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978-0-521-51830-7 - The British Aesthetic Tradition: From Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein

Timothy M. Costelloe

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The British Aesthetic Tradition

From Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein

The British Aesthetic Tradition: From Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein is the first single volume to offer readers a comprehensive and systematic history of aesthetics in Britain and the United States from its inception in the early eighteenth century to major developments in the late twentieth century. The book consists of an introduction and eight chapters, divided into three parts. The first part, The Age of Taste, covers the eighteenth-century approaches of internal sense theorists, imagination theorists, and associationists. The second, The Age of Romanticism, takes readers from debates over the picturesque through British Romanticism to late Victorian criticism. The third, The Age of Analysis, covers early twentieth-century theories of Formalism and Expressionism, concluding with Wittgenstein and a number of views inspired by his thought.

Timothy M. Costelloe is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the College of William & Mary. In 2003 and 2006 he was a Humboldt Fellow at Maximilians-Universität München, Germany. He is author of *Aesthetics and Morals in the Philosophy of David Hume* (2007) and editor of *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge, 2012), and his work has appeared in a variety of edited collections and scholarly journals.

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For Freyja, Oscar, Adam, Toby, and Daphne

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TIMOTHY M. COSTELLOE

College of William & Mary



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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City
Cambridge University Press
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA
www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521734486

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First published 2013

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data
Costelloe, Timothy M.

The British aesthetic tradition : from Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein /
Timothy M. Costelloe.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-51830-7 (hardback) – ISBN 978-0-521-73448-6 (paperback)
1. Aesthetics, British – History. 2. Aesthetics, American – History. I. Title.
BH221.G7C67 2013
III1'.850941–dc23 2012021360

ISBN 978-0-521-51830-7 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-73448-6 Paperback

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Acknowledgments

My thanks goes, first and foremost, to Beatrice Rehl, Publishing Director, Humanities and Social Sciences, at Cambridge University Press, who first approached me with the idea of writing this book. I am grateful for the confidence she showed in my abilities to complete the project in a satisfactory and timely manner, and for her enthusiastic support and guidance throughout. During the early stages I received useful feedback from David Fate Norton and four anonymous reviewers of the original proposal, and, in the latter stages, from Paul Guyer, who read the completed manuscript in its entirety and made a number of suggestions that proved invaluable when undertaking the final round of revisions. I have benefited enormously over the years from Professor Guyer's knowledge about and insight into the discipline, and I look forward to the appearance of his three-volume *A History of Aesthetics*, which is forthcoming from Cambridge. Initial research for *The British Aesthetic Tradition* was undertaken while I was a visiting scholar at Northwestern University in 2008–9, and I am grateful to the chair and faculty members of its philosophy department for their hospitality, and to the College of William & Mary for release from usual teaching and administrative duties during my sabbatical. I have Rachel Zuckert to thank for the invitation to spend the year at Northwestern and for the opportunity it provided for us to read together and discuss many of the issues and texts that subsequently formed the backbone of the book. I have learned a good deal from her. I am grateful to Adam Potkay for his generous comments and gentle guidance in my reading and understanding of the British Romantics, and to the students in my aesthetics classes at William & Mary – especially those in the Advanced Seminar on Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics that I taught in the spring of 2008 – in whose presence I rehearsed material and who kept me, more or less, on the straight and narrow. Needless to say, I alone am responsible for the final product and any waywardness it might contain. Elements of Chapters 1 and 2 formed the basis for “Imagination and Internal Sense: The Sublime in Shaftesbury, Reid, Addison, and Reynolds,” Chapter 4 in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Timothy M. Costelloe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 50–63.

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In a *nota bene* to the introduction of his *Elements of Criticism*, Henry Home, Lord Kames, informs readers of his decision to omit the definite article from the title in order to avoid the impression that he ever intended to exhaust his subject, as if it were possible to enumerate *all* the elements of criticism rather than offer a representative selection from a very large sample: because the “author is far from imagining that he has completed the list,” Kames writes, “a more humble title is proper, such as may express any number of parts less than the whole” (*Elements* 1.19). The title of the present study – *The British Aesthetic Tradition* – would not survive grammatically without a definite article, but, in the spirit of Kames, its retention should not be read as a claim to have written a definitive or exhaustive study. Some readers will object to the choice of figures and themes included, as others will wonder at those omitted, or find reason to criticize the relative space devoted to each and what is claimed of and for the content of their work. The gracious reader might bear in mind, however, that, by one estimate, the number of publications on aesthetics in the eighteenth century alone ran to some five thousand, and one dare not even speculate on how many fold that has risen with the passage of time, developments in publishing, and the growth of an academic industry. Besides, a history of thought is less a mirror of reality than a representation of its subject matter, crafted in good faith, accurate and honest as it goes, but refracted in the narrative it develops: something must always be left out and surely, as Hume remarks of the *Iliad*, the reader does not want to know every time Achilles ties his shoelaces.

Although the present study has no pretensions to be definitive, its design is not arbitrary nor its perspective partial. The book aims to give the reader a coherent and unified view of the tradition of British “philosophical aesthetics,” and the criterion for selection is simply that the thinker in question has made an original or noteworthy contribution to it. Some figures, arguably, could be removed and others added, but rather like the moments of consciousness in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, it is hard to imagine that revisions of this sort would make a substantive difference to the body of the whole. The book is not

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intended, moreover, to read as a history of literature or any of the fine arts, nor is it principally about the philosophy or critical appreciation of them, although inevitably each is touched on in due course and as occasion demands. The study concentrates fundamentally on theoretical contributions that have been made from the beginning of the eighteenth century through the latter part of the twentieth to understanding the phenomena that all these disciplines presuppose, namely, the nature and origin of aesthetic value and the various issues that arise from reflecting on it. The book, I hope, sails close to its theme and steers a course that will inform, engage, and entertain; this is certainly the spirit in which it was written and if even a little of that contagion spreads to those who read it, then the labor has been worthwhile.

T. M. C.
Williamsburg, VA