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(from earlier drafts of the manuscript)*

LECTURE COPY

Ancient Roots of Renaissance Rhetoric

But closer textual study was not the only major maneuver which the typographical Renaissance favored. The other was a return to the ancient ideal of rhetoric, somewhat tarnished by the fumes of dialectic in the Middle Ages. At this point, the lines of connection between the spoken and the written and printed word become almost unutterably confused, but also very interestingly so. For rhetoric is oratory (the Greek-rooted word as against the Latin), and oratory is doubtless the major preliterate oral-aural form of expression, far outstripping epic or ballad singing in breadth of appeal and cultural importance. Focus on rhetoric is, on the last analysis, focus on the spoken word. Although Erasmus and his predecessors and congeners were less than explicitly aware of the fact, their new addiction to rhetoric keeps alive and resurrects

old oral-aural attitudes and values, many of them no longer relevant to their age, in which typography had opened the way to modern textual study.

The study of rhetoric which the Renaissance knew had its remote roots in ancient Greek civilization. To see the forces which this study unleashed in terms of the oral-visual dichotomy, it will be necessary to situate rhetoric in its original Greek habitat. In his Introduction to A History of Education in Antiquity, H.-I. Marroux has pointed out that the initial critical change in ancient Greek civilization was a shift from a warrior culture to a scribal culture, signalized in great part by a new devotion to Homer as a written text and to written texts generally (an interpreter of poets was, significantly, styled a grammatikos, a "letter man"). This would seem to make writing rather than oratory the crucial Greek cultural phenomenon. And it is true that the new ascendancy of writing was crucial in bringing Greek society to organize itself around the pursuit of things of the mind rather than around mere military prowess. But even after the use of writing had become a major factor in Greek culture (as in some others), scribal skill itself was not the ultimate educational ideal. The organization of the city-states, with their assemblies in which all citizens took part, put a special premium on public speaking. (See M. I. Finley, The Ancient Greeks.) Even private life was highly litigious, and one might stand or fall at any time by one's own skill or maladroitness in speaking for one's own case in court. The intellectual side of Greek education, as Werner Jaeger has also explained in his Paideia, was based on a study of Homer which doubtless

made possible the sense of intellectual community underlying the democratic organization of the city states. But given this organization, public speaking became more important than ever before. By the second half of the fifth century a special class of teachers of public speaking, rhetoricians, the Sophists, had become established. Although they come off rather badly at the hands of Plato and his followers, these rhetoricians, as Marrou is at pains to show, deserve great credit, if only because of the fact that they were the first of a long line of persons in Western culture to devote themselves professionally to what can be legitimately regarded as specifically higher education. Elementary education was in the hands of the grammatistes, the writing master, or didaskalos, the schoolmaster. The Sophists, worked at the higher, oral level. And they, rather than "philosophers" such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, were the representatives of the principal trends in Greek culture. The Sophists' ideal, as Jaeger has shown, was not mere fine speaking (as H. Gomperz had maintained). Rather it was the teaching of political virtue (arete), which rhetoric implemented.

This was the original Sitz im Leben of the rhetorical tradition conveyed to the West from Greece. But the tradition which the humanists picked up was more complicated than this. Even in Greece, the utilitarian value of rhetoric does not entirely explain its appeal. Aristotle distinguished three kinds of oratory: deliberative or legislative, oratory carried on before law-making bodies, concerned with planning future events; judicial, in a court of law, concerned with judging past events; and epideictic or demonstrative, concerned with speaking for its own sake, for entertainment, and thus with the present the last was the lowest form.

But it was eventually the relatively impractical edideictic oratory which proved to be, on the whole, the chief concern of rhetoric, most notably at the time of the Second Sophistic in the second century before Christ, but also through antiquity generally. (See [book on epideictic oratory--Chicago U. Press? StLUL].) The Greeks were quite obviously fascinated with the spoken word for its own sake, even apart from its purely practical value. So were the Romans. In Rome, although the Senate and the law courts made skill in public speaking important, the warrant for making a great deal of rhetoric was rather less than in Greece, and grew still less after the establishment of the emperors, since the citizenry participated far less in public assemblies, but the fascination with public speaking continued, and Cicero devoted a work of his, Orator, to the delineation of the perfect public speaker, who for him is the perfect man.

This was the milieu of the spoken word, still strenuously cultivated in an alphabetic culture, to which the humanists in their devotion to classical antiquity actually sought to return--without, of course, quite seeing it in the perspectives in which we can see it now, as related to the tensions between voice and vision. In terms of the contrast between vocal and visual presentation of the word, the significant points about rhetoric as this dominated the humanist educational milieu are two: first, its omnivorousness, that is, the way in which the oration tends to become the paradigm of all artistic verbalization, especially insofar as this is the object of formal academic instruction; and secondly, its persistent association with the oral through all the vagaries of its application to other verbal composition, written and printed.

Omnivorous Rhetoric

Rhetoric was already rather omnivorous in ancient times. Because one studied expression typically, in theory, to become an orator, one studied other forms of expression, even Homer, primarily insofar as they helped develop oratorical process. Although rhetoric was, strictly, the art of oratory,--according to Aristotle in the Rhetoric, the art of finding the available means of persuasion for any subject--and although poetic enjoyed in theory a separate existence, the study of poetry could be assimilated to rhetoric and often was. Epic poetry had never been too distinct from speech-making anyhow. Almost half the Iliad and two-thirds of the Odyssey are devoted to speeches, and oratory had epic and dramatic phases of its own. Oratory and drama were obviously allied. Gerard F. Else has pointed out in an article in Hermes that Solon's particular kind of oratory--suddenly appearing in the market-place with a cap on his head to declaim elegiac verses encouraging resumption of the war over Salamis--is striking evidence of connections between the histrionic or role-playing sensibility and public speaking. Plays themselves are obviously made up of speeches--but, what is more important, until recent times of speeches which often had a public declamatory character--the difference between Euripides and Ibsen--making them manageable according to patterns worked out for purposes of public speaking. History, which was not a separate curriculum subject in antiquity, or indeed until fairly recent years, was considered subservient to rhetoric, being read as part of rhetorical training. The historians used rhetorical organization and formulas, and proceeded, even in the highly objective Thucydides, as well as in Livy, Sallust, Tacitus, and others, by dint of orations,

often of great length, inserted in the course of the narration. Tacitus even has "the soldiers" conjointly making a speech in Book IV of his Histories. Even the extraordinary objectivity of a Thucydides was sure to be effected somehow by the high partisan or polemical charge which the oration inevitably carried. Rhetoric made incursions also into what we should call literary theory or criticism

Title? Dionysius of Halicarnassus, in his _____, reads for a while somewhat like a present-day theorist or critic until one encounters the inevitable observation which reveals that all his interest in literary effect is ultimately pointed, in his own mind, toward the training of the orator.

Dialectic was both opposed to rhetoric and intertwined with it. In the sense of a Socratic inquisitory search for true values, dialēctic was associated with Plato and with "philosophy" as rhetoric was associated with the anti-Platonic or a-Platonic Sophists. But the opposition of philosopher and sophist is not so head-on as it is commonly made out to be, and a detailed study of the interaction of the Platonic and Sophistic traditions, as, for example, in Plato and Isocrates themselves shows that there is a good deal of rhetoric in Plato and a good deal of "philosophy" and dialectic in Isocrates and his followers. By the time dialectic has been processed into an art of discussion or debate, an art concerned with comparative probabilities, it shares with rhetoric the process of invention and many of the "places" of invention, as can be seen in Aristotle's Topics and his Rhetoric and in many similar works until the advent of Peter Ramus and beyond.

Aristotle well knew that there is no limit to the subjects with which dialectic can concern itself. Nevertheless, because it is more formalized, dialectic rules a more specialized performance than the huge, pervasive, amoeban range of activity referred to by rhetoric. Formal or scientific logic--called by Aristotle not logike but analytike--is even more specialized. Whatever it may do in principle, in point of fact there are vast ranges of intellectual material and activity it has never been applied to and never will be. But much of such material and activity untouched by formal logic has been grist in the rhetorician's mill. Hence it is understandable that, apart from Plato's claim for his "dialectic"--which is rather more a mystique than an "art"--ancient culture generally does not put forward claims for dialecticians comparable to those of Cicero and Quintilian for orators.

Dialectic, it is true, had a special vogue in the Middle Ages, where Peter of Spain's highly influential Summulae logicales calls it the ars artium et scientia scientiarum. And, despite the humanists' plans to minimize or suppress it in favor of rhetoric, it was almost as much in vogue in most of Europe except Italy through the Renaissance as in the Middle Ages. But its medieval vogue was not so exclusive as it is sometimes made out to be. Rhetoric even in the Middle Ages assumed many guises and turned up in unexpected places. In European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, Ernst Robert Curtius has documented in detail the medieval assimilation of poetry to rhetoric. Richard McKeon has pointed out in his very full 1942 Speculum article how in theology the scholastic method itself, commonly thought of today as identified with dialectic if not with formal logic, grew out of assemblages

of "sentences," such as those of Peter Lombard, "which derived their name and initial methods of treatment from rhetoric." Rhetorical questions--particularly the customary three, Is it? What is it? and What sort is it?--merged with questions of logic and shaped early attempts at formulating the scientific method in the Middle Ages, when rhetoric in its application or manner of application or theory of application reacted with almost every conceivable kind of enterprise from physics and medicine through metaphysics and mystical theology.

This omnivorousness of rhetoric continues and even grows during the Renaissance, when letter-writing manuals prescribe that letters themselves (despite their obvious non-oral character) be cast in the form of orations, with an exordium, narratio or assertion to be proved, proof of the point, refutation of adversaries, and peroration, /scholarly treatises, whether lengthy, as Bacon's The Advancement of Learning, or brief, as Sir Philip Sidney's The Defense of Poesie, are commonly organized as orations, when they are not organized as outright disputations or dialogues. History is written largely as a concatenation of orations, and playwrights, trained to express themselves rhetorically in the schools, string together huge quantities of orations in their dramatic productions, as can be seen in Shakespeare's Henry V. The Royal Society represents in many ways a break with the rhetorical tradition, but even a work so late as Thomas Sprat's History of the Royal Society, (1667), which commends a way of speaking as close to the mathematical as possible, is itself organized as an oration. Alexander Pope lived in an age which knew how to distinguish poetry from prose, (See G. K. Hamilton, The Two Harmonies.) at least to its own satisfaction,

and yet his Essay on Criticism (1711) and Essay on Man (1733-34)-- in the true essay format as known from Montaigne on--are concatenations of cleverly worked-up commonplaces, thematic and formulaic or semiformulaic garnerings such as those cultivated by oral poets and orators. These commonplaces were garnered in the commonplace books which teachers of rhetoric encouraged their pupils to keep.

Much of the role which rhetoric played in the curriculum and in life from the Middle Ages through the eighteenth and part of the nineteenth century was complicated by the peculiar status of Latin after the rise of the vernaculars between the sixth and ninth centuries, already mentioned above. Such was the force of the memorialized oral tradition that the Western educational system generally, until the rise of the little schools under commercial inspiration, particularly from the seventeenth century on, goes ahead on the assumption that it is teaching boys to be Latin orators, whereas in point of fact it was, or should have been, training vernacular writers. Even more oddly, the symbol of oralism, Latin, was a language which has been chirographically controlled for virtually a millennium or more. The confusion of aims in humanism here was basic, and has been all too little studied.

Rhetoric and dialectic, moreover, had themselves always been more or less confused in the general teaching tradition because of the fact that, following Cicero, the great rhetorician who had bequeathed to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance the commonly accepted definition of dialectic as the art of discourse (ars disserendi)-- a definition commonly made to do also for logic itself--most teachers had understood dialectic to consist of two parts, invention (inventio) and judgment (Judicium) or arrangement (dispositio). However one

might struggle to persuade oneself that dialectical invention (the quest for arguments to be used in dialectic) was not the same as rhetorical invention (the quest for arguments to be used in an oration), the two looked distressingly similar. And the same was true of the purportedly distinct dialectical judgment or arrangement (that is, of one's arguments) and rhetorical judgment or arrangement (of one's arguments). When in the sixteenth century Peter Ramus and his literary lieutenant Omer Talon decided to do something about this and relegate all invention and judgment or arrangement to dialectic (which they identified with logic), leaving only style and delivery for rhetoric (they dropped memory entirely), the result was not really a purification of logic or dialectic at all. Quite the contrary. Carl von Prantl and others are quite right in describing Ramist dialectic or logic as a rhetorical logic. Rhetoric is not done away with by ukase or violence. Qui mange du pape, en meurt.

The picture painted here of the dominance of rhetoric admits of much more refinement than has been possible in this brief account. But in its main outlines it is true. The Humanists fell heir to a rhetorical culture which was all pervasive and which they set about making more pervasive than ever.

What had happened historically to implement this pervasiveness appears in summary to be this. In a culture where the spoken word was paramount, attention came to be focused, understandably enough, on the publicly spoken word, on oratory (Greek, *rhetorike*). Around this focus of attention, theories of expression and of language and a whole world view grew up. Although there was always a vague or general awareness that public speaking was not all utterance,

this awareness was hardly operative on any effective scale within the educational system from antiquity through at least the seventeenth century. In the schools, one studied expression by studying "rhetoric," which from ancient times on was not thought of as entirely restricted to oratory but which nevertheless preserved a closer connection with oratory than with any other form of expression, at least in principle. The study of grammar and of poetry--which with gymnastics constituted the original Greek paideia--became more than ever propaedeutic to rhetoric.

This pattern in the study of language implied with varying force that all use of language was public speaking, or that language was at its optimum public speaking. The entire drift of education and culture enforced this implication, sometimes weakly and vaguely, sometimes with considerable explicit force, particularly in manuals of rhetoric. Fine distinctions between scientific logic, dialectic, rhetoric, poetry, and sophistic such as those more or less explicit in Aristotle and quite explicit in St. Albert the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas (who in great part on this matter repeats Albert), were powerless to stem the tide. Undoubtedly, this state of affairs was due to the history and existing state of the communications media.

Perhaps the ultimate reason for the quondam pervasiveness of rhetoric is the nature of the human situation, particularly as this manifests itself in preliterate cultures. By comparison with technological civilization, preliterate civilizations have only a minimum of scientific knowledge and technological control, so that verbal activity has relatively little to do with the detailed explanation and manipulation of things--in the absence of verbally construed "arts" of manuals, learning is largely by apprenticeship, by observation

and imitation. Thus the feeling for words is bound up chiefly with their relevance to specifically human situations, to interaction between man and man. Here the power to move and persuade are paramount. Moreover, in this field a kind of maximum in operation is achieved by the individual who can with his speech affect a large number of persons simultaneously. Public speaking is of maximal value, at least under many conditions.

Rhetoric thus appears to represent something mysteriously central to preliterate culture, and its central importance carries over somehow into the literate ancient, medieval, and Renaissance milieus. It is central not only to the arts and sciences but to life itself in the large. Even today, the public speaker has a paramount role to play, although it is a role remodeled by our mass media. Part of the strength of the rhetorical tradition is due to its closeness to life, which helps account for its abiding unsatisfactoriness or even crudeness as an "art", its resistance to adequate codification.