

## BOTH WITH OPEN EYES

### 1985 SCA Presidential Address

Beverly Whitaker Long

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Italo Calvino, Italy's leading contemporary novelist, was asked by a reporter for *The New York Times* what fictional character he would like to be. "Mercurio," he replied. "Among his virtues, I admire his lightness in a world of brutality, his dreaming imagination . . . and at the same time his wisdom. . . . He is a modern man, skeptical and ironic—a Don Quixote who knows well what dreams are and what reality is, and he lives both with open eyes."

I am just now getting to know Calvino's fiction, though the statement I just quoted makes me want to know it better and sooner. It speaks loudly to me and, I suspect, to many of you because it seems to distill what we wish for our students and for ourselves: to know very well—in fact, to move with ease within and between—"what dreams are and what reality is, and to live both with open eyes."

I think Calvino's response is also appealing because it explains much of the attraction of working in this interdisciplinary study we call *Speech Communication*. The dual pull, polarity, or tension of competing forces implied in Mercurio's attainment suggest something of the dynamics of our discipline.

Some of you may have leaped ahead of me at this point, putting those in the Humanities and Fine Arts under the heading of "dreamers" and those in the Social Sciences under "realists." But that division is unworkable and misleading, I believe, and unfair to the efforts of both groups. We are all dreamers and realists, and if we lean much of the time more toward one than the other, it is often as much a matter of choice and disposition and talent as it is of subject matter or methodology.

Here are three rather typical cases in point: (1) In this room there are many individuals who dream, or have dreamed, of helping citizens increase civic competence by improving their communication skills of critical listening, analysis, and debate. Implementing the dream, of course, requires the reality of strategic planning and administrative support. (2) Stage productions usually begin from a text of imaginative literature. Yet, the realities of production (scene painters, electricians, unions, box office, and so on) are so demanding that the dream of revealing a text in all of its splendor will surely fail unless actors and crew possess skill and wisdom to match their creativity. (3) In rehearsals for performance, improvisations and word play help people develop roles different from those they are currently living. Teachers and clinicians use many of the same techniques in helping handicapped children and adults who dream of communicating without—or in spite of—speech and hearing disorders.

The list could go on, but I think the point is clear. As these examples suggest, the chief reason we do not wish to identify ourselves

exclusively as realists or as dreamers is that we must be both. Initially, we separate ourselves according to focus: some of us deal principally with historical, epistemological, and critical aspects of rhetoric; others of us typically investigate probabilities, predicting the communication behavior of members in groups in interpersonal relations; others of us critically examine the effects of mass media on intercultural conflicts and their resolution, and so on. Eventually, I believe, despite this diversity, our studies intersect at that point where we ask questions about what it means to be human, about how humans communicate, whether in a public school, a university, corporation, court of law, campaign, laboratory, campfire, theatre, library, boardroom, or living room.

It seems to me that Michael McGee eloquently made a similar claim in his keynote address at the AFA-SCA Summer Conference on Argumentation. After calling for the formulation of "a theory of argumentation understood as applied political aesthetics," McGee outlines the "essential commitments underlying this theory":

We should not equate facts and truths. Facts are nothing but raw materials, blocks of stone awaiting the sculptor's chisel. You can discover facts, but truths are *made*. The test of a truth is its promotion of human need and aspiration. Argumentation is the *art of making dreams come true*, not in fantasy to delight the imagination, but in reality to make everyday life more comfortable. The products of argumentation are not speeches and essays, but human lives.

Let me turn now to that intersecting point as it relates chiefly to the part of *Speech Communication* closest to me, of literature and its performance. Since literature derives from an author's imagination, it must follow that its chief value is in the development of our dreamers. That's certainly part of the story, but not nearly all. The matter is complicated because writers with imaginations fanciful or domestic, interpret a real world. They do so, Annie Dillard claims, in texts that are simulacrum of reality. She writes:

The work of fiction is a smaller and more coherent world alongside the great world. We may inquire of the world within the world of arts all that we inquire of the great world: what, pray, is going on here? What sort of a world is this? Do social matters dominate it, or spiritual matters? Is man himself glorious or shameful? In other words, we can examine an artistic world not only formally, but also culturally, morally, and metaphysically, to gain insight about the great world—the great world that is the truest object of our most urgent inquiries and deepest hopes.

The related issue that Dillard addresses is at least as old as Plato. Okay, we say, literature may tell of something of the reality of the great world, but why not go directly to the great world itself, say to pelicans or pebbles? She answers:

. . . the art object wholly lacks certain qualities which we prize. Its components may lack simple material presence—mass and

extension—such as we find in the components of pebbles. As a total object, the art object lacks life, the capacity to grow and change and reproduce: spontaneity, mobility, warmth, senses and sensations, appetite, and other such fine things which any pelican possesses. Nevertheless, the art object may represent these things. And in the manner of its representing—in its surface and in its structure—the art object may present, embody, and enact certain additional qualities. We dearly prize these additional qualities as much as, or even more than, we prize the qualities of pebbles and pelicans. . . . We find in art objects qualities in which the great world and its parts seem often wanting: human significance, human order, reason, mind, causality, boundary, harmony, perfection, coherence, purity, purpose, and permanence.

Qualities we work for, long for in our great world, but find far, far too little of. Dillard makes a felicitous case, I feel.

If I may push the matter a bit further now into the realm of performance and ask, as before, if performing this literature, this simulacrum of reality, is of value, it must be so only to our dreamers—those who want to create Queen Mab, those who want to speak the speech? And, of course, my answer is the same as before: That's certainly part of the story, but not nearly all.

The way in which performance contributes to an expanded view of reality is extraordinarily simple; it is also complex to the point of mystery. Let's begin with the simple, with the absurdly simple. If you look at *New Yorker* cartoons, you may have seen one that appeared a few years ago during hunting season. A car is speeding down a wooded road, obviously returning from a successful day of hunting. Tied securely to the hood of the car is the hunter; in the driver's seat is a victorious and smirking deer. A professor of philosophy used this cartoon in explaining the humanities to a group of engineers. He told them that if they were amused with it, it was because they were not literal-minded people. Had they been only realists, they would have responded, "But deer can't drive." He explains:

To be able to see the point of the joke you have to be able to shift . . . from your normal perspective to a different one. The shift is not just from the perspective of a human being to that of a deer. . . . No, the shift is from the perspective of a hunter . . . to that of the hunted. . . . Most of the time we—you and I—are comfortably and securely located in the upper-middle class perspective, one in which we are either actual or potential hunters. What the cartoon does is to jolt us out of this familiar perspective and project us briefly into another.

All jolts, the philosopher insisted, are liberating.

Walter Ong, cultural historian and staunch defender of oral literacy, also writes of the liberating effect of that kind of jolt, one that can also be experienced when we become actors. "Acting a role," Ong says, "realizing in a specially intense way one's identity (in a

sense) with someone who (in another sense) one is not, remains one of the most human things a person can do."

For what reasons could Ong claim that acting a role is so intensely human? Max Reinhardt, famed director in the theatre, saw it as a matter of realizing a whole range of human feelings rather than wasting them through lack of use:

The normal man generally feels once in his life the whole blessedness of love, and once the joy of freedom. Once in his life he hates bitterly. Once with deep grief he buries a loved one, and once, finally he dies himself.

That gives all too little scope for our innate capacity to love, hate, enjoy, and suffer.

If Father Ong and Reinhardt are right, something in our lives is going to be better because we perform, because of these exercises in feelings.

To continue just a bit as to why this may be so, let's return to the deer driving the car. The professor who declared that jolts are liberating also spoke of loosening paradigms. What he meant was that we carry around a whole perspective, a complex lens through which we view the world. He says that

this perspective is so pervasive that most of us, most of the time see through the lens without noticing it. . . . We assume that the world we see through the lens of our particular paradigm is "out there" just as we happen to see it. To loosen a paradigm is precisely to become aware of the lens, to become aware of the fact that the world we are seeing is merely the world as seen from a particular perspective.

This ability to see the lens finds support in quarters other than the performing arts. In the area of Communication Theory, several individuals worked in the Seminar Series at last year's convention under Mark Redmond's direction to unravel differences among decentering, perspective taking, empathy and role taking. Each of these terms is used to differentiate self and other, whether for the purpose of identifying with others in order to predict what they may do in a communication situation, or to understand, in the interest of bonding, how another feels.

Another source that testifies, albeit somewhat perversely, to the potential power of behaving as if one were another, lurks in efforts at censorship. Phyllis Schlafly's pro-family group, Eagle Forum, provides instruction to parents concerned about their children's schooling. Among those so-called undermining activities that parents can and ought to object to are those aimed at "value clarification such as the use of moral dilemmas, and role playing or open-ended discussion of situations involving moral issues." Parents, Schlafly insists, have the right—as do their children—to hold views and attitudes that schools should not jostle, or jolt, through any means, including role-playing. Such tactics are both curious and encouraging as they attest to an unadvertised power in assuming the role of another.

The time has come for me to conclude and for us to move on to giving awards. My con-

clusion begins with a reference to a play, perhaps the most enduring of the Greek tragedies. Sophocles' *Antigone* (of Anouilh's or any number of others) continues to fascinate, challenge, and ultimately satisfy many readers, theatre goers, directors and critics. It does so, at least in part, because it deals so unflinchingly with two individuals, one a realist and one a dreamer. The tragedy lies in the fact that both Antigone and Creon are right, and their positions are absolutely irreconcilable. If he could have dreamed only a bit before it was too late. . . . If she could have looked out as a citizen of Thebes at the reality of the State. . . . We would not have had enduring tragedy. We would have had something greater and lesser, a model of how humans may try to live their lives—with both eyes open.

In his introduction to the printed program for this convention, Don Ecroyd wrote, "May you go home with a sense of pride in who you are and what you do." He was, I think, talking to all of us and to each of us. Let me join him in that wish, and let me add another: "May you go home and, like Mercutio, know very well what dreams are, and what reality is, and may you live both with open eyes."

### NICHOLS-EHNINGER AWARD PRESENTED

William B. Putman, a doctoral student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, is the first recipient of the Nichols-Ehninger Award from the Rhetorical and Communication Theory Division of the SCA. This award honors the best student paper selected competitively for presentation on R&CT-sponsored programs at the annual convention. Putman received the award for his paper, "Toward a Burkean View of Motives and Motivation," presented at the Denver convention.

The annual award carries a modest cash prize and honors the memory of two scholars who made enduring contributions to rhetorical and communication theory—Professors Marie Hochmuth Nichols of the University of Illinois and Douglas Ehninger of the University of Iowa.

In establishing the award, the R&CT division membership decided not to judge student papers separately from other submissions. Instead, all convention submissions, including papers written by students, are judged together. The top-ranked student paper selected for presentation receives the award.

Putman received B.A. and M.A. degrees from the University of Arkansas before entering the doctoral program at Illinois. His winning paper is the third he has presented at SCA meetings. His research interests concern contemporary rhetorical theory and criticism, the philosophy of rhetoric and criticism, and the work of Kenneth Burke.

### WILBUR SAMUEL HOWELL HONORED AT CONVENTION

For sixty years, Dr. Wilbur Samuel Howell, Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory, Emeritus, of Princeton University, has enriched our discipline through his teaching, his scholarship and his service. Despite his nominal retirement in 1972, he has remained active in our Association and in the preparation of still another book, *The Parliamentary Writings of Thomas Jefferson*.

Professor Howell completed his A.B. in 1924, his M.A. in 1928, and his Ph.D. in 1931, all at Cornell University. He taught at Iowa State College; Washington University, St. Louis; Harvard; Dartmouth; and spent thirty-eight years as a member of the faculty at Princeton. Additionally he has lectured widely; offered special seminars; authored numerous reviews and articles on the history of rhetorical theory and its related disciplines, logic and poetics.

His books are treasured for the depth and breadth of his scholarship: *The Rhetoric of Alcuin and Charlemagne*; *Problems and Styles of Communication*; *Fenelon's Dialogues on Eloquence*; *Logic and Rhetoric in England 1500-1700*; *Eighteenth Century British Logic and Rhetoric*; and *Poetics, Rhetoric and Logic: Studies in the Basic Disciplines of Criticism*; the latter two recognized with SCA awards. Dr. Howell's research demands close textual study of original materials in the most painstaking detail. Frederick Haberman commenting about *Logic and Rhetoric in England* in a Wisconsin seminar said with awe and pride in the quality of the scholarship demonstrated by a colleague: "Not only did he carefully read all those books, something no one else has ever done, he read many of them more than twice." That scholarship has been supported by two Guggenheim Fellowships, Huntington Library Fellowships, and a Council of the Humanities Fellowship.

Dr. Howell has served his colleagues and his discipline in many roles. He served as Clerk of the University Faculty of Princeton for a decade. He is a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Delta Sigma Rho, and Pi Kappa Phi. He has been an active member of the Modern Language Association of America, the Renaissance Society of America, as well as our Association. He edited the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 1954-1956. He even served as a volunteer in the Princeton Borough Police Force during World War II.

In exemplifying the concept of service to the academy, the discipline, and the polis, he is an exemplar for all. His accomplishments, his wit, his warmth and charm, his appreciation of life and friends, exemplify what I take to be the Aristotelian vision of the good life. The Association honors him as we have been honored by his participation in our work in presenting the 1985 Distinguished Service Award to friend and colleague, Wilbur Samuel Howell.