



AN INTRODUCTION TO RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract: Rhetorical Analysis is one of the key strategies to explore and comprehend a text beyond the obviously stated. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* elucidates the key elements of rhetoric and argues that rhetoric is an art. Critics utilize rhetorical analysis to reach the hidden meanings of the text by establishing relationships between several components of the text and the motives of the author. Rhetorical Analysis is an important way to understand a text or a speech, in various fields. This method of textual analysis constitutes a significant method of literary research. Understanding the key components of the rhetoric and the different rhetorical strategies used by the author, helps the critic achieve a just and objective rhetorical analysis of the target text.

Keywords: analysis, author, ethos, rhetoric, logos, pathos

INTRODUCTION TO RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

I. INTRODUCTION

The term 'rhetoric' can be understood in two ways. Firstly, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the term 'rhetoric' means 'the art of speaking or writing effectively'. The Cambridge Dictionary defines 'rhetoric' as 'the speech or writing intended to be effective or influence people'. Secondly, the term 'rhetoric' is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as 'the study of the ways of using language effectively'. The other meaning of the term 'rhetoric' given by the Cambridge Dictionary is 'the study of the principles and rules of composition formulated by the critics of ancient times.' In Literary Criticism, the term 'rhetoric' is, thus, the study of how the writer uses words to influence the readers.

II. RHETORICAL TEXT

The text which is written to convince the readers with the author's view is called the 'rhetorical text'. The writer of the rhetorical text is called a 'rhetorician'. A rhetorical text has three main sections: an introduction, a body and a conclusion. The Introduction introduces the topic being discussed; it provides the background information, and informs the readers of the thesis statement or the purpose of the text. The Body could consist of one or many paragraphs, each with a clear topic sentence, focusing on one distinct aspect of the topic. The Body attempts to explore in depth the various aspects of the subject. The Conclusion sums up the entire text, restates the thesis statement, and offers a convincing closure to the discussion.

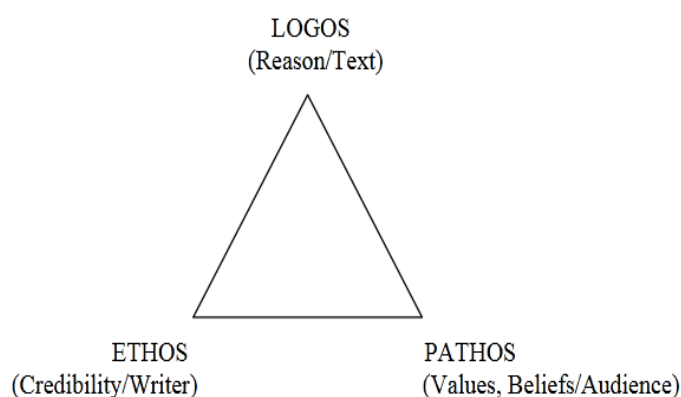
The argument in the rhetorical text is developed by the rhetorician with claims, supports, and warrants. An argument revolves around one or many claims. These claims could be explicit (clearly stated in the text) or implicit (implied indirectly in the text). A claim is any idea the rhetorician wants to convince the readers with. The author employs a support to prove a claim. This support could be evidence or an emotion. The logic or reasoning that connects the claim and the support is the warrant, which could again be explicit or implicit. The rhetorician may

clearly state the warrant (logic/reasoning) to establish a clear connection between the claim (idea) and the support (evidence), or he may assume that the readers understand the warrant (logic/reasoning).

III. RHETORICAL TRIANGLE

The rhetorical text uses rhetorical tools to make the argument convincing. According to Aristotle, there are three main tools in rhetoric. They are: logos, ethos, and pathos. Based on these three tools, rhetoric employs three appeals: logical appeal, ethical appeal, and pathetic appeal. The rhetorician attempts to appeal to the readers or win their approval through these three rhetorical tools, also called the rhetorical triangle: logos, ethos, and pathos.

‘Logos’ is the Greek word for logic. The author tries to persuade the readers through logic or reason by giving a convincing argument (evidence). This is a ‘logical appeal’ through evidence. The rhetorician uses reason to make an argument. Most of the academic discourse is driven by logos or logic, as the academic readers appreciate evidence-based argument. ‘Ethos’ is the Greek word for ethics. The author attempts to justify any claim by making a moral argument and giving a moral judgment. This is an ‘ethical appeal through values. The rhetorician can use his own credibility to gain the readers’ approval. He may use his own position as an expert or a moralistic person to convince the readers with his views. ‘Pathos’ is the Greek word for pity. This is an ‘emotional appeal’ through sentiments. The author portrays a touching picture to evoke pity in the readers. Through this ‘pathetic appeal’, the rhetorician invokes the readers’ emotion in order to attain their approval of his ideas expressed in the text. The rhetorician may aim to tap any emotion of the readers. These emotions could be diverse, depending on the subject of the text. The emotions could vary from compassion and love to anger and sorrow. The rhetorician tries to evoke any of these emotions in the readers through the text.



The Rhetorical Triangle

Source: Lutzke and Henggeler (2009) https://www.lsu.edu/hss/english/files/university_writing_files/item35402.pdf

In a nutshell, ‘logos’ refers to the text (the argument); ‘ethos’ refers to the author (his credibility) and ‘pathos’ refers to the readers (their emotions). An effective rhetorical text or rhetorician may strike a balance in all three aspects of this rhetorical triangle or may employ only one or more of these three rhetorical appeals to persuade the readers.

According to Guitarsophist (2019), most of the points stated by Aristotle in Rhetoric are in response to Plato’s arguments in Gorgias. According to Plato, rhetoric is not an art, but an artifice that can present good as bad and bad as good; it is a “tactic for trickery and deception.” However, Aristotle strongly maintains that rhetoric is an art as some writers and speakers communicate more effectively than others and their text or speech can be systematically analyzed as to why they write or speak better than others. Aristotle does acknowledge that rhetoric has the power to deceive but he strongly asserts that “rhetoric can defend the truth against lies”. Aristotle upholds logos superior to ethos and pathos.

Guitarsophist (2019) agrees with Jennifer Fletcher’s concern about the relevance of simplification of the rhetoric to a mere triangle undermining the dynamism of the interaction between these three elements. Guitarsophist clarifies that Aristotle did not design the triangle:

James Kinneavy was the first to do that, in Theory of Discourse. If we see ethos as speaker, pathos as audience, and logos as the world, we have a speaker speaking about the world to an audience, but both audience and world influence what is said and how it is said. And audiences can speak back. And words frame the world in different ways. It is too dynamic to be captured in a triangle or a pyramid, except as a frozen simplification (which can be useful). M. Jimmie Killingsworth makes a similar point in *Appeals in Modern Rhetoric*. (Guitarsophist, 2019)

Thus, Rhetorical Analysis explores not just the three poles: logos, ethos, and pathos, and how they shape the text, but also analyze how these three elements interact to contribute to the dynamism of the text.

IV. RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

A Rhetorical Analysis is an analysis or a detailed study of the text in terms of its rhetoric, i.e., the use of language. A Rhetorical Analysis examines the text from the perspective of a language analyst. It is a form of a close reading or criticism that uses the principles of the rhetoric to explore the interactions between a text and its readers. It is also called ‘Rhetorical Criticism.’

Any text, speech, advertisement, image, or video could be the subject of Rhetorical Analysis. A Rhetorical Analyst regards the work as aesthetically developed medium of communication. As Edward P. J. Corbett observes, a rhetorical analysis "is more interested in a literary work for what it does than for what it is" (as cited in Gagich & Zickel, 2018). A Rhetorical Analysis is, thus, more concerned with how the rhetorician says than with what the author says.

A Rhetorical Analysis focuses on the rhetorician’s goals, techniques, and appeals. The Rhetorical Analyst divides the work into different sections and examines how each part contributes to the whole, to create a certain effect: to inform, persuade, entertain, etc. In addition to the linguistic aspects, the Rhetorical Analyst explores the other media of communicating the message, such as the visual and the auditory elements, in order to bring out a holistic meaning from the work in its context. Understanding the context facilitates the process of analyzing the rhetoric of a given text. Knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement fosters a better appreciation of the historical speech, “I have a Dream” by Martin Luther King Jr. A Rhetorical Analysis attempts to identify the rhetorician’s purpose, the intended audience, and the explicit and implicit claims, the strong or weak supports, and the stated and the unstated warrants used by the rhetorician throughout the text.

Every word in any discourse, whether spoken or written, well-contemplated or spontaneous, is selected by the writer from the available word choice. Word choice or diction in any discourse is not neutral or accidental. It is a deliberate choice by the author. The Rhetorical Analyst focuses on the diction, the syntax, the sentence length, the argument, the persuasive techniques, the rhetorical tools, and the communication strategies employed by the author to structure the text and convey the message. Aristotle used the terms “invention” and “arrangement” to refer to this implicit process of choice and selection exercised by the author. The Rhetorical Analyst attempts to dissect the style of the author to interpret the discourse.

V. RHETORICAL PRECIS

In her famous article *Rhetoric Review* (1988), Margaret Woodworth, suggests that a Rhetorical Analysis may be started by drafting a “rhetorical précis.” She explains that a rhetorical précis is a paragraph that answers four questions, as illustrated in the table given below:

The Rhetorical Précis

| The Rhetorical Précis | |
|--|--|
| Write a four-sentence paragraph containing the following information: | |
| Sentence 1 | The name of the author, genre, title of the work, date, a verb, and a THAT clause containing the major assertion (thesis statement) of the work. |
| Sentence 2 | An explanation of how the author develops and/or supports the thesis, usually in chronological order. |
| Sentence 3 | <u>A statement of the author’s apparent purpose, followed by an “in order: phrase.”</u> |
| Sentence 4 | <u>A description of the intended audience and/or the relationship the author establishes with the audience</u> |

Source: *Rhetoric Review* (1988), Margaret Woodworth, as cited in Guitarsophist (2019) <https://textrhet.com/category/classical-rhetoric/>

Thus, a rhetorical analysis may be started by applying critical reading skills to “break down” a text into its parts, in order to understand how the author writes, rather than what he writes. Interestingly, writers from different

disciplines use different techniques to achieve their purpose of writing. Hence, a scientific article may be analyzed differently from a non-scientific article. Different writers focus on different goals and, thus, use different writing strategies.

VI. RHETORICAL STRATEGIES

Rhetorical strategies refer to techniques a rhetorician uses to achieve their purpose. Some rhetorical strategies include: Repetition, Alliteration, Figurative Language, Metaphor, Simile, Hyperbole, Understatement, Oxymoron, Irony, Allusion, Tone, Imagery, Rhetorical Question, Point of View, Comparison, Contrast, Diction, and Syntax

Source: <https://theintegratedteacher.com/how-to-write-a-rhetorical-analysis-of-any-text-in-6-clear-steps/>

VII. HOW TO WRITE A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

The following steps may be considered while attempting a Rhetorical Analysis of any text.

1. Identify the thesis statement (purpose) of the Rhetorical Analysis being attempted.
2. Read the specific text carefully.
3. Understand it well.
4. Identify the main idea of the text.
5. Identify the rhetorician's purpose.
6. Identify the intended readers.
7. Understand the arguments.
8. Decipher how the ideas are arranged, paragraphs are organized and the entire text is structured.
9. Break the text into sections.
10. Analyze each part for rhetorical features.
11. Focus on diction (word choice, arrangement, accuracy).
12. Study the sentence structure.
13. Observe the rhetorical tools used.
14. Notice repetition.
15. Examine punctuation.
16. Explore the author's choices in terms of the writing strategies.
17. Identify specific stylistic choices.
18. Examine the reason behind the choices made.
19. Analyze the effects of the tools used.
20. Evaluate all the strategies, tools and choices in terms of their effectiveness.
21. Summarizing all observations.
22. Revise, edit and proofread the Rhetorical Analysis drafted.

The following table can facilitate a critic to plan out a Rhetorical Analysis of any text:

Rhetorical Analysis Questions

| S. No. | WHAT THE AUTHOR DOES | WHY THE AUTHOR DOES IT |
|--------|---|--|
| 1. | What is Author's Thesis/Main idea? | Why did the author choose this thesis, or idea to study? |
| 2. | What is Author's Purpose? To persuade, inform, criticize? Something else? | Why does the Author choose this purpose? what effect does it create? |
| 3. | Who is Author's intended audience? | Is there a reason the author chose to write for this particular audience? |
| 4. | How did the writer arrange his or her ideas? Chronologically? | Did the arrangement of ideas, or way the author developed them create some sort of an effect? What purpose does it serve? Why did the Author arrange his/her ideas this way? |

| | | |
|----|---|---|
| 5. | What diction does the writer use? Informal or formal language? Technical or slang? Word choice, word arrangement, accuracy? Are certain words repeated? | Why does the Author use this type of diction? What effect does it create? |
| 6. | What sentence structure does the Author employ? Are there fragments or run-ons? Are the sentences imperative, declarative, exclamatory? | What effect does this type of sentence structure have? |
| 7. | Does the writer use dialogue or quotations? | Why does the Author include dialogue/quotations? |
| 8. | Any other important rhetorical features or strategies you noticed? | Why were these used? |

Source: Saeed (2015) <https://search.app/dofsURzppFBDSg4w7>

Using such a critical approach (the table given above) to attempting a Rhetorical Analysis helps to achieve the goal of the analysis which is to elucidate how the text unfolds, what made the author use a certain tool or strategy or a set of rhetorical moves, and how these choices influence the readers. A Rhetorical Analysis explores the rhetorician's techniques and the effectiveness of those techniques. The rhetorical analyst does not agree or disagree with the rhetorician's argument but only discusses how the argument is made and whether the strategies employed are effective

VIII. CONCLUSION

Rhetorical Analysis is one of the most common methods of literary research. It involves textual analysis based on the rhetorical tools and strategies employed by the author. Through Rhetorical Analysis, the critic attempts to uncover the hidden meanings of the text and the motives of the author. Applying the principles given by Aristotle in his famous philosophical treatise, "*Rhetoric*," the author can become an effective rhetorician, and the critic can become an effective rhetoric analyst. Indeed, rhetoric is an art that can be enhanced with practice. Since the times of Plato and Aristotle, Rhetorical Analysis, thus, continues to be a significant method of analyzing and critiquing a literary text. It is one of the most widely employed approaches in literary and linguistic research studies.

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