

## Exercise 6. Method: Rhetorical Criticism (*in-class, then homework*)

### *Introduction*

Rhetoric is the art of persuasion. Rhetorical criticism is the study of that art. The rhetorical critic assumes that the final composer of a speech or persuasive argument has a point they're trying to communicate, and they do so through the rhetorical conventions of their culture. The modern rhetorical critic seeks to discern the author's perspective by analyzing the author's argument and assessing its impact on its audience.

This style of criticism is well suited to speeches in narrative works (like the gospels or Acts of the Apostles) and to persuasive arguments like you find in the Pauline epistles. It's best to apply it to small sub-arguments in a letter, though, rather than to try to tackle anything the length of an entire epistle. Frankly, it can be applied to any contemporary example of rhetoric as well, from the speeches of President Obama to the million-dollar ads aired during the Super Bowl. But given that 2000 years have passed from Paul's time to our own, you might expect that some features of rhetoric have changed.

### *Types of Persuasive Appeals*<sup>24</sup>

This is something that hasn't changed much. In the fourth century BCE, Aristotle wrote in *The Art of Rhetoric* that there are three types of persuasive appeals. A good speech or epistle often appeals to all three:

- **Logos** – this type of argument is an appeal to reason (1 Cor 11:3-16)
- **Pathos** – this is an appeal to the emotion of the audience (Gal 4:12-20; 5:7-12)
- **Ethos** – the speaker presents himself/his own character as grounds for trust (1 Cor 4:6-21; 8:7-9:27; Gal 4:12-20)

### *Species of Rhetoric*

Classical rhetoric was exercised in three situations that again haven't changed much: the courts, legislatures, and public displays. There is a "species" of rhetoric for each, and each has its own conventions:

- **Judicial** – This type of rhetoric was exercised in the law courts and was oriented to the defense or accusation of the client. Reference could be made to past events in order to establish claims about what was just or unjust, right or wrong. (Matthew 21:23-23:39; 1 Corinthians 1:13-17)
- **Deliberative** – This type of rhetoric was exercised in legislative bodies as individuals debated matters of public policy. It has more to do with the future than the past, and with whether choices would be worthy or unworthy, advantageous or disadvantageous. (Matthew 5-7; most of 1 Corinthians)
- **Epidictic** – This term means "fit for display." It refers to speeches or writings made on public occasions, like eulogies at funerals, *encomia* (speeches of praise), or invectives (speeches of blame). The impetus is usually some event in the present or a ceremonial occasion, and the topics are vice and virtue. (Matthew 23; John 13-17; most of Philippians)

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<sup>24</sup> Information about the types of persuasive appeals, branches of oratory, and canons of rhetoric are derived from Gideon O. Burton, "The Forest of Rhetoric (*silva rhetoricae*)," *Brigham Young University*, online, <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/default.htm>.

*Canons of Rhetoric*

When a person sat down to write a persuasive speech or letter in antiquity, there were five canons or elements of the piece that were required.

- **Invention** – The speaker has to find something to say (*invenire* is Latin for “to find”). Common topics (*topoi* in Greek) included cause and effect or comparison.
- **Arrangement** – The speaker or writer also has to consider how to order his/her piece. In antiquity, each type of oration or literary genre had an established order or arrangement. Here are two, with their Latin/Greek names:

Classical Oration	Pauline Epistles
1. Introduction ( <i>exordium/prooimion</i> )	1. Opening <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address</li> <li>Grace greeting</li> <li>Thanksgiving prayer</li> </ol>
2. Statement of facts ( <i>narratio/diegesis</i> )	2. Body <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introductory formula</li> <li>Transitional formulas</li> <li>Concluding section (<i>includes autobiographical material, recommendation of messenger, announcement of visit, parenetic section, prayer of peace</i>)</li> </ol>
3. Division ( <i>partitio</i> )	
4. Proof ( <i>confirmatio/pistis</i> )	
5. Refutation ( <i>refutatio</i> )	
6. Conclusion ( <i>peroratio/epilogos</i> )	3. Closing <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Closing greetings</li> <li>The Holy Kiss greeting</li> <li>Grace benediction</li> </ol>

- **Style** – This has to do with the artful expression of ideas—not what is said, but how it’s said. It’s not just window dressing. The way ideas are “embodied” in metaphors and techniques (like those listed on pp. 104-105) is part of how the ideas communicate.
- **Memory** – An orator had to figure out techniques for memorizing his speech, because there were no teleprompters in antiquity. This often had less to do with memorizing a set piece; instead, rhetors built a repertoire of commonplaces, tropes and metaphors so that they could invent the oration on the fly.
- **Delivery** – Like style, this canon has to do with how something is said. The Greek word for this is *hypokrisis* or “acting,” since good rhetorical delivery borrowed from the theatrical arts of vocal training and gestures to evoke the pathos or emotion of the audience.

*Directions for Homework*

For homework, pick a new rhetorical unit in 1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, Galatians or Romans. You'll apply the same questions to the passage as you did in class, along with one more (#7 below). Type up your responses to these questions, but don't put the actual questions in your paper as subtitles. Just write one paragraph for each question, and write your paragraphs in such a way that it's clear which topic you're analyzing. Don't merely "list" or "claim" your answer; rather, argue why you believe that answer is correct (e.g., don't just state that this is an example of deliberative rhetoric, but show that the purpose of the passage is persuasion with an eye to future behavior).

1. Determine the problem to which Paul is responding. This will usually be addressed in the opening section of the passage.
2. Type of Appeal: Does Paul appeal to logos, pathos, and/or ethos?
3. Species of Rhetoric: Is this an example of judicial, deliberative, or epideictic rhetoric?
4. Invention: What is the argument? Identify the main point(s) Paul wants to make.
5. Arrangement: Identify the supporting arguments for each main point (see the in-class directions #5, above, for further help identifying supporting arguments).
6. Style: What rhetorical techniques does Paul use (for a list, see pp. 108-109)?
7. Re-assess the problem to which Paul is responding.
  - a. Gravity — how bad is it, given the quantity and nature of the author's arguments?
  - b. Determine the stakes — what is at stake for Paul? What is he afraid of losing, and how might this fear shape his argument?