia: Imprenta de Ignacio Arango, 1841, p. XXXVI.

⁵⁶ Clemente de Jesús Munguía, *Del pensamiento y su enunciación considerado en sí mismo, en sus relaciones y en sus leyes*, en *Obras diversas del Licenciado Clemente de Jesús Munguía*, Obispo de Michoacán, Morelia: Imprenta de Ignacio Arango, 1852, vol. 1, tome 1, pp. 192-193 (3 volumes).

considerations due to the audience and the orator's own decorum. The style must be current and easy, and strong and descriptive rather than diffuse, and the recitation resolute and firm."⁵⁷

Perhaps even more revealing, he contemplated Blair's thoughts when dealing with sacred oratory:

"The pulpit, says Gómez Hermosilla, citing Blair, requires a lot of dignity and nobility in style; and in it weak expressions and low or vulgar ways of speaking are intolerable; but this elevation in language is very compatible with clarity and simplicity. Words can and should be usual, so that everyone understands them; however, it is necessary that the style does not decay. It must be clear and simple, but at the same time energetic, alive and animated."⁵⁸

Accounting for Blair's Influence

Esther Martínez Luna has written that Blair's *Lessons* were reformulated by his translator at key points: Spanish literary examples replaced the English and French examples used by Blair. Some chapters were deleted and substituted by others. Munárriz added a chapter dedicated to the historical development of Spanish. The result was a "Castilianized Blair", an "adapted manual", according to the modifications made by the translator in consultation with the specialists surrounding him.⁵⁹ This certainly helped Blair become "preponderant in the literary doctrine of the period" and influenced the practice of the poet and the literati in Mexico.⁶⁰ Even so, José Ortiz Monasterio has stated convincingly that it is difficult to directly establish the influence of specific rhetoricians on individual writers in the 19th century. Many rhetorical principles were shared and could be dated back as far as classical Greece. Despite this uncertainty, however, Ortiz Monasterio detects a strong presence of Blair's *Lectures* in Mexican writers regarding his teaching on the sublime, as well as his insistence on cohesive unity in the organization and argument of

⁵⁷ Munguía, *Del pensamiento*, vol. 1, tome 3, p. 203; José Gómez Hermosilla, *Arte de hablar en prosa y verso*, Madrid: Imprenta real, 1826, tome 2, p. 40. Here also Gómez Hermosilla is synthesizing and condensing the ideas of Blair. See Blair, *Lecciones sobre la retórica*, tome 3, pp. 39-43.

⁵⁸ Munguía, *Del pensamiento*, vol. 1, tome 3, pp. 280-281. The quote is from Gómez Hermosilla, *Arte de hablar*, tome 2, pp. 49-50. The quote by Gómez Hermosilla is not strictly textual. While he sticks very closely to Blair's words, even using some literal expressions, he tends to synthesize his ideas. See Blair, *Lecciones sobre la retórica*, tome 3, pp. 51-55.

⁵⁹ Esther Martínez Luna (estudio, selección, edición y notas), *El debate literario en el Diario de México (1805-1812)*, Mexico City: IIF-UNAM, 2011, pp. 51-56, quotation on p. 54.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

historical writing.⁶¹ Blair, who was believed to be developing on the thought of Dionysius Cassius Longinus in his *Lectures*, associated the sublime with the capacity to “move the reader, impact him, leave an indelible mark on him”. His teaching on understanding greatness of thought and the pathos of the lives of heroes impressed itself on early romantic poetry in Mexico in the first half of the 19th century.⁶² Pablo Mora asserts that early republican literature in Mexico was dominated by the normative criteria of rhetoricians such as Boileau (Nicolás Boileau-Despréaux 1636-1711), Ignacio de Luzán (1702-1754) and Hugo Blair (1718-1800) within a general push to restore the power of language and literature in public life.⁶³ Mexican writers were experiencing acute anxiety over the need to create an authentically national literature, no longer derivative from or subordinate to Spanish literature. They needed to determine authoritative authors and models to be emulated; consequently, they searched for theoretical and systematic studies on language and literature to guide them. Among other authors, such as Condillac (Étienne Bonnot, Abbé de Condillac, 1714-1780), or Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836), they found Hugo Blair. Ideas, clarity of expression, purity of language were closely associated. By the late 1830’s, this permitted outstanding thinkers such as José Justo Gómez de la Cortina and Clemente de Jesús Munguía to lead in the development of critical criteria to detect defects and deficiencies in Mexican literature in order to propose remedies.⁶⁴

The context in which Blair’s *Lectures* were received in Mexico was complicated by the repeated political and social crises and changes the country experienced beginning as early as 1808 and continuing far past the mid-century. Not surprisingly, Blair’s *Lessons* were early on discovered to be “the most complete and luminous work” of its kind, a “guide for the young”, a path to eloquence due to its compelling precepts and a clear moral compass.⁶⁵ Prior to independence, writers were already concerned with reforming Mexican

⁶¹ José Ortiz Monasterio, “Retórica, preceptiva literaria e historia en Vicente Riva Palacio”: *Ruedas de la Serna* (ed.), *De la perfecta expresión*, pp. 178-189, especially pp. 178 and 187-188.

⁶² Margarita Alegría de la Colina, “De la poética de los sublime en el romanticismo mexicano”: *Ruedas de la Serna* (ed.), *De la perfecta expresión*, pp. 138-150, quotation on p. 139.

⁶³ Pablo Mora, “Orígenes de la crítica literaria en el México independiente (1824-1836)”: *Ruedas de la Serna* (ed.), *De la perfecta expresión*, pp. 151-164, especially p. 158.

⁶⁴ Pablo Mora, “La crítica literaria en México, 1826-1860”: Belem Clark de Lara / Elisa Speckman Guerra (eds.), *La república de las letras. Asomos a la cultura escrita del México decimonónico*, Mexico City: UNAM, 2005, vol. 1, pp. 355-376, especially pp. 356, 358-359.

⁶⁵ *Diario de México*, 8 de noviembre, 1806, pp. 279-280.

society and customs, and correcting literary imperfections. Hugo Blair's Lectures were seen as one of the works to set Mexico on the right path.⁶⁶ As was already mentioned, it was eventually desired that when university reform arrived in Mexico from Spain, Blair's works would be among the guiding texts to be studied.⁶⁷ By the optimistic 1820's, Mexican publications sometimes appealed to a broad public to engage them in social, political and cultural change. They used humorous titles and resort to instances of popular speech, or direct appeal to subaltern groups, as can be perceived in some of the writing of José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi or Juan Rodríguez Puebla.⁶⁸

As Pablo Piccato has noted, Mexico commenced its independence as a nation in the midst of an oratorical boom in which civil oratory built off a profound homiletic tradition fortified during centuries of evangelical labor. It aimed at including all social groups and persons, uniting the private and public domains of national existence. In this role, it was closely associated with expanding education to encompass all within its civic ambitions.⁶⁹ Carlos Herrejón has pointed to the colonial sermon as a "privileged means of communication", frequently used, authoritative and considered a necessary tool for social cohesiveness. Additionally, it was experiencing by the late 18th century a formidable makeover which Herrejón calls the transition from the baroque to neoclassic style. The largely commemorative civil oratory to which Piccato alludes, is in this perspective, a development upon the sermon.

Herrejón insists that the late colonial sermon was oriented to persuasion, practical piety, enhancing the moral qualities of the religious public, and emphasizing the inner transformation which would produce virtuous conduct. But at the turn of the century it was already increasingly political, going far beyond merely spiritual references. The late colonial sermon was undergoing international, especially French influence, as a more streamlined effective mode of communication, and one based on early Christian sources. It was meant to be transformative in the spiritual and civic domains. Already by 1808

⁶⁶ Esther Martínez Luna, "Diario de México. 'Ilustrar la plebe': Clark de Lara / Speckman Guerra (eds.) La república de las letras, vol. II, pp. 43-55.

⁶⁷ Diario de México, 28 de octubre, 1807, pp. 261-262.

⁶⁸ [José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi], Anita la tamalera ha dado en ser diputada. Carta primera al Pensador Mexicano, Mexico City: Oficina de la testamentaría de Ontiveros, 1826; [José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi], Respuesta del Pensador a Anita la Tamalera, Mexico City: Oficina de la testamentaría de Ontiveros, 1826; [Juan Rodríguez Puebla], El indio constitucional, Mexico City: Impreso en la Oficina de D. Alejandro Valdés, 1820.

⁶⁹ Pablo Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion. Honor in the Construction of the Mexican Public Sphere*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, pp. 106-107.

the patriotic sermon was making way as a hybrid rhetoric which could bind the religious to the temporal order in a new and more effective manner.⁷⁰

The sermon had been historically an outstanding form of catechesis, which could even assume theatrical guise to increase effectiveness.⁷¹ It was also unquestionably a vehicle for cultural tutelage. Was this a double-edged sword, simultaneously cutting away at social separation and thus uniting diverse peoples in religious belief and practice, on the one hand, but on the other creating a hierarchical order in which Indians, for example, would never be quite equal? Certainly this had been a prime point of discussion during the colonial period.⁷² As the sermon developed into commemorative discourse, and as civil discourse grew to dominate in post-independence Mexico, José María Portillo Valdés observes a clear continuity between colonial religious tutelage, and its republican heir, where in both cases the Indian continued to be a neophyte in the optic of “civilizing catechesis”. He was to be the object of “a new social discipline” which should eventually usher him into civilized society under the constitution. Indians were not to be admitted “as individuals of different cultural practices, but converts to the culture and civilization of constitutional liberalism”. Nationality and citizenship, beyond the constitution, were grounded in shared language and customs within a euro-centric worldview used to establish the Creole in post-Independent Mexico as the tutor who would “constitute and define”, nation, body politic, and the requisites to inclusion. Citizenship, understood as homogenizing the population under the same norms, implied treating most individuals and groups as absent from the cultural world until they fully adapted to the cultural norms predicated by their betters, leading effectively to “cultural despoilment”, the replacement of one culture by another.⁷³ Portillo Valdés has argued that this was also true of those groups that had been collectively referred to as castes under the colonial regime.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Carlos Herrejón Peredo, *Del sermón al discurso cívico. México, 1700-1834*, Mexico City: COLMICH / COLMEX, 2003, pp. 17, 20-23, 163, 190, 199, 204-205, 225-226, 367, 370-371, 379.

⁷¹ Francisco González-Hermosillo Adams / Norma Angélica Castillo Palma, “La remoción de los frailes en la diócesis de Puebla y el fin del sermón escenificado como teatro edificante: los neixcuitiles”: Juan Pablo Ortiz Dávila / Luz María Uhthoff López / Norma Angélica Castillo Palma (eds.), *Iglesia, historiografía e instituciones. Homenaje a Brian Connaughton*, Mexico City: UAM-I, 2018, pp. 75-114.

⁷² William B. Taylor, “‘de corazón pequeño y ánimo apocado’. Conceptos de los curas párrocos sobre los indios en la Nueva España del siglo XVIII”: *Relaciones*, 39 (1989), pp. 5-67.

⁷³ José María Portillo Valdés, *Crisis atlántica. Autonomía e independencia en la crisis de la monarquía hispana*, Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2006, pp. 235, 238-240, 243, 251, 255.

⁷⁴ José María Portillo Valdés, “Crisis e independencias. España y su monarquía”: *Cuadernos dieciochistas*, 8 (2007), pp. 19-35, especially p. 33.

Pablo Mora has written in a similar vein that writings on rhetoric and poetics were in fact virtually “manuals or catechisms for the new middle class”.⁷⁵ And especially after 1828-1829, when Mexico experienced popular riots in Mexico City and Sombrerete, Zacatecas, instability grew, social order seemed menaced, and earlier optimism inclined toward greater social inclusion seemed to fade.⁷⁶ The following two decades would be ones of growing despair over Mexico’s future, a turn toward retrenchment and search for political and social order, and – not surprisingly - increasing concern over tightening up literary norms, the moral behavior of the citizenship and rebuilding internal authority and international respect.⁷⁷ In this context, the thinking about national regeneration took on a new twist. Parallel with a constitutional change to centralism and an effort toward more hierarchical control there was a significant expansion in literary journals. After diplomatic recognition was obtained from Spain in 1836, Spanish influence grew, and there was a resurgence of Creole traditionalism rooted in colonial times, even as writers attempted to reconcile this transformation with liberalism. Pablo Mora points to a growing polarization in which enlightened intellectuals allied increasingly with the middle class, in order to develop a Creole patriotism markedly less concerned with the common people and more tuned to inventing or delineating practical guidelines for the nation. So powerful was this movement, he argues, that federalists and centralists were basically united in this task. This is when basic education and property requirements began to be more generally accepted as a requisite for active citizenship and voting rights. Popular acts of protest, such as those which characterized Mexican independence, were repudiated. Educated writers clearly assigned themselves a special role in directing and educating, culturally and morally, the nation as their optimism turned to criticism of the barbarism of the common population.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Pablo Mora, “El Conde de la Cortina. Retórica y crítica literaria en el México del siglo XIX”: Helena Beristáin / Gerardo Ramírez Vidal (eds.), *Los ejes de la retórica*, Mexico City: IIF-UNAM, 2005, pp. 295-308, quotation on p. 305.

⁷⁶ Silvia Marina Arrom, “Protesta popular en la ciudad de México. El motín del Parián en 1828”: Silvia M. Arrom / Servando Ortoll (eds.), *Revolución en las ciudades. Políticas populares en América Latina*, Mexico City: UAM / Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2004, pp. 83-116; Rosalina Ríos Zúñiga, “Popular Uprising and Political Culture in Zacatecas: The Sombrerete Uprisings (1829)”: *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 87: 3 (2007), pp. 499-536; Catherine Andrews, “Discusiones en torno de la reforma de la Constitución Federal de 1824 durante el primer gobierno de Anastasio Bustamante (1830-1832)”: *Historia Mexicana*, 56: 1 (2006), pp. 71-116.

⁷⁷ Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, *Dos décadas de desilusiones. En busca de una fórmula adecuada de gobierno (1832-1854)*, Mexico City: COLMEX, 2009.

⁷⁸ Pablo Mora, “Cultura letrada y regeneración nacional a partir de 1836”: Laura Beatriz Suárez de la Torre (coord.) / Miguel Ángel Castro (ed.), *Empresa y cultura en tinta y papel (1800-1860)*, Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 2001, pp. 385-393.

By 1849, as Laurence Coudart has pointed out, *El Libro del Pueblo*, a biweekly publication in Puebla could insist on civilization as a goal to struggle for, and redefined the people not as a collection of plebeians, but rather an “ideal people” composed of well-educated citizens, applying reason as the legitimate device for their participation in society.⁷⁹ Christian esthetics was returning to center stage as a cultural foundation even while rhetorical modernization continued in the midst of the search for both continuities and progress in the construction of the national historical narrative.⁸⁰ Not long after, El Zurriago would argue that the uneducated could be found in all walks of social life:

“[i]n every population [pueblo] there are large numbers of people, unfortunately, whose lowly condition, morally speaking, and whose invincible rudeness of ingenuity are cause for them to act without premeditation, they only aspire to meet present needs, and they consider whim as ample basis to do this or that without anticipating the consequences.”⁸¹

Reflecting on Atlantic Contexts and the Long-Term Influence of Blair’s Vision

Such widespread and prolonged influence across the political-ideological spectrum by a Scottish rhetorician and preacher suggests that Mexico and the Ibero-American world were undergoing a major shift in their use of language and their relationship to other cultures. Several authors have pointed this out for Spain, and remarked on the renovation of Spanish thought on matters of literature and discourse as well as the enduring influence of Blair throughout the 19th century.⁸² Clearly, religious difference in the Catholic-Protestant divide was no longer at the forefront of cultural considerations when it came to clear thinking and the expression of ideas. Logical and well-informed, carefully argued texts were put forth as models. And this new model of communication was spreading into religious discourse and influencing the way the values of both civic and religious culture should be communicated and lived, and the humanities cultivated. This change may have been even more important in the long run than the political polarization and civil war which

⁷⁹ Laurence Coudart, “Difusion y lectura de la prensa. El ejemplo poblano (1820-1850)”: Suárez de la Torre (coord.) / Castro (ed.), *Empresa y cultura*, pp. 343-355, especially pp. 353-354.

⁸⁰ Mora, “La crítica literaria”, p. 375.

⁸¹ El Zurriago, August 9th, 1851, p. 90.

⁸² Claudio Felipe González Alcázar, *Principios de poética en los preceptistas españoles del siglo XIX*, Madrid, 2002 (unpublished doctoral thesis, Universidad Complutense de Madrid).

plagued much of the Ibero-American world in the mid-nineteenth century. Ironically, perhaps, this resort to new norms of thinking and expression probably helped put opposing political elites on a level playing field as regards public debate. Hugo Blair was at the heart of this major transformation of cultural parameters.

It is illuminating, even as Mexico was experiencing trying times and the loss of momentum in an increasingly elusive inclusiveness, to mention how Blair was being understood in Spain at the time. Menéndez y Pelayo pointed up the enduring influence of Blair's Lectures in Spain down to the end of the 19th century. Menéndez emphasized Blair's encyclopedic tendencies, bringing into his work the "quintessence" of previous writers on rhetoric. Later authors, such as Gómez Hermosilla simply "pillaged" Lectures "in everything related to the theory of literary genres".⁸³ The great success of Blair was repeatedly accredited to his outstanding capacity for synthesis and systematization. "It was unanimous opinion among specialists that it was the most complete work written to date". Gómez Hermosilla admitted as much. Blair's Lectures dominated in the field of principled oratory in Spain throughout the 19th century. Blair's "naturalness" and "common sense" were widely followed by other authors. A certain amount of rigidity dropped away. The Scotsman became a guide to good taste, and refined, critical judgment regarding literary genres. His Lectures could be enhanced, but not displaced, by reference to other French, English or Greek and Latin authors.⁸⁴

In English-speaking countries Blair's influence was immense. Barbara Warnick explains why:

"Blair's view of speaking was thoroughly liberal and modern. Efficaciousness in pulpit, legal, and forensic oratory resulted when the speaker remained cognizant of the taste and interests of his audience and when he communicated in a clear style and with animated delivery. Floridity, ostentation, and turgidity were to be avoided, and simplicity, elegance, and vivacity embraced. Blair's rhetorical theory was excellently suited to an era when old forms of unilateral authority — the church and the monarchy, for example were losing their exclusive hold on the people, when education and knowledge were becoming popularized, and when individuals had access to forms of inquiry and decision-making which had been unavailable to them in the preceding century."⁸⁵

⁸³ Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, *Historia de las Ideas Estéticas en España*, t. III: Siglo XVIII, Madrid: Imprenta de A. Pérez Dubrull, 1886, vol. 1, pp. 121-122; y vol. 2, p. 297.

⁸⁴ González Alcázar, *Principios de poética*, pp. 41, 60-61, 65, 108, 511, 557, 572-573, 582.

⁸⁵ Barbara Warnick, "Charles Rollin's *Traité* and the Rhetorical Theories of Smith, Campbell, and Blair": *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 3: 1 (1985), pp. 45-65, quote on pp. 63-64.

In an age when religion itself was – internationally - still at the center of public life, rhetoric was to underpin “the moral demands of citizenship”.⁸⁶ Blair’s thinking, in the first instance, was aimed at his students in Scotland, who had to prepare for public life both in Edinburgh and London, or even Paris. In this context, “[h]e sought a Christian politeness that also was consonant with civic republicanism”.⁸⁷ He was intent on combining “traditional classical rhetoric grounded in civic republicanism with the new polite letters appropriate to a commercial polity”.⁸⁸ His Lectures exhibited his aim to reconcile the diverse traits necessary for his “ideal orator morally grounded in the political ideals of civic republicanism with a modern ideal grounded in the values of sincerity, earnestness, modesty, and benevolence that constituted for him a Christianized politeness”.⁸⁹ The ambivalences in this pretended reconciliation may have opened his counsel unintentionally to its use by opposing sides in the polarizations, which would take place in Mexico and other Latin American countries.

Blair’s influence spread throughout Europe and was of enormous influence in the United States. Adam S. Potkay has written regarding this last country that between the 1790s and the 1850s Blair’s Lectures were “known to a majority of college-educated Americans”. He insists that Blair’s Lectures 25 to 27 were in fact based on David Hume’s “Of Eloquence.”⁹⁰ Because of this, Potkay argues that “Blair served to disseminate Hume’s ideal of republican eloquence throughout America”.⁹¹ A distinctive feature of the United States’ political oratory, he suggests, was “a greater permeability between classical and biblical sources”.⁹² Indeed, this may be true also of Mexican and Ibero-American political oratory, wherein biblical references abounded for years after Independence, accounting for some of Blair’s popularity.⁹³

⁸⁶ Arthur E. Walzer, “Blair’s Ideal Orator: Civic Rhetoric and Christian Politeness in Lectures 25-34”: *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 25: 3 (2007), pp. 269-295, quote on p. 269.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 277.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 279.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 295.

⁹⁰ Adam S. Potkay, “Theorizing Civic Eloquence in the Early Republic. The Road from David Hume to John Quincy Adams”: *Early American Literature*, 34: 2 (1999), pp. 147-170, quote on pp. 151-152.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 153.

⁹² *Ibidem*, pp. 157-158.

⁹³ Brian Connaughton, *Clerical Ideology in a Revolutionary Age. The Guadalajara Church and the Idea of the Mexican Nation, 1788-1853*, Calgary: University of Calgary Press / University Press of Colorado, 2003; Roberto Di Stefano, “Lecturas políticas de la Biblia en la revolución rioplatense (1810-1835)”: *Anuario de Historia de la Iglesia*, 12 (2003), pp. 201-224; Douglass Sullivan-González, *Piety, Power and Politics. Religion and Nation Formation in Guatemala, 1821-1871*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh

The broad popularity of Blair's thinking in Europe and the Americas may also be related to his writing as a relative outsider, reflecting on cultural norms observed in more central areas such as England and France. Thomas Miller reminds us that "[r]hetoricians first introduced English into the university curriculum in the middle of the eighteenth century in Scotland, America, and elsewhere in the cultural provinces".⁹⁴ The great English universities in Oxford and Cambridge were impervious to this change, still placing their exclusive emphasis on "classical approaches to rhetoric and logic".⁹⁵ The teaching of Blair, Hume, and even Adam Smith on rhetoric, all Scots, reflected a broader change where provincial societies seemed more attuned to new trends. By contrast:

"[b]ecause the English universities were the preserves of the upper classes, English was not introduced until more than a century later than in the provinces. The Scots studied English for the same reason that the English studied Latin (and the Latins studied Greek): it was the language with authority because it was removed from the popular culture of their society. However, the Scottish universities were less removed from broader changes in the contemporary culture because they were more broadly accessible, for while Scotland had only a fifth of England's population, it had almost three times as many universities."⁹⁶

Miller argues that social status was being shunted aside to place importance on a republic of letters and "the broader transformation of higher education to suit the needs of commercial society".⁹⁷ Yet Miller also points up that Blair and other promoters of a new rhetoric in Scotland were part of a moderate coalition oriented to depoliticize discourse in deference to belletristic politeness and that they were strongly attached to middle and upper class - as well as specifically British interests - in Scotland. The rhetoric they favored was to be above political and religious controversies.⁹⁸

In Miller's critical view, Blair was "the principal founder of college English", but this was far from entirely positive: "Blair aptly demonstrates how those who come from the margins of the dominant culture become alienated from the traditions of their society as they master the culture of literacy". The great Scottish rhetorician synthesized "primitivism and propriety", simultaneously teaching his followers "that they had to rise above the

Press, 1998; Derek Williams, *Negotiating the State. National Utopias and Local Politics in Andean Ecuador, 1845-1875*, Stony Brook: 2001 (unpublished doctoral thesis, State University of New York).

⁹⁴ Thomas P. Miller, "The Rhetoric of Belles Lettres. The Political Context of the Eighteenth-Century Transition from Classical to Modern Cultural Studies": *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 23: 2 (1993), pp. 1-19, quote on p. 1.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 2-3.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 3-8.

traditions and modes of expression of their own community to gain acceptance into the culture of literacy”.⁹⁹ Miller believes that this approach artificially supported the special role of a class of middle class literati who would consolidate as the fundamental interpreters of modern life for their societies:

“the belletristic rhetoric that founded college English was both apolitical in theory and profoundly political in practice. The Scottish rhetoricians emphasized the study of English literature because they saw it as an important way to strengthen their social roles as the spokespersons for disinterested rationality and polite taste. In this way, the literati played on the educated Scottish public's insecurity about their own culture. These insecurities offered the literati a role as the arbiters of polite taste and correct usage, and the literati avidly played that role by claiming to speak as disinterested observers of the laws of good taste, polite usage, moral sentiments, and political economy.”¹⁰⁰

An inevitable dilemma of the elite was that “[e]ducated Scots wanted to talk, write, dress, and act like proper English gentry, yet remain Scots. The Scots divided sense of cultural priorities led bourgeois Scots to apply themselves to the study of English but to impress on such studies their own assumptions and values.” Deeply attached to English language and literature they strove to maintain Scottish educational, legal, and religious traditions and the institutions supporting them.¹⁰¹ This cultural ambivalence may have appealed to the cultural elites in Mexico and Latin America, as Blair equivocated in Lectures about the best role models to follow, holding up French achievements repeatedly, even as he judiciously critiqued English limitations. And as Esther Martínez Luna has pointed up, the Spanish version of Lectures was also accommodated to outstanding Spanish authorities.

Blair’s was a system open to a world in flux, but in which the fundamental structures of society still held, and in which it was possible to envision gradual change above bitter controversy, in which amelioration would be largely a question of the middle class urban literati’s evolving discussion of social destinies. Bob Harris encapsulates the overall program for Scotland itself as “internal colonization”.¹⁰² In many ways it was a program as clear and

⁹⁹ Thomas P. Miller, “The Rhetoric of Belles Lettres. The Political Context of the Eighteenth-Century Transition from Classical to Modern Cultural Studies”: *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 23: 2 (1993), p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

¹⁰¹ Thomas Paul Miller, *Eighteenth-Century Scottish Rhetoric in its Socio-Cultural Context*, Austin: 1994 (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Texas), pp. 76-77.

¹⁰² Bob Harris, *Politics and the Nation. Britain in the Mid-eighteenth century*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 149-150. See also Fredrik Albritton-Jonsson, *The Enlightenment in The Highlands. Natural History and Internal Colonization in the Scottish Enlightenment, 1760-1830*, Chicago: 2005 (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Chicago); Randall Joseph Holt, *Reasoning with Savages. The Anthropological Imagination of the Scottish Enlightenment*, Los Angeles: 2016 (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California).

purposeful as that behind public school promotion and citizenship formation in Mexico since constitutionalism made itself felt in 1812 and then again as of 1824. The aim of such thinking was ultimately a new economic, moral, political and lettered citizen.¹⁰³ The Mexican – and Ibero-American - elites, motivated and oriented by Blair’s lectures and sermons, moved under his key influence toward a new culture which was both open – and closed. Open to new ideas and rigor – with straightforwardness, polish and feeling in expression, but closed – or half-closed - to those who were unable to enter this rhetorical world of logic and good taste due to their lack of schooling and dealings with people of other stations. With an elite of privileged middle class literati at the center of the discourse, there were serious restrictions on the kinds of topics discussed, and the ways in which they would be treated, especially as national unity broke down and order was challenged. This world of debate was new and invigorating on numerous levels, and remarkably open to international communication, which must account for its enthusiastic reception in the Ibero-American world. But it was also limiting in the demands it placed on social recognition, as it was in Scotland itself, or the United States, as the critical voices I have cited here suggest.¹⁰⁴ Even the triumph of liberalism following the mid-century civil war and French Intervention in Mexico, was oriented precisely to “augment the elements of education in order to transform the Indian and the lower-class mestizo in social values”.¹⁰⁵ Portillo Valdés has argued that the late 19th century proposal of mestizaje as a new national identity was precisely to reconstitute the ideal of an ecclesia, “the seminal idea of a *communitas* that must culturally absorb its catechumens, although using modes, rites and forms culturally adapted to such an endeavor”.¹⁰⁶

Some Questions and Conclusions

Did the pretense of a culture of reasoned civic debate and equanimity, careful cultivation of literary genres, and the frank, simple and ethical exposition of religious thought in accessible sermons, as promoted by Hugo Blair and intended to create a cultivated citizenship of fellow countrymen and morally

¹⁰³ Jill Marie Bradbury, *The New Science of Economic Man. Prose Literature and Political Economy in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Providence: 2003 (unpublished doctoral thesis, Brown University).

¹⁰⁴ See also Dottie Broadus, “Authoring Elitism. Francis Hutcheson and Hugh Blair in Scotland and America”: *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 24: 3/4 (1994), pp. 39-52.

¹⁰⁵ Justo Sierra, Juárez. *Su obra y su tiempo*, Barcelona: Oliva Impresor, 1905-1906, pp. 106, 485.

¹⁰⁶ Portillo Valdés, “Crisis e independencias”, p. 21.

upright churchgoers, win out? Did educational programs and Church activities successfully extend their influence to this end? Was middle class elitism able to overcome both social conservatism and popular “barbarism”? Carlos Illades suggests that authors explored new literary possibilities oriented to the lives of middling individuals of humble origins in their fictional works especially following the war with the United States, but he adds that they eventually tired of their new, and relative, openness to local groups of popular origin not long afterwards.¹⁰⁷ And Andrés Molina Enríquez and Justo Sierra, highlighting mestizo values, cultivated the notion of stages of cultural transformation rather than the simple acceptance of local cultures or democratic values.¹⁰⁸ As for conservative intellectuals, Peter Guardino has written: “[t]hey were not at all comfortable with the egalitarian interpretation of republicanism and citizenship that equated all honest and hardworking Mexicans, regardless of their ancestry and income.”¹⁰⁹

There are many important questions for further discussion regarding cultural contradictions and ambiguities. For example, were religious and ethical practices seriously reformed as the century progressed? Did the conservative drift within moderate liberalism cancel the positive side of social change? As Portillo Valdés pointed out, a pronounced middle class emphasis on national citizenship evinced cultural tutelage, but did liberal policy also open up important new venues for public life, as well as individual and group lives, that have transformed Mexico from a Creole to a national society over time? Or did the basic prejudices embodied in this orientation constitute a heritage of tensions and contradictions which Mexico must still struggle with, postponing plural society for a distant future? Mariano Otero, in 1842, believed that orienting Mexican society to a growing, propertied and educated middle class would profoundly transform the dynamics and future of the country, weakening an overweening group of the wealthy and privileged at the top while opening the door to social mobility to the disenfranchised.¹¹⁰ The centralist regime waned quickly and yielded to the Reforma after mid-

¹⁰⁷ Carlos Illades, *Nación, sociedad y utopía en el romanticismo mexicano*, Mexico City: CONACULTA, 2005, pp. 87-117.

¹⁰⁸ Andrés Molina Enríquez, *Los grandes problemas nacionales*, Mexico City: Imprenta de A. Carranza e Hijos, 1909, p. 271; Justo Sierra /Agustín Aragón et al., *México. Su evolución social*, Mexico City: J. Balleescá y Compañía, Sucesor, 1901, tome 2, vol. 1, p. 124.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Guardino, *The Dead March. A History of the Mexican-American War*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017, p. 217.

¹¹⁰ Mariano Otero, *Ensayo sobre el verdadero estado de la cuestión social y política que se agita en la República Mexicana*, Mexico City: Impreso por Ignacio Cumplido, 1842.

century.¹¹¹ Was cultural tutelage fully able to withstand such ideas and transformations?

Appropriate answers require examining more closely the influences at play in the life of Mexico and Ibero-America throughout the nineteenth century. The importance of Hugo Blair, his resilient presence during many decades as a luminary of the Scottish Enlightenment, and English pre-eminence, suggest that international cultural influences were an integral part of this story. From Blair local elites could well have adopted or reinforced their vocabulary of social progress, modified by a stadial theory of history, emphasis on an hierarchically ordered civil society and the rhetorical virtues he promoted to uphold it and facilitate its development.¹¹² Mexico and Ibero-America were in a wide-ranging cultural dialogue armed with new instruments, both analytical and persuasive, dating back to the eighteenth-century and reinforced in the nineteenth. This only grew more complicated toward the end of the 19th century.¹¹³ While the elites were the main interlocutors, the Ibero-American peoples were one of the great topics being considered. Their malleability is a subject of debate, and the depth or range of elite disagreements, their equivocations, and their power to transform reality are all subject to question. Defining a continent of peoples would not be easy, nor would it end with the debates of nineteenth-century public intellectuals.

¹¹¹ Barbara Tenenbaum, *México en la época de los agiotistas, 1821-1857*, Mexico City: FCE, 1985; Michael P. Costeloe, *The Central Republic in Mexico, 1835-1846*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

¹¹² Mark Garrett Longaker, *Rhetorical style and bourgeois virtue: capitalism and civil society in the British Enlightenment*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015, pp. 46-48.

¹¹³ Charles Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth Century Mexico*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.