



American Rhetoric

If oratory describes the delivery, rhetoric is the architecture of a speech. Aristotle, one of its earliest proponents, identified three modes of rhetorical persuasion:

- **Ethos:** essentially, the credentials of the speaker that establishes the due weight of their opinion.
- **Logos:** the use of reasoning to construct an argument. Logos appeals might include statistics, maths, logic, and objectivity.
- **Pathos:** the use of a direct appeal to the emotions through metaphor, amplification or any presentation that evokes strong emotions.

This tripartite model of ethos, logos and pathos is the Aristotelian ideal. In your local computer shop it might go something like this:

Ethos... "Look, You know I'm Bill Gates, you know I used to make this stuff, so you can totally trust me when I tell you that the GP5700 SLX dbg is perfect for you!"

Logos... "Besides, it's the only one that comes with XzpUtNik inside and anyway, your old Amstrad is a smoking heap."

Pathos... "Course, I'm retired now and you know how hard it is for us old folks."

With Obama it is in the projection of ethos and his ability to extend his own personal experience to touch the collective memory that he particularly excels. "I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived a Depression to serve in Patton's army during World War II and a white grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas. I've gone to some of the best schools in America and lived in one of the world's poorest nations."

Obama wins souls mostly with pathos and with ethos. The story of his own upbringing and journey to the White House is like a recitation of the American dream - it is the American dream. It also embodies Aristotle's tripartite model; a direct statement of ethos, an appeal to logos in the vision of a fair multi-racial America, and a heady layer of pathos as he conjurs the common experience of immigrant Americans of all races.

Persuasive power rests not so much in what is said but in how it scans. Oratory has no morality of its own. It can and has been used many times to defend the indefensible. In its worst forms it is one of the most dangerous of human tools, at its best it made civilized life possible.



Pete Souza

Cicero was the last free Consul of Rome before he was murdered at the behest of Mark Antony. He was an ardent and courageous defender of the Republic. Of politicians he said: "Never was a government that was not composed of liars, malefactors and thieves."

For him, real eloquence is only to be found in speakers who have reached the highest state of knowledge: "Otherwise what he says is just an empty and ridiculous swirl of verbiage".

rhetorical notes

Ancient Greece
With the rise of the democratic polis, speaking skill was adapted to the needs of the public and political life of cities in Ancient Greece.

The Sophists
They taught that every argument could be countered with an opposing argument and that any probability argument could be countered with an inverted probability argument. Thus, if it seemed likely that a strong, poor man were guilty of robbing a rich, weak man, the strong poor man could argue, on the contrary, that this very likelihood (that he would be a suspect) makes it unlikely that he committed the crime, since he would most likely be apprehended for it.

Plato (427-347 BC)
Coined the term "rhetoric" both to denounce what he saw as the false wisdom of the Sophists, and to advance his own views on knowledge and method.

Aristotle (384-322 BC)
Identified three steps or "offices" of rhetoric--invention, arrangement, and style--and three different types of rhetorical proof: ethos, logos and pathos.

Roman rhetoricians
For the Romans, oration became an important part of public life.

Cicero (106-43 BC)
Left a large body of speeches and letters which would establish the outlines of Latin eloquence and style for generations to come. It was the rediscovery of Cicero's speeches that, in part, ignited the Renaissance.

Quintilian (35-100 AD)
Described not just the art of rhetoric, but the formation of the perfect orator as a politically active, virtuous, publicly minded citizen. His emphasis was on the ethical application of rhetorical training.

After the breakup of the Western Roman Empire, the study of rhetoric went into decline for several centuries, followed by a gradual rise in formal education, culminating in the rise of medieval universities.

Erasmus (c.1466-1536)
Influential figure in the rebirth of interest in classical rhetoric. His orations in favour of qualities such as madness spawned a type of exercise popular in Elizabethan grammar schools, which required pupils to compose passages in praise of useless things.

England, during the 17th century saw the development of a modern, vernacular style that looked to English, rather than to Greek, Latin, or French models.

Modern Rhetoric
The turn of the 20th century saw a revival of rhetorical study and the establishment of academic institutions as well as professional organisations. The rise of advertising and of mass media such as photography, telegraphy, radio, and film brought rhetoric more prominently into people's lives.

Style elements of rhetoric

Arrangement

- Anastrophe A change from normal word order.
- Climax increasing importance, in meaning (and occasionally in word length).
- Periodos Left-branching sentence; one where the subject-predicate construction follows its modifiers.
- Parallelism General parallelism, not falling within one of the other definitions.
- Tricolon Three perfectly parallel elements or structures.
- Asyndeton Omission of all conjunctions.
- Polysyndeton Inclusion of all conjunctions.

Repetition

- Gradatio Repetition of closing word/phrase of one clause as the opening of the next.
- Anaphora Repetition of a word at the beginning of successive clauses.
- Epistrophe Repetition of a word at the end of successive clauses.
- Complexio Repetition of both initial and final words in successive clauses.
- Traductio Repetition of word or phrase, not falling within one of the other definitions.

Antithesis

- Antithesis Two juxtaposed elements with opposite or contrary meanings.
- Chiasmus A grammatical figure by which the order of words in one of two parallel clauses is inverted in the other.
- Oxymoron Phrase of two words with normally opposite meanings.

Sound

- Alliteration Repetition of sound, usually at beginning of words.

Diction

- Archaic Use of language no longer in common use.

Comparison

- Metaphor Direct comparison; substituting one entity for another.
- Simile Comparison using like or as.
- Metonymy Metaphor where concrete entity stands for abstract entity or tangible for intangible.
- Synecdoche Metaphor where part of entity stands for whole entity.

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