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Crafting Character Through Emotion and Reason

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ABSTRACT

This thesis follows a reproduction of Aristotle's *The Art of Rhetoric* in hopes of assisting undergraduate students of Creative Writing majors. Its model will cast types and utility of reasoning alongside respective emotions in an episodic debate under the same methodology of Aristotle, enthymeme[1] and example[2], and the emotions of Aristotle's study will be organized by the system of reason they produce, practical, imperfect, or perfect. I have selected this method for, although Aristotle's work studies the various elements which constitute components of emotion, his work is without a cyclic theory of emotions' interconnection.

The advantage of reproducing Aristotle's rhetoric is the opportunity to direct a perceptive study of the mechanics of human behavior, emotions, and types of reasoning to grasp the very roots of literary persuasion, as seen through fictional characters. Ideas and discussion integral to Aristotelian concepts follow three forms of emotional reason (practical, imperfect, and perfect), which will be illustrated and analyzed using excerpts from *The Art of Rhetoric* as well as challenging opinion.

The conclusions found by this thesis herald closely from postulates, or self-evident assumption, than from any ruling guideline. This work is not meant to say students are without other systematic and orderly procedures for composing fiction, but an Aristotelian process for

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1 *Enthymemes*, Aristotle's rhetorical syllogisms; arguments based on probable opinion rather than scientific argument and aim at audience persuasion rather than scientific demonstration.

2 *Example,* Aristotle's rhetorical induction; a series of specific instances that form a generalization meant to be accepted as a universal conclusion.

attaining literary objectives is especially subjected to a multitude of psychological and social influences— our *own* characters— which, from these, helps create students' best work.

In short, as a consequence of this thesis, I hope undergraduate students gain a repertoire for building graphic yet authentic characters, as well as an appreciation for literature that exemplifies characters of intense emotions and developed reason.

TO INTRODUCE ARTISTOTLE

In considering the Platonic origin of Aristotelian rhetoric, one might initially assume Aristotle's adherence to the academic consensus of his era that “oratory, with its shameless emotionalism and attempts at psychological manipulation of the audience, [was thought] not worthy to be classed as so rational a thing as an art” (Lawson-Tancred 139). Yet Aristotle's meager compilation of academic notes, no more than a study of a series of proofs, manifests a work, *The Art of Rhetoric*, that attends his era's consensus as far from true.

The art of *The Art of Rhetoric* comes from the explored facets of oratorical technique. In its highest form, rhetoric creates persuasive arguments through specific language decisions: arrangement, delivery, and style work together in manipulating an audience's reasoned discourse, their guiding beliefs, and emotions. To a lesser degree, rhetoric also incorporates logical, or dialectic, influences.

This is pivotal to note because Aristotle's study of rhetoric holds a foundation “of two species of proofs – that of character and emotion – that cannot be classed as demonstrative” (Lawson-

Tancred 139). To have the qualitative nature of character and emotion, things that cannot readily bend to numeric study, operate as the basis of Aristotle's oratorical proofs may be seen as scientific heresy for some. However, to find which oratory methods are most effective for theoretical persuasion, 'hard science' logical relevance stands on equal footing to impulsive emotions. Everyone who utilizes persuasion does so either through *enthymemes* and *example*. Thus, by classing the use of emotion and character as a species of proofs in this way, Aristotle's allows himself the best of both worlds in bringing these two emotional features of rhetorical practice into a collection whose formal intention is scientific study.

TWO DISCLAIMERS

To begin, first realize Aristotle utilizes character as a means of categorizing his theoretical subjects by description, most predominantly denoting the appearance of the speaker, whose certain qualities may be advantageous for persuasion. In the same way, a student of creative writing may use physical character to “bring [a chosen emotion] into existence in the minds of an audience without direct connection to the specific substance of the discussion” (Lawson-Tancred 140). However, future use and understanding of character will not be of simple physical appearance, but rather a construct emulative of reality, created by emotion, or “those judgments which pain and pleasure accompany, such as anger, pity, fear, and all other such and their opposites” (Rhetoric 2.1), and forms of reason (Latin: *ratio*, Greek: *logos*).

Next, a student must see the treatment of each qualitative emotion and type of reasoning in “a clear example to the definitional approach” (Lawson-Tancred 142) to develop a mature

character. To expand this statement, the definitions of this thesis are absolute: the just and ambitious person *is* just and ambitious, or the undeserving *is* undeserving. Students using Aristotelian philosophy cannot argue convoluted cases where there might be differences in perception, for these are numerous and debatable indefinitely.

SYSTEMS OF REASON and EMOTION

PRACTICAL REASON: Anger, Indignation, Pity, Shame, Jealousy

IMPERFECT REASON: Envy, Fear, Confidence

PERFECT REASON: Friendship, Favor, Calm

EMOTION

While analyzing Aristotelian emotions as exhibited in *The Art of Rhetoric*, students of creative writing might find the concepts therein alien to contemporary literary theory and practice. Evolved from the high modernist movement and its subsequent phases, the predominant goal of contemporary work is to transmit whatever truth there is in a premise (Garver 57).

And yet, no study bests *The Art of* Rhetoric in conceptualizing emotions coordinate with types of reasoning to characterize people and moral theory. For the student, this means they must delve into the abstract, those concepts of logic determined very much by capricious emotion to "construct connections that allow initial desires to transfer motivating forces along a means to

an end" (Garver 57). Aristotelian analysis in this regard is integral to synthesizing the catalysts that will ensure characters mature.

For the "standard motion picture," however, "reason is famously the slave of the passions" (Garver 57). A character reveals themself through the struggle of becoming mentally aware, but the writer must know the rostrum of their characters' emotions before building upon them. Aristotle complicates emotions in three parts: "Take the case of anger. We must say *what state* men are in when they are angry, with *what people* they are accustomed to be angry, and in *what circumstances*. For if we have one or two, but not all, of these, it would be impossible to engender anger" (Rhetoric 2.1). Emotion is a grand arrangement and the master to reason-puppetry, for "without [emotion], reason would never begin" for a character and they would "never end in action" (Garver 57).

ANGER and INDIGNATION

The first emotion studied, anger is the lengthy forefront of Aristotle's rhetoric— a misleading initial analysis. Anger's significance serves the philosopher's "general fascination for human nature [rather than] a concern to cover all aspects of rhetorical practice" (Lawson-Tancred 142), and its length of study certainly shouldn't reflect commonality. Aristotle describes anger as a "desire, accompanied by pain, for revenge for an obvious belittlement of oneself or one's dependents, the belittlement being uncalled for" (Rhetoric 2.1). The belittlement, not anger, is what constitutes irrationality: "the cause for pleasure for those insulting is that they think by treating others badly, they are themselves superior. That is why the young and rich tend to

insult; for in their insults they feel they are superior" (Rhetoric 2.2). In its most evil state, we have a lack of reason; there is dishonoring in the belittlement, but being uncalled for, it has no worth, as "what has no worth has no honor, either good or bad" (Rhetoric 2.2).

Since anger occurs from experiencing one or more types of belittlement— contempt, spite, and insult— upon ourselves or those we love, it is felt towards a particular individual or group, becomes more narrow across this progression, and affects a character in different amounts.

But whereas anger is a classification of desire, indignation is the grief of undeserved good fortune. "We cannot be indignant of all good things; men feel indignation about wealth and power and... good features by nature, such as birth and beauty, and so forth" (Rhetoric 2.9). It is not felt by those who are perceived as good or worthy since indignation is classified towards the newly rich and powerful, or those who are ill-suited for the goods they possess. "Hence, also, the slavish and worthless and unambitious are not disposed to indignation; for there is nothing of which they think themselves to be worthy" (Rhetoric 2.9). Indignation— and the canon association of pity— belong to those of rational behavior and practical reason since "one should sympathize and feel pity for those who are unjustly faring badly and indignation at those undeservedly doing well" (Rhetoric 2.9). And, if we are to find ourselves vying for the undeserving, we fall to irrationality.

Thus, indignation is linked to anger although one is a desire and the other a grief. They are both emotions and subsequent mentalities attested to lawful integrity, a mental trajectory of practical reason, and knitted from malicious components. For anger, there is an "attendant pleasure to the prospect of revenge. [However,] it is pleasant to think that one will achieve what one seeks, nobody seeks those things that are obviously impossible for him, so that the angry man too aims

at something that is possible for him" (Rhetoric 2.2). Thus, in the experience of belittlement, and the consequent craft of anger, we have reason maintained: for even if a character falls victim to their emotions and the goal of revenge is enacted, their goal remains set within the self-acknowledged limitations of their reality.

This goal of revenge might even become a necessity, for it is a "personal condition when [characters] are in pain, [that] those in pain always aim at something" (Rhetoric 2.2). Each character is guided towards his particular goal by his present suffering, more specifically being the feeling of belittlement. Aristotle considers wrath in this regard, noting "a certain pleasure accompanies it for this reason. Men dwell on revenge in their thoughts... thus the imagination arising on these occasions produces a pleasure like that of dreams" (Rhetoric 2.2).

Both emotions are social constructs dependent upon character interaction. One cannot feel anger without belittlement, and another cannot act on indignation without witnessing undue success. However, it is not the natural or practical intent for man to be angry or indignant and conflict with his community; in literary context, then, student crafting these types of characters should never compose their existence in solitude, and beware a frequency of their occurrence.

PITY

"Pity may be defined as a feeling of pain caused by the sight of some evil, destructive or painful, which befalls one who does not deserve it" (Rhetoric 2.8). The evils that predominantly create pity are destruction, chance, or the betrayal of family and friends. By Aristotle's context, indignation is contrasted with pity, indignation being grief at undeserved success and pity being

grief at undeserved misfortune. But in a practical context, they are more closely paired as companions of grief, and with anger, are socially dependent emotions.

At the same time, in Aristotelian understanding, pity is not felt by those completely ruined or those invulnerable to evil, for they both must experience and overcome their misfortune. Thus, the pitiful and the arrogant, in their ineffectiveness, cannot feel pity. Rather, those who pity are alike to the pitied character in some fashion, be it by age, social standing, or experience. Moreover, they must be emotionally and intellectually effective, demonstrative and communicative, and who vaguely know the pitying circumstance, but are not closely related; if they were, they would enact fear instead. “Nor again those in great fear, for terrified men do not feel pity” (Rhetoric 2.8).

Aristotle includes that pity is also evoked in the expectation of suffering as much as the actual enactment of evil, something “we might expect to befall ourselves or some friend of ours, and moreover to befall us soon” (Rhetoric 2.8). Therefore, the pitying character itself is a highly imaginative one, one parallel to a writer himself, where in creating their own meta-story of evil with detailed characters and moral depictions, have found a path to reason: the best pitying characters offer proper pragmatic observations of humanity, having a realized awareness to the subject of passions, and an innate understanding of the compulsions that instigate men to action. They are ones capable of observing themselves and their peers objectively, and have the greatest potential to handle themselves from negativity (the fearful expectation of suffering) to a positive conclusion (preventative means). For these characters, there is an insurmountable worth.

However, this reasoning is enacted only through being compromised by an emotion, and, thus, is practical rather than perfect.

SHAME

“Shame is felt for its own sake and not for its consequences [because no one] considers reputation except through those who confer it, and so one must feel shame before those whom one holds in regard, and one has regard for” (Rhetoric 2.6). Those admired but unmatchable persons, the excellent, the gods, peers, and those whose characteristics are resistant to weakness.

Also, shame is the pain at being a dishonored victim alone in personal disgrace, as well as the disgrace of one's friends and family. In comparison, one feels no shame toward those of imperfect or irrational reasoning, such as the envious and those filled with enmity.

Being connected with disrepute, shameful experiences are like other social creations, such as anger, indignation or pity, and felt for their own sake rather than for others or for consequence. A character feels shame because it is their own affliction to do so.

Potential causes of shame include emotions of weakness, such as cowardice or fear. It also exists by deserving occurrences subjected upon a character in a past or present time frame, such as exile, or enacted by the character themselves, such as thievery. To these ends, shame is not pity, for only a person of imperfect reasoning would connect their shameful state as undue.

However, there do exist circumstances where shame is exhibited by the unfortunate character, namely in looking at attributes allotted by chance, such as particular social statuses (wealth, gender, race) or events (murder, rape). To study this in depth, take the narrator of Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel *Invisible Man,* an African American living along the border of Harlem: “all

[his] life [he] had been looking for [self-identity]" (Norton 1555) and succumbing to white society's enforced false ideology of what that self-perception should consist of. He was even "at one time ashamed" (Norton 1555) for this ideology forced upon him.

This shame eventually becomes a strength, driving Ellison's fictional protagonist to eventually fight white hypocrisy by committing his own, becoming "a spy in the enemy's country… living with [his] head in the lion's mouth" (Norton 1555) to falsely supply a passive, subservient exterior while his interior, his mind, dedicates his actions to his own agenda. He no longer allows himself "to be blindfolded with the broad bands of white cloth" (Norton 1557) as he once was. This reveals a character subjected to the power of shame in a highly social context, but dominating this emotion through the utility of mature practical reasoning.

FRIENDSHIP and FAVOR

Although numerous forms of friendship exists, *The Art of Rhetoric* classifies the particular relationship of an individual "wishing for someone" composed of goodness for a companion's sake rather than oneself (Rhetoric 2.4). However, this definition must hold a disclaimer of etymology:

"Although it is difficult to avoid the term 'friendship' as a translation of *philia*, and this is an accurate term for the kind of relationship [Aristotle] is most interested in, we should bear in mind that he is discussing a wider range of phenomena than this translation might lead us to expect, for the Greeks use the term *philia* to name the relationship that holds among family members, and do not reserve it for voluntary relationships" (Kraut).

Friendship, then, must be stripped of its modern context while considering Aristotle's definition, and the student must follow this understanding to be the "close relationship between virtuous activity and friendship. He is vindicating his conception of happiness as virtuous activity by showing how satisfying are the relationships that a virtuous person can normally expect to have" (Kraut). This is the ability to share pain during others' pain, to take on misfortune, share favor and enemies--- but not for oneself and not from voluntary action. It is a form of obligation and an expansion of communal justice.

An example to this Greek understanding of friendship may be seen in Toni Morrison's character Pilate Dead of *Song of Solomon*; she is the only character capable of resisting abandoning others due to her ever-present worth for heritage and community. She even carries the bones of her father, her heritage, with her. Also, in her final moments of life Pilate only desires that she had known more people of her community. She "would of loved 'em all. If [she'd] a knowed more, [she] would a loved more" (Morrison 336).

To fully grasp Aristotelian friendship, one must realize that "hostility can arise without personal involvement" (Rhetoric 2.4) simply because of friendship's forced association; as if one's brother committed a crime, that family is, by default, fallen by association. Continuing with our current example, the protagonist of *Song of Solomon*, Macon Dead Jr., suffers from selfishness, materialistic drive, and the lack of compassion for his family and friends. His disillusionment partners itself to the actions of his father, Macon Dead Sr., who continually urges his son to "own things. And let the things [he] owns own other things" (Morrison 54). With this mentality, Milkman sacrifices friendship and familial relationships in favor of material ones even until, over thirty, Milkman remains unable to connect to or love his heritage and community.

FEAR AND CONFIDENCE

“Fear may be defined as a pain or disturbance due to a mental picture of some destructive or painful event in the future, such as [to] amount to great pains or losses” (Rhetoric 2.5). Fear, therefore, is similar to shame in that it is felt for oneself. But where shame and its consequences are due, fear is results solely from a character's imagination. Overpowering fear is felt while at mercy or towards those who seek vengeance and torture, developed consequent of contemplating some future evil, and experiences true pain by that expectation. Like pity, fear associates with the evil that is something that holds the possibility to physically harm, although it is a mere perception. It is the *expectation* of suffering, not the actualization of suffering.

As an emotion of internal disruption, fear plays from an awareness rooted within the psyche that becomes primal, and intensely aware of mortality. Principle knowledge of survival collapses upon itself and the character breaks in language and mind. For example, in studying Katherine Mansfield's “Prelude,” there is reinforced internal disruption through Kezia; this fiction utilizes dialogue interjections to interrupt meditations and begins the story itself fragmented in structure (halfway begun) and in content (family abandonment) to compel internal disruption in readers as well.

Katherine Mansfield uses other short stories to focus upon cultural and social voices embedded in individual psyches and suffering from the affliction of emotions. Hers are tales where plot is subverted and the suffering through the fear or shame of institutional and social paradigms of powers such as religion, family, social, gender traditions create paralyzed characters. The

internal disruption of fear offers unconventional alternatives, revealing a character that is artistically sensible and highly sensitive. A reader toils upon Kezia's fascinations and disruptions and artifacts that refrain from lucidity, and “text that eludes definition” (Smith 418), which in turn compels readers to meditate upon their observations and question their own maturity of reasoning.

Opposite of fear, “we feel confidence if we believe we have often succeeded and never suffered reverses... it is, therefore, the expectation associated with a mental picture of the nearness of what keeps us safe and the absence or remoteness of what is terrible” (Rhetoric 2.5). To elaborate, confidence is felt when dreadful things are far off, assistance at hand, when none have been caused grief, and in the absence of enemies. It is felt when success is frequent and external resources, such as money and friends, are plentiful.

Like fear, confidence is a socially independent emotion; while one may feel fear for loved ones, or feel confidence in the presence of company, they are considerations to the relationship of the individual. As an example, the character does not want their family to hurt because of the grief they would feel as a consequence, and the character is confident in company because of the strength they gain.

JEALOUSY AND ENVY

“Jealousy is a certain pain at the apparent presence of valued goods which one might have oneself in the case of those naturally similar to us, not because they are the others but because they are not one's own” (Rhetoric 2.11). With jealousy, the character takes a perception of one's

own worthiness to possess the goods it desires, yet analyzes its restraints; character, class, lineage. Without realization, without awareness, they are envious instead.

An envious character is spiteful of others' good fortune, yet lack the desire to claim that possession; their pain is resentment without self-improvement, grounded in negativity and irrationality. Envy is, in a way, similar to indignation: respectively, one being spiteful of someone of equal stature having success and one being the grief of the unworthy man having success. However, where indignation is practical, envy is imperfect reasoning because with indignation, at least, “the man who is grieved by those who undeservedly fare badly will be delighted or be made to feel free from grief by those who fare badly in the opposite way, just as for parricides and murderers, when they are punished, no good man would be saddened; for one should be happy about such things” (Rhetoric 2.9). This is not the case for the envious.

Jealousy is positive, envy is unreasonable; one wields the potential to improve character through emulation, the other holds the possibility of enmity. But both feel intensely towards others, are outwardly aware, and engaging of the self – for both must take perception of one's own worthiness and restraints in comparison to external figures. They both are emotions of admiration, and felt by a character of lacking creation, of lacking rostrum upon which to build. Both emotions create characters that are self-analytical, being aware of what they lack, and social, being aware of what others possess. By feeling intensely towards others, they, like the jealous, are outwardly aware, judging, and mentally active— ultimately reflecting a social emotion with imperfect reason.

“Hence jealousy is both reasonable and belongs to reasonable men, while envy is base and belongs to the base; for the one makes himself get good things by jealousy, while the other does

not allow his neighbor to have them through envy" (Rhetoric 2.11). The student may use this to manipulate a character's usual composition through the inner desires of jealousy or envy reflecting an outer reaction of practical or imperfect reasoning.

To exemplify the difference of jealousy and envy in a literary context, we may look at a clip of Du Bois' work. Speaking on the dissent towards African Americans by white society and the separation of classes which Du Bois holds in "common contempt," the student describes a veil– – a double consciousness— that is his jealousy's practical reasoning, an objectification in its purest state; he deems himself living in a "region of blue sky" above the veil, finding his racial strife "fiercely sunny" for the white-exclusive "worlds [he] longed for" (Of Our Spiritual Strivings, Norton 694). This is a practical reasoning capable of dominating his emotion, capable of viewing themselves without the slants of the world upon them.

CALM

People become calm if they believe themselves having done wrong and suffered justly. For example, anger "does not arise against justice. For they also do not think that they are suffering beyond what is right, and this was what anger was defined to be" (Rhetoric 2.3). To consider calm, Aristotle reflects this same technique of dissolution within his other sections: that "the way to undo an emotion is merely the mirror opposite of the way to produce it" (Lawson-Tancred 147). But to follow Aristotelian study that emotions exist as opposites of one another – calm opposite anger for example, a student limits themselves to the only three pairs of clearly contrasting emotions with *The Art of Rhetoric*: calm and anger, friendship and enmity, and fear

and confidence. Thus, this description and its features cannot be an integral conception of emotion coordinate with types of reason. Instead, rather than understand calm as a reversal of only anger, it is better attested to a reversal of all emotions, like a spherical orbit with calm as the sun, and apathy the pinprick center.

It is one thing to say calm exists when a wrongdoer has encountered justice through vengeance, suffering, or enlightenment. But emotions are more complicated than that; they become rational as they become moral, forcing us to consider multiple perspectives, such as feeling “calm towards those who humble themselves before us and do not gainsay us, that they thus admit themselves our inferiors” (Rhetoric, 1380b18). Therefore, with this understanding, calm is may be readily felt towards those “who give respect, or the remorseful, or the involuntarily caused grief, usually initiated when” *all* emotions, not just anger, have been “spent or redirected, in the presence of success, relief, or prospering” (Rhetoric 2.3).

But, like “orators seeking to transform anger into calm as often as they seek to transform calm into anger” we must understand how to move our characters away and towards circumstances we provoke. Seneca's *On Anger* briefly covers this system, noting “... if the mind is to have the possibility of being calm, it must not be tossed about nor, as I said, exhausted doing many things or anything too ambitions for its powers” (Seneca Book III).

CONCLUSION

The Art of Rhetoric, the collective treatises of Aristotle, utilizes pragmatic reasoning in exploring the many facets of persuasive argument. These accounts are pervaded by Aristotle's

compelling appraisals of society and his judgment of men, viewing familiar issues in new perspectives as well as reflecting upon human behavior where all previous observations seemed nearly non-existent. Contrary to his predecessors, whose tactics concentrate on verbal tricks and gimmicks, Aristotle sought the very core of persuasion itself and found in his earnest study the means of swaying argument depends entirely on human emotions and reason. *The Art of Rhetoric*, therefore, "displays the interconnections between reason and the emotions it requires, as well as the context in which it is functional and intelligent" (Garver 58).

In their own right, students of creative writing use the same persuasive language of human emotions and reason to replicate authentic reality. In the words of Hume, "how great the pitch may be, to which this vivacity rises, it is evident in poetry it never has the same feeling with that which arises in the mind when we reason... and whatever emotion the poetical enthusiasm may give to the spirits, is still the mere phantom of belief or persuasion." Being a matter of persuasion, the powerfully performed and studied art of fiction is indebted to Aristotle.

And as fiction is ultimately a function of rhetoric in the art of persuasion, we cannot say it is all equally persuasive, equally affecting, and equal in terms of its power to evoke reality. But by studying *The Art of Rhetoric* and its definitions of emotions and concepts of reason, students may better "see reason in action, operating for good and ill" (Garver 58) and recognize a revolving connection of emotions leading to reason. By following the path of philosophers in this way, an student may produce classic work rather than cheap manipulation.

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