Part I

Historical perspectives in stylistics
Introduction

Without classical rhetoric and poetics there would be no stylistics as we know it today. This opening chapter introduces you to the fields of rhetoric and poetics, the classical forebears of contemporary stylistics. In doing so, it encourages you to go beyond this chapter and seek them out, to become better acquainted with them and to make them your allies, because a solid understanding of such past discourse and communication structures and models will both augment and enrich your current level of stylistic knowledge.

Almost every overview of stylistics in the past thirty years or so begins in the twentieth century, with Roman Jakobson and Russian formalism. This is understandable and in many ways it is appropriate and correct. However, choosing to start approximately one hundred years ago risks missing out on something that is of central importance to stylistics today, and to its continuing development into the multimodal and neuroscientific world of the twenty-first century. What this chapter seeks to accomplish is to offer you an indispensable contextual background to the field of stylistics, which many of the stylistics students of recent years have unfortunately been deprived of.

Jakobson’s critical poetic work did not come into being spontaneously; it did not emerge out a void of nothingness. If you read his works you will see that he had a profound knowledge of both poetics and rhetoric, upon which he drew heavily. For example, in his famous ‘Closing statement: Linguistics and poetics’ essay he conducts a detailed stylistic analysis of Mark Anthony’s famous monologue from Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar (Jakobson 1960, pp. 375–376). In this analysis he observes levels of foregrounding that include paronomasia, polyptoton, apostrophe, exordium, modus obliquus and modus rectus, which are all key terms from the field of classical rhetoric.

In this chapter we will survey the main principles of both poetics and rhetoric. There will be a focus on history, theory and methodology. We will see how these ancient disciplines continue to affect and influence modern-day stylistics. The chapter will close with some pointers towards future directions in the field.
Michael Burke

Historical overview

The great classical period of rhetoric and poetics began roughly in the fifth century BC with the beginnings of democracy in Athens. It continued right up to the fall of the Roman empire in the West, although the Roman tradition of rhetoric schools and their progymnasmata programme of learning (about which you will learn more later) continued in the Eastern Roman world right up until the fall of the Byzantine empire in the fifteenth century AD. After the fall of Constantinople, rhetoric continued to grow in status in the West and became part of the European trivium, which was the ‘academic core’, as it were, of schooling and learning, consisting of the three related disciplines of grammar, logic and rhetoric. This system lasted more or less in the same form through the Renaissance and Early Modern periods, only really disappearing in Europe in the early nineteenth century. However, rhetoric continued to be taught as a learning tool in the United States, and even today every US college worth its salt offers freshman courses in rhetoric, argumentation and composition.

It is perhaps fair to say that rhetoric, with its inherent link to style, is more important to modern day stylistics than poetics. It is for this reason that a relatively short overview of poetics will now be given, followed by a longer survey of classical rhetoric.

Classical poetics

The three main concepts that we will encounter in this section are: (i) mimesis (which is the opposite of diegesis); (ii) catharsis (which incorporates the emotions of pity and fear); and (iii) plot structure (including the key notions of hamartia, peripeteia and anagnorisis). These terms no doubt seem very strange to you in their ancient Greek form. However, they do all have straightforward English equivalents, which we will learn about in the course of this section and which you can use instead.

When the word ‘poetics’ is mentioned, there is really only one name that can follow: Aristotle. This fourth century BC homo universalis will be our starting point. From him, we will go on to consider the work of two Roman literary theorists, Horace and Longinus. Of course, there were many prolific Greek lyric poets and playwrights before Aristotle, including, Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Sappho, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes. However, it is Aristotle who is thought to have written the first book-length work of critical literary theory in the ancient Hellenic world (of course, there may have been earlier ones, of which Aristotle makes no mention, which are now lost to us). The main theoretical points that Aristotle focuses on are, as listed above, mimesis (broadly translated as ‘imitation’, ‘copying’ or ‘representing’), catharsis (a kind of ‘cleansing’ or ‘clearing away’) and plot structure. We will look at all three of these, starting with mimesis.

Perhaps paradoxically, it was not Aristotle who first wrote on mimesis but his mentor and teacher Plato. If you recall, Plato was the man who, if he had had his way, would have banned all poets from his ideal state for being generally useless and also a threat to people’s perception of reality. As such, poets were surplus to requirements in his hypothetical utopian republic. Therefore, if we wish to know more about Aristotle’s mimesis, we will first have to briefly consider Plato’s views on this topic. Not surprisingly, Plato writes about poetry not in the context of praising its worth, but to critique it and demonstrate its dangers to society. He reflects on mimesis in different places in his magnum opus, The Republic. For example, in Book 3 (pp. 392–395) he deliberates on the kind of literature that the future citizens of his ideal state should study. He then distinguishes between two types of narration. The first is when an author speaks in the voice of his characters. This he defines as mimesis: the author
is ‘imitating’ their voices. The second is when the author speaks in his own voice. This is ‘narration’, which Plato calls ‘diegesis’. You can see here the clear beginnings not just of narratology and narrative theory, but also the essential groundwork for speech and thought presentation, a key area in stylistics (see Chapters 11 and 13 in this volume for more on these topics).

Plato returns to the notion of mimesis in Book 10 of *The Republic* (2000, pp. 597–600) in a discussion of his famous ‘theory of forms’, where he relates mimesis to the negative idea of mere ‘copying’. This is somewhat different to the gloss mimesis is given in Book 3, where identification with character and character voice is central. In Book 10 poetic mimesis is presented as a superficial and essentially worthless practice, distracting people from seeing the true forms. As such it is a danger to the state, something that should be rooted out and banished.

Let us now turn to Aristotle and his views on mimesis. What makes Aristotle’s discussion different is that, unlike Plato, for him poetics is the object of study itself and not a side argument in a larger philosophical theory. In the *Poetics*, believed to be the first work of literary criticism in the Western tradition, Aristotle tackles the thorny issues of the nature of poetry and how its parts can be classified, categorised and understood. In this sense, Aristotle’s approach is very much a formalist one. However, the *Poetics* is not a prescriptive handbook. In fact, its concerns are aesthetic and psychological, because it seeks to understand how poetic discourse works on an audience, something with which current studies into ‘stylistics and real readers’ are also concerned (see Chapter 27 in this volume for more on this). Like rhetoric, Aristotle sees poetry as an art, in the sense of a skill/craft (*techê*), and this becomes clear in the course of his work. This differs to Plato, who mainly saw poets as slaves to the Muses – individuals who sat around waiting to be touched by the creative hand of inspiration. Where Aristotle thought that poets create things by means of their intellect and applied reason, Plato believed that they copy things with the help of their irrational mood swings and general ignorance.

Another significant difference is that where Plato saw poetry and drama as morally perilous and therefore a threat to society; Aristotle saw them as useful and practical and therefore helpful to society. Plato thought that emotions were best kept deep inside a person, but Aristotle wanted them expressed and out in the open, believing that this would be of benefit for both the individual concerned and for the community in general. Although Plato does give us a clear definition of mimesis in the *Republic*, Aristotle does not do so in his *Poetics*, so we can only assume that he is also referring to the imitative or representative power of both verbal and visual art forms.

Aristotle was also interested in why it is that human beings instinctively appear to delight and take great pleasure in artistic imitations. In this sense Aristotle takes mimesis to a new level, turning it into a kind of natural, basic instinct that exists alongside other social, cultural and individual phenomena. We do not only like to observe pleasurable things in art; we also like to observe things that are confrontational, such as acts of murder and human degradation, which we would not wish to encounter in real life.

The main bulk of the surviving chapters of the *Poetics* focus on the poetics of drama and on tragedy in particular. There was apparently a second book in the *Poetics* on the subject of comedy, but this is lost. There is also very little written in the *Poetics* about the third genre, ‘epic’. This leaves the *Poetics* as essentially a discourse on tragedy. Aristotle defines tragedy as

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\text{... a representation of action that is serious, complete and of some magnitude; in language that is pleasurably embellished, the different forms of embellishments occurring in}
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Rhetoric and poetics
separate parts; presented in the form of action, not narration, by means of pity and fear bringing about the catharsis of such emotions.

‘Catharsis’ is a major concept in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, even though nowhere in the book is it a given a solid definition. As a result, and in many ways similar to mimesis, views differ on its translation and on its semantic scope. The most general description involves the notion of a ‘clearing away’ or ‘cleansing’ of both body and mind. This is how catharsis is said to work.

Imagine that instead of hanging out in the pub with your friends you decide to go to the theatre. There you watch a tragedy. It could be something from ancient times, such as *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, something more recent like Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, or something relatively modern like Kesey’s *One flew over the cuckoo’s nest* or Miller’s *Death of a salesman*. On stage you see the protagonist/hero suffering, not as a result of deliberate, immoral deeds but because of fate. As a result you start to empathise with him/her and to pity his/her situation. That pity then transforms into fear for yourself and your loved ones as you subconsciously trigger a kind of ‘I hope that kind of thing never happens to us’ scenario in your head. At any stage in this process you can be moved to tears both by what you have witnessed and by the fear and anxiety you have experienced. This experiencing of intense emotion at what might be called a benign artistic distance, rather than in real life, is what ‘cleanses’ your mind, body and perhaps even your soul, allowing you to function better in your everyday life for the benefit of yourself, your loved ones and your fellow citizens.

Let us now look at the third of Aristotle’s poetic theories, plot structure, which is in many ways connected to both mimesis and catharsis. Three key elements in Aristotelian plot structure are *hamartia*, *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis*. *Hamartia* is essentially a ‘mistake’ or ‘error’, often translated in poetic terms as an innate ‘tragic flaw’ in a specific character, often the protagonist. *Peripeteia*, or ‘peripety’ as it is referred to in English, pertains to a ‘reversal of circumstance’ – a change of fortune. It comes as a surprise to the character, but it is a necessary development in the plot. *Anagnorisis* refers to an act of ‘recognition’. This is a place in the plot where the character realises what he/she has done (often as a result of his/her *hamartia* or earlier mistake or tragic flaw). For example, the character Oedipus Rex, in the play of the same name, does not know that he has inadvertently killed his own father (whom he thought was a stranger) and married his mother (whom he thought was the Queen of Thebes, the head of a city state from which he believed he did not hail). The reason for his misperception is that as a small baby he was taken from Thebes to Corinth, some distance way, where he was raised as the child of the king and queen of that city state. When in later life he travelled to Thebes as a young man, he did not know that his real mother and father lived there and that he would be destined to commit two prophesised heinous acts: patricide and incest.

The events in his past, the transgressions against the gods that had been committed by his ancestors, imbued him with *hamartia* (he is a tragic hero destined to suffer). The reversal or ‘peripety’ in the story occurs when a messenger comes to court in Thebes to tell Oedipus, who is essentially a good man, that his mother in Corinth is dead. Oedipus is relieved because this news means that he will not fulfil the prophecy that he will end up sleeping with his mother and killing his father. However, his lingering fears about the prophecy, together with a malicious plague of infertility that has suddenly descended on the city since he married the queen, slowly start to disclose the facts of the matter to him as the messenger gives him more information than he expected. The truth is revealed. The next stage *anagnorisis*, i.e. ‘recognition’, follows quickly after *peripeteia* as Oedipus realises who he truly is and what he has done. This is a stage where he passes from ignorance to knowledge.
Upon hearing the news his wife, who is also his mother, kills herself, and on finding her body Oedipus gouges out his own eyes and is doomed to wander the earth until the end of his days, becoming a wretched, worthless creature. For an audience watching the events unfold, the individuals in that gathering will almost certainly feel pity for the hapless Oedipus. This in turn may lead to tears. They might also project aspects of the events witnessed on the stage onto themselves and their loved ones according to different ‘what if’ scenarios. Upon leaving the theatre, the audience members might feel purged or cleansed of certain subconscious feelings they might have had. This is the catharsis of which Aristotle writes.

Aristotle was prescriptive with regard to which elements the ideal plot should entail. For example:

i. the plot should consist of a single issue (not a double one) and the representation of action should be serious and complete (with a beginning, middle and end), and it should be represented in embellished language where necessary

ii. plots can be simple or complex. In simple plots/actions the change of fortune comes about without the elements of reversal or recognition; however, complex plots/actions need reversal and recognition

iii. the hero’s change of fortune (peripeteia) has to be from happiness to misery (and not the other way around). There were few happy endings in the ancient Greek world, unlike the Hollywood of today

iv. the cause is not depravity or wickedness but a character error/flaw (hamartia)

v. the hero must be a relatively good man

vi. the action of the play unfolds over one day, no longer, which means that a lot of the story has to have already taken place when the play starts. This is reported in speech about past events and flashbacks

vii. the deed that is committed must be among family members or good friends/loved ones, not among strangers

viii. there is a predictable and necessary ‘surprise’ – recognition/discovery (anagnorisis).

In this structured approach we see a kind of organic unity that in some ways might (mimetically) imitate nature; the parts naturally make up the whole, which makes it beautiful.

Aristotle’s Poetics had a huge influence on later Renaissance writers. However, they made the error of thinking that like his Art of rhetoric, his Poetics too was a precise composition plan for how to construct the ideal tragedy. It was not. Long before the Renaissance, Aristotle’s Poetics had a huge influence on the Roman poets and playwrights. In Roman poetics and literary criticism there are two names that spring to mind: Horace and Longinus. Of course, there are many great Roman poets, such as Petronius, Ovid, Virgil, Juvenal and many more, some of whom also wrote theoretical treatises, but Horace’s The art of poetry and Longinus’s On the sublime are much cited works, and were already important didactic tools in antiquity. They will therefore constitute the mainstay of this next section.

Horace, a first century BC Roman, believed that the poet had to sweat in order to create great works of literary art. The archetypal long-haired bohemian artist who sits around most of the day waiting for inspiration to strike would be a depiction that Horace would neither recognise nor agree with. Natural ability was admittedly an asset, but without hard endeavour there could be no successful writer. Good writers were studious craftsmen, not carefree nonconformists. In order to become good writers, students had to read the Greek poetic masters like Homer, making these stories their own. They then had to learn to imitate the style and syntax of writers like Homer in their own words and draft compositions, in much
the same fashion as the young men in the rhetoric schools had to do. Indeed, modern-day stylistics and/or rhetoric-based creative writing modules and courses at universities also do just this. (For more on creative writing and stylistics, see Chapter 26 in this volume). Horace focused not so much on plot, as Aristotle did, but rather on character. Main characters had to be morally good individuals, and this knowledge and insight into what makes an ethically upright character came to the poet not just as a result of his hard work, but also as a consequence of his wide reading and subsequent knowledge of the world. This idea that being well read can make you a better citizen is something that is still topical today (see, for example, Nussbaum 1998).

Arguably, Horace’s main theoretical input was the notion of ‘decorum’, the idea that in poetry everything should be fit and proper and appropriate. In many ways Horace is a kind of proto-‘relevance theorist’ for poetics (for more on relevance theory in stylistics see Chapter 9 in this volume). For Horace, decorum ranged from the nature or genre of the subject matter right down to the more micro-level matters of words and meter. Characters should also be true to life. His ideas on decorum also extended to the mind. Although he valued the eye above the ear (i.e. looking at/watching something rather than listening to it), when it came to being capable of actively stimulating the mind, heinous acts like the killing of innocents, acts of rape and so on should always take place offstage and never be performed in full view of the audience, because this was not fitting. Of course, what all this shows is just how committed Horace was to the notion of mimesis: that art should imitate nature, and that incompatibility in these matters should be avoided at all costs.

Like Aristotle, Horace was also interested in literary emotions. One idea which he undoubtedly took from the rhetoricians was that if you wish to move your audience, then you must feel and express that same emotion yourself. Horace was certainly influenced by rhetoric. This can be seen in many areas including his nature–nurture discussions. Horace said that although one needed a rich vein of natural talent in order to embark on the road to becoming a successful poet, if such native genius remained uncultivated, then it was worthless. This essentially rhetorical principle of talent honed by craft is something that we can also find in the ideas of Longinus.

Probably written in the third century AD, *On the Sublime* has been traditionally attributed to Longinus. However, scholars nowadays are no longer sure who wrote the text, or even when it was written. Nonetheless the text itself, although fragmentary (several sections and subsections having been lost over the years), is an important window on Roman literary criticism and theory. *On the Sublime* is certainly inspired by the method of learning that was prevalent in the Roman rhetorical schools. Style, the third canon of rhetoric, prescribed three levels: plain style, middle style and grand style. Students were advised to use each of these styles in particular contexts. It is the grand style that interests us here in this discussion on the sublime.

Poetic sublimity can be defined as a kind of passionate style/language-based force that has the power to delight, engage and transport readers and hearers to states of bliss. Longinus claims that there are five sources of sublimity. These are set out in Chapter 8 of his work and are then investigated further in the subsequent chapters. The first two of these five sources rely on nature; one could say they depend on the innate genius of the poet. The other three are all nurture-like; they are all down to hard work, skill and craft. The first of the five sources is ‘the ability to form grand conceptions’. This is classed as a natural gift. The second, which is also classed as innate, concerns ‘the stimulus of powerful and inspired emotions’. The third source, which is the first of the nurture/craft inputs, is ‘the proper formation of the figures of thought and figures of language’. The fourth source is ‘noble diction’, which refers to the
choice of words, language and imagery. Fifthly, and lastly, comes ‘dignified and elevated word arrangement’.

From a stylistic perspective we can see how the latter three, which are by far the most rhetorical in nature, have their counterparts in modern stylistics. Figures of thought and language have the effect of deviating from normal language usage (schemes will deviate at the syntactic level of language and tropes will deviate at a semantic level). This is firmly in the territory of foregrounding, a core concept in stylistics (for more on this see Chapter 2 on ‘formalism’ and Chapter 5 on ‘foregrounding’ in this volume). ‘Noble diction’ and ‘prominent word arrangement’ at the sentence level also involve foregrounding, as well as creative text production.

We have started to see here how many of these poetic ideas rely on rhetoric and the method of instruction that was being conducted in the rhetorical schools of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. Let us now look more closely at classical rhetoric itself.

Classical rhetoric: History, theory, method

The following overview will consist of two parts, the first about history and the second concerning methods and theory. The first part is there to offer a little bit of historical context. It is the second part that is of the most importance to you, the practicing stylistician of today.

A short history of classical rhetoric

There is no appropriate way to compress a historical overview of rhetoric into a short section like this. For this reason, this brief account will be largely based on important individuals in the development of the field. The subject deserves a more extended account, which you will find elsewhere (see, for example, Burke forthcoming).

Classical scholars tend to agree that the formal codification of rhetoric, as a heuristic system, was first written down in the second quarter of the fifth century BC (around 475 BC) by a man named Corax. He came from the city of Syracuse on the island of Sicily, which in those days was part of the ancient Greek world. Corax taught the people of Syracuse how to structure their speeches logically and deliver them persuasively in front of a jury in the law courts in order that they might successfully reclaim their possessions which had been stolen by a recently deposed dictator name Thrasybulus. Corax charged a fee for his services. He soon became a wealthy man (as did his star pupil Tisias).

Most forms of rhetoric can only exist within a democratic political system. As we have seen, the tyrant of Syracuse was deposed, and as a result the people could argue publically about what was right and wrong in their view, and why. Athens was one of the few democratic city-states in ancient Greece (the others were monarchies, dictatorships or oligarchies), and good thinkers and speakers were needed to further the ends of the political and judicial city-state. It was not long before teachers of rhetoric such as Protagoras from the north of Greece and Gorgias of Lentini (in Sicily) were arriving there to make a living. (Gorgias was said to have been taught by Tisias, who in his turn had been taught by Corax). These were the first Sophists: itinerant teachers who for payment would teach the young and wealthy men of Athens how to speak and argue eloquently in the public arena.

Even though Athens was a democracy for most of the fifth and fourth centuries BC, there were still many rich aristocratic families within Athenian society who had been in charge during previous, less democratic periods. Therefore, the situation was quite simple: in a democracy, those who can speak well and put forward clear, solid arguments in front of either
juries or political assemblies will win the day in both courtrooms and parliament, which were, and still are, the two core seats of power in democratic systems. Young male aristocratic Athenians had money but no power, while the new teachers of rhetoric, who were sprouting like mushrooms in the city, had the skills to teach rhetoric but were relatively poor. In a society where eloquence meant power, it is easy to understand why things developed the way they did.

In many of Plato’s works you can find his mouthpiece Socrates attacking the Sophists, including Protagoras and Gorgias. Plato found them morally corrupt and therefore essentially worthless. His main argument was that Sophists can teach people to win public debates and discussions with weaker arguments by the use of unfair tactics such as ‘style’ and ‘emotion’. Plato believed that people should reason logically, ethically and truthfully, without the use of stylistic and/or affective embellishments. In short, Plato believed that the people who had been trained by the Sophists dazzled their interlocutors with lexical and syntactic trickery, rather than reasoning logically with them. Plato also believed in the philosophical notion of ‘truth’ and despised the oratory of the professional and political world. In a way this is ironic, since if you have ever read any of Plato’s works you will have noticed that they are written in a skilful rhetorical fashion, and quite often Socrates is not always the ethical debater we might expect him to be. In addition to this, Plato was an aristocrat who is reported to have disliked democracy, especially since he saw the democratic system as being partially responsible for the trial and execution of Socrates, his friend and teacher.

In the fourth century BC, schools of rhetoric started to emerge in Athens. Perhaps the most famous of these was the one run by the somewhat conservative but essentially ethical Isocrates, which in its day rivalled Plato’s philosophical Academy that was also located in Athens. Isocrates trained affluent young men to serve the state wisely, and what he showed in his teaching was that real rhetoric involved not just logic and reason, but emotion and style as well. In effect, he concluded that reason and emotion on the one hand and content and style on the other were more or less inseparable, so it was pointless to continue to complain about the emotive and stylistic aspects of rhetoric. Several of Isocrates’ speeches still exist, including ones on educational policy like ‘Against the Sophists’, and they make for fascinating reading. He almost certainly wrote an ‘art of rhetoric’-type handbook too, but it is lost to us. Many great and famous orators flourished in this period, not least the lawyer Lysias, who was also attacked by Plato in his works, and the statesman Demosthenes, who was said to have been the greatest public speaker of all time, despite a debilitating speech impediment that he suffered throughout most of his childhood. Demosthenes was born in 384 BC and died in 322 BC. These are also the dates of birth and death of a person who, for us in the twenty-first century, is, and always will be, intrinsically linked with classical rhetoric: Aristotle.

Aristotle, a Macedonian by birth, arrived back in Athens after the Macedonians under Phillip II (and later his son Alexander the Great, whom Aristotle tutored as a boy) had conquered the Greeks and put an end to democracy and seemingly to much of rhetoric too. He founded a school called the Lyceum (close to the place where Isocrates had founded his school of rhetoric), where, in addition to subjects like biology, physics and geometry, the students also studied poetics and rhetoric. Aristotle had learned from what he saw around him. As a young man he had spent twenty years studying and teaching at Plato’s philosophical school, the Academy in Athens, before he was asked to leave. There, under the tutelage of Plato, he learned to distrust rhetoric and rejected it for its purported phoniness. However, on his return as an older and wiser man, he saw on the streets of Athens and in the other schools, such as Isocrates’ school of rhetoric, that ‘rhetoric-in-practice’ was not a logical search for some philosophical notion of truth, but rather an innately human communicative process
which, in addition to employing logic, also centrally involves character and emotion, as Isocrates had already noted. Aristotle went on to produce his *Art of rhetoric*, which he may have used in his teaching at the Lyceum. It is the oldest complete treatise on rhetoric that we have today.

Aristotle had a huge influence on the Roman scholars, not least Marcus Tullius Cicero, who began his own investigations into rhetoric during the first century BC. As a leading lawyer of his day during his early life (as a member of the equestrian order), and as a member of the senate in later life, rhetoric was the tool of his trade and he needed to be able to use rhetorical techniques effortlessly. Cicero believed that rhetoric had a tripartite function: to teach (*docere*), to persuade (*movere*) and to delight (*delectare*). Thankfully for us, Cicero was also a prolific writer and in addition to all the letters he wrote and all his defence and prosecution speeches, we also have a number of his treatises on rhetoric – for example, *de Inventione* (*On invention*) and *de Oratore* (*On the orator*).

Several other Romans wrote on the subject of rhetoric over the next four hundred years, including the historian Tacitus and the late Roman St. Augustine of Hippo, who in his *Christiana doctrina* (*The Christian doctrines*) added a final chapter which sought to teach the new priests of the emerging Christian faith how to persuade the pagan masses. However, arguably the most important Roman rhetorician was a man who came from the Iberian peninsula and lived during the first century AD. He moved to Rome and set up a school of rhetoric, where in time he became the first ever professor of rhetoric. His name was Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, but we know him today as Quintilian. When Quintilian finally retired from teaching generations of young Roman boys, mostly of whom later became lawyers, he decided to write down his teaching methods. The result was a handbook in twelve volumes called the *Institutio oratoria* (translated as *The institutes of oratory* or sometimes more loosely as *The orator’s education*).

Quintilian’s main focus on rhetoric was ethical education. This was needed, given that most of his students were aspiring lawyers. He wrote of ‘the good man speaking’ and did his utmost to keep this ethical dimension alive in rhetorical practice. In the later Roman period of the second, third and fourth centuries AD, many rhetorical schools sprang up throughout the empire. A system that many teachers used was known as the *progymnasmata*. This entailed a series of rhetorical assignments that grew in length and degree of difficulty. Usually, *progymnasmata* employed a fourteen-level model. The students would start with something simple, like constructing and performing their own fable based on a traditional one. The assignments would then get gradually longer and more complex. The fourteenth and final assignment would often be something like writing and performing a defence speech, and thereafter a prosecution speech, in a court of law. Such a stylistic-rhetorical programme of learning can still be employed today in contemporary stylistic and rhetoric-based creative writing courses to great pedagogical effect.

After the fall of the Roman empire in the fifth century AD at the hands of marauding Germanic tribes (especially the Visigoths), the art of rhetoric continued to flourish in Byzantium, the surviving Eastern part of the Roman world. When it too fell at the hands of the Ottoman Turks in the fifteenth century AD, around a thousand years after the Western Roman empire had collapsed, knowledge of rhetoric began to flow back to the West where it had been largely abandoned, fuelling the early Renaissance. Around this time a complete copy of Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria*, which had been lost for centuries, was found in a monastery in Switzerland. The work quickly became embedded at the core of the European Renaissance educational curriculum, and in the two hundred years that followed, the book is reported to have gone through a hundred reprints.
One of the most influential rhetoricians in this period was Erasmus of Rotterdam. While studying and teaching in England at Cambridge University, he introduced his work *De Copia* (meaning ‘abundance’), which was to serve as a handbook in the grammar schools of England for many years. This work encouraged students to expand their Latin vocabulary (for the purposes of lexical variation), apply style figures (schemes and tropes) and basically make their written and spoken style more eloquent and engaging. Another continental scholar who had an influence on the teaching of rhetoric in England was Juan Luis Vives, who was appointed professor of rhetoric at Oxford by Cardinal Wolsey. However, the turbulent religious history of that time meant that his stay was a short one.

As we have learned, the university educational system in England and most of continental Europe in the Early Modern period was broadly based on the trivium. The trivium was an elementary programme that all students had to undertake. It was a bit like an undergraduate BA programme (or just the first/freshman year of that programme) where students only study three subjects. As mentioned earlier, the trivium consisted of grammar, logic and rhetoric, to be learned in that order, and was designed to give students the basic tools to be successful both in their higher-level quadrivium studies and in everyday life itself, after their formal education had ended. (The quadrivium consisted of the four fields of arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy.)

Rhetoric flourished in the grammar schools of Europe right up to the early nineteenth century. Around this period, however, the teaching and study of rhetoric seemed to dry up after more than two thousand successful years of practice. Rhetoric did continue, and flourish, in the United States; indeed, modules like rhetoric, composition and critical thinking still form an essential component in the first-year programmes at many top-ranked US colleges and universities, especially in those undergraduate institutions with a strong tradition in the liberal arts and sciences. Rhetoric was also still taught in Eastern Europe and it was no doubt taught at Moscow University, where a young Roman Jakobson encountered the basic principles which would go on to form and develop his thinking on formalism and, stylistics.

In a sense, rhetoric did continue in Western Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in both muted and mutated forms. One such area was literary criticism and early linguistics. Prominent figures were Charles Bally, who published a two-volume treatise on stylistics in 1909 entitled *Traité de stylistique française*, and Leo Spitzer who wrote *Stilstudien* (1928). It is with these individuals and their works that we see the beginning of modern stylistics.

### The theory and method of rhetoric

There are a number of basic principles that underlie classical rhetoric. The most important of these is the system of the five canons. Another basic rhetorical principle concerns the three traditional kinds of persuasive discourse, also known as ‘genres’. We will now look at these more closely.

### The five canons of rhetoric

Etymologically, the English noun ‘rhetoric’ is derived from the Greek word *rhēma* (meaning ‘a word’), which in turn is linked to *rhētor* (‘a teacher of oratory’). Both are ultimately derived from the Greek verb *eirō* (which means ‘I say’). Originally, therefore, the notion of rhetoric was firmly rooted in language. However, rhetoric is also about structure and strategy. Structure can be viewed at both a macro and micro level. The former pertains to the arrangement of the whole process of rhetoric, while the latter refers to the discourse itself,
irrespective of whether this is spoken or written text. The macro level is expressed by means of the five canons of rhetoric. These are the five logical steps in the process of producing a persuasive discourse. These steps are: (i) the discovery or ‘invention’ stage; (ii) the arrangement stage; (iii) the stylisation stage; (iv) the memorisation stage; and (v) the delivery stage. Below is a table which also shows the Latin and Greek terms that are used by several scholars. You do not need to learn these, but it is handy if you can at least recognise them since some traditional scholars insist on retaining them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Latin name</th>
<th>Greek name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 discovery</td>
<td>coming up with materials for arguments</td>
<td>Inventio</td>
<td>ἡεύρισις</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 arrangement</td>
<td>ordering your discourse</td>
<td>Dispositio</td>
<td>ταξις</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 stylisation</td>
<td>saying/writing things well and in a persuasive manner</td>
<td>Elocutio</td>
<td>λέξις//phrases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 memorisation</td>
<td>strategic remembering</td>
<td>Memoria</td>
<td>μνήμη</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 delivery</td>
<td>presenting your ideas</td>
<td>Pronunciatio/ Actio</td>
<td>ὕπόκρισις</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you are a native speaker of English, or indeed of any European Romance language, the Latin terms should all be recognisable to you. The Greek terms should not be completely strange to you either. We might perhaps all be expected to know what a ‘heuristic’ is, and we understand that ‘taxis’ means ‘place’ or ‘order’, just as our word ‘taxonomy’ refers to the science of classification. Of course, ‘lexis’ is ‘word’, which is closely linked to style, and this is something to which we will pay extensive attention in this chapter.

Let us now look at the first canon, discovery/invention. For courses and modules in ‘composition’ and ‘academic writing’, this canon is arguably the most important of the five. Every argumentative piece of written or spoken discourse needs a standpoint or proposition. This can be your thesis statement. Once you have decided on what this is going to be, next you need to go about gathering, discovering or generating arguments, also known as ‘proofs’, in support of your proposition. Aristotle was the first to point out in his *Art of rhetoric* that there are two categories of arguments, or ‘means of persuasion’ as he called them, which are available to writers and speakers. We can refer to these broadly as ‘internal’ and ‘external’ resources. The internal resources are also sometimes referred to as ‘artistic’ or ‘technical’ proofs, while the external ones are ‘non-artistic’ or ‘non-technical’ proofs. ‘Art’, as in the title *Art of rhetoric*, means ‘skill’. Therefore, artistic proofs are arguments or proofs that need skill and effort in order to be brought into being. Non-artistic proofs are arguments or proofs that need no skill or real effort to be created; rather, they simply need to be recognised – taken off the shelf, as it were – and employed by a writer or speaker.

Let us look first at the external proofs, since this category is by far the simplest. The non-technical means of persuasion (known in Greek as the *atechnoi pisteis*) are not, strictly speaking, really part of the art of rhetoric at all. As described above, you just need to know what they are, where they are and how to employ them. Speaking on the subject of the rhetoric of law, Aristotle said that there were five non-technical proofs to legal oratory. These were laws, contracts, oaths, witnesses and torture (illogically, in the classical Greek world the only credible evidence that
Michael Burke

could be given by slaves was that elicited under torture). For you, a twenty-first century student, these external proofs still exist, although they are somewhat different to the ones Aristotle listed. For example, you might think of reference books in libraries, academic search engines on the internet, articles in refereed academic journals, data, statistics, testimony and so on. These are all modern-day external sources or non-artistic proofs.

The internal mode of persuasion, the ‘technical’ or ‘artistic means’, is known in Greek as the *entechnoi pisteis*. This is central to the art of rhetoric and includes three modes: (a) rational appeal (logos); (b) emotional appeal (pathos); and (c) ethical appeal (ethos). We will now look at these more closely.

Logos centres on whether arguments are what we call deductive or inductive, fallacious or non-fallacious, syllogistic or enthymemic. These are all relatively complex concepts and beginner students would not be expected to know what they are (see Burke, forthcoming, for more on this). What we can say right now is that, broadly speaking, logos is about producing arguments in support of your thesis statement that are solid, honest and valid, rather than ones that are weak, false and invalid. The main means of argumentation in logos are realised by use of rhetorical examples and enthymematic reasoning. With regard to the first of these, it does not matter if you do not have a lot of rhetorical examples. Rhetoric is not like statistics or inductive reasoning in general, where numbers matter. Instead, it is the vividness and the relevance of the examples that you choose to employ in your speech or writing that matters. This visual intensity and community significance can be achieved by deploying analogical examples from history and/or fiction that your intended audience will easily recognise. In a way, there is a distinct crossover here between logos and pathos.

Enthymemic reasoning involves a premise being ellipated or suppressed from a syllogism. Often this is the main premise (a syllogism is made up of a major premise, a minor premise and a conclusion, and their arrangement must produce a logically valid pattern of reasoning). The ellipated (main) premise in the enthymeme (which is the syllogistic logical equivalent in rhetoric) acts to persuade people because they infer what is not there and fill it in themselves. It is the act of providing the answer that not only makes people feel good about themselves, at a subconscious level, but which also persuades them: it is a kind of self-persuasion. The inferential part of enthymemic reasoning keys into contemporary ideas in pragmatics. This is especially the case with regard to inference. (For more on the diverse pragmatic aspects of stylistics see Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 22 in this volume.)

Pathos, the second of the proofs, can be said to deal with the psychology of persuasion, focusing on how emotions are triggered by language and performance and then channelled within the minds of the people in an audience. Modern theories of communication and persuasion from the field of social psychology will tell you that pathos persuades more often than any of the other proofs. Irrespective of our intelligence, at times we all process information ‘mindlessly’, peripherally, unthinkingly. Indeed, we are probably neurally wired by evolution to employ such cognitive shortcuts in our everyday lives.

Ethos is concerned with character. It has two aspects. The first concerns the esteem in which the speaker or writer is held. We might see this as his/her ‘situated’ ethos. The second is about what a speaker/writer actually does linguistically in his/her texts to ingratiate him/herself with the audience. This second aspect has been referred to as ‘invented’ ethos. Situated ethos and invented ethos are not separate; rather, they operate on a cline. For example, the more effective your invented ethos is, the stronger your situated ethos might become in the long run, and vice versa.

The second canon of rhetoric is concerned with ordering or arranging the text or text elements. There is no real consensus as to how many parts a text should have. Aristotle, for
instance, thought that there were only two parts to a speech: he said you should first state the case, and then prove it. This is a bit on the minimalist side. You may recall Corax, who for a fee helped the citizens of Syracuse to get their belongings back by writing speeches for them. It is said that he used a four-part system that included: (1) an introduction, (2) some background information, (3) the arguments, and (4) a conclusion. This simple model would fit many basic student essays even today. A famous model of discourse presentation that went on to be very influential during the Renaissance period is the one set out in the first century BC handbook *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. This manual, the author of which is unknown (although it was once attributed erroneously to Cicero), stipulates that there are six distinct parts to a speech or piece of written discourse. They are shown in the table below, together with the original Latin terms.

| 1. introduction (*exordium*) | Where you foster good will, make your audience receptive and attentive and state your standpoint |
| 2. background (*narratio*) | Where you set the scene (past facts) |
| 3. brief list of arguments (*divisio/partitio*) | Where you state your arguments briefly |
| 4. arguments in favour (*confirmatio*) | Where you put forward your arguments in detail |
| 5. counter arguments (*confutatio*) | Where you deal with the views of your opponents |
| 6. conclusion (*peroratio*) | Where you end appropriately (summarising and employing style figures) |

One of the reasons that rhetoric fell out of favour in Western Europe in the nineteenth century was that it was said to have become too prescriptive, too dogmatic, too narrow. These accusations were not without substance. However, this was never the ideal for what rhetoric should be. The notion of rhetoric as a narrow, prescriptive methodology would have been completely alien to great rhetoricians of antiquity such as Demosthenes and the wily Cicero. Claims that rhetoric was always prescriptive can be rebuffed with a single word: *kairos*. It is in this discussion of the second canon of rhetoric, arrangement, that we can observe how *kairos* works.

In our modern world, we have only one conception of time, namely, the idea that it moves forward in a linear and fixed fashion. The ancient Greeks, however, had two. In addition to the linear sense of time, which the Greeks called *kronos* (and from which we get our word ‘chronology’), the Greeks also had *kairotic* time from the word *kairos*. *Kairos* is about locative time, time in and at a specific moment. It is also essentially about context. It is the pragmatic utterance *avant la lettre*, as can be observed in a number of chapters in this volume (see, for example, Chapter 22 on literary pragmatics). Every textual utterance will differ depending on the contextual elements involved in that utterance. Everything depends on the speaker, the message, the audience, the audience’s relationship with the speaker and with the issue, as well as the speaker’s relation towards the issue and with his/her audience. If that was not enough, the mode of the message is also important. Perhaps most important of all are the time and place of the utterance.

The Romans called *kairos* ‘*occasio*’, from where we get our word ‘occasion’, and this points to another important aspect of *kairos*. A good speaker needs to be situationally attuned to the possibilities of *kairos*. A moment might arise suddenly and unexpectedly when he can
deliver a speech that he has been working on. A speaker has to have all sensory channels open at all times, looking for such opportunities. There is no telling how long a kairotic window might stay open; it may be mere seconds, or it might last for years. It will all depend on the context and the nature of the subject matter. A speaker will also have to be situationally sensitive to the audience. If he feels that the audience is in a certain mood, he will have to deviate from the planned order and content of his speech and insert new parts and/or restructure sections until he/she notices that the audience is starting to move psychologically back towards him. If he sticks to a set linear structure, he will probably lose the debate and the day. Alterations in a discourse can result in the six-part structure that was mentioned above being reduced in number and/or given different or unusual places in the arrangement.

Once textual material has been generated (the first canon of rhetoric) and then preliminarily arranged in a discourse (the second canon), it can be stylised. The third canon of rhetoric therefore deals with style. It is this canon which we can say has had the greatest influence on the structuring and development of modern day stylistics. Below, we will look at: (i) the notion of style itself, (ii) grammar and clarity, (iii) the levels of style, (vi) style figures, and finally, (v) imitation.

Style has always been, and still is, an elusive concept. Etymologically speaking, the word derives from the Latin ‘stilus’, an ancient writing implement. For the Romans, style, or elocutio as they called it, was a system for producing and thereafter performing persuasive acts of discourse. The elusiveness of style lies in the age-old dispute as to whether style is extrinsic or intrinsic in nature; whether it is the icing on the cake – in effect, an optional extra – or whether it is an inherent part of the cake itself. Although no definite, all-encompassing answer can be given to this question, most contemporary views on the form/content debate support the idea of inseparability. Style, it would therefore seem, is not a discretionary extra in linguistic exchanges; rather, it is part of the essence of communication itself. As Marshall McLuhan, the twentieth century philosopher of communication, once put it, ‘the medium is the message’.

In the Art of rhetoric Aristotle writes extensively on style. He deals with such phenomena as ‘clarity’, ‘amplitude’, ‘propriety’, ‘rhythm’, ‘syntax’ and ‘metaphor’. These are concepts still relevant to modern stylistic scholarship. Aristotle’s Art of Rhetoric can be said to have paved the way for the publication of On Style, written by Demetrius of Phaleron, former student of Aristotle and Theophrastus at the Athenian Lyceum. This work is the first that we know of to focus exclusively on style genres and style figures. In a way, we might view it as the first systematic stylistics textbook on foregrounding.

The main grammatical aspects of style depend on correctness, clarity and appropriateness. Correctness, also known as ‘purity’, is very much grammar-based and prescriptive. Clarity, also known as ‘perspicuity’, requires that a writer or speaker should use words in their ordinary/everyday sense, avoiding the use of obsolete, technical or colloquial terms. Appropriateness is about what is correct in a certain situation. These ideas are repeated and expanded on in both modern day pragmatics and in stylistics (for further evidence of this, see in this volume Chapter 7 on speech acts, Chapter 8 on conversational analysis and the cooperative principle and Chapter 9 on relevance theory).

The style of a text should fit the audience, occasion, subject matter and so on, as we saw in our earlier discussion on kairos. This idea goes back to the notion that certain subject matters require a certain style. Ancient orators and writers would adopt an appropriate high, middle or low style, depending on the discourse context and the make-up of their audience. The low style, also known as ‘plain’ or ‘Attic’ style, was the most ordinary speech. It was said to be often used for instruction and teaching. It had very little ornament, and the narrative was
straightforward. It was often a simple exposition of the facts. It employed so-called ‘loose’ sentences, which is also known as ‘paratactic’ style. This is a chat-like style, which is fast and casual with little or no punctuation and many run-on sentences. We see it in use today in text messaging and in the interactive discourse of social media such as Twitter and Facebook.

The high style is sometimes known as ‘florid’ or ‘Asiatic’ style (‘Asiatic’ in the sense of the Greek cities of Asia Minor, where it was cultivated). It was used for lofty issues and required the employment of a lot of style figures. It often employed what is known as a ‘periodic’ style. Unlike its opposite, paratactic style, discourse in the periodic style was well structured, well punctuated and generally formal in nature. It was said to be the most effective style to move, delight and produce emotion in listeners and readers. The middle style, as might be expected, was a mix of both low and high styles.

We saw above how style figures are important for a high or florid style. They are significant for stylistic analysis too. Style figures can usually be divided into the categories of ‘schemes’ (from the Greek for ‘to form/shape’) on the one hand and ‘tropes’ (from the Greek for ‘to turn’) on the other. Schemes are broadly concerned with deviations in syntactic structure, involving a transfer of order, while tropes often constitute deviation in semantics, entailing a transfer of meaning. Schemes can be categorised in different ways, such as schemes of ‘balance’, ‘inverted word order’, ‘omission’, ‘repetition’ and so on. Similarly, tropes can be grouped by metaphor-type figures (e.g. similes, oxymora, hyperboles, etc.), and puns or word-plays. Other more general groupings can also be made, such as those pertaining to ‘brevity’, ‘description’, ‘emotional appeals’ and so on. In addition, style figures can be grouped as to whether they are figures of thought or language, as we saw in Longinus’s earlier classification. All style figures fall under the stylistic heading of ‘foregrounding’, namely, parallelism, repetition and deviations (see Chapter 2 in this volume on ‘formalist stylistics’ and Chapter 5 on ‘foregrounding’ for more on this).

Classical rhetoricians believed that rhetoric was learned in three stages, to be studied in this order: (i) by means of the study of principles; (ii) through imitation of the work of others; and (iii) through practice in writing. This strategy, involving (i) knowledge, followed by (ii) analysis, followed by (iii) production, not only follows a recognised contemporary pedagogical norm (see for example Bloom’s ‘Taxonomy of educational objectives’ (1956)); it also forms a sound basis for the successful creative writing classroom of today, with its foundation of testable, principle-based creativity. We can also see here some clear overlap with the principles of poetics described earlier in this chapter, not least the three nurture-based inputs that are part of the five principles of the sublime set out by Longinus: (i) the proper formation of the figures of thought and figures of language, (ii) noble diction, and (iii) dignified and elevated word arrangement.

The fourth and fifth canons set out the performative aspects of rhetoric and concern mainly oral rather than written production. These are the memorising and delivery of a speech. Delivery places a focus on intonation, prosody, voice, rhythm and gesture, all factors that the Roman orators made an art of in themselves. Indeed, when he was asked what the most important aspects of rhetoric were, the ancient Athenian Demosthenes, the greatest speaker of all time, answered, ‘delivery, delivery, delivery’. In order that great delivery be achieved one must practice, and then when you are finished you must practice again. The canon of delivery in its written form impinges on the multimodal dimension of stylistics (for more on this, see in this volume Chapter 29 on multimodality and Chapter 31 on hypertext fiction). The visual persuasive tools of fonts, layout, typography, graphology and so on are all essentially aspects of the fifth canon of rhetoric, the delivery and performance of the discourse.
The three genres of rhetoric

In addition to the five canons, the three traditional kinds of persuasive discourse are also central to a good understanding of classical rhetoric. In ancient times three distinct ‘genres’ or kinds of oratory developed. The first was forensic oratory, the rhetoric of the law courts, which is also referred to as judicial oratory. The second is deliberative oratory. This is the rhetoric of the political arena, also known simply as political rhetoric. The third, which we have not really encountered thus far, is known as epideictic oratory. This is the rhetoric of praise or blame, also called display, demonstrative, ceremonial or panegyric oratory. These three categories of oratory are also known as the ‘special’ topics.

Speakers often belong to one particular group, depending on their profession. Having said that, there is often a lot of crossover. For example, people like Corax, Tisias, Lysias, and Cicero from the ancient world all practiced some form of law, as did famous fictional characters such as Perry Mason, Atticus Finch, Horace Rumpole and Mr. Tulkinghorn. These individuals all belong to the category of forensic orators. Political speakers like Demosthenes and, more recently, Winston Churchill and John F. Kennedy are deliberative orators too, as is Barack Obama.

Both forensic and deliberative genres have their own separate focus, expressed in so-called ‘means’ and ‘topics’. Deliberative oratory is said to be about what is ‘good/worthy’ or ‘useful/advantageous’ for society. The opposites are also topics. Ideally, a speaker should ‘exhort’ or ‘dehort’ an audience either to do – or not to do – something. For example, a deliberative orator might plead that ‘we need to build a new road’ or ‘we should not pull down those houses in the centre of town in order to create a park’. The subject matter can also be much more serious, such as ‘we have to go to war against a state that uses chemical weapons on its own citizens’. This kind of political oratory is about what should happen in relation to upcoming events: it is concerned with future time. Forensic oratory, the rhetoric of the courtroom, is about the past: who did what to whom, when, how and why, and who witnessed it. Its topics are justice and injustice, what is right and what is wrong.

The third and final genre is epideictic oratory. This is the oratory of praise and blame, of honour and dishonour. In a praise speech, often called an encomium, one focuses on the virtues of an individual. A speaker often points out how noble he/she is and how he/she has achieved things better than others have done, endured things for longer and under more demanding circumstances, and so on. These days you will hear epideictic oratory at venues such as at graduation ceremonies and weddings. Another type of praise speech is the eulogy. In this case the person being praised has died. Eulogies are most often heard at funerals. In a way, detailed obituaries in newspapers are also a form of epideictic rhetoric. In the past, the discourse of blame used to be heard as often as the discourse of praise. Individuals were lambasted for their lack of virtue, their ignoble behaviour, their gluttony, greed, immorality and callousness. These speeches are often called invectives. These days they are not often heard, because of the fear of being sued for either libel, if the invective is written, or slander, if it is spoken. Political satire is a good way to circumvent such repressive laws.

This brings us to the end of our overview of classical poetics and rhetoric. In all honesty we have only started to scratch the surface of these two subjects. Nonetheless, it should be relatively clear how both ancient poetics and ancient rhetoric have influenced the stylistics we know today, and why they justifiably constitute the classical heritage of stylistics.
Rhetoric and poetics

Recommendations for practice

Poetics

1. In order to understand Aristotle’s notion of plot a little better, try applying his structural requirements to a popular film of recent years. You can choose your own – and indeed you should do – but just to get you going, try one of these first: Gladiator, Rocky, Terminator, Angel Heart, American Beauty, the Harry Potter series, Atonement, The Unforgiven, Hamlet, King Lear, Apocalypse Now, the Star Wars series, or The Godfather. You may recall that some of the structural components of Aristotle’s plot were: (a) a plot should consist of a single issue (not a double one) and the representation of action should be serious, complete (with a beginning, middle and end) and be represented in embellished language where necessary; (b) the hero’s change of fortune has to be from happiness to misery and not the other way around; (c) the cause is not depravity or wickedness but a character error/flaw; (d) the hero must be a relatively good man; (e) the play/film takes one whole day, no longer (so a lot of the story has taken place once the play starts); (f) the deed that is committed must be among family members or loved ones and not among strangers; (g) there is a predictable and necessary ‘surprise’ – recognition/discovery. Now ask yourself whether the film or play that you have chosen broadly fits Aristotle’s framework. Which categories listed above are missing? Do you think the acts of peripety and recognition are powerful enough to instigate pity and fear (leading to catharsis) in the average film goer from your country/culture? Try to give examples as to why or why not.

Rhetoric

1. Have a look at a stylistic analysis that you have carried out in the past. See where you have made observations pertaining to foregrounding: either parallelism, repetition or deviation. Now do some investigative work into the vast array of style figures that are available in classical rhetoric. (See for example the ‘Forest of Rhetoric’ website hosted at Brigham Young University in Utah, USA http://rhetoric.byu.edu/). Return to your original observation/analysis in your essay/paper and try to give it more detail by referring to the style figure(s) concerned. Does this extra level bring to light new descriptive observations that the general umbrella classifications of parallelism, repetition or deviation did not? Does this alter your original interpretation in this part of your analysis? If so, how?

2. Choose a short story from the twentieth or twenty-first century and go on a style figure hunt. Try to find five different schemes and five different tropes. Explain what the style figure is – i.e. give a short description – and then say whether you think it is aesthetically pleasing/persuasive or not – i.e. did it grab your attention, move you, make you think of things beyond the text and/or guide you to draw new links with other aspects of the story? Also, try to say whether the short story you have chosen is primarily written in the plain, middle or high style. Does the style remain constant through the story or does it change? Are these changes in important places (like the end of the story)? If so, what effect might this have on you as a reader, and what effect do you think it might have on other engaged readers?
Summary and future directions

Rhetoric has exerted a considerable influence on the stylistics that we know today, in terms of foregrounding, relevance theory, narratology, metaphor, literary pragmatics, multimodality and many more areas. For example, foregrounding, a key concept in stylistic analysis, is firmly rooted in the style figures of classical rhetoric. Indeed, a cogent case can be made that by limiting ourselves to only three terms in our foregrounding analysis, namely parallelism, repetition and deviation, we are left with a potentially impoverished linguistic analysis that only allows the analyst to make somewhat shallow and superficial analytic observations. Were he/she to have the whole range of schemes and tropes at his/her disposal, the stylistician would be able to observe whether or not certain repetitions or parallelisms were based on schemes of balance, inversion, omission and so on, or whether certain tropes were pun-like, metaphor-like, word plays, etc. In short, it would allow sub-levels of analysis to take place that could bring to light patterns of linguistic evidence that might support an earlier evaluation or interpretation which might otherwise have eluded the analyst had he/she restricted his/her analysis to the surface level of foregrounding analysis and the three main terms. A wider and deeper range of tools should yield a more detailed and perhaps even more accurate stylistic analysis.

In the past thirty years or so there has been little mention of rhetoric in the stylistics classroom, or in the research conducted by stylisticians. This has been an unfortunate omission, as students during this period have been deprived of much useful knowledge. There are great modern stylisticians writing today who have based much of their stylistic scholarship on a thorough grounding in rhetoric. These include, most prominently, Geoffrey Leech (1969; 2008) and Walter Nash (1989). Other stylisticians who have employed rhetoric in their stylistic analyses include Leech and Short (1981), Wales (1993) and Verdonk (1999). All five of these scholars have now retired from teaching. A new generation of rhetorical stylisticians is needed. Perhaps you, the very students reading this chapter, might make up that new cohort.

Some might ask – but what is the point of looking back? Scholarship and research should be about ‘onward and upward’. It might very well be a good thing that tools, methods and perspectives have narrowed over the years in some respects. This might have been necessary in order to change a paradigm or advance a set of ideas within the field. However, sometimes, and especially when one has reached a methodological or theoretical impasse, it is beneficial to step back and look at the original blueprint, as it were, of human communication, a design which has at its core the fundamentals of Aristotelian rhetoric and poetics. The stylisticians of the 1970s and 1980s listed above knew of these tools and could fall back on them when necessary. Scholars working in the field since the mid-1980s, however, often cannot, since poetics and rhetoric have largely not been explicitly taught but have instead disappeared under the burgeoning fields of narrative, in the case of poetics, and pragmatics, in the case of rhetoric.

It is time to reintegrate the key tools of rhetoric and poetics into the modern stylistician’s toolkit, for he/she will need them to both pick out finer detail and map out larger and more innovative frameworks as stylistics steps boldly into the fields of creative writing, multimodality, hypertext fiction and cognitive neuroscience. It is for this reason that this chapter on rhetoric and poetics has been situated as the first chapter in this handbook, in order to lead you into the modern world of stylistics that will unfold in the upcoming chapters. When you are reading those chapters, ask yourself ‘does this sound a little like classical rhetoric or classical poetics?’ If it does, explore that link further, because it may well give you
new and unexpected tools with which you can conduct your stylistic analysis more thoroughly than might otherwise have been the case.

**Related topics**

cognitive poetics, creative writing, emotion and neuroscience, formalism, foregrounding, literary pragmatics, metaphor and metonymy, narratology, pedagogical stylistics, real readers

**Further reading**


An accessible introduction to the field of rhetoric, complete with exercises and examples which will help you understand the significance of rhetoric in such diverse contemporary fields as stylistics, pragmatics, literary theory, communication studies, social psychology and cognitive neuroscience.


This chapter sets out a pedagogical model which shows how rhetoric feeds into stylistics, which in turn feeds into the practice of the modern creative writing classroom. It shows the inseparability of these three fields and is embedded within the pedagogical framework of Bloom’s taxonomy of learning.


A pioneering study in its day, which maintained the important role of rhetoric in stylistic analysis. The result is a series of stylistic analyses that are deep, rewarding and poignant. It offers rhetorical tools to help young stylisticians to at least double their existing analytic toolkit (see also Leech’s later 2008 work which preserves important links to rhetoric.)


A companion to rhetoric applied to literary studies and especially to stylistic analysis. A skilful reminder of the power and importance of the *ars rhetorica* for the budding stylistician.

**Online resources**


English versions of all of the classical texts mentioned in this chapter can be found online at *The Perseus Digital Library*, a web resource which covers the history, literature and culture of the Greco-Roman world. It is hosted at Tufts University (editor-in-chief G. R. Crane). The current version is Perseus 4.0, also known as ‘The Perseus Hopper’ (last accessed September 22, 2013).

The Forest of Rhetoric ([silva rhetoricae](http://rhetoric.byu.edu/)) [http://rhetoric.byu.edu/](http://rhetoric.byu.edu/)

This useful online rhetorical resource is hosted by Brigham Young University and edited and updated by Dr. Gideon Burton. It is essentially a beginner’s guide to the many terms that abound in the world of classical rhetoric (last accessed September 22, 2013).

**References**


Michael Burke


