Theoretical Foundations of Rhetorical Criticism: Rhetorical Critic and Critical Lens

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Abstract

This paper discusses rhetoric's historical evolution and theoretical foundations and criticism to scrutinize the significance of rhetoric criticism for oral and written discourse analysis. It emphasizes the lineage of classical rhetoric and its essential progression into contemporary rhetorical practices. These practices demonstrate the use of symbols as strategic and intentional tools for human communication, tracing their significant development from Ancient Greece through Rome to today's frameworks. Prominent figures such as Corax, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian are critically examined for their pivotal contributions to rhetorical theory and its undeniable relevance to civic life. The paper effectively dissects Aristotle's framework of rhetoric, which encompasses three forms and three appeals: ethos, pathos, and logos, all vital components of persuasive language. Furthermore, the text addresses the transformative shift in communication modes during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, wherein rhetoric became predominantly focused on philosophy, literature, and politics. In the present day, the scope of rhetoric has unequivocally expanded to include verbal, nonverbal, kinesthetic, and visual dimensions of communication. The paper also analyzes the critical methodologies employed in rhetorical criticism, highlighting the crucial role of the rhetorical critic in interpreting and evaluating rhetorical artifacts. Investigating various traditions and contemporary adaptations underscores the lasting significance of rhetoric across multiple disciplines, effectively connecting classical principles with modern communicative practices.

Introduction

Human beings are surrounded by symbols to articulate in a roundabout way. One of the persistent tools to make people do something, act in a certain way, think differently,

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change a course of action, and make choices is the use of language or human symbols. All symbols are invested with messages but not with meanings. Conveying meaning is the mark of a special and distinguished function of human use of symbols or language. While animals pass signals, they use a stream of sounds to serve only extremely limited functions; their communication is linear and one-dimensional. human being; however, use language to get numerous things done. One distinguished feature that separates the nonhuman use of signs from that of humans is that human beings make a conscious use of language or symbols to execute diverse activities. This implies that they intend to do something with language.

Language or a symbol, when used as a tool consciously and strategically with overt or covert intention to reach a goal, is a uniquely human undertaking. In the words of Jim A. Kuypers and Andrew King, Through the use of language, human beings make a, "strategic use of communication, oral or written, to achieve specifiable goals" (4). Thus, four key variables stand out in the human communication of language: conscious, strategy, intention, and goal, emphasizing the fact that language has a pragmatic communicative dimension. However, not all communications have successful results due to the failure of certain messages. Many times, some messages fall flat while others are extremely powerful, exerting unprecedented influences on audiences. This discrepancy raises a crucial question: why are some communicative acts very persuasive or influential and others fail to accomplish the intended purpose altogether? To find the answer, one has to journey as far back as the fifth century BC to a place called Syracuse on the island of Sicily in ancient Greece, where a powerful seed of a theory to account for this strange phenomenon was first seen sprouting—rhetoric.

The birth of rhetoric is associated with a political upheaval that occurred in Syracuse in which James Williams asserts, "an aristocrat named Thrasybulus seized control of the government and set himself up as a tyrant" (3). This coup happened in "around 467 B.C.", and this time is usually taken as a temporal reference for "the formal study of rhetoric" (Williams 3). Following this event, Thrasybulus distributed land as a reward to conciliate the supporters who had shown their allegiance to him during the usurpation. Being tyrant, his regime did not last long, and soon enough, he had to abdicate his position. However, the restoration was not smooth, and one of the earliest problems that common people encountered was how to reclaim the land that was confiscated by the ruler Thrasybulus. People had to take recourse to courts whose verdict was final. But as per the provisions of the land, the defendants could not hire any paid lawyers to argue for their cases and therefore, it was incumbent upon them that they advocate their cases themselves. Meaning that individuals whose lands were confiscated by the tyrant "had to present their cases in court –they could not hire lawyers to speak for them—creating the need for individuals to become adept at the art of rhetoric" (Sojana K. Foss 854). This specific political turnover and the resulting period of transition showed that rhetoric began with a lawsuit.

A very astute citizen of Syracuse named Corax observed that some people who won the land case uniquely presented their ideas, using language very effectively. Having made several observations, he discovered that a powerful presentation exhibited a special pattern and technique of language that recurred frequently. Corax noticed that "successful litigants used certain techniques in speaking that their adversaries did not. He used his observations to develop a system of rhetorical study and began teaching classes on how to win in court" (Williams 3). Such a presentation made a compelling impact on the members of the jury in court. For his contribution to developing the examples of cogent arguments and the pattern of such language, "Corax was credited with the first formal rhetorical theory; he wrote a treatise called 'The Art of Rhetoric" to assist those involved in the land disputes" (Foss 854). His student, Tisias, is believed to have introduced rhetoric to Athens. Civil practices in speeches, where democracy had just flourished, requiring people to be eloquent in their arguments, showed that democratic practices and rhetoric occurred simultaneously. Following Corax and Tisias, rhetoric flourished in mainland Greece and was for the first time branded as a lucrative business by a group of people called sophists.

Sophists called themselves teachers of rhetoric because they disseminated techniques for monetary purposes. They moved to different parts of Athens and taught the techniques of rhetoric to young people for monetary profit. They were called "philosophers" and "teachers" because of "their understanding of the power of language" (Foss 854), although their teachings aroused suspicion among the Athenians due to their peripatetic manner of teaching. They claimed that their teaching essentially aimed at preparing the youths to be eloquent citizens of Athens, who were supposed to be active participants of the democratic process there. Their practices, however, were severely criticized at that time because they were allegedly corrupting youths by diverting their minds from reality in the name of rhetoric. Sophists, however, defended their method, saying that rhetoric was not an inborn attribute and, hence, had to be imparted through proper training and orientation. In the words of Jarratt C Susan , "They evinced at the special interest in human perception as the only source of the knowledge in all fields, including nature and emphasis the significance of language construction knowledge" (18). But a common belief that sophists were teaching trickery and deceits rather than knowledge reigned supreme, a concept that lingers on even today. Despite its long-dignified history, rhetoric has come in for scathing criticism from all around. The term is now riddled with a litany of pejorative terms. Often "contrasted with action" (Foss 853), rhetoric is understood as a discourse that is empty, lacking in candor and forthrightness, a talk that is devoid of truth or substance. The bashing, however, has a long legacy, stretching back to Athens itself. As soon as rhetoric reached mainland Greece through sophists, it did not take time to arouse suspicion, much to the embarrassment of a very eminent philosopher of the time, Plato. Plato was enraged at sophists' professed claim that the ability to express – rhetoric -- was not inherent and that instruction was necessary for its inculcation. Showing the vacuity of their claim, Plato posed a three-fold objection to rhetoric: first, it is "rooted in a false ontology"; second, it is "epistemologically

deficient"; and third, it resorts to "linguistic opportunism" (D.P. Gaonkar 5). Thus, Plato's main objection emanated from the fact that rhetoric, as practiced at the time, was taught by the itinerary group of sophists to mask truth and promote trickery; in this sense, rhetoric became a synonym for falsehood and treachery; in other words, the practice of rhetoric promoted a spurious discourse that not only pitched appearance as essence but also posed a hindrance to the growth of civil discourses and democratic practices. In short, as Plato perceived, rhetoric was devoid of substance and intellectually vacuous.

A contemporary of Plato, Aristophanes, joined Plato in the denunciation and indictment of the sophistry of the time. In his satirical monograph, The Clouds, he held the sophists up to ridicule by comparing them with the clouds that, because of their ethereal nature, lack any definitive shape and form. He called them amorphous. With Aristophanes' criticism coupled with that of Plato, sophists had a hard time struggling in their defense of the teaching of rhetoric.

A Review of Rhetorical Traditions and Theory

The literature that exists about rhetoric shows that there was some consensus about the definition of rhetoric. One unilateral approach is that rhetoric involves "the use of language for purposes of persuasion" (Williams 2). There is another related definition that emphasizes the "relationship between language and persuasion" (William M Keith and Christian Lundeberg O. 3). From the perspective of communication, rhetorical theory is "the body of thought about human symbol use". (Foss 853). So, rhetoric connects thought with human beings.

Two terms are commonly associated with rhetoric: discourse and persuasion. Differentiating it from persuasion, Keith and Lundberg state that a piece of discourse "can be any speech, written or spoken, as well as the exchange of symbols or meanings in any context; books, newspapers, pictures, movies, Websites, music and so on" (4). Persuasion, on the contrary, "occurs when some convinces you of something; it encompasses the dramatic experience of being moved to rage, tears, or action by a speech" (Keith and Lundberg 4). Keith and Lundberg show the relationship of discourse and persuasion with rhetoric and define it, "as the study of producing discourses and interpreting how, when, and why discourses are persuasive" (4). Williams' definition of rhetoric sheds lights on "emphases and purposes" (Williams, 2). Both terms are significant for the evolution of rhetoric in relation to persuasion.

A decisive point of departure is seen in Aristotle's defense and systematization of rhetoric. Aristotle established the first organized body of rhetoric in his treatise The Rhetoric. This book not only lays a tangible foundation of rhetoric as a systematic body of knowledge but also rids it of the denunciation of Aristophanes and Plato, especially the latter's charge that rhetoric is an "unspecifiable discipline" (Gaonkar 5). At the outset of this

book, Aristotle specifies rhetoric as a discipline by defining it "as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (Craig R. Smith, 1). Aristotle also links rhetoric to civic affairs of the life of Athenian people and divides it into three specific genres: "deliberative, judicial and epideictic" (Eugene Garver 1). According to George A Kennedy, this classification is "still useful in categorizing forms of discourse today" (4). His formulation of rhetoric into these three forms and three appeals of rhetoric, namely logos, pathos, and ethos, is a remarkable step towards establishing this volatile topic as a discipline.

Following Aristotle, there was a massive transformation in the study of rhetoric at the hands of two influential Roman rhetoricians: Cicero and Quintilian. For Aristotle and these two successors, rhetoric was the best medium of expression to discuss " important political, religious, or social issues" and, therefore, for them, "the study of rhetoric was equivalent to the study of citizenship" (Sharan Crowley and Debra Hawhee 1). Like Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian have remained very influential for successive periods and provided a foundation for contemporary theory of speech and communication. Cicero was an epitome of Roman rhetoric as "he both wrote about rhetoric and was himself a great orator" and because of his three books "De Inventione (On Invention), De Oratore (On Oratory), and Orator (Orator)" along with his five "canon of style" –invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery--(Foss 854). Cicero views that rhetoric should be taken as "a means of serving the people" (Kuypers and King 2). Quintilian, "Rome's greatest teacher and codifier of rhetorical knowledge" (Kuypers and King 2), links rhetoric to active citizenship, saying that it is "the art of the good citizen speaking well" (James A. Herrick 107). Verbal presentation exposes the identity of the speaker.

Gradually, there was a noticeable shift in the use of rhetoric from its earlier function as a civil discourse to an instrument of embellishment. This change was seen during the middle ages. In this period, rhetoric was confined to cathedral schools, universities, sermons, royal proclamations, poetry, letter writing, and even bureaucracies (Kuypers and King 2). Similarly, rhetoric witnessed a massive transformation from the Renaissance through to the twentieth century. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it enjoyed the same status as "philosophy, literature and politics" (Kuypers and King 5). Additionally, the scope of rhetoric also expanded at an unprecedented level, encompassing such domains as "print, radio, television and the Internet" and "whole spectrum of academic subjects" (Kuypers and King 5). Thus there is shift from one dimension to the next.

Lloyd F. Bitzer, an eminent rhetorician, introduces a new dimension to rhetorical theory by discussing what he calls exigence. Bitzer defines exigency as "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" (Bitzer 6). According to Bitzer, rhetoric emerges in response to "an exigence or some kind of urgency or problem, or something not as it should be" (Foss 853). As per this, the rhetorical situation is identified as "exigence", "audience", "rhetor",

and the extended contexts like "historical, economic, cultural, and symbolic" (Foss 853). These contribute to the rhetoric criticism as a dimension for literary analysis.

To deal with the historical trajectory, verbal presentation and its connection to persuasion, the linkage between hominoid and language, and the differences between discourse and persuasion have been the subject of philosophers. Aristotle established the foundation of rhetoric, and Cicero and Quintilian established the bedrock for the theory of speech and communication. However, during the 16th and 17th centuries, the value was given to literature, philosophy, and political discourse. Print media got replaced by electronic social media. Currently, the significance of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and websites, has become the subject of discourse for rhetorical framing, verbal and non-verbal forms of persuasion. This study embarks on the historical evolution of rhetoric, its concepts, processes, and approaches.

Concepts, Processes, and Approaches of Rhetorical Criticism

Fundamentally, rhetorical criticism entails interpreting rhetorical artifacts/acts critically. In rhetorical parlance, rhetorical artifacts and rhetorical acts are technical terms. The former refers to tangible texts. For example, a printed form of a speech or a written discourse is an instance of rhetorical artifacts. They differ from rhetorical acts, which are ephemeral and "can never be re-created in its entirety" (Valerie Renegar and Jennifer A. Malkowski 49). For being elusive, rhetorical acts pose a difficulty to critics. More often, rhetorical artifacts are chosen over rhetorical acts because the former are "tangible evidence of rhetoric" (Renegar and Malkowski 49), for engaging in rhetorical criticism. Rhetorical artifacts include a wide range of written texts such as textbooks, newspapers, billboards, architecture, music paintings, and a diverse rendering of linguistic and symbolic usages. A critic engaged in the activity of rhetorical criticism can examine any of these rhetorical artifacts to explore how the rhetor–author or writer makes a strategic use of language to put his message across to the audience effectively. According to Foss, "In rhetorical criticism, the theorizing that critics do deals with explanations about how rhetoric works. A critic asks a question about a rhetorical process or phenomenon and how it works, and provides a tentative answer to the question" (19). Asking questions and trying to find the answers is also one of the methods of rhetorical criticism that discusses basic phenomena or rhetorical processes to explain how it works.

So, one of the early tasks of a rhetorical critic in the process of doing a rhetorical criticism is to understand the basic difference between rhetorical artifacts and rhetorical acts. Selecting the artifacts involves the next crucial step. Although a rhetorical critic is at liberty to choose texts of his interest, they must be amenable to rhetorical analysis. Foss prescribes two criteria that such texts must meet. First, they should "contain the kinds of data that are the focus of the units of analysis of the method" (Foss 10). This means that the texts –rhetorical artifacts—must have the parts that "serve as a vehicle or lens" (Foss

10) for the critics to study them. For example, if they want to explore a text from the lens of metaphor, the text must have the elements of metaphoric importance or value. Second, the texts for rhetorical criticism should be something that "puzzles or baffles" (Foss 10) the critics Ruszkiewicz Lunsford and Keith Walters explain that "Rhetorical analysis and critical reading also probe the contexts that surround any argument or text – its impact on a society, its deeper implications, or even what it lacks or whom it excludes" (211). The texts may include a particular poem, a speech, an advertisement, a newspaper editorial, and the like. The onus for the critic is that of examining what is amazing or baffling, why it is so, and what strategies the rhetors employ to achieve their intended purpose or goal.

Thus, rhetorical criticism involves the processes and steps of understanding or appreciating an act of rhetoric. Grounded in a qualitative, interpretative paradigm, rhetorical criticism calls for "the systematic investigation and explanation of symbolic acts and artifacts to understand rhetorical processes" (Foss 6). Thus, the act of rhetorical criticism engages a critic in a variety of ways, ranging from what to focus on texts, how to select ones to what paradigm to use.

An eminent twentieth century theorist and rhetorician, Edwin Black has made a substantial contribution to the development of rhetorical criticism. His monograph Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method is a groundbreaking example of what rhetorical criticism is and its processes. His oft-quoted definition of rhetorical criticism is as precise as it could be: "rhetorical criticism is the criticism of rhetorical discourses" (Black 10). This subtle definition means that the scholarship of rhetorical criticism is related to the understanding of the nuances that inhere in any kind of rhetorical texts. Another important view of Black is that "criticism is a humanistic activity," which means that it is "concerned with humanity" (5). Thus, Black recognizes that rhetoric is a uniquely human use of symbols and that rhetorical criticism involves a critic to appreciate and judge different dimensions of a rhetorical artifact.

Black is not alone in announcing that rhetorical criticism is a typically human undertaking. Kuypers also maintains that although the act of rhetorical study "has many broad applications, but in general it is a humanizing activity. That is to say, it explores and highlights qualities that make us human" (Kuypers and King 13). Both Black and Kuypers agree that a rhetorical criticism is the examination and evaluation of how a rhetorical artifact functions and how critics employ rhetorical strategies for result-oriented actions. In short, the process of a meticulous appraisal of a rhetorical text to find out how it communicates a meaning is the act of rhetorical criticism. The purpose of an act of criticism is to inaugurate the knowledge about the way rhetoric operates in a certain rhetorical environment to influence or sway target audiences.

If Black and Kuypers focus on the humanistic dimension of rhetorical criticism, Kaylyn Kohrs Campbell deals with is functional dimension. Campbell avers that rhetorical

study refers to "the description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of persuasive uses of language" (12). Focusing on the functional aspect, Foss notes, "the discipline of rhetorical criticism itself offers critical methods designed to discover a rhetor's worldview or how that rhetor structures the world" (33). In another book entitled Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice, Foss approaches rhetorical criticism as a "process" for a rhetorical critic to engage in "thinking about symbols, discovering how they work, and trying to figure out why they affect us" (3). Thus, rhetorical criticism is used to serve multiple functions and examine a wide range of rhetorical artifacts.

Unilateral views about the role of a rhetorical critic can be found among some other rhetorical theorists. The discussion of Black, Kuypers, and Foss resonates with that of Celeste M Condit and Benjamin R Bates. According to Condit and Bates an objective rhetorical critic is not swayed by any preoccupations. They suggest that "Rather than adopt methods, rhetorical critics first adopt a critical posture and then choose critical referents for their analyses" (110). They also remark that equipped with "formal training in rhetorical theories," a critic can select "the critical referents that best help to understand a given text" (110). Specifically, good rhetorical criticism comes out of a "formal training in rhetorical theories" (110). According to Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz, (212), rhetoric analysis encompasses "advertisements, websites, editorials, political cartoons, and even songs, movies, photographs, buildings or shopping malls" This approach resembles Black's conclusion that rhetorical criticism should reflect "only the convictions, values, and learning of the critic, only the observational and interpretive powers of the critic" ("On Objectivity" 32). These collective views highlight the lassitude that rhetorical critics can avail of in the selection a rhetorical artifact and an approach.

Another key dimension of rhetorical criticism is the critic himself. Discussing the nature and function of a rhetorical critic, Fred J. Kauffeld notes that a rhetorical critic has "fundamental powers," which enable him to lend new directions and alternatives (236). Kauffeld states that the "intuitive, perceptual and affective capacity" of a rhetorical critic constitutes "the most basic power of competent critics" (237). Similarly, Black remarks that a rhetorical critic is "the only instrument of good criticism" (32). According to him, "the perceptions and values" of "the observational and interpretative powers of the critic" take precedence over "any external perspective or procedure or ideology" (32). Black's conclusion that "the method of rhetorical criticism is the critic" (32) gives a new twist to the vital role that a rhetorical critic can play in the processes of doing rhetorical criticism. Chaim Pereleman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation has enlarged "the principles of Aristotelian's rhetoric, offering much more sensitive and sophisticated heuristics for evaluating argumentation than classical systems provide" (Richard Leo Enos 364). Thus, rhetoric criticism values criticism as a tool to dissect a text.

Thus, rhetoric equally encompasses oral and written discourse as its artifacts. To understand the symbolic significance of the rhetoric, rhetorical criticism because it has direct humanistic connection. Rhetorical critics adopt a critical posture to choose critical referents for a rhetorical critic. The process of internal motivation using rhetorical features is to make the society believe the argument. Rhetoric criticism is connected to good criticism to engage readers and the social work**.**

Conclusion

This study makes a general survey of the development and growth of rhetorical practices as found in different periods of Western rhetorical philosophy, beginning with its classical foundation. As mentioned, although rhetoric has had a long academic heritage that goes back to ancient Greece, the term is very often couched in pejorative or depreciatory terms. It is disparaged as a discourse that has no substance at all. However, theoreticians like Aristotle established it as a system body of knowledge and theorized it very scientifically. In the same way, the contribution of Roman rhetoricians like Cicero and Quintilian in the growth of rhetorical theory is highly significant. With time, the development of rhetoric took a very convoluted route before it was finally established as a prestigious discipline. Rhetorical criticism is a concrete attempt in this direction. Different rhetoricians developed a system and technique of how a rhetorical critic can conduct the rhetorical study. Many books and articles are available. Therefore, rhetorics has now undergone many breakthroughs. For example, it is now being used in a diverse discipline, with some revising classical tenets in the form of New-Aristotelian criticism and some extending argumentation in a new direction. Rhetorical criticism is the call of the time because it functions as an analytical tool to scrutinize print media discourse, digital social media, and speech and communication.

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