

Rhetorical Criticism

English 493/593 Winter 2021 T-Th 1015-1145am

Hours T-Th 1145-1215, 345-415, W 1-2pm

Online in Canvas and on Zoom

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Note: This syllabus will change. I will give you plenty of heads up for any changes.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

What is criticism? What is rhetoric? What is rhetorical criticism? What can rhetorical criticism do? What is it good for? In this course, we will explore the potential of rhetorical criticism. You will gain knowledge of rhetorical theory and rhetorical criticism, and you will gain experience and skill in practicing rhetorical criticism.

STARTING POINTS

Since we have the ability to persuade one other and to make clear to ourselves what we want, not only do we avoid living like animals, but we have come together, built cities, made laws, and invented arts... Logos is responsible for nearly all our inventions. It legislated concerning justice and injustice, the honorable and the dishonorable; and without it, we should not be able to live with one another. With it we refute the bad and praise the good. Through it we educate the ignorant and recognize the wise... With this logos we both contend against others on matters which are open to dispute, and seek light for ourselves on things which are unknown; for we use the same arguments by which we persuade others in our own thoughts. We call "rhetorical" those who are able to speak before a crowd, and we regard as wise those who debate their problems in their own minds. ... None of the things which are done with intelligence take place without the help of logos. In all our actions as well as in all our thoughts logos is our guide, and the most intelligent people use it most of all. Isocrates

Is not the art of rhetoric, taken as a whole, an art of leading the soul? Socrates *Phaedrus*.

Consider rhetoric to be the ability to see, in each particular case, the available means of persuasion. Aristotle

[Rhetoric is] the art of communicating thought from one mind to another, the adaptation of language to circumstance. Sister Miriam Joseph

Rhetoric [is] the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents... Wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric. And wherever there is "meaning," there is "persuasion." Food, eaten and digested, is not rhetorical. But in the *meaning* of food there is much rhetoric, the meaning being persuasive enough

for the idea of food to be used, like the ideas of religion, as a rhetorical device for statesmen. Kenneth Burke

[The problem is that of introducing] rhetoric, the orator, the struggle of discourse within the field of analysis; not to do, as linguists do, a systematic analysis of rhetorical procedures, but to study discourse, even the discourse of truth, as rhetorical procedures, as ways of conquering, of producing events, of producing decisions, of producing battles, of producing victories. Michel Foucault

Rhetoric, which was the received form of critical analysis all the way from ancient society to the eighteenth century, examined the way discourses are constructed in order to achieve certain effects. It was not worried about whether its objects of inquiry were speaking or writing, poetry or philosophy, fiction or historiography: its horizon was nothing less than the field of discursive practices in society as a whole, and its particular interest lay in grasping such practices as forms of power and performance. This is not to say that it ignored the truth-value of the discourses in question, since this could often be crucially relevant to the kinds of effect they produced in their readers and listeners. Rhetoric in its major phase was neither a language, nor a “formalism,” preoccupied simply with analyzing linguistic devices. It looked at such devices in terms of concrete performance – they were means of pleading, persuading, inciting and so on – and at people’s responses to discourse in terms of linguistic structures and the material situations in which they functioned. It saw speaking and writing not merely as textual objects, to be aesthetically contemplated or endlessly deconstructed, but as forms of *activity* inseparable from the wider social relations between writers and readers, orators and audiences, and as largely unintelligible outside the social purposes and conditions in which they were embedded. Terry Eagleton

[R]hetoric may be the art of persuasion, that is, it may be seen from one angle as a practical capacity to find means to ends on specific occasions; but rhetoric must also be seen more broadly as a human potentiality to understand the human condition.

Robert L. Scott

[Rhetoric is] the study of the ways in which character and community – and motive, value, reason, social structure, everything, in short, that makes a culture – are defined and made real in performances in language. Whenever you speak, you define a character for yourself and for at least one other – your audience – and make a community at least between the two of you; and you do this in a language that is of necessity provided to you by others and modified in your use of it. [...] As the object of art is beauty and of philosophy truth, the object of rhetoric is justice: the constitution of a social world. James Boyd White

Rhetoric is love, and it must speak a commodious language, creating a world full of space and time that will hold our diversities. Most failures of communication result

from some willful or inadvertent but unloving violation of the space and time we and others live in, and most of our speaking is tribal talk. But there is more to us than that. We can learn to speak a commodious language, and we can learn to hear a commodious language. Jim W. Corder

Contrarianism is of the essence in rhetoric, and was of the essence in careers of traditional rhetoricians such as Erasmus and Thomas Wilson. Understanding that contrarianism should help us understand what it means to think like a rhetorician. Thomas O. Sloane

[R]hetoric is the study of what is persuasive. ... Rhetoric is a humanistic study that examines all the symbolic means by which influence occurs. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Susan Schultz Huxman

The theory of argumentation, conceived as a new rhetoric or dialectic, covers the whole range of discourse that aims at persuasion and conviction, whatever the audience addressed and whatever the subject matter. Chaim Perelman

REQUIRED TEXTS

Readings are available online.

REQUIRED TIME

From UO Catalog: "In planning a term's studies, students should anticipate that each credit requires at least three hours a week for class meetings or homework." This is a 4 credit course.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADE BREAKDOWN

Writing and Reading

You will develop your own critical project that will culminate in a 3500-5000 word essay of rhetorical criticism. You will also give a brief oral presentation of the project. I will distribute instructions and a grading rubric. You will be developing this project over the entire term. The final written version will be due any time before noon on Tuesday, March 16. Submit an electronic copy through Canvas.

Working proposals, outlines and partial drafts of this project will be due at dates specified in the schedule.

Reading Responses: Assigned reading must be completed before class begins. One day a week, beginning the second week, there will be a brief, written assignment due. It should answer the following questions: (1) What part of the reading for the day seemed to you the most applicable for rhetorical criticism? Does it seem to apply to your critical project? How? To another kind of project? How? (2) What question do you have about the reading

that you would like to have addressed in the discussion (perhaps a question that might concern your project)? I may call on you for these ideas and questions in class. 100-250 words, or about the length of this paragraph. Submit these assignments through Canvas (under “Assignments”) by 6pm the day before class starts. Last names A-L submit on Tuesday, M-Z on Thursday.

Participation

For each day of class that reading is assigned, the reading must be completed before class begins. Each day you attend, come prepared to participate in discussions. Have the reading (in some form) with you.

Attendance is required. Show up to class in person, *live on video*. Be sure you are audio capable. Feel free to take a necessary break, if you need one, just as you would in an in-person course, but *return live on video*. To cover illness or other events that make it impossible for you to attend, you are allowed two absences. For each of the next absences, three percentage points will be deducted from your final average for the course. **Lateness** counts in considering your participation. So does perfect attendance. Having said this, if you face special difficulties or become sick or incapacitated or are having technical difficulties, let me know. I will work with you. I usually take attendance twice—once at the start when I call roll and once later in the meeting, silently. If you arrive after attendance is taken, be sure to stay after class and check to see if I recorded your attendance.

If an emergency arises or a situation out of your control prevents you from completing work on time, contact me so that we can agree on a plan—before the work is due if that is possible. Email is the best way of reaching me for this.

Finally, we are pursuing this important work in an unusual and difficult time. I will be as flexible and fair as possible. If anything is preventing your full participation in the course, please let me know. If we encounter technical difficulties, let’s all ride it out and get it corrected, even if it takes a while.

Grades

One page proposal for possible project due 1/26: 5%

Project Plan due 2/18: 10%

Reading Responses : Due weekly at 6pm the night before the reading when there are readings assigned. 20%

Projects: Brief oral presentation of project the last three meetings of the term: 15%.

Final Written projects may be submitted any time before and up until Tuesday, March 16 at 10:15am. Instructions and a rubric are on Canvas. 50%

Late work loses 2 % for each day late. I cannot accept final projects more than 3 days late. Contact me by email in case of emergency.

Written Work

Please give your written work a title and include word count. Electronic copies should be submitted through Canvas. Reading responses are due by 6pm the day before class begins. Final Paper is due anytime before 10:15am on March 20. All other papers are due by 1159pm of the due date.

RESPECT, CONSIDERATION, AND PARTICIPATION

The design of this course requires your active involvement. Give your full attention. Feel free to speak up—to ask questions or offer your own insights and knowledge. You will learn more if you participate more. Besides, what you have to say is important and unique. The rest of us can learn from you. Let's all do our best to pay respectful attention to each other—and perhaps to offer some kindness as well. If we can encourage each other in our course projects, we will all benefit.

A LITTLE MORE

If affects your ability to participate fully in this class, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can make arrangements for your full access.

Please be aware also that the Tutoring and Academic Engagement Center provides support for all students. Contact is: engage.uoregon.edu Click around to find the resource you need. See me if you need help.

An “Incomplete” can be given only in cases when a very limited but essential aspect of the course cannot be completed because of unforeseen circumstances beyond a student's control.

All work submitted for this course must be your own and must be written exclusively for this course. If you plagiarize or cheat, the penalty will be an “F” in the course.

The use of sources (for example, other people's language or paraphrases of their language or ideas) must be properly documented. Use MLA or APA documentation style.

SCHEDULE (tentative)

WEEK 1

T 1/5 What is Rhetorical Criticism?

Th 1/7 Philosophy and Rhetoric. Some Basic Concepts of Rhetoric.

WEEK 2

T 1/12 Toward a New Rhetoric: *The New Rhetoric* (TNR) 1-62 (Intro, sections 1-2, 6-7, 9, 11, 13-14. (Or read it all!) Reading Responses A-L

Th 1/14 Toward a New Rhetoric: *The New Rhetoric* 65-114 (sections 15-20). Reading Responses M-Z

Week 3

T 1/19 Rhetoric of Medicine, Segal: Intro (1-12), Chp 4 Hypochondria (74-90)

Th 1/21 Rhetoric of Medicine Chp 5 Death and Dying (91-114)

Week 4

T 1/26 **One-page proposal due**

The Economics of Attention, Lanham (Preface and Chp 1).

“Selection and Presence” *The New Rhetoric*, 115-120

Th 1/28 *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Kahneman (19-49, 80-88).

Week 5

T 2/2 Plato: “Allegory of the Cave” and “The Apology of Socrates.”

Th 2/4 Foucault: “Fearless Speech” (11-24), Quinn (1-17), Handout: *Figures*

Week 6

T 2/9 Sequential Relations (*The New Rhetoric* 261-292)

Th 2/11 Dualities, Binaries, Polarities. (*The New Rhetoric* 411-459)

Week 7

T 2/16 Kenneth Burke: Terministic Screens

Th 2/18 **Project plan due**

Kenneth Burke: Dramatism

Week 8

T 2/23 Kenneth Burke: Master Tropes

Th 2/25 Plato: *Phaedrus*

Week 9

T 3/2 Plato: *Phaedrus*

Th 3/4 **Oral Presentations of Projects R-Z**

Week 10

T 3/9 **Oral Presentations of Projects Ko-Q**

Th 3/11 **Oral Presentations of Projects A-Kl**