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Clear Thinking and Writing: The Logic and Rhetoric of Exposition

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The third Dramabook, *Shakespeare and the Elizabethans*, is a reprint of an English translation of Henri Fluchère's work on Shakespeare first published in French shortly after the second world war. It is not only a surprisingly good work on Shakespeare for a Frenchman, but a fine book by any standards. French dramatic criticism, unlike the German, had its own rigid traditions of classical restraint in the theatre, and few French critics could ever see Shakespeare as anything more than a "strange, abnormal and disorderly genius." M. Fluchère's work does much to redress the balance and deserves the not easily given praise of Dr. Leavis: "As a compendium of relevant knowledge and thought, and a provocative discussion, the book is of the greatest use to university students. I know of no comparable book to recommend." These volumes are the beginning of a series. We may hope for even better things to come.

JAMES F. DONELAN

CLEAR THINKING AND WRITING

THE LOGIC AND RHETORIC OF EXPOSITION. By Harold C. Martin. New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1957, 1958. x, 204p.

If the axiom, the pen is mightier than the sword, is true, it is also true that the wielding of the pen is a difficult and intricate art. To master it effectively demands the assistance of someone who is experienced in the technique and who has spent time and effort in teaching others how to produce clear and forceful prose. Such assistance is given by Harold C. Martin in his excellent volume, *The Logic and Rhetoric of Exposition*.

The book itself is a model of what it is trying to teach. It is intelligently conceived and executed in an orderly fashion. Beginning with the premise that clear thinking must precede clear writing, the first part of the book treats, in a far from superficial way, the fundamental problems of logic and the various proofs for assertions. In this treatment of the laws of right reason, Professor Martin feels obliged to make an excursion into the realm of philosophy. He does not attempt to settle the epistemological question, but he is aware of it and its implications in the art of communication. The all-important question of whether a definition is *real* or *nominal* is answered in the following way:

For most human purposes it is necessary to believe either that some definitions are real or that, in order to act at all, we must assume them to be so. Justice Holmes spoke of a certain undemonstrable postulate of law as "can't helps," and real definitions seem to make somewhat the same claim in our habits of thinking and writing (p. 10).

Professor Martin again has recourse to belief when classifying certain assertions which deal with "some general idea of the universe"

and therefore are beyond our personal experience. Such statements as "man is inherently noble" and "God is good", as well as statements of obligations must be put, according to the author, into a category of "statements of belief". Once we have assumed and believe certain definitions and assertions are real, logic takes on an important role in knowledge. For a human being it is "the soundest way we know for him to become the best kind of thinker he can be" (p. 57). Even the conclusions of intuitions must be subjected to logical examination since only then is "the intuition likely to be of any value to a writer or reader as a trustworthy ground for action or for further thought" (p. 57).

This reliance on belief rather than knowledge itself as a foundation for knowledge would seem to undermine the strong position of Professor Martin on the role of logic and truth in communication. If the basis of assertions is ultimately an irrational belief or assumption, is one ever preserved from becoming a relativist? It would seem that to build the structure of our knowledge on belief is to be condemned never to pass out of belief. If we have knowledge at all, we must be in contact with reality, and the validity and criterion of knowledge must be reality itself and not belief. In other words, I know God is good and that man is inherently noble, not because of some belief or assumption, but because they are that way in reality.

The second part of the book deals with the clothing of thought in clear English prose. In the course of this part of the book, all the points of style are discussed briefly and in a lively manner. For instance, we are warned against the use of too many transitional words and phrases because "a page spattered with *however's* and *for's* and *then's* is as unsightly as a garment held together with safety pins" (p. 146). Professor Martin develops this section by beginning with the analysis of the elements that compose a simple sentence and ends by giving pointers on the essay and diction in writing. There follows an appendix which includes a glossary of words and expressions which are frequently confused and misused. The appendix also includes a chapter called "mechanics" which gives rules for punctuation and spelling. In the final two chapters the author treats of how to handle sources without plagiarism and gives examples of three essays which are criticized by the principles previously laid down in the book.

The general impression which is given by this volume is that the author has a great deal of competence, balance and depth. Because of Professor Martin's ability, it is a pity that he limited himself to such a short volume and did not allow himself more space and freedom to discuss at more length many of the points that he could only touch upon briefly. However, it is certain that the author has succeeded in his purpose which was to write a book "as a helpful way of bringing average and better-than-average students to a recognition of their responsibilities as speculative and critical writers" (p. v.).

WILLIAM J. MALLEY