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. The series *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 investigates 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. The series includes 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, the books in the series seek to demonstrate just how important rhetoric really is to human beings in society.

By investigating the ambivalent response of the middling classes in Enlightenment Britain to classical eloquence, Adam Potkay's *Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume* offers an incisive

analysis of one of the central tensions, perhaps *the* central tension, of the age. Potkay demonstrates how, on the one hand, those classes looked back nostalgically to the oratorical culture of Demosthenes and Cicero, admiring their eloquence because of its implication in the public domain, its direct association with republicanism, and its "masculine" force, a force thought to be the product of its characteristic figures of speech. On the other hand, the middling classes of Enlightenment Britain simultaneously distrusted classical eloquence: because it was associated with the lower orders and with the primitive and the vulgar, on whom figures of speech were supposed to be able to make particularly vivid impressions; because it was opposed to their standards of politeness and good manners, standards they identified as "feminine" in opposition to "masculine" political activity; and because it violated their behavioral norms of reserve and ironic detachment. After presenting this thesis in detail in the first two chapters, which focus on Hume as an exemplary or representative figure for the period, Potkay goes on in his third chapter to show how the tensions and contradictions he has mapped out inform some of the most important works of mid-eighteenth-century English literature, specifically Pope's *Dunciad*, Gray's *Elegy*, and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey*. Chapter 4 then turns to the question of religion and again focuses on Hume. Hume criticized religion as a form of rhetoric insofar as it used figures such as personification, apostrophe, and allegory to attribute powers—gods—to various aspects of the natural world, but he also sought to replace the community once produced by religion with a community of people brought together by their passions in a modern, internalized version of the classical polis once created by eloquence. Finally, in the last chapter of his wide-ranging and provocative study, Potkay examines Macpherson's Ossianic forgeries and shows how, in the imaginary realm of primitive Celtic society, those poems attempt to integrate the opposing tendencies of the Enlightenment. They do so through their heroes, who combine the force of classical eloquence with good manners and a refined sensibility, and who, though engaging in epic battles, simultane-

ously manifest the haunted consciousness characteristic of the modern world, a consciousness that may dismiss the superstitions of the ancients but still sees "ghosts," if only in the form of psychic projections.

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