

# Introduction

This introduction discusses four questions that readers might like to have answered before studying the discourses in this anthology: (I) What is “rhetorical discourse”? (II) Why study rhetorical discourses of the past? (III) How should they be studied? and (IV) What guidelines governed the selection of discourses for this anthology?

## I. What is “Rhetorical Discourse”?

Some academicians define *discourse* as any meaningful utterance, including a mere “Hello.” Others restrict it to longer, more formal utterances, such as editorials and sermons. This anthology is restricted to longer, formal utterances.

A more difficult question is, What makes a discourse *rhetorical*? The word *rhetoric* has acquired many diverse meanings in its 2500-year history. We shall survey these meanings, beginning with the ancient Greeks. They thought of “rhetoric” as the teaching and practice of persuasive speaking about civic affairs. These speeches fell into three categories, one being those delivered at civic celebrations. Most ancient societies had speeches of this type, but the other two types grew out of the Greeks’ unusual political situation. Greece was a collection of small, independent city-states, most of which were democratic in the sense that free male citizens (not slaves, women, or aliens) could participate *directly* in transacting public business. Speeches were delivered in the assemblies as citizens deliberated about public policy (for instance, whether taxes should be increased). There was no legal profession, and litigants did their own speaking in the courts, where decisions were rendered by juries of 500 or more.

Adapting to these civic needs, some enterprising sophists taught “rhetoric” and wrote how-to-do-it textbooks. Their textbooks have not survived, so we do not have their formal definitions of “rhetoric,” but we know they taught students to speak persuasively on ceremonial occasions, in the assembly and in the courts. We also know that most sophists were skeptics; that is, they believed there is no Truth. There is only persuasion.

Unlike most sophists, Plato (428-348 B.C.) was not a skeptic. He believed in the Reality of True Ideas. Believing that the public was incapable of learning True Ideas, he scorned democracy and advocated an “ideal” government in which the populace would be ruled by “philosopher kings.” This led him to

two definitions of “rhetoric.” One, which defined the “rhetoric” that was being taught and practiced, was the “art of flattery.” The second was an “Ideal” rhetoric that could presumably be practiced by philosopher-kings: they know Truth, define their terms and classify propositions. The nearest he came to compromising with the sophists was to permit the truth-tellers to adapt to popular audiences, or in his words, give simple speeches to simple souls and complex speeches to complex souls. Plato’s influence on Western culture led to a widespread, informal definition of “rhetoric” as sleazy persuasion.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) spent two decades in Plato’s school, first as a student and then as a teacher. He was a Platonist in his younger days, but he later rejected his mentor’s concept of “Ideal Truth.” To the older Aristotle, Ideas were not Real; they were abstractions created by the human mind. Yet he did not reject the concept of rationality. He deplored the sophists’ skepticism and developed a complex system of logic, central to which was classification: individual things were placed in a class on the basis of their similarities; and classes were differentiated from one another on the basis of their differences.

Classification ran through all of Aristotle’s theorizing, including his definition of “rhetoric.” He differentiated “rhetoric” from two other classes of formal discourse. “Poetics” embraced fictional discourses, such as epic poetry and theatre. “Dialectic” embraced discourse between intellectuals. The third category, “rhetoric,” was defined as “an ability, in each (particular) case, to see the available means of persuasion.”<sup>1</sup> In Aristotle’s scheme of classification, rhetoric and poetic were similar in that both involved popular audiences; but they differed because poetic was fictional, whereas rhetoric was non-fictional. (Even if a rhetorical discourse includes falsehoods, they are presented as fact, not fiction.) Dialectic was also non-fictional, but it involved learned audiences, whereas rhetoric involved popular audiences.

Continuing his penchant for classification, Aristotle categorized rhetorical discourses into three oratorical genres: (1) deliberative, in which audiences are urged to accept or reject a proposed policy; (2) forensic, in which audiences are urged to accept or reject a proposition about past actions; and (3) epideictic, in which persons are praised or blamed. In theory, Aristotle’s scheme was more inclusive than the types of civic discourse that prevailed in Greek society. For example, we could interpret “forensic” to include a debate about the historical authenticity of the Bible. Yet Aristotle’s lectures on rhetoric put so much emphasis on civic affairs that our generation of Aristotelians thinks of “rhetoric” as political persuasion and equates his genres with contemporary modes of political discourse: *deliberative* with legislative speaking; campaign oratory and other discourses dealing with policy-making; *forensic* with legal argument; and *epideictic* with ceremonial oratory.

Alert readers will have noticed a shift from the word *discourse* to *oratory*, but Aristotle’s neglect of writing in his *Rhetoric* is understandable. Popular audiences in his day were generally illiterate. In our day, literacy is widespread (although some teachers have their doubts), and we can fit many written discourses into Aristotle’s three genres. For example, newspaper editorials that advocate certain

policies are deliberative; judicial opinions are forensic; and eulogistic biographies are epideictic.

Greece was conquered by Rome, which in turn was conquered by Greek culture. Unlike the Greek democracies, where free male citizens ruled *directly*, Rome had a republican government, in which free male citizens ruled *indirectly* by electing public officials. Unlike the Greek city-states, where litigants presented their own cases in court, Romans had a legal profession. Despite these differences, Romans saw the practical value of Greek rhetoric. They too defined "rhetoric" as the study of persuasive discourse about law and public affairs.

Many Roman textbooks still survive, and some were used in European schools until modern times. Thus the Greco-Roman definition of "rhetoric" has persisted to the present time, but a host of cultural changes inspired so many other definitions that much confusion now surrounds the word. One change was the rise of Christianity. Although many early Christians rejected rhetoric because of its pagan origins, the famous theologian, Augustine (who taught rhetoric before joining the priesthood) adapted rhetoric to preaching. After Augustine, many rhetoric textbooks classified oratorical genres as Aristotle's three, plus the sermon. By implication, "rhetoric" encompassed religious as well as political persuasion.

The history of Western culture has involved vast fluctuations in the extent to which governments were democratic. For centuries after the fall of the Roman Republic, rhetoricians repeated the old theory of the three genres, but they often said little about deliberative oratory. Some went so far as to ignore all the genres. They adapted to the nobility's desire to speak "eloquently" by teaching only the stylistic devices. Eager to set themselves apart from the "common herd," aristocrats wanted "rules" about how to dress and behave, many of which involved an "elegant" or "eloquent" style of speaking. This was especially true during the Renaissance, when some teachers explicitly restricted their definition of "rhetoric" to style and delivery. The modern revival of democracy revitalized the Greco-Roman view, but the long tradition of restricting "rhetoric" to style, especially an "elegant" style, is still reflected in many current definitions.

New communication technologies also influenced definitions of "rhetoric," but in ways that both broadened and restricted the term. Printing gave rise to many new genres of written discourse. The novel, for example, is sometimes included under the heading of "rhetoric," even though Aristotle would have classified novels as "poetic." On the other hand, many modern rhetoricians became so absorbed with the teaching of writing that they ignored the ancients' emphasis on public speaking. Some writing instructors concentrated on teaching grammatical correctness, thereby limiting "rhetoric" still further.

The importance of written discourse is now being undermined by many recent technologies, such as photography and television, which are pictorial as well as verbal. Whereas Aristotle's contemporaries voted on policy matters after hearing deliberative orations, we look at newspaper cartoons, posters, films, and television commercials. The psychological effects of the pictorial media

are unclear, but some scholars speculate that contemporary audiences have been so inundated by pictorial media that we are less able, or at least less willing, than our ancestors to follow a complex chain of argument in a long, formal discourse. Although this speculation is debatable, it is obvious that complex arguments which can be presented in a Senate speech or magazine article cannot be presented in a cartoon or television commercial. This has implications for defining "rhetoric." Some scholars, adhering to the traditional idea that "rhetorical discourse" involves extended verbal argument, exclude visual discourses such as cartoons from their definition. Others, emphasizing the increased importance of visual media, include them.

A fairly recent cultural change that has influenced the meaning of "rhetoric" is increased specialization. Until recently, most men were farmers and most women were housewives. The few who attended college received basically the same undergraduate education. Thus they needed to develop the same kinds of communication skills. Until around the middle of the nineteenth century, American undergraduates took a prescribed curriculum that placed heavy emphasis on rhetoric because it was assumed that they would enter a profession that required speaking and writing skills (law, teaching, preaching or medicine) and that they would become opinion leaders in the political world.

Starting around the middle of the nineteenth century, most colleges established specialized courses-of-study and adopted an elective system. The teaching of communication skills was adapted accordingly, and the result was a hodgepodge of definitions of "rhetoric." In many cases, beginning courses, sometimes called "rhetoric" and sometimes labeled by terms such as "communication" or "composition," dealt only with the communication skills deemed necessary for all specialized professions, such as grammar and exposition. Advanced courses were designed to meet the needs of specialists. Sometimes the courses received labels that did not include the word "rhetoric" (courses in preaching are usually called "homiletics," for example), but sometimes they were called "Rhetoric and . . ." (such as "Rhetoric and Composition," "Rhetoric and Argument," or "Rhetoric and Literature"). Running through this confusion was one commonality: the old concept of "civic humanism" diminished, and with it came a de-emphasis of rhetoric as political persuasion. Curriculum planners no longer took it for granted that graduates would play a major role in civic affairs.

Specialization also affected college administrative structures, which in turn affected definitions of "rhetoric." During the late nineteenth century, departments of "rhetoric" developed into departments of "English," and "Speech" departments later split off from English Departments. English professors often think of "rhetoric" as written composition, while Speech teachers often think of "rhetoric" as public speaking.

If readers are now confused about *the* meaning of "rhetoric," they are not alone. Neither this writer nor anyone else can provide *the* meaning. Any definition is arbitrary, but in the case of this anthology, we shall define "rhetoric" in neo-Aristotelian terms. We shall consider "rhetorical discourses" to be formal writings and speeches that attempt to persuade popular audiences

about matters concerning civic affairs. A few sermons are included in the anthology because American history has been influenced strongly by what historians often call "civic religion," a concept that hopefully will be clarified in later sections of this book.

## II. Why Study Rhetorical Discourses of the Past?

Implicit in this question is another, Why study *anything* about the past? Readers of this book probably have their own answers, and this writer will simply state a couple of basic assumptions. First, irrespective of our specialized occupation, everyone is a citizen and ought to be concerned about civic affairs because we live in a democratic society. Second, understanding contemporary civic affairs requires a knowledge of the past.

Assuming, then, that history is important, we turn to the question of how studying old rhetorical discourses helps us understand the past. To begin, we should remind ourselves that "understanding" involves more than factual knowledge, such as dates of events. Factual knowledge is essential, but "understanding" means more. It means discovering and explaining trends, seeing changes and continuities. It means interpreting facts.

No clearly formulated theories of interpretation exist to guide historians, but some of them are clearly identifiable, albeit loosely defined. The value of studying rhetorical discourses depends largely on which of these "theories" we accept. I shall begin with two nineteenth-century views that are diametrically opposed. One emphasizes the *personal* forces that guide history, while the other emphasizes *impersonal* ones. Thomas Carlyle emphasized personal forces when he proclaimed that "the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here."<sup>2</sup> Great men "accomplish miracles," he said, because "they persuade men."<sup>3</sup> If we subscribe to Carlyle's view, studying rhetorical discourse helps in two ways. First, it helps us understand the extent to which a leader's power arose from persuasive ability and the extent to which it arose from non-rhetorical factors, such as administrative and military skills. Second, the application of general rhetorical principles helps explain *why* a leader was persuasive. However, Carlyle unfortunately fails to justify studying "great" women or persuaders below the level of "great."

The other nineteenth-century view, often called "Scientific History," focused on general historical "laws," *impersonal* forces that guide historical change. In this spirit, Karl Marx found the dominant force to be economics. To Marx, history is a class struggle, the specific nature of which at a given historical moment is determined by the means of production. In agrarian societies, landowners and peasants struggle against one another; in industrial societies, capitalists and workers are the antagonists. Marx was so confident about his theory that he predicted the future: the struggle between capitalists and workers will lead to revolution and a classless, communist society.

Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, which urged workers to "throw off your chains

and revolt," was a persuasive discourse, and his denouncement of religion as the "opiate of the people" implied that religion was a rhetorical tool to keep workers contented in their dismal state. Yet Marx never theorized about the role of rhetoric in history. Economics was the ultimate determinant.

Paradoxically, Marx's impact on American historians has been both limited and extensive. It was limited because he has had only a few avowed followers, and even the "New Left" historians have not been able to interpret the past in strict Marxist terms. Instead, as one of their severest critics observes, they have "danced their way around the [historical] data in a visionary haze."<sup>4</sup> Marx's impact was extensive because it encouraged an interpretation known as "economic determinism," which was popular in the years between the two world wars and is still influential.

Economic determinists often disagree with Marx about the inevitability or desirability of capitalism's collapse, and they do not confine their study to the conflicts between workers and capitalists. Yet they agree on the importance of economic forces in the flow of history, and whatever rhetorical discourses they bother to study are usually seen as a gloss to cover the economic motivations of the speaker or writer. For example, in contrast to "Great Man" interpreters, who usually attribute the Civil War to the rhetoric of antislavery polemicists such as Lincoln, economic determinists usually attribute it to the competing economic interests of the agrarian South and the industrialized North. Debates about the legality of secession are dismissed as "mere rhetoric."

Few scholars today interpret history in terms of either great leaders or economics, although most (including this writer) agree that both are important. Believing that history is too complex to be interpreted by any one factor, most adopt what one historian calls "a pluralistic vision in which more factors are seriously taken into account."<sup>5</sup> Pluralism makes rhetoric one, but not the only, historical factor; and it leads to our next question.

### III. How Should Rhetorical Discourse be Studied?

Inasmuch as history can be interpreted pluralistically, discourse can be studied from different perspectives. Before turning to them, we shall consider two common problems: textual authenticity and selecting texts.

**(A) *Textual authenticity and selecting texts.*** Although beginning students are usually content with the texts of discourses in anthologies such as this, they should be sensitive to textual problems. Countless numbers of speeches went unrecorded and have been reconstructed after the fact. For example, Patrick Henry's famous "Liberty or Death" speech was delivered at a meeting of the Virginia legislature (formally known as the Virginia Convention), which made no provision for recording the debates. It was reconstructed (accurately?) over a quarter-century later by his biographer, who generated a text based on interviews with a few listeners.

Many speeches have been read from manuscript or typescript, and if the

script is available, the student probably has an authentic text. Yet speakers often depart from their script, sometimes in major ways.

Textual authenticity has been less of a problem since the advent of shorthand reporting and tape recording. Yet even recorded speeches are sometimes published differently. Congressional speeches, for example, are recorded, but legislators have the option of revising the recorded text before its publication in the *Congressional Record*. Speech texts in newspapers are usually based on press releases distributed prior to presentation and therefore do not reflect the speaker's "ad libbing." Similarly, written discourses are often revised from one edition to another. Thus, we have variant texts of a "single" discourse.

Deciding which of several texts to study depends largely on the critic's purpose. Suppose, for example, that a Senator delivered a commencement address from manuscript but that the Senator substantially revised the text for publication during her re-election campaign a year later. If the critic wishes to study the speech given to the immediate audience, the manuscript (although not perfect) is probably the "best" text. If the critic wishes to study the Senator's re-election campaign, the published version will be "best."

The "best" text is not always available, and the critic must "make do" as best he can. Yet a good student will remember the limitations and qualify his interpretations accordingly. The need to be careful about drawing conclusions increases when a critic selects a broad topic for research, such as antislavery discourse or Populist rhetoric. Some topics are so broad that not all relevant discourses can be studied in a single lifetime, and critics must be content to select only a sample of discourse. Careless critics give little thought to sampling, but careful ones make sure they are studying a large and representative sample.

The importance of sampling is illustrated by a classic study conducted by Merle Curti. Before his work on the subject, ideological historians "knew" that antebellum Americans had abandoned the eighteenth-century belief in Natural Law. Suspecting that this "fact" rested on studying the discourses of a few intellectuals (who often do not represent public opinion), Curti studied hundreds of Fourth of July orations delivered by a wide variety of speakers to a wide variety of audiences at various times during the antebellum period and corrected the misapprehension.<sup>6</sup>

Having selected a good sample of the best available texts, a student's next task is to make insightful critical interpretations. We should keep in mind that a pluralistic view of history leads to various worthwhile critical approaches.

**(B) Ideological Approaches.** An ideological interpreter studies a discourse (or set of discourses) to ascertain the ideas of the speaker or writer and/or the audience(s) to whom the discourse was addressed. Note our assumptions. If we are studying a speaker's ideas, we are assuming that the ideas in the discourse were really his (for example, he was not lying when he said he believed in X). If we are studying the audience's ideas, we are assuming that the ideas in a discourse reflected those of the audience.

Studying ideology involves more than isolating the ideas that were actually expressed in a discourse. Look, for example, at the long debate over woman

suffrage—when proponents argued that women would cleanse American politics of its corruption, and opponents replied that its corruption made politics an unfit place for women. Implicit in both arguments was an unstated belief in the moral superiority of women.

A technical rhetorical device that is helpful in locating unstated ideas is Aristotle's enthymeme, which he described as the counterpart of a logical (or dialectical) syllogism. So let us begin with the syllogism, which was an elaborate scheme for analyzing the logical validity of various kinds of deductive reasoning, but we shall ignore complexities by simply looking at his oft-cited example:

Major premise: All men are mortal.

Minor premise: Socrates is a man.

Therefore: Socrates is mortal.

In this syllogism, the major premise is a statement in which one category (men) is classified within a broader category (mortal beings). The minor premise is a statement in which the particular (Socrates) is placed within the category, men. It follows logically, therefore, that Socrates falls within the broadest category, mortal beings.

Aristotle recognized that speakers rarely articulate their premises in the formal way noted above. They might not even be aware of their premises; nor do they necessarily start from premises that dialecticians consider to be true. A rhetorical syllogism, or enthymeme, therefore, is simply an informal syllogism with popularly-accepted premises that might or might not be articulated.

Because unstated premises tell us a great deal about a speaker's or writer's (and perhaps the audience's) ideology, critics should make a special effort to look for them. Critics should also keep in mind that describing the ideology within a discourse(s) does not necessarily reveal how persuasive it was. After all, a speaker's premises might be acceptable to some audiences but unacceptable to others. To study the persuasiveness of discourse, we shall adopt a neo-Aristotelian rhetorical approach.

**(C) Neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism** goes beyond studying the text of a discourse. We must know what the speaker or writer was trying to accomplish. We must know as much as possible about the audience, because a text that is persuasive to one audience might be unpersuasive (or even counterpersuasive) to another. Obtaining such knowledge is called *extrinsic criticism* because it is extrinsic to the text. We shall consider it before turning to the *intrinsic criticism* of the text(s).

**(1) Extrinsic criticism** begins by asking, What was the speaker's or writer's persuasive purpose? Incidentally, a few (but fortunately not many) literary critics would object to this question on the grounds that an author's "meaning" is "indeterminate," but this view is ridiculous. In some cases, the purpose is obvious. A political candidate's campaign rhetoric is obviously designed to get votes. In some cases, the speaker or writer stated the purpose in the discourse.



Yet ascertaining purpose is sometimes a little tricky. For example, as you read Henry Clay's "American System" speech, you will note that he said nothing about the upcoming presidential election. You might therefore conclude that his purpose was simply to persuade his congressional hearers to vote for a high protective tariff. However, if you remember that Clay was a presidential candidate and that the speech was distributed nationwide as a pamphlet, you will probably conclude that the speech had two purposes: to persuade congressmen to vote for the tariff and to persuade voters to support his candidacy.

Among the extrinsic data available for determining purpose(s) are: statements made by the speaker or writer in his or her private papers, and inferences that can be deduced from the general context (or what some theorists call the "rhetorical situation") surrounding a discourse.

A second question is, What were the audience's pre-existing attitudes toward the author's purpose? Were they sympathetic, hostile, or undecided? The answer will become important when the critic turns to internal criticism. If attitudes were sympathetic, intrinsic criticism will focus on how the speaker or writer reinforced pre-existing attitudes. If attitudes were hostile or undecided, it will focus on how the persuader identified his or her ideas with the audience's values (or what Aristotle called major premises). But before intrinsic criticism can be meaningful, the critic must ascertain the audience's pre-existing views.

Ascertaining predispositions is complicated by three factors: (1) An audience might be divided; some were sympathetic, some hostile, some indifferent. (2) Audience predispositions differ in degree as well as in kind; one hostile listener might be extremely hostile while another might be mildly so. (3) A discourse might have been addressed to more than one audience. In our own day, for example, presidential State of the Union addresses are delivered to Congress, but television viewers are another (perhaps more important) audience. Many of the speeches in this anthology were published soon after delivery, thus giving them an immediate listening audience and a wider reading audience.

The extrinsic sources that can be used for ascertaining audience predispositions are pretty much the same as those available for determining a speaker's or writer's purpose. The same sources can also be used for answering a third question: What were the audience's attitudes toward the speaker or writer (as distinguished from his purpose)? This question is important because a persuader's reputation is an influential factor in his or her persuasive success or failure.

In assessing the "pre-discourse" reputation, critics should avoid confusing reputation and biographical accuracy. To illustrate, let us return to Clay's "American System." Biographers know he was born into a prosperous Virginia family, but contemporaries regarded him as a poor boy who went West and became a self-made man (a reputation he cultivated).

Critics should also avoid confusing a persuader's pre-discourse reputation with a future reputation. For example, Abraham Lincoln now has a reputation of being an abolitionist because of the Emancipation Proclamation, but when you read his Cooper Union Address (later in this anthology) you should

remember that he had not yet proclaimed Emancipation. In fact, one of the reasons that the speech helped him get the presidential nomination was that he used it to build a reputation of moderation.

A final question for external criticism is, What audience attitudes constituted *available* means of persuasion? Even hostile audiences usually share some attitudes with the person who is trying to persuade them. These attitudes can be thought of as major premises which a persuader could use as starting points in a persuasive effort. Later, when the critic turns to internal criticism, he can compare the available means of persuasion with those actually used in order to assess the persuader's rhetorical skill. For example, when you read Sarah Grimke's public letter in this anthology, it will be obvious that her audience was partially hostile, but she based much of her argument on religion. This was a good rhetorical technique because her audience was favorably disposed toward religion. How does a critic know the available means of persuasion? By reading exhaustively in the field of history, especially ideological history.

Armed with an understanding of the speaker's or writer's purpose, the audience's attitudes toward the purpose, the speaker's or writer's reputation with the audience, and audience values in general, the critic can turn from extrinsic to intrinsic criticism.

**(2) Intrinsic criticism** is the close analysis of the text of discourse(s), but it is more than just describing the discourse. It involves relating the ideas, arguments and symbols within the discourse(s) to the kinds of information discussed above in order to assess its persuasive potential. This requires insight, and rigidly following an analytical system can often hinder insight. Yet insightful interpretation requires a systematic approach. In other words, a good critic strikes a balance between rigidly following a system and having no system at all.

One useful analytical system is a modification of the one that Greco-Roman rhetoricians told students to use for preparing and presenting persuasive speeches. It was a process-oriented system that took speakers through five stages: (1) invention (finding possible persuasive appeals), (2) disposition (selecting and organizing appeals), (3) style (wording the discourse), (4) memory (memorizing the speech), and (5) delivery.

Critics can proceed through the same stages, but they usually modify this system. Critics usually ignore memory, partly because modern speakers rarely memorize texts, partly because it is virtually impossible to determine how a speaker memorized a text (even if it was memorized) and partly because it does not seem to be a particularly important aspect of discourse to analyze. Delivery is not amenable to internal criticism unless the text exists in visual form (a videotape, for instance). Critics must study delivery via extrinsic sources, such as comments by observers.

Strictly defined, invention is finding possible appeals, which we discussed earlier as an aspect of extrinsic criticism. Strictly defined, disposition includes the selection of possible appeals, but most neo-Aristotelian rhetorical critics blend their study of invention with an analysis of appeals that were actually within the discourse. This brings us to Aristotle's three "modes," or types,

of persuasive appeals: ethos, pathos, and logos. Aristotle defined ethos as the character, wisdom, and goodwill of a speaker as it appears to the audience. Some modern rhetoricians rephrase these aspects of ethos as competency and integrity. Irrespective of the terminology, the critic examines the methods used in a discourse to enhance the speaker's or writer's ethos. We have already mentioned a couple of examples of ethos enhancement: Clay's self-portrayal as a poor boy who made good and Grimke's implicit self-portrayal as a religious person. Readers will find many other techniques of ethos enhancement in this anthology, but they should do more than describe them. They should ask whether the techniques were adapted well to the audience's predispositions. If so, why? If not, why not? Were some potentially good ethos-raising techniques not used?

What Aristotle named pathos is what moderns usually call emotional appeals. Critics will ask: To what emotions did the speaker or writer appeal? How were the appeals made? Were they the best appeals to use? Did the persuader overuse or underuse emotionalism?

The Greek word "logos" is usually translated as "logic," but Aristotle did not mean that logic in rhetorical discourse is the same as logic in scientific demonstration or dialectic. Rhetorical logic is what seems reasonable to the audience. The speaker must base arguments on premises that the audience finds acceptable.

Critics often find it helpful to diagram arguments in the form of an enthymeme, especially when the major premise was unstated. For example, the recent debate over sending U.S. troops to Bosnia featured the opposing argument, "Sending troops will lead to another Vietnam." Although the major premise was unstated, we can diagram the argument as follows:

Major premise: Anything that leads to another Vietnam is bad.

Minor premise: Sending troops to Bosnia will lead to another Vietnam.

Therefore: Sending troops to Bosnia would be bad.

Such diagrams help critics isolate the unstated premises undergirding an argument, but critics should also ask: Would the premises have been acceptable to the audience? What, if anything, did the speaker or writer do to persuade the audience to accept questionable premises?

Critics should not limit themselves to looking for premises that undergird formally stated arguments. Slogans and stylistic choices (if they are persuasive) also rest on audience-approved premises. For example, political campaign rhetoric often includes the word "new," as in Wilson's "New Freedom," Roosevelt's "New Deal" and Reagan's "New Beginning." As we shall see later in this book, America's Puritan heritage has left us with a faith that new is better. The faith need not be articulated by a persuader because audiences "know" it is true. Similarly, the "Declaration of Sentiments" issued by the women's movement in 1848 was stylistically similar to the Declaration of Independence, and its effectiveness rested on the unstated premise that the Declaration of Independence was wonderful.

Thus far, our discussion of logos has been limited to the enthymeme, but Aristotle also discussed examples. In his theory, enthymemes involved deductive reasoning, whereas examples involved induction (reasoning from particulars within a class to generalizations about the class). From a strictly logical, or dialectical, perspective, critics should ask whether the examples were sufficiently representative of the class to justify the conclusion. Unfortunately, audiences do not always ask this question. They often respond favorably if an example is consistent with their own personal experiences and if the example is presented in a way that is vivid and emotionally appealing. Critics therefore should assess examples within a discourse in terms of persuasive potential as well as logical merit.

Unfortunately, Aristotle's discussion of logos did not include a detailed treatment of some argumentative patterns that modern rhetoricians consider important. These include (followed by one example of each pattern): arguments from authority (Abortion is moral or immoral because authority X says so); arguments from analogy (A single-payer system of health insurance will work, or not work, in the U.S. because it is, or is not, working in Canada); statistically-based arguments (Congress should, or should not, adopt the president's proposed budget because it has a deficit of X number of dollars); and arguments involving cause-effect relationships (Teen-age pregnancy is, or is not, caused by poverty). Assessing the persuasive potential of all these types of arguments involves the same kinds of questions, previously discussed, that critics should raise about enthymemes and examples.

Rhetorical disposition involves the organizational pattern of a text. Organizational patterns vary, and critics should consider whether the pattern actually used in a discourse was best for the audience. For example, some of the sermons in this anthology follow the Puritan format (which will be explained later), while other follow a narrative mode. Which would have been most persuasive to the audience? Irrespective of which organizational pattern was employed, critics should assess whether the discourse was clear. If so, what made it clear (summaries, enumerations, well-worded transitions)? If not, why not?

Finally, the critic should turn to style, or the wording of a discourse. Ancient rhetoricians gave much attention to what are commonly called the "stylistic virtues." Although the "virtues" varied from one rhetorician to another, they usually included grammatical correctness and appropriateness to the audience, the speaker, the subject, and the genre. Aristotle also said a speech should be more dramatic than a written discourse, making use of devices that arouse an audience's emotions by "bringing things before the eyes." He described stylistic devices that could bring things before the eyes of the audience, including puns, riddles, proverbs, hyperboles, antitheses, and metaphors.

Critics can assess a discourse in terms of these stylistic virtues, but many recent rhetoricians complain that ancient theory, although not wrong, is inadequate. This complaint has given rise to some new approaches to stylistic analysis, especially "metaphorical criticism." Unfortunately, "metaphor" is defined differently by different scholars. To Aristotelians, a "metaphor" is a

symbol that either states or implies that one thing is similar to another ("He's a pig"). Metaphorical critics concentrate on locating the metaphors that predominated in a text or set of texts and then asking whether they helped the persuader(s) achieve his or her purpose. For example, critics have noted that war metaphors predominated in many discourses about domestic policy during the 1960s and 1970s, such as Johnson's "War on Poverty" and Ford's "War on Inflation." Did war metaphors help them achieve their purpose?

Metaphorical criticism is only one modification of neo-Aristotelian criticism. Many others have emerged during the last two or three decades. However, many presuppose a definition of "rhetoric" that differs from Aristotle's and are of marginal value in analyzing the *persuasiveness* of rhetorical discourse. Others, such as those devised by Kenneth Burke, a literary-rhetorical critic whose theories have been both praised and belittled by other critics, are too complex to summarize adequately in a few pages. I shall summarize only three modifications of neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism: generic, movement, and social criticism.

(1) *Generic criticism* seeks to refine Aristotle's theory of genres and to apply that theory to the analysis of specific discourses. Although acknowledging the value of Aristotle's set of genres, generic critics say the modern world has seen the rise of so many new genres that Aristotle's system is inadequate. For example, presidential war messages and campaign speeches are both deliberative, but each has its own singular features.

What are generic features? Answers vary, but generic critics believe that the commonalities of a rhetorical situation (such as a funeral, a declaration of war, or an inauguration) impose "restrictions" that "require" (or at least result in) discourses given on those occasions having common rhetorical characteristics. They also believe that assessments of individual discourses should be in terms of these general characteristics and restrictions. For example, this writer once did an exploratory study of war rhetoric to see what appeals are commonly used in persuading the "home front" to support a war.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Ware and Linkugel studied a group of discourses that speakers delivered in self-defense after their integrity had been attacked.<sup>8</sup> In both cases, the critics used their generalizations about commonalities to analyze individual discourses.

Few rhetoricians deny completely the idea of generic commonalities, but skeptics have two reservations: (1) Individual discourses within a genre have differences as well as similarities. (2) The alleged "restrictions" and commonalities of a genre provide an inadequate standard for analyzing individual discourses. For example, many of the essays in a recent book about presidential inaugural addresses focus on the differences between discourses in order to correct what the authors regard as erroneous statements made by earlier critics about commonalities.<sup>9</sup>

(2) *Movement criticism* involves assessing the persuasiveness of a set of discourses which collectively constitute a "movement." As is the case with generic criticism, rhetoricians disagree about the value of this approach. This

writer thinks that movement criticism is very valuable because it adds an important dimension to the context of discourse.

Scholars also disagree about definitions. Even the term *movement* is defined in varying ways, but the following is common: a movement is a more-or-less organized effort by a group of people to bring about or prevent some kind(s) of social and/or political change. This definition does not equate a "movement" with established institutions (such as labor unions, churches and political parties), but it does include more-or-less organized efforts to seize control of an established institution (as when opponents of the Vietnam War took over the Democratic party). We think of a movement as a semi-organized group or set of groups, such as Woman Suffrage, Abolitionism, Populism, Right-to-Life, Gay Rights or the New Right.

Although the definition is admittedly ambiguous, it is precise enough to permit rhetorical critics to study discourses produced by members of a particular movement in terms of certain theoretical presuppositions about the nature of movements. What are these presuppositions? Movement theorists have yet to develop an agreed-upon set of presuppositions, but they generally agree that movements go through a series of stages, which I call (1) dissent, (2) inception, (3) maturation, (4) termination and (5) post-termination. Each stage poses particular problems for a movement and imposes certain rhetorical requirements if the movement is to succeed. Critics must analyze the discourses of each stage accordingly.

Dissent is not, strictly speaking, a stage because nothing has been done to organize the movement. It is simply a time when discontent is spreading and, because reasons for discontent vary, critics must analyze the precise reason(s) if they are to understand the rhetoric of later stages. Unfortunately, no one knows all the reasons for discontent, but the following list, phrased in general terms (followed in each instance by a parenthetical example) is useful: (1) unfulfilled economic expectations (people expect to be prosperous but are not); (2) a perceived inconsistency between their own values and those of society (a value which says that abortion is immoral at a time when it is widely practiced); (3) a fear of some catastrophe (fear of another ice age); (4) unhappiness with the status of their group (some students complain that big universities treat them like numbers instead of people). Although various rhetorical discourses reflect one or more kinds of discontent during the dissent stage, leaders have not yet emerged, and discontented people have not yet been brought together.

Eventually, some leaders emerge to organize the discontented. This is the inception stage. In the real (as opposed to the theoretical) world, the process of inception is often more messy than I have just described it. Various groups with similar, but different, complaints might get organized by different leaders at various times and places, thus making it difficult for a critic to isolate precisely the "inception."

A naive critic might think that organizing the discontented would be easy, but organizers often face a host of problems. Potential followers might be lethargic; lack respect for the self-appointed leaders; fear legal repression; fear

social disapproval; disagree with other discontented people about the nature of, or solutions to, the problem; be pessimistic about the possibility of success; or simply be unaware of the existence of the movement. Leaders, therefore, face special rhetorical tasks during inception. They must attract attention, establish their own ethos, build a sense of unity, arouse enthusiasm, and develop a sense of optimism. The rhetorical critic who studies discourses from a movement perspective must, therefore, study those of the inception period to determine how, and how well, they achieved these particular tasks.

Once a movement is fairly well organized, it enters the maturation stage, when leaders must gain a broader following. This implies two types of audiences: (1) the original followers, who often are militant and uncompromising; and (2) potential followers, who often are less militant, more compromising and satisfied with partial remedies. If the movement tempers its extremism, it risks alienating the original following; but if it does not, it risks failure with the larger public.

The maturation stage also brings other tasks. First, the movement must develop a set of *positive* goals. In earlier stages, it is enough to have a negative rhetoric (attacking devil figures who are allegedly causing the problem), but the persuasiveness of negative rhetoric declines as time goes by. The necessity of a positive rhetoric often leads to a second task—the prevention of splintering within the movement. Third, a movement that is showing signs of success usually generates a countermovement to which the movement must respond. The antislavery movement is a good example of all three tasks. Most of the early rhetoric was against slavery, and some of it was against the “Slavepower Conspiracy.” Only later did the movement develop positive goals, but it splintered in the process. Moderates wished only to stop the spread of slavery, but extremists demanded total abolition. Even Northern extremists were split between those who demanded that the North secede from the Union (William Lloyd Garrison, for one) and those who did not (such as Frederick Douglass). Meanwhile, a vigorous proslavery countermovement developed. In cases such as this, critics should assess how, and how well, the movement overcame these problems.

Movements eventually terminate, sometimes in clear and sometimes in confusing ways. They might succeed or fail or do some of both. Sometimes non-rhetorical factors, such as an improving economy, remove the sources of discontent, and the movement simply withers away. At other times, growing popular support for a movement motivates established institutions to co-opt it. For example, the Populist movement, which attracted growing support from economically-depressed farmers during the 1890s, was co-opted by the Democratic party (see Bryan’s “Cross of Gold” in this anthology). Then it withered away as prosperity returned to the farms.

The relationship between post-termination and rhetorical discourse is not very clear, and it constitutes an interesting area for future research. Sometimes the movement is forgotten. Sometimes it is eulogized with a plethora of epideictic discourse, as for example the now-current ceremonial rhetoric about the Civil Rights movement on the birthday of its major leader, Martin Luther King,

Jr. Sometimes even unsuccessful movements are eulogized, as for example when post-Civil War Southern speakers commemorated the "Old South" and the "heroes" of the "lost cause."

Although post-termination rhetoric is predominately epideictic, it can serve other important functions. It sometimes rebuilds social unity after it was disrupted. For example, the Gettysburg commemoration of 1903 brought together thousands of aged veterans who had fought one another fifty years earlier. The event was highly publicized and presumably helped unify North and South.

Another function is to provide favorable public images and myths for other movements and institutions. For example, abolitionists of the antebellum period capitalized on the favorable image of the American Revolution by holding Fourth of July celebrations, at which orators analogized the two movements. The Democratic party of today still calls itself the "Party of Jefferson" (even though its "activist government" philosophy is antithetical to Jefferson's). A movement critic attempts to determine whether a post-termination rhetoric appeared and, if so, to assess its nature and persuasive functions.

(3) *Social criticism* is such an extremely broad term that some scholars consider it too ambiguous to be useful. However, because it is a widely-used term and has generated a considerable amount of controversy in Academe, I shall express a few opinions that readers might wish to consider, irrespective of whether they agree or disagree.

Our earlier discussion of persuasive *purpose* assumes that the author of a discourse intended to have a certain effect on the audience. However, a discourse or set of discourses probably has unintended effects as well. For example, a political candidate might put a short commercial on television for the persuasive purpose of getting votes, but the rise of this new rhetorical form has led some social critics to ask about its unintended effects. Do commercials lessen our ability to comprehend a complicated line of argument? Do they lessen public interest in civic affairs? Do they blur the distinction between entertainment and serious discussion of public issues?

My personal opinion is that the kinds of questions listed above are important, although they are difficult to answer. So are similar questions about other rhetorical practices. For example, some historians and critics dismiss ceremonial oratory (such as Fourth of July speeches and inaugural addresses) as trivial, whereas others say it functions to build social unity. Who is right? Again, some observers say that the common rhetorical practice of arguing that "my" group has certain "rights" is disrupting social unity, whereas others say this is not true. Who is correct?

Another type of social criticism consists of making judgments about discourse, not on the basis of its persuasiveness, but on the basis of the individual critic's personal opinions about the ideas and rhetorical characteristics of the discourse. This type of criticism has become extremely popular in Academe during the last few decades, especially among feminists, "new left" scholars and other "politically correct" writers in the humanities and social sciences. I confess



that I do not know why this kind of criticism has become so popular, but I suspect that several factors are involved: (1) the increased popularity of "revisionist history" (which emphasizes the bad features of our past, such as slavery and imperialism); (2) increased political activity among academicians; and (3) the uncomfortable feeling that critics get when their rhetorical analysis tells them that a discourse was persuasive, yet they think it was morally reprehensible.

Supporters of this kind of social criticism argue that they fail in their social responsibility if they do not evaluate discourse in terms of morality, philosophy, and truth. They add that their knowledge of rhetoric makes them uniquely competent to distinguish "good" from "bad" persuasion.

Opponents of this kind of social criticism say that their rhetorical expertise gives scholars no more authority to present personal evaluations about the moral worth of a discourse than anyone else. They add that assessing discourse on the basis of subjective standards actually distorts our understanding of the past. It constitutes what many historians called "presentism"—looking at the past through the eyes of the present.

This is not to suggest that opponents of "presentism" (of whom I am one) have no personal opinions or are capable of totally keeping subjectivity out of judgments about the past. We try as best we can. For example, I belong to that minority of critics who has a strong personal dislike of Franklin Roosevelt and his New Deal rhetoric, but I try to avoid mixing my personal opinions with my judgments about his mastery of the rhetorical art and the social significance of the New Deal. Being human, we cannot avoid confusing different kinds of judgments, but we ought to try to avoid mixing personal opinions with analytical judgments.

#### IV. Selecting Discourses for This Anthology

Although most of the guidelines which were followed in preparing this anthology should be obvious from previous sections, a brief explanation might help readers get a better idea of the book's purpose, strengths, and limitations. Selections were made on the basis of Aristotle's definition of rhetoric as persuasion about civic affairs. The book is limited therefore to discourses dealing with civic affairs. Its primary purpose is to provide texts for introductory survey courses in the history and criticism of American public discourse. Therefore it covers a wide range, too wide to provide readers with enough material for definitive studies of specialized topics. It is a survey.

Inasmuch as it is a survey, it seemed appropriate to include mostly discourses of well-known leaders, such as Lincoln and Roosevelt, who represent dominant views. However, because I do not subscribe to the Great Leader theory of history, some lesser lights are included. I also believe that an adequate understanding of history requires an examination of the "losers" as well as the "winners." Losers tend to be forgotten with the passage of time, but they were often so important in their own day that the winners cannot be understood

properly without seeing them in the context of the losers' opposition. Readers therefore will find some discourses by Loyalists as well as American Revolutionists, pro-slavery as well as anti-slavery polemicists, "isolationists" as well as "internationalists."

Believing in the value of movement criticism, many of the discourses in this anthology were selected to demonstrate the development of some important movements in American history, such as anti-slavery and woman suffrage. In the process, some discourses were selected to illustrate common problems of movements, such as splintering and counter-rhetoric.

Because of the availability of many good anthologies covering the recent past, this book is weighted towards earlier historical periods. Fearing that readers sometimes lack sufficient historical background to appreciate the context of individual discourses, each is preceded by a brief (admittedly somewhat superficial) commentary. The commentary is not a rhetorical analysis of the discourse. It simply puts the discourse in its context. Most commentaries are organized by first sketching the general context and then the immediate situation. Information about the author is not to provide a biography per se, but to provide a sense of his or her reputation at the time. Textual authenticity is discussed only when it constitutes a problem, as it occasionally does. Although preferring to include complete texts, I used excerpts when the discourse was too important to omit but too long to present in its entirety. In such cases, the commentary includes an overview of deleted passages.

Hopefully, this introduction provides you with a fairly clear idea of what this anthology is all about. Hopefully, you will find the discourses interesting and profitable to study.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, translated with commentary by George A. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), book I, chp. 2, p. 36.
- <sup>2</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History* (New York: D. Appleton, 1841), p. 1.
- <sup>3</sup> Carlyle, p. 184.
- <sup>4</sup> Oscar Handlin, *Truth in History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1979), p. 104. For a conflicting view, see G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).
- <sup>5</sup> Ernest R. May, cited by Michael Kammen in his introduction to *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 40.
- <sup>6</sup> Merle Curti, "The Great Mr. Locke: America's Philosopher, 1783-1861," *Huntington Library Bulletin* (1937), 11:107-51.
- <sup>7</sup> Ronald F. Reid, "New England Rhetoric and the French War, 1754-1760: A Case Study in the Rhetoric of War," *Communication Monographs* (1976), 43:259-86.

<sup>8</sup> B. L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (1973), 59:274-83. Reprinted in Sonja K. Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1989), pp. 122-34.

<sup>9</sup> Halford Ryan, editor, *The Inaugural Addresses of Twentieth-Century American Presidents* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993).