

# philippine studies

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## **Philosophy of Rhetoric: The Ethics of Rhetoric**

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sound of cicadas, the thunder, the dry grass, the thoughts of an old man in a dry season waiting for rain. One figure (the tiger) goes back through Eliot to Blake.

Not only imagery but certain phrases or rhythms seem derivative. For instance the following lines are an echo of *Geron-tion*:

history is now an old man  
Raving for the lost toys in a desolate corner  
Of another childhood.

And the following lines recall both *The Waste Land* and *Prufrock*:

I have fled them all  
.  
.  
.  
In this dull sanctuary  
Of an inland lake...

There is of course good precedent in Eliot himself for this type of poetry, and we have tried to justify it in an article published earlier in these pages ("Poetry by Allusion" I, 1953, 223-235). But we suspect that Mr. Santos has not found himself. We hope he does because there is a certain sanity in his outlook which we like.

There is one thing we miss—the genuinely Filipino note that makes Filipino poetry in English as distinctive as Irish poetry in English. These poems, written abroad for the most part, are American in tone and idiom. This is of course no defect: it is merely a fact worth noting. Now that Mr. Santos is back home, within sight of Mayon Volcano, we hope that the sound of the sea and the smell of the grass and the sight of that beautiful mountain will haunt his dreams and demand utterance.

MIGUEL A. BERNAD

## PHILOSOPHY OF RHETORIC

THE ETHICS OF RHETORIC. By Richard M. Weaver. Chicago: Henry Regnery and Company. 1953 Pp. 234.

This is a book which every professor of rhetoric should read. It is not a "practical" work, not a "handbook" for teacher

or student; it is rather a philosophical analysis of certain aspects of rhetoric, an attempt at rationalization of certain modes of speech.

It begins somewhat lamely: with an analysis of Plato's *Phaedrus*. "A highly original analysis," the book-jacket calls it: unfortunately, originality is not always a guarantee of validity, and Mr. Weaver's analysis would seem to be more clever than helpful. There surely is a difference between saying that what Plato says of the lover might be *applied* to the user of language, and saying that when Plato speaks of a "lover" he really *means* the "user of language."

But from the second chapter onwards the treatise is excellent.

The difference between rhetoric and dialectic is exemplified concretely in the Scopes trial in which Clarence Darrow and his associates vainly contested the anti-evolution law of Tennessee. "The remarkable aspect of this trial was that almost from the first the defense, pleading the cause of science, was forced into the role of rhetorician; whereas the prosecution, pleading the cause of the state, clung stubbornly to a dialectical position."

There are four chapters which we might group together under an old and half-forgotten rhetorical term: *elocutio* (style). One is an analysis of "Milton's Heroic Prose"; a second is an examination into the "spaciousness of the old rhetoric," the term "spaciousness" being here used in a pejorative sense; a third is a sober but devastating judgment on "the rhetoric of social science." Best of the four is the chapter on "Some Rhetorical Aspects of Grammatical Categories," which we might illustrate by a footnote which (though not found in that chapter) exemplifies its tendency:

Some correlation appears to exist between the mentality of an era and the average length of sentence in use. The seventeenth century, the most introspective, philosophical, and "revolutionary" era of English history, wrote the longest sentence in English literature. The next era, broadly recognized as the eighteenth century, swung in the opposite direction, with a shorter and much more modelled or contrived sentence. The nineteenth century, again turned a little solemn and introspective, wrote a somewhat long and loose one. Now comes the twentieth century, with its journalism and its syncopated tempo, to write the shortest sentence of all. (p. 144)

This reviewer suggests that the philosophically-minded rhetorician might find that sentence a challenge. For if the length of sentences is in direct proportion to the degree of introspection, would it not follow that the twentieth century, with its extremely short sentences, would be the least introspective era in history? Yet is not this century introspective to the degree of neurosis?

The best portion of Mr. Weaver's book is his analysis of the *topics*. His thesis is that the mind's bent reveals itself by the type of argument which it tends to prefer as a major premise. Thus, a philosophic mind like Newman's would tend to argue from "genus," a poet from "similitude," a man of principles like Lincoln would argue from "definition," and a man of expediency like Burke would argue from "circumstance." There is danger of exaggeration here, for the type of argument that a writer or speaker uses is not always dictated by his own preferences but by the bias of his audience and the nature of the case. Nevertheless, with this caution in mind, the professor of rhetoric would do well to study Mr. Weaver's thesis, for the professor (especially the Catholic professor) of rhetoric aims at training not the glib sophist but the persuasive individual who can speak from a massive background of solidly held *principles*. Mr. Weaver's work is analytic, not hortatory; yet it has a hortatory implication which the modern professor might well listen to, if he believes in Quintilian's dictum, *Nemo eloquens nisi vir bonus*: only good men can be truly eloquent.

Nor is this book useful to the rhetorician alone. Mr. Weaver's analysis of the varying fortunes of the Whig and the Republican parties might be read with profit by the historian and the political scientist.

There are two approaches to rhetoric: the one pragmatic, the other philosophic—or, as the title of this book indicates, ethical. The first (the pragmatic) is that of the sophists; the other (the ethical) that of Aristotle. Mr. Weaver's work belongs in the latter category and Messrs. Henry Regnery and Company deserve congratulations on another excellent publication.

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