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AN INTRODUCTION TO RHETORIC

When the word *rhetoric* is used today, the meaning frequently is pejorative. More often than not, it refers to empty, bombastic words with no substance or trivial talk. A typical use of the term occurred in an article in *The Toronto Star*, in which the Canadian prime minister was criticized for suggesting the use of "tough love" on Western Canadians to stem their growing alienation from the rest of Canada. In response, Stockwell Day, a leader of the Canadian Alliance, suggested that Western Canadians want to "feel the love" Prime Minister Jean Chrétien speaks of through actions, not rhetoric."¹

Rhetoric, however, should not engender only negative connotations. In the Western tradition,² the study of rhetoric dates back to the fifth century B.C. and has a distinguished history of largely positive meanings. For those of us who have chosen to study rhetoric, it is an art and a discipline that facilitates our understanding of the nature and function of symbols in our lives. How we perceive, what we know, what we experience, and how we act are the results of our own symbol use and that of those around us; *rhetoric* is the term that captures all of these processes. For us, rhetoric is the human use of symbols to communicate. We believe this definition is broad enough to cover most contemporary uses of the term, including the perspectives offered by the theorists who are the subjects of the chapters that follow. To clarify this definition, we will discuss each of the key components of this definition—*human*, *symbols*, and *communicate*.

Our definition of rhetoric features the use of symbols by humans. As far as we know, humans are the only animals who create a substantial part of their reality through the use of symbols. Some people debate whether or not symbol use is a characteristic that distinguishes humans from all other species of animals, pointing to research with chimpanzees and gorillas in which these animals have been taught to communicate using signs or systems of signs

such as American Sign Language. Although many of the theorists whose ideas we will discuss in this book argue that symbols are uniquely human, we believe that the debate over whether animals use symbols is unresolved and perhaps unresolvable. Most would agree, however, that the difference between humans and other animals with regard to symbol use involves such a difference in degree that whether or not it is also a difference in kind is largely irrelevant to the position that the human is the symbol-using animal. Even if certain primates can be taught signs that operate in some fundamentally symbolic ways, these species do not create any substantial part of their realities through their use of symbols.

We take seriously the notion that humans create their realities through symbols. Put another way, humans construct the world in which they live through their symbolic choices. This does not mean that there is no objective reality—that this book, for example, is simply a figment of our imagination. Rather, we mean that the symbols through which our realities are filtered affect and perhaps determine our view of the book and how we are motivated to act toward it. The frameworks and labels we choose to apply to what we encounter influence our perceptions of what we experience and thus the kinds of worlds in which we live. Is someone an alcoholic or morally depraved? Is a child misbehaved or unable to concentrate because of attention deficit disorder? A move to a new state can be a struggle or an adventure, a coworker's behavior can be seen as irritating or not worthy of attention, and a child's interruption can be greeted with frustration or seen as a chance for a break. The choices that an individual, a community, and a culture make in terms of how to approach alcoholism, children's fidgetiness, a relocation, or interruptions—to continue with these examples—are critical in determining the nature and outcome of interactions. Every word choice we make—every perspective we choose to apply—results in seeing the world one way rather than another. In each case, the experience will be different because of the symbols used to frame it. Because we create our worlds through symbols, changing our symbols changes our worlds. Gloria Anzaldúa describes the process of changing the world as one of shifting metaphors—choosing new terms to label and thus create experience. The outcome is control over the situations in which we find ourselves and the ways in which we respond to them: “People in possession of the vehicles of communication are, indeed, in partial possession of their lives.”³

The second concept in our definition of rhetoric is symbol, by which we mean something that stands for or represents something else by virtue of relationship, association, or convention. Symbols are distinguished from signs by the degree of direct connection to the object represented. Smoke is a sign that fire is present; there is a direct relationship between the fire and the smoke. Similarly, the changing color of the leaves in autumn is a sign that winter is coming; falling leaves are a direct indicator of a drop in temperature. A symbol, by contrast, is a human construction connected only indirectly to its referent. The word *kitchen*, for example, has no natural relationship to the place where

meals are prepared. It is a symbol invented by someone who needed to refer to a place where food is cooked. Words are symbols that stand for objects to which there usually is no literal connection. A *kitchen* could have been labeled a *fish*, for example. That the word *kitchen* was selected to refer to a particular room in a house is totally arbitrary.

The case of a heart attack further clarifies the distinction between a symbol and a sign. A woman is awakened in the middle of the night by a severe pain in her arm and chest and calls an ambulance to take her to the hospital. The doctor who examines her concludes that, on the basis of her heart rate and rhythm, she has suffered a heart attack. In this case, heart rate and rhythm are signs. If someone goes to a doctor because she is suffering from pain in her chest and arm, explains the nature and location of the pain, and the doctor diagnoses her condition as a heart attack, the patient is using symbols to communicate. In the first example, the symptoms (heart rate and rhythm) were signs directly connected to the woman's illness; they were not conscious choices. The second example involved the conscious use of symbols to communicate a particular condition. Of course, in reality, this distinction is never this clear. In all likelihood, the woman taken to the hospital by ambulance would use words to communicate—assuming she is conscious—in addition to the signs of a heart attack evident in her body.

That signs and symbols often intertwine is typical of human communication. For instance, a tree standing in a forest is not a symbol; it does not stand for something else. It simply is a tree, although the word chosen to represent the thing standing in the forest is a symbol. The tree could be a sign of regeneration after a forest fire of the previous summer when it sprouts new leaves in the spring. The tree also becomes a symbol—an instance of rhetoric—when it is cut, for example, for use as a Christmas tree. The act of bringing a tree into the house and decorating it symbolizes certain aspects of the Christmas holiday, but Christmas trees can be used symbolically to express other meanings as well. Some people choose real rather than artificial Christmas trees to symbolize their disdain for anything fake or artificial. Some people keep a live Christmas tree in a pot that can be reused year after year to symbolize their respect for nature and the need to preserve the world's natural resources. Humans use all sorts of nonrhetorical objects in rhetorical ways, turning them into symbols in the process.

Rhetoric often involves the deliberate and conscious choice of symbols to communicate with others, but actions to which rhetors do not consciously attend also can be interpreted symbolically. Humans often choose to interpret something symbolically or rhetorically that the sender of the message did not intend to be symbolic. In this case, someone chooses to give an action or an object symbolic value, even though the sender does not see it in symbolic terms. Often, in such cases, the meanings received are quite different from what the rhetor intends. When the United States deploys an aircraft carrier off the coast of a Central American nation to warn its government not to install a weapons system that could endanger North America, the United

States has performed a rhetorical action that is designed to be read symbolically by both sides, and there is no doubt about the meaning of the message. If a United States reconnaissance plane accidentally strays over North Korea without the purpose of communicating anything to North Korea, however, the pilot is not engaged in rhetorical action. In this case, however, the North Koreans could choose to interpret the event symbolically and take retaliatory action against the United States. Any actions, whether intended to communicate or not, can be taken as symbolic by those who experience or encounter those actions. This is one reason why many claim that we “cannot not communicate.” Any human action can be received and interpreted rhetorically. We are constantly using symbols to communicate with those around us, and we are assessing and evaluating the symbol use of others.

The third primary term in our definition of rhetoric is *communicate*. For us, rhetoric is another term for communication. Some scholars make rigid distinctions between rhetoric and communication, suggesting that rhetoric refers to intentional, purposive interactions, while communication covers all kinds of meanings, whether intended or not. For us, however, they are essentially synonymous terms, and the choice of whether to use the term *rhetoric* or the term *communication* is largely a personal one, often stemming from the tradition of inquiry in which a scholar is grounded. Individuals trained in social scientific perspectives on communication, for example, often prefer the term *communication*, while those who study symbol use from more humanistic perspectives tend to select the term *rhetoric*.⁴

Classical Theories of Rhetoric

Although this book deals with contemporary treatments of rhetoric in the West, the focus of this chapter is primarily a history of Western rhetoric. This history is intended to provide context and background for the study of the contemporary theories of rhetoric that follow. In some instances, the contemporary theories relate directly to the classical rhetorical tradition, developing or extending some of the same constructs in similar ways, as is the case with Ernesto Grassi's focus on *ingenium*. Other theorists expand constructs and theories beyond their conceptualizations in the rhetorical tradition, as Kenneth Burke and Jean Baudrillard do in defining symbolicity in broad terms that extend far beyond traditional conceptualizations. In other instances, contemporary rhetorical theorists ignore and even challenge rhetorical history as they develop constructs that were not even part of the discussion about rhetoric in traditional theories. Michel Foucault's discursive formation offers one example of a concept that did not exist in classical times.

We begin with the fifth century B.C., where the art of rhetoric in the West is said to have originated with Corax of Syracuse. A revolution in about 465 B.C. in Syracuse, a Greek colony on the island of Sicily, was the catalyst for the formal study of rhetoric. When the dictators on the island were overthrown and a democracy was established, the courts were deluged

with conflicting property claims about rightful ownership and had to sort out whether a piece of land belonged to its original owner or to the one who had been given the land during the dictators' reign. The Greek legal system required that citizens represent themselves in court—they could not hire attorneys to speak on their behalf as is the practice today. The burden, then, was on the claimants in these land disputes to make the best possible case and to present it persuasively to a jury.

Corax realized the need for systematic instruction in the art of speaking in the law courts and wrote a treatise called the “Art of Rhetoric.” Although no copies of this work survive, later writers suggest that the notion of probability was central to his rhetorical system. He believed that a speaker must argue from general probabilities or establish probable conclusions when matters of fact cannot be established with absolute certainty. He also showed that probability can be used regardless of the side argued. For instance, to argue that someone convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol probably is guilty if arrested for a second time on the same charge is an argument from probability. So is the opposing argument—that the person convicted once will be especially cautious and probably will not get into that same situation again. In addition to the principle of probability, Corax contributed the first formal treatment of the organization of speeches. He argued that speeches consist of three major parts—an introduction, an argument or proof, and a conclusion—an arrangement that was elaborated on by later writers about rhetoric.⁵

Corax's pupil, Tisias, is credited with introducing Corax's rhetorical system to mainland Greece. With the coming of rhetorical instruction to Athens and the emerging belief that eloquence was an art that could be taught, the rise of a class of teachers of rhetoric was only natural. These teachers were called *sophists*, a term derived from *sophos*, which means knowledge or wisdom. A sophist, then, was a teacher of wisdom. Sophistry, not unlike rhetoric, acquired a tarnished reputation that had its origins in the sophists' reception in Athens. This reputation persists today in the association of sophistry with fallacious or devious reasoning.

The Greeks' distrust of the sophists was due to several factors. Because the sophists were itinerant professors and often foreigners to Athens, some distrust existed simply because of their foreign status. They also professed to teach wisdom or excellence, a virtue that the Greeks traditionally believed could not be taught. In addition, the sophists charged for their services, a practice not only at odds with tradition but one that made sophistic education a luxury that could not be afforded by all. Some resentment may have arisen among those who could not afford to study with the sophists. In large part, however, the continuing condemnation accorded the sophists can be attributed to an accident of history—the survival of Plato's dialogues. Plato was a strong critic of the sophists, and several of his dialogues make the sophists look silly.⁶ Although Plato's views now are considered unjustified in large part, his dialogues (discussed below) perpetuated an antisophistic sentiment that has continued to the present.⁷

For the sophists, absolute truth was unknowable and perhaps nonexistent and had to be established in each case according to the perspective of the individual involved.⁸ This perspective privileged language because the incomplete, ambiguous, and uncertain world could be interpreted and understood only by means of language. According to the sophists, truth and reality do not exist prior to language but are creations of it: "Speech is a powerful lord [that] can stop fear and banish grief and create joy and nurture pity."⁹ The sophists valued figurative and poetic language in particular because of its capacity to appeal directly to the senses through images, thus providing alternative possibilities for understanding and experiencing the world.

Protagoras of Abdera (c. 480–411 B.C.) is considered to be one of the earliest sophists. He is remembered for the statement, "Man is the measure of all things," which indicates the interest the sophists collectively placed on the study of humanity as the perspective from which to approach the world. Gorgias, another important sophist, was the subject of one of Plato's disparaging dialogues on the sophists. Originally from Sicily, Gorgias established a school of rhetoric in Athens and became known for his emphasis on the poetic dimensions of language. He also is called the father of impromptu speaking because this was a favored technique at his school.¹⁰

Another sophist whose work is significant in the history of rhetorical thought is Isocrates (436–338 B.C.). He began his career as a speechwriter for those involved in state affairs because he lacked the voice and nerve to speak in public. In 392 B.C., he established a school of rhetoric in Athens and advocated as an ideal the orator active in public life. He believed that politics and rhetoric could not be separated; rather, both disciplines were needed for full participation in the life of the state. Unlike many other teachers of his day, Isocrates encouraged his students to learn from other teachers—to take instruction with those best qualified to teach them.¹¹

While the sophists offered the beginnings of a philosophical position on rhetoric, the codification of rhetoric was left to those who followed. The work of the Greek philosopher Plato (427–347 B.C.) provided the foundation for such developments, despite his opposition to the sophists and their relativistic perspectives on rhetoric. Plato was a wealthy Athenian who rejected the ideal of political involvement in favor of philosophy after the death of his teacher and mentor Socrates. At his school, the Academy, Plato espoused a belief in philosophical thought and knowledge, or dialectic, and rejected as unreal any form of relative knowledge or opinions. The two dialogues in which Plato's views on rhetoric emerge most clearly are the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*. In the *Gorgias*, Plato set Gorgias and others against Socrates to distinguish false from true rhetoric. Plato faulted rhetoric for ignoring true knowledge; for failing to work toward the good, which Plato believed was the end toward which all human pursuits should be directed; and because it was a technique or knack rather than an art.

In Plato's later dialogue, the *Phaedrus*, he used three speeches on love as analogies for his ideas about rhetoric. The first two speeches illustrate the

faults of rhetoric as practiced in contemporary Athens. Either a speech fails to move listeners at all, or it appeals to evil or base motives. With the third speech, however, which Plato had Socrates deliver, he articulated an ideal rhetoric. Such a rhetoric is based on knowing the truth and the nature of the human soul: "any man who does not know the truth, but has only gone about chasing after opinions, will produce an art of speech which will seem not only ridiculous, but no art at all."¹² In addition to his concern for content, Plato also commented on organization, style, and delivery in the *Phaedrus*, thus paving the way for a comprehensive treatment of the rhetorical process.

Plato's student Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) was responsible for first systematizing rhetoric into a unified body of thought. In fact, his *Rhetoric* often is considered the foundation of the discipline of communication. Although Aristotle could not avoid the influence of Plato's ideas, he diverged significantly from his teacher in his treatise on rhetoric. Some of these differences are due to Aristotle's scientific training. Rather than attempting a moral treatise on the subject, as did Plato, Aristotle sought to categorize objectively the various facets of rhetoric, which he defined as "the faculty of discovering in the particular case what are the available means of persuasion."¹³ The result was a philosophic and pragmatic treatise that drew upon Plato's ideas and those of the sophistic tradition.

Aristotle devoted a large portion of the *Rhetoric* to invention, or the finding of materials and modes of proof to use in presenting those materials to an audience. He dealt as well with style, organization, and delivery—the pragmatic processes of presentation. Thus, he incorporated four of what later would be identified as the five major canons of rhetoric. The canons consist of invention, the discovery of ideas and arguments; organization, the arrangement of the ideas discovered by means of invention; elocution or style, which involves the linguistic choices a speaker makes; and delivery, the presentation of the speech. Memory, memorizing the speech for presentation, is the fifth canon, which Aristotle did not mention in his rhetorical theory.

No major rhetorical treatises survived in the 200 years after Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. This was a time of increasing Roman power in the Mediterranean, and, not surprisingly, the next extant work on rhetoric was a Latin text, the *Ad Herennium*, written about 100 B.C. The Romans were borrowers and, as they did with many aspects of Greek culture, they adopted the basic principles of rhetoric developed by the Greeks. The *Ad Herennium* appears to be a representative Roman text in that it is essentially Greek in content and Roman in form. A discussion of the five canons constitutes the essence of this schoolboys' manual, but the practical aspects, not their theoretical underpinnings, are featured. The systematization and categorization that characterized the *Ad Herennium*'s approach to rhetoric were typical of the Roman treatises that followed. The Romans added little that was new to the study of rhetoric; rather, they organized and refined it as a practical art.¹⁴

Cicero (106–43 B.C.) represents the epitome of Roman rhetoric because, in addition to writing on the art of rhetoric, he was himself a great orator. He

earliest treatise on the subject was *De Inventione* (87 B.C.), which he wrote when he was only 20 years old. Although he considered it an immature piece in comparison to his later thinking on the subject, it offers another model of the highly prescriptive nature of most Roman rhetorical treatises. Cicero's major work on rhetoric was *De Oratore* (55 B.C.), in which he attempted to restore the union of rhetoric and philosophy by advocating that rhetoric be taught as the single art most useful for dealing with all practical affairs. He drew heavily on Isocrates' ideas in advocating an integration of natural ability, comprehensive knowledge of all the liberal arts, and extensive practice in writing. As a practicing orator, Cicero developed the notion of style more fully than did his predecessors and devoted virtually an entire treatise, *Orator* (46 B.C.), to distinguishing three types of style—the plain, the moderate, and the grand.¹⁵

Another Roman rhetorician who contributed theoretically and practically to rhetoric was the Roman lawyer and educator M. Fabius Quintilian (35–95 A.D.). In his *Institutes of Oratory* (93 A.D.), Quintilian described the ideal training of the citizen-orator from birth through retirement. He defined the orator as “the good man speaking well,” and his approach was not rule bound as was the case with many Roman rhetorics.¹⁶ Quintilian was as eclectic and flexible, drawing from Plato, Aristotle, Isocrates, and Cicero and also integrating his own teaching experiences into traditional theory. His work was so systematic that it not only served as an excellent synthesis of Greek and Roman rhetorical thought, but it was an important source of ideas on education throughout the Middle Ages.

With the decline of democracy in Rome, rhetoric entered an era when it essentially was divorced from civic affairs. A series of emperors ruled, and anyone who spoke publicly in opposition to them was likely to be punished. Rhetoric, then, was relegated to a back seat and became an art concerned with style and delivery rather than with content. This period, from about 150 to 400 A.D., often is referred to as the *second sophistic* because of the excesses of delivery and style similar to those for which the early sophists were criticized.

The Middle Ages (400–1400 A.D.) followed the second sophistic and, during this period, rhetoric became aligned with preaching, letter writing, and education. The concern with preaching as an oratorical form began with St. Augustine (354–430 A.D.), who often is viewed as a bridge between the classical and medieval periods. During the Middle Ages, as Christianity became increasingly powerful, rhetoric was condemned as a pagan art. Many Christians believed that the rhetorical ideas formulated by the pagans of classical Greece and Rome should not be studied and that possession of Christian truth was accompanied by an automatic ability to communicate that truth effectively. Augustine, however, had been a teacher of rhetoric before converting to Christianity in 386. Thus, in his *On Christian Doctrine* (426), he argued that preachers need to be able to teach, to delight, and to move—Cicero's notion of the duties of the orator—and that for Christianity to accomplish its ends of conversion effectively, rules of effective expression should not be ignored.¹⁷ Because Augustine believed such rules were to be

used only in the expression of truth, he revitalized the philosophic basis of rhetoric that largely had been ignored since Quintilian's time.

Letter writing was another form in which rhetoric found expression during the Middle Ages. Many political decisions were made privately through letters and decrees, and letter writing also became a method of record keeping for both secular and religious organizations as they increased in size and complexity. Letter writing, too, was necessary to bridge the distances of the medieval world, which, in contrast to the classical period, no longer consisted of a single center of culture and power.¹⁸ Thus, principles of letter writing, including the conscious adaptation of salutation, language, and format to a particular addressee, were studied as rhetoric.

Finally, rhetoric played a role in education in the Middle Ages as one of the three great liberal arts. Along with logic and grammar, rhetoric was considered part of the *Trivium* of learning, much as the three Rs of reading, writing, and arithmetic function today.¹⁹ Rhetoric was paired with the *Quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music) to form the seven liberal arts, equivalent to a baccalaureate degree. As part of the *Trivium*, the teaching of rhetoric generally emphasized classical figures of speech and other facets of style. Rhetoric, then, was a practical art that provided the foundation of a basic liberal education.

The Renaissance, from 1400 to 1600, signaled the end of the Middle Ages and gave rise to humanism, a movement that encompassed a diverse group of thinkers and writers. Although the term *humanism* today has a broad meaning—concern for and interest in humans and their activities—during the Renaissance, it referred to a scholarly interest in the learning and languages of classical antiquity, especially in the fields of history, moral philosophy, poetry, and rhetoric. The movement began and reached its height in Italy, where the humanists were the professional successors of the medieval monks who had served as letter writers and secretaries, copying rediscovered texts from antiquity and recording the deeds of the present. Unlike the monks who lived and worked in seclusion, however, the humanists were active participants in civic life; they were lawyers, historians, grammarians, and teachers as well as intellectuals and scholars. Thus, although required to perform technical writing as part of their professions, humanists pursued philosophical and literary interests in their leisure time and developed a theory of rhetoric not unlike that of the sophists.²⁰

Interested in the human world as constructed through language, rather than in the natural world, the humanists gave the human as knower a central position. They highlighted the world of human culture and language, believing and delighting in the power of the word not only because it gives those with a command of it special advantage in practical affairs but because of its inherent capacity to disclose the world to humans.²¹ The Italian humanists believed rhetoric, not philosophy, to be the primary discipline because humans gain access to the world through language. Poetry, not the rational proofs of logic, was considered the original source of intelligibility and inspiration, capable of transforming the world.

Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374), the Italian poet and essayist whose name is often translated into English as Petrarch, is perhaps the best known of the Italian humanists. Particularly interested in ancient Roman literature, he revived the style of great Roman writers in his own works. Coluccio Salutati (1331–1374) was a prominent disciple of Petrarca; among his works was *De laboribus Herculis*, in which he argued that only through poetry does human history emerge. Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457)—scholar, polemicist, and pamphleteer—is another representative of Italian humanism. In his *De ver falsoque bono*, he argued for privileging everyday language over formal, arcane usage, suggesting values of rhetorical accessibility, flexibility, and responsiveness. The work of Giambattista Vico (1668–1774) often is seen as the culmination of Italian humanist thought, although he was separated from the mainstream of humanism by almost a century.

A second trend in rhetoric—rationalism—also began during the Renaissance and dominated the rhetorical theories that followed. Rationalists sought objective, scientific truths that would exist for all time and, not surprisingly, had little patience for rhetoric. Poetry and oratory might be aesthetically pleasing, but they were seen as having no connection to science and truth. Two major contributors to rationalism were Peter Ramus (1515–1572) and René Descartes (1596–1650). Ramus was a French scholar who made rhetoric subordinate to logic by placing invention and organization under the rubric of logic and leaving rhetoric to focus only on style and delivery.²² This dichotomizing and departmentalizing of knowledge made for easy teaching, and Ramus's taxonomy was perpetuated for generations through the educational system. Descartes believed that to reach certain knowledge, the foundations of thought provided by others had to be abandoned.²³ He was willing to accept only that which would withstand all doubt. Thus, he rejected truths established in discourse, relegating language to the role of communicating the truth once it was discovered.

Dominated by the rationalism instituted by Descartes and Ramus, rhetoric in the modern era, generally equated with the Enlightenment period of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries,²⁴ was considered to be subordinate to science and philosophy. A prominent rhetorician of this period, Francis Bacon (1561–1626), sought to promote a revival of secular knowledge through an empirical examination of the world. He introduced ideas about the nature of sensory perception, arguing that sensory interpretations are highly inaccurate and should be subjected to reasoned, empirical investigation. Likewise, he rejected narratives, myths, and fables as simply tales of the past that had no bearing on a rational world. His definition of rhetoric suggests his effort to bring the power of language under rational control: “the duty of rhetoric is to apply Reason to Imagination for the better moving of the will.”²⁵

Three trends in rhetoric characterized the modern period—the epistemological, belletristic, and elocutionist. Epistemology is the study of the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge, and epistemological thinkers sought to recast classical approaches to rhetoric in terms of modern developments in psychology. George Campbell (1719–1796) and Richard Whately

(1758–1859) exemplify the best of the epistemological tradition. Campbell was a Scottish minister, teacher, and author of *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776). He drew on Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian as well as on the faculty psychology and empiricism of his time. Faculty psychology was characterized by an effort to explain human behavior in terms of five powers or faculties of the mind—understanding, memory, imagination, passion, and will—and Campbell's definition of rhetoric was directed to these faculties: “to enlighten the understanding, to please the imagination, to move the passions, or to influence the will.”²⁶ Campbell's approach to evidence also suggests his ties to the rational, empirical approach to knowledge. He identified three types of evidence—mathematical axioms, derived through reasoning; consciousness or the result of sensory stimulation; and common sense, an intuitive sense shared by virtually all humans.

Richard Whately, like Campbell, was a preacher, and his *Elements of Rhetoric*, published in 1828, often is considered the logical culmination of Campbell's thought.²⁷ His view of rhetoric was similar to Campbell's in its dependence on faculty psychology, but he deviated from Campbell by making argumentation the focus of the art of rhetoric: “The finding of suitable arguments to prove a given point, and the skilful [*sic*] arrangement of them, may be considered as the immediate and proper province of Rhetoric, and of that alone.”²⁸ He also is remembered for his analysis of presumption and burden of proof, which paved the way for modern argumentation and debate practices. The epistemologists, then, combined their knowledge of classical rhetoric and contemporary psychology to create rhetorical theories based on an understanding of human nature. They offered audience-centered approaches to rhetoric and paved the way for contemporary concerns with audience analysis.

The second direction rhetoric took in the modern period is known as the *belles lettres* movement. A French term, *belles lettres* literally means fine or beautiful letters. It referred to literature valued for its aesthetic qualities rather than for its informative value. Belletristic rhetorics included within their purview spoken discourse, written discourse, and the criticism of discourse. Scholars of this school believed that all the fine arts, including rhetoric, poetry, drama, music, and even gardening and architecture, could be subjected to the same critical standards. Thus, rhetoric gained a critical component not seen in earlier approaches.

Hugh Blair (1718–1800) stands as a representative figure of the belletristic period. In his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, based on a series of lectures he delivered at the University of Edinburgh, Blair presented an overview of the relationship among rhetoric, literature, and criticism. One of his most innovative contributions was his discussion of taste, which he defined as the faculty that is capable of deriving pleasure from contact with the beautiful. Taste, according to Blair, is perfected when a sensory pleasure is coupled with reason—when reason is used to explain the source of that pleasure.²⁹ Blair's ideas on rhetoric proved extremely popular and laid the foundations for contemporary literary and rhetorical criticism.

12 Chapter One

The elocutionary movement, the third rhetorical trend of the modern period, reached its height in the mid-eighteenth century and represented an effort to restore to prominence the canon of delivery, neglected since classical times. It developed in response to the poor delivery styles of contemporary preachers, lawyers, and other public figures. Like the epistemologists, the elocutionists were concerned about contributing to a more scientific understanding of the human being and believed that their observations on voice and gesture—characteristics unique to humans—constituted one such contribution. The elocutionists also sought to determine the effects of delivery on the various faculties of the mind, thus continuing the link with modern psychology. Despite a stated concern for invention, however, many elocutionary treatises were prescriptive, using highly mechanical techniques for the management of voice and gestures.

Gilbert Austin's guidelines are representative of the highly stylized approach to delivery of the elocutionists. For instance, he offered this advice to the speaker about eye contact and volume: "He should not stare about, but cast down his eyes, and compose his countenance: nor should he at once discharge the whole volume of his voice, but begin almost at the lowest pitch, and issue the smallest quantity; if he desire to silence every murmur, and to arrest all attention."³⁰ Another example is provided by James Burgh, who categorized 71 emotions, believing that each emotion could be linked to a specific, external expression. Thomas Sheridan (1719–1788), who wrote *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* in 1762, was perhaps the most famous elocutionist. Sheridan was in the forefront in terms of criticizing the speakers of his day, and he sought to establish a universal standard of pronunciation for the English language, in addition to offering the usual techniques for delivery.³¹ The elocutionists have been criticized for their excesses in terms of style and delivery and for the inflexibility of their techniques. Their efforts to derive an empirical science of delivery based on observation, however, foreshadowed the use of the scientific method to study all aspects of human communication.

Each of the trends in the development of rhetoric in Europe and Great Britain had its counterpart in the approaches taken toward rhetoric in the United States. The earliest rhetorical instruction in the United States, offered at Harvard in the seventeenth century, was based on the work of Ramus. *A System of Oratory*, published by John Ward in 1759, did much to generate a renewed interest in the rhetorics of antiquity in the United States. Widely used as a text until the late eighteenth century, this book dealt with all of the classical canons—invention, organization, style, delivery, and memory—and thus restored invention to a place of primacy in rhetorical education.³² The rediscovery of the classics prompted an increased attention to rhetoric in U.S. colleges that lasted into the early years of the nineteenth century. Seen as a broad art of communication, the discipline of rhetoric integrated ideas from a variety of areas and provided the basis for a liberal education. Chairs of rhetoric were common and were held by some of the most respected American scholars. Among them was future president John Quincy Adams, who served

as the first Boylston Professor of Rhetoric at Harvard in 1806 and published *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory* in 1810.

With the rise of the *belles lettres* and elocutionary movements, however, rhetoric again began to decline as a subject of study as these movements emphasized style and aesthetic appreciation over issues of substance. Simultaneously, the college curriculum became more specialized. Separate departments formed, including departments of English, and there no longer was a place for rhetoric as a multidisciplinary art. Colleges also shifted from testing students orally to giving written examinations, thus making written skills more important than competence in public speaking.³³ All of these developments furthered the image of rhetoric as associated primarily with composition, style, and standards of usage. Any instruction in speech at the turn of the twentieth century was available in departments of English, where it was considered secondary to the teaching of written composition.

A major shift again occurred in the approach to rhetoric in 1910, when a small group of public speaking teachers, housed in English departments, broke away from the National Council of Teachers of English. Interested in restoring the richness and breadth of the study of rhetoric to their classrooms, these teachers established in 1914 a new association, the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking.³⁴ This organization remains the national association for professors and students of communication, although its name has undergone several changes since its inception. Today, it is called the National Communication Association.

The development of the field of speech adopted the humanistic/scientific dichotomy that first appeared in the Renaissance. Members of the Cornell school of rhetoric, which began with a graduate seminar on classical texts offered by Everett Hunt at Cornell University in 1920, believed the discipline should focus on public speaking or oratory, with an emphasis on classical principles and models from a humanistic perspective. The Midwestern school of speech, associated with James O'Neill at the University of Wisconsin and Charles Woolbert at the University of Illinois, was influenced by the research methods of behavioral psychologists. Members of this school advocated specialized and scientific studies of the process or act of speaking, thus following in the footsteps of the rationalists in the Renaissance who sought to understand the world through scientific principles.³⁵ Both schools were concerned with recapturing the substance of communication for the discipline but disagreed on what that substance should be. The Midwestern and Cornell schools initiated a split between rhetoric and communication that continues today in various aspects of the discipline.

World War II prompted yet another set of issues for the emerging discipline. An international concern with persuasion and propaganda arose during the war, with scholars from journalism, political science, sociology, and information science directing their attention to all aspects of rhetorical processes as part of the war effort. This multidisciplinary effort eventually resulted in the emergence of the field of mass communications.³⁶ As a new

source of material about the communication process, the field of mass communications was bolstered by European critical theory, the result of the emigration of the Frankfurt School to New York during the war.

The rapprochement of rhetorical, philosophical, literary, psychological, and mass communications studies that characterizes contemporary approaches to rhetoric is evidence of yet another revival of interest in the study of rhetorical processes. Whether or not the scholars in these disciplines use the term *rhetoric* to define their interests, they share a concern for how symbols function—personally, socially, and epistemologically—in the human world. They formulate theories of rhetoric that investigate the possible relationships between thought and discourse as well as pragmatic theories that explore what humans do with discourse. Whatever aspect of the rhetorical process receives attention, there is a recognition that rhetoric is both the use of symbols and a “mode of approaching the phenomena of discourse.”³⁷ The individuals whose work is discussed in the following chapters represent the diversity that exists among those who study human symbols.

Contemporary Theories of Rhetoric

In the following chapters, we present the theories of I. A. Richards, Ernesto Grassi, Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, Richard Weaver, Stephen Toulmin, Kenneth Burke, Jürgen Habermas, bell hooks, Jean Baudrillard, and Michel Foucault. We do not see these theorists as comprising a necessary or best list of contemporary rhetorical scholars. Rather, the theorists were chosen for inclusion because they met at least two of three criteria. Our first criterion for selection of these theorists was that they not only have some important things to say about rhetoric but have developed a somewhat coherent body of knowledge relevant to the study of symbolicity. All of the theorists included meet this criterion. The individuals included here also meet one or both of two additional standards: they intended to develop a perspective on or theory of rhetoric, and scholars in the discipline of rhetoric see their work as contributing in important ways to the subject of rhetoric. The works of Richards, Weaver, Burke, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, and Grassi are directed intentionally toward the development of perspectives on rhetoric; thus, they meet the former standard. Toulmin, Foucault, Baudrillard, Habermas, and hooks did not deliberately develop rhetorical perspectives, but people in the discipline of communication have interpreted their works as relevant to the study of communication. Thus, these writers meet our third criterion.

The theorists are arranged by the breadth of their theories about rhetoric. This schema is designed to provide readers with a sense of the development and evolution of the various perspectives that constitute the study of contemporary rhetoric. The theorists who are the subjects of the early chapters, such as Richards, Grassi, and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, tend to single out a particular concept or dimension for attention, while

later chapters deal with theorists such as hooks, Baudrillard, and Foucault who have developed theories of rhetoric that are more comprehensive and explore a number of rhetorical processes.

We begin with I. A. Richards. In 1923, he co-authored *The Meaning of Meaning* with C. K. Ogden, which focused on the process of meaning creation in symbols. Ernesto Grassi, the subject of the third chapter, focuses on a revitalization of humanism as rhetorical philosophy. Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca are discussed next; their focus is on a rediscovery of the classical rhetorical approach to argumentation. The next chapter deals with the ideas of Stephen Toulmin, whose theory includes the nature of everyday argumentation, argumentation in ethics, an evolutionary view of science, and the humanization of modernity. Richard Weaver offers a valuable perspective in the chapter that follows and also explores the intersection of rhetoric with culture. A chapter on Kenneth Burke follows; he is the theorist who presents a comprehensive treatment of rhetoric as a foundation for humanness and as a primary motive for human action. We have placed Jürgen Habermas next because of his interest in a rationality inherent in speech acts that can serve as the basis for consensual decision making. bell hooks introduces notions of gender, race, and class as they inform rhetorical production and reception, as well as suggesting the importance of standpoint in the development of rhetorical theory. Jean Baudrillard, the focus of chapter 10, extends rhetorical theory into a concern for consumer objects, and the mass media as they interact in a postmodern age. The final chapter in the book is about the theory of Michel Foucault, who makes rhetoric key in the creation and maintenance of systems of knowledge and power.

Our intent in this book is not to limit the conversation about rhetoric by stating definitive conclusions about the nature of contemporary rhetoric or by suggesting that contemporary thinking about rhetoric is confined to the theories presented here. We hope the ideas of the theorists included here provide you with an entry point for contemporary conversation about rhetoric. We hope the summaries offered here intrigue, puzzle, and challenge you so that you, too, will contribute to this conversation and to the continual expansion of rhetorical theory.

Endnotes

- ¹ Anne Dawson, “Day Rips PM for Western Dejection/Says Stop ‘Tough Love,’” *The Tor Star*, January 3, 2001, p. 18.
- ² We acknowledge that there are many rhetorical traditions outside the Western one, which has its origins in ancient Greece. We only will be dealing with the Western tradition here, however. For an example of ethnocentrism on the part of Western rhetorical scholars, see L. Morrison, “The Absence of a Rhetorical Tradition in Japanese Culture,” *Western Speech* 36 (Spring 1972), 89–102. Morrison argues that “Japanese culture before World War II denied no rhetorical tradition.” His claim is based, among other things, on the “predominantly intuitive and emotional tendencies in the Japanese language” that “mitigate against rhetorical development” (p. 101). Similarly, James J. Murphy suggests that rhetoric is

entirely Western phenomenon." According to Murphy, "no evidence of interest in rhetoric exists in the ancient civilizations of Babylon or Egypt, for instance. Neither Africa nor Asia has to this day produced a rhetoric." See James J. Murphy, ed., *A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric* (Davis, CA: Hermagoras, 1983), p. 3. For examples of treatments of non-Western rhetorics, see George A. Kennedy, *Comparative Rhetoric: An Historical and Cross-Cultural Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and William J. Starosta, "Roots for an Older Rhetoric: On Rhetorical Effectiveness in the Third World," *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 43 (Fall 1979), 278–87. The Japanese tradition is described in: Satoshi Ishii, "Buddhist Preaching: The Persistent Main Undercurrent of Japanese Traditional Rhetorical Communication," *Communication Quarterly*, 40 (Fall 1992), 391–97; Satoshi Ishii, "Thought Patterns as Modes of Rhetoric: The United States and Japan," *Communication*, 11 (December 1982), 81–86, 97–102; and Roichi Okabe, "Cultural Assumptions of East and West: Japan and the United States," in *The Rhetoric of Western Thought*, 7th ed., ed. James L. Golden, Goodwin F. Berquist, and William E. Coleman (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 2000), pp. 390–404. For examples of treatments of Chinese rhetorics, see: Xing Lu, *Rhetoric in Ancient China, Fifth to Third Century B.C.E.: A Comparison with Classical Greek Rhetoric* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998); Xing Lu and David A. Frank, "On the Study of Ancient Chinese Rhetoric/Bias," *Western Journal of Communication*, 57 (Fall 1993), 445–63; and D. Ray Heisey, ed., *Chinese Perspectives in Rhetoric and Communication* (Stamford, CT: Ablex, 2000). In a special section in *Communication Quarterly* about communication practices in the Pacific basin, several articles discuss communication practices in Australia, Hong Kong, Korea, and the Philippines. See *Communication Quarterly*, 40 (Fall 1992), 368–421. The text *Rhetoric in Intercultural Contexts*, edited by Alberto González and Dolores V. Tanno (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), describes the intersection of rhetoric and intercultural communication, situating rhetoric within the cultures that produce and nurture it.

³ Gloria Anzaldúa, "Metaphors in the Tradition of the Shaman," in *Conversant Essays: Contemporary Poets on Poetry*, ed. James McCorkle (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1990), p. 100.

⁴ For additional information on the meanings of the terms *rhetoric* and *communication*, see: Gerald R. Miller, *Speech Communication: A Behavioral Approach* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966); Wayne E. Brockriede, "Dimensions of the Concept of Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 54 (February 1968), 1–18; Walter R. Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument," *Communication Monographs*, 51 (March 1984), 1–22; and Nancy L. Harper, *Human Communication Theory: The History of a Paradigm* (Rochelle Park, NJ: Hayden, 1979), p. 71.

⁵ George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 58–61; and Bromley Smith, "Corax and Probability," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 7 (February 1921), 13–42.

⁶ Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, pp. 13–15; and Lester Thonssen and A. Craig Baird, *Speech Criticism: The Development of Standards for Rhetorical Appraisal* (New York: Ronald, 1948), pp. 36–37.

⁷ That Plato's negative view of the sophists was unjustified has been asserted by numerous scholars. His views in the *Gorgias*, in particular, have come under frequent re-examination. See, for example: Bruce E. Gronbeck, "Gorgias on Rhetoric and Poetic: A Rehabilitation," *Southern Speech Communication Journal*, 38 (Fall 1972), 27–38; Richard Leo Enos, "The Epistemology of Gorgias' Rhetoric: A Re-examination," *Southern Speech Communication Journal*, 42 (Fall 1976), 35–51; Susan C. Jarratt, *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991); and Mark Backman, *Sophistication: Rhetoric and the Rise of Self-Consciousness* (Woodbridge, CT: Ox Bow, 1991).

⁸ Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, p. 13; and Philip Wheelwright, ed., *The Presocratics* (Indianapolis, IN: Odyssey/Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), pp. 238–40.

⁹ Gorgias, *Encomium on Helen*, trans. George Kennedy, in *The Older Sophists*, ed. R. K. Sprague (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), p. 52.

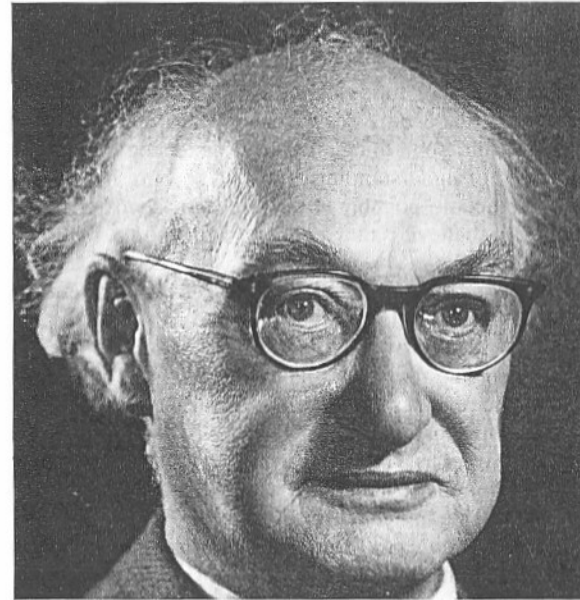
¹⁰ Thonssen and Baird, p. 38.

- ¹¹ Russell H. Wagner, "The Rhetorical Theory of Isocrates," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (November 1922), 323–37; and William L. Benoit, "Isocrates on Rhetorical Education," *Communication Education*, 33 (April 1984), 109–20.
- ¹² Plato *Phaedrus* 262.
- ¹³ Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1.2. 1355b.
- ¹⁴ George Kennedy, *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 106–08.
- ¹⁵ For a summary of Cicero's style, see Thomas R. King, "The Perfect Orator in *Brutus*," *Southern Speech Journal*, 33 (Winter 1967), 124–28.
- ¹⁶ Thonssen and Baird, p. 92.
- ¹⁷ James J. Murphy, "Saint Augustine and the Debate About a Christian Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 56 (December 1960), 400–10; and Saint Augustine *On Christian Doctrine*, xvii, 34.
- ¹⁸ Harper; and James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).
- ¹⁹ Donald Lemen Clark, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1957), p. 12.
- ²⁰ John F. Tinkler, "Renaissance Humanism and the *genera eloquentiae*," *Rhetorica*, 5 (Summer 1987), 279–309.
- ²¹ Samuel Ijsseling, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Conflict: An Historical Survey* (The Hague, Net Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), p. 55.
- ²² Wilbur Samuel Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500–1700* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1956), p. 148.
- ²³ Ijsseling, p. 64.
- ²⁴ The period of the modern often is equated with the Enlightenment and a focus on rationality at the turn of the eighteenth century. Berman, however, identifies three distinctive historic eras in the emergence of modernity: (1) from the beginning of the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth centuries, when elements of what are considered modern life begin to emerge; (2) the French Revolution and the social and political upheavals that followed it; and (3) the development of a global process of modernization that extends into contemporary life. S. M. Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* (London, UK: Verso, 1983).
- ²⁵ Hugh C. Dick, ed., *Selected Writings of Francis Bacon* (New York: Modern Library, 1955), x; and Harper, pp. 100, 109.
- ²⁶ George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, ed. Lloyd F. Bitzer (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963), p. 1.
- ²⁷ Douglas Ehninger, "Introduction," in *Elements of Rhetoric*, by Richard Whately, ed. Douglas Ehninger (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963), p. xv.
- ²⁸ Richard Whately, *Elements of Rhetoric*, ed. Douglas Ehninger (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963), p. 39.
- ²⁹ Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (London, UK: William Baynes, 1825), p. 2.
- ³⁰ Gilbert Austin, *Chironomia or a Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery*, ed. Mary Margaret Robb at Lester Thonssen (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), p. 94.
- ³¹ Thomas Sheridan, *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* (London, UK: W. Strahan, 1762).
- ³² Robert J. Connors, Lisa S. Ede, and Andrea A. Lunsford, "The Revival of Rhetoric in America," in *Essays on Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse*, ed. Robert J. Connors, Lisa S. Ede, and Andrea A. Lunsford (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), p. 1.
- ³³ Connors, Ede, and Lunsford, pp. 3–4.
- ³⁴ George Gerbner and Wilbur Schramm, "Communications, Study of," *International Encyclopedia of Communications*, vol. 1, ed. Erik Barnouw (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 360.
- ³⁵ For descriptions of the Cornell and Midwestern schools, see W. Barnett Pearce, "Scientific Research Methods in Communication Studies and Their Implications for Theory and Research," in *Speech Communication in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Thomas W. Benson (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), pp. 260–64.

³⁶ The emergence of the field of mass communications is described in James Carey, "Graduate Education in Mass Communication," *Communication Education*, 28 (September 1979), 282-93.

³⁷ Donald C. Bryant, "Literature and Politics," in *Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature: An Exploration*, ed. Don M. Burks (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1978), p. 107.

I. A. RICHARDS



"What I feel is that if there is a way of doing things which is obviously much better than what anyone else has to offer then, in a bad enough emergency, everyone will jump at it. I've been only concerned to produce something really better than anyone else has."¹ This statement by I. A. Richards suggests the motive for much of his work in the areas of rhetoric, linguistics, and literature. He seeks to help solve the problems confronting society, many of which he sees as directly related to a lack of effective communication.

Ivor Armstrong Richards was born in Sandbach, Cheshire, in England, on February 26, 1893, the son of William Armstrong Richards and Mary Anne Haigh Richards. An early interest in language developed when he