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RITICISM

RODERICK P. HART

MODERN

RHETORICAL

CRITICISM

RODERICK P. HART

The University of Texas at Austin

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To Chris and Kate

And the other college students I have known and loved

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The Scott, Foresman/Little, Brown Rhetoric and Society Series
Bruce G. Gronbeck, General Editor

Preface

Rhetoric was studied by ancient Greeks and Romans, medieval courtiers, Renaissance theologians, and by political thinkers in the emerging democracies of the eighteenth century. In each age there was a sense that something powerful happened when a firebrand mounted a public platform, entered a church pulpit, or delivered a scathing editorial. Because this same feeling continues today, there has been a renewed interest in the study of rhetoric. Here is why: Hitler's rise to power, the Iran-Contra hearings, the resurgence of David Duke, televised evangelism, the politicized novel, advocacy journalism, apartheid protest rallies, AIDS awareness campaigns, Weight Watchers International, soap operas, and the Ayatollah Khomeini. All of these characters and events collect in the rhetorical arena. All of them change people's lives. To ignore them is to incur possible political, moral, health, and financial risks.

Modern Rhetorical Criticism is a comprehensive, up-to-date guide to public rhetoric, written for those taking courses in rhetorical criticism and for students of literary criticism interested in the rhetorical approach to ideas. Its goals are threefold: (1) to broaden the reader's conception of persuasion so that its uses in law, politics, religion, and commerce are seen as different in degree—not in kind—from its less obvious uses in literature, science, education, and entertainment; (2) to survey the major critical studies of rhetoric produced in the United States during the past thirty years; and (3) to equip the reader with the critical tools and attitudes needed to see how rhetoric works its magic.

The reader, however, will not find in *Modern Rhetorical Criticism* a complete history of rhetorical thought or a history of rival schools of criticism. Rather, the book emphasizes the more recent U.S. tradition of critical inquiry. Unlike the European tradition, which has been popular among students of literature and has focused largely on stylistic matters, the American tradition (beginning in the early 1900s) has featured public debate and emphasized the spoken word. In an era of electronic mass media that has given public speech a kind of power never before witnessed in human history, such an emphasis seems especially warranted.

Features of the Text

The book begins with two overview chapters, one on the nature of rhetoric and one on the nature of criticism. These introductory discussions present the basic terminology of rhetorical study and examine the reasons criticism is so central to intellectual life. Part Two goes deeper into rhetorical texts themselves by providing the basic tools needed to understand the situations, ideas, arguments, structures, and styles that make up rhetorical exchanges. Finally, Part Three treats more ambitious forms of analysis—those dealing with role, culture, and drama—and also shows why certain recent schools of criticism—feminism, Marxism, and postmodernism—must be understood by anyone hoping to produce intelligent criticism in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Several features make this book unique. For example, in addition to a wide array of critical techniques and summaries of critical studies, the book contains numerous pieces of original criticism. Sometimes, the texts analyzed are masterworks—patriotic oratory, Shakespeare's plays, congressional debates, and Orwell's *Animal Farm*—and sometimes they are more practical—Army recruitment literature, bureaucratic propaganda, radio drama, and junk mail circulars. These sample analyses are intended to demonstrate the way creative criticism can "open up" a text that the persuader has (consciously or unconsciously) wrapped up tightly.

Still other features make *Modern Rhetorical Criticism* distinctive. These include:

- **Critical Probes** Specific, concrete questions that can be asked of a given text are scattered throughout the book. These probes are, essentially, the critic's tools. When used carefully, patiently, and imaginatively, these questions shed light on textual matters often ignored by the average listener or reader.
- **Chapter Headnotes** Each chapter begins with a sample persuasive message that graphically previews the chapter's content. These headnotes range from Richard Nixon's resignation speech to Broadway lyrics, from contemporary funeral prayers to children's textbooks, and from avant-garde poetry to social protest rhetoric.
- **Critical Profiles** These are brief, intriguing summaries of some of the most interesting research studies produced in the area of rhetorical criticism. They are grouped under such headings as Rhetoric and the American West, Rhetoric and Corporate Life, Rhetoric and the Law, and Rhetoric and the Popular Arts. Col-

lectively, they demonstrate how vast rhetoric's influence has become and how many disguises it wears in the contemporary world.

- **Appendixes** Two highly practical appendixes also help the reader. Appendix A directs the critic to library materials suitable for rhetorical analysis. Complete bibliographical citations are included, as are library call numbers. Among the materials listed are patriotic orations, editorial cartoons, political campaign speeches, government propaganda, court transcripts, underground magazines, corporate reports, and television newscrips.

Appendix B helps the aspiring critic do the background reading necessary for producing a complete criticism. Here, readers are advised how to do literature searches (for both popular and scholarly periodicals and books), how to use historical sources to sketch out cultural background, how to access popular reactions to major rhetorical events, how to find relevant audio-visual materials, and how to search computerized data-bases for background ideas.

The very existence of *Modern Rhetorical Criticism* shows how widespread rhetorical inquiry has become during the last thirty years. In colleges and universities, more academic courses are devoted to rhetorical matters every year. When taught in Departments of Speech or Communication, courses on rhetoric bear such titles as Speech Criticism, Contemporary Public Address, Political Communication, Persuasion and Propaganda, Rhetoric and Media, or Historical/Critical Research Methods. In Departments of English, they fall under such headings as Rhetoric and Literature, Text and Language, Stylistics, Rhetoric and Genre, or Advanced Composition and Exposition. Moreover, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, historians, and religious scholars have all demonstrated increasing interest in rhetorical issues. But no matter what such courses are called, they tend to tell the same tale: rhetoric has always been studied and used, and always will be. *Modern Rhetorical Criticism* is designed to prepare its reader for that reality.

Acknowledgments

For me, this book has been a long time in coming. The idea for it was germinated when I first began teaching rhetorical criticism in the early 1970s, and the book largely reflects the intellectual routes I have traveled since that time. Professor Carroll Arnold of Pennsylvania

State University started me on that journey. A truer guide than he is surely not imaginable. His influence and the influence of Professor Richard Gregg have been profound, no matter how remote those influences may seem at this late date.

More recently, I have benefited from the advice of many others. Professor Jill McMillan of Wake Forest University encouraged this book from the beginning. Professor Charles Stewart of Purdue University, my former colleague, talked with me about rhetorical criticism for nine happy years. Professor Kathleen Jamieson of the University of Pennsylvania carefully read each word in this manuscript and gave me the benefit of her oh so gentle counsel. I also must acknowledge Professor Edwin Black of the University of Wisconsin, Professor Richard Cherwitz of the University of Texas, Professor Bruce Gronbeck of the University of Iowa, Professors Carol Jablonski and David Payne of the University of South Florida, and Professor Kathleen Turner of Tulane University. Each directed me away from certain pitfalls. I alone am responsible for the other pitfalls into which I may have inadvertently fallen.

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Above all, I am thankful to my family, especially to my mother, who is the best rhetorical critic I know, and to my wife who is, simply, the best.

R.P.H.

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PART ONE

Introduction to Criticism

