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Meet Your Footnote: Hoyt Hopewell Hudson--An Ignored Giant

by *[Jim A. Kuypers](#)*

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Hoyt Hopewell Hudson was born 6 July 1893 at Norfolk, Nebraska. His father, Rev. Fletcher Edward Hudson, was an itinerant minister, and Hudson's early life was marked by wide roaming through the West and Midwest. Eventually the Hudson family settled in Huron, South Dakota, and Hudson was graduated from Huron College with his A.B. in 1911. At Huron he majored in Classics; he also met Everett Lee Hunt, establishing a relationship that would eventually bring Hudson to Cornell. He received his A.M. in 1913 from the University of Denver. After graduation, he taught at various High Schools from 1913 through 1920 as a teacher of English and Public Speaking (these included Coeur d'Alene, Idaho; Duluth, Minnesota; and Cleveland, Ohio); this period was punctuated also with study at the University of Chicago from 1916-1917. Hudson impressed Hunt during his stay at Huron, and in 1920, at Hunt's urging, Hudson began studying at Cornell for his doctorate. At Cornell he was also an Instructor of Public Speaking; he was graduated with the Ph.D. in September, 1923.

Hudson worked with disciplinary superstars while at Cornell: Everett Lee Hunt, Alexander Drummond, Lane Cooper, Harry Caplan, and Herbert Wichelns. Like many in the embryonic speech discipline, Hudson took courses in both Speech and English. In 1920-1921 he took Philosophy 5: History of Philosophy, with James E. Chreighton; Public Speaking 20: Seminary, with Alexander Drummond and Everett Lee Hunt (given throughout the year); English 44: Shakespeare, with Joseph Q. Adams; English 41: The English Drama to 1642, with Joseph Q. Adams. From 1921-1922 Hudson took Public Speaking 20: Seminary with Alexander Drummond ("for the study of special subjects in the history, literature, psychology and pedagogy of public speech"); English 72: Principles of Literary Criticism, with Lane Cooper ("a study of the chief theories of poetry, and chief kinds of literature, with illustrations drawn from writers both ancient and modern"). From 1922-1923

Hudson took Philosophy 16: Reading of Philosophical German, with William A. Hammond; English 53: Old English, with Benton S. Monroe.

From 1923 to 1925 Hudson taught at Swarthmore as an Assistant Professor of English and Public Speaking, and from 1925 to 1927 he taught at the University of Pittsburgh as a Professor of English. In 1928 Princeton University lured him away from Pitt with rank as an Associate Professor of English; he was promoted to Professor of Public Speaking in 1931. In 1933 he became the editor of the Quarterly Journal of Speech. Also in 1933 he was named Chairman of the English Department and Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory.

Let me stress what an eye-popping feat this was for someone who considered himself a teacher of Speech, for then, as now, there existed blatant bigotry toward the speech profession by some in the Ivy League. I feel the following excerpt from the announcement in the Princeton Alumni Weekly of his appointment as English Department Chairman explains this well:

PUBLIC speaking teachers are divided into two armed camps. The classicists find their beginnings (and also their endings, if detractors are believed) in Cicero and Demosthenes; the scientists babble of Jung and Freud, draw diagrams of the larynx, and (again believing the opposite school) have no knowledge of grammar or literature. But esteem between the two camps is cordial compared with the attitude of many pedagogues toward the whole field of public speaking, the country cousin of English literature. This is set down to emphasize the abilities of Hoyt H. Hudson, professor of public speaking, and new English Department chairman. Under any circumstances the chairman must have unusual qualities, but to gain appointment under the handicap of being known as a public speaking teacher requires character and scholarship of superlative excellence.

In 1938 he was presented with an honorary Doctor of Letters from Huron College; during this same year he was appointed editor for the Popular Educator, a weekly serial composed of 53 issues. Each issue contained articles dealing with almost every cultural and practical field: Accounting, Anthropology, Penmanship, Philosophy, and English. Throughout his career Hudson taught summer courses at Cornell, University of California at Los Angeles, Stanford, Colorado, Northwestern University, and Harvard. In addition to many intellectual pursuits, he also participated in the everyday life of his local community. For example, he was a trustee of the Princeton Country Day School and was the first President of the Princeton Committee on Russian War Relief. He was also a member of Phi Beta Kappa, the Modern Language Association, and the National Association of Teachers of Speech, the Book Fellows Club of Chicago, and the Princeton Club of

Philadelphia. Hudson was also the managing editor for the Step Ladder and a trustee and member of the committee on publication of the Princeton University Press. He stayed at Princeton as chairman of the English Department and Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory until 1942 when he left Princeton for Stanford University.

So much for Hudson's personal and professional biography. What makes him worthy of inclusion here? How can I so easily write that he is an ignored giant? We rightly proclaim the accomplishments of Winans (who, by the way, taught longer at Dartmouth than he did at Cornell) and Wichelns (who also taught at Dartmouth). However, Hudson, whose collective works leaves both of those scholars in the dust, is virtually ignored.

Past time to remedy this. Two of his earliest essays, the "Field of Rhetoric" and "Rhetoric and Poetry" deserve landmark status. Two others, "De Quincey on Rhetoric and Public Speaking" and the "Tradition of Our Subject" might deserve this status as well.

Hudson was the first to begin the project of discussing modern rhetorical theory for our discipline, and also the first to advance seriously a disciplinary definition of rhetoric. Hudson, along with Everett Lee Hunt, argued extensively for the primacy of humanistic methods in the sprouting Speech profession. This, of course, came at a time (early 1920s) when the profession was developing along two interanimated yet potentially antagonistic lines of thought: humane and scientific.

The more humane view during this early period has traditionally and narrowly been called the Cornell School of Rhetoric. Whether of Cornell or not, those exemplifying this view have been labeled Cornellians, and are credited with developing a historical-critical approach to the study of Speech. This approach, although not limited exclusively to classical rhetorical theory, did rely a great deal upon the rhetorical texts of ancient Greece and Rome. Following the publication of Ed Black's little red book, many practitioners of this approach came to be unhappily called "neo-Aristotelians." In direct contrast to this approach, scientifically oriented researchers focused upon the orality of Speech. Departments whose scholars stressed the scientific approach desired to make the study of Speech specialized and in keeping with the scientific standards of the day. These scholars often focused research and teaching on discovering and understanding the techniques of oral language usage. They saw Speech as a rather distinct field of study, one in which any course, in any department, dealing with human communication would belong to Speech.

Hudson's seminal essays planted plentiful ideational seeds; germinated by others (Wichelns in particular), these ideas would later be expanded upon and grouped

together under the heading of the Cornell School of Rhetoric. Speech was a humane study for Hudson, not scientific. He made the argument for the centrality and importance of rhetoric at the heart of a liberal arts education--rhetoric was not to devolve into a specialized type of training. As Hudson's essays demonstrate, rhetoric, not techniques for studying oral language, was at the heart of the new profession. Although Hudson is all but ignored today, his work is crucial for understanding the development of rhetorical studies: it removed rhetoric from the realm of composition studies and literary criticism, forcefully argued for understanding rhetoric as an art, and made the case for rhetoric as an independent disciplinary study.

I find myself dumbstruck when I compare the attention Hudson heretofore received with his actual contributions to our discipline and our understanding of rhetoric. His contributions, judged by the standards of the time they were offered, were invaluable, often prescient, often seminal. Hudson was among the first to cogently and consistently expand the study of Speech to include oral and written discourse. Although he traced the roots of rhetoric to the ancients, he was ever aware of the 2,500 year continuity of rhetorical studies. Because of this, he able to present a classical theory of invention integrated with the 1920s avante garde rhetorical understanding. He was the first to provide the discipline with a well developed and serious definition of rhetoric, and may have been the first to differentiate between composition and rhetoric.

Hudson was also the first to discuss rhetorical criticism differentiated from literary criticism, and was also the first to suggest using topics and the classical canons as theoretical touch stones for rhetorical criticism. Yes, I know, Wichelns is credited with this. However, in his 1921 essay, "Can we Modernize the Study of Invention?" Hudson implied the use of topics for "speech or argument." The "Field of Rhetoric," published in 1923, contains even more explicit definitions. In this essay Hudson fully defined the term rhetoric, which included the study of written as well as oral discourse.

Although he spent his career in departments of English, Hudson firmly defended the separation of rhetorical studies from English. At a time when many borrowed from other disciplines, Hudson consistently bombarded readers with insightful argumentative contrasts between rhetoric and art, poetry, drama, etc., that distinguished well the field of Speech from other disciplines. I am inclined to believe he was the first to treat the subject of rhetoric consistently in this manner. He further advanced the importance of our discipline by arguing forcefully that students of literature and literary criticism ought to study rhetoric. Hudson firmly believed that rhetorical studies were as significant and honorable as literary studies.

At a time in our disciplinary development that saw others relying upon secondary

sources and other disciplines for interpretations and theoretical groundings, Hudson used his own imagination and intellect as touchstones for his close textual readings. While others were looking almost exclusively to the ancients for their understanding of rhetorical theory, Hudson was the first to show a serious and sustained interest in post-classical rhetorical theorists. When others were suggesting that we limit rhetoric to the study of oral discourse, Hudson was banging the drum and marching forward with his call for broadening the paths of study to include pamphleteering, newspapers, radio broadcasting, and other forms of communication. Along these same lines he suggested that we consider taking into account methods of publication, as well as the effects of national and racial characteristics upon rhetorical style. Hudson may even have foreseen the impact of photojournalism when he suggested analyzing “pictorial communication.”

Hudson’s grasp of the tradition of our subject abounds throughout his work; its immensity staggers the mind. He was the first well known and respected scholar to unabashedly state that our discipline emerged from a long and proud tradition. He thrust this tradition upon us, contributing greatly to our intellectual understanding of our field. We are, I firmly believe, deeply indebted to this man.

Hoyt Hopewell Hudson was, unfortunately for us, a shooting star: he died 13 June 1944. He was but fifty years of age. Hungry for more details? See the essay on Hudson in [Twentieth Century Roots of Rhetorical Studies](#).

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