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Since its appearance in 1774, there has never been another English edition of Alexander Gerard’s *An Essay on Genius*, and since Christian Garve’s German translation of the *Essay* in 1776 there have been no editions. The need, then, for a modern edition with vital critical and bibliographical apparatus alone justifies the *raison d’être* for Bernhard Fabian’s critically sound and thorough facsimile edition. However, Fabian’s introduction is in itself a valuable contribution to Gerard scholarship, and indeed to students of aesthetics. Fabian’s access to hitherto unpublished manuscript material in the Aberdeen University library has enabled him to trace the genesis and evolution of the *Essay* through papers read by Gerard at meetings of the Aberdeen Society. His integration of this material with contemporary inquiries on “genius” illuminates and defines Gerard’s position as a methodical and original commentator on the important aesthetic questions of his time.

Fabian views Gerard as no late-comer among the heralds of original genius, but a pioneer thinker who preceded both Edward Young and William Duff in devising the most inclusive eighteenth-century concept of genius, and considers the aesthetic controversies that raged throughout the late eighteenth-century as reinforcing that period’s position in terms of its own critical assumptions and standards as well as one to which the Romantics were profoundly indebted. It is during this period that Gerard’s importance can be measured through both his scientific inquiry into the mental processes that define the source and nature of genius and his inclusive concept of genius as embracing science as well as art, whereby both disciplines are reduced to the same principles and referred in their operation to the same processes of the mind. In this context Fabian sees Gerard as achieving “the very balance which the Romantics lacked and which gave rise to their nostalgic vision of a reunion of science and poetry.”

Following the facsimile reprint of the *Essay* is a useful second list of errata, a register of quotations, indexes of names and topics, appendixes of contemporary reviews and modern biographical and critical studies, and bibliographical information on Garve’s translation. One wishes, however, that the pagination in this section of the book corresponded with the Table of Contents.
Although Fabian is strongest in his reconstruction of the genesis and development of the Essay, a critical question arises regarding his repeated emphasis on the intuitionalists as something less than scientific in their inquiry, and thus less valid in establishing and coming to grips with fundamental aesthetic principles and criteria. Although he admits the indebtedness of the Romantics to eighteenth-century associationist psychology, he fails adequately to develop this important relationship in terms of evolving critical and aesthetic principles. Indeed throughout his introduction it seems as if the Romantics and intuitionalists are being admonished for their lack of empirically supported theories on the creative process. Fabian injudiciously dismisses Edward Young as a mystic for whom genius was some "magical" force when he writes that "Young was inclined to mysticism: he took refuge in enchantment and invisible powers. Gerard, on the other hand, aimed at a synthesis: 'nature' and 'art' he set against each other." This kind of argument must necessarily slight the critical impact and rich legacy of Shaftesbury and his intuitive successors. Again, in his emphasis on Gerard's "originality" Fabian seems to deny the theoretical efficacy of contemporary commentators who developed and furthered credence in associationist psychology (there is little or no mention of Locke, Burke, Hutcheson, Addison, Hartley, etc.). It is, then, difficult to accept his statement that Gerard "conducted his inquiry without preconceived ideas." Certainly it is difficult to accept it only in terms of Gerard's learning.

Norwithstanding Fabian's questionable critical predilections on the above issues, his edition is an important addition to studies in eighteenth-century aesthetics, and one which rightly attempts to reassert Gerard's place and importance in the milieu of that period's rich tradition of aesthetic inquiry.

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