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## IMAGINATION IN ORATORY<sup>1</sup>

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IN ALL art the psychic activity of man manifests itself through some outward, physical form or medium to the senses of those who receive its message. With the pianist the medium of his artistic expression is quite distinct and apart from himself. The orator finds the medium, or agent, of his expression (namely his own body) most intimately related to his inner self. This closeness of the agent of expression to the source of expression ought to bring about a certain sensitiveness and immediacy of expression in oration which other arts could scarcely expect. As the soul itself resides in the body, the most evanescent activities of the soul may well be reflected in the fleeting glance, the shadow of a smile or frown, the lifting of an eyelid or a finger—activities which we might well expect to fade into thin air long before they could reach the violin or the piano or the canvas. This quick response is really the spontaneity of the artist. How much more spontaneity we ought to expect in an orator or actor than in a violinist or a painter! The painter, the violinist, the *littérateur*, the pianist, may well study spontaneity first in recitation or in acting.

The orator, however, has great lack of spontaneity. He seldom has breadth of vision in his delivery, however much he may have in his preparation. He does not often display an ability to shift for a moment his point of view. His emotion is artificially worked up or thrust upon us, and his appeal is mechanical and ineffective.

An analysis of the psychic elements in expression will show that the orator needs thorough training in the use of his imagination in order to overcome these faults. This study of imagination should be pursued, not in orations, but in literature distinctly understood to be literature of imagination.

<sup>1</sup>The steps mentioned in this article are those taught by Dr. S. S. Curry. For a textbook treatment, see Dr. Curry's *Lessons in Vocal Expression and Imagination and Dramatic Instinct*.

In the first place, an oration deals with ideas. It tries to arrange those ideas in such sequence as to reveal a deeper truth which underlies them. The endeavor to reveal that underlying truth frequently blinds us to the nature of the ideas which are on the surface. Each idea must be an image. What fascinates an audience is the series of images you give it, one at a time, at exactly the right speed. The explanation is that just as the mind has grasped one idea or image and is ready to grasp another the speaker presents his next image and the mind prefers to take that image to creating one of its own—nay, is really better prepared to take that image than any other in the world at just that moment.

One day at Andover Theological Seminary a student denied the assertion about the fascinating power of a simple sequence of ideas. Within fifteen minutes the opportunity came to prove it to him and the rest of the class in a most convincing manner. He had turned around to speak to the man behind him when I began such a simple sequence of ideas. I tried to have no feeling in the matter or other condition except the pictures which I was mentioning—like this: “An apple fell from the tree to the ground. A small boy picked it up and put it in a basket, which he emptied into a barrel. The barrel was later lifted to a wagon and the farmer took it to town, where it was unloaded on a station platform and then put on a train. The apples traveled to the city, were carted to a provision store two miles away from the station. The barrel was opened and the apples taken out and spread on a counter. Along came a small boy and purchased the apple first mentioned and ate it on his way home.” This little story I made up as I went along, but soon a curious thing happened. The youth stopped a moment in his conversation with his classmate behind him to search for his next idea. Just then the apple on its little journey was presented to his consciousness and for the moment accepted. After that instant he was fascinated by that chain of ideas and little by little turned around toward the front. When he was well around I stopped, and—he understood. So will it be with any audience if the images are presented in the right order and just fast enough.

Out of the consideration of this story come several truths: (1) The mind must be trained to see images exactly, strongly, and spontaneously. This faculty of the psychic life is perfectly natural and almost always present in children. A more general statement is perfectly true: the power to see images, hear sounds, feel substances, taste foods, and smell odors—all in the world of the imagination—is natural and existent in children. Our educational life in the past has tended to destroy these powers of the imagination until the average graduate from college has no imagination. He thinks that it is absurd to see things—that it is quite sufficient to reason about them. Professor Royce once confessed his inability to visualize the journey from Cambridge to Boston. A small boy picked up a big cinder from the path and said it was a lobster and he was going to eat it for supper. The next day I asked him if he enjoyed the lobster. He looked puzzled for a moment, and then he smiled triumphantly. I had entered into his imaginative world.

These senses in the psychic world may be developed slowly but surely in those who have pretty nearly lost them. Gaze on nature, landscapes, trees, sunsets, lakes, sky, and try to recall the forms and colors. There will be a growing delight in the exercise. Learn lyrics and recite them with all the vision you can muster. The poems will mean more and more to you as the years go on. You will see and feel a larger world of more real meaning to a human being and at the same time your images in your recitations and in your speeches will become truly impressive.

The hard part of this matter is yet to come. When you have the power to imagine spontaneously all the concrete things of your speech or literature you must consider the abstract things. There must be something very definite in your psychic world to stand for those abstract things—so definite as not to get confused with other things. Every idea, as we ordinarily use the term, must have its corresponding image or imaginative value of perfect distinctness. Sometimes you will have curious combinations to stand for them, and those combinations may change in softness or color or shape or motion. The world of the imagination is very wonderful and frequently the moment unaccountable. You must not hesitate. The reasons or causes will come to you later.

(2) Each idea must be the natural, even spontaneous, leap of the mind from the preceding idea or image. This chain of ideas must be unbroken by the obtrusion of any image utterly unconnected with the previous series of images. An illustration of such intrusion would be a parenthetical phrase on a foreign matter, the final dropping of a bit of plaster which had long been dangling from the ceiling, a sudden flash of lightning, or other disturbance from without. In most such instances, especially when they are unavoidable, a speaker with powers of imagination will not attempt to hold the attention of his audience over against the larger appeal. He will wait, to allow the minds of his hearers to be satisfied in the new direction, when they will gladly return to the consideration of his series of ideas.

A more serious difficulty is where the orator allows his own center of attention to leap in the wrong direction and then finds it impossible to get back. I like to illustrate this whole subject by a railroad train. The images on which the attention centers are the stations at which the train stops. The leap of the mind to the next image is the plunge of the train forward to the next station. The track is the line of logic that binds the images together.

There is after all not so much need to speak of this aspect of our subject as of other aspects, because the one element in an oration most consciously in the average orator's mind is that line of logic, the chain of ideas, that carries the hearer to the inevitable conclusion. But there is this danger, to use my figure of speech, that the orator pay more attention to the railroad than to the stations which the railroad was built to connect. The railroad is subordinate to the stations; the line of logic underlies the ideas. The problem is to see the images in right relations. The very vision carries with it as a subordinate attribute the true relations of objects. The orator must be more or less conscious of many things—each step as he takes it, all the steps he has taken, the direction in which he moves, the ultimate goal. While each thing takes its proper place in the field of his attention, the center of his attention is always on the idea or image which he is at the moment presenting.

This field of attention I have just mentioned is very interesting in itself and very important in the orator's work. It is really the



world of the imagination. When we ask a friend or an audience to pay attention, we generally refer only to the center of attention, not to the whole field of attention. What happens to the rest of the field of attention? That question opens up the whole world of art which grows out of our human imaginations.

(3) The world of imagination that surrounds the apple story gives the story its real meaning and its appeal to us. At first sight we say there is no connection between the story and its setting—that is, no connection of serious import. From a logical point of view there is little value in Situation, but from the imaginative point of view Situation is everything. The enjoyment of life grows out of the imagination.

If we revert to the figure of the railroad, the matter becomes clearer. The logical passenger cares only to get to the end of his journey, studies his time-table between stations, gets out of the train to make sure at just what station the train has stopped, and heaves a sigh of relief when he reaches the end. The imaginative passenger studies the country through which he passes, enjoys the prospect as he looks about the station when the train stops, and learns and appreciates much that had nothing logically to do with his getting to his destination. He will even arrive at the proper destination with more certainty than the logical passenger, for when he alights at a station his observant eye notes the train on the other track destined for a different direction from his own train and he is on his guard against mistakes. On occasion he may even find that the other train may prove to him the better train and so transfer his baggage to that train. He has an open mind.

The idea is the spot where the orator stands. His logic is the road he travels. His imagination is the country he beholds. All three are vitally connected. All three are present in his mind, his consciousness, at the same moment. The apparent contradiction in paying attention to individual ideas, to sequence of ideas, to environment—all at the same time—disappears in the discovery that the three things occupy different parts of the field of attention.

Beyond the line of the chain of ideas is the realm of imagination, stretching away infinitely to the edge of consciousness and out into the dim awareness of activity and still beyond into utter uncon-

sciousness. The larger the field of such psychic activity which can be brought one way or another into sympathetic responsiveness to the image at the center, the greater the artistic soul. The great problem of the artist, in whatever form of art, is to express in some way those unfathomable depths beneath the single individual idea he is for the moment expressing. He feels that just as the head is but a small part of the body, so the purely intellectual is but a small part of the meaning of life, and he seeks to develop sensitiveness in the depths of his psychic self that will react quickly and truly in the presence of concrete images.

(4) The story of the apple excites interest, first, because the mind centers its attention on it for a while; secondly, because the whole field of attention around the apple grows into a number of possible relations; and thirdly, because the hearer, from the depths of experience, responds to those possible relations with a feeling of delight in memory and in hope. All emotion, to be truthful, must be spontaneous, must react to the presence of an imaginative world. Emotion that has been bottled up for even an hour is not true emotion. Every audience will almost instantly detect counterfeit emotion.

The orator has a tendency disproportionately to emphasize, first, the logical sequence of his ideas, and, secondly, what he calls emotional appeal. He fails to see that the true realization of the whole field of his imaginative attention will give him exactly the true logical emphasis on the one hand, and on the other hand will call forth from him exactly the true emotion for his appeal to his audience. The key to the whole situation lies in the imagination.

(5) The springs of human conduct, the motives, the throb of life itself, lie deeper in the unconscious than ordinary emotion. Under the expansive spell of imagination the orator may so open up the depths of his own responsive nature that he induces the same frankness and openness in his audience. To touch an individual so deeply, though never so lightly, is to alter inevitably the individual's future conduct. The orator cannot avoid the revelation of himself. If he is a shallow artist, we see quickly his shallowness. If his depths are full of dead men's bones, we loathe him. If the springs of his life are sweet and clear, he captures us

without knowing how. Such revelations are utterly unconscious at the moment—except as he finds himself stirred to unusual depths as he speaks. His whole nature seems enlarged and intensified in sensitiveness and activity. This condition is more likely to come to his knowledge afterward than at the time. What has happened has been this: the limits of his consciousness have been pushed back under the intense glow of the occasion, and the sub-conscious has come out from the shadow into the bright light.

(6) The orator must study his hearer as he studies himself and as he develops himself in his art. In one way he can study both himself and his audience at the same time. But in any system of discussion the audience will come after the orator. The reason is not far to seek; it is a problem of the imagination. As the orator makes his imaginative field larger, he makes it not only deeper—to include even motives—but broader, to include all his own body and the room in which his audience is situated. His mind and his imagination become part of the greater mind and imagination. He becomes sensitive to the drift of their feelings and their deeper responses to imagination. He finds himself the mouthpiece, not so much of his own thoughts, as of theirs. At such times his knowledge of his own imagination and of his own technique will be of immense use to him. He will find himself swaying them at will, being swayed by them in spite of his will. All the problems of the individual will come up again in the crowd. There is then revealed the deepest thing I shall mention in this paper—Purpose.

(7) Why does the orator try to persuade his audience? Whither would he carry them and why? After he has fathomed and purified his own life in its sources, after he has fathomed the hearts of his audience, what is their destiny together? Charles I was a good father, but he was a bad king. When the orator discovers that the crowd is his to mold as he will, how will he mold them?

This is the third point which the orator is likely to emphasize. The first is his logic, the second is his emotion, and the third is his earnestness of purpose. It has been necessary to discuss all these



seven steps, which every artist takes for the development of his soul and his art, in order to show what great needs confront the student of oratory. All seven steps should be present in all works of art, but every art lays special emphasis on some one step or on some peculiar combination of steps. Much of literature exemplifies most obviously the third step, which I have called Imagination. Oratory naturally endeavors to convince and to persuade men, and its emphasis is more on the second step, the logic, and after that on the fourth step, the feeling, and on the seventh step, the purpose or general end, of the speaker. But to put emphasis on these three phases does not mean that the other four phases should be omitted, and yet just such omission occurs.

There is a real, vital connection between these seven phases of psychic development. If the second is presented without the first, we feel a lack of justification in that presentation. To give us feeling without giving us the imaginative world which causes that feeling is to make us think at once that the feeling is unjustifiable, without basis, and hence artificial and forced. To endeavor to accomplish a certain purpose or end with an audience without a very sensitive realization every instant of just what that audience thinks and feels, and just whither it is tending, is not only to work in the dark, but generally to work in vain.

Some orations may have imaginative work of too little logical sequence. But in this article we are considering general methods of teaching oratory in the colleges of the land, where the student is set the task of constructing an oration and delivering it, without any previous work in imagination (at any rate in delivery), and his mind is so absorbed in disentangling the arguments that he fails to perceive any imagination, and his product only lives and influences his hearers when he pumps into it an extraordinary amount of noisy vitality and personal demonstrativeness.

To recapitulate, the orator tends: (1) to omit the objectification of his ideas, (2) to forget the environment of his whole course of reasoning, (3) to neglect the study of motives and of the true approach to them in himself and others, (4) to content himself with the expression of his own mind and feeling without reckoning the temper and attitude of his audience.

The remedy for all four of these bad tendencies is found in a thorough development of the imagination, beginning with the formation of concrete images projected without a man's own mind as if in real life on the floor before him. The orator has little use for an imaginative world three inches in diameter. His world must be twenty feet in diameter and must include every atom of his own body and all the people whom he wishes to address. He must see clearly every idea he expresses—and he must see it before he expresses it—and he must express it because he sees it and is looking at it. He must look at it until he wants to express it—and he must not express it until he wants to. If he will look at it long enough it will take possession of him soul and body and will express itself in its own unique way. He must struggle to be intensely alert and alive to impressions of the imaginative world on his whole soul and body, without any predetermination as to the direction of response of his organism to those impressions. The orator must not expect to utter a tenth of what he sees and realizes. Not the words he pronounces so much as the meaning back of those words persuades us of his truthful reasoning.

To develop the imagination the literature of the imagination had best be studied and then the resulting power can be readily brought to bear on the problems of orations. Use the greatest specimens of the world's literature in all forms where imagination is clearly and strongly present—Homer, Dante, Milton, Shakespeare, Tennyson, and Browning.

The orator who wants to develop his imagination should study these supreme artists, because their arrangement of ideas, their choice of words, their vision, their human experience, their realization of human motives and destiny—all would subtly engrave on the mind permanent conceptions invaluable for future success. With these boundless treasures in his soul, the student could well study the great orations. He would be amazed to find so much magnificent imagination there subtly permeating and influencing the reader or hearer.

The practical development of the imagination is a different problem for every individual. One of the best ways of making a student get a working conception is to make him move continually—

just to get a sense of his own body as an organism for the expression of his imagination. For each idea he should do some act. He should not be told what to do—that would certainly be wrong. He must grope for the right action. It is essential that he should have some action, or his imaginative world will shrivel up into his own cranium. Little lyrics are the best bits of literature to begin with. They seem very remote from a great oration and they are remote. For that reason the orator will not endeavor to “orate” in them, but will just live in the beautiful pictures, and feel the accompanying emotion. After a while he will realize that lyrics are not so remote from great orations as he thought.

Some students need dramatic work—acting on a stage with others in a play. One who is very stiff will frequently be helped by working with others, but this is not always so. No good physician will risk a prescription before he sees his patient, and a good teacher is like him. Seldom does a patient know how to diagnose himself, so the prescriber must see him. Suffice it to say that the great oration rises above the plane of the lyric and the dramatic and the narrative and the descriptive and the explanatory and the argumentative into a higher plane, which embodies and reflects them all, intertwining them with varying proportions, but always with a clear purpose and a clear vision and a boundless reach of imagination.