

❖ Oratorical
Culture in
Nineteenth-
Century
America ❖
❖ Transformations
in the Theory and
Practice of Rhetoric ❖

❖ Edited by ❖

Gregory Clark and

S. Michael Halloran

Southern Illinois University Press
Carbondale and Edwardsville

Copyright © 1993 by the Board of Trustees,
 Southern Illinois University
 All rights reserved
 Printed in the United States of America
 Production supervised by Natalia Nadraga
 96 95 94 93 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Oratorical culture in nineteenth-century America : transformations in the theory and practice of rhetoric / edited by Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Speeches, addresses, etc., American—History and criticism. 2. Rhetoric—United States—History—19th century. 3. Oratory—United States—History—19th century. 4. United States—Civilization—19th century. I. Clark, Gregory, 1950–. II. Halloran, S. Michael.

PS407.067 1993

815'.0109—dc20

ISBN 0-8093-1739-7

92-42230

CIP

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984. ©

Contents

Introduction: Transformations of Public Discourse in Nineteenth-Century America 1

Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran

Part One. Classical Forms and Forums in the Nineteenth Century

1. Edward Everett and Neoclassical Oratory in Genteel America 29

Ronald F. Reid

2. The Oratorical Poetic of Timothy Dwight 57

Gregory Clark

3. The Sermon as Public Discourse: Austin Phelps and the Conservative Homiletic Tradition in Nineteenth-Century America 78

Russel Hirst

4. Margaret Fuller: A Rhetoric of Citizenship in Nineteenth-Century America 110

P. Joy Rouse

Part Two. Nineteenth-Century Transformations of Oratorical Culture

5. The Popularization of Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric: Elocution and the Private Learner 139

Nan Johnson

6. Rhetorical Power in the Victorian Parlor: *Godey's Lady's Book* and the Gendering of Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric 158

Nicole Tonkovich

7. Jane Addams and the Social Rhetoric of Democracy 184

Catherine Peaden

8. The Divergence of Purpose and Practice on the Chautauqua: Keith Vawter's Self-Defense 208

Frederick J. Antczak and Edith Siemers

9. The Rhetoric of Picturesque Scenery: A Nineteenth-Century
Epidictic 226
S. Michael Halloran

Afterword 247
Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran

Works Cited 253
Contributors 271
Index 273

Introduction ❀

Transformations of

Public Discourse in

Nineteenth-Century America

❀ Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran

*In his history of the discipline of English studies, Gerald Graff speaks of an "oratorical culture" that grounded the study of language and literature in American colleges through the first half of the nineteenth century (1987, 36-51). In his view, this oratorical culture "pervaded the college and linked the classical courses with the courses in English rhetoric and elocution, with the literary and debating societies, and with the literary culture outside" (35). It consisted of the oral exercises—disputation, declamation, forensic oration, and the like—that were a part of the traditional arts curriculum, as well as the literary and debate societies and the literary magazines that were increasingly prominent in the extra-curriculum of American colleges from the mid-eighteenth century on. According to Graff, this collegiate oratorical culture lent some vitality to the study of literature in English, though it supported a view of literature as "a public or civic discourse fit for socializing future citizens" (42), a view he takes as falling short of the true "literary" understanding that began to emerge with the dawn of "the professional era" in English studies in the last quarter of the century (53). "What finally should be the verdict on the literary education provided by the old-fashioned college?" he asks, replying that "in many ways it was worse than a waste of time, a form of unredeemed drudgery carried on in the name of archaic social ideals" (50).

As Graff's reference to "archaic social ideals" hints, "oratorical culture" in fact pervaded more than college life in the early nineteenth century. American politics and society during this period were in-

formed by a discourse inherited from the Revolutionary period, a discourse drawn self-consciously on the model of classical Roman rhetoric. In principle, this discourse enacted the neoclassical assumption that moral authority in a community is located in the public consensus of its members rather than in their individual private convictions. It took the form of the classical rhetorical kinds—deliberative, forensic, and epideictic—as practiced by orators such as John Adams, John Hancock, Thomas Jefferson, Timothy Dwight, John Witherspoon, Daniel Webster, Edward Everett, and a host of others. This neoclassical rhetorical discourse is likewise illustrated by the voluminous periodical and pamphlet literature of the era, of which the Federalist Papers and Paine's *Common Sense* are probably the most familiar examples. Its consistent purpose was to form and sustain a public consensus, intellectual and moral, as the basis of civic action.

What we now call "literature" this rhetoric treated as a species of epideictic discourse whose end was to "teach and delight," to pass on the established values of the culture and thus to sustain the common ground upon which arguments about particular issues could be conducted. Robert Ferguson shows in *Law and Letters in American Culture* (1984) how the fiction and poetry of such writers as Charles Brockden Brown, Washington Irving, and William Cullen Bryant were shaped by ideals of civic humanism and legal eloquence drawn from Cicero and contemporary legal authorities. He lists a number of prominent periodical editors who were educated in the law (71) and argues that for many of them, what we would privilege as their "literary" endeavors were epiphenomena of their primary vocation. The didactic voice of the lawyer can be heard in their poetry, the lawyer's organizational genius read in their prose. Those who taught rhetoric in the colleges during this period quite naturally adopted pedagogical practices time-honored in the liberal arts curriculum and traceable ultimately to Isocrates and Quintilian, the original inventors of an educational system aimed at producing the eloquent and morally informed leader of society, "the good man skilled in speaking," of which the lawyer of the Revolutionary and Federal period was a particular instance.

Graff is thus correct when he says that oratorical culture "permeated" American colleges of the early nineteenth century but is somewhat misleading when he says that oratorical culture linked the college curriculum and extra-curriculum with "the literary culture

Introduction

outside." The culture outside during the early years of the nineteenth century was not "literary" in our sense of that term, but oratorical. Its most prized symbolic work was that of the orator. Its social ideals may from the perspective of the late twentieth century seem archaic and were from that perspective exclusionary, but they deserve an effort to understand them in their own terms.

This book tries both to understand those social ideals and to show how they gave rise to the radically different ideals of the later professional culture within which Graff's history is situated. Our purpose in this introductory essay is to explore the oratorical culture that characterized the United States at the beginning of the nineteenth century and show how that culture was transformed by an emerging individualistic spirit that, in diverse social and institutional forms, challenged the traditional principle of collective moral authority by establishing as a new principle the moral authority of the individual. We will suggest that, once established, this authority of the individual was itself transformed by the political and economic complexities of a rapidly expanding nation into the authority of the expert and that it was this new public morality of expertise that defined the professional culture we see characterizing the United States by the end of that century.

We describe this change as a "transformation" in Kenneth Burke's sense of that term: a process through which "the position at the start can eventually be seen in terms of the new motivation encountered enroute" ([1945] 1969, 422). That is, we use the term to suggest that as the political and economic realities of the American community changed during the nineteenth century, its public discourse, in theory as well as in practice, changed as well. The term *transformation* enables us to bear in mind Burke's advice that, while such a change in motivation may appear to observers (such as historians) as "a kind of jolt or inconsistency," to those who experienced the change it appeared to be simply the natural progress of things (422). In doing so it provides us with the method we are using both to understand oratorical culture in its own terms and to remain skeptical of any teleologically grounded explanations that we might want to impose as we examine the ways in which that culture changed.

We are not the first to use this term to explain the changes that occurred in rhetorical theory during the nineteenth century. In Thomas M. Conley's *Rhetoric in the European Tradition*, the nineteenth

century in both Europe and America is described as a period of "political and social transformations" that made it "a watershed between the old society of hierarchy and caste and the new culture of industrialism" (1990, 236). Conley describes American colleges in particular undergoing a "transformation" that secularized and democratized them as their purpose shifted from initiating "the young into polite society" to preparing them for "a fruitful occupation and individual self-realization" (248). Nan Johnson's *Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric in North America* uses the term more specifically to characterize "the adaptive dynamics of rhetorical theory and practice" (1991, 4), describing change in the theoretical materials she examines as a "process of responsive transformation" (6). And Johnson's statement of her guiding historiographical assumption can illuminate ours:

To investigate the configuration of any rhetorical tradition necessarily obliges us first to recognize that throughout the history of rhetoric, rhetorical theory and pedagogy have displayed a dynamic tendency toward responsive transformation. An account of the nature of the nineteenth-century rhetorical tradition implies an investigation of the philosophical assumptions, theoretical models, and cultural mandates that shaped nineteenth-century theory and practice. (7)

The essays in this volume examine change as transformation in the practice of rhetoric in nineteenth-century America as well as in its theory and pedagogy. In doing so, they explore the methodological resources that this notion of transformation provides for situating change in the context of the cultural forces to which rhetorics are always a response. A historiography guided by this notion requires that a place of beginning—in the case of this introductory essay, the discursive culture we are characterizing as oratorical—not be privileged as an origin. Rather, it becomes a point on a line of descent that enables us to identify and evaluate historical forces that contributed to the construction of its descendant—here the inherited discursive culture we are characterizing as professional. In doing so, this essay presents a particular narrative of transformation providing what we believe is a useful explanation of what happened to the theory and practice of rhetoric in the United States during the nineteenth century. We present this narrative as a "representative anecdote" in the sense that Burke ([1945] 1969) uses that term—as a case that exem-

Introduction

plifies what we mean by transformation used as a guiding methodological term.

The essays that follow all focus on specific moments in nineteenth-century American rhetoric and use the concept of transformation in a variety of ways to explain the patterns of change they present. In doing so, of course, they expose the limitations inherent in the particular narrative of transformation that this introductory essay presents. Oratorical culture as we render it here was distinctly limited in the gender and class of its participants, and while its individualist and professional transformations as we describe them gradually expanded the scope of participation in public discourse, almost all women and many men still remained at its margins. Further, oratorical culture was not the only form of public culture in America early in the century and what we are calling professional culture not its only transformation at the century's end. Some of the essays that follow confirm and elaborate this introductory narrative, while others point to limitations of it and to cultural issues such as these that it ignores. In doing so, they complicate and even conflict with it in ways that, fully examined and developed, could overturn it. So while the immediate purpose of this essay is to present one narrative of transformation, its larger purpose—the purpose shared by the essays that compose this volume—is to explore the concept of transformation itself as a historiographical trope that enables constructions of the past that are skeptical of teleological assumptions about its relation to the present. We explore this concept in the hope of developing narratives of the history of rhetorical theory and practice in nineteenth-century America that assert neither decline nor progress. Reminding us of Burke's motto that always "it's more complicated than that" ([1961] 1970, 277), a historiography of transformation commits us to histories that acknowledge losses and gains while tempering the impulse to assign praise or blame.

Our narrative of transformation in this introductory essay ends in a description of a culture in which the locus of public morality is the expert and autonomous individual rather than a communal consensus. Indeed, that is the primary characteristic of the culture that Graff describes as "literary." What we describe is a process of transformation that brought public culture in the United States to that point at the end of the nineteenth century. Our thesis is that both the theory of rhetoric taught in the schools and the practice of public discourse

sustained outside them were transformed during the nineteenth century from those of the neoclassical oratorical culture into those of the professional culture we see characterizing both colleges and communities by its end. What Graff calls "literary culture" is but one expression of this new professional culture, albeit the one most apparently like the older oratorical culture. Burke observes that the problem with any such specialized culture is that it tends to treat its activities as "autonomous," as unconnected to those of the larger community in which it is situated (1950: 1969, 27). Such a culture makes morality something to be determined in terms of the effectiveness and efficiency of the activity alone rather than in terms of the function of that activity within that larger community. This transformation in the motivation of rhetoric in America during the nineteenth century suggests a diminishing ability of American public culture to function collectively—for us, one of the losses. However, the emergence of these specialized communities gave access to the theory and practice of public discourse to people who had never had access before—for us, one of the gains.

Rhetoric in the Oratorical Culture

The rhetoric taught in American colleges at the beginning of the nineteenth century was strongly neoclassical, which is to say that it was a rhetoric of general citizenship closely tied to the public discourse practiced in pulpit, bar, and senate of the larger society. Some prominent teachers of rhetoric, such as John Quincy Adams of Harvard and Timothy Dwight of Yale, were in fact simultaneously practitioners in one or more of those rhetorical forums. Adams served as senator from the state of Massachusetts from 1803 to 1808, a period that overlapped his tenure as Boylston Professor of Rhetoric at Harvard. Dwight, as president of Yale from 1795 to 1817, made his pulpit one of the most prominent political lecterns in New England as he sustained the cause of Puritan theocracy well into the second decade of the nineteenth century. The commitment of these men to the practice of rhetoric in this classical sense of oratorical discourse on civic issues was paralleled in the theory they taught. The statutes for the Boylston Chair were drawn directly from John Ward's English language compendium of Ciceronian rhetoric (1759; Reid 1959), and Adams's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory* (1810) were likewise virtually

Introduction

pure Cicero. Dwight's senior course in rhetoric, although influenced by Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) and so less purely classical than Adams's work, still directed his students insistently to use the art of deliberative, forensic, and epideictic discourse to address civic matters.

At the center of this neoclassical rhetoric was an American version of the traditional rhetorical ideal, "the good man skilled in speaking" whose civic duty it was to articulate an established wisdom and focus it on particular issues. The ideal had been expressed and exemplified a generation earlier by John Witherspoon, president of the College of New Jersey at Princeton from 1768 to 1794 and author of what has been called "the first complete rhetoric by an American" (Guthrie 1949, 100). Witherspoon spoke in his posthumously published *Lectures on Moral Philosophy and Eloquence* (1810; Miller 1990a) of a "complete orator," and he enacted in his own life the ideal of theory and practice, contemplation and action combined. He was active in both civil and church politics while serving as president of Princeton and was the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence. He also encouraged his students' inclinations to become involved in issues surrounding the Revolution. Like Cicero and Quintilian, Witherspoon rejected the idea of a contemplative life divorced from the concerns of the public forum, arguing that "when statesmen are also scholars, they make upon the whole greater orators and nobler writers than those who are scholars merely, though of the greatest capacity" (Miller 1990a, 260). The insistent refusal to draw a sharp line between contemplation and action, between the academy and the public forum, was in fact a key element of his "complete orator," as it had been of Cicero's and Quintilian's "good man skilled in speaking." From the classical and this neoclassical point of view, a central purpose of academic life was to preserve and articulate a moral consensus for application by citizens in the public forum.

Witherspoon's complete orator was not motivated by the ideal of striving for individual advancement that would become central to middle-class culture in the nineteenth century. As Burton J. Bledstein shows in *The Culture of Professionalism*, Americans of the eighteenth century did not have a middle class in the modern sense, though they were inclined to see themselves as "persons of middling ranks" (1976, 8). They understood this phrase in a sense that drew implicitly on the Aristotelian ideal of the mean: neither too rich nor too poor, govern-

ing their lives by shared interests and a concern for community welfare and values. To become a "complete orator" was not a personal achievement but the public responsibility of citizenship. The underlying ethos was communitarian, though in a limited and exclusive sense. While their particular shared interests and common concerns authorized a kind of participatory democracy, they limited participation — citizenship, essentially — to educated, white males. Both women in general and men who weren't "middling" — who lacked the education that developed those interests and concerns or who were poor or recent immigrants or black or native American — were denied the public responsibility and opportunity of citizenship so defined.

By mid-century, the concept of oratorical public discourse and its communitarian ethos as taught and practiced by figures such as Witherspoon, Adams, and Dwight had begun to erode in the United States, both outside the academy and within. As Americans became more conscious of the invitations to individual autonomy inherent in their physical and social settings, they became increasingly self-absorbed. And this self-absorption is characteristic of the individualistic rhetoric that was emerging in both the college classroom and in public practice. By the end of the century, "rhetoric" as a college-level subject had little overtly to do with the traditional rhetorical forums. This was a consequence of two closely related factors: the growth of individualism as a central cultural value and the increasing specialization of knowledge leading to a similarly specialized academic discourse. Teachers and practitioners of rhetoric alike came to conceive public life primarily as a context for individual self-definition and action. Knowledge became increasingly arcane and specialized and came under the control of narrowly defined professions and disciplines. Citizens were no longer people who brought general knowledge to bear on broad public issues so much as specialists who attended to their own sharply limited domains.

The dynamic of this transformation is illustrated by an episode in the early history of one of the new nineteenth-century professions, engineering. The first American school to grant degrees in engineering was Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, founded as The Rensselaer School in 1824 for the purpose of training itinerant lecturers who would travel the countryside, teaching farmers, merchants, and mechanics to apply science in their own pursuits (Rezneck 1968, 3–8). Its philosophy might be characterized as "populist applied science" in

Introduction

that it understood the new scientific knowledge as common property to be spread widely for the general improvement of the populace. Like the lyceum movement, formally established by Josiah Holbrook just two years after The Rensselaer School's founding, it was an expression of an individualistic idealism that envisioned every American (at least every white male American) able to prosper in private affairs and participate fully in public affairs by virtue of a general moral and intellectual improvement. And like the lyceum movement, it was inexorably transformed into something quite different. By mid-century, The Rensselaer School was training professional engineers who would market their knowledge of applied science as a specialized ability, doing for hire what the general populace was now presumed incapable of doing. And the lyceum movement was now presumed toward becoming a medium of entertainment.

We will have more to say below on the general theme of professionalization, and the essay by Frederick Antczak and Edith Siemers traces the transformation of a successor to the lyceum movement, the Chautauqua. The example of The Rensselaer School raises the tantalizing (and probably unanswerable) question of whether there was some inevitability in the move from what we have called the populist model to the professional model for the new scientific knowledge. Could the individualist vision of a morally and intellectually elevated public have survived in the changing cultural climate of nineteenth-century America? We don't claim to be able to answer that question, but we will turn now to a more detailed consideration of how the individualist vision developed.

Individualistic Transformations of Oratorical Culture

A powerful physical aspect of the American setting invited a shift in the culture of the United States from a social morality grounded in the community to one grounded in the individual. In the course of the nineteenth century, the expansive landscape of the continent became more accessible to many white Americans who perceived within it unlimited space and resources theirs to claim. And while such a perception seems to have been characteristic primarily of men during the first half of the century (Kolodny 1984), later in the century, as settlement moved closer to the barrier of the Pacific, some women began to act upon that perception for themselves. Indeed, Myra

Jehlen argues that in availing both space and resource to the exertions of individual enterprise, this seemingly unlimited landscape made the individualism for which the liberal philosophy of the eighteenth century had argued appear "natural" and materially necessary (1986, 3). Liberal individualism became material in the form of the private property that the American landscape offered to its citizens, property that, for them, warranted individual claims of natural rights and political autonomy. As Jehlen puts it, the very word "America" came to connote "not only the strenuous spirit of individualism, but also . . . its material effectiveness in the real world" (15). Extending Jehlen's thesis that conceptions of America were shaped more by the material reality of that landscape itself than by philosophy, we can suggest that as that landscape became increasingly accessible to individual settlement and enterprise, American concepts of self became increasingly individualistic and autonomous.

Philip Fisher (1985) documents this shift in his study of the social setting in which the American novel developed. Using terms appropriate to our discussion, Fisher argues that the public world in America during the nineteenth century shifted from a "polis" to an "economy" — a shift that itself can be read as a transformation, as Burke puts it, of the motives of "economic necessity" into "moral purpose" ([1950] 1969, 422). Social life, in Fisher's analysis, "became economic rather than political, atomized rather than centered, focused on money rather than on power, and based in the lives of individuals rather than families" (1985, 16). What Fisher documents is the cultural impact of the unprecedented expansion of American settlement and the rapid emergence of a manufacturing and commercial economy that resulted in the capitalism that came to dominate all aspects of American life. Capitalism in this early form — relatively small-scale and utterly unregulated — seemed to present every American with opportunities for both economic advancement or disaster, opportunities that were, in either case, accessible to the individual alone. Richard Sennett (1977) observes that as the economic experience of Americans grew increasingly treacherous and seductive, individuals withdrew from each other for protection and advantage to become rivals in an inherently competitive and risky game. The public realm that had once been the place where those who had access to it collaborated in constructing a social order became a stage where they attempted to define, assert, and aggrandize themselves as

Introduction

autonomous beings. These individuals who had conceived themselves as both contributors to and beneficiaries of the public good came to see themselves as autonomous moral agents responsible first and last for their own survival (19–22). Consequently, increasing numbers of Americans adopted a moral stance that Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) describes as "bureaucratic individualism." Caught within institutions and organizations that seemed to wield power impersonally and were apparently answerable to no one, people intensified their allegiance to the very ideology of self-interest of which they were victims, one that justified withdrawal from others in order to protect and provide for themselves (34–35).

The intellectual setting for this intensifying individualism was a later version of the liberalism in which American rhetorical theory and practice had merged in an eighteenth-century neo-Ciceronian synthesis: the consensual conviction that every individual has a natural right to freedom of conscience and action. Under the influence of Lockean and Cartesian epistemologies that grounded knowledge in individual experience, moral authority shifted gradually from institutions to individuals. This shift was affirmed publicly in the American Revolution, which was in large part a rejection of traditional institutional authority. During the years that followed the Revolution and the adoption of the Constitution, this philosophical individualism was tempered politically as individual moral authority was directed, by the consensus that established it, toward communitarian ends. The rhetorical theory and practice of Witherspoon, Adams, and Dwight, for example, addressed the articulation of shared individual values that would support common, cooperative action. But our point is that discourse such as this was gradually rendered obsolete by the more materially based individualist consensus that began to develop in the rhetoric that was taught as well as practiced as the public discourse of the nineteenth century.

Particularly instructive in the development of the ideology of liberal individualism to a point where it almost left the community behind was the Massachusetts poet and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson. Extending the individualist epistemologies of Locke and Descartes, Emerson made absolute spiritual truths accessible to individual perception alone. Jehlen describes Emerson's project as resulting in "an intensification of consciousness so powerful that the material universe dissolves into . . . a [personal] knowledge that claims, be-

yond interpretation, to be simply vision" (1986, 77). In doing so, he authorized his fellow citizens to reject history and heritage and to redefine both themselves and their world in autonomous personal terms. It is of course more than a bit paradoxical for us to claim that Emerson "authorized" such a move, since his views on the autonomy of the individual mind and conscience, taken literally, would have made any such "authorization" extraneous. Few among privileged Americans were prepared to go to Emerson's individualist extreme, fewer still were capable, and one who did suggested, as the story goes, that Emerson himself pulled up short of living out the values he espoused. Jailed for refusing to pay a tax in support of the Mexican War, Emerson's friend Henry David Thoreau is said to have asked Emerson why he was not himself in jail—why Emerson had bowed to government authority by paying the tax he too opposed as unjust. Thoreau articulated this position in his influential essay on "Resistance to Civil Government," which asserted the moral and political autonomy of the individual conscience in the statement that "there will never be a really free and enlightened State, until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly" (1849 [1990, 1981]).

While perhaps atypical in the extreme to which they carried the ideology of individualism, Emerson and Thoreau and a few others like them nonetheless represented an important tendency in American thought and culture. Sennett observes that the role of the public realm was shifting during the early nineteenth century from the setting for the formation of social order to the setting for the formation of individual personality (1977, 22). For the New England Transcendentalists, the public realm became the place for self-culture, for development of an individual vision that would energize the consciousness and the conscience that would ensure in the enlightened self correct thought and action. For them, social reform began with this reform of the individual. And while for Emerson and Thoreau it seemed to end with the individual as well, for others, like Margaret Fuller, it came to require participation in political public discourse. In "The Great Lawsuit" (1843), her long essay in the Transcendentalist journal *The Dial*, Fuller put the concept of self-culture into the service of the women's rights movement. While she believed with Emerson and Thoreau that moral reform in America must begin with reform of the

Introduction

self, she located that self in relationships that are inflected by inequities of power. In doing so, she parted ways with them by making self-culture explicitly a political practice. Specifically, Fuller argued that relationships between men and women should be changed to enable women not "to learn their rule from without" but, like men, "to unfold it from within" (16–17). She suggested that to enact this argument, women must "lay aside all thought . . . of being taught and led by men" (45). It was Fuller's position as a woman in a culture dominated by men that led her to transform the politics of self-culture from one that designates the individual a majority of one into one that makes the individual an activist working to establish a new majority coalition.

Another element in this general shift of the public realm from a setting for socialization to a setting for individuation is the increasing secularism—or at least the decreasing practice of traditional, formal religion—of a people who insisted upon assigning moral responsibility to conscience alone. Through the nineteenth century, religion in the United States became less a public concern of institutions and more the private matter of individual conscience. Even those Americans who continued to practice formal religion shifted increasingly to evangelical movements led by lay ministers who left matters of piety and moral judgment to the private person. That this change in the location of even spiritual authority to the individual was representative of a more general cultural transformation during the early nineteenth century is demonstrated at the grass roots of American political life that shifted, with Andrew Jackson's 1828 defeat of John Quincy Adams, from the centralized and patrician leadership of an elite to the decentralized and democratic leadership of the common man. More than any preceding president, Jackson was innocent of a classical education, and his victory over the one-time Harvard chair-holder Adams can be taken as a figure of the declining importance of oratorical public discourse and of the collectivist assumptions about moral authority on which it was based.

Individualistic Transformations of the Rhetoric of Oratorical Culture

As the nineteenth century progressed, the rhetoric that emerged both within and outside the academy in America expressed this increasing individualism. Sennett describes the change as a shift in

the role of the individual American to whom public discourse is addressed from that of judging reasons advanced to observing the performance of an exemplary, representative self (1977, 261). In examining that shift, Frederick Antczak (1985) has traced the growth of what he calls the rhetoric of identification that was affirmed in the election of Andrew Jackson. Jackson defeated Adams by presenting himself to the voters as a representative personality, using rhetoric that addressed its audience not as citizens who must judge but as spectators observing a version of themselves. This rhetoric of identification was not necessarily a pandering to or indulgence of the audience. Rather, its purpose was what Antczak calls "popularization": A speaker would present to an audience a personality that was recognizable yet idealized and thus would invite them each to become their own versions of that better self (9). But his examples of such rhetorical popularizers—Emerson, Mark Twain, and William James on the public lecture circuit—demonstrate that this rhetoric tended to turn people inward, making public discourse a drama through which spectators define themselves as an assemblage of autonomous individuals. It did so by presenting no arguments, and, as Antczak's essay with Edith Siemers in this volume suggests, public discourse of this sort came to function primarily as entertainment.

That this rhetoric presented no arguments marks a significant change. Arguments, as Lloyd Bitzer (1978) shows, function as essentially collaborative exchanges that construct public knowledge. In hearing arguments, an audience is invited to judge and make a public commitment—intellectual, emotional, and moral—to something common. In place of arguments, Antczak's popularizers presented their personalities alone, expecting the personalities of their auditors to develop in response. Their invitation was not to some specific and shareable commitment but to the acceptance of individual moral responsibility generally. Sennett makes a case against public discourse of this sort, associating it with the cult of charisma in which leaders are judged not by their policies and accomplishments but by the "sincere" intentions their personalities convey (1977, 265). Our concern here, however, is that the representative personalities were often inherently inaccessible to many of the people who may have heard them speak—women, for example, and men of different and less privileged class, race, or culture than the speaker. In its public practice, such a rhetoric appears to have been as socially exclusive as

Introduction

the neoclassical.

Within the nineteenth-century academy, the neoclassical rhetoric of public discourse taught by professors/statesmen like Witherspoon, Adams, and Dwight was transformed into a rhetoric that would address the "practical, accumulative, . . . acquisitive" purposes of the late nineteenth-century American university that, as Richard Hofstadter and DeWitt Hardy wrote, emerged to serve primarily the interests of "business and technology" (1952, 36). In the early decades of the century, the Scottish rhetorics of Hugh Blair (1783), George Campbell (1776), and Alexander Jamieson (1820) became widely popular as textbooks. According to Sharon Crowley, "The crucial move made by [these] modern discourse theorists was their centering of invention [i.e., the discovery of what to say in a discourse] in the minds of individual authors" (1990, 54), an innovation for which she gives primary credit to Campbell (15). The significance of this move, which Crowley places at the heart of the rhetoric that came to dominate American colleges in the nineteenth century, is that it locates the experience of the private individual where the public moral consensus had once been. The most popular version of this tradition in the United States was that of Hugh Blair, whose *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* was for decades the most widely used textbook in its colleges. Blair is also the major source for the first rhetoric text published by an American, Samuel Knox's *A Compendious System of Rhetoric* (1809). Knox's book was not a commercial success, but neither were the two more classically based texts published the following year, Adams's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory* and Witherspoon's *Lectures on Moral Philosophy and Eloquence*. The popularity of Blair's "belletristic" rhetoric coincided with a growing interest in the creation of a distinctly American literary culture to refocus scholarly attention away from deliberative, forensic, and epideictic discourse and toward poetic discourse.

When a commercially successful text was finally published (Samuel P. Newman's *Practical System of Rhetoric* [1827]), it was clearly in the mold of Blair, Campbell, Jamieson, and Knox. As Crowley shows, its treatment of rhetorical invention emphasized the role of private experience and neglected classical methods of scanning the common wisdom of the public mind. Moreover, two of its five chapters were organized around the concept of "taste," an idea that occupied-in-belletristic rhetoric a position roughly equivalent to that of "elo-

quence" in classical and American neoclassical rhetoric. As a rhetorical virtue, taste was to some extent based in what Bitzer would call public knowledge and thus connected with the communitarian view of moral responsibility that grounded classical rhetoric. Indeed, Nan Johnson notes that the doctrine of taste assumed that its principles "embody 'natural' inclinations" that, when nurtured in the members of a community, would bring them to a common recognition of higher laws (1991, 56). And Hans-Georg Gadamer shows that, in the pre-Kantian version that was adopted by Newman from the Scottish belletrists, "taste" was a kind of knowledge of objects shared by members of a community and thus was part of the *sensus communis*, the common understanding that provided the ground for moral and political judgment (1975, 33–39). In distinct contrast to eloquence, however, taste was an inward response rather than a manifest expression and hence inherently more private. Further, as Gadamer also shows, that belletristic notion of taste had already been invalidated by the time of Newman's writing. Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790) denied any status as knowledge to the judgment of taste, thus stripping it of moral and political implications and providing a theoretical basis for the understanding of "literature" as an arhetorical, aesthetically autonomous mode of discourse. Newman's text was thus symptomatic of academic rhetoric's turn inward and prophetic of its eclipse in the academy by the emerging discipline of literary studies.

The tendency to ground rhetoric in the private experience of the individual is likewise evident in the *Lectures Read to the Seniors at Harvard College* (1856) by Newman's contemporary, Edward T. Channing, one of Emerson's teachers at Harvard. In comparison with Newman, Channing showed considerably more interest in the classical forms and forums of rhetoric, but his lectures nonetheless focused on individual moral experience in a way that was more in tune with the thinking of Locke, Hume, and the belletristic rhetoricians—Newman included—than with the American neoclassicists such as Witherspoon who, as we have already noted, had echoed Cicero's and Quintilian's concept of "the good man skilled in speaking." Like others of the Revolutionary and Federal periods, Witherspoon assumed the state of American society to be closely analogous to that of ancient Athens and Rome and so appropriated classical rhetoric as a means of imposing moral leadership on a mob who needed it. By contrast, Channing argued in his opening lecture that American

Introduction

society was politically very different: "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" ([1856] 1968, 17). As a consequence, sound arguments and high eloquence would not be enough for the modern leader:

It is his virtues, his consistency, his unquestioned sincerity that must get the orator attention and confidence now. He must not rely too much upon the zeal or even the soundness with which he treats a question under immediate discussion. His hearers must believe that his life is steadily influenced by the sentiments he is trying to impress on them, — that he is willing to abide by principle at any hazard, and give his opinions and professions the full authority of his actions. (23)

In effect, Channing was teaching the kind of rhetoric that Antczak describes in practice.

Channing's faith that the audience could be relied upon to understand and value common interests flew in the face of abundant contradictory evidence. Presidential election campaigns of the 1820s through the 1850s—all of which Channing witnessed—more often than not were won by crass and mindless appeals to prejudice and factional loyalty. What Channing illustrates, then, is an ideological commitment to an ethos of the sincere individual—in Antczak's terms the "representative personality," in Sennett's the "charismatic man." Like the rhetorical practice of Andrew Jackson, the rhetorical theory taught in the colleges turned away from the public knowledge of the community and inward toward the experience of the individual as the locus of moral authority.

The Rhetoric of a Culture of Professionalism

An often noted development in nineteenth-century American academic life is the emergence of distinct academic disciplines. Certain specialties—natural and moral philosophy, rhetoric, mathematics, the classical languages—were well established in American colleges of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries. These were understood as separate areas of study, and some division of faculty labor was organized around them. Under this system, it was

customary for the college president to assume responsibility for rhetoric and moral philosophy, and individual professors might each present a "course of lectures" in mathematics or natural philosophy or some other "department" of knowledge. But it was still the tutors who did most of the actual teaching of students, and they were likely to be responsible for the full range of subjects included in the curriculum. Not infrequently, one person would serve as "professor" of a particular discipline and as tutor for the range of disciplines as well. It was assumed that an educated person should and could know everything being taught—that the professor who happened to lecture on moral philosophy would be equally qualified to teach mathematics or Greek grammar. Thus, when Timothy Dwight needed someone to fill a professorship of chemistry and natural philosophy at Yale in 1801, he selected a twenty-two-year-old law student with little specific training in science named Benjamin Silliman (Reingold 1964, 1). Essentially, this was a system in which the unity of the knowledge comprehended by the arts curriculum was emphasized far more than the distinct areas into which it could be divided.

Benjamin Silliman would go on to found the country's premiere scientific journal and establish Yale as its leading center for scientific education; when a failed lawyer named Amos Eaton took up the career in applied science that would eventually lead to his appointment as the first director of the Rensselaer School, it was Silliman to whom he went for instruction (Rezneck 1968, 10). Silliman's career thus figures the inexorable shift of curricular emphasis in the nineteenth century toward specialized knowledge and the distinctness of disciplines. In part, this was a simple matter of division of labor resulting from the growth of the colleges. With increasing numbers of students and faculty, it became necessary to divide the curriculum among a larger number of people and hence possible to divide it into a larger number of more formally differentiated disciplines. This simple process of division coincided in the latter half of the nineteenth century with a pattern of specialization and professionalism that was developing both inside the academy and out, transforming the knowledge of each loosely defined department from part of the common ground of educated people to the property of a specially trained elite. And in the minds of many leading educators, that transformation worked in the interest of the public good. When President Eliot of Harvard, for example, became alarmed by the tendency he saw in

Introduction

public culture to embrace "loose and inaccurate statements," he restructured his undergraduate curriculum as an elective system of courses taught by specialized departments and his graduate curriculum as training in specific professional disciplines (Bender 1984, 89).

That similar restructurings were widespread in the American academy late in the nineteenth century is evident in the nearly universal development of a system of specialized examination and grading. At the beginning of the century, examination was for the most part a matter of oral public performance before the assembled college community, which on certain occasions would include the trustees and even persons having no formal affiliation with the college other than a self-defined interest in its activities. Judgment of the students' performance—and in the case of disputations, participation in the questioning—was open to all present, not just to persons specially qualified in the subject matter at hand. The process assumed all educated persons to be fully qualified in all subjects of the arts curriculum. By the end of the century, separate written examination in particular subjects, with each examination under full control of disciplinary specialists, was the norm. Where they endured, public oral examinations were more and more a quaint ritual. The emphasis had shifted decisively from common to specialized knowledge, from liberal arts to the disciplines and professions.

In *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges*, James Berlin shows the relevance of this development to the current-traditional rhetoric that emerged after about 1870, characterizing the trend as a scientizing of the entire curriculum, rhetoric in particular (1984, 62). Central in Berlin's interpretation is the science of faculty psychology, which relegated invention to the empirical procedures of nonrhetorical disciplines, insisted on the distinctness of modes of discourse, and reduced arrangement and style to mechanical processes. Crowley likewise emphasizes the role of faculty psychology in the development of current-traditional rhetoric, though she moves the beginnings of current-traditional rhetoric back several decades to the early years of the nineteenth century and associates its inventional component with the experience of the private individual rather than with disciplinary procedures. While both Berlin's and Crowley's discussions of current-traditional rhetoric are insightful, neither the scientific spirit in general nor the specific science of faculty psychology seems adequate to account fully for the emergence of this new

"rhetoric" in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. As Douglas Sloan shows in *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal* (1971), science was a lively force in American colleges of the eighteenth century. The science of which Sloan speaks included faculty psychology, some traces of which are evident in the neoclassical rhetoric of John Witherspoon, who brought into the Princeton curriculum, as Dwight did to the curriculum at Yale, other aspects of the new science as well. Further, the faculty psychology that was scientifically current in the time of Witherspoon was outmoded by the time that A. S. Hill, John F. Genung, and Barrett Wendell are supposed to have based a scientized rhetoric upon it. If eighteenth-century neoclassical rhetoric could coexist with the scientific spirit and even draw upon a then-current scientific psychology, one must ask why this same psychology would give rise to a radically different rhetoric after it had been scientifically discredited.

The point is that while late-eighteenth-century science was in most aspects "modern," it was not yet "professional." The knowledge it produced was still morally tinged, rooted in the tradition of belles lettres, and thus presumed to be the common property of educated people. Within the professional culture that developed in the nineteenth century, scientific knowledge became a neutral commodity, and its practical value to the community thus made it an economic asset to those who possessed it. Once the pursuit of amateurs whose passion gave its products the moral valence of traditional philosophy and rhetoric, science as a profession became a vehicle for the social and economic advancement of the individual. As Bledstein shows, the professional ethos went hand in hand with the rise of a true middle class motivated by the drive to move up in a competitive socioeconomic hierarchy. Expertise, whether specifically scientific or not, came to be understood in the new professional sense as a privately held commodity and was for many in the new class the means of advancement. Eliot Friedman (1986) has documented the consequences of this transformation upon American public culture, observing that the division of labor into specialized activities relocated public knowledge, as Bitzer uses that term, to the separate and diverse territories of the various professional specialists, out of a realm held in common by citizens. As such, Friedman observes, when that knowledge is used to determine public policy, "decision-making on its basis is not democratic, not open to the active participation of all" (5), a situation that

Introduction

directs the community "toward rule by technique rather than rule by public debate" (8).

Whether the professionalization of science was simply the unfolding of tendencies implicit in its origins or a distinct cultural development is an open question. It is worth noting that specialized educational programs and professional societies appeared in such nonscientific fields as law, librarianship, social work, and the humanistic disciplines at about the same time as in the sciences. Athletics likewise took on the trappings of "professionalism" in the same period (Bledstein 1976, 81-86). These developments coincide very closely with the emergence of current-traditional rhetoric in the last four decades of the nineteenth century. Whatever its relationship to "science," we believe it was the professional ethos, not science or faculty psychology alone, that set the stage for current-traditional rhetoric. By defining knowledge-bearing communities as private enclaves of specialists and knowledge as an economic commodity rather than a moral virtue, this professional ethos created the need for a rhetoric of morally neutral and exclusionary discourse, and current-traditional rhetoric arose to fill this need. Its neglect of classical invention was an inheritance from the rhetoric of Blair and Campbell and thus genetically linked to faculty psychology. But its real basis was the new authority granted to professional expertise in matters of public policy.

John Witherspoon had identified four "objects or ends" of rhetoric—information, demonstration, persuasion, and entertainment—and noted that the term "persuasion" could legitimately be used in a sense that would make it the overriding end of all discourse (Miller 1990a, 290). This perspective would in our own century be expressed by the neoclassicist Richard Weaver (1963) in the adage "language is sermonic." Persuasion is central in classical and the various neoclassical rhetorics because they see language as inherently suasive and society as an arena of collective moral and political inquiry and suasion. But in the professional ethos of current-traditional rhetoric, language becomes something more like a calculus and the public forum an arena of more or less individual calculation and force. From this perspective, argument is the marshalling of evidence according to morally neutral rules of logic. With argument so perceived, public discourse becomes not a place to debate the common good but, as MacIntyre puts it, "a place where bargaining . . . is conducted" (1988,

338). In this setting, persuasion becomes a distinct, mostly optional, and often dubious function of exciting the passions.

This radically new understanding of language and the public forum expresses itself in the new prominence given by such textbook writers as A. S. Hill and Barrett Wendell to "exposition," prose meant to inform the reader in a clear, dispassionate, untendentious fashion. The expository essay, as taught by the new rhetoric, was essentially a knowledge-bearing object, an academic version of the technical report in which a professional would present his findings. Discussions of current-traditional rhetoric, from Albert Kitzhaber (1953) on, have tended to focus on exposition as its most important feature, though few have considered its relationship to the emergence of professional culture. But the current-traditional view of argument and persuasion may illustrate more forcefully the transformation of oratorical culture into professional culture, given the centrality of these genres to neoclassical rhetoric. We thus turn to George Pierce Baker, one of the earliest and most influential of the late nineteenth-century argumentation theorists. His *Principles of Argumentation*, first published in 1895, was cited well into the 1920s as an authoritative text on its subject. Like Whately's *Elements of Rhetoric* (1828), Baker distinguished sharply between argument proper, whose end is intellectual conviction, and persuasion. Unlike Whately, however, he had virtually nothing to say about the latter. While he acknowledged the importance of persuasion in moving an audience to act on the implications of an argument, most of his text is devoted to the purely logical argument to convince. Another early and influential argumentation text by Gertrude Buck (1899) made no mention at all of persuasion, treating argument as applied logic, pure and simple.

Baker's stated reason for saying so little about persuasion is that there are no general principles, comparable to the "universal laws" of logic, to govern its operation. But he also betrays the conviction that in a somewhat better world persuasion would be unnecessary. "Unfortunately," he writes, "to be convinced of the truth of an idea does not mean that he who is convinced will act promptly in accordance with that idea" (343); and later, "The expression of strong emotion . . . has especially for a cultivated audience, something a little repellent in it: it is too uncontrolled" (358; emphasis added). Baker's ideal audience would conduct themselves like the members of a profession, weighing the evidence pro and contra by the strictest of rules of rationality, with no

consideration for preferences and interests and most importantly with no passion. Other writers on argumentation would be even stronger in expressing the view that a proper argument should contain only as much emotional persuasion as necessary for the particular audience, and a proper audience should need none at all. Ideally, an argument should be pure applied logic, a structure of evidence devoid of the tendentiousness that had been inherent in classical and neoclassical rhetoric. Ironically, Baker himself abandoned the study of argumentation just a few years after writing *Principles*, moving into the field of drama, which he saw as a realm of emotional expression. He went on to found the Yale School of Drama, where his students included Eugene O'Neill.

The problem with Baker's rhetoric, as with professional culture in general, is that when knowledge is commodified as specialization and professional communities claim the authority to develop and apply that knowledge, few rules of rationality can be found that will apply across this fragmented spectrum. Rationality, as Friedson notes, becomes definable for each of those communities in terms of the "functional efficiency" of its particular project (1986, 3). MacIntyre characterizes those terms as a "politics of effectiveness" that addresses "how far rival interests can be promoted and yet reconciled and contained within a single order" (1988, 39). In other words, when not only knowledge but rationality itself are at least partly constituted by the specific and specialized interests of a professional community, the discussion of common problems that cross the boundaries of those communities—problems of public policy, for example—is transformed, as MacIntyre observes, from a process of cooperative common inquiry to an exchange of conflicting convictions based upon differing if not conflicting assumptions and justifications (5–6). What happens in practice in the public discourse of a pluralistic culture, such as the one MacIntyre characterizes, is that conflicts of public consequence may never be fully confronted. Instead, they are dismantled and their elements appropriated by the various specialists who claim authority to address them. Oratorical culture, built upon the common ground of the shared public knowledge of the relative few who had access to the public discourse, enabled them to confront their conflicts constructively. Professional culture, while providing to Americans who had never had it before access to knowledge and discourses of public consequence, is structured by boundaries of

expertise that fragment public knowledge and prevent some significant conflicts in the community from ever being addressed collectively at all.

The pluralistic public culture of professionalism, with all its benefits and handicaps, enacts in its discourse the economic and institutional consequences of the ideology of liberal individualism in which the United States began its political life as a nation. During the nineteenth century, these consequences emerged in the form of a political culture that was primarily economic, one in which public power was brokered by people who claimed the authority of professional expertise. That this professional culture can be treated as a manifestation of American liberal individualism and the economy of individual enterprise it implies is suggested in this statement by Andrew Abbott:

We have professionalism . . . because our market-based occupational structure favors employment based on personally held resources, whether of knowledge or wealth. Such employment is more secure, more autonomous, and usually more remunerative, partly because it is organized in "careers," a strategy invented in the nineteenth century to permit a coherent individual life within a shifting marketplace. . . . Professionalization thus offered continuously independent life chances. (1988, 324)

The professionalization of American public culture provided access to those chances to a far broader range of American citizens than had the oratorical culture that preceded it, though by definition it excluded many others who lacked requisite expertise. What appears to have been lost in the transformation is some of the ability of those citizens to think and act collectively beyond the boundaries of their professional subcultures.

Conclusion

We have argued that the earliest nineteenth-century American rhetoric was neoclassical because American culture at this time was in an important sense an oratorical culture. What this means is that at the beginning of the century, the orator had a central cultural role: to articulate a public moral consensus and bring it to bear on particular issues through forms of discourse — spoken or written — that were more or less classical. During the course of the nineteenth century,

Introduction

both the oratorical culture and the neoclassical rhetoric that was central to it were transformed, first by individualism and later, and more radically, by its material consequence, professionalism. Individualism challenged the old assumptions about a communal moral consensus and gave rise to a rhetoric of the charismatic or representative personality whose role was to exhibit a private moral commitment. Because that private commitment was one with which the people addressed were expected to identify, the establishing of a general moral consensus remained the primary purpose of public discourse.

With the development of professionalism, the theory and practice of rhetoric were again transformed as Americans began to treat knowledge as a morally neutral commodity. Such knowledge was considered the property of specialists whose job was to apply it to particular problems through a discourse of strictly logical argument sustained among themselves. While this distinction between the first transformation and the second is perhaps overstated, it points to persistent tendencies. The rhetoric of identification does not necessarily preclude all logical argument, though it does tend to deemphasize it. The rhetoric of professional expertise does not suppress all passion and moral commitment, though it tends to undermine their legitimacy. These rhetorics did not counterbalance each other so much as the latter grew out of the former as the cultural situation of life in the United States changed. Our immediate argument in this essay is that by the end of the nineteenth century, the dominant aspects of American culture in general and the theory and practice of its public discourse in particular had been transformed by the emergence of the practical and seemingly apolitical ideals of professionalism. The larger argument explored in this book, however, is that the concept of transformation itself — rather than the teleological concepts of decline or progress — can explain cultural change in a way that enables us to understand why it occurred and to assess the legacy of theories and practices left to us as its consequence.

Some of the essays that follow illustrate aspects of the particular transformation we have traced, while others suggest the shape of other transformations that might explain changes in nineteenth-century American culture and in the theories and practices of public discourse that sustained it. Collectively, these essays suggest that American neoclassical rhetoric wasn't simply replaced by something

different but rather was transformed by changing cultural realities that required shifts in theories and practices of public discourse in order to meet changing cultural needs. The essays in Part One by Ronald F. Reid on Edward Everett, Gregory Clark on Timothy Dwight, Russel Hirst on the conservative homiletician Austin Phelps, and P. Joy Rouse on Margaret Fuller examine aspects of this transformation in terms of a variety of neoclassical forms and forums of rhetorical theory and practice. Those in Part Two by Nan Johnson on self-instruction manuals in rhetoric and elocution, Nicole Tonkovich on rhetorical instruction in *Codey's Lady's Book*, Catherine Peadar on the rhetorical practice of Jane Addams, Frederick J. Antczak and Edith M. Siemers on the Chautauqua, and S. Michael Halloran on the picturesque examine public discourse in theory and practice as it was transformed later in the nineteenth century in terms of the individualism and ethos of expertise that we have argued here came to dominate American public culture.

Together the essays in this collection should suggest to historians directions for further study that examine connections between shifts in the theory and practice of rhetoric and the larger process of cultural change. We will reflect on those directions and on the primary purpose of such work—to inform our critique of our current theory and practice of rhetoric in particular and our public culture in general—in a brief afterword.

Part One * Classical Forms and Forums in the Nineteenth Century