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LUTHER'S RHETORIC

STRATEGIES AND STYLE
FROM THE INVOCAVIT SERMONS

NEIL R. LEROUX



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PREFACE

This is a book about Martin Luther. It is also a book about rhetoric, style, Scripture, and preaching. Those are five reasons why, in part, this work took so long to complete. I found myself nearly overwhelmed with the breadth of the task. And I struggled for a long while trying to determine whether this would be a book about Luther or a book about rhetorical style. When I thought I had resolved the dilemma in favor of Luther, Ross Wolin suggested that perhaps the book can do justice both to style and to Luther. My readers will ultimately decide whether Ross was right.

My interest in Luther began 15 years ago during a course in Renaissance rhetoric with Tom Conley. As a fairly new pastor to a small congregation in central Illinois, I had begun graduate studies in Speech Communication at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, only 22 miles away. Tom's courses were stimulating because the range of his expertise goes far beyond understanding the history of rhetoric. During his seminar on style, I first acquired a taste for, and I hope some ability in, the careful reading of a text. I learned some fundamental principles for examining the intricacies of arguments and the language in which they are expressed. When Celeste Condit suggested to me that my experience in biblical exegesis produced important insight into Frederick Douglass's speeches, I began to feel more at home in rhetorical criticism. Once I realized that Luther's discourse was virtually untouched by rhetorical critics, at least in America, I began planning a dissertation on the *Invocavit* Sermons. I wanted to discover why Luther's sermons interested me so much—how they were so clear and yet so powerful. My focus was on Luther's style, which Conley agreed was a fruitful area to explore. The dissertation was a delightful experience, and much of that enjoyment can be credited to Tom's support and standards of excellence. Joe Wenzel and Jack Bateman helped shepherd the project to completion, and Jack was one of the first to encourage me to bring the work to publication as a monograph. During the 1990s, both Jack Bateman and Heiko Oberman simply expected the book to be finished, even when I had plenty of doubts. I am grateful I was able to meet Professor Oberman before he died.

Yet the task of converting the manuscript into a book was daunting, so much so that the more I contemplated it, the more I was convinced the job should wait until after I had tenure. One of the most difficult areas was my lack of personal experience with liturgical churches. After spending my entire life, in both pew and pulpit, in what we in the United States call "evangelical" churches (Christian churches, Baptist, Evangelical Free, Nazarene, and some independent churches), I had little idea what it felt like to be surrounded by Christian images in cloth, paint, and sculpture; neither did I understand the liturgies—Protestant or Catholic. Most of the historical conflicts regarding images, the Lord's Supper, Baptism, and confession were only vaguely familiar to me. I was unfamiliar with canon law, the church councils, and the sacraments. So becoming conversant

with these topics meant considerable research. I suppose the “outsider” perspective can be something of an advantage, though. As some historians of Luther observe, confessional loyalties can cloud one’s perspective. As a non-Lutheran who studies Luther, I formed great admiration for Doctor Martin, not only for the prodigious writings and sermons he gave to the world, but also for his expertise with language, his vast knowledge of Scripture, and the passion with which he preached, wrote, and shepherded his flock, beginning with his own family, colleagues, and students.

Moreover, the issues of the Wittenberg Movement of 1521–1522 were perplexing for those involved, and they required both passion and prudent leadership to resolve. On the side of the more zealous reformers in Wittenberg during Luther’s stay at the Wartburg, Andreas Karlstadt and Gabriel Zwilling were equally passionate about what should be done with their newly discovered Gospel and its implications for society. After studying several of Karlstadt’s writings, and being fortunate to work with Ulrich Bubenheimer, I have acquired an appreciation for the “radical” side of the controversy. It was important to research the views Luther came to oppose in the *Invocavit Sermons*, not only to better understand Luther’s positions and strategies, but also because historical and rhetorical research demanded it, if such research is to be truly scholarly. Furthermore, to investigate vigorously a matter so the truth can be exposed (if truth is possible in controversies such as these) and to humbly acknowledge one’s debt to others is, I believe, pleasing to God, who alone is the source of all truth. Augustine reminds us that for a Christian, “wherever he may find truth it is his Lord’s” (*On Christian Doctrine* 2.18.28; cf. prologue 8). In my work with Bubenheimer, I became more familiar with the current resurgence of scholarly research on Karlstadt. My project was additionally blessed by the opportunity to work on the *Wolfenbüttel Manuscript*, which Prof. Bubenheimer discovered in the mid-1980s. Once published, this manuscript (from an unknown hand that recorded Luther’s preaching) will foster additional research into the *Invocavit Sermons*. It may even advance our understanding of how Luther preached because we have so little evidence beyond published sermons.

The debts acquired for this project are huge. The “Notes” and “Further Reading” sections acknowledge the sources I have consulted. Additionally, so many people have assisted me during the past 10 years that trying to mention them all is risky. I owe much to my students at the University of Minnesota, Morris, many of whom have produced striking insights into texts of all kinds in their papers. My student assistants—Julie Brotzler, Sylvia Anderson, Matthew Kauffmann, and Cindy Norberg—have made enormous contributions. My colleagues at UMM in Speech Communication—Mary Elizabeth Bezanson and Barbara Burke—have continued to support and encourage me. UMM colleagues from other humanities disciplines—Dwight Purdy and Laird Barber in English, Ray Lammers (emeritus) in Speech Communication, and Fred Peterson in Art History—read the entire manuscript in a version much longer than the present one. Librarians Margaret Swanson, Maggie Larson-Dylla, Ardath Larson, and Leann Dean processed hundreds of requests for books and articles through inter-library loan and via the simply wonderful Minitex system we have in Minnesota. In short, it is a blessing beyond words to be able to work here at UMM. I have also benefitted from the assistance of nearby libraries: St. John’s University, Collegeville, Minn., and Luther Seminary in St. Paul. Financial assistance for research and travel came to me from many sources: in-state travel grants, out-of-state travel funds, and a single-quarter

leave from the University of Minnesota, Morris; international travel funds from the International Studies Program at the University of Minnesota; graduate school summer fellowships from the University of Minnesota; and McKnight summer fellowships from the McKnight Foundation. My thanks for personal encouragement and scholarly assistance is also due to: Ted Underwood, Fred Farrell, Jenny Nellis, Cindy Poppe, Jayne Hacker, Tom Mahoney, Dieter Fauth, Erika Schulz, Tom Benson, Craig Kallendorf, Heiko Oberman, Robert Bast, Carter Lindberg, Carol Jablonski, Ernst Wendland, Andries Snyman, Bruce Shields, Ronald Heine, Bruce Parmenter, Hans Hillerbrand, Gerhard Krodel, Linda Mitchell, Jameela Lares, Tom Duncanson, Gary Selby, Pete Verkruyse, Tap Payne, Jim Aanerud, Mike Sager, and Cindy Winter. I am grateful to colleagues of the Rhetoric Society of America, the International Society for the History of Rhetoric, the National Communication Association, and the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference for opportunities to present my work. A huge thanks to Ken Wagener and Dawn Weinstock of CAP/CPH (along with their readers) for believing that this book is a worthwhile endeavor and, especially, for their untiring and cheerful suggestions. Lastly, to my family—Joyce, Shelly, Mandy, and Brian (1967–1984)—to you I am the most grateful because you never gave up on me. All praise be to God!

INTRODUCTION

For Martin Luther, the man about whom more has been written than any other Western mortal of the modern era, there still is a scholarly frontier that is only beginning to be charted—Doctor Luther's preaching.¹ So far, Luther scholarship of the past 60 years has but minimally responded to James Mackinnon's lament in 1930 of a lack of scholarly work on Luther's preaching.² Elmer Kiessling's 1935 monograph³ on the early sermons remains one of the few detailed studies we have in English that investigates some portion of the vast amount of extant preaching material (homilies, sermons, and postils) from one of the European tradition's most influential orators. However, contemporary scholars such as Birgit Stolt,⁴ Klaus Dockhorn,⁵ Ulrich Nembach,⁶ John W. O'Malley,⁷ and Knut Alfsvag⁸ have recently begun to investigate the rhetorical practice of Luther (and also Calvin), which, when compared to the rhetorical theories of Erasmus or Melancthon, has previously been much neglected. It now has been convincingly shown that not only was Luther thoroughly trained in the art of rhetoric and dialectic, but that most of his writings cannot be fully appreciated or even understood without taking into account the rhetorical intent and context in which they were composed. To be sure, a failure systematically to investigate Luther's preaching for its contributions to our understanding of how rhetoric works represents an opportunity missed because it is in the engagement of audiences that Luther excelled. Indeed, enemies and followers alike—in different ways and toward opposite ends—attested to the rhetorical skills of this "German Cicero."⁹ Preaching in the Reformation was not only popular, but central, and the reformers articulated the theory for the prominence of preaching.¹⁰ One Reformation historian has stated:

The religious reform was first and foremost a powerful preaching revival. The first act of any community which developed an interest in the new ideas was to request a preacher to proclaim the "pure Word of God." It was not held to be sufficient to read printed tracts or even the Bible: the desire was to hear the word. Indeed, for Protestants "hearing the Word" became virtually a third Sacrament alongside Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Communities cared enough about this to pay out of their own pockets to support a preacher if no benefice was vacant, and to put considerable pressure on magistrates who were reluctant to provide or permit such a preacher.¹¹

Others have already shown Luther's knowledge of—and regard for—rhetoric.¹² I will demonstrate Luther's adeptness at rhetorical skills, regardless of how, when, or where he acquired

them. I will show that Luther, who preached weekly for 34 years at the *Stadtkirche*—daily during Lent, and on many of those days he preached three or four times—was skilled with argument and rhetorical devices and that he knew how to draw listeners—his congregation—into his messages.¹³

Furthermore, because not only Luther's preaching, but also his written commentaries on Scripture have been said to display the same kind of oratorical style,¹⁴ Luther was a skilled rhetorician who was intensely committed to the interpretation and proclamation of God's Word from both lecture desk and pulpit [*Kathedr und Kanzel*]. In Bubenheimer's words, Luther was "Word possessed."¹⁵ In addition, an essential component behind Luther's messages consisted in the fact that he believed listeners should embrace the Gospel and that faith entailed that one could do so. One of the most well known Reformation paintings is on the predella of the Wittenberg city church altar (1547); indeed, the entire altarpiece still captivates the attention of visitors to the *Stadtkirche*.¹⁶ The painting is Lucas Cranach the Elder's depiction of Luther in his Kanzel, pointing the congregation to the crucified Christ. The audience consists not only of Luther's own family, but also of Wittenberg leaders. Moreover, the cross and crucified Jesus seem to stand on that very church floor! To preach meant to preach Christ to people; preaching is the Word enacted. In short, Luther's concept of faith was deeply indebted to rhetoric, faith being an affectively present phenomenon, one that derives from the Holy Spirit's own role as rhetor.¹⁷ Thus, scholars ought to be keenly interested in Luther's sermons.

A study of Luther's preaching surely can contribute to the exploration of intriguing questions homileticians have asked: What sorts of sermon structure did Luther employ in his career? Did he—and in what period of his preaching career—continue, modify, or abandon the so-called "thematic" or "university" sermon with which we are so familiar? To what extent did he adopt the "homily" or "expository" sermon format? What commitments might have brought this about? However, I prefer to venture directly to a question of potentially far greater general interest not only to homileticians, but to all scholars who care about how words work: the question of what I call Luther's style.¹⁸ Precisely what I mean by style—how I examine it and what we learn from it—is addressed in [chapter 1](#). While my approach is somewhat nontraditional, this perspective on style is not without precedent in American rhetorical criticism.¹⁹ The argument in the case study is that careful rhetorical analysis of sermons, through an innovative approach to rhetorical style, opens up Luther's discourse to reveal a preacher (rhetor) engaging an audience. The reader (critic) will begin to appreciate the audience-orientation for its crucial role in the persuasive choices the speaker has made, and the critic can rightfully speculate with a measure of confidence upon the kinds of effects certain language choices may have on their actual and potential listeners. The analysis will attempt to show readers how better to read—to learn to be more sensitive to the strategies, style, arguments, and potential effects upon readers or listeners—by attending first to their own responses.

Unlike Luther's correspondence, theological tracts, Bible translations, and postils, the sermon texts found in collections of Luther's works are questioned by many scholars who doubt that the texts authentically preserve his pulpit speech. One reason for these doubts is a belief that Luther

normally spoke extemporaneously, while the sermon texts seem carefully crafted.²⁰ Another reason is that many extant texts come from the hands of note takers, not from Luther himself. Although the scribes were sympathetic to his agenda (most had been Luther's students), there are inherent transmission problems in note taking. For example, note takers used shorthand dictation—often inserting Latin phrases as abbreviations—to which they later added missing words as they were able to recall them (or words they think Luther should have said or had said on similar occasions). Hence, many of the sermon texts are macronic—mixtures of Latin and German.

Nevertheless, the problem of textual authenticity is nothing new for rhetorical scholars who analyze speech texts. We often work with artifacts of the rhetorical act, texts that do not issue directly from the hands of the rhetor. Indeed, rhetorical critics must often work with “nonofficial” texts, those not released for publication by the author. Moreover, for most ancient texts there are no extant autographs, and still we vigorously investigate those texts for what they can suggest about what is said, how it is put, why the given language choices might have been made, and what plausible effects might have resulted (and can result) from hearing and reading the piece.²¹ Undeniably, crafting a tract or sermon are in many ways similar rhetorical tasks. For those who were literate, Luther's vernacular tracts were readily available for devouring. For the many more who could not read, the same engaging style made his ideas available to all who cared to attend to the messages—whether directly from his pulpit, his pamphlets, or those many people who shared the oral transmission of those messages. As the *salutatio* to Luther's “A Sincere Admonition” (1521) announces, “To all Christians who read this pamphlet or hear it read [*Allen Christen die dissen brieff leszen odder horenn ...*].”²²

A particular instance of this challenge is the case of the so-called Invocavit Sermons of 1522 (LW 51:70–100). These were eight sermons that Luther preached—one each day during the first week of Lent (March 9–16)—in Wittenberg, sermons that helped end the turmoil surrounding controversial church reforms that had occurred during the 11 months Luther was away at Wartburg castle. These were the early days of theological and educational reform— affecting church, monastery, university, and city in Wittenberg and Electoral Saxony. Hence, this was a pivotal period in the German Reformation. In addition, this Wittenberg Movement was the first serious threat to emerge from *within* the evangelical camp because it provoked occasional violence and strong repercussions by rulers. Therefore, what Luther had to say in these sermons was of keen interest.²³

The Invocavit Sermons are still the most famous of all sermons preached by Luther. Familiar lines from them are ubiquitously quoted;²⁴ their historical situation is discussed in every comprehensive Reformation history; and the texts are preserved in many important collections of Luther discourse in English.²⁵ These sermons and the situation that surrounded them continue to be crucial not only for understanding Luther's rhetoric, but also for appreciating the positions and strategies of Luther's opponents. Contemporary scholarship on the so-called radical reformation, for example, commonly refers to Karlstadt's role in the Wittenberg Movement because he was chiefly responsible for many of the church reforms that Luther opposed in the sermons. Thus,

Karlstadt—Luther’s senior colleague on the theological faculty of the university and initially a strong supporter—became Luther’s chief opponent in the sermons. Karlstadt is considered by some as a chief forerunner of Anabaptist and Pietist traditions, and his participation in the Wittenberg Movement, as well as all his writings, have been under intensive reassessment for the past two decades.²⁶

What is disconcerting, however, is that historians and theologians have conducted no detailed analysis of the organization, strategies, and style of the *Invocavit* Sermons. Discussions assess the historical situation, summarize the arguments, and comment that the sermons were effective, but these discussions do not carefully explore how Luther’s arguments function logically and psychologically. Birgit Stolt of Stockholm has provided careful rhetorical analysis of other selected Luther sermons based on classical rhetorical categories; Sergiusz Michalski has recently reemphasized the important substance of Luther’s arguments about images in the *Invocavit* Sermons.²⁷ The Englishspeaking world also needs case-study analysis of Luther’s rhetoric, and such analysis is stronger when it considers not only ancient rhetorical categories, but also contemporary rhetorical theories and critical methods.

Two examples will show how my rhetorical analysis will challenge or bolster existing studies. First, James Preus argues that in the *Invocavit* Sermons Luther’s differences with Karlstadt were over pace not purpose, policy not theology. In other words, the two reformers differed about tactics and timing but were united in theology.²⁸ My analysis shows that the “tactical” differences also reveal divergent theological perspectives. Second, historians often acknowledge Luther’s concern in the *Invocavit* Sermons for “love” and for the “weaker brother,” leaving the implication that these were new themes for Luther. However, it is not the case that these were new themes, and my analysis will demonstrate that fact. Moreover, the analysis also reveals how Luther embodies these themes in his style.²⁹ In addition, the major issue of iconoclasm—whether artwork in the church should be permitted, removed, or destroyed—continues to occupy art historians; the theological and pragmatic arguments of Luther and Karlstadt in 1522 provide important sources of scholarly debate.

A particularly challenging feature of the *Invocavit* Sermons is the state of the texts. The modern German texts derive from early printed editions of 1523 and 1526, which most scholars agree came from the hands of people other than Luther. The only manuscripts that exist are fragmentary texts: (1) A Latin manuscript contains approximately 125 words: 10 *propositiones*—followed by two brief explanatory paragraphs—that summarize the major positions that Luther maintained in the eight sermons. (2) One handwritten German text (and three other prints) contains approximately 1,500 words, which parallels some of the material in sermons 1 and 2.³⁰ (3) A recently discovered German manuscript, what I call the Wolfenbüttel manuscript, consisting of approximately 2,000 words is believed to be a stenographic record of one of the sermons.³¹ However, in April 1522 (only a few weeks after the *Invocavit* Sermons were preached) Luther published a pamphlet that addresses many of the same topics as the sermons but in different order, arguments, and evidence: “Receiving Both Kinds in the Sacrament” (LW 36:231–67). Which

documents, then, constitute what Luther “said” during those eight days in the pulpit? The answer is, of course, we may never know. But the printed texts are the best we have.

While the present study can only begin to plumb the depths of Luther’s preaching, I hope that the background material provided in [chapter 1](#) sufficiently orients and intrigues readers to better understand how rhetoric, rhetorical style, and rhetorical criticism are important tools for learning how Luther’s discourse—how any discourse—works. In [chapter 1](#), I explain the important concepts of rhetorical form (Kenneth Burke), how an argument advances (Chaim Perelman and Lucy Olbrechts-Tyteca), and some important rhetorical devices used to advance an argument. The chapter will prepare readers to follow the careful exposition and analysis of the *Invocavit Sermons* by sharpening their critical “eyes and ears” and by giving them a critical vocabulary with which to articulate their observations.

In [chapter 2](#), I provide important historical and theological background for understanding the *Invocavit Sermons*. Included in the background material is a discussion of the historical and theological issues that provoked the sermons. The explanation covers not only what Luther did and wrote about prior to his exile in Wartburg, but also discusses the people and events surrounding the Wittenberg Movement. The chapter covers both the preacher Luther and his audience members, their concerns and vested interests.

In [chapters 3](#) through [6](#), I describe in detail the flow of arguments and exhortation Luther pursues in the *Invocavit Sermons*. I explain how the sermons are organized, specifically what arguments, appeals, evidence, and exhortation are present. Without knowing this “substance,” one cannot understand the “form.” Conversely, it is only the form (or style) through which and in which the substance of Luther’s preaching can possibly be appreciated because no idea comes without form.

In [chapter 7](#), I present a brief discussion of Luther’s “Receiving Both Kinds in the Sacrament” (April 1522), which is a revision and summary of the *Invocavit Sermons* for reception by towns surrounding Wittenberg that were facing the same issues she faced upon Luther’s return from Wartburg. I also offer some observations about how the Luther documents analyzed in this book—the eight *Invocavit Sermons* and “Receiving Both Kinds”—can be understood to represent differing points in the rhetorical situation. I also draw some concluding summary remarks about key features of Luther’s rhetorical style. Although the thrust of the study differs from other analyses of Luther’s discourse, my arguments participate in a wider scholarly dialogue about Luther as preacher.

CHAPTER 1

RHETORICAL CRITICISM AND STYLE

To appreciate Luther's skill as a preacher, a brief discussion of the processes of understanding any sermon can be helpful. Because preaching and sermon construction draw heavily upon the principles of rhetoric, a review of the key concepts and aims of rhetoric and its subfield, rhetorical criticism, may prove helpful. Rhetorical criticism that closely monitors not only some skeletal outline, but the very language (diction, rhythm, strategy, etc.) of the discourse can help listeners open up the discourse they are reading or hearing because it can train listeners to hear and see—to understand—what had formerly been missed.

Rhetorical criticism is the attempt to describe, analyze, and evaluate discourse, much of which can be called “functional communication,”¹ which is oral and written speech designed for—and which should thus be judged as—“influencing men in some concrete situation.”² The preponderance of contemporary criticism draws upon traditional Western rhetoric, which consists in five parts, or “canons,” that represent the stages of planning, composing, and delivering a speech: invention, arrangement (*dispositio*), style (*elocutio*), memory, and delivery.

Speeches in the Greco-Roman world were of three types, distinguished according to whether or not the audience acted as “judge.” When they did act as judge, the decision audiences were to make was often about what had happened in the past. In such cases the species was forensic (judicial), and the audience ultimately decided the guilt or innocence of a defendant. When the decision considered the future, the species was deliberative, and the audience's judgment ruled on a course of action. If the audience did not act as judge and did not have to render a specific action decision—about past or future—the species was epideictic (ceremonial). The nature of this last species has raised many questions throughout the generations not only because its occasions seem less uniform than the other two, but also because the role of the audience may arguably still be seen as judging something. One suggestion about what that “something” is holds that the audience's role is to judge the quality of the speech and the speaker. Others argue that the values at stake in the praise and blame appeals of the speech are what are ultimately judged (hence, what constructs and deconstructs the culture).

In the ensuing centuries, Western rhetoric has influenced all discourse in many ways, not the least of which is that all human communication can be appreciated for its effort to influence people. It is this broader sense that I bring as a domain for rhetoric and which I have in view for an analysis of Luther's *Invocavit Sermons*. I want to attempt to discover how the discourse functions, beginning with how it functioned in its own concrete situation.

The context, or “situation,” can be studied with help from the rhetorical tradition. Bitzer's theory of “rhetorical situation” (and subsequent critiques), which I address in [chapter 2](#), can help us consider what the speaker and audience are up against prior to the speech. In addition, other

resources speakers have at their disposal are (1) the facts and evidence pertinent to the issue—what Aristotle calls inartistic proofs—and (2) the three forms of artistic (manipulable) proof in traditional rhetoric, which are interlocked and dynamic throughout the speaking occasion. These forms are *ethos*—the proof residing in the character of the speaker (as ascertained by the audience); *logos*—the proof deriving from the arguments of the message; and *pathos*—the proof consisting in the audience's disposition (feelings) toward the speaker and the speech. Hence, the speaker (*rhetor* in Greek; *orator* in Latin) will attempt to design a discourse that presents a compelling case. Accordingly, rhetorical criticism tries to ask how the discourse functions. To do that, one must know what the rhetor is trying to accomplish with the audience. But how shall a critic begin? What features should be examined?

Rhetorical criticism, as it has developed over approximately the past five decades, has taken on many agendas—for example, neo-Aristotelian criticism, movement studies, dramatic criticism, genre criticism. All have been attempts to apply, reconstruct, or improve on a long tradition. What is striking about this body of critical literature is that none of it takes very seriously one of the paramount concerns of that tradition—namely, style. Indeed, a survey of some periodical literature in communication journals shows that there persists a fundamental neglect of style in both the theory and the practice of criticism.³ While various theoretical and critical practices represented in this body of literature suggest that style is a frustratingly amorphous creature, eluding easy definition, most of the material does not venture much beyond theory and is, for the critic, consequently inadequate. It falls short of a level of analysis that would reveal *how* discourse works. As a result, such criticism often fails to provide a useful critical approach to reading a discursive text. What has happened in some applications of rhetorical criticism is instructive. For example, in biblical studies (particularly of the New Testament) much criticism in the past two decades has been preoccupied with scrutinizing a piece of discourse—say, a Pauline epistle—according to the prescriptions found in Greco-Roman rhetorical handbooks. These prescriptions have, to a great extent, applied the requirements of *dispositio* that were thought pertinent to the appropriate genre (species) to which the epistle is judged to belong. Most of the subsequent critical analysis, then, follows (and flows from) a diagnosis of what type of discourse the epistle is characterized as. Features of style are taken to be incidental to this critical process; that is, the invention and arrangement dictate the style.⁴

In one respect, this line of thought shows that some incisive remarks about the importance of style in criticism made more than 40 years ago have been either forgotten or disregarded.⁵ While style may follow invention and arrangement in the natural transpiration of events in the speech planning process, the opposite occurs in the speech listening (or speech criticism) process. Style is apprehended first; arrangement of the arguments, the “parts of the speech,” and the strategy of the speaker usually must be inferred by both audience and critic. Moreover, those inferences generally reconfigure the speech's own idiom, translating it into the critical vocabulary of the analyst, which often results in abridgment of the speech into only its motives, content, strategies, and arguments. Consequently, the language that actually affected the hearers, and which the speaker took such pains to develop, is often overlooked.⁶

Style, then, is of primary, paramount concern to the critic, especially if that critic wants to know how the audience might be receiving the message (a crucial factor in attempting to determine the function of discourse, which I argue ought to be the *modus operandi* of the critic). Moreover, both the interpretation of discourse (literary and rhetorical criticism) and the production of discourse (composition, preaching) can profit from careful attention to style. If, as Donald Bryant has suggested, “style is the final elaboration of meaning,”⁷ then surely style is the initial encounter through which auditors (listeners, readers) *apprehend* meaning. Does it not seem reasonable that style ought to play a major role in the critical act of analyzing discourse?

However, granting that scrutinizing style in criticism has been neglected, what do I mean by style? To begin, we should not regard style as the mere “department” of *elocutio*, but in it *dispositio*, and even *inventio*, participate:

It is difficult at best to consider the functioning language of discourse without becoming involved at once with the ordering of the discourse. Furthermore, if we go beyond the static idea of disposition as arrangement, to the potentially dynamic idea of disposition as *disposing*, as Wagner thought necessary, we may conclude that for the critic the two names signify the two lenses for a stereopticon view of a single factor in discourse. This factor is best conceived as style because that name suggests the foundation of discourse in language.⁸

Such a conception of style may seem radical, particularly in view of narrow (and tainted) conceptions of style—as decoration, eccentricity, fashion, or falsehood. Yet construing style as a phenomenon worthy of a critic’s concern is not new—not for Bryant or Comte de DeBuffon⁹ or others.¹⁰ Style, then, is functional, not only ornamental; rhetorical, not merely literary. Style “does, and the real question is always ‘How well does it *do*?’ So we judge style according to the demands of a particular move; we judge style move by move.”¹¹ Reaching back into disposition and invention, style becomes the “order and movement we give to our thought.”¹² Moreover, style is a crucial factor in traditional rhetorical criticism, even revealing insights of which the speaker might possibly be unaware. C. Joachim Classen argues:

For there is no good reason to assume that a text could and should be examined only according to categories known (or possibly known) to the author concerned. For rhetoric provides a system for the interpretation of all texts (as well as of oral utterances and even of other forms of communication), irrespective of time and circumstances (except, of course, for the fact that some rules of rhetoric immediately concern the external circumstances).¹³

In fact, then, there is no reason why our critical repertoire need be limited to classical categories. Luther’s Wittenberg colleague Philipp Melanchthon made an enormous contribution

to the development of rhetorical criticism, introducing new categories and new terms. By implication, he encouraged any reader or scholar to apply rhetoric in its most advanced form or even to develop it further when and where needed.¹⁴

In what follows, I sketch an outline of a coherent conception of style for use as a critical approach. Then, to develop some procedure or approach for perceiving style, I offer an analysis of the rhetorical process—three operations that occur when a rhetor sets out to secure (or to strengthen) an audience's adherence to an idea, for which I develop a lexicon of critical tools. I hope that what I show will serve as a framework for use by the critic who would understand the function of a discourse for its audience.

A COHERENT CONCEPTION OF STYLE FOR THE CRITIC

One of the first setbacks in casting about for a starting point with style is the pedagogy of style. The handbooks are largely prescriptive. If we resist the aesthetic standards of stylistic prescriptions discussed in the handbooks—clarity and appropriateness (Aristotle); clarity, brevity, sincerity (Richard Lanham)—to what will we turn?¹⁵ I suggest we put aside the handbooks until *after* we have more fully clarified the nature of discursive style, that business of manipulating language for the purpose of executing the rhetorical function, “adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas.”¹⁶ In describing what he calls “textual criticism” (a term somewhat misleading, especially to scholars familiar with classical and biblical studies), Stephen Lucas argues that “meaning and effect are produced, not by the text as a static entity, but by the progressive interaction of the audience with the temporal flow of the ideational, dispositional, stylistic, and syntactical elements in the discourse. Each word, each phrase, each sentence *conditions the response of the audience* to each succeeding word, phrase, and sentence.”¹⁷

While his project of close analysis of texts is on the right track, Lucas fails to provide an effective anchor for an encompassing theory of style. To be able to apprehend the “progressive interaction of the audience with the ... elements in the discourse,” the critic must have a way to engage the discourse as she encounters it in the text. To do that, I have found extremely helpful an approach that provides framework and tools for analyzing a discourse, one that incorporates some fundamental, but overlooked, notions of Chaim Perelman and Lucy Olbrechts-Tyteca and of Kenneth Burke. Using the ideas of these scholars, I have devised a set of principles that helps organize a practical, critical vocabulary.¹⁸ My approach consists of two lenses, two foundational ways of thinking: (1) a formal, structural, or dramatistic lens; and (2) a stylistic, argumentative, rhetorical lens.

The first lens derives not from Burke's later work on motives, but from his concept of *form*, which he offered most accessibly in his 1931 collection of essays, *Counter-Statement*.¹⁹ The second lens derives from Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, who characterize argumentation as the attempt to secure audience *adherence* to theses and who present their analysis of figures according to their argumentative, not aesthetic, function.²⁰ Both of these lenses together allow the critic to analyze

discourse in much the same way one holds a prism to the sunlight. The prism does not *impose* colors upon the white light; rather, it *enables* one to discern what is already there by enhancing one's observational (and analytical) capabilities.²¹

BURKE'S *FORM* AS RHETORICAL ACTION

Burke offered a compelling case for understanding how artistic discourse works in social interaction. Instead of insisting that interpreters continue trying to get inside the mind or world of the artist, he maintained that we should be asking what the audience is thinking and feeling as they encounter the work of art. The key to understanding what makes discourse persuasive is *form*: "an arousing and fulfillment of desires."²² Burke's project in the 1920s was to challenge a dominant elitist aesthetic wherein a work of art is primarily the avenue by which an artist may *express* something—most often an idea or emotion the artist experiences. Against this consensus was Burke's "counter-statement," in which he insisted that the essence or goal of an artistic work is to *evoke* something in others, that is, in audiences. Consequently, Burke saw discourse as communication, as rhetorical action, with *identification* between artist (speaker/poet, etc.) because identification (not "persuasion") is the artist's goal.²³ The audience is then able to participate in the action because the artist has deliberately chosen "forms" in which to instantiate ("individuate") her or his emotion or idea via an argument, plot, story, etc. Hence, an author fashions (*inventio*) a work in which an audience can participate not only through the information presented, but also through the forms into which the information is organized. Information can bring satisfaction through its newness, but form has the capability repeatedly to satisfy because of its power to elicit our recognition of its rightness or fittingness. Furthermore, this rightness—our cooperation with and ability to apprehend, appreciate, and participate in form (whether by agreeing with it, rejoicing at it, mourning over it, being terrified by it, etc.)—is the work's *psychology*, the explanation behind its function. What makes audience identification happen is usually not information, but form, "the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite."²⁴ Therefore, to dichotomize form and content—making content primary, form merely something later selected (as shape, container, or format)—is misguided. Rather than being irrelevant or in opposition to content, form and content are inseparable; form becomes part of, is the "body" of, the (disor pre-embodied) content.²⁵

It may seem that, rather than having a new concept of form, Burke is simply insisting the interpreter gives greater priority to form. In arguing that form, not information, is what "hooks and holds" audiences, has not Burke merely taken the notion of shape and/or arrangement of information and given it greater importance than the information itself? Somewhat to the contrary, I believe when Burke says that literary works of art normally should strive for some balance between form and information and that those works violating this principle are either bad or highly specialized art, Burke appears to have muted the objection. Moreover, if "everything that gets communicated does so through form,"²⁶ we need to ask, How complex is form and whence does it come?

Form is a natural ability to function in a certain way. Just as we possess heartbeats, we humans possess forms. Thus, we can respond to or be aroused by (though we may not always know what to call) form when it appears in artistic works. "An ability to function in a certain way implies gratification in so functioning. A capacity is not something which lies dormant until used—a capacity is a command to act in a certain way."²⁷ While Burke seems to describe form in psycho-physical terms, such as "muscular imagination" (and many others), he really is interested only in form's employment through our language systems.²⁸

Two fundamental "aspects" of form, or patterns of order through which it seems to operate, are the most common in discourse.²⁹ Indeed, unless we understand these aspects, most rhetorical figures remain mere decoration— apparent stylistic novelties. First, *progressive* form occurs in its most straightforward manner (syllogistic progression) as linear or temporal advance. This form occurs whenever one element leads to another element of a different kind, such as when A leads to (suggests, requires, permits, causes) B, an argument advances step by step, a plot moves along scene by scene, premises force a conclusion, a cause results in effects, or effects cry out for causes. For instance, when a theatrical audience learns of the discovery of a murder, they anticipate (desire) the apprehension of the villain. This "requirement" for the apprehension exists because similar phenomena already have been experienced by persons alert to their own empirical and artistic worlds. We "expect" certain outcomes, whether we call them logic, justice, "just desserts," or "the breaks." Because we have previously experienced it, forward movement of some pace and magnitude is something we have come to expect, recognize, and desire (or dread). Consequently, an artist sensitive to these existential recurrences can play on our human psychological expectations, installing syllogistically linked episodes within the work. The fascinating introduction to Burke's essay "Psychology and Form" is itself a demonstration of how syllogistic progression works. It describes how the audience has long expected the ghost's arrival in the fourth scene of the first act of *Hamlet*: "This ghost ... is the rich fulfilment of a promise. Yet this satisfaction in turn becomes an allurements, an itch for further developments."³⁰

So this development illustrates first of all form itself. Then, because the satisfaction provided, despite its expectedness (which has been cleverly enhanced by delay and diversion), is a desired outcome—a payoff—the version or aspect of form is syllogistic progression. To be sure, this progressive form is behind the "logic" of story, and we are all well aware of some contributions that narrative insights have brought to interpretation and preaching. Stories seem to "move" and succeed in their ability to address both "itch" and "scratch."³¹ Hence, we now realize that the ordering of sequences in a story— what Latin handbooks call arrangement [*dispositio*]"—works" because of progressive form. It works for us primarily because we encounter progression in the natural world (for example, the progressive cycle of the seasons; the sense, during an oppressive hot spell, of an impending storm; a disobedient child's dread of "Just you wait until your father gets home!") even before we experience it in artistic creations (for example, expecting happy endings or anticipating a character's being startled when the camera lets us watch her or him gradually retreat backward on stage). Before these became established literary or cinematic codes and stereotypes (conventions), our experiences allowed these patterns to ring true. So at the level

of larger units—parts sequenced to fit into a whole—progressive form is at work when an artistic “tale” advances in an acceptable fashion for us. It possesses *narrative probability*—the story coheres—and *narrative fidelity*—the story is somehow congruent with lived experience.³² Even when fidelity is in question and still we willingly suspend belief, we are consenting to the continued telling of the story because the progressive essence of the endeavor has us in its grip.³³

Furthermore, it is a simple matter to perceive progression at more minute linguistic levels. For example, even the syntax of a verbal language (subject, verb, complement) reflects this progression.³⁴ “A naming must be completed by a doing, either explicit or implicit. The subject demands a predicate as resolutely as the antecedent of a musical phrase in Mozart calls for its consequent.”³⁵ Yet in a matter as small as a single sentence, the formal satisfaction may go unappreciated, except where lacking, because we are “spoiled,” we are accustomed to satisfaction. It can be “better revealed by our dissatisfaction with an uncompleted thought than by our satisfaction with a completed one.”³⁶ So when, in our act of critical reflection, we “turn aside to see this thing which has come to pass,” forcing form and content to “go to their separate corners,” we are better able to detect form at work. All other times, however, content cannot be experienced apart from its form.

An alternate variation of progressive form is *qualitative progression*, something far less clear and not nearly as easy to understand as syllogistic progression. Nonetheless, the link between episodes is still one of before/after; however, the *after* episode is not expected (demanded, desired, dreaded, etc.). It is still *fitting*, though in less predictable ways, because the presence of a quality or mood prepares the audience for the introduction of another, different mood. This mood “prepares” because the audience is oblivious to the outcome (and its fittingness) until later, often much later than would be the case with syllogistic progression. One scholar argues that qualitative progression is distinguished from syllogistic progression precisely because subsequent developments are unexpected rather than demanded.³⁷ Another scholar finds qualitative progression in the Gospel of Mark to be those “unexpected developments” or “reversals of expectations,” primarily when some occurrence (for example, the disciples’ reaction to Jesus’ pronouncements) is different than the one expected by the reader, yet one the reader eventually accepts as having been prepared for because the proper state of mind for it was created.³⁸ So syllogistic progression always looks forward, and qualitative progression reflects back; the latter is surprising and discernible only in retrospect, while the former is expected, desired, and immediately recognizable. For both types of progressive form, however, there is audience satisfaction at finding a contrast, a difference in-kind, between subsequent developments as they are encountered in a work of art.³⁹

The second fundamental aspect of form reveals that even as audience expectations respond to linear movement among contrasting, complementary episodes, they also respond to discursive developments that continue the *same* unit (topic, claim, attribute, theme, or characteristic). Indeed, were it not for *repetitive* form, all would be in flux, a perpetual grasping for change. Of necessity, then, there must be some continuity, which is seen especially in examples from music and drama. Repetitive form develops through the consistent maintenance of a principle under new guises, the

restatement of the same thing in different ways. Sometimes the repetition is sustained and immediate, or it may be scattered throughout a piece. Beethoven's Fifth Symphony clearly develops many rich variations of its thematic paean; a dramatic villain manifests many behaviors and characteristics consonant with what we have come to expect from such a person. Surely the idea of thematic and verbal repetition/variation needs little explication or defense. Or does it?

In the discursive arts, we have come to recognize, laud, and practice *good* repetition while trying to avoid, even loathe, *mere* repetition. Wherein lies the difference? Is it in some magic number of repeatings and no more (few or many?) or in their nature (verbatim or variation)? Each of us has our preferences. Surely more votes would be cast for variety and the number three. Mark's gospel, for example, prefers verbatim patterns (particularly threes), while Greco-Roman manuals advocate minor variations.⁴⁰ The author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* advises, "We shall not repeat the same thing precisely—for that, to be sure, would weary the hearer and not elaborate the idea—but with changes."⁴¹ Moreover, the difference between instances of bad and good—that is, the difference between *repetitious* and *repetitive*—is not in their design, but in their reception, which is what the rhetorical manuals also sought:

Repetitious: when a word, percept, or experience is repeated with less impact at each recurrence; repeated to no particular end, out of a failure of invention or sloppiness of thought. *Repetitive*: when a word, percept, or experience is repeated with equal or greater force at each occurrence. Successful repetition depends both on the inherent interest of the recurring unit and on its context.⁴²

Repetition, then, is an attempt to make manifest an experience for the purpose of evoking audience response to that experience. If the experience is inherently interesting and intense, an author may, in places, resort to repetition to inculcate—even to enact—those qualities. The reader, whose own experience coalesces to some degree with the experience being described, will have no trouble feeling the intensity; the repetition will not be repetitious. Bruce Kavin says: "[N]or do I scold Lear that he has made his point, [or that] the last four *nevers* are unnecessary. On the contrary, Lear's cries attain an intensity possible only in unremitting repetition; it is the power of his howl that is under discussion here, and its tendency ... to open on areas of experience generally considered inaccessible to language."⁴³ Accordingly, parents who encounter King David's repetitive "my son" (five times in one verse), cried out as he reels from hearing about the death of Absalom (2 Sam 18:33), come to *feel* the "stammer of anguish."⁴⁴ As Luther put it, "Troubled hearts are fond of repetitions."⁴⁵ Should parents ever themselves have to endure that kind of pain (and there are few things worse), they can lend their testimony to what other readers, spared the actual experience, have perceived in the text as virtual experience. Hence, as the "key to our experience," repetitions (one's heartbeat, a ticking watch, a horse's hoofbeats, a flashing semaphore, a daily habit) become the "key to our *expression of experience*."⁴⁶ Whereas Plato said the forms derive from the heavens, Burke is interested only in their omnipresence in nature and particularly in our human capacity, as unique among the natural creatures, to know and use them. David Buttrick

would have us consider the uniqueness of Jesus' resurrection—its lack of both precedent and repetition— as an important dimension of our difficulty in believing it: “Repeated events are credible—what does happen is likely to have happened [before]—and singular events are incredible.”⁴⁷ Repetitive form is, therefore, basic to any work of art or any kind of orientation; it is “our only method of talking on the subject.”⁴⁸ Buttrick's own compositional style reveals a mastery of alliteration (rhyme through initial consonantal repetition), which is consistent with his commitment to careful selection of “appropriate” poetic language to convey the Good News. But using rhyme well, not with “superficial arbitrariness,” is certainly a challenge for one who employs it.⁴⁹

Both repetitive and progressive form can (and often do) work in combination. For example, in the two repetitive series in Rom 8:35 and Rom 8:38–39, we may notice one formal device—*polysyndeton*. We also intuitively sense these series working on our emotions. The former series (“shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution ... ?”) builds expectation and anxiety through carefully contemplating—via the conjunctions—manifestations of trouble; the latter series (“neither death nor life nor angels ...”) matches in-kind the anxiety by providing its solution—thus, we have progression.⁵⁰ Moreover, uncomplicated instances of form are easy to locate in literature (especially poetry) and in music, and they can also be found quickly and accurately in drama and prose. Most people can easily grasp the progression and repetition of nursery rhymes, especially when demonstrated orally (in song) and/or visually (in print).

1 Three blind mice,
2 Three blind mice.
3 See how they run,
4 See how they run.

5 They all ran after the farmer's wife,
6 She cut off their tails with a carving knife,
7 Did you ever see such a sight in your life
8 As three blind mice.

Without recounting the most obvious repetitive elements both of sight and sound (including musical pitch), the progression is also manifest in moving from cause in the first quatrain to effect in the second. Children are thus invited to follow these patterns as they psychologically initiate and agitate their expectations through repeating words, images, and rhymes (“any chiming of the sounds of words”).⁵¹ They are drawn along in a delightful, easily followed narrative. Although here a satisfaction felt mostly by the resolution of tension produced by the sustained, repetitively generated crescendo of lines 5 through 7, *assent* seems granted by virtue of a collaboration by audience and author, who in this case is not even needed but would be in situations where we are not so willing to suspend disbelief or judgment. Despite how the decades have dimmed my memory, I was able to reconstruct this verse by recollection simply by singing it to myself. By next

adding punctuation, I managed to document more of the cognitive sense of the narrative flow, or progression, which I had already felt as my recitation transpired. Recitation and song, therefore, have always been powerful pedagogical devices.

We can now legitimately attest to the power of these two types of form, in such simple states as they are here demonstrated, to promote consideration of discourse by participants. As would-be reflection of raw emotion (the case of David and Absalom) and as playful deployment of progression/repetition in children's literature, form directs audience thought-feelings. In addition, these strategies even reflect upon their maker (author). Philo of Alexandria's repetitive "lists" employ a logic that accounts for participation of his readers' emotions: "Chains of epithets and lists of persons and things ... tend to generate expectations of consistency and direction. By the time Philo has accumulated half a dozen epithets for the wicked man ... his audience anticipates consistency as he adds more ..." The effect is that the auditor "must begin to marvel both at the profundity of wickedness *and* at the resourcefulness of anyone who can so thoroughly exhaust the available vocabulary of wickedness."⁵² James Muilenburg has convincingly shown all three of the above results of repetitive form. What is less convincing is Muilenburg's claim that the repetitive tendencies found in the Hebrew Bible give us an "open avenue to the character of biblical thinking."⁵³ Such a view of style—as if it were a "window to the soul," whether of an individual artist or of a culture—was long a prevalent concept.⁵⁴ My argument here, however, is more interested in the *fact* that form is present (to what extent, of what type, to what ends) than with precise processes *by which* form gets into the text.

Both progressive (syllogistic and qualitative types) and repetitive form are patterns of order and, as arranged by the author, often work their wonders without audience awareness of their nature. Another aspect of form is a phenomenon quite different from these: When auditors *expect* a work to acquiesce to some prior notion of appropriateness, they display a categorical expectancy wherein form that *appeals as form* occurs. For example, we insist that a work start with a sense of beginning and end with a sense of closure; we follow the word order and inflections of a particular language; we adhere to the constraints of a 14-line sonnet. These conventions are not requirements learned but regularities experienced in works of art. Moreover, intricacies of convention may ultimately become fitted for occasions and fixed by consensus. Conventions are pliable and evolving, and artists have always toyed with them; jurisdiction over conventions is negotiable. Yet this does not negate the power of conventional form; indeed, the fact that conventions are "noticed" with such vigor, even controversy, attests to their potency to involve and satisfy audiences. Conventions can be seen as "tacit contracts" authors have worked out with their contemporary audiences.⁵⁵ But the matter of whether or when to "violate" them is difficult:

[H]is expectancy [that is, a reader's] may be so imperious that he will condemn the slighting of this form even in an author who is aiming at different effects. Yet in violating a convention, an author is undeniably violating a major tenet of form. For he is disappointing the expectations of his audience; and form, by our definition, resides in the fulfilment of an audience's expectations. The only justification which an author may

have for thus breaking faith with his audience is the fact that categorical expectations are very unstable and that the artist can, if his use of the repetitive and progressive principles is authoritative enough, succeed in bringing his audience to a sufficient acceptance of his methods. And as the history of art fully testifies, if the changes in conventional form are introduced to obtain a new stressing, to produce a kind of effect which the violated convention was not well able to produce, but which happens to be more apropos to the contemporary scene, the changes may very rapidly become "canonized" in popular acceptance and the earlier convention may seem the violator of categorical expectancy.⁵⁶

Finally, small, individual instantiations of form within a work can be more or less present in a work as *minor forms*. Such forms contribute to the development of the whole—by repetition, progression, or convention—but they also have their own "episodic distinctness" worthy of consideration apart from their context. Examples of these forms are metaphor, paradox, disclosure, reversal, contraction, expansion, bathos, apostrophe, series, and chiasmus. Form crafted by an artist helps an audience to "dream" the dream that led to the creation of the artistic work. "It is, rather, the audience which dreams, while the artist oversees the conditions which determine the dream."⁵⁷ However, just as art is not simply the weak representation of some actual experience, neither is the arousing of emotion *per se* the goal of art. The goal, the essence, of art is eloquence, and the emotions that we experience in life are the material on which eloquence feeds: "Eloquence is not showiness; it is, rather the result of that desire in the artist to make a work perfect by adapting it in every minute detail to the racial appetites."⁵⁸ Considering, then, the long-standing struggle between wisdom and eloquence, should we not investigate form and come to critically assess the *eloquent truth* of biblical passages or preaching, "God's Word in *man's language*"?⁵⁹

PERELMAN AND OLBRECHTS-TYTECA'S *NEW RHETORIC*

The perspective on argumentation as the attempt to gain "adherence to theses" (or to strengthen adherence) is an important concept, one that focuses on the communicational goal of discourse. Such a perspective emphasizes the relationship between audience and message. And this perspective is particularly significant and fundamental to my approach because, as with the concept of form, the audience-thesis connection properly maintains a strongly functional objective to the analysis of discourse.⁶⁰ In short, style is not the traces of an author; style is the workings of a rhetor's discursive intentions toward audience adherence.

Accordingly, the manner in which Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca proceed with their consideration of rhetorical figures proves instructive for this approach because they discuss figures according to their argumentative function: "We refuse to separate the form of a discourse from its substance, to study stylistic structures and figures independently of the purpose they must achieve in the argumentation."⁶¹ Of course, here the authors do not use "form" in the sense that Burke does, nor do they indicate that they understand "substance" in the sense of act.⁶² Yet

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca are sensitive to the function of argumentation as inextricably bound up in the way ideas are expressed, that is, how those familiar elements of style—chosen, arranged, presented—become the “means whereby a particular presentation of the data establishes agreement at a certain level, impresses it on the consciousness with a certain intensity and emphasizes certain aspects of it.”⁶³ Put another way, simply identifying and classifying figures according to their manner of deviation from the norm only labels the obvious and describes the surface. Stylistic criticism needs to delve into the reasons behind, the objectives in view, and the effects that might plausibly be achieved by figures employed.

One further note concerning the functional approach to discourse is the discussion of selected grammatical features related to their application in argumentation. Here Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca do not allow themselves to be guided by grammatical rules; rather, they analyze the effective tendencies that these features are capable of producing. Many of the features they discuss present stimulating suggestions, some of which I have found nowhere else. Philological reference works (for example, lexicons and grammars) tend to document and classify tendencies or prescribe rules, but they do not raise questions about argumentative function.⁶⁴ Some brief examples of helpful discussions in the *New Rhetoric* are the sections on Modalities in Expression of Thought,⁶⁵ Tense,⁶⁶ Pronouns,⁶⁷ Singulars and Plurals,⁶⁸ and Demonstratives.⁶⁹ Through their rhetorical approach to argumentation, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca show how persuasive force obtains in discursive style: “What is required is not so much the exactness of specific logical modalities attributed to what is asserted, as the *means of obtaining the adherence of the audience* through variations in the way of expressing thought.”⁷⁰

One of the most quickly noticed features of situated oral discourse—once a critic has been sensitized to notice it—is pronoun usage, particularly a shift in tendency (for example, from “I” to “you”) or a preponderance or paucity of similar personal pronouns. A speaker or author can do many things with pronouns:

Hold a subject at a distance by using a predominantly *third-person* prevalence. When a discussion addressed to an audience is dominated by “he/she/ it/they/them/those,” the sense conveyed is that of detachment. The audience feels a disconnection from what is being discussed. Knowing they are not part of the subject, the audience is free to examine it, to feel frightened by it, to think of themselves superior to it, etc. The particular mood or disposition felt depends on how that subject is being characterized. The third-person pronoun is helpful for casting blame elsewhere, for vilifying an enemy. Moreover, not unlike the third-person pronoun is the demonstrative, which can be used to dramatically call special attention to a nearby subject already contemplated (“this/these”) or to cast light on a far removed subject (“that/them”).

Create a strong sense of speaker *ethos*—one of authority and experience, one of fearful self-disclosure, one of bravado or rage, etc. The *first-person singular* (“I/me/mine”) draws attention to the speaker; the more it continues, the greater the presence of the speaker from the perspective of the listeners. When speakers want to assert difference and distance between themselves and their audience, they can turn to first-person singular.⁷¹ Accordingly, even when not intending that effect,

a feeling of distance is produced when speakers heavily use first singular. Audience members feel unlike/removed from the speaker. Of course, without context we cannot predict whether the audience will desire or loath to be like/near the speaker.

Cultivate a sense of inclusiveness by using *first-person plural*. Of course, it is possible to use “we/us/ours” in an exclusive way (apostolic authors occasionally do that to call attention to their own authority as a special group), but one can just as easily be perceived as attempting to incorporate the audience into one’s world. Erasmus’s use of the editorial “we” and the fraternal “we” is an example.⁷² When a speaker tries to draw her audience close, she may relinquish some of the authority and control over them in exchange. But the rhetor’s strategy is often to accept such losses in pursuit of greater gain: sharing a stake in the issue; appearing to understand, to see things as audience members do; or appearing to risk being involved in the problem (its cause, its blame, its solution). Such gains in speaker-audience communion would not be necessary if *ethos* and *pathos* did not enter into the mix of proofs, if *logos* alone mattered.

Address listeners in the most direct and intimate way through the use of *second-person pronouns*. Normally the plural is used when addressing an audience, but a singular pronoun can draw attention to an individual, perhaps when a rhetor wants to develop a typical scenario for one person that can be contemplated by all. The speaker can single out a special (nontypical) individual—with or without naming the person—whereby others then are spared the intimacy (and its attendant comfort or discomfort) and can listen in on and benefit from what is said. Second-person pronouns abound when speakers are confronting, challenging, blaming, exhorting, or pleading with their listeners.

Overall, pronoun watching can be most productive for the critic not merely for attaching a label such as “confrontational style,” but for compiling observations, along with other evidence, and for asking how the speaker’s stylistic tendencies with this audience are presently functioning to advance a thesis— whether to celebrate a cause, to blame an enemy, to charge with a fault, etc.

THREE OPERATIONS FOR SECURING ADHERENCE

The traditional lines for classifying dispositional and stylistic devices are “figures of thought” and “figures of speech,” or schemes and tropes. Schemes have to do with expression, tropes with content.⁷³ However, I resist dichotomies of that sort and choose instead to develop a critical vocabulary for perceiving and analyzing style that employs three broad categories of rhetorical function, categories that subsume “expression and content” or “speech and thought.” My primary rubrics for discussing style are three categories of intended effects—*focus*, *presence*, and *communion*. In other words, besides examining how devices are constructed, we shall ask what need they were conceived to meet.

Focus is that which the speaker seeks to achieve by directing the audience’s attention to specific aspects of subject matter. Focus is one of the first means of controlling the perceptions and expectations of the audience, an issue that a rhetor cannot afford to ignore.⁷⁴ While the rhetorical

situation in many ways constrains what ought to be said, the speaker still controls the agenda through which the discourse addressing the situation proceeds. *Presence* is that element of proof that is created when a speaker makes a focused-upon subject more impressive, significant, and real to the audience. Although presence is an important concept in *The New Rhetoric*, I am simply interested in what a speaker does with the topic before the audience.⁷⁵ Presence is unquestionably explained largely in sensual, especially visual, terms by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca and their critics.⁷⁶ It is not at all misleading to consider presence the “fine-tuning” or “zooming in” or development of focus not only as to function, but also in the temporal progression of the adherence-gaining process. As the proverbial blind person is led to the elephant (and not to the giraffe) before examining (by feeling) its parts, so focus precedes presence. However, it would be foolhardy to attempt to rigidly separate focus and presence.

Through focus and presence, the audience’s disposition toward topic and speaker contributes to proof — *pathos* and *ethos*. However, because a relational dynamic between the two human participants in the discursive transaction also plays a role, *communion* is crucial. *Communion* refers to the bond that exists between the rhetor and the audience, while “stance” or “persona” denotes only the speaker. Many strategies for achieving communion elude easy description under the rubric of “stance.”⁷⁷ Moreover, persona seems to be a conclusion that a critic draws late in the process of apprehending a speaker, a puzzle constructed with many pieces. Communion, on the other hand, can be scrutinized in much clearer disclosure at almost any point in the discourse.

In summary, these three functional categories constitute a systematic attempt to unwrap the discourse. They provide a means for linking descriptive taxonomies to strategy, function, and effect. In the next section, I explore some ways that focus, presence, and communion are created in discourse, drawing on examples from Luther and from the English Bible.⁷⁸

LEXICON OF CRITICAL TOOLS FOR USE IN ANALYSIS

FOCUS

Many of the stylistic devices and rhetorical strategies that are intended to focus attention are argumentative in nature because they aid in getting at the issue or cause of the situation. In other words, they are in service of *inventio*. Directing and controlling an audience’s attention to a subject is often accomplished by the specific stylistic device of *distributio*, traditionally the division of a concept and the apportioning of its parts.⁷⁹ This can be done more or less explicitly; sometimes a single thematic statement provides a map for what follows. Consider, for example, Exod 23:14–16: “Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year. Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread And the feast of the harvest . . . and the feast of ingathering . . .” Occasionally a speaker wishes to direct the audience’s attention to one of the parts, particularly when considering choices or alternatives rather than parts. By eliminating all but one choice, the speaker employs *expeditio*, preserving attention to the selected choice. Such a process of elimination, of course, goes beyond mere selection; the surviving option consequently has achieved greater stature by virtue of

or the idea employed, can vary, producing a bewildering assortment of terms in the handbooks. Verbal parallelism occurs commonly by strategically positioning a key term—signaled for listeners by its position in the clause and/or its vocal stress—at the beginning of successive clauses (*anaphora*, as in Hebrews 11, where the writer uses “by faith” [pivsttei times] or at the end of each clause [epistrophe]). Using sound itself (*rhyme*)—as in alliteration, the repetition of the initial sound, or the internal and terminal repetitions of vowels (*assonance*) or consonants (*consonance*)—the same theme (mood, characteristic, dilemma, etc.) can be developed, heightened, sustained, or tapered off.

Would Luther be averse to using the vocal power of his own language in service to the Gospel, the “good shouting” about Christ? Martin Brecht is now convinced of Luther’s power as a craftsman of language: “Reading Luther, one is repeatedly surprised by the selection of individual words or even the creation of words, the combination of words, the modulation of sound by the use of specific words or their combinations, and even the flow of sound in sentences.”⁹⁶ Moreover, Luther’s theology not only permitted, but welcomed, such a perspective. Speaking and hearing were more important even than seeing because the essence of the *imago dei* in a human is that he “utters words like God”; God is a *deus dicens*, to whom a *homo audiens* corresponds.⁹⁷

A small, brief example of Luther’s use of repetitive sounds to underline a single theme is “klaren, starken spruch” [a “clear, strong text”].⁹⁸ The “r” and “k/ch” sounds of the two adjectives are what linguists call phonemes; those sounds alone make no reference.⁹⁹ Yet when enlarged with vowels, these morpheme[s]—a joint semantic-phonetic unit that is shared by both words—do make reference, whereby each word has something in common in both meaning and sound.¹⁰⁰ Take away the shared meaning and all that remains is *homonymy*—like sounds; without the rhyme, one might have only what we call *synonymy*—like meanings. Luther uses synonymy to expand a theme by appearing to exhaust it (“all our works, intentions, thoughts”).¹⁰¹ But when our two morphemic sounds [klaren, starken] are also present in the noun they modify [spruch], we have to ask what this might mean. The similarity of sound makes us think of their possible connections, so I suggest that the shared sounds poetically and rhetorically construct a phonemic bridge among the three terms—they comingle—and we need not concern ourselves at all whether there is any “natural” connection between the sound and the things signified. Unless the listener either knows nothing about the ideas or is vehemently opposed to the claim, he or she may be drawn along by the artistry. Supposing, then, that some stronger connection between sound and sense already obtains, even before the rhetor constructs a repetitive bond, what about the potential for “phonetic symbolism,” a leading representative of which is *onomatopoeia*?

The notion that speech sounds have symbolic values at the phonological, as well as morphological, level has been much debated and tested. Some evidence suggests that particular sounds—especially vowels—are associated by the brain with our perceptions of the world that depend on elemental contrasts, such as light/dark, high/low, big/small, warm/cold. However,

tribal experience and/or simple chance seem to exert clear influence on which sounds become associated with which feelings. The following are some guidelines for hypothesizing about phonetic symbolism.

First, certain sounds—the voiceless /s/, for example—possess a range of potential suggestibility rather than a fixed or single capability. Thus a prominence of /s/s is capable of suggesting certain classes of sounds (rustling, hissing, sighing, whispering) but not other classes (booing, humming, hammering, or groaning). Second, this power of suggesting natural sounds or other qualities is relatively weak—too weak to operate unsupported by meaning—and because of its range, this power is only latent. The semantic content of words has to activate and focus this imitative potential. If the semantic content does not do this, then the collocations of sounds are in most cases neutral.¹⁰²

Thus, one needs to proceed with caution when suggesting how sound aids sense. It is physically accurate to note that “like /s/ and /z/, the sighing of the wind is a fricative sound, produced by the passage of air through gaps or past obstructions.”¹⁰³ However, it is quite another—and requires meaningful, relevant, supporting context—to conjecture that the sibilant /s/ must mean a “soft” or “soothing” sense. Winds blow for good *and* ill; a sleeping baby may indeed breathe gently, while a terminally ill patient may struggle for each breath; the mythical “hissing” snake is anything but soothing (except to herpetologists); the gas leak is not at all comforting. However, when a pattern (of sound or rhythm or theme) can be detected, that pattern is indeed an inextricable element in the meaning, force, or impact of an argument. If repetitive associations do not “work,” then product advertisers and songwriters are only fooling themselves (and us). David Buttrick’s advice on “making language ‘come alive’ through imitation” is helpful. Note carefully that his first two statements “practice what they preach”:

Quick things can be said quickly. Labored activity can be expressed with a labored syntax. Syntactical imitation will also employ the sounds of words, vowel-sound repetitions, and other rhetorical devices. Of course, many of the so-called tropes, such as antithesis, or anticlimax, and the like, are best understood as imitations. While many ministers are apt to overdo some devices, notably, alliteration and onomatopoeic systems, the notion of imitation is helpful. A mere striving for effect is, of course, pernicious, but imitative language can assist a congregation in grasping meaning.¹⁰⁴

Presence can be achieved by more than language choices and placement, however. It develops, for instance, through the use of supporting ideas, often through employment of *topoi*—lines of reasoning that tap premises held by the audience. One such strategy is to offer evidence such as an *exemplum*, a concrete instance that shows presence through elaboration on a lower level of abstraction. Examples can clarify a principle or elicit audience identification. Luther pursues the former when he suggests an historical instance in which an action or principle he is recommending to his audience had already been carried out by someone (say, a biblical heroine) of exemplary stature. The exemplary person’s behavior suggests what the action is and that it is possible. Of course, if a preacher wants his audience members to envision themselves through an example, he

must choose the material carefully. A contemporary preacher knows that scarcely anyone thinks herself “rich” (or poor, either). Therefore, the listener may think she can escape culpability when hearing of the rich man in Luke 16:19–31 or when reminded that “the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Tim 6:10) because who thinks she *loves* money? Still, evidence of the correctness, appropriateness, or clarity of a thesis (subject) can also be brought through analogy or contrary examples. An instance of this *contrarium* for presence is when Luther argues that coercing people to do even “necessary” tasks is wrong, thus his audience can conclude that it is even more likely that coercion is inappropriate in the “free” or “unnecessary” matter. Simplistically, if we do not execute all murderers, we surely should not execute all petty thieves!

Speakers often dramatize a subject to enliven it in the minds of the audience. A character can be introduced as one who is the source (creator, discoverer, interpreter) of the evidence. Supporting evidence can then be put into some character’s mouth as a statement or a question—hence, we have speaking in character (*prosopopeia*). Further, the character can enter into dialogue with the speaker or another character—hence, we have dialogism (*sermocinatio*).¹⁰⁵ Stephen’s defense speech in Acts 7 is an extended narrative employing these devices. He utters words from the mouths of God, Moses, a Hebrew slave, and the children in the Sinai desert—all as part of a dramatic story. Luther did, on occasion, incorporate additional voices into his sermon in such a way as to bewilder the audience, as if they were witnessing a debate, one not at all easy to resolve. For the reputed dogmatist Luther to do this seems unusual—until one realizes that the situation required it. The idea of scriptural complexity and the corresponding attitudes of humility and patience necessitated a dramatic presence or enactment.¹⁰⁶ Finally, the speaker can evoke feelings and evaluations about a subject by the use of *epithet*. The use of “fool” not only suggests an evaluative characterization for Luther’s audience to consider (or endure), but it clearly reveals the speaker’s feelings about the subject (or the audience).

COMMUNION

While a speaker effects choice and presentation of particular features of the topic, and through strategies generates presence of that topic, *communion* between speaker and audience is constantly in flux. Many of the devices already discussed, particularly those for presence, work toward building communion. For example, (1) rhetorical questions that seek no explicit answer but give plenty to think about often carry obvious, implied answers; and (2) dialogue in which simulated exchange occurs allows interaction between speaker and audience, involvement that the speaker hopes will dispose the audience more kindly toward the message through their heightened exchange with the messenger. In 1 Cor 12:29–30, Paul uses seven successive rhetorical questions in rapid, asyndetic succession, every one beginning with the Greek *mh*.¹⁰⁷ Each one carries an obvious “No!” response: “Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?” The use of epithets, carefully chosen examples, and *contraria* facilitate the bonding through shared perspectives of authority, judgment, and value. Direct address to an outside character (*apostrophe*) can have the effect of the speaker acting out his or her subject, thus creating presence, but it also is a

way of acting on behalf of the audience.¹⁰⁸ Direct address to the audience, such as Luther's frequent use of what I call "endearment" ("Dear friends"), is an obvious use of a strategy for communion because Luther's need in the *Invocavit Sermons* was, more than anything else, to restore his credibility and leadership in the minds of the Wittenbergers who had seen others assume leadership in the movement and had heard rumors of Luther's death.¹⁰⁹ The first Johannine epistle is an example of strategic use of direct address to the audience. Its five short chapters, consisting of 105 verses, contain 20 instances of direct address. Usually the vocative¹¹⁰ comes at the beginning of the sentence, but 1 John 2:12–14 is different, both in syntax and dictional variety. Unmistakably, it becomes a *song*:

I write unto you, *little children*, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. I write unto you, *fathers*, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, *young men*, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, *little children*, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, *fathers*, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, *young men*, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one. (*my emphasis*)

The song is *not* a gratuitous display of what has been learned from a handbook; rather, it becomes a formal enactment, an incarnation, of the content it seeks to convey: that genuine knowledge of the "word of life" creates and maintains meaningful relationships between God and people in their familial roles.

The invoking of authority and values through Bible stories, proof texts, and revered characters is an unmistakable means of working with (and most likely within) the belief structures of audiences holding those values. The citing of *sententiae* (maxims, proverbs, aphorisms) not only demonstrates familiarity and shared cultural circumstances, but it has the benefit of apparent command of a subject, an aura of wisdom and common sense, that speakers inherit as their own credibility before their audiences.¹¹¹ Humor and hyperbole of varying degrees can be ways of delighting an audience; alarm and puzzlement, too, can aid a speaker if these expectations are successfully fulfilled or channeled. The "feet of them that preach the gospel of peace" (or protect from the bad or solve a mystery or relieve an anxiety) are deemed "beautiful," along with the adherence to the good news itself.¹¹² *Exclamatio*, the ejaculation of utterance of feeling, is another display employed for consideration, approval, or rejection by the audience.

While these features can be found everywhere, they are especially prevalent in epideictic rhetoric, where praise and blame are most prolific. The stance of the speaker toward the subject and toward the audience (and vice versa) are inextricably intertwined and extremely crucial to