Foreword

Stated simply, the purpose of this series is to study rhetoric in all the varied forms it has taken in human civilizations by situating it in the social and political contexts to which it is inextricably bound. *Rhetoric and Society* rests on the assumption that rhetoric is both an important intellectual discipline and a necessary cultural practice and that it is profoundly implicated in a large array of other disciplines and practices, from politics to literature to religion. Interdisciplinary by definition and unrestricted in range either historically or geographically, the series will investigate a wide variety of questions—among them, how rhetoric constitutes a response to historical developments in a given society, how it crystallizes cultural tensions and conflicts and defines key concepts, and how it affects and shapes the social order in its turn. *Rhetoric and Society* will include books that approach rhetoric as a form of signification, as a discipline that makes meaning out of other cultural practices, and as a central and defining intellectual and social activity deeply rooted in its milieu. In essence, all the books in the series will seek to demonstrate just how important rhetoric really is to human beings in society.

Ranging widely through rhetoric and literature, educational writing and theological debate, Kenneth Graham's *The Performance of Conviction: Plainness and Rhetoric in the Early En-*

glish Renaissance revises significantly our notion of what the plain style meant for the English Renaissance. It does so by analyzing the concept of plainness as a style of knowing and being as well as a style of writing. Antirhetorical insofar as it refused the tentativeness and need for consensus of rhetoric, plainness constituted a response to the institutional and epistemological crisis of the Renaissance. Countering the skepticism brought about by humanism and the Reformation, it provided a means to express a deep, personal conviction of truth while making personal identity immune to doubt. However, although plainness was antirhetorical, opposed to the dialogue and debate central to humanist rhetoric, it was also deeply rhetorical as well, for the conviction it bespoke had to be acted out in the public realm, had to persuade others of its validity. The performance of conviction could thus undermine as well as establish the authority of conviction, a paradox Graham goes on to explore in a fresh series of readings of important, primarily literary texts from Wyatt to Shakespeare. As he shows how rhetorical practices are related to philosophical, theological, and political positions, Graham reveals in these chapters how the interplay of plain conviction with rhetorical performance subtly shapes the authority of a variety of claims to truth. A kind of end point is reached in the works of the satirists and writers of revenge tragedies, as well as in *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens*, works that reveal how the angry truth they offer as their version of antirhetorical plainness can find no adequate communal response and ultimately turns into an amoral performance merely designed to effect the performer's own self-realization. The book concludes with a valuable discussion of *King Lear*, showing how the play resists its own skepticism about the notion of a plainness identified with anger and stoic withdrawal by endorsing instead a new concept of plainness as the performance of love.

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