Second Edition

The History and Theory of RHETORIC

AN INTRODUCTION

JAMES A. HERRICK

SECOND EDITION

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For Janet

PREFACE

The History and Theory of Rhetoric provides students with an interesting and readable survey of the history of rhetoric and equips them with an accessible conceptual framework for evaluating and practicing persuasive writing and speaking. It introduces readers to many of the major theories of rhetoric advanced by some of the western world's greatest minds. Through encountering the rhetorical tradition, students are encouraged to develop their own rhetorical abilities and are equipped to understand the symbolic practices that mark our social and private lives.

In this second edition I have attempted to refine the presentation of a unifying and practical overview of the historical sweep of rhetorical theory that animated the first edition. My goals are to help students to understand what rhetoric is, to appreciate the important social functions it performs, and to recognize how theories of rhetoric help us to improve our understanding and practice of this essential art. In *The History and Theory of Rhetoric* I present the story of rhetoric in a manner that is historically accurate and intellectually stimulating.

The basic structure and coverage of the second edition have been maintained from the first edition, although revisions have been made to all chapters. Chapter 1 presents the defining characteristics and functions of rhetoric as themes that run throughout its history. These themes include rhetoric's relationship to power and knowledge, the art's role in building human societies, and rhetoric's relationship to conceptions of truth and ethics. Subsequent chapters return to these themes, making the point that rhetoric in different historical eras has always been marked by a fascinating set of unifying concerns that make it both a relevant and an intriguing topic of study for the contemporary student.

Chapters 2 through 8 trace rhetoric's historical progression from classical Greece through eighteenth-century Britain. Chapter 2 presents the Sophists as early teachers and practitioners of rhetoric. The Sophists' experiments in the power of language are explored, and the controversy they generated by their exotic claims and iconoclastic theories is set in its historical context. The Sophists, however, are also seen as thinkers who achieved considerable insight into rhetoric's nature and power. Chapter 2 also considers the important female rhetorician of the Greek classical period, Aspasia. Chapter 3 examines Plato's famous criticism of the sophistic approach to rhetoric in the dialogue *Gorgias,* as well as the philosopher's own suggestions about a true art of rhetoric in the dialogue *Phaedrus.*

Chapter 4 explores Aristotle's highly influential theory advanced in his *Rhetoric.* The chapter discusses the details of Aristotle's affirmative answer to Plato's question of whether rhetoric qualifies as a true art. The notions of the enthymeme, artistic proofs, and topics of argumentation are all reviewed. Chapter 5 completes the discussion of the classical period by considering Roman adaptations of greek rhetoric to a new social situation. Key components in the rhetorical theory of Cicero—including his famous canons of rhetoric as well as his concern for the preparation of

the orator/leader—are focal points in the chapter. The contributions of Quintilian and Longinus to rhetorical thought are also explored.

Chapter 6 considers the theories and uses of rhetoric that characterized the long period of Christian dominance in Europe from the fifth through the fourteenth centuries. St. Augustine's rapprochement between the "pagan" rhetoric of Greece and Rome, and the educational needs of the Christian church are discussed. The chapter also examines the rhetorical arts which developed in the later Middle Ages, including the arts of preaching, letter writing, and versification.

Renaissance rhetorical theory, particularly the contributions of the Italian Humanists, is the topic of Chapter 7. The period's intense interest in classical texts and languages, and the Renaissance's fascination with rhetoric generally, are seen as forces that produced an era of extraordinary influence for rhetoric in European education, and that led to remarkable insights on the part of rhetorical theorists. This chapter includes a discussion of women's contributions to Renaissance rhetorical practice.

Chapter 8 directs attention to Enlightenment theories of rhetoric. The chapter opens with a discussion of the intriguing theories of Giambattista Vico regarding the role of rhetoric in the evolution of human thought processes. The chapter then directs attention to Britain and the diverse impulses animating the elocutionary theories of Thomas Sheridan, the psychological rhetoric of George Campbell, the argument theory of Richard Whately, and the stylistic concerns of Hugh Blair.

The dramatic renewal of interest in rhetoric during the twentieth century is treated in Chapters 9, 10, and 11. I consider contemporary rhetorical theory under three headings because of the remarkable variety of voices and concerns that characterize the twentieth century's return to rhetoric. Chapter 9 considers Stephen Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument* and the theories of audience and argument that mark Chaim Perelman and Madame L. Olbrechts-Tyteca's *The New Rhetoric.* This chapter also considers the recent work of theorists and critics in the rhetoric of science, a movement that has brought traditional rhetorical concerns for strategic communication and audience adaptation to an arena not traditionally studied by rhetoricians.

Chapter 10 traces a different thread through twentieth-century rhetorical theory, one that runs from Kenneth Burke's dramatism through Wayne Booth's and Walter Fisher's narrative theories. Theorists in this chapter see rhetoric as shaped both by situations common to human experience and narrative structures inherent to the human mind. Other theorists discussed in this chapter include Mikhail Bakhtin, Ernest Bormann, and Lloyd Bitzer.

Finally, Chapter 11 treats those recent theories of rhetoric and discourse that explore the intersection of language, culture, and power. Michel Foucault's insights into the close connection between the uses of discourse and the distribution of power in a society are discussed, as is Jacques Derrida's critique of the instability of language itself. Richard Weaver's concern for rhetoric's potential to preserve cultural values over time is explored, as is the highly influential feminist criticism of this very phenomenon. Feminist rhetoricians are viewed as applying insights regarding

rhetoric and power to the tendency of the rhetorical tradition itself to exclude women from participation in social power structures. The feminist critics' call for a new rhetoric which avoids the older metaphors of confrontation and domination is also considered. The chapter also introduces George Kennedy's recent exploration of rhetorical traditions in non-Western cultures.

I have included several items in the text to make it a more useful and convenient educational tool. Each chapter includes a list of key terms, as well as questions for review and for discussion. Students should find the complete glossary of rhetorical terms useful for review. The bibliography can be of assistance to students who wish to do additional reading on a particular topic or theorist. An instructor's manual is also available which recommends additional assignments, exercises, and examination questions.

In this second edition I have incorporated recent insights from research into the history of rhetoric. I have also noted the tension between two competing views of rhetoric—the magical and the technical—in the chapters on the classical and renaissance periods. A particular goal of the second edition has been to represent some of the advances in our understanding of the roles women have played in the history of rhetorical theory. A greater effort has also been made in this new edition to accommodate critical reactions to several of the theorists covered. In addition, clearer connections from one historical period to another have been developed in a number of cases.

The centrality of symbolic activity to our social and private lives has driven the incessant human interest in symbols and their instrumental use. The written record of this interest constitutes the history of rhetoric. Our reliance upon rhetorical interaction for the development and maintenance of cooperative social arrangements makes the history and theory of rhetoric a crucial study for all thinking people today. Given the pluralistic nature of contemporary society and the resulting necessity of improving our means of finding working compromises through discourse, the study of rhetoric is perhaps more relevant today than it ever has been. It is my hope that this book conveys to readers the vitality of this essential art. I also hope to provide a sense of the intense intellectual electricity that crackles around the thinking of so many brilliant minds as they seek to understand for themselves, and to educate their own students about, the inherent power of artfully managed symbols.

James A. Herrick

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CHAPTER

1 An Overview of Rhetoric

My first problem lies of course in the very word "rhetoric."
—Wayne Booth, *The Vocation of a Teacher*

This text explores the history, theories, and practices of rhetoric. But, as literary critic Wayne Booth suggests in the quotation above, the term *rhetoric* may pose some problems at the outset because of the various meanings it has acquired in our contemporary cultural setting. For example, for some people *rhetoric* is synonymous with "empty talk," or even "deception." We may hear clichés like "That's mere rhetoric" or "That's just empty rhetoric" used as an insult when directed at someone else's comments on a subject. Meanwhile, rhetoric has become an important topic of study in recent years, and its significance to public discussion of important political, social, and even scientific issues has been widely recognized. Scholars and teachers have expressed great interest in the topic. Many colleges and universities are again offering courses in rhetoric after having banished the term from their curricula for years, and dozens of books are published every year with *rhetoric* in their titles. Clearly, *rhetoric* arouses mixed feelings—it is widely condemned and widely studied, employed as an insult and recommended to students as an important subject of study. What is going on here? Why all the confusion and ambiguity surrounding the term *rhetoric*?

The negative attitude toward rhetoric reflected in comments such as "That's empty rhetoric" is not, as we shall see, of recent origin. In fact, one of the earliest and most influential discussions of rhetoric occurs in Plato's dialogue *Gorgias,* a work written in the opening decades of the fourth century B.C. when rhetoric was popular in Athens. Plato, as his dialogue makes clear, takes a dim view of rhetoric, at least as practiced by some. The character Socrates, apparently representing Plato's own perspective, argues that the type of rhetoric being taught in Athens was simply a means by which "naturally clever" people "flatter" their unsuspecting listeners into agreeing with them and doing their bidding. Plato condemns rhetoric as "foul" and "ugly."[1] We will discuss his specific criticisms of rhetoric in Chapter 3.