

RHETORIC

It is widely acknowledged that during the nineteenth century the academic discipline of rhetoric enjoyed undisputed preeminence in the curriculum of both secondary and college education in the United States. It is also widely acknowledged that this is the last time it exerted such influence. Subsumed by the development of writing instruction within English courses and the growth of speech departments in the early twentieth century, rhetoric lost its integrated status during the increasing departmentalization and professionalization of the academy.

One explanation for its abrupt reversal of fortune is that rhetoric, understood as a formal university discipline rather than a field of discursive practices, shifted its emphasis from the study of persuasion to the appreciation of literary taste and fine writing. This aesthetic departure from the speakerly orientation of Greek and Roman authorities such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian is sometimes called the "New Rhetoric." New Rhetoric is associated with the literary approach of the British clergymen Hugh Blair, George Campbell, and Richard Whately and their many American adherents, such as Edward T. Channing, Adams Sherman Hill, and John Franklin Genung. Despite the practical aspects of this modification, many later American rhetoricians feel that it augmented the most superficial aspects of the discipline—the study of the ornamentation of discourse, rather than the study of its sinews and bones. For example, questions of style (word choice, diction, organization) began to eclipse a classical emphasis on the choice of the best kind of argument to use in a given situation (whether to argue from causes, effects, or different types of appeals to human emotions). This transformation had its origins in the English rhetoric texts that dominated American classrooms during the early nineteenth century, but it grew in a specifically American climate of widespread literacy, class mobility, and professional expertise. Rhetoric, which once advertised itself as the art of persuasion, or, more grandly, the master discipline for the study of all discourse, became the utilitarian study of expressive protocols that make people appear educated.

HUGH BLAIR'S RHETORIC

By most accounts, one of the primary engineers of this transformation was Hugh Blair (1718–1800), whose 1783 *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* influenced American education for more than one hundred years.

Blair was a member of the Scottish common sense school of professors who developed an integrated worldview of the empirical and hermeneutic sciences, humanities, and theology (Charvat). Rather than its modern meaning of *practical*, the philosophical term “common sense” derives from Thomas Reid (1710–1796), who argued that there were impressions, such as a feeling of *reality*, or a sense of *time*, that were common to all human beings. This view tended to ground the principles of rhetorical appeal on assumptions about the shared elements of human experience. Blair was a celebrated Presbyterian minister to a wealthy congregation prior to his formal appointment at Edinburgh, and his rhetoric, theology, and political thought were united by a genteel aesthetics.

Blair's text seems fairly unremarkable today. That is a testament to how thoroughly his approach to rhetoric became assimilated by American culture. Whereas most studies of rhetoric had previously focused on persuasive oratory, Blair gave equal attention to the importance of fine writing. Almost a quarter of Blair's lectures focus on the arts of written composition. They include discussions of cultured British writers for emulation, such as Joseph Addison (1672–1719). Blair eschewed theorizing about the broader dimensions of epideictic (ceremonial) and deliberative (legal and political) oratory, showing a more professional concern for shaping the modern arenas of pulpit eloquence, addresses to public assemblies, and legal arguments. Blair had virtually no interest in *inventio* (the processes of choosing one's argument), suggesting that appropriate arguments occur automatically to most writers and speakers. Although the place of *inventio* in rhetoric had been under attack since the French logician Petrus Ramus's works of the mid-1500s—Ramus asserted that it was part of dialectic or logic, not rhetoric—Blair's orientation further contributed to its exile.

The cumulative effects of Blair's modest departures from the classical tradition were to normalize middle-class standards of taste. Gone was a concern for listing the various techniques with which the elite orator could mold the opinions of different kinds of audiences. In its stead grew advice about how a middle-class professional could influence a middle-class audience through written prose. Blair's text was taught at Williams and Yale as late as 1860, and the text itself went through many later printings (Guthrie

15:62–63). Beyond its direct use, however, it was greatly influential on a variety of later American texts, such as George Quackenbos's *Advanced Course of Composition and Rhetoric* (1855), M. B. Hope's *Princeton Text-Book in Rhetoric* (1859), John Hart's *Manual of Composition and Rhetoric* (1870), or John Genung's *Working Principles of Rhetoric* (1900). As many scholars of rhetoric and public address have noted, Blair's influence is apparent in most college composition texts to the current day.

GEORGE CAMPBELL'S RHETORIC

A second British text that exerted an astonishing long-term influence was George Campbell's (1719–1796) *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776). Widely republished during the nineteenth century and used as an upper-level course text at many American universities through 1860, Campbell's book was a landmark attempt to theorize the physiological appeal of successful rhetoric on the human mind. It was drawn from the theories of associational psychology initially proposed by John Locke, David Hume, and David Hartley. Agreeing with Locke that the events of the world somehow made impressions on the human mind, Hartley suggested that our feelings and thoughts were connected to vibrations in our nervous system. For example, the feeling evoked by the word “boom” becomes associated with the feeling produced by a thunderclap. Similarly, our sensations, ideas, and feelings about explosive themes are connected by their associations with each other, organized by such principles as resemblance, contiguity, and causation.

Campbell applied these physiological and philosophical hypotheses to the way rhetoric works. For example, he argued that concrete words generated more intense physiological sensations and associations than abstract words (memories, imagined ideas). At the heart of Campbell's project was a term he borrowed from Hume: “vivacity.” Campbell asserts that the vivacity of ideas is the quality primarily responsible for attention and belief. If mental operations were a mixture of immediately powerful sensations, the fading impressions of memory, and the fleeting dreams of the imagination, a strong writer or speaker will connect abstract ideas with the vivacity of immediate sensations. The third part of Campbell's text offers very specific advice about how to achieve vivacity through the choice, number, and arrangement of words.

Although Campbell's rhetorical advice was based on psychology that has been long drawn into question, his study treated his subject at an interdisciplinary level rarely achieved in rhetoric texts. His lucid and practical discussions about how to achieve vivacity and

perspicacity (clarity) were copied nearly verbatim by later British and American rhetoric manuals for a hundred years. Unfortunately, his compelling rehabilitation of the study of passions as a worthwhile—if not preeminent—concern of rhetoric was lost in the late nineteenth century's growing pedagogical agenda for technical correctness, standardized word usage, and belletrism. However, Campbell's subtle vision of the mind as feelings-in-movement had great effect on American thinkers ranging from Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) to William James (1842–1910) (Berlin, pp. 42–57). Campbell's powerful influence appears as late as 1890, when William James approvingly quoted Campbell's account of how words acquire associations in the famous "Stream of Thought" chapter of James's *Principles of Psychology*.

RICHARD WHATELY'S RHETORIC

The third major New Rhetoric text to shape American thought during the nineteenth century was the English theologian Richard Whately's (1787–1863) *Elements of Rhetoric* (1828). Even though Whately's text is primarily an ecclesiastical debater's manual, he imagines that many of these debates will be carried out in journals, pamphlets, and articles. He begins his text by recommending habits of daily composition on familiar topics to develop students' minds. Unlike Blair, Whately discusses *inventio* in depth, and he also gives concise and lively advice on debating tactics, the interrogation of witnesses, and defense and offense strategies. Even today, one of the great appeals of his text is its frank instruction on the proper use of underhanded rhetorical techniques, such as circumlocution and fallacy. Despite Whately's obvious enthusiasm for rhetorical combat, the overall tone of his text, like Blair's, focuses much more on developing techniques of conviction, rather than persuasion. He insists that proper management of one's *ethos* (basically, the *character* of a speaker or writer) is more effective than firing volleys of persuasive tricks. Like Blair, Whately repeatedly recommends a "natural" style, free of affectation and laxity.

THE BOYLSTON PROFESSORS AND THE SHIFT TO TASTE

The influence of these texts in American colleges prior to the Civil War is well illustrated by the changes in Harvard's chair, the Boylston Professorship of Rhetoric and Oratory. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the successive holders of the position demonstrate a clear shift from classical theory to New Rhetoric, culminating in an emphasis on word choice, style, and poetic diction in writing. The first two Boylston Professors were John Quincy Adams (1767–1848), whose term lasted from 1806 to 1809, and the Reverend Joseph McKean

(1776–1818), who served from 1809 to 1818. As his collected *Lectures* indicate, Adams's work in rhetoric was based primarily in Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, with the public persuasion of men as their primary object. Although McKean did not publish his addresses to the students, Dorothy Anderson and Waldo Braden report that McKean followed very closely to the professorship's job description, giving lectures on the rise and progress of oratory; sketches of famous orators; analysis of the functions and departments of the five-part oration; and application of the theories of the ancients to pulpit oratory.

The first chair to move away from classical practices was Edward T. Channing (1790–1856), Boylston Professor from 1819 to 1851. Assessing Channing's general influence on New England letters, the Harvard historian Samuel Eliot Morison wrote that "Channing and Edward Everett may be said to have created the classic New England diction—the measured, dignified speech, careful enunciation, precise choice of words, and well modulated voice that (for men of my age at least) will ever be associated with President [Charles] Eliot" (p. 216). Channing taught Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Richard Henry Dana Jr., Oliver Wendell Holmes, James Russell Lowell, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, to name only a few luminaries of American letters. Channing's *Lectures* were published in 1856 but they reflect addresses he made as early as 1819. Channing was a Unitarian like his brother, William Ellery Channing, and his recommendations are characterized by sobriety, reasonableness, and faith in the perfectibility of humankind. He felt that stable government and the growing diffusion of education were tending to make public discourse more temperate and egalitarian. Discussing the difference between modern and ancient oratory, Channing declared: "A modern debate is not a contest between a few leading men for a triumph over each other and an ignorant multitude; the orator himself is but one of the multitude, deliberating with them upon common interests, which are well understood and valued by all" (p. 17). Channing was mildly progressive as an educator and refrained from giving students too many exact rules that might make them awkward. Like Blair and Whately, he preferred that they should develop their own natural language of expression and learn to be versatile and sensitive to changing contexts.

Channing was primarily interested in developing students' taste as writers. Every two weeks, students wrote on topics such as "some of the causes of false judgment as to merit in the works of Literature and the Arts," "the reasons why criticism of recent works is to be distrusted," or "the English poets as advocates of Liberty" (Anderson and Braden, pp. xlvii–xlvi).

Afterward, he would meet his students for discussion in his office alone and in groups. He could be very sarcastic in his comments. Studying some of Channing's student papers held in the Harvard archives, Anderson and Braden note that Channing's written comments show a preference for "precision" and "graceful ornamentation and amplification without superfluity" (p. xl). As the number of students rose after 1845, Channing was forced to reduce the number of compositions they wrote to one a month. This reduction portended greater problems to come. By the end of the century, as rhetoric became more and more associated with writing, acute increases in college enrollment and overcrowded classes prompted the hiring of large number of lower-level writing instructors.

Although Channing was charged with supervising student declamation (in 1828 freshmen declaimed seven times a year; juniors and seniors four times a year) he seemed to have little interest in coaching oratory. After complaints about the quality of student speech, the university hired the elocutionist Jonathan Barber (1784–1864) from 1829 to 1835. Greatly influenced by Gilbert Austin's *Chironomia* (1806), which taught body language with elaborate drawings, Barber made his students practice declamation in a bamboo cage to learn the proper limits of gesture. Predictably, the students rebelled bitterly against his methods. After Barber's departure, the new assistant teachers used Ebenezer Porter's *Analysis of the Principles of Rhetorical Delivery* (1827), but complaints about the quality of student declamation were perennial until the elocution requirement was dropped in the 1870s. •

After thirty years of teaching Edward Channing was succeeded in 1851 by a former student, Francis James Child (1825–1896), who had even stronger literary interests. Previously, literary authors had been read strictly as an extracurricular activity. Upon taking the Boylston chair, Child changed the title of his lectures to seniors from "Rhetoric and Criticism" to "English Language and Literature." Child aggressively pursued these interests in his own research, writing on Spenser and Chaucer and gathering source materials for his monumental *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882–1898).

Child's hiring also reflected a larger movement at Harvard away from the study of Latin and Greek authors. As Albert Kitzhaber reports, when Charles Eliot (1834–1926) was inaugurated president of Harvard in 1869, he announced his intention to make the study of English a central part of the curriculum. Eliot augmented the system of entrance examinations in English (instituted just prior to his presidency) so

that by 1874 students had to write an entrance composition based on an analysis of a Shakespeare play or a novel by Goldsmith or Scott.

FROM TASTE TO COMPOSITION

Because Child was absorbed in his ballad research, in 1872 Eliot hired Adams Sherman Hill (1833–1910) as an assistant professor of rhetoric. By 1876 Hill was given the Boylston chair. Although Hill was known to be ruthless in his comments on student papers (which seems to have been a tradition at nineteenth-century Harvard), his great achievement was the institution of a freshman year required writing course in 1885. He wrote the *Principles of Rhetoric, and Their Application* in 1878, enlarged in 1895. These texts, and Hill's *The Foundations of Rhetoric* (1892), modernize the advice of the Scottish rhetoricians, but more important Hill's texts show how thoroughly *rhetoric* had become *composition*. Hill's *Foundations*, three hundred pages divided into equal sections on word use, sentence construction, and paragraphing, indicates an almost desperate hope that students' advanced writing skills might be improved if they could only master the most basic parts of speech.

Hill was also an advocate of a genre-based approach to composition instruction that stressed four or five "forms" of discourse: description, narration, exposition, argumentation, and (in some authors) persuasion. The widespread acceptance of these genres as the basic templates for student writing cannot be overstated—many rhetoric texts of the late nineteenth century devote half their pages to them. This influence has continued through the twenty-first century in texts like *The Macmillan Writer*, which teach them as "modes."

The last Boylston chair of the nineteenth century was Barrett Wendell (1855–1921). Wendell took his post at the end of the age of the "theme," which had embittered several generations of faculty before him. Kitzhaber notes with humor that faculty would assign compositions on abstract topics like "Honesty," "the Evanescence of Pleasure," or "the Dice of the Gods Are Loaded" and then find themselves discouraged that the students could muster little of sense on these themes (pp. 104–105). Predictably, many faculty became bad-tempered and developed a sarcastic wit that students rarely appreciated. Wendell was known to tell students they had written "disgusting slop" (p. 66). There were alternative voices in composition-rhetoric studies that argued that students should write from personal experience or research, such as Alphonso Newcomer's *Practical Course in English Composition* (1893), Fred Newton Scott and Joseph Villiers Denney's *Composition-Rhetoric* (1897), and

Abraham Henry Espenshade's *The Essentials of Composition and Rhetoric* (1904), but there was consensus that students could not somehow visualize the simple goal of making meaning.

Wendell's 1891 *English Composition* was an attempt to try something new. Convinced that the terminology of the New Rhetoric was too technical for a modern student, Wendell sought to simplify the business of writing by applying a three-part heuristic of "unity," "mass," and "coherence" to composition. In the introductory chapter of his textbook, Wendell asserted that "every composition should group itself about one central idea" (unity); "the chief parts of every composition should be so placed as to readily catch the eye" (mass); and "the relation of each part of a composition to its neighbors should be unmistakable" (coherence) (pp. i, 28-29). "Mass," a curious term, was later redefined by other composition writers as emphasis. The discourse of "unity" and "coherence" as terms for paragraph creation had significant precedent in Alexander Bain's (1818-1903) *English Composition and Rhetoric* (1866), but Wendell sought to apply it at every level of composition: sentence, paragraph, and essay. Wendell's scheme was an admirable attempt to simplify the dizzying scope of rhetorical instructions from earlier eras. Its minimalist philosophy, however, pointed in the direction of William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White's famous seventy-one-page *Elements of Style* (1918; 1959), which can hardly be called a "rhetoric" text in the old sense of the term.

Although the study of integrated theories of rhetoric had been all but abandoned in classrooms by the twentieth century, rhetoric's practical transformations did not bring the immediate end of civilized discourse. In fact, the stultifying protocols for composition that evolved out of rhetoric during the nineteenth century were a response to astonishing democratic upheaval and competing professional interests. For example, in his study of literature and legal discourse, Robert Ferguson notes that the authority of a unified moral principle in law began to give way to a plurality of technical rights over the course of the century. Similarly, Kenneth Cmiel has argued that the nineteenth century is significant for its proliferation of "middling" rhetorical styles and lack of a single persuasive mode. The diversity of social and professional contexts in which people make meaning brought with it a multiplication of different discourses and audiences, such as the rhetoric of the economist, the lawyer, the parent, the psychoanalyst, and the farmer. In some ways, the sense of crisis many rhetoric faculty experienced in the late nineteenth century was legitimate: students did not intuitively know what to write, or for whom, or what truly counted as authority. In a

larger sense, however, their teachers may have begun to feel a similar anxiety.

See also Classical Literature; Colleges; Curricula; Education; English Literature; Literary Criticism; Oratory; Philosophy; Psychology

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Granville Ganter

"RIP VAN WINKLE"

Appearing in *The Sketch Book* (1819-1820), Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" became an immediate American classic and retains that position in the American canon today. Indeed, the central character,

Rip, has attained iconic status in both popular culture and with academic critics. One reason for the story's popularity is the sheer humor of Rip's predicament: henpecked by a shrewish wife, he sleeps for twenty years and awakens after the American Revolution has radically changed the sleepy Dutch village where he had previously lived. Generations of readers have enjoyed the ways in which Rip slyly escapes Dame Van Winkle's authority and have laughed at his confusion as he walks into the same village twenty years later and finds himself in the new republic, accused of being a Tory spy—a British sympathizer who had opposed America's independence. Critics have focused on the story's theme of change, in which the contrast between the peaceful pre-Revolutionary colony and the bustling post-Revolutionary America reinforces a simultaneous sense of nostalgia for a simpler time as well as a sense of the reality of our always-shifting American world. Almost everyone, however, recognizes that the American Revolution is somehow central to the story's meaning. Indeed, the secret subject of "Rip Van Winkle" is the significance of the American Revolution vis-à-vis the new democratic nation that came into being in its aftermath. The story records Irving's own ambivalence as both an admirer and a critic of the new republican government the Revolution had wrought.

TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

To understand this ambivalence and its significance in the story, it is necessary to recover a series of contexts that impinge on the story's meaning. First, there is the biographical context of Washington Irving, who had moved to Liverpool in 1815 to look after the interests of his brother's soon-to-be bankrupt firm and who subsequently achieved literary prominence with the publication of *The Sketch Book*. Here at last, English critics proclaimed, was the first American who seemed to be worthy of literary recognition, an American who wrote like a cultured Englishman. The American public, gratified to have one of its own acknowledged by English critics who usually sneered at anything American, also hailed Irving's accomplishment. But not all of his compatriots were pleased, for Irving was identified as a sympathizer of the Federalists—the conservative American party of John Adams and others opposed to the Democratic-Republican Party of Thomas Jefferson. With Jefferson's election, Republicans like the poet Philip Freneau despised Irving and accused him of preferring to live abroad among aristocrats in a country that had just attempted to deprive Americans of their freedom. Irving was self-conscious that some were accusing him of not being American enough, and the American stories in *The Sketch Book*, such as the "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," were his attempt to

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"THE RAVEN"
to
"YOUNG GOODMAN
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JANET GABLER-HOVER & ROBERT SATTELMAYER
Editors in Chief

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