In the “Editors’ Introduction” to this new edition of Blair’s Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, Linda Ferreira-Buckley and S. Michael Halloran present an impressive overview of Blair’s life, work, and legacy. They trace the publication, reception, and influence of the Lectures, providing particularly insightful discussion of the multitude of abridgements and derivative works that represented Blair’s work to so many. They sketch Blair’s early education and his university training, then lead readers through his life as a preacher, man of letters, and university lecturer. Finally, they assess Blair’s place in the history of eighteenth-century rhetorical theory.

The “Introduction” provides an authoritative survey of scholarship on some of the key issues related to Blair’s work including Blair’s influence on the teaching of writing in universities, on the emerging discipline of literary criticism, and on the continuing shift of the focus of rhetorical theory from oral declamation to written language (especially belles lettres). Ferreira-Buckley and Halloran’s extensive research in archival materials related to Blair’s career and published work allows them to contribute new insights to all of these lines of inquiry. This reader found particularly interesting their reminder that Blair’s Lectures not only informed later college curricula but also played a significant role in “schools, in literary societies and clubs, and in home study” (xxi). An annotated copy of the Lectures in St. Andrews University’s rare book collection, for instance, provides evidence of the ways that individuals studied and used the Lectures, and I wanted to hear more about that body of evidence. Ferreira-Buckley and Halloran end their Introduction with an innovative analysis of the curious fact that Blair “makes little mention of the works of any of the great visual artists who were his contemporaries” despite his “heavy reliance on visual metaphors and analogies” (xlvi–xlvii). Similarly, they note that Blair says nothing about contemporary music. Despite repeated references to the connections between poetry and music, Blair never acknowledges work by contemporaries such as Handel and Purcell, both of whom had set English poetry to music. While acknowledging that his inattention to contemporary art and music may simply reflect Blair’s “pedagogical purpose,” the editors argue that the larger significance of these lacunae may lie in the fact that “the printing press had long since created the conditions for a kind of sedentary cosmopolitanism in the textual realm” (xlviii). In short, Blair did not get out of Scotland much and “‘the age of mechanical reproduction’ of visual and musical works would not arrive for another century,” leaving his “experience, while rich in the literary arts, ... impoverished with respect to other media” (xlviii). Through arguments like these, Ferreira-Buckley and Halloran’s Introduction suggests new lines of inquiry into Blair’s Lectures.

Beyond the “Introduction,” this volume consists mostly of an edition of the Lectures based on the 1785 London edition, which contained Blair’s
corrections to the 1783 first edition. As a textual edition, the volume is something of a puzzle. To be sure, the text seems trustworthy with regard to what textual editors traditionally termed “substantives”—the words of the chosen copy text—but some of the editorial decisions, and the lack of textual apparatus, leave the goals of the edition unclear.

The main goal of the volume is to bring the 1785 edition of Blair’s Lectures back into print (it was last published in facsimile by Garland in 1970, five years after Southern Illinois University Press published a facsimile of the 1783 edition). While the 1785 edition is no longer in print, the entire text is currently available online (in a searchable facsimile edition) through Gale’s Eighteenth-Century Collections Online. (This new edition is also searchable online via Google Book Search, though one can read only a limited number of sample pages on that site.)

The editors argue further that to “truly understand Blair’s influence, scholars must begin to study differences among editions and abridgments, because what readers took away from Blair’s Lectures depended upon what version of the text they studied” (xvi). Surprisingly, then, they dismissively characterize Blair’s corrections to the 1783 edition as follows: “Blair for the most part simply edited his prose, making the second edition conform even more meticulously than the first to his own precise stylistic principles” (lv). One could argue that such an effort on Blair’s part would make those corrections especially interesting, but the editors do not identify the corrections. Further, according to their short “Note on the Text,” the editors preserved the spelling (even inconsistent spelling) and punctuation of the 1785 edition, but “[I]n a very few instances” they “silently corrected more minor inconsistencies or obvious misspellings” and “emended some eighteenth-century typographical conventions (e.g., long s, running quotations)” (lv). Yet in the index, which follows “the text of the index that appears in” the 1785 edition—page numbers, of course, now conform to the numbering of the present volume—“alphabetization has been corrected, punctuation and capitalization now conform to current style, and obvious typographical errors have been corrected” (567). It is not clear why the editors decided to treat the text of the index differently than the main text. The edition also contains an appendix prepared by Professor Frederick Williams “that presents contemporary versions” of Blair’s Greek quotations because “Blair’s quotations of Greek sources are not always accessible to the modern reader” (lv), but the particular difficulties presented by those quotations are not explained. Why reproduce eighteenth-century typographical conventions for representing Greek exactly in the text, and supplement it with a modernized appendix, while partly modernizing the English in the text?

Several passages in the Editors’ Introduction raise more substantive—and tantalizing—textual questions. At one point, the editors tell us that although scholars “have long believed that Blair’s lectures remained virtually unchanged throughout the time he delivered them, our reading of students’ copies of the lectures spanning three decades discloses some meaningful changes. When preparing his lecture notes for publication, Blair excised
sensitive passages (one satirizing Samuel Johnson’s prose style is particularly cutting)” (xi). Again, one wishes for a textual apparatus that would bring those changes to light. In sum, while the volume does not make a notable contribution to the rich and complex textual history of Blair’s Lectures, this is a perfectly usable edition of the text accompanied by an excellent Introduction.

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Après une brève présentation d’Ibn Ṭumālūs (= IT), l’introduction évoque l’importance que revêt le Livre de la Rhétorique d’un point de vue biographique: ce traité prouve avec évidence—ce qui n’a jamais été fait jusqu’à présent—qu’IT est un disciple d’Averroès puisqu’il a utilisé ici un texte philosophique du Cordouan, le Commentaire moyen à la “Rhétorique” d’Aristote. Le Livre de la Rhétorique est ensuite situé dans l’économie générale de l’Introduction à l’Art de la Logique d’IT (conservé dans un unicum de l’Escorial), dont il occupe environ 20% du nombre total de folios—c’est dire son importance—puis parmi les différentes sciences énumérées par l’auteur dans son prologue (il faut distinguer à ce titre la rhétorique de tradition philosophique et la rhétorique purement arabe, qui s’occupe du style, de la langue, sans trop se soucier de la vérité ou de la vraisemblance de ce qui est dit). Le plan du Livre de la Rhétorique, repris en détail infra (p. CXXIII-CXXIX) et qui a l’avantage de donner une idée générale de ce dont traite IT, est suivi d’une section (p. VI-X) où M. Aouad (= MA) examine avec précision les sources du Livre de la Rhétorique, en ne tenant compte que des convergences littérales (et non doctrinales) qui existent entre IT d’une part et Averroès, al-Fārābī et Avicenne d’autre part. Les phrases ou expressions communes à IT et aux trois philosophes sont très nettement mises en évidence grâce à une saisie en caractères gras dans de nombreux passages du Livre de la Rhétorique (tous cités dans l’annexe, p. LXXXVIII-CXXII). Il ressort de ces analyses que la source principale d’IT est le Commentaire moyen à la “Rhétorique” d’Aristote d’Averroès—et ce, pour l’ensemble du Livre de la Rhétorique—que ses sources secondaires (IT indique lui-même avoir utilisé des “livres”) sont Avicenne (Rhetorique du Shifä’), Averroès (Abrégé de la Rhétorique) et al- Fārābī (Livre de la Rhétorique)—très majoritairement dans les cinq premiers folios du Livre de la Rhétorique—et qu’IT ne s’est pas directement appuyé sur la traduction arabe de la Rhétorique d’Aristote.

MA examine ensuite, citations d’IT à l’appui, le but et la méthode du Livre de la Rhétorique (p. X-XV). Ni commentaire, ni abrégé, ce traité au