In the six studies which make up most of the present volume, I have tried to do four things: (1) to recover the crucial steps in the attempt to reconstitute rhetoric as a discipline for France and for the French language in the seventeenth century (Chapters I-II); (2) to analyze the opposition to that attempt, as it appears in the Logique of Port-Royal (Chapters III-IV); (3) to show how Pascal, starting from principles like those of the Port-Royalists, invented an art of persuasion which is reflected in the Lettres provinciales especially, but also in the Pensées (Chapter V); and (4) to compare and contrast the ways in which one theme or factor in rhetorical theory—the audience—becomes specified in the minds of Corneille, Racine and Molière as they write and defend their dramatic works (Chapter VI). In a final chapter I have summarized my findings and have pointed out some of their literary implications in the seventeenth century.

In connection with the first of these aims, I have been obliged to choose from a multitude of relevant documents found in the Bibliothèque Nationale and elsewhere. The small number studied here have as a common feature a concern for rhetoric as a technical discipline that can be set down in a treatise; they are not occasional pieces that exemplify or use some particular aspect or device of rhetoric. My first two chapters contain, therefore, an account of the chief phases—translation, adaptation and reformulation—through which the ancient scientia bene dicendi passed in the period extending
roughly from 1635 to 1685. It is here, perhaps, that the reason for the general title of this book is clearest, for at every turn in the theoretical study of rhetoric one encounters the three notions of audience, words, and art (in its personified form, speaker or writer), so interrelated that changes or effects in the first are traceable to causes in the other two, that is, in materials and techniques.

In my next main section, comprising Chapters III and IV, I have brought together and discussed evidence showing that Arnauld and Nicole intended to replace rhetoric by logic. Their project, based on Cartesianism, calls for innovation and for departure from tradition rather than for guidance from Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, such as that sought by my first group of thinkers. As an intellectual center hostile to rhetoric, Port-Royal is thus set against the Academy, which was certainly the main base of those who wished to think and write according to lines laid down by ancient teachers of eloquence.

In treating seventeenth-century theorists and their Greek or Latin predecessors and in treating the conflict between the Port-Royalists and the upholders of the traditional rhetoric, my effort has been to go beyond confrontations on matters of detail. I have attempted to uncover principles and to give some sense of their consequences within the frameworks established by logic and rhetoric as disciplines. Such a treatment makes it possible for one to see through these seventeenth-century discussions to certain permanent possibilities of method that have not been, and indeed, cannot be, exhausted: for example, Rapin realized some of those possibilities in his particular way, as Quintilian had done in his fashion; and as later thinkers have shown, intellectual commitment and inventiveness are all that is needed for further elaborations. I have referred briefly to this point in Chapter IV; as a matter of fact, the somewhat paradoxical idea of
rhetoric as a permanent possibility having various historical realizations underlies all that I have done here. (The same thing is true, of course, of logic.)

The relationship of disciplines or theories to literature is a delicate matter. Theories do not lead by some deductive process to works in their particularity, but they may explain the generic or common aspects of works, and beyond that, they define the field in or against which the author exercises his freedom of choice as to the end and means of his activity. I have studied this relationship in some detail in my two chapters on Pascal and on the major dramatists. To take the outstanding instance, the Provinciales, in certain of their fundamental characteristics, are what they are because of Pascal's geometrically inspired art of persuasion; he shows us what an intellectual position much like that of the authors of the Port-Royal logic will give when it is applied in a literary context. Similarly, one finds in the critical writings (essays, prefates, epistles, and so on) of Corneille, Racine, and Molière many reminders of the rhetorical slant generally assumed by literary creation in the seventeenth century. I have studied one of these—the preoccupation with the audience and its tastes and its reactions—a propos of each of the dramatists and have found that each has his own manner of coping with his audience and, in his mind's eye, his own way of defining it. These two chapters (V and VI) present, therefore, two specifications in and around literature of principles drawn from seventeenth-century logic and rhetoric.

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