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MODERN
RHETORIC

SECOND EDITION

HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PREFACE

With this revision of *Modern Rhetoric* we have not changed our notion of what such a book should be. This revision is, rather, an attempt to realize our original notion more clearly and vigorously. We are convinced that good writing is not merely a matter of rules or tricks but a natural expression of necessary modes of thought. Good writing cannot be learned — or cannot readily be learned — by a process of blind absorption, trial and error, or automatic conditioning. It is learned as the student becomes aware of the underlying principles. If, in the practical, day-to-day business of writing, the student can be made constantly aware of the principles underlying what he is trying to do, then he comes to a deeper realization of the workings of his own mind and feelings and, through that realization, to a greater skill in expressing himself.

The first thing we have tried to do is to make the theory that informs the book more readily accessible to the ordinary student. To this end we have eliminated certain distinctions, omitted some theoretical niceties that might blur more fundamental matters, and have relegated some of the specialized discussions to the appendixes.

Our second aim has been to make the book itself more practical for classroom use. With this in mind, we have included a large number of student themes, not merely to provide models to be imitated or examples of what is to be avoided, but also, in some instances, to illustrate the actual process of composition and, in all instances, to counterpoint the literary selections to which the student's attention is constantly called. We have also rewritten the exercises in order to provide the student with more specific and attractive invitations to develop his own skill. With this end in view, we have tried to make references to the Readings more systematic and fruitful. In the Readings themselves, we would point out, we have increased the number of selections, with the idea of furnishing greater variety in subject matter and tone.

One of the changes aimed at making *Modern Rhetoric* more useful is the addition of a handbook of grammar and usage. Since our book,

as the title indicates, is primarily a rhetoric, the handbook is concise and is designed chiefly for reference, with a great deal of space devoted to the highly practical matter of "Exceptions and Problems." In our approach to grammar, though we have included some of the more useful formulations of the functional grammarians, we have attempted no radical innovations.

One further consideration: A book about writing should, alas, be well written. We hope that, with time and tears, we have refined our own style.

Whatever improvement appears in this revision of *Modern Rhetoric* is largely due to the criticisms and suggestions of friends of the book. Though these friends are many and all merit our deep gratitude, we wish to make special mention of Mr. Lloyd Bruno of Sacramento Junior College, Mr. Henry Cassady of Hartnell College, Mr. Sanford Kahrman of Columbia University, Mr. Daniel A. Lindley, Jr., the Reverend Dennis B. McCarthy, O.P., of Providence College, Mr. Ernest Nagel of Columbia University, Mr. George B. Rodman of the University of Wisconsin, Mr. Gerald A. Smith of the University of Rochester, Mr. Richard M. Weaver of the University of Chicago, Mr. Rulon Wells of Yale University, Mr. Harold Whitehall of Indiana University, and particularly Mr. Donald A. Sears of Upsala College, who kindly provided us with very valuable material.

C. B.

R. P. W.

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THE
ESSENTIALS
OF
RHETORIC

CHAPTER ONE

Language, Thinking, and Rhetoric

What is this course all about? Is it primarily concerned with commas and figures of speech and participial phrases? Does it have to do with outlining themes, constructing topic sentences, and working to achieve unity, coherence, and emphasis? These questions obviously have to be answered with a *yes*; but there is a larger sense in which the proper answer has to be *no*, for the essential purpose of this course goes far beyond the mere technicalities of grammar and rhetoric. Ultimately, this course engages your deepest needs and interests, your thinking, your feelings, your relationships with other people. These last assertions will not seem too sweeping when you realize that language is an indispensable instrument in the functioning of the human mind and personality and that rhetoric is the art of using language effectively.

If you doubt what has just been said, consider for a moment the college career before you. No matter what major interest you are to pursue in college, most of the instruction will be in language and you will be required to respond in language. If you do not understand language well and cannot use it effectively, the chances are that you will not do very well in college. When you leave this course, you will not, then, be through with the subject of language. You will be just beginning it. The analysis of city planning assigned for Government 11 and the textbook used in Astronomy 6 present complicated ideas through language, ideas more complicated than any you will commonly encounter here. The term paper you must write in Economics 114 and the essay questions in the Biology 63 ex-

amination will make greater demands on your use of language than any theme you will have to write in this course.

The Need To Use Language Well

Nor are you through with the need to use language well when you leave college. In most occupations there are letters and reports to be written, conferences to be held, policies to be drawn up and debated, many forms of communication which require skill in language. But language is not only necessary for communication; it is tied fundamentally to thinking. Lacking competence in language, you will spend much of your life fumbling in a kind of twilight world in which facts and ideas are perceived only dimly and often in distorted shapes.

How important language is to the whole business of thinking, the way in which it gives definition and outline to our world, is dramatically put by Helen Keller's account of learning her first word when she was seven years old. She had been blind and deaf almost from birth and had never learned to speak. Then a wise teacher began her education:

We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word *water*, first slowly and then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten — a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that “w-a-t-e-r” meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away.

I left the well-house eager to learn. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object which I touched seemed to quiver with life. That was because I saw everything with the strange, new sight that had come to me.

— HELEN KELLER: *The Story of My Life*.

To the arguments advanced so far you may retort, “I intend to be a physicist, and physics has its own special mathematical language.” Or: “I intend to be a businessman. Look at Mr. Horton. Why, he made a million dollars and he can scarcely write his name. He has his secretary compose his letters.” Or: “I intend to be a

painter, and a painter understands the world and expresses himself by line and color, not by words."

The first thing to be said in reply to such remarks is not by way of rebuttal but of agreement. The physicist *does* make use of a special mathematical "language." The businessman *does* manipulate his world of business through considerations of supply and demand, business organization, profit and loss, and the ledger. The painter *does* define his world through line and color. But these various ways of understanding the world are not brainless and automatic activities. They are "languages" of a special sort. As such, they are manifestations of intelligence and serve to develop and extend intelligence.

Of course, there are some people with special aptitudes, talent, or genius, whose thinking seems to be nonverbal — the born physicist, the born businessman, the born soldier, the born painter. Such people may be able to by-pass much of the conscious discipline that most of us have to go through in order to develop our capacities.

Yet even the person who has a very special aptitude does not live his whole life in the exercise of that aptitude. The physicist in the laboratory may seem very far away from the demands of everyday life, but a few years back we had a startling demonstration that he is not far away at all. With the development of the atomic bomb, physicists suddenly saw that physics had to be thought of in relation to the whole society, in relation to the survival of the race. Some physicists took the position that they would do no research directed toward military use; some took the opposite stand; but both groups were forced into thinking about their relation to the world outside physics, and many of them felt compelled to express their thoughts in letters and articles.

Or take a businessman. More and more, the businessman, big or little, sees that business is not a mere matter of supply and demand, profit and loss. It has enormously complicated relations to the whole of the society in which it is exercised — from the management of the Community Chest to the conduct of national foreign policy. And in dealing with the relation of business to society in general, the businessman who is businessman and nothing more, who happens to have an aptitude for making money or building up a great organization, may be a baby, even a dangerous and destructive baby.

A prominent businessman,¹ one-time chairman of the board of a great steel company, has recently said that for years he has made a policy of hiring half the new men for his company from among those who have majored in the humanities. In his words:

¹ Clarence Randall, in an address at Colby College, May, 1956.

I always chose in each group half that were trained in the technical disciplines and half in the Liberal Arts, feeling that in business we need both those disciplines, and that in no man's life is there time for him to achieve, in the early years, both. So I looked to the Liberal Arts boys to catch their metallurgy on the fly, and I looked to the technically trained to do their best to make up in general education. . . . Now what did I ask for as I interviewed young men? I wanted, first of all, intellectual superiority — let there be no nonsense about that. I had no patience with the theory that a man who wastes his time in college is apt to embrace his opportunities the minute he enters business. I leave that to the others to find out. I want those who have proven that they understand opportunity when they see it and know how to make the most of it. I wanted then evidence that a man could master a subject and lick it. I didn't care what the subject was. When a man came into the steel industry, it didn't make any difference to me what he had studied. We do not employ young men for what they know. That may be a shock to some of you boys, but that's a fact. We employ you for your capacity to learn. I wanted first to know that he could lick a subject. I wanted secondly to know whether he had sufficient intellectual flexibility to be willing to tackle a job for which he was not trained. It is unthinkable that you will find in industry the task for which you are adequately prepared, and your capacity to prepare yourself thereafter is the test. I have always believed that the educated man must learn to walk with confidence upon unfamiliar grounds. Moreover, I wanted the young man I hired to be able to communicate ideas. I wanted him to be able to speak and write the English language with persuasion and conviction. And therein lies the weakness of technical education. When a young engineer comes to my desk to present a matter, he always reaches for a pad and a pencil to draw a sketch. And I never let him have it. I say, "Sit there now and tell me without the pencil."

But the most important use of language, no matter how specialized the user's occupation, is in his personal life. A man lives with a family, with friends, with neighbors, with fellow church members, with people on civic or political committees, with the stranger on the street. He needs to understand these people, to express himself to them, and to think about his relation to them. So here we are back to language as, first, a means of communication and, second, a means of thinking. We are once again talking about language as one way of learning how to live.

How Language Shapes Thought

There is the joke about the old lady who, when asked to say what she meant, replied, "How can I know what I mean till I say it?" Was the old lady a scatter-brained rattletrap, or was she talking sense?