

of them. On one hand, these rhetorical acts and the approaches or perspectives taken in the critiques are diverse; they illustrate the varied forms both rhetoric and rhetorical criticism can take. On the other hand, each of the critiques illustrates the principles of good criticism and how the four stages of the critical process culminate in an enlightening analysis of the persuasion that surrounds us. In that sense, they are excellent models for your own critical efforts.

Campbell & Burkholder,
Critiques of Contemporary
 Rhetoric (Wadsworth,
 1997)
 J.A. ...

CHAPTER TWO

Descriptive Analysis: The First Stage of Criticism

four stages of rhetorical criticism:

- 1) Analyze discourse for distinctive characteristics
- 2) understand discourse in context
- 3) select/create critical methodology to guide critique
- 4) make evaluative judgement of quality, effect, or both, based on methodology &

In its final form, rhetorical criticism is the result of a four-stage process: (1) Critics analyze a discourse or a group of discourses in order to identify distinctive characteristics. (2) They attempt to understand the discourse in relation to its milieu or context. (3) They select or create a critical perspective, approach, or system to guide the critique. (4) They make evaluative judgments of its quality, of its effects, or sometimes of both, based on explicit criteria that make the grounds for evaluation apparent to readers. These stages or phases are not distinguishable in a written criticism. Rather, critics must complete these tasks in preparing to write a piece of criticism. In the completed critique, each phase of the process is integrated into a unified essay. There is no guarantee that performing these steps will produce a "great" criticism, but an insightful and creative criticism can be composed only by going through the four stages. In this chapter we explain and illustrate the first stage of the critical process: descriptive analysis.

The critical approach used in this book rests on our strong personal commitment to organic criticism that responds to the special qualities of the rhetorical act under examination, in contrast to formulaic or prescriptive criticism. The prescriptive approach to criticism applies a formula or set of prescriptions to all discourses. For example, in the past the critical system or formula often called neo-Aristotelianism was used prescriptively to analyze discourses in terms of the classical canons or standards of invention, disposition, style, and delivery, and

the classical modes of proof: *logos* or rational argument and proof, *pathos* or audience adaptation and/or creating a state of mind or feeling, and *ethos* or the means by which rhetors make themselves seem worthy of belief. Further, critics following that formula often evaluated discourse in terms of its effectiveness in achieving the rhetor's purpose with the immediate audience. What made such criticism formulaic was that *all* rhetorical acts were required to meet the same rationalistic criteria.

Critics of contemporary rhetoric need to consider what critical perspective best illuminates the rhetoric to which they are responding. For some discourses traditional precepts constitute an ideal and workable critical system; for many others, especially in the contemporary U.S. milieu, they are inappropriate. Traditional, rationalistic theory, in keeping with its classical origins, is committed to the values of reason, order, and law. These values are sometimes challenged in rhetorical acts arguing that power holders use such values to rationalize injustice and oppression (see Robert L. Scott and Donald K. Smith, "The Rhetoric of Confrontation"). Contemporary critics must examine and develop critical systems to describe and evaluate such rhetoric in ways that do not inevitably force them to censure its purposes and strategies. Ultimately, the danger is not in any particular critical formula or system itself, but rather in viewing any *single* critical system as monolithic—that is, as appropriate in every case.

An organic approach to criticism asks critics to consider a rhetorical act on its own terms, not to approach it with prejudgments and prior assumptions. The first stage of criticism is an evidence-gathering endeavor that, if done carefully and thoroughly, puts the critic in possession of the act, giving the critic a detailed understanding of how the rhetorical act works to achieve its ends. An organic approach to criticism focuses on the specific goals of particular persuaders in specific contexts; it views rhetorical acts as patterns of justification and interaction that grow out of particular conditions. In adopting such an approach, critics apply critical categories that respond to qualities in the discourse; they are eclectic, experiential pluralists, selecting and adapting a critical framework in order to reveal and respond to the peculiarities of that rhetorical event.

Conflict between formulaic and organic approaches to criticism need not be irreconcilable. Good criticism is often the result of selecting and applying elements from one or more perspectives that seem best suited to illuminating the discourse under consideration. Several critical perspectives are described in later chapters. In one sense, these, too, are formulas or prescriptions that represent options for critics. But for many, if not most discourses, critics must "invent"

a critical approach adapted to the particular work or genre they are evaluating.¹

An essential premise of the organic approach is that the critical process should begin with a careful and exhaustive examination of the discourse itself, which we call descriptive analysis. Critics should come to know the discourse on its own terms, and they should do so encumbered by as few presuppositions as possible. Of course, the context in which the discourse was produced is of extreme importance to completion of the critical process. And critics will virtually always know something, perhaps a great deal, about the circumstances and events leading up to and surrounding the discourse. But that knowledge of context should be put aside for the moment, and further investigation of context should be delayed until examination of the discourse itself is completed. We believe that to do otherwise and begin the critical process with an in-depth examination of the context is potentially risky for at least two reasons. First, it risks elevating historical-contextual issues to a position of importance above the discourse itself. Such an emphasis on historical issues is essential in rhetorical *historiography*, an equally important, but different, scholarly activity. In rhetorical *criticism* the discourse itself should be of prime importance. Second, it risks creating a counterproductive bias in the critical process. By carefully examining the context first, critics may form preconceptions regarding what the rhetor could have, or should have, said. Those perceptions could then easily distort the analysis and evaluation of the discourse.

Through descriptive analysis, critics attempt to discover what characteristics, if any, make a discourse or group of discourses distinctive. At the completion of this stage, critics should be familiar with the nuances of the rhetoric and aware of the rhetor's selections of language, structure, arguments, and evidence. Critics will then have excellent grounds for ascertaining a rhetor's purpose and the responses that rhetor seeks from the audience or audiences. They will also have extracted information to determine the role the speaker or writer has chosen to play, the ways the audiences are perceived and selected, and the choice of persuasive strategies.

Descriptive analysis should be entirely intrinsic; that is, critics should make descriptive statements solely on the basis of the *content*

¹Sometimes critics find in the work of earlier critics and theorists a critical system that can be used "as is," without modification, to guide their analysis and evaluation of a particular discourse. More often, however, the critical approach must be "invented" by adapting an existing system to the discourse, or by combining and adapting elements from more than one existing critical system.

of the discourse itself. They should use extrinsic materials and sources only under very limited circumstances. One such circumstance is to determine the authenticity of the text. The other is to identify references to persons, places, events, and the like in the discourse with which they are unfamiliar; such identification may be necessary in order to understand how the references function in the discourse. Otherwise, the single source needed to complete this first phase of the critical process is the discourse itself.

ELEMENTS OF DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

Descriptive analysis seeks answers to two fundamental questions: (1) What is the apparent purpose of the discourse, or what aim or goal does the rhetor seem to seek? (2) How does the discourse work to achieve that purpose, or what strategies does the rhetor employ to achieve the goal? Rhetorical strategies are many and diverse. Thus, we suggest descriptive analysis of discourse in terms of the following seven elements: purpose, persona, audience, tone, structure, supporting materials, and other strategies. Keep in mind that, with the possible exception of purpose, each of the other six elements should be considered for its strategic function in the discourse. Be aware that the elements frequently overlap and are interrelated. How they are manifested and how they function may vary considerably from one discourse to another. We have resisted the temptation to include "arguments" in the list of elements of descriptive analysis. To do so, we fear, would risk biasing this phase of the critical process in favor of rationalistic criticism. Moreover, because all the components that compose "arguments" in a traditional sense are present in the seven elements, we believe that careful descriptive analysis is a necessary first phase of criticism, even when critics eventually choose to employ a rationalistic perspective.

Purpose

Purpose refers to the argumentative conclusions, particularly the major conclusion or thesis, of the discourse and the responses desired by the source from those who receive the message. Analysis of purpose usually requires careful analysis of the structure through which major ideas are developed and their relationships emerge. In many discourses the conclusion, or thesis, is explicitly stated. In others, the

what is the goal and how is it achieved?

purpose is implicit and must be inferred from the content. Implicit purpose is closely allied to the tone of the discourse. In an analytical description of the implicit purpose, critics attempt to determine the kinds of responses that the rhetor seeks from the audiences or from different parts of the audience. Such purposes may include the traditional goals of acceptance and understanding or such "radical" goals as feeling ashamed or experiencing confrontation, polarization, and alienation. Implicit purposes are related to the rhetor's perceptions of the audience or audiences addressed.

Persona

Persona refers to a role or roles that a rhetor takes on for strategic purposes, much as an actor assumes a role or character in a play. Persona is revealed in the language of the discourse. For example, when addressing the people of the United States, the president may take on the role of commander-in-chief of the armed forces, the role of a moral or spiritual leader, the role of prophet, the role of teacher or authority on United States history, and so on. More than one persona may be adopted within a single discourse. Persona influences an audience by creating or contributing to a rhetor's *ethos* or credibility.

At this stage, critics are concerned with the relationship between the discourse and the identities rhetors create for themselves through the discourse or the roles they assume in its development. What is the function of the discourse for its author? How does it serve to create an identity for the speaker or writer? To what degree does the discourse serve as self-expression or self-persuasion? If the discourse were the only piece of evidence available from which to determine the character of the author, what inferences could be made about that person? A discourse reveals the attitudes and beliefs of its author. The rhetor's views of humanity, truth, and society may reveal the philosophic position or perspective from which that person speaks. Moreover, rhetors may take on particular identities or roles to strategically enhance their persuasive influence.

Audience

The actual or *empirical* audience is composed of all those who receive the rhetor's message. For speeches, the empirical audience includes those who are present when the speech is delivered as well as those who read a transcript of the speech or watch or hear a video or sound



1) explain to
2) how might it appear to the audience?
Example

recording of the speech at some later time. Listeners who are present when a speech is delivered are sometimes called the *immediate* audience, whereas those who read or hear it later are called the *mediated* audience; however, live television and radio broadcasts of speeches to distant audiences have blurred that distinction. Usually, sources external to the discourse itself must be consulted to draw final conclusions regarding the nature and size of the empirical audience. That task is best left for the second phase of the critical process (see Chapter Three).

In this first phase of the critical process, conclusions regarding audience should be based on evidence found in the discourse itself. Those conclusions may be tentative, because subsequent research using sources external to the discourse may reveal new information regarding audience. Nevertheless, identifying the audience suggested by the text is essential for understanding how a discourse is intended to work.

Speakers or writers construct their discourse for particular individuals or groups. In descriptive analysis, critics concentrate on the ways that discourses select or target an audience or audiences. They locate statements that indicate that the rhetor is aware of more than one audience. They decide who will compose the target audiences and what part of the potential empirical audience would likely be alienated by the discourse. They also attempt to identify the sorts of people for whom the appeals are constructed and examine the supporting materials. At this stage, critics may also wish to consider what groups, if any, are excluded from the rhetor's audiences (see Philip Wander, "The Third Persona").

Rhetors also seek to reach audiences composed of "agents of change"—that is, persons with the capacity to do whatever it is that the rhetor desires. Expensive cars can be purchased only by individuals with substantial income; hence, advertisements for Rolls-Royces appear in *Architectural Digest* rather than in *Reader's Digest*. Political candidates target voters, especially registered voters, because voters are the people who can elect them. Advertisers generally target women between the ages of 25 and 44 because they know that these are the people who make the majority of decisions about consumer products.

In some cases, rhetors face audiences who lack confidence that they can be effective. Voters may not go to the polls because they believe that a single vote cannot make much or any difference. Members of ethnic minorities may not register and vote because they believe their votes will be overwhelmed by those of an ethnically different majority. Today rhetors commonly use the term *empowerment* to describe a process by which individuals or groups come to believe that they *can* be effective, that their actions *can* make a difference.

Empowering an audience is just one form of a larger process of *creating one's audience*—that is, of symbolically transforming those addressed into the people the rhetor wants them to be. Sometimes that means creating a role for the audience that is attractive and praiseworthy, a role the audience wants to assume but that also entails the response the rhetor desires. For example, in a speech in 1969 announcing and defending the policy of Vietnamization (withdrawing U.S. ground troops from Vietnam but maintaining air support, matériel, and advisers), President Richard Nixon referred to the target audience as "the great silent majority of Americans." He made that role attractive by describing such people as patriotic and law abiding, but the role also entailed silent acquiescence to the policy he was announcing. In other words, rhetors sometimes invite members of the audience to assume a particular role or to think of themselves in a particular way. If the audience accepts that invitation, they become ideal listeners, those most likely to agree with the rhetor.

We have called the role that the rhetor assumes the *persona*. If we think of the rhetor's role as the *first* persona, then the auditor implied by, or the role that members of the audience are invited to play in, a rhetorical act can be considered the *second* persona. Edwin Black argues, "The critic can see in the auditor implied by a discourse a model of what the rhetor would have his [*sic*] real auditor become" (113). Because identity is shaped by the network of interconnected beliefs that an individual holds, the second persona has ethical significance. Accordingly, Black argues that identifying the second persona enables a critic to make a moral judgment of the model of humanity or character implied in a rhetorical work. (See also the discussion of criteria for evaluation in Chapter Five.)

Descriptive analysis of audience includes identification of the target audience, of the agents of change who can do what the rhetor seeks, and of the efforts by the rhetor to create the audience in the image desired either by developing a role consistent with the rhetor's purpose or by empowering the audience to make them effective agents of change. Critics must be able to provide evidence from the text of the discourse itself to support descriptive statements regarding audience.

Tone

Tone refers to those elements of discourse, primarily language elements, that suggest the rhetor's attitude toward the audiences and the subject matter. Because tone reveals the rhetor's attitude, it also often reveals the connotative meaning the rhetor intends to convey. Thus,

tone can influence listeners or readers to see issues in a similar way through that shared connotative meaning.

Statements about tone are inferences drawn from stylistic qualities. Critics may describe tone in an infinite number of ways—as personal, direct, ironic, satirical, sympathetic, angry, bitter, intense, scholarly, dogmatic, distant, condescending, tough, realistic, sweet, euphemistic, incisive, elegant, and so on. Each such label should reflect, as accurately as possible, the language used in the rhetorical act as well as whether the language is abstract or concrete, socially acceptable or unacceptable, technical or colloquial; it should reflect sentence length and complexity. Critics should also be prepared to support each characterization with evidence from the discourse that shows most clearly the general attitudes of the rhetor toward the audiences and the subject.

Structure

Structure refers to the form of the discourse, the method by which it unfolds, and the nature of its movement. Critics should describe how and why the discourse develops, how it creates expectations in an audience, whether it promotes a sense of inevitability, and how the speaker or writer constructs a context for materials that follow. There are many kinds of structure, and rhetorical acts often develop in more than one way. The names for the kinds of structure reflect organizing principles that guide development of the discourse—for example: narrative–dramatic; historical–chronological; logical or pragmatic, such as problem–solution, cause–effect, or effect–cause; topical, or analysis by a number of facets or perspectives; and taxonomical, or division of a process into its relevant parts. These forms are not mutually exclusive; the discourses in this book all use combinations of them.

The structure of the discourse is important because it represents the rhetor's choice of the most significant perspective on the subject, issue, or section of reality examined. A *historical–chronological* structure emphasizes development through time. A *narrative–dramatic* form reflects an organic view of reality and assumes that vicarious sharing of integrally related experiences is essential to the understanding of a concept or situation. A *problem–solution* form emphasizes either the need to discover a concrete policy in order to resolve a troublesome situation or the identification of reasons, origins, and antecedents. A *cause–effect* form stresses the prediction of consequences. A *topical* form selects certain facets of the subject for attention and suggests that others are relatively unimportant. A *taxonomical* form focuses on the interrelationships either between the parts of an institution, such

as the branches of the federal government, and how the parts work together or between the parts and the whole. Each structural form represents a choice of perspective that emphasizes certain elements of the subject over others. Writers or speakers use a given structure to develop the discourse in order to support their points of view and lead most directly to their desired goals. Moreover, structure can function to influence audiences by inviting them to see the same relationships between ideas that are seen by the rhetor.

With the exception of addresses using a narrative or historical structure based on a kind of plot line, outlining the major ideas and arguments of the discourse is a helpful critical technique for determining structural form. An outline may also serve as a basis for testing the coherence and validity of the rhetor's arguments. Because critics are concerned with ideas and conclusions rather than topics, a full-sentence outline is best. At this stage of analysis the chronological order in which ideas appear in the discourse is not important. The critic reorders concepts so that reasons and conclusions appear in logical relationships. At times, critics may need to experiment with alternate ways of understanding structure to discover which most accurately and completely reflect the patterns of development.

Supporting Materials

The supporting materials or evidence in a discourse are the explanations, illustrations, statistics, analogies, and quotations or testimony from laypersons or experts used to clarify ideas, to verify statements, and to make concepts vivid and memorable. In descriptive analysis critics are not concerned with testing the validity, reliability, and credibility of support materials because such processes require the use of extrinsic sources. At this stage they are concerned solely with describing the supporting materials and analyzing their functions in the discourse.

Types of supporting material are many and varied. Each form serves different functions. For instance, to the degree that an audience can identify with the persons or events, a detailed example is a vivid, personal, dramatic method of illustrating a principle, concept, or condition. Such instances may be real or hypothetical; they may be brief or extended. But their primary function is creating identification because one example has only limited demonstrative value. In most instances, a single case of anything is not adequate grounds for drawing a general conclusion; it may be an atypical situation, even a remarkable coincidence or accident. Illustrations, like dramas, “clothe ideas in living flesh,” and their greatest strength is in their concrete impact on

individuals. Extended examples also introduce narrative–dramatic form into a discourse.

Literal analogies, or comparisons, function primarily for the purposes of prediction; they connect what exists and is known with what is in the future and is unknown. Susan B. Anthony’s comparison of white women’s social, economic, and political condition under state and federal laws in the 19th century with that of slaves is a literal analogy. Figurative analogies are comparisons between things unlike in detail but similar in principle, such as the comparison of the denial of civil rights to the “Bank of Justice’s” refusal to cash a citizen’s check in Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. Figurative analogies operate in the same way to connect the known, familiar, and simple with the unknown, unfamiliar, and complex.

Expert testimony or authoritative evidence provides criteria, standards, or principles to interpret data. Such evidence increases the understanding of an audience inexperienced in the area being discussed. In addition, authoritative evidence demonstrates that experts share the rhetor’s perspective or attitudes. Testimony from nonexperts generally serves the same functions as examples.

Statistical evidence demonstrates how frequently something occurs. Used in conjunction with examples, statistics provide evidence of the typicality of the examples and the size or scope of a problem. Statistical evidence is strengthened by cultural preference for the quantified and scientific, but because statistics are often perceived as dull and boring, audiences may have difficulty absorbing or retaining them.

In descriptive analysis, critics describe the supporting materials used in the discourse and their functions. They also consider how the supporting material is related to the tone, purpose, and structure of the discourse. Different structural forms require different kinds of supporting materials, and the rhetor may select a structure to avoid certain evidentiary requirements. The selection of a structural form to emphasize certain kinds of evidential questions is closely related to the descriptive analysis of strategies.

Other Strategies

The descriptive analysis of strategies determines how rhetors shape their material in terms of audience and purpose. Indeed, each of the elements of descriptive analysis serves strategic functions. Strategies may include the selection of purpose, persona, structure, arguments, and supporting materials. The tone expressed in the choice of language, the use of definitions, and repetition of key words and phrases may also be strategic. Critics might consider certain questions to de-

termine the rhetor’s strategies: What elements in the discourse create common grounds between the rhetor and the intended audiences? What attempts does the rhetor make to label or relabel, define or re-define, structure or restructure the experienced reality of the audiences? How does the speaker or writer attempt to provide new experiences for the readers or listeners? What changes in evaluation or association does the rhetor seek?

Examples of recurring strategies include, among many:

- refutation, or answering the arguments of opponents; inoculation, or providing a framework that makes the audience more resistant to opposing arguments
- *a fortiori* argument (literally, “to the stronger”), a strategy of arguing that if something is true in one particular and unlikely case, it is much more likely to be true in other cases
- labeling or relabeling, such as calling the Strategic Defense Initiative “Star Wars”
- repetition of a key phrase that becomes an ever more poignant refrain, such as Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I have a dream”
- vivid depiction or description so that audiences experience events with immediacy
- allusions to culturally familiar materials, such as television programs, to prompt the audience to fill in details or to evoke powerful associations
- enthymemes, or arguments constructed so that listeners participate in forming conclusions by providing from their own experience and memory additional evidence or reasons intentionally omitted from the rhetoric.

SUMMARY

Descriptive analysis, the first stage in the critical process, is almost entirely intrinsic and organic. As textual analysis, it is intended to focus attention on the rhetorical act itself. At this basic stage in the critical process, critics gather the data that will provide the basis for subsequent analysis and interpretation. Therefore, care and thoroughness in this process are extremely important.

Descriptive analysis alone does not constitute rhetorical criticism; the remaining phases of the critical process must be accomplished before the critical act is completed. Nevertheless, we believe that

descriptive analysis should be completed first, so that the discourse can be properly placed within its context and evaluated according to criteria selected or invented by the critic.

The following outline provides a useful review of the seven elements of descriptive analysis. However, the outline should not be considered either a prescriptive or an exhaustive checklist to be applied to all discourses, because how the seven elements are manifested can vary considerably from one discourse to another.

- I. What is the act's *purpose*?
 - A. What is the thesis—that is, the specific purpose, central idea, or major conclusion of the rhetorical act?
 - B. How is the subject limited or narrowed? Frequently, a broad topic is reduced to an aspect more suited to limits of time, space, audience, or occasion.
 - C. What audience response is desired? Desired response consists of the beliefs and actions sought from the audiences.
- II. What role or *persona* does the rhetor (source) assume? Personas are roles adopted by rhetors in order to enhance the case made in the rhetorical act.
- III. Who compose the target *audiences*? Rhetorical acts often suggest an ideal audience or audiences.
 - A. What must you know, believe, or value to participate in this act?
 - B. Who are the relevant agents of change?
 - C. What roles, if any, are audience members invited to assume?
- IV. What is the act's *tone*?
 - A. What is the expressed attitude toward the subject?
 - B. What is the expressed attitude toward the audience(s)?
 1. Are audience members addressed as subordinates (for example, expert to nonexpert)?
 2. Are audience members addressed as peers (for example, fellow students)?
 3. Are audience members addressed as superiors (for example, less powerful to more powerful or knowledgeable)?
- V. How is the discourse *structured*?
 - A. What does the introduction do? For example, introductions may gain auditors' or readers' attention, introduce the sub-

ject/issue or the perspective to be taken, narrow the subject, and create a relationship between rhetor and audience. Not all of these are done in every introduction.

- B. What kind of organization is used to develop ideas? For instance, rhetorical acts may unfold using one (or a combination) of the following:
 1. Chronological development—the development over time (starting with the earliest and working toward the latest event) or in sequence.
 2. Topical development—an organization of material in terms of some of its parts or aspects.
 3. Logical development—an organization examining processes that are necessarily related, such as the relationship between causes and effects or problems and solutions.
 4. Narrative-dramatic development—an organization that is similar to a story, novel, or play, assuming that a vicarious sharing of integrally related experiences is essential to understanding a situation.
 5. Taxonomical development—a focus on how the parts or elements of an institution or a process are interrelated and work together.
 - C. What does the conclusion do? For example, conclusions frequently summarize major ideas presented in the rhetorical act and reinforce the thesis or purpose.
 - D. What efforts are made to create relationships among ideas? Transitions, often internal summaries, call attention to relationships between ideas. They are reminders of what has gone before and preparations for what is to come. They enable the audience to follow the act's structural plan.
- VI. What kinds of *supporting materials* are used?
 - A. Supporting material consists of evidence that describes, explains, enumerates, and proves. For instance, an act may include:
 1. Examples—instances or specific cases that illustrate concretely and often in detail.
 2. Statistics—numerical measures of size, scope, or frequency of occurrence.
 3. Authority—quotation of an opinion or conclusion drawn by someone with expertise and experience in an area

relevant to the issue. Presumably, such a person has special abilities to interpret or translate information relevant to the issue addressed in the rhetorical act.

4. Analogies. Literal analogies, usually called comparisons, compare events, objects, persons, and so on that are obviously or literally (on the face of it) alike or in the same category. Figurative analogies are imaginative comparisons between things, events, and persons that are not obviously alike at all but that nevertheless are asserted to resemble each other in some way.
 - B. How is evidence adapted to audience members?
 - C. How is the selection of evidence adapted to the purpose?
 - D. What evidence is evoked from the audience?
- VII. What *other strategies* are used? Strategies are reflected in the rhetor's selection of language, appeals, arguments, and evidence and adaptation of these to particular audiences, issue, and occasion.
- A. What is the style of the rhetorical act? Terms and labels are often selected for their appropriateness and impact.
 1. How does the language reflect the rhetor's role?
 2. How does the language reflect the relationship between rhetor and audience?
 3. How is the language adapted to the complexity of the subject?
 - B. How are appeals made to the needs, drives, desires, and cultural values of the audience?
 - C. What strategies are used to assist in proof?
 - D. What strategies are used to animate ideas?
 - E. What strategies are used to alter associations and attitudes?
 - F. Specific discursive and aesthetic techniques may include (but are not limited to):
 1. Refutation—stating an opposing argument and showing its weakness.
 2. Enthymemes—presenting an argument in such a way that audience members participate in its creation.
 3. A *fortiori* argument—a special form of argumentative comparison that says, in effect, if it happens in that unlikely case, how much more likely it is to occur in this one.
 4. Allusion—a reference to historical events, literature, mythology, or some other repository of cultural wisdom.

To explain descriptive analysis more fully, we shall illustrate its application. The rhetorical act we analyze descriptively was printed in a special "Hers" column of the *New York Times* on December 10, 1981. It was written not by a journalist or member of the *Times* staff, but by Nell Irvin Painter, then a professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and now Edwards Professor of American History at Princeton University in New Jersey. We have chosen this essay because, as you will see, it works well to illustrate the various elements in rhetorical action and because, even though it was written in 1981, it treats a typical rhetorical issue of continuing importance, a question of public policy that rests on cultural values and requires the creation of social truths. The broad issue is what public policy should be to provide equality of opportunity in employment for women and members of minorities, legislation often referred to as "affirmative action." Paragraph numbers have been added so that we can make later references to precise areas of the text.

WHITES SAY I MUST BE ON EASY STREET²

Nell Irvin Painter

1 I've always thought affirmative action made a lot of sense, because discrimination against black people and women was prolonged and thorough. But I've been hearing talk in the last several years that lets me know that not everyone shares my views. The first time I noticed it was shortly after I had moved to Philadelphia, where I used to live. One evening I attended a lecture—I no longer remember the topic—but I recall that I arrived early and was doing what I did often that fall. I worked at polishing my dissertation. In those days I regularly carried chapters and a nicely sharpened pencil around with me. I sat with pencil and typescript, scratching out awkward phrases and trying out new ones.

2 Next to me sat a white man of about 35, whose absorption in my work increased steadily. He watched me intently—kindly—for several moments. "Is that your dissertation?" I said yes, it was. "Good luck in getting it accepted," he said. I said that it had already been accepted, thank you.

3 Still friendly, he wished me luck in finding a job. I appreciated his concern, but I already had a job. Where? At Penn, for I was then a

²Nell Irvin Painter, "Whites Say I Must Be on Easy Street," *New York Times*, 10 December 1981: C2. Copyright © 1981 by The New York Times Company. Reprinted by permission.

beginning assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania. "Aren't you lucky," said the man, a little less generously, "you got a job at a good university." I agreed. Jobs in history were, still are, hard to find.

4 While cognizant of the job squeeze, I never questioned the justice of my position. I should have a job, and a good one. I had worked hard as a graduate student and had written a decent dissertation. I knew foreign languages, had traveled widely and had taught and published. I thought I had been hired because I was a promising young historian. Unlike the man beside me, I didn't think my teaching at a first-rate university required an extraordinary explanation.

5 "I have a doctorate in history," he resumed, "but I couldn't get an academic job." With regret he added that he worked in school administration. I said I was sorry he hadn't been able to find the job he wanted. He said: "It must be great to be black and female, because of affirmative action. You count twice." I couldn't think of an appropriate response to that line of reasoning, for this was the first time I'd met it face to face. I wished the lecture would start. I was embarrassed. Did this man really mean to imply that I had my job at his expense? The edge of competition in his voice made me squirm.

6 He said that he had received his doctorate from Temple, and yet he had no teaching job, and where was my degree from? "Harvard," I said. It was his time not to reply. I waited a moment for his answer, then returned to my chapter.

7 Now I live in North Carolina, but I still hear contradictory talk about affirmative action. Last spring I was having lunch with some black Carolina undergraduates. One young woman surprised me by deploring affirmative action. I wondered why. "White students and professors think we only got into the University of North Carolina because we're black," she complained, "and they don't believe we're truly qualified." She said that she knew that she was qualified and fully deserved to be at Carolina. She fulfilled all the regular admissions requirements. It was the stigma of affirmative action that bothered her; without it other students wouldn't assume she was unqualified.

8 Another student said that the stigma of affirmative action extended to black faculty as well. She had heard white students doubting the abilities of black professors. Indeed, she herself tended to wait for black professors to disprove her assumption that they did not know their fields. She was convinced that without affirmative action, students would assume black faculty to be as good as white.

9 That's what I've been hearing from whites and blacks. White people tell me I must be on easy street because I'm black and female. (I do not believe I've ever heard that from a black person, although some blacks believe that black women have an easier time in the white world than black men. I don't think so.) White people tell me, "You're a twofer." On the other side of the color line, every black student knows that he or she is fully qualified—I once thought that way myself. It is just the other black people who need affirmative action to get in. No one, not blacks, not whites, benefits from affirmative action, or so it would seem.

10 Well, I have, but not in the early 1960s when I was an undergraduate in a large state university. Back then, there was no affirmative action. We applied for admission to the university like everyone else; we were accepted or rejected like everyone else. Graduate and undergraduate students together, we numbered about 200 in a student body of nearly 30,000. No preferential treatment there.

11 Yet we all knew what the rest of the university thought of us, professors especially. They thought we were stupid because we were black. Further, white women were considered frivolous students; they were only supposed to be in school to get husbands. (I doubt that we few black women even rated a stereotype. We were the ultimate outsiders.) Black students, the whole atmosphere said, would not attend graduate or professional school because their grades were poor. Women had no business in postgraduate education because they would waste their training by dropping out of careers when they married or became pregnant. No one said out loud that women and minorities were simply and naturally inferior to white men, but the assumptions were as clear as day: Whites are better than blacks; men are better than women.

12 I am one of the few people I know who will admit to having been helped by affirmative action. To do so is usually tantamount to admitting deficiency. To hear people talk, affirmative action exists only to employ and promote the otherwise unqualified, but I don't see it that way at all. I'm black and female, yet I was hired by two history departments that had no black members before the late '60s, never mind females. Affirmative action cleared the way.

13 Thirty-five years ago, John Hope Franklin, then a star student, now a giant in the field of American history, received a doctorate in history from Harvard. He went to teach in a black college. In those days, black men taught in black colleges. White women taught in white women's colleges. Black women taught in black women's colleges. None taught at the University of Pennsylvania or the University of North Carolina. It was the way things were.

14 Since then, the civil rights movement and the feminist movement have created a new climate that permitted affirmative action, which, in turn, opened areas previously reserved for white men. Skirts and dark skins appeared in new settings in the 1970s, but in significant numbers only after affirmative action mandated the changes and made them thinkable. Without affirmative action, it never would have occurred to any large, white research university to consider me for professional employment, despite my degree, languages, publications, charm, grace, *despite* my qualifications.

15 My Philadelphia white man and my Carolina black women would be surprised to discover the convergence of their views. I doubt that they know that their convictions are older than affirmative action. I wish I could take them back to the early '60s and let them see that they're reciting the same old white-male-superiority line, fixed up to fit conditions that include a policy called affirmative action. Actually, I will not have to take these people back in time at all, for the Reagan Administration's proposed dismantling of affirmative action fuses the future and the past. If they achieve their stated goals, we will have the same old discrimination, unneedful of new clothes.

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS APPLIED

All audiences encounter rhetorical acts chronologically. That is, they begin reading or hearing with the introduction and continue through the conclusion. For ordinary observers, that encounter is usually a single reading or hearing. But critics engaging in descriptive analysis must achieve a much more thorough and complete understanding of the rhetorical act. Several close and careful readings are usually necessary. The analysis should be exhaustive; all the rhetorically significant aspects of the text should be identified and described. Further, all descriptive claims regarding the rhetorical act should be supported with evidence taken from the text itself.

Although audiences encounter rhetorical acts chronologically, talking about the results of descriptive analysis is usually best done topically, discussing each of the seven elements in turn. The following is our descriptive analysis of Painter's essay, presented topically.

Purpose

Painter introduces the topic at the beginning of the essay. She says: "I've always thought affirmative action made a lot of sense, because discrimination against black people and women was prolonged and

thorough. But I've been hearing talk in the last several years that lets me know that not everyone shares my views" (1).³ In addition to introducing the topic, affirmative action, this passage performs two other functions regarding Painter's purpose. First, it hints at her own position regarding affirmative action, "I've always thought affirmative action made a lot of sense," and provides an initial justification for her point of view, "because discrimination against black people and women was prolonged and thorough." Second, the passage acknowledges that the topic and Painter's position on it are controversial: "I've been hearing talk in the last several years that lets me know that not everyone shares my views."

The ultimate purpose of the essay is to justify Painter's position regarding affirmative action. The purpose becomes quite clear near the end of the essay. There, Painter says:

Since then [the 1950s], the civil rights movement and the feminist movement have created a new climate that permitted affirmative action, which, in turn, opened areas previously reserved for white men. Skirts and dark skins appeared in new settings in the 1970s, but in significant numbers only after affirmative action mandated the changes and made them thinkable. (14)

The justification for her position, then, is that affirmative action is a desirable policy because it has opened employment opportunities previously denied to women and minorities.

Painter's case for affirmative action, however, is carefully limited: She justifies the policy as a means to ensure quality education and employment for *fully qualified* individuals. She says: "To hear people talk, affirmative action exists only to employ and promote the otherwise unqualified, but I don't see it that way at all." She goes on to credit affirmative action for her own educational and professional success. "I'm black and female," she says, "yet I was hired by two history departments that had no black members before the late '60s, never mind females. Affirmative action cleared the way" (12). Later, she clearly links the policy to qualified individuals through a personal example: "Without affirmative action, it never would have occurred to any large, white research university to consider me for professional employment, despite my degree, languages, publications, charm, grace, *despite* my qualifications" (14). In that way, her support for affirmative action is narrowed to the benefits of the policy for fully qualified individuals.

³Paranetical citations are paragraph numbers.

Finally, at the end of the essay, Painter goes a step further to attack proposals for eliminating affirmative action: “. . . the Reagan Administration’s proposed dismantling of affirmative action fuses the future and the past. If they achieve their stated goals, we will have the same old discrimination, unneeded of new clothes” (15).

In summary, Painter’s purpose in this essay is to defend and justify her controversial position, to gain audience support for affirmative action as a policy to ensure quality education and employment for fully qualified individuals, and to attack proposals to eliminate or weaken affirmative action. That purpose, together with other evidence from the text, suggests the audiences Painter seeks.

Audience

One targeted subgroup within Painter’s potential empirical audience is made up of women and minorities, those whom affirmative action legislation was designed to help, but who have grown skeptical about the effects of the legislation. The second targeted subgroup is made up of those white males and others who Painter feels may oppose affirmative action not because of rigid political ideology, but because they are unfamiliar with the benefits of the legislation.

Painter targets those audiences at the end of the essay when she says, “My Philadelphia white man and my Carolina black women would be surprised to discover the convergence of their views.” That those are the individuals she wishes most to influence is apparent as she concludes, “I wish I could take them back to the early ‘60s and let them see that they’re reciting the same old white-male-superiority line, fixed up to fit conditions that include a policy called affirmative action” (15). Those targeted individuals—women, minorities, and those who oppose affirmative action out of lack of information or ignorance rather than rigid ideology—compose the agents of action who can respond in the way the rhetor desires.

However, one subgroup in the potential empirical audience seems to be excluded from the target audience. Painter’s attack on the proposal to eliminate or weaken affirmative action suggests that she does not expect to influence members of the Reagan administration and its strongly conservative supporters.

Persona

One means Painter uses to influence the target audiences is to assume a role or persona that enhances her credibility or ethos. That complex persona is revealed at various places throughout the essay.

At the beginning, Painter takes on the role of a careful, conscientious scholar. Relating an experience she had some years earlier, she explains:

One evening I attended a lecture—I no longer remember the topic—but I recall that I arrived early and was doing what I did often that fall. I worked at polishing my dissertation. In those days I regularly carried chapters and a nicely sharpened pencil around with me. I sat with pencil and typescript, scratching out awkward phrases and trying out new ones. (1)

She was attending a lecture, presumably of a scholarly nature. Moreover, while waiting for the lecture to begin, she was working on her dissertation, “scratching out awkward phrases and trying out new ones.” Those details portray her as a conscientious scholar.

Shortly, she adds that she is a historian and “a beginning assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania” (3). She provides more details. “I had worked hard as a graduate student and had written a decent dissertation,” Painter says. “I knew foreign languages, had traveled widely and had taught and published” (4). Although the audience must accept these facts based solely on Painter’s own assertions, she nevertheless assumes the role of a well-qualified professor of history. Further, she reveals that she earned her doctorate in history from Harvard (6), perhaps the most highly regarded university in the United States. That fact enhances her credibility even further.

Later in the essay, Painter clearly assumes the role of professor as she provides her audience with a history lesson, much as she might in class. Explaining events both before and after the passage of affirmative action legislation, Painter says:

In those days [before affirmative action], black men taught in black colleges. White women taught in white women’s colleges. Black women taught in black women’s colleges. None taught at the University of Pennsylvania or the University of North Carolina. It was the way things were.

Since then, the civil rights movement and the feminist movement have created a new climate that permitted affirmative action, which, in turn, opened areas previously reserved for white men. (13–14)

More subtle, but equally important, evidence of Painter’s persona exists. She says that she was “cognizant of the job squeeze” (4) and later that for one to admit being helped by affirmative action “is usually tantamount to admitting deficiency” (12). Her choice of the

words *cognizant* and *tantamount*, not part of common usage, also helps her assume the persona of a well-educated individual.

Throughout the essay Painter also acknowledges that she is African American and female. In one sense, those facts serve to promote identification between Painter and one of the targeted subgroups. But they serve another strategic function as well. As an African American woman, by supporting affirmative action Painter takes on a somewhat unexpected role.

She first explains that opposition to affirmative action is significant, not only among whites but among African Americans as well. She explains, "That's what I've been hearing from whites and blacks. . . . No one, not blacks, not whites, benefits from affirmative action, or so it would seem" (9). Then she immediately places herself outside that opposition, against the trend: "Well, I have," she says (10). And later: "I am one of the few people I know who will admit to having been helped by affirmative action" (12). Because Painter has created the impression that many African Americans oppose affirmative action, her unflinching support for the policy makes her distinctive; she violates that expectation. Moreover, Painter reveals herself to be a courageous individual, unafraid to defend a controversial position.

Finally, at the end of the essay, Painter assumes something of the role of prophet, or at least one who can predict the future consequences of legislative action. Grounded in her role as historian and her knowledge of the history of affirmative action, she predicts: "If they [the Reagan administration] achieve their stated goals, we will have the same old discrimination, unneeded of new clothes" (15).

Taken together, these aspects of persona enhance Painter's ethos for members of her target audiences. Thus, the role or persona Painter assumes in the essay performs an important strategic function by lending credibility to the justification she offers for affirmative action.

Tone

Tone suggests the rhetor's attitude toward both the topic and the audiences. It can affect or influence audience members by inviting them to share that attitude. Painter adopts a personal tone. At the outset she says: "I've always thought affirmative action made a lot of sense" (1). Throughout the essay, the first-person, singular pronoun *I* continues to reveal her personal association with the topic. That tone reinforces her persona as one who is personally involved with the issue. Strategically, it also invites members of her audience, especially women and minorities, to identify personally with the issue as well. In this way, Painter strives to make the personal political for her readers and thus gain public support for affirmative action.

Although personal tone predominates in the essay and reveals Painter's attitude toward the topic, various passages reveal her attitude toward potential audience members. In relating her conversation with a white male that occurred some years earlier in Philadelphia, her tone starts off as matter-of-fact, even friendly. She says, "Next to me sat a white man of about 35, whose absorption in my work increased steadily" (2). But as her conversation with the man progresses, and he seems to imply that Painter has benefited unfairly from affirmative action, her tone shifts. She is surprised, a little embarrassed, and defensive: "I couldn't think of an appropriate response to that line of reasoning, for this was the first time I'd met it face to face. I wished the lecture would start. I was embarrassed. Did this man really mean to imply that I had my job at his expense? The edge of competition in his voice made me squirm" (5).

Later, as Painter relates a more recent conversation with several African American students who also express skepticism about affirmative action, her tone is again matter-of-fact: "Last spring I was having lunch with some black Carolina undergraduates. One young woman surprised me by deploring affirmative action. I wondered why" (7). And at the end of that section, she is disappointed, perhaps even sad, about the attitudes others hold regarding affirmative action. She says, "No one, not blacks, not whites, benefits from affirmative action, or so it would seem" (9).

When Painter announces her own support for affirmative action, her tone becomes assertive, almost defiant:

I am one of the few people I know who will admit to having been helped by affirmative action. To do so is usually tantamount to admitting deficiency. To hear people talk, affirmative action exists only to employ and promote the otherwise unqualified, but I don't see it that way at all. I'm black and female, yet I was hired by two history departments that had no black members before the late '60s, never mind females. Affirmative action cleared the way. (12)

Here, tone reinforces her persona as a courageous individual. Members of her audience are invited to share that attitude.

Near the end of the essay, Painter is again saddened by the opposition to affirmative action she has discovered among members of her target audience. "My Philadelphia white man and my Carolina black women would be surprised to discover the convergence of their views," she says (15). But she is not angry with her target audiences. Rather, she seems to project a benevolent attitude when she says, "I wish I could take them back to the early '60s and let them see that they're reciting the same old white-male-superiority line, fixed up to fit conditions that include a policy called affirmative action" (15).

Structure

The introduction of Painter's essay is very long, consisting of the first eight paragraphs, for strategic reasons we shall explain shortly. As we said earlier, the first two sentences of the first paragraph introduce the topic and preview her purpose.

The remainder of the introduction, from the third sentence in the first paragraph through the end of paragraph 8, consists of two real, extended examples presented as a narrative. The detail of the narrative creates a little drama, as if it were a play with two acts. The setting in the first example, or the first act of the narrative, is a lecture hall; the scene opens with two people sitting side by side in chairs. The time is evening. One character has certain props, pages of typescript and a sharpened pencil, and she is editing her work.

The second paragraph introduces a second character, a slightly older white man who is intensely interested in what Painter is doing, so interested that he is willing to speak to a total stranger. She writes, "Next to me sat a white man of about 35, whose absorption in my work increased steadily. He watched me intently—kindly—for several moments. 'Is that your dissertation?' I said yes, it was. 'Good luck in getting it accepted,' he said. I said that it had already been accepted, thank you" (2).

Painter interprets his interest positively, as "kindly," and answers his opening question. She perceives his good wishes for getting her dissertation accepted as "friendly." The next paragraph begins, "Still friendly" (3). She thanks him, but she is proud to tell him that she doesn't need his good wishes; it has already been accepted.

The drama continues in the third paragraph. The next concern of someone who has completed a doctorate is finding a job, so the man wishes her well in that effort, but again she does not need his good wishes; she already has employment. As in other dramas, the tension escalates when she tells him that she is a beginning assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania, a prestigious, Ivy League school. Painter says:

Still friendly, he wished me luck in finding a job. I appreciated his concern, but I already had a job. Where? At Penn, for I was then a beginning assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania. "Aren't you lucky," said the man, a little less generously, "you got a job at a good university." I agreed. Jobs in history were, still are, hard to find. (3)

For the third time, the word *luck* figures in their exchanges. The first two times the word was used phatically, as part of phrases that are so conventional as to be ritualistic, as, for example, when we say "How

do you do?" when introduced to someone but do not expect the person addressed to tell us. This third time the meaning of *luck* has changed slightly. Here it suggests that luck, as accidental or undeserved good fortune, has played an important role. Painter responds to this slight shift, perceiving these words to have been said "a little less generously." However, she agrees that some luck was involved and explains, "Jobs in history were, still are, hard to find."

Dramatically, the next paragraph is an aside; as narrator, Painter steps outside the drama to address readers directly. As we explained earlier, what she tells us here, coupled with the data already provided in the story, is an integral part of her persona. We know that Painter is a historian with a doctorate who started her career as a faculty member at the University of Pennsylvania. In this paragraph, we learn more about her character. She is self-confident and self-assured. "I never questioned the justice of my position. I should have a job, and a good one," she says (4). She sees herself as deserving, and explains why. She asserts that she "worked hard" and wrote "a decent dissertation," but we have no evidence other than her assertion. She tells us she is well-qualified and provides some evidence related to academic criteria familiar to most readers: command of foreign languages, travel, teaching experience, and publications. In effect, she has provided a résumé that details her qualifications for us to judge. Based on those qualifications, she labels her being hired at Penn as "justice," as capable of an ordinary, not "extraordinary" or "lucky," explanation (4). At this moment, however, we do not really know which interpretation is correct. We know she has qualifications, but we don't really know how good they are.

The next paragraph takes us back to the first act of the drama. Painter writes: " 'I have a doctorate in history,' he resumed, 'but I couldn't get an academic job.' With regret he added that he worked in school administration. I said I was sorry he hadn't been able to find the job he wanted" (5). She responds with empathy, but he continues with a kind of attack, suggesting that, as an African American woman, she had an unfair advantage resulting from affirmative action: "He said: 'It must be great to be black and female, because of affirmative action. You count twice' " (5). In effect, he claims to have been the victim of what is usually called "reverse discrimination." "Did this man really mean to imply that I had my job at his expense?" Painter asks (5). She is shocked, speechless, embarrassed. His words suggest that he sees himself in a competition rigged in her favor. At that point, however, although we see things only from Painter's point of view, it is still possible that the man is right.

As the narrative continues, the man tells Painter that his degree is from Temple, a private university in metropolitan Philadelphia, and

asks her where hers is from. When she tells him “Harvard,” this portion of the narrative ends; the man has nothing more to say (6). This paragraph provides crucial details of the narrative. Although Temple University is a good school, its standing and that of its history department are significantly lower than that of Harvard and its history department. Throughout the narrative, Painter and the man have been compared, with the issue whether or not she should have been hired for the job in the history department at Penn. Within the narrative, Harvard functions as authority evidence, a kind of expert evidence that enables us to interpret data. The contrast between Temple and Harvard is a kind of shorthand that functions as an enthymeme: Because we already know something of the reputation Harvard has for quality, we are probably willing to complete the association in our minds and accept Painter’s assertion that she wrote a “decent dissertation” and that she has the qualifications to be hired as a beginning assistant professor at Penn.

The first act of the narrative functions strategically. The story gains and holds our attention because characters emerge, because they act through dialogue, and because there is rising action, increasing tension and suspense. In effect, the story dramatizes the issue. If readers persist through the fourth sentence, they are likely to continue through the sixth paragraph, which ends the first act of the narrative. Moreover, the example also personalizes the opposing opinion in the voice of a resentful white male, someone with whom some readers are likely to identify and empathize. The narrative refutes that opinion, but it has been presented in a way that makes the reader understand why some might believe that affirmative action policies produce reverse discrimination. In other words, the narrative has gained and held attention, laid out the opposing view, and refuted it with a single example, the narrator.

Structurally, the second act of the narrative begins in paragraph 7 with a second real, extended example, but the expectations created in the first act of the narrative are fulfilled here. The movement between the first and second acts of the narrative is chronological: The first encounter happened in the past; the second occurs in the present. The setting also changes: The first encounter happened in Philadelphia; the second takes place in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. This second act of the narrative is also a matter of evidence and strategy. It is easy for issues of affirmative action to divide audiences of men and women, of African Americans and whites. The first act of the narrative illustrates the potential conflicts along ethnic and gender lines. Painter has identified herself as African American and female, and based on that example alone, it would be easy to misinterpret this rhetorical act as an attack on white men by a nonwhite woman. She tries to avoid that

impression, although she may not be completely successful, by treating the white man quite sympathetically.

Painter attempts to broaden the argument and enlarge her audience. The characters in this second example are “black Carolina undergraduates,” whose views of affirmative action are also negative. Painter says:

One young woman surprised me by deploring affirmative action. I wondered why. “White students and professors think we only got into the University of North Carolina because we’re black,” she complained, “and they don’t believe we’re truly qualified.” She said that she knew that she was qualified and fully deserved to be at Carolina. She fulfilled all the regular admissions requirements. It was the stigma of affirmative action that bothered her; without it other students wouldn’t assume she was unqualified. (7)

Another student extends that problem to nonwhite faculty, arguing that “without affirmative action, students would assume black faculty to be as good as white” (8). Once again, the narrative sets out an argument that must be answered and disproved if the author is to achieve her purpose. The argument is cause-effect. The effect is a “stigma,” a word for a blemish or a taint, that here refers to assumptions by whites that African American students aren’t qualified and to assumptions by students that African American professors don’t measure up to their white counterparts.

Paragraph 9 is an internal summary and a transition between the two examples, or the introduction, and the body of the essay. It pulls the two examples together, but it respects distinctions between the whites and African Americans and the men and women in the audiences she is addressing. Whites like the man in the first example assume she has an unfair advantage; she doesn’t think nonwhites have ever expressed that view to her. She recognizes that some African Americans think women like her have it easier, but she disagrees. African American students like those in the second example all know that they are fully qualified; it is only others who need the help of affirmative action. In other words, as she sums it up, “No one, not blacks, not whites, benefits from affirmative action, or so it would seem” (9). And that is the central issue Painter addresses in the essay: Do qualified women and minorities—like her, like the Carolina undergraduate students—benefit from or need affirmative action as a means of entry into higher education, into good jobs?

The body of the essay, which begins with paragraph 10 and runs through paragraph 14, offers Painter’s answer to that question. It is not presented in narrative form, but it provides other types of supporting

material that we shall examine shortly. As we explained when discussing purpose, in this second part of the body, Painter attempts to explain the benefits of affirmative action. In one sense, the structure here is inductive. That is, Painter employs two specific examples to illustrate the general conclusion that affirmative action is beneficial. Those examples also will be discussed shortly.

The structure of the body is a form of logical organization, best characterized as problem–solution. Painter first explains the nature of the problem, overt discrimination against women and ethnic minorities. Before affirmative action, she says, “No one said out loud that women and minorities were simply and naturally inferior to white men, but the assumptions were as clear as day: Whites are better than blacks; men are better than women” (11). Affirmative action is the solution to that problem. Painter says; “Since then, the civil rights movement and the feminist movement have created a new climate that permitted affirmative action, which, in turn, opened areas previously reserved for white men” (14).

The conclusion of the essay is brief. It consists of paragraph 15. As we explained earlier, there Painter clearly identifies the subgroups in the empirical audience that make up her target audiences. Those subgroups are exemplified by what she calls “my Philadelphia white man and my Carolina black women” (15). In addition, the conclusion also includes Painter’s attack on the Reagan administration’s “proposed dismantling of affirmative action” (15), which grows naturally from her justification for that policy.

Supporting Material

Painter employs several types of supporting material, or evidence, to bolster her claims. The first to appear in the essay are the two real, extended examples, which we described earlier and which function as the two acts of the narrative. How those extended examples are intended to influence Painter’s audience was explained in our discussion of structure.

Three other examples appear in the second part of the body of the essay. All three are used to demonstrate the need for affirmative action. The first is that of Painter’s experiences as a student prior to affirmative action. She says:

Well, I have [been helped by affirmative action], but not in the early 1960s when I was an undergraduate in a large state university. Back then, there was no affirmative action. We applied for admission to the university like everyone else; we were accepted or rejected like

everyone else. Graduate and undergraduate students together, we numbered about 200 in a student body of nearly 30,000. No preferential treatment there. (10)

The statistical supporting material, which appears at the end of this example, is designed to demonstrate what conditions were like for students prior to affirmative action. It appeals to the portion of her target audience exemplified by the female, African American students at the University of North Carolina.

Later, Painter applies her experience to other members of the target audience as well. Although these African American undergraduate and graduate students had met all regular admission requirements, she writes that

[W]e all knew what the rest of the university thought of us, professors especially. They thought we were stupid because we were black. Further, white women were considered frivolous students; they were only supposed to be in school to get husbands. . . . Black students, the whole atmosphere said, would not attend graduate or professional school because their grades were poor. Women had no business in postgraduate education because they would waste their training by dropping out of careers when they married or became pregnant. No one said out loud that women and minorities were simply and naturally inferior to white men, but the assumptions were as clear as day: Whites are better than blacks; men are better than women. (11)

This relatively long, extended example is part of the “history lesson” we mentioned when we discussed Painter’s persona earlier. As such, its force or ability to influence her readers comes from Painter’s qualifications as a historian. Not only did she personally experience conditions for students prior to affirmative action, but also her standing as a historian qualifies her to describe those conditions in a general sense.

Painter’s own professional experiences and career provide a second, relatively brief, real example. She says, “I’m black and female, yet I was hired by two history departments that had no black members before the late ’60s, never mind females. Affirmative action cleared the way” (12). Later she adds, “Without affirmative action, it never would have occurred to any large, white research university to consider me for professional employment, despite my degree, languages, publications, charm, grace, *despite* my qualifications” (14). This example also draws its persuasive force from Painter’s persona, which established her “qualifications.” That a person of her professional stature would

not have been hired by major universities without affirmative action justifies that policy.

An additional example is that of the professional career of John Hope Franklin. Painter writes:

Thirty-five years ago, John Hope Franklin, then a star student, now a giant in the field of American history, received a doctorate in history from Harvard. He went to teach in a black college. In those days, black men taught in black colleges. White women taught in white women's colleges. Black women taught in black women's colleges. None taught at the University of Pennsylvania or the University of North Carolina. It was the way things were. (13)

This example draws its force from Franklin's character and professional accomplishments. So in case readers are unfamiliar with him, Painter reveals that he was a "star student" who became "a giant in the field of American history." Significantly, Franklin's case precedes affirmative action and demonstrates that without that legislation, even the most highly qualified individuals suffered employment discrimination. Thus, the case of Franklin is an *a fortiori* example: If it is true in the case of "a giant in the field of American history," then it must certainly happen to most others as well. That is important strategically. Because Painter offers only these three examples of employment discrimination, her essay is open to the charge that these are isolated examples that do not reflect what usually takes place. Her careful development of her credibility as a historian is designed to erode that charge; she can be trusted to relate historical facts accurately without misinterpretation. And the *a fortiori* example is intended to refute the charge completely: If this happened to the highly qualified John Hope Franklin, then, without affirmative action, every qualified person who was not a white male faced such discrimination.

Other Strategies

Painter employs language strategically in several instances. One is her use of synecdoche, a figure of speech in which a part stands for the whole. Explaining the effects of affirmative action, she says, "Skirts and dark skins appeared in new settings in the 1970s" (14). She could as easily have said "women and African Americans" instead. But the phrase "skirts and dark skins" makes the passage more vivid.

Metaphor also adds vividness to the essay. At the end, Painter says, "If they [the Reagan administration] achieve their stated goals, we will

have the same old discrimination, unneeded of new clothes" (15). "New clothes" is a metaphor for opposition to affirmative action and charges of reverse discrimination, which, according to Painter, only mask "the same old white-male-superiority line" (15). In her view, they are "convictions older than affirmative action" (15), which have simply been "fixed up to fit conditions that include a policy called affirmative action" (15). The metaphor helps to enliven the idea, and may even function as an allusion to "a wolf in sheep's clothing."

Irony is also employed in the essay. In passages already explained, it is certainly ironic that highly qualified individuals such as John Hope Franklin and Painter herself faced discriminatory attitudes and practices. At the end of the essay, the irony of what Painter sees as continuing racism and sexism is clear. She says, "My Philadelphia white man and my Carolina black women would be surprised to discover the convergence of their views. I doubt that they know that their convictions are older than affirmative action. I wish I could take them back to the early '60s and let them see that they're reciting the same old white-male-superiority line" (15). That members of her target audience, especially African American women, would adopt such a position is clearly ironic. That irony again contributes to the vividness of the essay, helps account for Painter's reactions to the people she encounters in the narrative, and perhaps also injects a tone of sadness.

Finally, the passage just quoted also includes a strategy of labeling. Painter says that the attitudes of the man in Philadelphia and the African American women in North Carolina are "the same old white-male-superiority line" (15) that existed before affirmative action. The label casts those attitudes in the most negative light possible. Moreover, the label reinforces the conclusions we drew earlier regarding target audiences. Members of the Reagan administration and their strongly conservative supporters would likely be alienated and angered by the label. In contrast, members of the target audiences would likely wish to avoid holding the attitudes that Painter labels so negatively. Thus, the label also provides a created audience strategy, inviting them to view themselves as individuals who shun "white-male-superiority" or who perhaps even feel guilty for holding those attitudes, and thus choose to end their opposition to affirmative action.

Descriptive analysis has put us in possession of this piece of rhetoric in a very detailed way; this analysis has identified and explained all the rhetorically significant aspects of Painter's essay. As a result of the analysis, critics are ready to move on to the second stage of the critical process and place the essay within its historical context. In Chapter Three, we explain historical-contextual analysis and illustrate that stage in the critical process by applying it to Painter's essay. Moreover,

descriptive analysis has also provided the evidence needed to consider what critical perspective or system might be most appropriate when the critical process advances to the third stage, which we discuss in Chapter Four.

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- Black, Edwin. "The Second Persona." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56 (April 1970): 109–119.
- Scott, Robert L., and Donald K. Smith. "The Rhetoric of Confrontation." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 55 (February 1969): 1–8.
- Wander, Philip. "The Third Persona: An Ideological Turn in Rhetorical Theory." *Central States Speech Journal* 35 (Winter 1984): 197–216.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Several published essays illustrate the use of careful descriptive analysis. These include:

- Black, Edwin. "Ideological Justifications." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 144–150. An editorial published in the *New York Times* is subjected to textual analysis.
- Slagell, Amy R. "Anatomy of a Masterpiece: A Close Textual Analysis of Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address." *Communication Studies* 42 (1991): 155–171. A thorough explication of Lincoln's famous speech.
- Stelzner, Hermann. "'War Message,' December 8, 1941: An Approach to Language." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 33 (November 1966): 419–437. Using historical data and close textual analysis, Stelzner brings to our attention the artistic choices Franklin Roosevelt made in what initially appears to be a relatively simple, straightforward report on the attack on Pearl Harbor.

CHAPTER THREE

Historical–Contextual Analysis: The Second Stage of Criticism

As we indicated in Chapter One, rhetorical acts do not come into existence or work to influence in isolation. Instead, they are a product of, and function within, a particular historical context. Rhetoric is *practical* because rhetors are motivated to speak or write by events and circumstances that they encounter. Their rhetoric is intended to resolve some problem or gap between personal or societal goals or values and existing structures, procedures, or conditions. Rhetoric is also *public* because it is addressed to a particular audience or audiences. The problems to be resolved through rhetorical action require the concerted effort of both the rhetor and the audiences. Thus, critics cannot adequately judge or evaluate rhetorical acts without understanding the historical context in which they occur. That understanding is the product of the second stage of rhetorical criticism. In this chapter, we discuss historical–contextual analysis and illustrate this stage of the process by illuminating the historical context of Nell Irvin Painter's essay.

Unlike the first stage, descriptive analysis, which is almost entirely intrinsic and organic, the second stage of criticism examines elements extrinsic to the discourse: the context and the occasion. Remember that any rhetorical act is a rhetor's effort to persuade audiences to view events and issues in a particular way. The "vision of reality" presented in the rhetorical act is the author's. Careful critics should consult sources outside the text to form their own conclusions about