

CONGRUENT AFFINITIES: RECONSIDERING THE EPIDEICTIC

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## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Aristotle's division of the "species" of rhetoric (deliberative, forensic, and epideictic) has served as a helpful taxonomy in historical accounts of rhetoric, but it has also produced undesirable effects. One such effect is that epideictic rhetoric has been interpreted historically as deficient, unimportant or merely ostentatious, while political or legal discourse retained a favored status in authentic civic life. This analysis argues that such an interpretation reduces contemporary attention to the crucial role that *epideixis* plays in modern discourse.

As often interpreted, epideictic rhetoric contains at its heart a striving toward communal values and utopic ideals. Taking as its province the good/bad, the praiseworthy/derisible, it is a rhetorical form supremely attentive to what counts for audiences, cultures, and subcultures. As such, it has direct entailments for all forms of rhetorical practice, however categorized, for in its essence is not simply a suggestion of timeliness or appropriate context for its delivery, but also method: a focus on identification and affinity is at the heart of *epideixis*.

Taking an expanded definition of *epideixis*, I argue that Aristotle's classification be read as provisional (that he allowed for and expected overlap with his divisions), and further, that criticism be seen as a form of contemporary *epideixis*. I claim that contemporary norms

are more fractured than in classical times, and that as citizens no longer at the behest of formerly more unified cultural ideals it is through acts of criticism and aesthetic consensus that we often form emergent communities, gathering around objects of appraisal, around that which offers us pleasure (even the popular). I attempt to account for the mechanics of how, as Dave Hickey argues, “beautiful objects reorganize society, sometimes radically” (*Invisible Dragon* 81). The vectors through which this reorganization occurs are via popular discourse involving “comparisons, advocacy, analysis, and dissent” (Hickey *Invisible Dragon* 70), be it at the level of the interpersonal or in a more widely-sanctioned public forum such as professional criticism. I hope to show that *epideixis* is not a moribund rhetorical category, but a key discursive mode and way of forming community in our times.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE AMBIGUOUS THIRD GENRE

In classical times, the encomiast often sought subject matter that constituted a thematic challenge (Carey 246). For example, in choosing Helen as the topic of praise, the encomiast's project assumed overtones of reassessment, *dissoi logoi* with the purposes of not simply indexing oratorical ability, but expanding thought and establishing common values. Historically, consideration of the epideictic genre has tended more toward the former element of this rhetorical species—the indexing of oratorical ability—at the expense of other important entailments. These other “important entailments” are compelling enough to animate my investigation of praise and blame. Meta-analytically then, this project represents an initiatory and incomplete encomium for the epideictic, to attempt what Kenneth Burke asserted as the role of the rhetorical critic, and “argue for whatever has been dismissed” (qtd. in Roberts-Miller 222). Though generally dismissed if not overlooked entirely, and often relegated to an inferior category, I argue that epideictic rhetoric represents a broad civic function both classically and contemporarily, and that it serves (and served) not only in highly visible and ceremonial moments of discourse, but also in the crucial establishment of interpersonal and group rapport. This analysis argues in favor of reconsidering the epideictic by offering evidence that, despite the genre's “othering” in Western rhetorical history generally, that epideictic rhetoric served a crucial civic function classically alongside its more privileged sister species (deliberative and forensic) and that it thrives today as a central part of various modes of contemporary discourse.

While my contention is that epideictic rhetoric is centrally important to contemporary communication, this argument must be made against a historical backdrop wherein the epideictic has not fared as well as forensic and deliberative rhetoric in terms of theoretical esteem. Lawrence Rosenfield states that scholars “betray a certain unease with epideictic as a category” and that it is usually treated as an “afterthought meant to cover those orations that are unable to fit neatly into one of the two major classifications” (131). While Rosenfield is speaking principally of contemporary scholars who demonstrate “unease” with the epideictic genre, such “unease” could be seen as wildly progressive when compared to the deeper distrust and exclusion of the genre exhibited historically by influential language theorists. Richard Lockwood acknowledges the historical limiting of epideictic rhetoric, which he dubs “the most problematic of rhetorical genres,” likely as a result of “the fundamental difficulty of defining its goal or effect” (318), and Richard Chase finds that epideictic functions as a “wastebasket term” for many theorists, a catch-all that contains all non-important forms of oratory (293). In his recent book on the epideictic, Laurent Pernot also acknowledges the poor reception of the genre, saying that historically “The field of epideictic rhetoric seems vague and laden with poorly-resolved ambiguities” (71). That the epideictic genre has been a contested topic for rhetoricians is hardly at issue.

In *The New Rhetoric*, Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca address the history of the epideictic genre, showing that in distinction to forensic and deliberative debates (which many theorists elevate over epideictic for their “realness” and immediacy), *epideixis* has been interpretively removed from immediate, high-stakes contexts, and was

reduced to just a showcase of talent where “[the audience] merely applauded and went their way.” As the New Rhetoricians assert, “Roman rhetoricians abandoned [the epideictic’s] study to the grammarians, while they trained their pupils in the two other kinds of oratory which were deemed relevant to practical oratory,” and epideictic rhetoric thereby inherited the status of “a degenerate kind of eloquence” (48). The New Rhetoricians interpret this division of forensic/deliberative from epideictic occurring along lines of immediacy and utility, as contributing to the “disintegration of rhetoric,” wherein epideictic was aligned with the literary, excluding it as a valid artifact of formal rhetoric, and thereby, as a formal method of inquiry, invention, or utility in the quasi-logical sense. While *The New Rhetoric* ultimately takes a more charitable and expansive view of *epideixis*, some contemporary accounts of rhetorical history, such as Renato Barilli’s 1989 *Rhetoric*, still suggest a deficiency model regarding epideictic rhetoric. Barilli defines the epideictic as “less functional and immediate” than the other species, and as “almost superfluous” (3). He suggests that epideictic rhetoric was less vital to the operations of Athenian democracy than forensic and deliberative rhetoric. Brian Vickers’s history suggests that Barilli’s perspective on the epideictic is neither a contemporary novelty, nor a rare view to take, and that “in the three centuries between Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and the first Latin handbooks, epideictic...had come to be associated with praise...rather than virtue, developing in the process connotations of flattery and insincerity” (56). Many scholars do not go so far as to criticize epideictic itself, but simply downplay its social significance, reserving the “genuine” label of rhetoric for speech situations that are more obviously eristic and persuasive. As an example, Vickers

writes that Cicero's influence on the reception of epideictic was to paint epideictic "speeches as 'show-pieces,' designed to give pleasure and entertainment, 'unconnected with the battles of public life'" (57). But is this secondary (or more accurately, tertiary) treatment justifiable?

Jeffrey Walker's *Rhetoric and Poetics in Antiquity* gives what might be considered a non-traditional account of the confluent histories of rhetoric and poetics, while also operating against "standard histories" which emphasize "the conventional (and still widely prevalent) notion of epideictic discourse as mere display" (viii). Walker argues a similar theme elsewhere, asserting that "epideictic is philosophically, rhetorically, and formally prior to pragmatic discourse" ("Aristotle's Lyric" 9). Jonathan Pratt's work responds directly to the ostensible limitation Aristotle placed on audience types (as either *theoros* or *krites*) by arguing through etymological evidence that "Aristotle himself makes clear...that epideictic oratory involves judgment no less than the other two genres" (185). In sum, there exists scholarly momentum to allow that epideictic rhetoric operates beyond mere praise or blame, that its temporal orientation is more than just the present, and that its focus extends beyond simply defining the honorable as a means of indexing oratorical skill. Against the doctrinaire interpretations of the genre stands a growing body of scholarship affirming that "the social and political dimensions" of epideictic have been "neglected, and the degree of overlap with other rhetorical practices minimized" (Schiappa 202). "Whatever the customary pretense," writes Jonathan Pratt, "praise does persuasive and ideological work" (191).

To counter the unease often associated with the epideictic are growing questions regarding the assumedly degenerate status of the genre. Pernot argues that "the birth of the



epideictic genus was the birth of an ambiguity” (69), and ambiguity can tend in various directions. As Andreea Ritivoi has stated

Ever since [epideictic’s] conceptual inception, the genre walked a thin line between education and propaganda. And the distinction seems all the more difficult to maintain in contemporary rhetorical theory...If we acknowledge that the past is always constructed—as virtually every historian after Hayden White urge us—what role can we still assign epideictic discourse?” (19).

To initiate a response to Ritivoi’s question, I will first examine what could be argued as the key primary source, the user’s manual, for epideictic discourse: Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*. My analysis will focus specifically on Aristotle’s division of oratory to demonstrate adequate textual ambiguity to then reconsider key assumptions still governing numerous contemporary interpretations of epideictic rhetoric, and allow a starting place from which the genre’s scope, temporality, and utility can be expanded.

### **Comingled Rhetorical Species**

In undertaking an analysis of the epideictic genre, options for beginnings are arguably limited. Aristotle seems the logical place to begin. To even account for the term “*epideixis*” itself, as contemporarily understood, all roads lead to Aristotle. Edward Schiappa notes that Aristotle’s definition of “epideictic rhetoric is highly original” and “re-describes and reconfigures a set of previously disparate rhetorical practices...into one large category of ‘epideictic’ that was largely untheorized prior to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*” (183). As such, any analysis will likely need to acknowledge the “highly original” account of *epideixis* contained

in the looming presence of the Aristotelian tradition, and undergo a conscious self-positioning regarding this tradition's enduring legacy. Such positioning might involve the act of defining a historical counter-lineage to Aristotle's taxonomy, as does Jeffrey Walker in *Rhetoric and Poetics in Antiquity*, wherein Walker challenges historical narratives that have devalued the importance of epideictic, literary, and poetic discourse historically. Another approach is to argue Aristotle's taxonomy as either moribund or at least bound by its formative context, as vestiges of a cultural practice no longer representative of contemporary discourse for contemporary societies. Such is the argument of Paul Ricoeur, stating that Aristotle's rhetorical taxonomy has purchase in the functions of Athenian rhetoric, but that the taxonomy has trouble travelling beyond this limited context (137-50). Aristotle's taxonomy, for Ricoeur, represents a time and place-contingent set of discursive analytics that do not travel well to contemporary situations.

My approach hopes to avoid reading *Rhetoric* as a monolithic statement. Any act of contemporary interpretation risks the imposition of modern sensibilities on a manuscript which is, as most rhetorical historians argue, a series of lecture notes, subject to the shifting revisions likely brought about by mood, pedagogical exigencies, and political influence. Paul Brandes suggests that "The clear thrust of internal evidence and scholarly speculation is toward the view that the *Rhetoric* is not a 'book' in the usual sense but is a series of lecture notes subjected to a series of revisions, not always systematic" (qtd. in Erickson 2). I am persuaded that the most fitting way to approach such a work is through synthesis of various perspectives, dialogically uncovering moments that problematize many given historical

interpretations of the work as a whole. My approach is to synthesize these various perspectives to achieve something of what Kenneth Burke deemed “perspective by incongruity” (*Counter-Statement* 216). This methodology is similar to what I. A. Richards highlights in *Mencius on the Mind: Experiments in Multiple Definition*, where through various Chinese sources and translations of key terms, Richards arrives at more nuanced and robust interpretations of terms that, in translation from Mandarin to English, are contingent and notational. The method of this examination attempts a faintly similar approach, arguing that within the annals of rhetorical history, the epideictic stands at best as contingent and notational, and at worst a useless and unconsidered term, a rhetorical *bête noire*. My aim is a close analysis of the passages of Aristotle’s rhetoric, as provided by various translators and interpreters, to ultimately arrive at a more robust accounting for *epideixis* within Aristotle’s system. It would be, hopefully, a perspective on *epideixis* that is more generous than has traditionally been ascribed to Aristotle on the subject.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to closely examine Aristotle on the subject of the species of rhetoric. My analysis will ultimately contest the traditional account of Aristotle’s interpretation, in which Aristotle is read as relegating epideictic rhetoric to an inferior status in service of the apparent civic utility of deliberative and forensic rhetoric. Choosing to approach the text via multiple perspectives will offer a symphonic view of moments in the *Rhetoric* that have been historically problematic, and will ideally constitute a more dialogic approach to the problem of historicizing ancient rhetoric. This approach is also a necessity, being that I as an interpreter am what Thomas Conley would call a “Greekless reader” of

Aristotle (74). I will turn to theorists who arguably have been ranked among the primary interpreters and translators of Aristotle: W. Rhys Roberts, George Kennedy, William M. A. Grimaldi and E. M. Cope. Doing so, I hope to triangulate an interpretation that more directly acknowledges the built-in latitude of temporality, purpose, and utility of epideictic rhetoric, to identify what Gerard Hauser calls the “alternate tendency” in Aristotle: a subtle and historically downplayed acknowledgment that Aristotelian thought is less rigidly systematic than often ascribed, and that Aristotle’s categorizations are best seen as fitting starting places for inquiry, initial forays into limning the features of various systems too large and unwieldy to totalize (17). Hauser’s description of an “alternative tendency” prefers that latter interpreters not take too prescriptive a stance when reading Aristotle’s classifications, and that readers credit Aristotle for recognizing diverse and subtle alternatives.

I argue that in *Rhetoric*, despite the seemingly clear classification of what seems to be an airtight, tripartite division of rhetoric into the species of the deliberative, forensic, and epideictic, there are also curious glosses on each species that challenge their sequestration in ways that potentially make for a more robust body of rhetorical theory, representative of dynamic and hybridized speech situations. Any interpretation that accomplishes such a reinterpretation would stand at odds with the common designation that forensic, deliberative, and epideictic rhetoric deal individually with the past, the future, and the present (respectively), and would illustrate that even within Aristotle’s assumedly rigid classification there is pliability and room for movement between the species. Such an analysis would also accord added intellectual respect to Aristotle, softening the historical image often

produced of a thinker wedded to a relentless positivism of categorization, showing his rhetorical theory to be more accommodating of the interstices of various speech situations, more attuned to change and the dynamism of cultures over time.

Although various theoreticians of rhetoric such as Anaximenes, Plato, Protagoras, and Isocrates have each put forward divisions of rhetoric as an art, it is Aristotle who codified a taxonomy whose stamina has carried it through the centuries as a popular model for the ordering of rhetoric—it remains one of the primary analogues for the teaching of the subject, being “the division which most subsequent theorists of rhetoric accept” (Grimaldi 79).

Regarding the lasting reach of this tripartite division, it is important to consider the discursive act of naming and codifying such a division in the first place. As Schiappa states, “Once *named*, intellectual practices can become what we loosely call a discipline,” and it is from this initial ordering that sub-orderings and subdivisions inevitably proceed (186). Such divisions order and structure knowledge in ways that often suggest a natural, objective pre-existing condition that has merely become codified—as if the ordering were defining a concrete reality. The problem in this is when such divisions are intuited *as* realities. But while Schiappa challenges this naturalness of Aristotle’s division on extra-discursive grounds, identifying the disparate cultural practices (*enkômion*, *panegyrikôs logos*, *epitaphios logos*) subsumed under the banner of “epideictic” (185), I contend that within Aristotle’s very system there is room to blur his own boundaries, a blurring that I argue Aristotle accounted for throughout the *Rhetoric*, based on textual evidence. This is to say that Aristotle’s taxonomy, commonly argued to represent hermetic classes of speech, actually reflects a

complex and interwoven set of discursive purposes that are mutually informative of each other. In particular, I argue that each of Aristotle's species is shot through with *epideixis*, and that this curiously relegated rhetorical genre actually comprises a crucial discursive act that is important to not only Athenian democracy but contemporary society as another basis for community construction. But for this analysis and these arguments to proceed, it is of vital importance to turn to Aristotle and work through his definitions of the species of rhetoric.

### **The Issue of Judgment in *Epideixis***

Book I, Chapter III of *Rhetoric* is where we first encounter Aristotle's division. Before arriving at the particular division of rhetoric, Aristotle offers a brief treatment of audience, and it is here where the problems for *epideixis* begin. Aristotle sets forth what has been commonly interpreted as a dichotomized view of the potential role of the audience for a given speech act. Each speech act "consists of three things: a speaker and a subject on which he speaks and someone addressed" (1358<sup>a</sup>1). This "someone addressed" is restricted to playing one of two roles: they are "either a spectator [*theoros*] or a judge [*kritēs*], and [in the latter case] a judge of either past or future happenings" (1358<sup>b</sup>2). As Aristotle subsequently defines the species of rhetoric and the role the audience takes in each species, spectatorship becomes aligned with the epideictic. In modern connotation, the term "spectator," when contrasted with the term "judge," assumes an air of passivity and indolence. Spectators are present for entertainment purposes, for the spectacle and the show, not for the civically important roles of activity and participation. Based on Aristotle's dichotomy, critics contend

that the spectators' alignment with the epideictic renders anyone employing epideictic rhetoric as being concerned with "no burning issue that demands a decision" (Chase 296). Edward Meredith Cope, after naming deliberative rhetoric the "first and noblest" of the species, further underscores the suspect importance of epideictic involvement, claiming that epideictic rhetoric is "made for ostentation's sake and to gain applause," nothing more (120). Continuing on, Cope asserts that epideictic rhetoric is "inferior to [deliberative and forensic] in extent, importance and interest," and that the audiences for epideictic speech "are therefore...like spectators at a theater, or a contest for a prize," and concerned with trivialities, not "any serious interest or real issue at stake" (121). In a similar fashion, classical scholar Theodore C. Burgess suggests that "The [*theoros*] is so named from the analogy of the theatre, where the audience are mere spectators and entertainment is the chief purpose" (92). Such definitions further establish and contribute to the common notion of the inferior status of *epideixis*. Also telling is the use of the adjective "mere." "Mere" has become a common designation in various discussions of rhetoric (and even the legitimacy of contemporary rhetoric itself), and "mere" typically suggests either a willful delimiting by the theorist or an inherent defect or limitation of the object theorized. Burgess's use of "mere" preceding "spectators" in his assessment is a further intensifier of the epideictic genre's alleged inutility—a way of ensuring understanding that spectatorship is a less important civic activity and that it is to be viewed as degeneracy in comparison to judgment. From the outset, *epideixis* is troubled by an apparent limitation of its usefulness and application, and

the forthcoming divisions of rhetoric follow from this controversial distinction between the role of a spectator [*theoros*] and a judge [*kritēs*].

Other interpreters challenge this early relegation concerning the status of epideictic rhetoric reflected in the commentary of theorists such as Cope and Burgess. In his analysis of the *theoros/kritēs* binary, William Grimaldi offers that the “point of the distinction” between spectator and judge “would seem to be to allow [Aristotle] to differentiate the three kinds of rhetoric” (80). This proves unsatisfying for Grimaldi, as ultimately, in “each case the auditor is a χριτής [*kritēs*], whether of the future, the past, or a speaker’s command of the art,” and because of this, Grimaldi “sees no reason to press the distinction between θεωρός and χριτής.” Grimaldi takes exception with Spengel’s assertion that the “θεωρός is not a χριτής,” and further states that it is not necessary “to accede to Cope’s view...that θεωρός is like θεατής, a spectator, one more passively occupied than the χριτής.” Grimaldi puts further pressure upon the assumed distinction between the terms, ultimately stating that for “[Aristotle] as far as judgment is concerned the auditor in each class of rhetoric can be rightly called χριτής” (80-81). This is not to say that Grimaldi is arguing against Cope and Burgess regarding the status of *epideixis* in general, but simply that he claims that too fine a point has been made on the distinction between the different classes of auditors as outlined early in Book III.

For Grimaldi, the auditors of each of these separate species are judges, though the object of focus shifts with the employment of the various species. As Grimaldi argues, the distinction between the *theoros* and *kritēs* is not a distinction worth belaboring, nor is it a



token of value relative to Aristotle's esteem for one species over another. And yet, Aristotle did employ two different terms. One could easily make the argument that if we are giving Aristotle due credit as a shrewd thinker and rhetorician in his own right, that the specific choice of two different words is likely laden with competing or contrasting values—that there are critical differences between a *theoros* and a *kritēs*. But what Grimaldi seems to be implying is that whether or not there is a difference, for whatever reason, historians have tended to pit these terms hierarchically together, with *theoros* always assuming a lesser value than a *kritēs*. Such valuation tends to import contemporary connotations of these root words onto the original meaning, rendering the *theoros* of ancient times on par with a contemporary spectator or theater-goer only, while not granting spectatorship the potential of legitimacy. The ancient *theoros* may or may not have had the historical connotation of being a more important position to maintain than a “spectator” in contemporary society. Alongside the hermeneutic impositions of modern connotations, such a hierarchy is also reflective of a particular modern value system, replete with its own socially-constructed privileges that deem observation secondary to action, and that attempt to define what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable levels of involvement in given activities. Therefore, the hierarchy between *theoros* and *kritēs* might be falsified, the result of contemporary connotations and superimpositions that distort the impact of the term in its original cultural context.

Pitting the contradictory “expert testimonies” of Cope and Grimaldi against each other takes on shades of a court of law. This “pitting against” is not assumed to offer definitive proof of one position over another. It is ultimately impossible to know the exact

mind of Aristotle on the matter, and to definitively assert that the *theoros* was an important position would be to commit the same error I am criticizing in other histories. There is an inherent limitation in any act of translation, and uncertainty allows some inquirers to mine history in an attempt to perform historical confirmation bias: positing a theory and then finding voices to support this position, however potentially idiosyncratic. To avoid such accusations in this particular inquiry, in the subsequent uncovering of the nature and interactions of each species of rhetoric, the evidence supports Grimaldi's interpretation as being not only more integral, but also more considerate of the complicated rhetorical framework that lends credence to Aristotle as a creative and critical thinker in a way that maintaining a substantive (and airtight) distinction between *theoros* and *kritēs* fails to do. Aristotle's own fleshing out of the rhetorical species is suggestive of the notion that the epideictic is witnessed through acts of both spectatorship and judgment (often concurrently), as we might presently define them.

### **Rhetoric's Tripartite Division—the Surface Distinctions**

Soon after this concern with audience, Aristotle arrives at his classic division, stating that there are “three genera of rhetorics; *symboleutikon* [“deliberative”], *dikanikon* [“forensic”], and *epideiktikon* [“demonstrative”]” (1358<sup>b</sup>3).<sup>1</sup> Each of these species is apportioned a specific function, a temporal focus, and a given *telos*. The functions of the species are characterized as such: deliberative rhetoric concerns itself with exhortation or

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<sup>1</sup> Translations of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* from Kennedy's 1991 *Aristotle on Rhetoric*.

dissuasion, forensic with accusation or defense, and epideictic, “either ‘praise’ [*epainos*] or ‘blame’ [*psogos*]” (1358<sup>b</sup>3). The temporal orientations of the species correspond fluidly with the subjects above, with the deliberative’s focus on the future, the forensic’s focus the past, while for the epideictic “the present is the most important” (1358<sup>b</sup>4). Finally, the *telos* or end of each species is different, according to Aristotle, with the deliberative speaker seeking the advantageous (against the harmful), the forensic aiming at the just or unjust, and the epideictic in pursuit of “the honorable [*kalon*] and the shameful” (1358<sup>b</sup>5).<sup>2</sup> With this basic taxonomy, Aristotle sets in motion an enduring model of classical rhetoric that has influenced numerous subsequent interpretations of the art down to the present time. With this ostensibly reductive division, the species are allotted their respective territories in a manner that at a glance suggests discrete categorization, with each operating in its own sphere, unconcerned with the subject matter and aims of the other species.

As understood, each of the species is granted a primary temporal orientation. But soon after this orientation is explained, the matter is complicated not solely by a hermeneutic challenge, as in the case of the distinction between spectatorship and judgment, but by Aristotle’s own qualifying statement concerning the epideictic genre’s domain. Kennedy translates Aristotle as saying that even though within *epideixis* the present is the most central temporal concern, that the epideictic orator will “often also make use of other things, both reminding [the audience] of the past and projecting the course of the future” (1358<sup>b</sup>4). With this simple qualification, Aristotle complicates the seemingly strict partitions surrounding the

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<sup>2</sup> Kennedy offers that *to kalon* is fittingly translated as “honorable,” “fine,” or “noble” (78).

three rhetorical species. Suddenly, the temporal focus of the epideictic is allowed to make use of “other things,” most notably, the temporal concerns of both deliberative and forensic rhetoric. Aristotle’s claim here is that the epideictic will draw on the past, most likely praising notable figures in history as exemplars for contemporary action. On this point, Cope resists validating the epideictic, insisting that even though the epideictic orator is granted some temporal latitude, the purpose of doing so is still always for the present moment. As he writes,

to the declamatory speaker the present time is most properly assigned; for though he often refers to the past in the way of reminiscence, and to the future in the way of anticipation, yet it is to the present character and condition of the object of his declamation that he really and substantially directs his approbation or censure: [so that even in a funeral oration the orator’s “time” may still be considered as the present.]. (169)

As a result of these differences, Cope asserts that each species is given a “distinct end,” furthering the notion of a natural sequestration as interpreted in Aristotle’s taxonomy (169).

While drawing on the past to project “the course of the future” might arguably still take as its purpose the influencing of human action in the present, as Cope argues, and while the oratorical ability of the person delivering the speech may indeed be a key feature of the epideictic speech, such speech situations are nonetheless laden with deontological significance, and even Cope’s invocation of a forward-looking anticipation hints at this significance. Epideictic speech carries an ethical charge concerning how the citizen-spectators

ought to conduct themselves, not just in the present but also into the future. The Kennedy translation suggests an invocation of the past that moves beyond the simple “reminiscence” that Cope assigns to the epideictic. This is done not in the service of simple amusement or spectatorship, not for an audience concerned with “no burning issue that demands a decision,” or for “mere amusement” as Cope argues, but as a means of “projecting the course of the future” (1358<sup>b</sup>4). With this compelling and forward-looking addendum, Aristotle transgresses the very temporal limitations he set upon the species. Doing this shows the epideictic genre’s unique position as a discursive bridge, drawing attention to the span of time, all with the important task of not only reminding auditors of the past, but “projecting the course of the future.”<sup>3</sup> With this important gloss, epideictic speech becomes not only temporally unmoored, but expressly pedagogic and exhortatory, much like the general interpretation of the purpose of the deliberative genre. Such a qualification suggests the epideictic’s immediate utility in something like an ancient court of law, the political forum, or even in the interpersonal give and take of quotidian interaction in the *polis*. This is a crucial gloss, because if taken to constitute a reasonable translation, this addendum connects epideictic rhetoric to human action, and not simple spectatorship.

If the phrase “projecting the course” can be interpreted as indeed containing a didactic function, then Aristotle’s qualification suggests that the epideictic concerns itself with the ethical (virtue/vice), and the aesthetic or decorous (fine/mean—noble/base). In short, this is an initial indication that epideictic rhetoric has purchase, to some indeterminate

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<sup>3</sup> On the blurred demarcation of the temporal focus of the epideictic, W. Rhys Roberts’ translation reads “The ceremonial orator is, properly speaking, concerned with the present, since all men praise or blame in view of the state of things existing at the time, though they often find it useful also to recall the past and to make guesses at the future” (qtd. in McKeon 1335). Roberts’ translation curiously renders the forward-thinking exhortatory mode of discourse that I am arguing as a prognostication or divining: making “guesses at the future.”

degree, in various normative domains—the legal, the moral, the religious, and matters of etiquette and social approbation—whereas certain historical interpretations of the concept of the epideictic might be eager to limit its application to specific socially-sanctioned events and contexts such as funeral speeches and public gatherings only. As contemporary scholars have recognized, Aristotle’s definitions, in context of his later qualifications of the three species, might at worst suggest mild imprecision. Gerald Hauser reads Aristotle more charitably, suggesting “an alternative tendency in [his] remarks”—that Aristotle’s apparent looseness is more reflective of discursive options (17). And I agree with Hauser. Similarly, Jeffrey Walker addressed the hermeneutic variability of Aristotle in a 2003 keynote speech where he closely considered Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric and found more latitude than contemporary readers are often willing to grant. Walker argued ultimately that Aristotle was essentially saying “Let’s say that rhetoric is a faculty of observing the available means of persuasion — where will that get us?” (“On Rhetorical Traditions” 2). Walker found a far more provisional nature in Aristotle’s own definition of Rhetoric; if this is a valid reading (and there is little evidence to suggest otherwise), then we might also assume that other concepts share in this fluidity.

Aristotle’s addendum regarding the provenance of the epideictic genre is a suggestion of his understanding of the protean nature of discourse, and an awareness that democracy operates on systems of discursive overlap. The tripartite classification sets up usable frameworks of approach, and given Aristotle’s persistent focus on the probable, the division suggests that in the endless permutations of potential speech situations, we at least need to attempt to form some rules. But Aristotle doesn’t seem willing to categorically restrict the

species he has defined in a way that reduces their interplay or disavows the ingenuity of the speaker to use “available means,” whatever they might be. The purpose of this classification, like any, is to structure an uncontainable reality that likely doesn’t map as cleanly as the classification suggests. Malcolm Wilson, in a study of Aristotle’s theories of science, attempts a rapprochement between three key perspectives regarding Aristotle’s biological taxonomy, to respect “analogy as a significant part of Aristotle’s system of difference” while also “embracing the more and less of analogues” (59). I interpret his analysis as portraying Aristotle taking more interest in homologous structures over delimited and concretized types—abiding features that could be reified through analogical constructs, with given definitive latitude (the “more or less”). From an epistemic perspective, classification of a realm of human conduct beggars generalization and oversight, but the need for and facility created by such classification is important. As Eugene Garver argued about the division of rhetoric in Aristotle, “The existence of the three kinds of rhetoric, like the existence of the *polis*, saves Aristotle equally from purely descriptive accounts of how persuasion in fact works and from an idealism that tells us instead how it should work” (13).

Grimaldi, in his extensive translational notes on the finer points of the species of Aristotle’s rhetoric, is also quick to acknowledge that in no way have the three species been delimited to only representing fragmentary moments of time, but that they participate in a notable temporal overlap, what Grimaldi and earlier *Rhetoric* translator Lane Cooper deem a “natural commingling” (81). Grimaldi accounts for both the culturally-bound condition of Athenian rhetoric while also allowing for its boundless nature, stating that

It seems correct to say that, although Aristotle's analysis of rhetoric is conditioned...by the contemporary historical and cultural context and its somewhat circumscribed understanding of rhetoric, it would be wrong to restrict his analysis to such a limited compass. (82)

Such circumscription would be wrong, Grimaldi argues, because the *Rhetoric* takes as its project "a critical study of all discourse as men employ it to communicate with their fellow-men" (82). Such a broad discursive backdrop presents unlimited permutation and recombination of available means, and against this it seems understandable that distinct speech occasions and practices are perpetually emerging. Grimaldi underscores what he sees as Aristotle's clear-eyed position on the symphonic nature of the rhetorical species. After arguing on behalf of reading the species as interwoven, Grimaldi continues along a similar trajectory, asserting, "Just as the three kinds of rhetoric commingle, so do the times." This comingling is an "interchange of times" that Aristotle "admits...in his comments on epideictic" (82). Despite the more temporally restrictive definitions found in 1362<sup>a</sup> 15-16 and 1366<sup>a</sup> 17-18, Grimaldi maintains that this early and clear indication of the species' temporal latitude is helpful in understanding Aristotle's very conception of the role, timing, and use of each species. I argue that this "interchange of times" performs important work principally for epideictic rhetoric, which for some commentators is limited from the outset by the debate of judgment and spectatorship. An orator at a public assembly, given free rein over the collective wisdom and history of the community, while also tasked with the monumental importance of gaining consensus in the hopes of projecting the course for the



future hardly seems set to a frivolous task. Certainly, aside from the display speeches and performance pieces, it is arguable that such epideictic occasions are more easily accepted as being civically important. Away from the political forum or the court, such speech occasions act as a popular ethic, expressing a utopian paradigm. As Nicole Loraux argues, “On the horizon of the [epideictic] oration is an ideal” (409). This “ideal” represents not only the concrete values of a defined community, but the imagining of that very community itself, its utopian aspirations, the vision of what a community might become if all citizens therein were as truly noble and great as the subjects of encomia or funeral orations.

The comingling of times mentioned by Grimaldi is important to consider as it illustrates some of the difficulty of defining the epideictic, which is bound up in problems of defining the nature of time itself. Notably, the difficulty arises when trying to account for the present as a discrete moment of time, as distinct from its respective counterparts of past and future. Curiously, the difficulties attendant to determining the “presence of the present” represent the very difficulties that often plague the distinguishing of the rhetorical species. These three modes of time (past, present, and future) are unstable and evasive situations whose very reality is quite often intuited only via their relationship with the other modes, against which they are assumed to be distinct and unique. The present, for example, is incessantly becoming both the future and the past at once, yet it is always the here and now—the present. Such an interpretation is of course metaphysically literalist, and it fails to account for a broader notion of what people think of as the present (one which, for example, sees the past two weeks or two months as constituting a collective moment known as “the

present”). But interpreting the present in this way does illustrate the difficulty, or even the impossibility, of acting as if the present were an isolable element whose reality was not born up by what had preceded it or whose reality is not directly related to what is forthcoming. To suggest that temporality itself can be discretely categorized and separated out into three clean modes is perhaps overly simplistic, and this recognition helps illuminate the difficulty of attempting to wrest given speech situations into static temporal categories. In the case of the epideictic, there is a built-in absurdity to think that prompting a specific course of behavior will have positive entailments for the present only. Such ethical exhortation, if heeded in any way, has interest not only in the present moment, but in the future as a means of securement. Praise takes an eye to a more concurrent notion of time that not only solidifies present action and reifies some shared community ideal, but does so always in the service of perpetuation, as does ethical exhortation, or hortatory speech. And in performing this act of solidification, the epideictic is continually reliant on the past and on past or present exemplars from which to construct its message. Illustrating this temporal duality, W. Rhys Roberts’ translation of 1367<sup>b</sup>35 reads “To praise a man is akin to urging a specific course of action,” and this interpretation rightly suggests a further comingling of purpose amongst the rhetorical species. There is no sense in publically-declaimed praise or blame that is not oriented in all temporal directions concurrently: how we (or certain exemplars) have behaved in the past has brought our society to this point in the present, and attention to how we behave currently will positively influence our society (however defined) as we move toward the future. All three modes of temporality can be (and often are) infrangibly combined in the

deployment of epideictic rhetoric. As Frank Lentricchia has observed about any reference to the present as somehow ahistorically separated from the past, such a moment would lose “any sense of potentiality, of the possible, of change...a present so understood...is not human time” (119). So it is with the epideictic—it cannot exist as a disoriented isolate, but is animated by past fact and future potentiality.

Aristotle further blurs distinctions concerning the species, and by implication challenges a common notion that the epideictic, as ostensible “showpiece” speech, operates solely on style at the expense of substance. In speaking of the common features of the three species, Aristotle argues that

It is necessary for the deliberative, judicial, and epideictic speaker to have propositions about the possible and the impossible and [about] whether something has happened or not and [about] whether it will or will not come to be. (1359<sup>a</sup>8)

This passage reiterates Aristotle’s qualification of the epideictic: that the species will draw on past fact and example to suggest a given path or behavior moving forward. The epideictic is involved then with causal determinations about what falls within the range of possibility for a society or a people. As stated above, each of the species then is also involved in the work of the propositional, these propositions advanced through the employment of the enthymeme, the rhetorical syllogism. This is real speech about real things that clearly should matter to the intended audience if the orator truly hopes for her message’s claims to be fully considered.

In the above passage, Aristotle says that *epideixis* is involved, at least to some indeterminable degree, with propositional constructs, with argumentation, with more than just showiness and ostentation. It is not simply praise or blame, but *argumentative* praise or blame, if even just tacitly argumentative. That *epideixis* is involved in propositional work would suggest at very least that the epideictic is a crucial sort of deontological exhortation. The epideictic genre arguably then is linked to decorum and how the members of a given community should self-comport for the benefit of society writ large. In this way, the epideictic functions with a curious deontological utilitarianism. The project of *epideixis* seems to say, “you (members of my audience) *should* be like such-and-such figure because our community stands to benefit from such individualized emulation.” The epideictic is reliant upon a form of behavioral precedent that is used in fashioning impactful public arguments. Everett Lee Hunt suggests that in his description of the epideictic, Aristotle is not simply providing the student of rhetoric a blueprint for flattery and ostentation, but a “conventional ethics” (51). “The ethical conceptions of the *Rhetoric* are the conceptions of the man in the street—current popular notions that would supply the most plausible premises for persuasive speeches” (Hunt 52). In this way, *epideixis* serves as a linchpin binding rhetoric to a more fully-formed Platonic art, a “true rhetoric” which gains its legitimacy through a close connection to philosophy, namely, ethics.

The crucial gloss of epideictic’s ability to recall the past while “projecting the course of the future” has been, for whatever reason, a footnote which has gone relatively unremarked in the discussion of the division of Western rhetoric. I claim however that it is a

powerful qualification in understanding the nature of *epideixis*: that the genre, though bound in Aristotle's time by certain applications, content, and contexts, is also more than a simple genre of rhetoric, but also arguably a mode of *all* effective rhetoric, for it entails an understanding of what an audience will give assent to as "the good" or "the bad." In this way, *epideixis* establishes a basic precondition for countless acts of meaningful speech (not simply moments limited to praising and blaming). Along these lines, Amelie Oksenberg Rorty argues that "epideictic rhetoric...has a latent, important practical and educative function," and because of this, "Aristotle wants to bring at least some of its users under the aegis of deliberative rhetoric. Since praise and blame motivate as well as indicate virtue, they are also implicitly intended to affect future action" (4). Aristotle's definition of the other species of rhetoric are shot through with the specific features of the epideictic, allowing the epideictic to become a vivifying principle related to the other two species of rhetorical address. Aristotle offers proof beyond this passage concerning epideictic's claims on the past and future, and thereby doesn't relegate the epideictic to an inferior status as many commentators have assumed. He allows it to be a richly popular and foundational speech concept upon which democratic Athens can secure its sense of public good and continue to enact its own political and democratic progress.

### *Examining the Species More Closely*

After delimiting the two audience types at work in the branches of oratory, and after offering a quick and usable definition of each of the species in an attempt to illustrate their

surface features and apparent distinctions, Aristotle soon thereafter initiates a longer discussion of the species severally to give a more full account of the finer points of the context, temporality, *telos*, and *topoi* specific to each species. While I am most concerned with the description of the epideictic, it is important to also consider the presentation of the two other species, because their definition is at points reflective of the same type of genre overlap that I argue above. That is, each description not only outlines areas of distinction between the species, but each also offers inroads of comingling which serve to challenge the historical assumption of mutually exclusive categorization that has been attributed to Aristotle's rhetorical taxonomy.

In Chapters IV-XV of Book I, Aristotle sets out to offer an account of the *idia* or “specific topics” of each of the species, with an attendant view to the purpose or effect of each of the specific topics—why they matter to the species in question. Wedged between Chapters IV-VIII, which detail the features of deliberative rhetoric, and Chapters X-XV, which account for the forensic, we find Chapter IX, whose provenance is the epideictic. Even the volume of attention between these chapters is suggestive to some of the epideictic's inferior status in this rhetorical taxonomy. For example, Cope is unable to resist maligning the epideictic again, stating that the chapter on epideictic appears “out of its usual order,” normally coming last as it is the “least important of the three [species]”<sup>4</sup>, and that its insignificance is reflected in Aristotle's ability to have the subject “dispatched in a single

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<sup>4</sup> Cope doesn't seem to allow that this ordering might inversely have some other hierarchical significance, but views it simply as an anomaly. If pressed, I might suggest, somewhat facetiously, that the positioning between the two other species suggests the presence of the epideictic in both the deliberative and forensic modes. It can be seen in this central position as a bridge or a bonding agent between the others.

chapter” (183). As Cope and others might ask: if the epideictic is in fact on equal footing with the two other species, then why didn’t Aristotle grant it more theoretical focus in *Rhetoric*? Why not write more? I account for this disparity by suggesting that, just as the purposes and temporalities of the rhetorical species intermingle, so do the definitions of the various species in the *Rhetoric*, and that the descriptions of the deliberative and forensic species of oratory are rife with epideictic descriptors as well. In just such a fashion, Mary Margaret McCabe accounts for the sparse coverage given to the epideictic by acknowledging that while it doesn’t seem to be “of prime interest to Aristotle,” based on sheer volume, this might be so simply because *epideixis* has an ability to be confluent with the other forms of speech, or as McCabe herself suggests, epideictic speeches “often take the form of either forensic or deliberative speeches” (qtd. in Furley and Nehamas 149). In one sense, then, there is less need to account directly for the epideictic on its own terms because of its confluence with and presence in the definitions of the other rhetorical species. Alongside the description in Chapter IX, the epideictic’s enmeshment within the other species allows it to be delineated obliquely in the discussions of judicial and deliberative rhetoric.

Book I, Chapter IX of *Rhetoric* is where we have our most cohesive and collected explanation of the epideictic in the Aristotelian system. Aristotle begins by saying “After [the deliberative], let us speak of virtue and vice and honorable and shameful, for these are the points of reference for one praising or blaming” (1366<sup>a</sup>1). Kennedy’s notes on this introduction of the epideictic point to a use of language that suggests cross-domain assessments of what constitutes “the good” or “virtuous,” to clarify that when we reference

the epideictic, it is not *just* about human action. As Kennedy explains, *to kalon* (translated above as “the honorable”), along with the other epideictic descriptors (*aretē*, *kakia*, and *aishkron*) are suggestive in “a predominantly moral sense.” The realm of epideictic’s dealing then is primarily human action, with models of conduct and public decorum. Nonetheless, the use of these terms also carries an implication of what is or is not “fine” or “seemly” generally (78-79). *Kalon* is justly interpreted by Kennedy as meaning “‘good’ in the sense of having something beautiful about it” (79). According to Grimaldi, the account of *to kalon* here in Chapter IX is also “the most extended statement on the idea in A[ristotle] which we possess,” where “we are told that [*to kalon*] is a [*telos*] of all good things and that it is...something which exists for its own sake and is praiseworthy” (193-194). Suggested by these translations is a concept that applies broadly to both human action and artifacts or possessions as well (even abstract possessions like personality traits). This moment of polysemy suggests that the domain of epideictic can be broadened beyond focusing solely on moral action and human subjects exclusively. It offers a mode of speech that might be inclusive of states of affairs, fine ‘things’ or inanimate objects, abstract concepts, logical demonstration, that which demonstrates “the good.” Importantly, there is an aesthetic dimension to the nature of *epideixis* as presented early in Chapter IX. This element of the epideictic’s broad subject matter is borne out not only by the translational freedom of *to kalon*, but by the very exemplars of epideictic speech that exist from Aristotle’s time through Latinity and into the Renaissance and beyond.



Regarding this same introduction to Chapter IX, Cope has considerably less to say about the use of *to kalon*, instead undertaking a comparative hermeneutical endeavor of his own to consider Aristotle's use of *aretē* between the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Rhetoric*, ultimately determining that the difference between these two references to virtue are "not so glaring" (184). What is worth considering is that Cope's analysis focuses solely on the use of *aretē* as in relation to human action and personality traits. His assessment suggests that the use of *aretē* is normative only, and I argue that this is again representative of a common misconception of *epideixis*: that it is *only* in relation to human action and moral praise or blame. Kennedy and Grimaldi interpret Aristotle's use of this term as a more expansive concern with goodness and praiseworthiness beyond the strict confines of human action (though importantly and perhaps primarily situated there as well), and again, the exemplars of the genre throughout most of Western history seem to suggest that this is a more fitting view to take of *epideixis*, or at least, this is what *epideixis* has become. In fact, just a few lines later, Aristotle himself affirms that the epideictic covers more than only human behavior as its chosen subject, saying that the source of epideictic speech is "not always of a human or divine being but often of inanimate things, or of the humblest of the lower animals" (Roberts 1354, 1366<sup>a</sup>1). This notion carries hints and vestiges of a Platonic concern with ideal form, whether it is the form and fruition of a human subject or action, or non-human subject or object. *Epideixis* in its original form carries with it a cross-domain influence between the realms of the moral, the performative, and the aesthetic. It references the ideal and the exemplary (and their inverse) in various domains. It could, in this sense, account for

the heroism of Pericles, the athleticism of Milo of Croton, the sagacity of Aspasia, or the impeccable symmetry of a Grecian urn.

### *The Effects of the Epideictic*

Aristotle continues in Chapter IX by explaining one of the key effects of epideictic speech: its ability to help portray the speaker favorably, in a given sense. Kennedy translates Aristotle as saying

As we speak of [virtue and vice and the honorable and shameful], we shall incidentally also make clear those things from which we [as speakers] shall be regarded as persons of a certain quality in character...for from the same sources we shall be able to make both ourselves and any other person worthy of credence in regard to virtue. (1366<sup>a</sup>1)

W. Rhys Roberts has this passage slightly different, saying that by talking about the areas of praise and blame and their attendant virtues and vices,

We shall at the same time be finding out how to make our hearers take the required view of our own characters—our second method of persuasion. The ways in which to make them trust the goodness of other people are also the ways in which to make them trust our own. (1354)

Aristotle offers that epideictic speech holds unique inroads into establishing rapport between speaker and audience. Whether this rapport is authentic is a natural and just critique of this position. Indeed, both passages as translated are still weighed down by the perennial

critiques of rhetoric broadly, attendant to the discourse since at least *Gorgias*: critiquing that “rascally, ignoble, deceitful” manner of speech that delights in making the “better seem the worse” and vice versa (98). It is always possible that the epideictic functions to establish a false sense of identification between hearers and speakers—that it could be used in a predatory sense. Even the wording of the passages above hints at contrivance or involuntariness: that there is a “required view” of the speaker, that the worth of the speaker is something we should “make clear,” or that “there are ways to make [the audience] trust” the goodness of the speaker. The emphasis in these passages on making, on fabrication (in both the sense of creating as well as conflating) could be suggested as a troubling and particular danger of the epideictic, and of a speaker who knows what you like/dislike and sets about to influence your action without an actual shared concern for your interests. But this is of lesser concern for my line of reasoning—what is most important is that Aristotle posits in this section and throughout *Rhetoric* that the epideictic has some portion of this power. The epideictic is uniquely equipped to establish a speaker favorably in the minds of the audience. This is not to say that Aristotle was advocating for a “win at all costs” form of discourse. As Kennedy’s translation notes state, “It is clear from book 1 up to this point that a speaker should have a virtuous moral intent and an understanding of the good” (83). In the Aristotelian rhetorical economy, a virtuous disposition and intent still remains as a viable precondition for all public discourse. But nonetheless, *caveat auditor*.

What is also informative about these passages from Aristotle is that once again the confluence of the species is underscored by Aristotle’s attention to where the species happen

to overlap. In these opening remarks from this short defining chapter, the epideictic is quickly shown as a potent index of ethos. In fact, it is arguable that none of the other species of rhetoric are so clearly tied to an isolated element of the *pisteis* in Aristotle's treatise as epideictic is to ethos. As Grimaldi mentions in his notes on this passage, as the orator establishes "something as virtuous and honorable (or vicious and dishonorable)," doing so will

also serve to show forth [the speaker's *ethos*]...The honorable is primarily, if not indeed exclusively, an ethical quality and therefore has an intimate relationship to [*ethos*] and to the virtues: for [*ethos*] and the virtues are closely allied. (192).

It would be hard to argue that for an orator of any of the three Aristotelian species that the establishment of an *ethos* that functions as a positive conduit of identification between speaker and audience is a bad thing. In fact, given its place in the *pisteis*, it is seen throughout the Aristotelian system as a necessity and a necessary artistic counterpart to both *pathos* and *logos* to constitute a well-crafted rhetorical proposition.

However, I want to immediately avoid the dangers of conflation that might be suggested in my commentary. Ethos should not be thought of as synonymous with *epideixis* or vice-versa. Ethos is of course wholly isolable from epideictic speech as a distinct element of the rhetorical *pisteis*, commonly found in other wide-ranging forms of discourse that have nothing to do with praising or blaming or discussing "the good." I argue, however, that ethos and *epideixis* have certain shared concerns: what audiences perceive of as "the good," what

audiences will give assent to as a result of experience and cultural influence, what “counts” for forms of evidence or chosen commonplaces in various speech situations. Aristotle’s Socratic example of considering the audience—that “it is not difficult to praise Athenians in Athens” (1367<sup>b</sup>30)—encapsulates the overlap between ethos and the epideictic. In such a situation, the employment of praise for the audience in question establishes good rapport (unless perceived to be flattery, which invokes its own host of problems). It could suggest that a speaker be aware of the favorable commonplaces and the stockpile of communal experience from which to draw to secure trust and thereby give the speaker’s propositions legitimacy. Ethos can and does operate outside of the bounds of the epideictic, but the epideictic is reliant on ethos for its operations. Epideictic speech then in a way might be thought of as the employment of public ethos occasioned with the subject of praise or blame. And again, to avoid conflation, I would add that where there is ethos, there is not always *epideixis*. They are not fungible. But operating like an indicator element, the presence of an auditor’s attention to establishing a positively perceived ethos is often a helpful indication of the presence of epideictic purposes, even in the other rhetorical species.

What is encouraging for this project’s purposes is the potential inroad that an epideictic function has in the other species of rhetoric. If we can allow that the employment of *epideixis* is importantly bound up in the project of establishing a positive ethos in the view of the audience, then it stands to reason that such an epideictic function may at times be present in the enacting of both forensic and deliberative rhetoric. Again, there are other ways for a speaker to develop and maintain ethos that are not reliant on acts of praise and blame.

But various lines of insight that focus on models of conduct, exemplary human action, or “the good” as vaguely constituted will invoke an epideictic spirit. This could happen in forensic rhetoric through an attempt to establish the character of an individual whose very character is at issue. In deliberative rhetoric, as mentioned, this might be an attempt by a legislative body at making decisions that will move society toward a positive outcome, assuming that the legislative body is acting in earnest good faith for the better of society as a whole. Or in either deliberative or forensic rhetoric, it might be the appeal to a precedent of human excellence or depravity as a sort of lodestone for current action.

### *The Subject Matter of the Epideictic*

After his treatment of the effect and purpose of the epideictic, Aristotle then enumerates the “greatest virtues” which are “those most useful to others,” much as he does in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1366<sup>b</sup>6). He does this to establish again the *topoi* of the epideictic speech—to account for what is commonly referenced when praising human action. He enumerates here various virtues with suggested utility (“those most useful”), indicating Aristotle’s position regarding epideictic speech generally. His disposition certainly doesn’t seem to align with the historical relegation of epideictic speech that has followed after his taxonomy. He is here ascribing to epideictic speech a concern with utility in the realm of human comportment—not simple showpiece rhetoric. Aristotle recognizes that the subject matter of epideictic speech is civically important and vital to the ongoing stamina and stability of a community. He suggests that the virtues most commonly used as the focus of

epideictic speech (contingent to Athenian society, though he of course makes no such qualification) are justness, liberality, manly courage, self-control, magnanimity, prudence, et al. After working through this list of virtues, Aristotle suggests a latitude regarding “other things” or virtues that fall within the general scheme of *to kalon*. Those “things productive of virtue are necessarily honorable,” implying that the aforementioned list is not exhaustive, that there is a range of interpretation and application regarding the epideictic commonplaces. I mention this as it is once again an indicator of a more expansive awareness of rhetorical practice in the Aristotelian system than is often assumed. As I’ve argued, Aristotle’s division of the species is often read with too much restriction and limitation. His acknowledgment of “other things” lends inventive power to the speaker, suggesting instead a soft algorithm for a speaker to use in determining his or her own commonplaces. The doors are flung open for discovering the base elements of the epideictic in not only Aristotle’s time, but across time and circumstances as well.

These epideictic commonplaces all have a shared axis, which Aristotle discusses after enumerating the virtues. What they all share, and what thereby makes them worthy of inclusion as centerpieces of epideictic speech, is an essence of rarity. They operate on a basis of distinction and hierarchy. Talking about this rarity, and why the rare is desirable, Aristotle says, “things extraordinary and things in the power of only one person are more honorable, for they are more memorable” (1367<sup>a</sup>25). Scarcity or rarity is a preferable status for a thing, an action, a state of affairs, because it is inherently more memorable. While this criterion might play on specific Athenian anxieties about legacy, namesake, and pedigree, it also

brushes up against a more generalized social and psychological desire for safe forms of distinction, for acceptable uniqueness. In a culture such as Aristotle's, which was arguably more directly reliant on memory as a vector of longevity, it is understandable perhaps why "the memorable" is favored as that which serves as a fitting subject of the epideictic. Objects and acts of praise or blame were arguably not as easily or simplistically preserved in Aristotle's time as they are now, given our technological advances in print and image production and capture. Linking the epideictic with this "canon" of rhetoric, Aristotle suggests that the most memorable of things were the most sure guarantors of decorous human action in the future, and thereby were the most sure guarantors of Athenian culture (or culture generally).

The notion of the memorable operates on a subtle and assumed principle of aesthetic hierarchy that keeps people searching for "the good." This is akin to what Dave Hickey calls the "precognitive certainty" that there are things such as "jump shots and sunsets," as Hickey says, "worthy of mention" (*The Invisible Dragon* 69). This certainty is "precognitive" in that it is born upon a general desire to witness anew the rare, uncommon, or excellent. Such a desire requires no forethought or positive identification. And it need not be a desire in service of personal distinction, but can be animated with a communal awareness—a desire to see a collective group (such as a culture, a society) exhibit excellence or rarity of behavior, actions that "surpass expectation" (1368<sup>a</sup>38). Such action inherently limns a possibility for others to aspire to, a further ideality, and it is this that the epideictic takes as its provenance. And the motivations for this impulse range wide.



Aristotle qualifies certain of the virtues listed by talking about their relative impacts as viewed from the level of social interaction. While many of the actions and patterns of conduct described by Aristotle might fall under the category of the supererogatory in terms of moral action (that is, they could suggest going well beyond the expected measure of decorum to achieve a given end), Aristotle asserts that utility is the most crucial hallmark of the best of virtues (1366<sup>b</sup>6). With this distinction, Aristotle grants that the truly exceptional is not merely any notable object or action that is unique, but one that's also useful. By underscoring utility as a necessary criterion for identifying a praiseworthy virtue, Aristotle is suggesting that an overall sort of integral function is key for determining the subject of epideictic discourse. Praise seems most due in instances where the exceptional form of a thing (its beauty and comeliness) meets with utility.

Chapter IX also contains a detailed treatment of specific instances of “things absolutely good”—enumerated for the employment of epideictic orators. These virtues contain the rarity indicated earlier, and many of them also hinge on acts of self-sacrifice and altruism, for example: “whatever someone has done for his country, overlooking his own interest,” “works...done for the sake of others,” “successes gained for others,” and “acts of kindness” (1367<sup>a</sup>17-20). Aristotle continues to enumerate pro-social behaviors, often pursued at the risk of personal suffering, as being self-evident examples of what constitutes “the good” in terms of human action, and thereby what is worthy of being considered an epideictic commonplace. It is after this survey of epideictic *topoi* that Aristotle, according to Kennedy, “becomes prescriptive, for the first time seeming to lay down rules that the orator

should follow if he is to succeed in persuading an audience” (82). And it is here where critics might once again posit that Aristotle’s rhetoric is predicated on falsity or what Wayne Booth called “rhetrickery,” as Aristotle seems to be suggesting that a well-placed euphemism is not only permissible but also required for effective deployment of *epideixis*. He suggests, for example, “that a cautious person” can be described as “cold and designing and that a simple person is amiable,” or that calling an “irascible and excitable person ‘straightforward’ and an arrogant person ‘high minded’” is permissible (1367<sup>a</sup>28-29). Again, this section should be read with Aristotle’s virtuous orator in mind as a necessary precondition. What this passage suggests is a confidence granted to the orator by Aristotle, a mark of good faith. If one operates as a speaker on the precondition of virtue and societally oriented intention, then “a speaker can be allowed a certain amount of cleverness in obtaining legitimate ends” (Kennedy 83). In this way the epideictic is also shown to have the potential of a sort of harmonizing function at best, or a “character card-stacking” at worst: sifting the admirable qualities of an individual’s character while opting to not comment on the less desirable characteristics. As such, it might be read as disingenuous, although its overarching function is always that of the establishment and preservation of civil society. Aristotle concludes this section of Chapter IX with a reiteration of the key distinguishing feature of that which is praiseworthy, that which “goes beyond the norm in the direction of the nobler and more honorable” (1367<sup>b</sup>31).

After this short, prescriptive section on associated terms, there begins a discussion of character and the epideictic. Aristotle claims that

Since praise is based on actions and to act in accordance with deliberate purpose is characteristic of a worthy person, one should try to show him acting in accordance with deliberative purpose. It is useful for him to seem to have so acted often. (1367<sup>b</sup>32)

This statement not only presages Aristotle's forthcoming discussion of "praise and deliberations" being "part of a common species" (1367<sup>b</sup>35), but I find that it also offers insight on the confluence of forensic/judicial rhetoric and epideictic rhetoric, defining an area where the two species coningle. What is suggested in this brief accounting is something similar to Chaim Perelman and Lucy Olbrechts-Tyteca's version act-person argumentation: that it is a popular practice for moral character to be intuited (correctly or not) from actions made publically known (295). It states that our actions can be properly intuited as tellers of our underlying moral character, whether praiseworthy or blameworthy. This highlights a casuistic form of reasoning (in the non-pejorative sense): a sort of character-based precedent. Aristotle suggests this as a basis for involving witnesses in judicial rhetoric, admonishing an awareness of the reputation of witnesses and their potential situatedness in relation to the accused (as friends, enemies, or some combination of the two) (1376<sup>a</sup>19). Such judicial reasoning is borne upon attempts to establish a clear indicator of a person's character, and this character is made incarnate through reference to their observable actions. This is not only suggested in *Rhetoric*, but is clearly invoked in *Nicomachean Ethics*, the notion being that ethical conduct or its inverse is indexed by rationally and voluntarily chosen acts predicated upon deliberation. Praise and blame are inevitably bound up in these

determinations, used ultimately as the social binding agent to guide and influence not only public and political, but in this case, legal decisions. The open spectacle of social disapprobation, of character assassination, brought forth through negative discourse, is a compelling public motivator for improved behavior both anciently and contemporarily, as is the positive telling of a person's past actions.

The recent focus of this analysis concerns the comingling of the rhetorical species by highlighting moments in the text where more than one rhetorical mode seems to be in play, as suggested by Aristotle. In doing that, I have set forth some preliminary evidence that Aristotle both implicitly and explicitly recognizes the overlap of his own species. This, I argue, stands at odds with the historical narrative that tends to rank the species in order of importance, with only two permutations that always find the epideictic in third place. However, much evidence has already suggested that Aristotle explicitly recognizes moments of comingling between the epideictic and the deliberative so strong that the two species seem to yield their distinctive features. Aristotle is led to state explicitly that “praise and deliberations are part of a common species” (1367<sup>b</sup>35). This is an important linkage, given that according to Kennedy, Aristotle deemed deliberative “as the finest form [of rhetoric],” thus taking up his discussion of deliberative rhetoric first, the epideictic second, and the judicial third. If these two assertions hold up, and there is direct textual evidence from Aristotle to suggest that they do, this alone should be sufficient evidence enough to compel reconsideration of the role of *epideixis* in the Western rhetorical canon.

A common approach to contemporary rhetorical scholarship involves the counter-narrative or counter-history of what has for long seemed to be a given or doctrinaire interpretation of the field. The attempt of this study to revisit the epideictic and recover perhaps a significance that has been denied to it are in this vein. But there already exist, at various junctures in rhetorical history, recognitions of the overlap of the Aristotelian rhetorical species. It is important to note that this awareness is not a new phenomenon, just a phenomenon that rhetorical scholars generally should begin to more directly acknowledge. There are also examples from the history of western rhetoric that question the Aristotelian division of rhetorical art. Famous among these is the critique of Aristotle by Ramus (1543). However, for my analysis, I will consider the commentaries of Oxford scholar John Rainolds. Rainolds' critique directly embodies the very interpretations regarding epideictic rhetoric that I hope to question. I argue that his perspective is among the clearest representations of the dismissal of the third genre and Aristotelian rhetoric generally, and it is emblematic of other broadly conceived ideas regarding an insufficient reading of Aristotle's division. In his lectures on Aristotle, Rainolds argues that by dividing up rhetoric as he does, Aristotle

Omits more causes and questions than he includes, omits greater ones than he includes, and fails to mention their countless subdivisions....He is not ignorant, I think, that he is dividing falsely, but he is considering custom rather than truth. (229)

As Rainolds interprets Aristotle's chosen method, the latter's division is a serviceable arrangement, not a prescriptive and absolute account of all speech habits and their suitable

commonplaces. This reading, evident in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, emphasizes again the contingent status of the *Rhetoric* and its contents, and resists a totalizing reading that assumes clear cut and expansive accounts of all there is to speech, even though the anxiety and desire for such totality is evident in the rest of Rainolds' lectures.

Continuing on, Rainolds complains that “the three kinds [or species of rhetoric] seem improperly distributed among the three times, since, according to Quintilian, we praise and blame things past rather than things present” (235). Where Rainolds uncovers an ostensible imprecision, I would again argue that this is an indicator of the epideictic's tendency toward comingling—its ability to draw from the storehouse of a shared historical past, a commonplace of icons, to shore up current conduct and move toward the future with concerted purpose. Rainolds continues with a slightly vexed tone, saying:

Of Aristotle, I ask why he would propose honor as the end for demonstrative speaking, and usefulness for deliberative speaking? It is wicked to recommend that which, if performed, you could not praise. It is false to praise that which you would not wish to recommend if you were obliged to do so. Prudent and wise men recommend the performance of those things which they praise when performed, and advise against the performance of those things they vituperate when done. (245)

Rainolds' difficulty with this seeming inconsistency in Aristotle, I argue, is merely further indication of the difficulty of sequestering these rhetorical categories into hermetic units. Rainolds' resistance to this passage can unveil many potential explanations about the nature

of the text in question: oversight on the part of Aristotle, historical and cultural incommensurability between Aristotle's and Rainolds' times and their differing standards of communication, or a more pliable and dynamic division within *Rhetoric* than is often assumed at first reading of Aristotle. What is ultimately revealed is that these species often share intention, purpose, and ends. Rainolds recognizes the comingling of the species, but arrives at a different conclusion regarding Aristotle's division. "I declare that, according to the opinion of Aristotle," Rainolds continues,

Honor must always be borne in mind in both demonstration and deliberation. There is only this difference between deliberative and demonstrative speaking: in deliberation what we recommend be done, in demonstration we praise as done. (247)

In Rainolds' final assessment, he determines that there is but slight difference between deliberative and demonstrative speaking. Because of these apparent imprecisions and incongruities, Rainolds determines Aristotle's division to be "mangled and false" (247). This is likely the result of Rainolds' empirically rigorous mind striving for the crisp edges and bounded order representative of the best works of his time.

I include Rainolds' anxieties specifically here because they can be read as external evidence from a secondary source that the question of Aristotle's division is hardly settled, and has been an ongoing locus of discussion throughout rhetorical history. However, where Rainolds' finds a ruined and suspect system, I argue that Aristotle provided for the confluence of rhetorical species, and knowingly allowed for their overlap and ambiguity.

There is proof enough within the *Rhetoric* itself to suggest that scholars might provide a more charitable reading of Aristotle's system, recognizing the built-in affordances for symphonic operation between the species. And the closest resonance between the species arguably occurs between the epideictic and the deliberative.

In Chapters IV-VIII of *Rhetoric*, Aristotle walks the reader through his assessment of the features of deliberative rhetoric. He says that there are at least five "important subjects on which people deliberate and on which deliberative orators give advice in public," these being: "finances, war and peace, national defense, imports and exports, and the framing of laws" (1359<sup>b</sup>7). Aristotle's detailed explanation of each of these key areas reveals moments where the concerns and methods of epideictic delivery dovetail with the deliberative to the point where they become difficult to tease apart as discrete concerns levied at different audiences.

In his explanations of each of these five stated areas of concern, Aristotle admonishes the speaker to not simply know the history and methods of his own region or country, but to be aware of neighboring societies' fiscal, trade, defensive and martial practices, and their results (1359<sup>b</sup>8-9). His advice suggests once again a system of logic-based precedent as a means of accounting for future concerns, orienting the direction of a society with the vicarious experience of intercultural observation. This helps to establish paradigms of proper state conduct in the present that will more firmly guarantee the perpetuation of a culture or society. Much as the epideictic takes as its models the laudable or deplorable conduct of individuals (or exemplary specimens of artifacts, animals, etc.), the deliberative looks to



larger-scale exemplars and societal paradigms as a means of suggesting more fitting avenues of state conduct and improved decision making. A case could perhaps be made, given the proximities observed between these two species, that the major difference between deliberative and epideictic speech is that *epideixis* seeks to sway the individual as a subjective unit of society, whereas deliberative rhetoric's orientation is toward collectives. They are both reliant on conduct models with the key difference being that of scale, and they are both reliant on concomitant concerns: as Kennedy states in his translation notes at the beginning of Chapter IV, Aristotle's is a system wherein the "*Ethical* includes [the] *political*" (51).

Aristotle asserts that deliberations, like the epideictic, are concerned with good and evil (this is what "the deliberative speaker advises about" (52). The Bekker edition shows "good" from the opening of Chapter IV (1359<sup>a</sup>30) as ἀγαθὸν from *to agathon* or "the good." This is a slight departure from the use of *to kalon* in Aristotle's following chapter concerning the epideictic, where the tone suggests something good by virtue of its "having something beautiful about it." Kennedy, however, asserts elsewhere that the distinctions between these words are probably forced, saying that *agathon* is a "common word for 'good' in Greek..., more general in meaning, though often moral and with no necessary aesthetic connection" (79). The crucial consideration is that once again, we are brought to an awareness of the proximity of these seemingly distinct species in a way that makes their discrete use difficult to rigidly categorize.

This discussion of "the good" is once again emphasized soon after the partitioning of deliberative rhetoric in Chapter IV. Chapter V continues covering the features of the

deliberative, beginning with what might be arguably the upshot of not only the rhetorical enterprise but societal formation generally, serving as the “ultimate good”—the *summum bonum* of human experience. Aristotle says that both for “an individual privately and to all people generally there is one goal [*skopos*] at which they aim in what they choose to do and in what they avoid. Summarily stated, this is happiness [*eudaimonia*] and its parts” (1360<sup>b</sup>1).

Aristotle continues, defining happiness and attempting to account for “the sources of its parts” (1360<sup>b</sup>2). Kennedy offers the reader a synopsis of the Aristotelian notion of happiness, citing *The Nichomachean Ethics* as containing Aristotle’s “preferred definition” of happiness as “activity [*energeia*] in accordance with virtue,” with “the highest virtue...found only in contemplative life” (57). Also in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle comments on the multiform nature of the good, acknowledging that “good is predicated in as many ways as there are modes of existence” (5). And it is this good, this excellence of comportment, of craft, of thought, of athleticism, of all things relative to a given society, that the epideictic seeks through its reliance on examples and shared histories both excellent and tragic.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

The basis of my argument from this chapter can be seen as constituting both a strong and a weak form. The strong form argument is that Aristotle intentionally allowed the epideictic more latitude as a meaningful speech genre, one that was crucial to the operation of life in Athenian society. The difficulty with this line of reasoning arises from the contention that we invent Aristotle each time we translate him—that the complexity of

hermeneutic distance between the ancient acropolis and our time is enough to render any encounter with Aristotle as one predicated on a need for hermeneutic creativity, argumentation, and interpretation. Naturally, this suggests that for every vision of Aristotle and his rhetorical theory, there will naturally be a counterdiscourse (as there should be). If this strong form argument is not compelling enough for some audiences because of a direct lack of textual evidence on behalf of the confluence the rhetorical species, then the weak form argument might prove more compelling. The weak form argument I am advancing is that there is not enough textual evidence, or at least not a compelling and unified body of hermeneutic proof, to sustain an argument in favor of Aristotle's dismissal of the epideictic as unimportant, and that this dismissal occurs somewhere (or many "somewheres") in the rhetorical lineage post-Aristotle. Textual evidence being what it is, there is clearly not any settled notion that Aristotle discretely separated the categories, nor that he desired *epideixis* to be seen as an inferior and degenerate form of eloquence. His text is explicit concerning the epideictic as a discursive art closely aligned with the deliberative (which he gave primacy), which considers the broad span of time to situate its crucial arguments (often subtly stated) in the present. Aristotle's notion of the epideictic takes part in the ethics of living with and among others in a society whose determinations fall (and often fail) to verbal wrangling and argumentation. And within this scene, an epideictic concern continually asks what the audience sees as good, how that is reflected in the speaker's concerns, and how this identification can help foster joint civic action.

Yet even if we accord epideictic rhetoric nothing more than its oft-assumed role as showpiece rhetoric, it would still occupy some important role within not only the Aristotelian system, warranting inclusion in his tripartite division, but also within an Athenian society keen on training orators—a place where your ability to speak and argue well could mean the difference between life and death, poverty or prosperity. If it is *only*, as many are wont to argue, a discursive index of stylistic ability on the part of the speaker, then it becomes a crucial training ground for all eloquence (including the assumedly elevated species of deliberative and forensic speech). It is at very least the laboratory, the gymnasium of speech—where the training and “feeling out” of discursive moves comes full circle. It is an arena for honing the key catalyst for democratic society: propositions, stated eloquently, for public decision.

## CHAPTER II

### SELECTED INTERPRETATIONS OF *EPIDEIXIS*

The focus of chapter I was to reconsider the epideictic as theorized by Aristotle, whose model arguably serves as the most enduring and popular taxonomy. The chapter attempted to account for the standard reception of rhetoric through the Aristotelian system, with the hopes of providing a theoretical starting-point from which standard notions of *epideixis* might be augmented. I argued that even within the Aristotelian division of the corpus of rhetoric, there is textual evidence to at least complicate the interpretation that the three species of rhetoric are easily isolable, and furthermore there exists textual evidence to challenge the idea that epideictic rhetoric was of tertiary consideration or lesser status within Aristotle's system.

David M. Timmerman suggests that a helpful way to view the history of the epideictic genre is by envisioning "A funnel that first narrows to Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* (where the genre is formed as the confluence of several types) and then broadens again after his day" (qtd. in Enos 231). The prior chapter hoped to illustrate this presumed "narrowing," where Aristotle likely, for the first time in rhetorical history, used the Greek form of the word *epideixis* not simply to characterize the features of given texts, but to characterize an entire genre and subtype of civic language. The current chapter will in some measure attempt to account for the post-Aristotelian broadening of the epideictic by examining selected interlocutors from the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition. It will offer an episodic history of the movements of epideictic rhetoric after Aristotle, seeing *epideixis* as a

travelling discourse that serves a variety of intercultural purposes while always maintaining its essential core: that it involves chiefly praise or blame of notable human conduct, that it concerns itself with non-human excellence or baseness as well, and that it indexes the rare and unprecedented. And yet, around this core, different interpreters have added to the notion of the epideictic, making it a notational term, subject to the nuances of the person defining it in a given cultural moment. These same theorists have also questioned the genre in a way that supports my broadening initiated in the first chapter, but addressing issues such as the subject and focus of epideictic rhetoric, its temporal focus, and its tendency to overlap with the other two Aristotelian species. This historical tracing will suggest, as my overall thesis does, that the epideictic is a malleable notion that resists clear and steadfast categorizations. It will hopefully, with some evidence, show that there are various “epideictics.” This history will culminate in contemporary rhetorical and aesthetic theories which both directly and indirectly suggest the current relevance of the epideictic genre, theories which also add to what might be obviously and classically examples of *epideixis*. This will hopefully set the stage for the discussion in the subsequent chapters, which will hope to illustrate moments of contemporary *epideixis* in various contexts.

### ***Rhetorica ad Herennium* and the Epideictic**

One common lineage of interpretation in the canon of Western rhetoric seems to typically move from Aristotle to Cicero and through Quintilian, given the lasting influence of Aristotle on Roman oratorical thought. Both Cicero and Quintilian can arguably be read

as qualification of and expansion upon Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, and for the sake of a discussion of the epideictic, this is likely a helpful if well-worn path. But before considering Cicero and Quintilian, it is important to examine the perspective of the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, as this text suggests a more dynamic version of *epideixis* than latter theorists, and also illustrates a more symphonic relationship between the species of rhetoric as codified by Aristotle. While early assessment of this anonymous text suggested that perhaps Cicero was its author, contemporary understanding posits that it was written by an author whose identity is unknown to us, someone we know only through his (assumedly, "his," given the gender dynamics of the time) manuscript.<sup>5</sup> Close attention to how the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* characterizes the epideictic as also a telling marker suggesting non-Ciceronian authorship: the tone regarding *epideixis* is markedly different from Cicero's. The author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* leaves a fluid interpretation of the rhetorical species which more closely aligns with Aristotle's division than it does with Cicero's later, often dismissive or indifferent, treatment of the epideictic.

In the exordium, the anonymous author details the overall project of public speaking, which is to "discuss capably those matters which law and custom have fixed for the uses of citizenship, and to secure as far as possible the agreement of his hearers" (5). This very Aristotelian definition of rhetoric renders it a practical art, a basis for citizenship, an art whose *topoi* are defined by precedent, both legal and extra-legal. The three "causes which the speaker must treat" are those three as defined by Aristotle and later reiterated by both Cicero

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<sup>5</sup> See Harry Caplan's comprehensive notes regarding the work's authorship in *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard U Press, 1954.

and Quintilian. The *Rhetorica* defines epideictic as “devoted to the praise or censure of some particular person,” restricting its scope, at least at this particular moment, to the actual discussion of human action, deeds, and/or character. Here, in this definition, there is not so much an elaborate vision of the species broken into their various parts: no mention of the more broad applications of epideictic as applying to non-human excellence, for example, nor its temporal orientation, or the role of audience in the assessment of its deployment. After a partitioning of various rhetorical concerns, including what have come to be known as the “canons of rhetoric,” the *Rhetorica*’s author dedicates the remainder of the balance of Book I (and all of Book II) to the juridical, and specifically to invention within the juridical. The volume of attention given to judicial rhetoric is undergird with the claim that this species of public speaking is “by far the most difficult” (59).

This demarcation with its hierarchies of difficulty and labor does seem to suggest a clean sequestration of the species as encountered elsewhere in rhetorical history. It appears at first blush that taxonomic limitations are already locking down the epideictic. But even within this initial treatment of the juridical early in *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, there is abundant genre overlap. When discussing the manner of selecting the most appropriate introduction for a juridical oration, the author suggests that the speaker consider “what kind of cause it is.” These “kinds” are enumerated by the author as being “honourable, discreditable, doubtful, and petty” (11). For my purposes, I am drawn to the notion that in assessing the most fitting way of crafting a juridical oration, the author is bound to consider matters of honor as determining the appropriate approach. The author states that:



A cause is understood to be of the honourable kind when we either defend what seems to deserve defence by all men, or attack what all men seem in duty bound to attack; for example, when we defend a hero, or prosecute a parricide. (11)

From this, we understand that for the author, honorable defenses require the consideration of paragons of comportment generally and their inverses. And these are not privately-held, subjective determinations, but decisions that seem to weigh most heavily in the public sphere, being things that “deserve defence by all men.” Such considerations are in service of discovering generally understood and publically-valid assessments of virtue and excellence to which a general audience will respond favorably. And these recognitions become indices of the speaker himself: they reflect an advocate who is or is not sensitive to what the community holds in value. The proper intuiting and deployment of these common objects of praise are necessary precursors to fully engaging in effective juridical discourse. Being that these objects of praise deal with the honorable and dishonorable, with exemplars of surpassing excellence, these particular juridical considerations are thoroughly epideictic. Epideictic concerns take part in the very formation of effective juridical discourse, not as discrete and distant considerations, but as commonplaces and starting points of the juridical species itself. As Laurent Pernot suggests, juridical discourse is thoroughly seasoned with the “additive role of praise” (9).

Much as Aristotle often aligns the purposes of the deliberative and the epideictic, Book III of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* covers both of these species together. This is never stated

as an intentional pairing in the *Rhetorica*, though it is telling that they are treated together here, as their concerns are frequently shared. Book III divides the treatment of the deliberative and epideictic species along seemingly clear axes; however, the definitions of deliberative rhetoric are again, as in Aristotle, shot through with what might be deemed epideictic concerns. As it is comingled in Aristotle's assessment, *epideixis* is again a present facet in the *Rhetorica*'s assessment of political rhetoric.

The author argues that a speaker involved with political rhetoric will of necessity (and often, while speaking) "set up Advantage as his aim." This advantage is bifurcated into "two aspects: Security and Honor" (161). Honor, in political speech, is "divided into the Right and the Praiseworthy." "The Right" is subdivided into various of the cardinal virtues as found in the *Nichomachean Ethics* and elsewhere throughout the ethical treatises of Western antiquity: "Wisdom, Justice, Courage, and Temperance" (163). Each of these virtues is explained in kind, though the exact definitions are of less concern to my current thesis. What is of necessary concern is that again these virtues are held aloft as ideals sought after at both the individual and state level. Operating from a position of self-evidence, these are paragon virtues, the accumulation (or loss) of which constitutes a necessary element within political strategizing, a strategizing most frequently enacted through persuasive discourse. "Honor" (*to kalon*), which in the Aristotelian tripartite division is the primary consideration for the epideictic (1358<sup>b5</sup>), is here a necessary consideration for the other species of rhetoric. This acquisition of the advantage of honor (with its subcategories of virtue) is thoroughly self-reflexive: it is concerned with pedigree, public and international appearance, legacy, and

behavioral and diplomatic precedent. The political advantage of being a praiseworthy individual, body politic, or nation is once again replete with these precursory epideictic considerations.

The author, still treating deliberative rhetoric, further underscores the convergence between the deliberative and epideictic, writing that, “The Praiseworthy is what produces an honorable remembrance, at the time of the event and afterwards.” This is asserted as a means for the speaker to draw attention to a proposed course of action or a historical precedent for the purpose of guiding the state toward similar beneficial ends. Separating the “right” from the “praiseworthy” in this discussion, the author argues that correct moral action of a nation should be followed regardless of the potential for praise and recognition, that “we should pursue the right not alone for the sake of praise,” but that when a thing “is shown to be right, we shall show that it is also praiseworthy” (169), wherein praise becomes an effect of the first consideration of decorum. In this analysis, there is not a simple method of teasing apart these confluent discourses of epideictic and deliberative to show where one alone is operational while the other is not. Important to my argument is that in the preceding examples, the epideictic is not only importantly present in a formational element of juridical discourse, but very saliently present in deliberative considerations. Resonating in the treatment of political oratory are the earlier echoes of Aristotle’s argument that “praise and deliberations are part of a common species” (1367<sup>b</sup>35).

Turning to “the Epideictic kind of cause,” the author of *ad Herennium* classifies this species perhaps as expected, arguing that it takes as its topics “Praise and Censure.” The

subjects of praise are given as “External Circumstances, Physical Attributes, and Qualities of Character” (174-175), which constitute relatively popular *topoi* for epideictic invention. The first two subjects, external circumstances and physical attributes, are largely considerations of externalities accrued through “chance, or by fortune.” Within external circumstances is included “descent, education, wealth, kinds of power, titles to fame, citizenship, friendships.” Physical attributes are here considered as natural endowments, not as proficiencies purposefully gained by an individual. These include “agility, strength, beauty, health, and their contraries.” Qualities of character contrast with the prior topics in that they are considered intrinsic. They “rest upon our judgment and thought” and include “wisdom, justice, courage, temperance” and their contraries (175). Again, as in the section on deliberative rhetoric, we find this emphasis on the practice or demonstration of the cardinal virtues by individuals. As in deliberation, the presence or absence of these virtues creates the necessary basis and context for accounts of praise or blame, respectively. Epideictic is once again inexorably bound up in ethical determinations, representations of public decorum, and assessments of individual character and action. Ethos is here aligned with the epideictic, as it is at points in the Aristotelian account. The *ad Herennium* suggests that in constructing epideictic statements, one should proceed from detailing the character of the person as indicated by their acts (179). The assumption here is obvious, of course: that actions and habits are clear tellers and manifestations of a deeper and more fundamental character, and that these are useful in affecting an audience when a speaker is considering persuasive elements of a given oration.

*Rhetorica ad Herennium*, while notably similar on various accounts, is ultimately distinct from Cicero's general attitude regarding the epideictic in that, as I will argue, the author of the *ad Herennium* grants the species more confluence than does Cicero. In fact, the anonymous author takes a more Aristotelian view of the divisions of rhetoric, allowing that a necessary intermingling occurs between the three and, therefore, a thorough knowledge of each allows for a more complete and holistic orator. The author writes that, although epideictic rhetoric in its true, isolated form is a more rare discursive act, presenting "itself only seldom in life," it is nonetheless important because of its cross-species entailments. It is not simply a *progymnasmata* for demonstration of oratorical ability. The author, acknowledging the infrequent employment of what might be considered pure *epideixis* nonetheless recognizes that even if

Epideictic is only seldom employed by itself independently, still in juridical and deliberative causes extensive sections are often devoted to praise or censure. Therefore, let us believe that this kind of cause also must claim some measure of our industry. (184-185)

The author is here evidently attuned to the confluence of the rhetorical species in a manner belying their oft-assumed separation from each other. If not granted its own expediency outright as a distinct genre and a meaningful rhetorical force, epideictic rhetoric is presented at very least as a necessary ingredient for the creation of a larger message. As the cited examples of juridical and deliberative rhetoric demonstrate, considerations of honor and dishonor (and the very human acts that serve as the benchmarks for these considerations) are

implicitly considered in these domains. Honor and dishonor are central to the epideictic enterprise, and their appearance is suggestive of a more manifold rhetoric than any strict taxonomical division might suggest.

In the *ad Herennium*, we are shown that the epideictic is important to argumentation in multiple ways. First, speaking metadiscursively, most speakers who desire a successful reception ought to frame their arguments with a consideration of the audience firmly in mind. This consideration involves, among myriad other factors, an attempt to approximate what audiences hold as important or worth hearing, to understand their tastes, their values, and their ethical inclinations as a means of situating an argument on shared space from which dialogue can proceed. This is the first way in which argumentation (of any sort) should ideally proceed, and this baseline condition is an epideictic condition. The *ad Herennium* also recognizes epideictic as an important genre of speech on its own. Arguably employed less frequently than its counterparts, the epideictic still retains unique features that make it worthy of individual scrutiny and mastery. While it is not solely a step in development toward a more full and complete oratorical awareness, but also an end to be sought in its own right, the *ad Herennium's* author does assert that the epideictic constitutes part of the training of the complete orator who is ready to employ effective speech in a multitude of situations (182-185). It is also deemed as worthy for mastery because of its intertwining with the other modes of public argumentation. The assessment of human conduct becomes a central key to effective speech in both deliberative and juridical

argumentation, and a speaker cannot cleanly extract epideictic considerations from the formation of their arguments without undesired results.

### **Cicero and the Epideictic**

In contrast to the *ad Herennium*'s more enveloping take on the rhetorical species stands Cicero, who in *De Oratore*, indicates a history of western rhetoric that largely discounts *epideixis* as a viable speech genre. Suggesting early in the discourse that the epideictic genre is “useful” though “less important” than judicial and political rhetoric (Watson 94), the epideictic is from the outset freighted with a limitation of utility and significance. Thus categorized, Cicero all but excludes coverage of *epideixis*, continuing his ongoing dialogue with a focus on the importance of both forensic and deliberative rhetoric, with the epideictic remaining conspicuously absent until near the end of the treatise.

In *De Oratore*, Book I, section 141, Cicero talks of a “third kind” of rhetoric, “which [has] to do with the extolling or reviling of particular persons” with its own “prescribed commonplaces,” namely, “the greatness of the individuals concerned” (99). *Epideixis*, which Cicero lumps together under the catch-all term of “Panegyrics,” is either of little concern for Cicero, or is in his view something whose mastery is so self-evident that it is a subject that presents no difficulty (457). His analysis throughout books I and II of *De Oratore* are by his own admission dedicated to the analysis of deliberative and judicial oratory, with the epideictic being “excluded from [his] set of instructions at the outset.” The rationale behind this exclusion is that for Cicero “there are a great many kinds of oratory that are both more

dignified and wider in scope” than the epideictic, and as these go untreated as well, *epideixis* should also be excluded from thorough analysis. In some ways, this moment presents Cicero as resisting the received taxonomical lineage of Aristotle—almost as a precursor to the more defiant resistance of Ramus and Hobbes. Cicero essentially employs a *praeteritio* to dismiss epideictic, but nonetheless this dismissal suggests a sort of centrality for the genre. It is a presence that Cicero needed to address.

Cicero claims that Roman oratorical tradition is less reliant on Panegyrics than its Greek predecessor, and given that his is a treatise in usable oratorical practice for his immediate cultural context, the general omission of the epideictic might therefore stand to reason. But what Cicero’s determination of the epideictic fails to consider is the blended and overlapping nature of the rhetorical species, that, as both Aristotle and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* indicate, the deliberative and the epideictic, and even the judicial and the epideictic, are often bound up in purpose and temporal orientation. This sense of a natural division between the species and purposes of rhetoric is evident for Cicero, when he suggests that

the Greeks themselves have constantly thrown off masses of panegyrics, designed more for reading and for entertainment, or for giving a laudatory account of some person, than for the practical purposes of public life with which we are now concerned. (341)

This move of delimitation again paints *epideixis* as mainly privatized, inconsequentially spectatorial, and impractical—something of little or no concern to publically-judged and



useful deliberation. However, this notion of an epideictic rhetoric being primarily a private speech act, divested of public sanction is challenged by Pernot, who argues that “Far from being gratuitous or arbitrary, epideictic speech would appear to be an authorized speech; its legitimacy is drawn from one or another form of mandate conferred upon the orator” (83). The selection of an epideictic orator for a demonstrative purpose was, in both Roman and Greek times, a consular choice. Speakers were chosen for particular public contexts and ceremonies in the way that current consular bodies might select speakers for public events. This should underscore the important social function fulfilled by disparate acts of speech that could be considered “epideictic.” Pernot continues, arguing, “We can therefore conclude that epideictic speeches normally were not initiated by an individual; rather, the orator responded to an exterior solicitation, which took the form of an order, a command, or an invitation, or an institutional or legal obligation, or of a simple custom” (85). While the epideictic flourished as a private speech genre for occasions of everyday life, it always retained a notable public function.

After making a distinction regarding the necessity of the epideictic in Greek vs. Roman society, Cicero then cites the volumes of Greek works that operate as *epideixis*, countering these with the more laconic cultural difference of Roman memorial:

our Roman commendatory speeches...have either the bare and unadorned brevity of evidence to a person’s character or are written to be delivered as a funeral speech, which is by no means a suitable occasion for parading one’s distinction in rhetoric. (457)

Here, in addition to the assertion that the epideictic is entirely about adornment and display, we have yet another conception regarding the character of the epideictic: that it stands opposed to simplicity and brevity, that it is defined only by ostentation, pomp, and a self-aggrandizing loquacity impertinent enough to assert itself in improper cultural contexts. If categorized as such, it stands to reason that *epideixis* can do little to assert its own civic necessity.

Cicero soldiers on, with an almost begrudging tone, offering “But nevertheless, as laudatory speeches must be delivered occasionally and sometimes even written out...let us also treat of this topic.” Cicero’s claim of the episodic utility of *epideixis* limns his belief in the strict divisions that attend the rhetorical species. He provides a culturally relevant breakdown of the disparate virtues that panegyric takes as its focus, much as Aristotle does as a means of listing the *topoi* of the species. To this, Cicero adds his own hierarchy regarding what is worthy of *epideixis*, that the virtues of individual people’s behavior or character are worthy subjects, but they gain more force and necessity as these virtues are employed outwardly for the sake of the community at large (460). He further asserts, “virtues of these kinds should also be introduced in a panegyric, since an audience will accept the bestowal of praise on the aspects of virtue that call for admiration as well as on those that give pleasure and gratification” (461). The properly wrought panegyric begs admiration, and provides “pleasure and gratification” to the audience. His conception of the species is entirely oriented to the present, what Aristotle suggests as the primary temporal focus of the epideictic. But as discussed earlier, this very temporal limitation is challenged by Aristotle

himself in the understanding that the epideictic draws freely from past acts and states of being to define future programs or actions as well, much as deliberations do. Cicero, in the above passage, fails to account for this multi-temporal nature, instead suggesting that the utility of the panegyric is met there in the moment, with an audience being persuaded to admire, to be entertained, or to be pleased. The entailments are present-specific, and no mention is made of how the implications of the panegyric might extend themselves to future action and acts by that very audience, pleased as it might be.

Continuing on with his categorization of the *topoi* of the genre (and on this point reflecting a similarity to Aristotle's thinking) Cicero says that the highest form of epideictic praise is reserved for "deeds that appear to have been performed by brave men without profit or reward," those supererogatory acts that exceed expectation and which are removed from expectations of financial or social recompense. Cicero also claims that narratives of risk and danger are especially suited to panegyric recitation for their ability to be delivered in a high and "eloquent style" (461), and proceeds to list qualities reflective of these especially worthy topics. Concluding his section on panegyric, Cicero offers an odd aside concerning the species that paints his position with a degree of ambivalence. He admits that his discourse, which up to this point has been to explain deliberative rhetoric more fully, has been charged with the emergent occasion of speaking about *epideixis*, that "the spirit has moved [him] to enlarge rather more fully on this class of topic than [he] had promised to do." While the discussion of *epideixis* is at odds with his stated purpose, Cicero admits that the facility for panegyric is something the accomplished orator should be prepared for. He asserts that for

the employment of panegyric, the speaker must “possess...a knowledge of all the virtues.” And finally, at the end of this treatment of panegyric, Cicero offers one notable (yet small) concession. After acknowledging that the proper panegyricist will have a full knowledge of virtue and vice, Cicero admits that these epideictic characteristics have cross-genre importance, that “these topics of praise and blame we shall frequently have occasion to employ in every class of law-suit” (463). This is given no development or expansion, but it stands at odds with Cicero’s prior resistance to the importance of the epideictic. In *De Oratore*, then, we find a curious progression in Cicero regarding this third species: first, a resistance to the genre and an expression of its limited efficacy, then, a brief explication of the genre as if under duress. Soon after, Cicero admits that he has been moved upon to speak more on the subject of the epideictic than he had intended, recognizing that the genre has an important preparatory function for other strains of discourse. And ultimately, Cicero mentions (if unremarkably) that the epideictic often plays an important role in judicial rhetoric—for example, when judicial *stases* include questions regarding the character of the accused. We are left then with perhaps a sense of ambivalence, a lack of surety regarding the species, perhaps prompted by epideictic’s historical alignment with sophistry. It is in turning to other works of Cicero where we gain a more robust view of his estimation of the epideictic genre.

In *Orator*, one of Cicero’s latter works, the author solidifies his resistance to the utility and practicality of the epideictic despite his limited concessions to the genre in *De Oratore*. Here, Cicero refers to epideictic (or *demonstrative*) speech as the “ornamental species

of Eloquence,” one “peculiar to the Sophists” (267). It is a type of speech accorded more poetic overtones than the other species of rhetoric, being described as “sweet, harmonious, and flowing,” with “pointed sentiments, and arrayed in all the brilliance of language” (267-268) Cicero describes the manner of epideictic speech, but then goes further to make delimiting claims regarding its efficacy and utility. To Cicero’s thinking, the demonstrative form of rhetoric “is much fitter for the parade than the field [of battle]; and being, therefore, consigned to the Palaestra, and the schools, has been long banished from the Forum” (268). *Epideixis* is here separated from action and the realm of practicality, and becomes therefore reserved for public displays far from the action.

The confinement of the epideictic to the Palaestra (the wrestling school) suggests again the assumed preparatory nature of *epideixis*: for Cicero, epideictic speech points at the reality of actual “combat” both metaphorical and literal, but it is a mere pointing—all gesture and no contact. It is still assumed to be little more than a means of employing praise and/or blame in a safe and low-stakes environment where it can be tested out. Cicero’s invocation of “the Forum,” and his assertion of epideictic’s expulsion from the Forum further solidify his position on the functionality and importance (or lack) of the epideictic genre. The Forum, being the site of public contests of the political, gladiatorial, and legal kind, serves metaphorically as the bastion of meaningful experience, of lived life, of consequential social intercourse. To deny the epideictic entrance herein is a powerfully exclusionist rhetorical move that contributes to the negative perceptions of the epideictic genre throughout Western rhetorical history. If Aristotle is, as I argue, often interpreted as

being less charitable to the epideictic, Cicero's position (at least here) is far less ambiguous: in his assessment, the epideictic is generally less important as a distinct speech genre.

Continuing on in *Orator*, Cicero states that the epideictic is “only for shew and amusement: whereas it is our business to take the field in earnest, and prepare for action” (268). Action and amusement are functionally opposed here to again reinforce what manners of public address are more or less meaningful. In *Orator*, Cicero doesn't go so far as to challenge epideictic entirely as a valid speech category, and he in fact expands the genre to be more inclusive of other discursive arts than Aristotle, but he does this not as a means of suggesting the utility of the epideictic genre, but to suggest its limitations as a form of discourse. Considering rhetorical taxonomy, Cicero notes the existence of “several kinds of Eloquence,” with enough variation between the kinds as to make clean and satisfactory division of the art somewhat difficult and reductive. He mentions various genres which he determines are “unconnected with the Forum”—with the stakes and rewards of meaningful experience. These include “mere laudatory Orations, Essays, Histories, and such suatory performances...of many others who were called *Sophists*...and the whole of that species of discourse which the Greeks call the *demonstrative*.” It is precisely these genres which Cicero offers to “pass over.” For Cicero, *epideixis* is aligned with poetic and historical accounts through shared defects of character. It is known as poetic more for the “pomp and lustre of [its] expressions, than by the weight and dignity of [its] sentiments” (282-283). It is therefore characterized as not attending to the subject with requisite respect and gravity, but once again as a practice in self-reflexivity. And *epideixis* is considered historical, as Cicero suggests

in the above passage, for its lazy elegance, where it typically concerns itself with simple narration “short speeches, and florid harangues,” all the while lacking the “vehemence and poignant severity” of true oratory (281).

Despite the placement of the epideictic amongst these “lesser” genres, Cicero concedes nonetheless that he ultimately does not consider the epideictic “as a mere trifle, or a subject of no consequence,” but that in fact “on the contrary, we may regard [*epideixis*] as the nurse and tutoress of the Orator we are now delineating” (263). This is once again in keeping with the general status of the epideictic as a preparatory oratory only, a laboratory for other significant genres of speech. Cicero argues that it is within the epideictic genre where a “fluency of expression is confessedly nourished and cultivated; and the easy construction, and harmonious cadence of our language is more openly attended to,” suggesting that one of the few virtues of the genre is its aid with oratorical form generally. He contends that it is within the epideictic genre that “we both allow and recommend a studious elegance of diction, and a continued flow of melodious and well-turned periods.” And crucial to Cicero’s classification is that notion that in epideictic speech, a burgeoning orator

may labour visibly, and without concealing our art, to contrast word to word, and to compare similar, and oppose contrary circumstances, and make several sentences (or parts of a sentence) conclude alike, and terminate with the same cadence. (263)

Epideictic and its public practice become poetic and formative laboratories, oratorical safe havens with padded floors. In the Ciceronian account it is primarily a simple precursor to meaningful and subtle speech—speech whose art, in opposition to the epideictic, is measured, terse, concealed, and above all, important. And while the above quote seems to proffer a positive assessment on the epideictic, there is also the occurrence of damning by faint praise: the notion of visible labor stands at odds with doctrinaire rhetorical discourses that value and enfranchise fluidity, naturalness, and hidden or concealed art.

Despite the limited concessions offered to the epideictic—that it has a nascent and formative function for the orator—Cicero ultimately can't keep his distance. Like a guilty party returning to the scene of the crime, he implicates his aversion to *epideixis* when later he discusses the discursive methods of the Sophists. These methods aren't directly indicted as "ornamental" or "demonstrative" oratory, but they are thought of as exhibiting a form of hollow eloquence. Having already aligned Sophism and *epideixis*, Cicero makes clear his assessment of sophistic discourse, arguing that the Sophists "industriously pursue the same flowers which are used by an Orator in the Forum," but they fail at achieving this because "their principal aim is not to disturb the passions, but rather to allay them, and not so much to persuade as to please" (280-281). For Cicero, Sophistic discourse (read: *epideixis*) carries an inordinate obsession with pleasing, with flattery, with kowtowing to public sentiment. It is thereby divested of any hortatory or sermonic function, no longer meant for broad public reception, ultimately helping to "chart the course for the future" as Aristotle suggests, but solipsistically engrossed in its own superficial ends. Sophists "seek for agreeable sentiments,



rather than probable ones,” using “frequent digressions, intermingle[d] tales and fables, employ[ing] more shewy metaphors,” and they “work them into their discourses with as much fancy and variety as a painter does his colours.” The genre, continually associated with Sophistry, is accorded limited importance in the works of Cicero.

### Quintilian and the Epideictic

Quintilian, in his expansive and pedagogy-centered treatise *Institutes of Oratory* is at various turns more mindful of the limits of classification. He troubles his very own notion of oratory as a practical art, offering that while it is largely so, it nonetheless “partake[s] greatly of the other sorts of arts,” namely, the theoretic and productive (160). His consideration of the kind of art—an art which can be enacted through internal reasoning and meditation as well as through public speeches and declamations—reflects an awareness of the contingency of rhetoric, and a further awareness that categorization often begs fluidity. Important as well is Quintilian’s questioning of whether this art can be thought of as a virtue. He says that the “oratory which I endeavour to teach, of which I conceive the idea in my mind, which is attainable only by a good man, and which alone is true oratory, must be regarded as a virtue” (162). On this point, the perspective of Quintilian is not different from either those of Cicero or Aristotle: a sense of ethical principle and moral attentiveness is a necessary precondition for “true” rhetoric.

After asserting that oratory is a virtuous and useful art (170), Quintilian examines the common divisions of rhetoric and offers his commentary on various of the existing

taxonomies, soon turning to the tripartite division of Aristotle, the classification that he assures us is most highly favored by the authoritative voices of antiquity (180). Although he himself ultimately operates from an understanding of the Aristotelian division, Quintilian mentions the Ciceronian impulse of broadening the rhetorical categories to include rhetoric of “kinds almost innumerable.” He allows that if praise and blame alone are earmarked for their own species of rhetoric, that nearly every discursive purpose under the sun (to “complain, console, appease, excite, alarm, encourage, direct,” etc.) might similarly warrant their own attention and designation. This suggests a general post-Athenian awareness of the limitations of strict classification. It implies recognition of the numerous ways rhetoric can be ramified and context-dependent in a manner that resists nominal strictures and presents discourse and its analysis on almost a case-by-case basis.

Allowing for this diversified perspective, Quintilian nonetheless continues his analysis from the tripartite division, begging pardon of a more contemporary reader who might recognize the difficulty of breaking oratory into three clean categories. His initial purpose, then, is to investigate why the ancients were compelled to render all discursive art into these three neat categories. He determines that one critique of earlier simplistic divisions of rhetoric is that said taxonomists were “led into” error based on observations of oratory culled from culturally-specific sites of knowledge and discourse. In sum, cultural differences might account for some of the discrepancies, and the judicial, deliberative, and demonstrative genres were the most labor-intensive and common, thus warranting primary consideration. But Quintilian ultimately rests upon an argument siding with the earlier taxonomists, and he

suggests that it is the question of audience that compelled them to divide the terrain of rhetoric as they did. He says that

But those who defend the ancients, make three sorts of hearers; one, who assemble only to be gratified; a second, to listen to counsel; and a third, to form a judgment on the points in debate. For myself, while I am searching for all sorts of arguments in support of these various opinions, it occurs to me that we might make only two kinds of oratory, on this consideration, that all the business of an orator lies in either causes *judicial* or *extrajudicial*.

On this point, Quintilian reflects some of the Aristotelian division, and the distinctions assumed between a *theoros* and a *krites*. Quintilian ultimately asserts that even the more broadly-conceived taxonomy of Anaximenes (who “admitted only the general divisions of *judicial* and *deliberative*, but said that there were seven species”) ultimately collapses into a tripartite division, as the latter species mentioned by Anaximenes (exhorting, dissuading, praising, blaming, accusing, defending, and examining) all comprise the range of epideictic concerns (182).

Quintilian ultimately rests on the long-standing tripartite division of rhetoric; he finds that popular consensus has determined this division to be the most compelling and durable model available. His analysis of this tripartite division, unlike that of any of his predecessors, actually begins with the epideictic. He accounts for the various names of the genre (demonstrative, epideictic, panegyric), and argues that the genre is broad enough to contain various forms of address, including ostentatious showpieces as well as solemn

panegyric occasions. To emphasize this point, he claims that even though his interpretation of the Greek word for “*epideixis*” suggests a tendency not so much of “demonstration as of *ostentation*” (182), that various speeches fit within this broad framework. These speeches “take the *suasory* form, and generally speak of the interests of Greece.” Although the genre can be inclusive of ostentatious speech acts that try to shine in the light of their own brilliance, the genre can be the site of persuasion and legitimate argumentation, typically centered on a shared interest.

Despite his partitioning of rhetoric, Quintilian is quick to highlight the problems involved with making content-specific divisions of rhetoric, simply because of the necessary interplay of the individual species. The task of discerning and disentangling the species one from another is a fool’s errand. He argues that he cannot “agree even with those” who believe in the “specious” simplistic division which assigns honor, expediency, and justice to the epideictic, deliberative, and judicial (respectively),

for all are supported, to a certain extent, by aid one from another; since in panegyric justice and expediency are considered, and in deliberations honour; and you will rarely find a judicial pleading into some part of which something of what I have just mentioned does not enter. (183)

Quintilian’s purview of the taxonomy of rhetoric is that the Aristotelian division is, up to this moment, the best we’ve got, as long as it is understood to be a provisional categorization. His view also contains an awareness of the comingling of the branches.

In Book III, Chapter VII of *Institutes of Oratory*, Quintilian gives a more robust account of the epideictic genre and its features. Throughout his breakdown of the rhetorical species is a constant affirmation of their interactive nature. Quintilian's questionable contention is that both Aristotle and Theophrastus "excluded [epideictic] altogether from the practical department of speaking," considering "that its only object is to please the speaker" (218). This is a curious irony: that at the same time Quintilian broadens the conception of rhetoric's third genre, he also asserts that Aristotle himself was guilty of limiting its efficacy. He then proposes another curious assertion that stands at odds with Cicero's conception of the epideictic. Quintilian states that it was Roman eloquence that granted more of a public sphere for the epideictic genre to act as a meaningful form of public discourse. What this circuitous attribution suggests is the notational nature of the epideictic: that being a term around which some uncertainty always looms, its definition is contingent on the intentions and ideologies of the person doing the defining, perhaps more so than other rhetorical terms generally. Quintilian outlines the forms where epideictic is given civic purpose: as standalone funeral speeches, as judicial proceedings invoking praise or censure upon a witness, panegyrics on behalf of the accused, and even written criticisms (in his example, those against Cataline and Antonius by Cicero) which carried important weight in the senate. These examples are carefully selected to illustrate the purchase of *epideixis* in judiciary and deliberative argument, not just as discourse unto itself (218-219).

Quintilian asserts that many orations have been composed simply for their own sake—not as works confluent with expedient public discourse. There remains here an

alignment of *epideixis* with a highly wrought style and poetic flourish. But even in these forms of address, the epideictic is not free from the burden of proof or of providing compelling fact to secure assent and solidify its efficacy. While acknowledging that *epideixis* is chiefly concerned with the actions of both gods and men, Quintilian also reserves that “it is sometimes employed about animals and things inanimate” (220). He then proceeds to address commonplaces of the genre: how to address Gods as distinct from human agents (the praise of Gods presenting certain unique limitations on the poetic range of the orator). He consults on the praise of both the tangible and intangible qualities of man, and suggests corollary structures for conducting blame.

Quintilian argues that for the epideictic to function and proceed effectively, a close understanding of the values of the audience is key. This is of course necessary in any speech genre, but it is a particular hallmark of the epideictic. Quintilian advises, “some praise of [the] audience too should always be mingled with [the speaker’s] remarks” (223), although he is critical of Aristotle’s suggestion of using euphemism to persuade an audience. Attunement toward the audience’s values functions critically in Quintilian’s assessment of this rhetorical species. He suggests, as examples, that certain genres for certain audiences will proceed more easily than for others. Hence, a literary panegyric will be less warmly received in Sparta than a discourse on “patience and fortitude” (223). The essence here is not simply that an understanding of the audience—their values, temperaments, inclinations and disinclinations—will place them more squarely in the orator’s hands, prime for manipulation. Such advice would contradict Quintilian’s own preconditions for public

speech and his understanding of rhetoric as *vir bonus dicendi peritus*. But such knowledge attunes both speaker and listener to a more bilateral relationship. Such knowledge creates resonance between speaker and audience, it creates identification, and it conditions the speech occasion with a sort of mutual ethos that at very least helps establish a potential degree of rapport, thus providing willingness to continue in each other's presence.

This necessity of broadly understanding the addressee is a key feature of the epideictic genre for two reasons: the first reason is the presumption that a more favorable audience disposition is a good thing (and that knowing something about an audience will help achieve that end), and the second is that quite commonly the content of the epideictic speech will be specifically about real cultural practices and events that will be mentioned explicitly in the discourse. While both of these features are pronounced in Quintilian as features of the genre itself, they are also not only limited to the epideictic. Each rhetorical situation requires some foreknowledge of the purpose of speech, and this purpose is impossible to detach from the role of the audience. This cross-genre consideration suggests again how epideictic rhetoric operates as an essential condition of rhetorical acts generally. It tells a speaker that he or she should know something of what the audience knows, and it suggests a hope of perhaps finding a shared interest from which at very least a sense of interpersonal identification might arise.

Quintilian's major gloss on the epideictic species is to underscore it as a genre that mattered, claiming in *The Orator's Education* that "Roman custom...has found a place for [praise and blame] in practical business" (Russell 103). He also represents a broadening of

the awareness that the epideictic genre need not limit itself to praise or blame of human subjects. As Pernot has argued, “The praise of a person enjoyed a historical and moral primacy of place:...humans were deemed the primary addressees for ethical approbation,” and that “other objects made their appearance progressively...Quintilian conceives of encomia addressing a wide range of objects” (31). Quintilian also points at the limitations of strict species division, and his interpretation follows along in an intellectual lineage that suggests a more provisional taxonomy of rhetoric.

Between these three significant post-Aristotelian interpreters of *epideixis* (the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Cicero, Quintilian), we find the genesis of a conceptual broadening that continues on, ramifying the term into a dizzying map of braid channels and backwaters. And this post-Aristotelian broadening continues apace beyond Quintilian as well, as different orators and theorists wrangle with not only the taxonomy of rhetoric but also the specific employment of its varied parts. A thoroughly comprehensive history of Western rhetorical interpretations of *epideixis* would comprise a multi-volume work. What such a historical survey would likely reemphasize (as this short, selected history has highlighted up to this point) is the interpretive dynamics of the epideictic genre, which receives a scrutiny not unlike the study of rhetoric generally. Epideictic can in fact be seen as a microcosm of the interpretation of rhetoric: divided differently at each turn, sometimes scorned, sometimes centralized, sometimes limited to showiness, artifice, sophistry, deceit. My interest in including these three perspectives on the epideictic genre has to do with the immediacy of their interpretations as well; given their relative historical proximity to Aristotle and the



Athenian rhetorical tradition, I interpret them as central voices of critical concern on the question of epideixis. And while this might be true, it is also true that they do not form the totality of perspectives on epideictic rhetoric. There are numerous other names that bear mention as contributors to the discourse of the epideictic. Among these, one clear voice in particular is that of Menander Rhetor.

### **Menander Rhetor and the Epideictic**

Laurent Pernot argues that the epideictic genre flourished in the Imperial Period, not only as a means of public ceremony but in private and familial situations. The genre was not only seen as assisting in the important work of statecraft, but was equally formative in strengthening immediate social bonds among families and smaller communities. Epideictic discourses became ever more common markers of various events of private life such as weddings and school exercises (Pernot 10-19). As Pernot writes, “The epideictic innovations of the Imperial period mainly consist in the proliferation of the kinds of occasional discourses,” and that “the circumstances of public and private life were punctuated by ceremonial allocutions” (15). Following along after this historical proliferation into late antiquity, the genre also began to receive more detailed codification, including a thorough categorization of its associated commonplaces.

Menander of Laodicea-on-Lycus, more commonly known as Menander the Rhetor (or simply Menander Rhetor), was a Byzantine rhetorician writing at the turn of the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. Although there exist some problems concerning the attribution of the

works typically ascribed to him, according to Nigel Wilson and D. A. Russell, “there is no doubt that he was known in Byzantine times as the best authority on the topics with which [these works] dealt,” namely, epideictic speech (xi). Menander was particularly interested in the epideictic, and his extant works expand the considerations of the genre, describing in minute detail not only numerous subjects of praise and blame—many of which appear to be clearly novel attributions—but also abundantly considering the commonplaces associated with each subject. His division of the epideictic in the first treatise ascribed to him includes numerous unique sub-genres, for example: praise of land animals and praise of water animals (5); diverse hymns to the gods (cletic, apopoemptic, scientific, mythical, genealogical, et al) (7-27); praising a mountainous country (31); praise of harbors, bays, and citadels (43-45).

The second treatise deals with various speech genres, such as the imperial oration (78), the speech of arrival (95), the bedroom speech (“an exhortation to intercourse”) (147), and the birthday speech (159). The diversity of these epideictic situations suggests a breadth and relevance that becomes increasingly hard to deny. The particular suggestions for each rhetorical moment of praise and blame is approached by Menander with a thorough partitioning, suggesting commonplaces of invention for each unique situation, as well as auxiliary concerns for each moment. This is one of Menander’s important contributions to the legitimization of the epideictic genre: his exhaustive *topoi* for the species. Importantly, Menander also suggests a hybridized form of discourse that draws from both the epideictic and deliberative genres. Within Treatise II of Menander Rhetor, while he explains many of the situations that warrant epideictic discourse, there is a brief passage concerning what

Menander simply refers to as “the talk” or *lalia*. *Lalia*, as characterized by Menander, is “extremely useful to a sophist,” apparently being classified as “two kinds of rhetoric, the deliberative and the epideictic, for it fulfills the needs of both.” In *lalia*, a speaker is not bound to rigid precedent or commonplaces, but is free to personalize the message, being that there is nothing to “prevent one revealing to the audience in a “talk” some anger or pain or pleasure of one’s own,” a subjectification which, in traditional deliberative speech, might have seemed inappropriate or unexpected. Menander illustrates the principles of the *lalia*, asking the reader to imagine a speech situation calling for “an encomium of a provincial governor” (115). Preparation and invention for such an event, as Menander states, would involve research on the various attitudes this governor might have toward emperors past and present, his involvement in the construction of the empire, his personal temperate and attitudes, etc. In such a situation, Menander calls for the employment of appropriate myths and analogies to underscore the positive character traits of the governor. The employment of such narrative devices not only lauds the subject in question, but also highlights models of decorum and propriety for a general audience, which fulfills the deliberative function of the speech by suggesting a course of action, or at very least a mode of behavior, for the audience. But above all this, the emphasis in *lalia* is placed on making the speech situation abundantly memorable and personalized with self-reflexivity, candor, and a willingness to recognize emergent occasions and subjects that might effectively persuade an audience.

As Russell and Wilson say in the preface to their translation of Menander, *lalia* is a speech with “a sort of formal informality” (xxxiii). Elsewhere, it has been defined as having

“no clear classical ancestors,” representing “a new form based on traditional foundations” (Matsen, Rollinson, Souza 351). The *lalia* is classified as having this “formal informality” precisely because it occupies the interstices between various genres of speech, adhering to certain of a given genre’s commonplaces while also retaining an informal license and an inventive spirit as the occasion allows. Martha Vinson classifies *lalia* as “a flexible form of speech recommended...for its utility either for praising a ruler or giving counsel...(as well as more personal purposes)” (qtd. in Fulford 171). Jaclyn Maxwell suggests that *lalia* is something like the popular philosophy of Dio Chrysostom, marked with a measured combination of both style and substance. Maxwell states that the *lalia* served to “give advice to an entire city and tell stories that the audience would enjoy,” thus demonstrating the amphibious nature of this category (24).

According to Russell and Wilson, the *lalia* is specifically described as “informal talks, where spontaneity and variety are admired qualities,” and this focus on *lalia* stands as one of two novel expansions of the genre of epideictic discourse during this time—the other being the emotionally charged “funeral or disaster speeches” (xviii). And while *lalia* is not historically accorded much significance alongside a divided rhetoric wherein the three classical species reign, it is important because it represents a symphonic application of the species, invoking two of them directly to suggest that there is (and for effective speech, should be) a degree of overlap occurring. *Lalia* is a unique characterization because it directly confronts the overlap of the epideictic and deliberative hinted at by both Aristotle and Quintilian as foundational codifiers of the epideictic genre. Pernot comments on this

curiosity, arguing that encomia “convey a message, which must be sought in the exhortation, in the advice, which draws praise closer to the deliberative genus” (93). Grimaldi also identified textual evidence of this comingling, and Pernot suggests that despite raising the possibility of overlapping rhetorical species, both Aristotle and Quintilian, “overlook the intriguing proximity between praise and advice and its contribution to the conception of praise” (93). Granted, the *lalia* remains ambiguous in just how it stands apart from former classifications of *epideixis*, but it does seem to be a unique classification that invokes two of the rhetorical species directly, with the bold assertion that their apparently disparate needs can be met in one speech act. As such, this novel rhetorical category responds directly to the historical sense of comingling between the species, specifically, between the epideictic and deliberative. The designation of *lalia* undermines the assumed fixity inherent in a partitioned rhetoric, and acts as multi-purposive synthesis of discursive ends.

Additionally, Menander Rhetor’s legacy is that of the most comprehensive compiler of the *topoi* associated with the epideictic genre. As Pernot writes, “The second treatise attributed to Menander Rhetor provides the best guide for studying the *topoi* for the encomia of persons,” and while seemingly simple and at times self-evident, Menander’s classification of epideictic *topoi* is “the result of centuries of reflection on rhetorical and philosophical problems” (35). As Pernot suggests, the epideictic is bound up in not only what should be said at a given occasion, but the ethical charges attendant to the situation and the maintenance of the larger community. The epideictic genre “affirms values, and by this affirmation, its aim is to create a conviction and suggest a conduct. The encomium offers

listeners models of virtue and encourages their imitation” (Pernot 95), and Menander Rhetor’s attentiveness to the commonplaces of these speech acts (as well as the complexity approached in situations employing *lalia*) suggest an interpreter of the genre attuned to the nuance of the form. Menander’s legacy then within the traveling discourse of the epideictic genre, is notable particularly for his categorization of the epideictic form—his cataloguing of the scenarios and contexts that seem to elicit discourses of praise and blame. He is also notable for his synthesis of the deliberative and epideictic, ossifying the subtle connection hinted at by prior theorists. Menander’s legacy suggests a context-dependent utility for a genre that has often been limited to funeral orations or state ceremonies. In a similar fashion, Boethius also emphasized the need for contexts to draw forth the purposes of praise and blame, freeing the genre from its previously delimited purposes.

### **Boethius and the Epideictic**

In his *Overview of the Structure of Rhetoric*, Boethius outlines an Aristotelian division undergird with the Ciceronian/Latin rhetorical canon. His *Overview* is a straightforward précis on rhetoric in the Aristotelian tradition, and it also accentuates certain features of *epideixis* that are present but understated in Aristotle’s own account, namely: a recognition that the object of epideictic focus can vary widely, that the epideictic functions as a legitimate and necessary speech genre alongside the more traditionally visible categories of the deliberative and judicial, and that as a legitimate speech genre, the epideictic demands the full capacity of the rhetorical canon for its effective deployment.

Boethius' approach to examining the structure of rhetoric is a well-partitioned, if at times formulaic, exegesis of the parts of rhetoric and their interplay. His short exordium begins with a statement concerning the difficulty of examining rhetoric, or "the structural bond which holds rhetoric together," because of its difficulty to recognize and satisfactorily define. He asserts that interpreters have erred by isolating parts of rhetoric, by neglecting ostensibly lesser parts, and in doing so, have constructed an incomplete view of the art. While he doesn't go so far to mention the neglect of the epideictic (or any other given part of rhetoric) specifically, his subsequent detailing of the art does suggest a sort of organic unity to rhetoric, wherein each part complements the whole, forming an integral structure that can guide discourse in myriad settings (70).

Rhetoric is "a faculty; by species it can be one of three: judicial, demonstrative, deliberative," and these "species of rhetoric depend upon the circumstances in which they are used" (70). In this sense, the rhetoric gains clues from the occasion in a more Isocratean way—the exigency of the speech situation creates a moment for the speaker, which the speaker then approaches through careful analysis to formulate a message. This is something like the "situational" rhetoric as defined by Lloyd Bitzer: a given exigency with certain communicative sanctions will not provide a speaker with a script per se, but will serve as a sort of preliminary guide and a means of orienting the proceeding discourse.

Boethius argues that each of the species deals with either generalizations or specified, concrete instances, citing that in *epideixis* (or "demonstrative" oratory, as he calls it) "we deal with what deserves praise or blame" and that "we may do this either in a general way, as

when we praise bravery, or in a particular case, as when we praise the bravery of Scipio” (70-71). Rhetoric can take as its subject matter “any subject at all which can be proposed by speaking,” though what is a stable feature of the chosen topic is that it is “usually a question of civil importance.” Public relevance here is not reserved for the deliberative and judicial species. All three species share in matters of controversy regarding questions that remain at issue. For Boethius, the topic in question will necessitate a certain form, wherein the

three species of rhetoric act as molds which shape the topic to themselves; as soon as one of these forms is applied to the question, it is held to that particular structure...the category into which the material falls comes from the rhetoric. (71)

While this formalism seems simplistic given the countless contexts for public discourse, Boethius’ subsequent analysis suggests more of a focus on *topoi*. The “molds” referred to by Boethius seem more along the lines of invention-dependent rhetorical commonplaces held by each of the three species, and less as formulas that constrain the actual structure and content of the speech act.

Speaking specifically of the epideictic, Boethius suggests that when speech “proclaims publically what is good, the civil question becomes demonstrative rhetoric.” He continues, “anything treating of the propriety, justice, or goodness of an act already performed in a matter of public interest is demonstrative.” This definition might suggest a limitation in Boethius’ view regarding the epideictic genre: that it is applicable only to praiseworthy human action or performance. There is no mention here of the inherent excellence of an



exemplary thing (non-human, living or non-living) being a fitting subject for *epideixis*.

However, in Boethius's own assertion that rhetoric takes as its focus "any subject at all which can be proposed by speaking," there is pragmatic latitude that lends itself well to the cultural contexts in which the imagined speech might occur. That is to say: if it is civically important to praise (for example) a given artifact or even an animal, then the particular exigencies of the culture in which this act occurs will grant it relevance (or not). The unstated judgments and sanctions in place from culture to culture will act to legitimize or delegitimize a given speech act. While of course Boethius is not this explicit with his account, his focus on civic relevance is a helpful enhancement to the historical reception of the epideictic.

A final assertion of Boethius's which once again underscores that the epideictic is not simply a trivial third category—occasionally employed but having no real part of important civic matters—is his assessment of how the rhetorical canon (after a Ciceronian interpretation) convenes in each of the individual species equally. For Boethius, epideictic speech requires the same formal attentions and considerations as the other species. Boethius says, "It makes no difference whether the matter is treated in a judicial manner, in a deliberative manner, or in a demonstrative manner; invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery must all be present" (72). Boethius's assertions on this point challenge the notions of the epideictic as all style and little substance: the effective deployment of the genre is conditioned upon its attentiveness to the canons of rhetoric writ large.

Aside from an implied rigidity and formalism, as well as a somewhat limiting definition of *epideixis* as accounting for performed human action only, one final critique of

Boethius' position is that he doesn't directly acknowledge any apparent confluence or overlap between the species of rhetoric as Aristotle and Quintilian do, aside from his mentioning that each species is beholden to the same considerations and formal development as the others. His definitions of rhetoric and the species suggest a rigidity of form and context, and fixity of purpose resulting from a simple heuristic model that determines the speaker's approach for her—the more narrowed interpretation of how the form “molds” the type of discourse as mentioned above. Furthermore, as Boethius says, “There is one special kind of rhetoric for judicial matters, based upon their special goals; there are other kinds for deliberative and demonstrative purposes” (70). This delineation cleanly posits one approach for one situation and another for a different scenario. However, it shouldn't be seen as an ironclad assertion that the species do not intermingle. My interpretation of Boethius' classification is to read that within these categories, certain stable features will be readily observable, and that the presence of commonplace features will classify the type of species being employed. These primary features are characteristics that serve as necessary tellers of the employed rhetorical species, but they might not tell the whole story. What is of most importance about Boethius' admittedly small entry into the annals of the history of *epideixis* is his egalitarian view of epideictic speech—that it is on par with its fellow species, that it requires the same diligence and attention as deliberative and judicial speech for its effective deployment, and that it addresses civically-relevant and important questions for a given society.

## Erasmus and the Epideictic

The writings of Desiderius Erasmus in general do not address the subject of the epideictic as directly as other language theorists<sup>6</sup>. Aside from the *Copia*, his treatises are less meta-linguistic and more in service of general applications of skills. However, as a figure, Erasmus represents an embodiment of a change in the long-held view that Hellenic and Roman culture represented a fallen paganism, and a tradition to be avoided. Erasmus's Neoplatonist impulses allowed him to recognize the discursive implements represented through antiquity in the belief that these thinkers were inspired from on high, and that the duties assumed by the speaker in *artes praedicandi* might be facilitated with reliance on the oratorical methods of Greece and Rome. As he writes in *Ecclesiastes*, the god-fearing speaker need not worry about pagan corruption, for

If [God] finds [in his servants] natural endowments, improved by the art of reasoning, the rules of rhetoric, or by the pursuits of philosophy, the Holy Spirit will turn them all to the further advancement of religion and to the increase of God's glory. (59)

Whereas other thinkers of his time might have abandoned certain Greco-Roman practices because of their pagan foundations, Erasmus was willing to both acknowledge and reclaim the discursive practices of the ancients. Erasmus, and other writers of the time who concerned themselves with effective ecclesiastical oratory, began to align the epideictic with the sermonic, specifically the encomiastic moments of religious discourse.

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<sup>6</sup> I use the phrase "language theorists" to define a wide range of writers, thinkers, and educators who come from diverse fields of thought (theology, philosophy, philology, oratory) but who nevertheless are all bound by an interest in the deployment of effective speech.

Erasmus's style at turns offers an exemplar of the epideictic mode—his writing often embodying the epideictic as effective practice. This was generally a departure from many of the rhetorical norms of his time. As Debora Shuger writes in *Sacred Rhetoric*, Christian writers beginning with Augustine adopted from the Latin tradition a negative view of *epideixis*, linking it to mere ostentation and self-aggrandizement, which conflicted directly with the Christian ethics of humility and meekness. As a result,

Epideictic oratory often receives the same condemnation meted out to all forms of ostentatious artistry. But in the Renaissance, a combination of Hellenistic and theological influences considerably alters this negative attitude. (174)

John O'Malley's work on Renaissance rhetoric supports this notion, showing that around the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the epideictic was appropriated for sermonic and humanistic use (239). Even though the epideictic gained some favor in limited speech contexts, "the authority of Cicero, added to the traditional Christian mistrust of *epideixis*, never wholly vanished," and as a result of this, "Renaissance discussions of epideictic and related qualities often show considerable ambivalence and occasional confusion" (Shuger 174).

In his later work *Ecclesiastes*, Erasmus does speak specifically about the epideictic species (which he calls the "encomiastic type"), defining it as an oratorical approach of varying application and purchase, "sometimes involved in doxology and thanksgiving, sometimes in praising the devout, especially the martyrs who have glorified God by their death" (630). He enumerates the various forms of encomiastic praise that have been

commonly employed throughout Christendom. Aside from delivered discourses, these include “hymns and spiritual songs,” psalms, prayers, certain forms of prose, and credos, broadening away from the traditional (or at least classically-conceived) forms of *epideixis* as generally understood. Erasmus’s earlier definition of the epideictic argues that the lauding of martyrs is among the most fit forms of *epideixis*. However, Erasmus explains that this might bear with it some faint traces of sacrilege. His view of encomia and the epideictic is that it is a hortatory and instructive mode of speech, one which illustrates proper modes of comportment for the audience. His suggestion is that

In general, one should instruct the speaker not to dwell on the end that rhetoricians prescribe—that is, for the audience merely to have a high opinion of the person we are commending—but to direct everything toward the goal of stirring them up to imitate the right deeds. (631)

The “end that rhetoricians prescribe” could be a reference to any number of rhetoricians through classical antiquity and the middle ages. But the specific referee is not important: what this quote indicates is an observable misconception concerning the nature of the epideictic, a misconception that persists through Erasmus’s time and down to our own. It is once again the supposition that epideictic speech is meant for the adornment of the specific thing in question, and that it ends there. If this is in fact how epideictic is defined, then it is of course a speech act with little substantive merit. However, as Erasmus (and as Aristotle well before him) avers, the end goal of epideictic speech is to inspire culturally sanctioned excellence amongst the hearers—to get those in the audience inspired to “imitate right

deeds.” The epideictic here carries forward a supremely ethical function. Its ostentation and showing forth, if it does so at all, is in the service of drawing attention to paragons of “the good,” of comportment and/or proper conduct, thus not simply drawing attention to a specific person or action or thing in time, but also suggesting a way forward for the audience. In this way, the epideictic shares in any moment involving ethical teaching by way of exemplars. It is the species of proper conduct that radiates outward not simply impacting the present, but guiding a culture along a forward trajectory of decorum. As Pernot notes, “praise consists of methodical reasoning, which aims to demonstrate” (87). In the evaluation of Erasmus and others who employed epideictic *topoi* in *artes praedicandi*, what was ideally demonstrated were idealized modes of decorum by saints and devout followers, none of whom were meant to serve as the ends themselves, but as representatives of higher Christian ideals that all attendant followers should strive to emulate. The limited treatment of Erasmus stresses the community-building (or solidifying) potency of the epideictic genre. This is a theme present, if only subtly, in various theorists prior to Erasmus (Aristotle, Quintilian). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the purpose of this selected history is to congregate theorists around certain questions regarding the efficacy, scope, temporality, and relevance of the epideictic genre. As such, it would be impractical to stop at every integer along the trajectory of the epideictic from Aristotle to the present day. What is most important and relevant for this analysis is a consideration of impactful moments in the history of the genre’s interpretation. Regarding the notion emphasized by Erasmus—that the epideictic has at its

core a tendency to strengthen discourse communities—few theorists have gone as far in pursuing and explaining this feature as have Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca.

### **Perelman, Olbrechts-Tyteca, and the Epideictic**

*The New Rhetoric* helps to expand the historical discourse of epideictic by underscoring its confluence with the other species of rhetoric, and by broadening the subject matter and aim of the epideictic. This expansion of epideictic is reflective of the larger mission of *The New Rhetoric*, a project which aims at the creation of community via the contact of minds.

Relatively early in *The New Rhetoric*, Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca contribute their observations of the epideictic discourse. The New Rhetoricians state that unlike forensic and deliberative debates (whose status had been historically underscored by their apparent “realness,” their immediate entailments for *in situ* audiences), epideictic speeches were often affairs removed from these immediate, high-stakes contexts, and were quite often showcases of talent where “[the audience] merely applauded and went their way.” Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca also suggest that because of this auxiliary status of the epideictic, its explicit study was often neglected, especially in early Roman history. Epideictic rhetoric thereby inherited, largely, the status of deficiency (48). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca see the dissection of forensic/deliberative from epideictic occurring along fault lines of immediacy and utility. Epideictic rhetoric, which became aligned with poetic and literary modes, was thereby seen as less valid because of its delimited context. Through historical

misinterpretation, the genre lost out from being considered as a true method of inquiry and invention.

After their brief illustration of the history of epideictic, the New Rhetoricians waste little time in defining their stance regarding the discourse, stating with unalloyed clarity that “epideictic oratory forms a central part of the art of persuasion, and the lack of understanding shown toward it results from a false conception of the effects of argumentation” (49). Their acknowledgment of the centrality of the epideictic stands at odds with the received wisdom of the Western rhetorical canon. In their proclamation of epideictic’s centrality, they are participating in a revision of the history of rhetoric while at the same time recovering this storied means of persuasion from the dustbin of verbal analysis. In order to demonstrate, in at least one principle way, how epideictic rhetoric functions as a central part of persuasion, they turn first to the issue of temporality. They say that in a given persuasive act, “The intensity of the adherence sought is not limited to obtaining purely intellectual results...but will very often be reinforced until the desired action is actually performed” (49). Once adherence is verbally (or otherwise) obtained, epideictic rhetoric functions in the interval between the adherence and the action. It is the glue for shoring up and strengthening commitments and inclinations of a given sort. The way that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca theorize the species stands notably apart from the analysis of Cicero, for example, who excluded *epideixis* from the forum, seeing it as show only, not as a catalyst for action, as the New Rhetoricians argue. For them, *epideixis* is the way by which the speaker indexes the adherence, as often or as forcefully as necessary, in that discursive “middle space,” where “the



taking of an action” stands between the disposition to act and the performed act. Epideictic rhetoric is herein indispensable to forensic and deliberative acts, “because it strengthens the disposition toward action by increasing adherence to the values it lauds” (50). It is the teller of adherence, a verbal monument of intent, willingness, and the “contact of minds.”

The New Rhetoricians continue theorizing the epideictic, suggesting that its historical consideration has proceeded often from a tendency of confusion, in which the manner of address supplanted the artifact in question as the sole locus of evaluation. They say that the epideictic is

A question...of recognizing values. But in the absence of the concept of value-judgment, and of that of intensity of adherence, the theoreticians of speech, from Aristotle on, readily confused the concept of the beautiful, as the object of the speech (which was, besides, equivalent to the concept of “good”) with the aesthetic value of the speech itself. (48)

The beauty of the word or its delivery, classically, often stood in lieu of the beauty of the thing. This confusion added to the shunting of epideictic to the realms of only the literary or poetic: if it was not talking about anything upon which dissent or agreement could occur (but only stood as a dissected act worthy of approval or disapproval), its public usefulness could be easily questioned or dismissed outright. The New Rhetoricians’ position constitutes an enfranchisement of the object of analysis for epideictic. Epideictic now, for them, becomes not only a decorous or appealing manner of saying something (though it still retains this classically-determined dimension), but as Aristotle and Quintilian have

suggested, it also engenders the genre with an added possibility of discussing beautiful things, a specific content. Not only is the manner of address beautiful or evaluative, but the artifact addressed is that which aims to strengthen shared value by its admirable quality, or serve as a cautionary exemplum for its lack of such. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's later suggestion of the use of the superlative could then, following this interpretation, offer a concrete usage of the epideictic in the course of quasi-logical reasoning.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca further expand the reach of the epideictic, stating that

Unlike the demonstration of a geometrical theorem...the argumentation in epideictic discourse sets out to increase the intensity of adherence to certain values...The speaker tries to establish a *sense of communion* centered around particular values recognized by the audience. (emphasis added, 51)

The inclusion of "sense of communion" is a distinct notational gloss, which suggests the larger project of *The New Rhetoric*, while also indicating a specific ethical-discursive charge. Hermeneutic questions notwithstanding, using "communion" instead of "agreement," or the handily used "adherence" presents this moment as one when two speakers recognize in dialogue the shared value between them. As I will discuss in the following chapter, this sense of communion is a key animating feature of the epideictic.

Additionally helpful in understanding Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's thoughts on epideictic rhetoric's utility is to recognize their characterization of the species as being "part" of the art of persuasion. This metaphysical emphasis on the "part" of a greater rhetorical

whole suggests a confluence of the rhetorical corpus, formerly divided by rhetoricians for centuries. Andreea Ritivoi characterizes Paul Ricoeur's stance on the epideictic as having a similar osmotic quality to that suggested by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca. For Ricoeur, the three rhetorical genres, "although differentiated by situation as well as by specific purpose...share...an epistemic concern. They all involve making one judgment prevail over others." According to Ritivoi's interpretation, Ricoeur's assessment of the species suggests that, "One can speak in a broad sense of litigation or of a trial even in the epideictic genre" (13). Christopher Carey is also quick to add what the New Rhetoricians clearly recognized, that "the categories are not watertight; there is movement between them" (237).

In an essay entitled "The Public Value of Epideictic Rhetoric," Cynthia Miecznikowsk Sheard distills *the New Rhetoric's* essence to argue that for Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, "argument begins in agreement" which "helps explain how it is that what is compelling rhetoric for some can be mere rhetoric for others." Sheard argues that *The New Rhetoric's* insight has become

A commonplace within the related disciplines of composition and rhetoric, for it testifies to the importance of establishing a common ground as a basis for persuading a reader (or a listener) to think or to do whatever a writer (or speaker) deems necessary, urgent, productive, or otherwise significant.

Perelman's assumption is that good reasoning—sound rationale—is not enough to persuade others to our visions; we must also address our common humanity. (766)

This “common ground,” identified as a feature of the project of *The New Rhetoric* is quite commonly claimed (as I mention here but argue more fully in the third chapter) in the most basic form of interpersonal speech—the act of lauding, of stating a preference, of holding an approval up for another’s input or evaluation, always with the end goal (tacitly or overtly understood) as establishing some form of consensus or interrogation regarding the thing in question. Such common ground is easily found in the daily congress of evaluation of things deemed “good,” and in making public such pronouncements.

From this brief analysis of *The New Rhetoric*’s treatment of epideictic speech, I would suggest in summary that we gain at least three important emphases of the epideictic. The first is direct acknowledgment of the confluent nature obtaining between epideictic speech and forensic and deliberative argumentation, wherein epideictic constitutes a sort of argumentative “pith”—a compulsion toward and indexing of the adherence granted in the contact of minds (the natural precursor for all symbolic exchange). The second development offered by *The New Rhetoric* is an enfranchisement of the discussion, initiated in antiquity, of both “beautiful” and “good” things (corresponding to aesthetics and ethics generally, or “values” writ-large), not just beautiful or moving modes of speaking or praiseworthy human subjects. In this way, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca suggest that epideictic speech is not merely demonstrative or for show, but that epideictic is suggestive of a certain content. It is not just beautiful speech, but in its maximal case, it is beautiful speech referencing the shared values of a given culture with the aim of solidifying action to a given end. The third contribution is that epideictic speech aims at the establishment of communion or

community, based around audience-recognized values. This can occur at the level of state-sponsored affairs, or even at the level of subcultures who disagree with the values sponsored by the state (as I will later discuss). I argue that such “communion” also importantly occurs at the level of the individual—that *epideixis* can proceed bilaterally between merely two correspondents. The New Rhetoricians recognized the necessity of the epideictic genre as a central part of a larger initiative, arguing that it was not simply a rhetorical footnote or afterthought, but that its effects were both important and immediate, and that its contexts of employment myriad.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

What this chapter has attempted to do is offer a selected tracing of the movements of the epideictic genre after Aristotle, focusing on moments in rhetoric’s intellectual lineage where theorists wrestled with the elusive third genre. This chapter saw the epideictic as a “travelling discourse” that ventured far from the Acropolis and, in the process, took on different shades and tints to become a very different thing from its early conception, even though persistent themes presented themselves repeatedly in the genre’s travels. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* aligns not only the deliberative and epideictic genres, but also importantly suggests moments where the juridical and epideictic work in concert to achieve a given end. This text also focuses on an epideictic mode as a sort of necessary precondition to any effective oratory—that a hallmark of the epideictic is a form of value awareness between the speaker and the audience. Finally, it recognizes the epideictic as a necessary element for the formation of a complete speaker. Cicero also agrees with the formative necessity of the

epideictic, although he seems hesitant to grant the epideictic the same legitimacy as either the author of the *Herennium* or Aristotle. Nonetheless, Cicero does acknowledge that a mastery of *epideixis* is necessary for the complete orator. In both *Herennium* and Cicero, then, we find the acknowledgment of the epideictic genre as a necessary implement in the training of an orator.

Quintilian, ever the teacher, is hesitant to affix too firm a division on the species of rhetoric, recognizing that the categorization of “the epideictic” might in fact represent a host of other speech practices not fully accounted for in a simplistic tripartite division. He allows for the comingling of the rhetorical species with a pragmatic sort of understanding of the need for (and the limitations of) clear partitions of oratory. Importantly, Quintilian also aligns *epideixis* with exemplary audience awareness. As one of its key features, *epideixis* takes a direct interest with the values of a given community or culture and allows those elements to prefigure the oratory. This suggests the presence of commonplaces in epideictic oratory, and challenges assumptions about the genre being style in favor of substance. Menander Rhetor represents an important moment in the trajectory of the epideictic: the theorization of a hybrid speech act that combines the ends, means, and temporal orientations of both the epideictic and deliberative genres. This is an important embodiment of the suggested comingling that is encountered through a re-reading of the history of rhetoric. Menander also offers the history of the genre a thorough cataloguing of the *topoi* of the epideictic genre, covering a range of situations and suggesting through comprehensive treatment the increasing relevance of the genre in his time. Boethius affirms the epideictic as civically-

relevant and ever-invested in determining what is the “good” for a given community, and his ultimate determination that the epideictic matters (on order with how the judicial and deliberative genres matter) is but another historical affirmation of a genre that is often maligned as tertiary or unimportant. Erasmus reclaims the epideictic as a hortatory force, as a sermonic mode of address that effectively marshals pious attention through its invocation of excellence and chaste pleasure, and similarly, Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca renew the discourse of the epideictic by suggesting its involvement in the ethical orientation of a community, despite historically having been a troubling rhetorical category. These views represent an admittedly thin selection of perspectives on the epideictic, but they are arguably crucial perspectives in understanding the history of the epideictic within Western rhetoric. Resonating in these limited voices (and others), is at least preliminary evidence that the epideictic genre has more utility than it is often historically granted.

Despite the various sanctions and nuances placed on the definition of the epideictic through the limited selection of interlocutors above, it is important to distill a general pattern of *epideixis* in the hopes of creating working understanding of the genre for contemporary application, which I hope to do in the following chapters. Among the vying definitions and distinctions, there are stable and continually present characterizations. Foremost, the epideictic is involved with praise (or its inverse) in response to excellence or rarity (or the corresponding lack thereof). I limit this definition to “excellence” and “rarity,” as these subsume a range of attitudes and qualities that serve as the particular foci for epideictic moments (excellent beauty, excellent courage, a rare physical ability, a rare

selflessness, etc.). Second, the epideictic can take as its concern both human objects and human actions as well as non-human objects or actions: essentially, whatever can be praised (or blamed). Third, the epideictic genre contains a trans-temporal element. While early codifications of the genre suggested its application to the present moment alone or most importantly, this very determination is undermined by Aristotle himself in explaining that while the main orientation of the epideictic is toward the present, the genre also freely draws examples from the past with the purpose of guiding a community along a preferable future trajectory. Various of the historical instantiations of the epideictic genre reflect just such a multi-temporal awareness—its utility is not merely for the moment of its saying, but for the ongoing affairs of a society or community, even those beyond the ken of the immediate audience. Epideictic rhetoric seems inclined toward cultural preservation, at whatever level. Fourth, the epideictic genre is bound up in thorough consideration of audience assent and community values. At various points in the briefly surveyed history, the epideictic is seen as having an ethical force, responding to the *endoxa* of a community not merely as a rhetorical ruse, but as a legitimation of that belief and a shoring up of assent. It is attuned to what people hold as important, and to what is determined to be in the collective best interest, as dictated by the power structures of a given culture (a critique addressed later).

While the aforementioned criteria in no way comprise the entirety of the epideictic genre, they do offer a starting place. With these criteria, in the next chapter I will turn toward the question of the purpose of the epideictic contemporarily.



## CHAPTER III

### *EPIDEIXIS* AND CONTEMPORARY VALUES

Chapter I accounted for the value of epideictic rhetoric within Aristotle's rhetorical taxonomy. This evaluation produced evidence that stands opposed to the historical reception of epideictic rhetoric as a tertiary contender with the two "more important" genres of rhetoric: the deliberative and the judicial. Chapter II accounted for the post-Aristotelian broadening of epideictic rhetoric, considering if only cursorily the genre's expansive application and interpretation through a selected historical view. Important to these first two chapters were the arguments that the genres of rhetoric are not easily divisible from one other, and that there especially seems to be a strong affinity and purpose between deliberative and epideictic rhetoric. Frequently, as historical examples have attested, the epideictic surfaces in arguments made both in the courts of law and the forums of political deliberations. In line with this argument is the concept presented by Menander Rhetor, that of the *lalia*: an amphibious brand of commonplace speech whose purported "formal informality" frees it from the contextual constraints placed upon the rhetorical species historically, emphasizing the impact and necessity of seemingly innocuous everyday speech acts. Of further importance is the consideration that *epideixis* has at its heart an expansive notion of the good, the excellent, the notable, the rare (and the respective inverses). The epideictic is a rhetoric of ideals—of identifying and trading off of what people hold as important, good, the best—and as such, it shares a notable connection with the considerations of character and ethos. This chapter will argue that epideictic rhetoric is not

only important to contemporary discourse generally, through large acts of ceremony and commemoration, but that it is a crucial contemporary argumentative mode. I argue that contemporary epideictic rhetoric takes various forms as required by continually ramified and scattered value systems. I will argue that cultural ideals were formerly more unified and centralized in everyday life, and that the post-modern condition of societal fracture has engendered various orders of epideictic rhetoric, diffuse “epideictics” that serve as the basis for reforming communities, specifically what Dave Hickey calls “communities of desire” (*The Invisible Dragon* 74).

But first, there is the question of the transportation of a classical rhetorical concept to contemporary speech—moving an ancient artifact to a modern context and claiming that it is still the same thing. This transportation might arguably render the artifact in question dead on arrival. This is of course not a new argument: it has been made prior by various language theorists throughout rhetorical history. In *Deep Rhetoric*, James Crosswhite specifically foregrounds a comparable argument by invoking Paul Ricouer’s doubt about the universalist reach of rhetoric, specifically rhetoric as inherited from Greek and Roman antiquity (a perspective held by Gadamer, Perelman, and others). For Ricouer, rhetoric’s formation in “sixth century BCE Sicily” with its specific manners of governance, custom, law, etc. creates a time-specific exigency that results in context-specific forms of discourse. The classical Greek model of rhetoric is very much a product of its own distinct environment. This form of rhetoric, like any other, is thereby “forever conditioned, shaped,

and limited by the typical discursive situations in which it arose” (qtd. in Crosswhite 18).

Speaking of Ricouer’s interpretation of rhetoric’s mobility, Crosswhite says that Ricouer

acknowledges that there is an internal tendency of rhetoric to move beyond these contexts—specifically, he believes that rhetoric’s focus on argumentation as a kind of reasoning that takes place in conditions of uncertainty, in the vast domain between arbitrary deciding and certain proof, moves rhetoric’s scope outward without limit toward all discourse, even to that point of completion at which it incorporates philosophy. However, he also believes that the generative seats of rhetoric provide an unconquerable constraint on rhetoric’s ambitions. Rhetoric will always have a historical and situational and quasi-institutional character. (18)

As presented, Ricouer’s concept shows rhetoric as pushing against the constraints of its Greek genesis. Rhetoric is naturally an eager intervention within the realm of uncertainty, wherever it occurs. But nonetheless, it is trapped by the highly specialized particulars of its origins.

There is a compelling element in Ricouer’s argument: the contexts that formed the specific responses of classical rhetoric have changed drastically, perhaps enough to render the proto-rhetorical practices of ancient Greece ill-equipped for much of contemporary discourse. The rhetorical contexts have changed enough to at very least question the relevance of the specific practices attendant to the Athenian<sup>7</sup> model of rhetoric.

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<sup>7</sup> I use “Athenian” here to discern a lineage that continues through Roman orators. However, calling this “Greco-Roman” might be too monolithic, as the work of Richard Enos (among other comparativists) has shown that “ancient sources allude to other forms of rhetoric” (qtd. in Lipson and Binkley 186).

In response to this position, or to other even more hardline positions that would argue classical rhetorical models either ill fit or moribund, I would offer that what these ancient models recognized at their root was something of a psychology. This is not to say that they are purely motivistic communication models, but most of these ancient systems convened around what have proven to be long-standing objective human interests and questions of stasis: questions of living happily among other people—people who often have competing desires and aims, questions of organizing life within systems that provide public safety and aid, questions of what is the good, what is the bad, what is the honorable, what is the dishonorable. So while allowing that the given terminology itself might be suspect (and this is a concern I will take up later: what is gained by identifying certain modern artifacts as “epideictic”) and subject to change, the impetus behind the species has, at least up to the present day, remained of viable concern to the general populations of countries, states, municipalities, families, and to individual people. These rhetorical concepts have a stamina that extends beyond their “generative seats” to provide frameworks for viewing trans-historical language concerns. Post Athenian-rhetorical concepts are but selected, provisional forms of response, among various others, to these questions that remain importantly at issue contemporarily. They do not tell the whole story, but they do tell a story. As such, these rhetorical modes don’t need to provide the final word for speech acts and contexts unimagined at the time of their origin, but they can be helpful as fitting starting points—as armatures upon which further analysis can proceed. And such a model would ideally open itself to a polyvocal rhetorical history such as identifying moments within ancient Chinese

rhetoric, for example, where models of praise or a focus on “the good” were employed for social effect, creating a rich tapestry of terminology for present usage. Such a specific application is beyond the scope of my analysis, however. I will be limited to the interpretation of Western rhetoric as an inheritance from specific Greco-Roman origins, believing that within this model, an enduring albeit shifting concept of *epideixis* continues to be of benefit. Namely, an understanding of contemporary *epideixis* provides helpful ways of viewing generally homoversal motivations concerning the living of life amongst factions who sometimes experience difficulty gaining assent with each other when faced with challenging problems.

### **On Value and Fragmentation**

Similar to Ricouer’s concern about rhetoric’s ability to travel beyond its context of origin, it is this very idea of using an ancient Greek system of thought and invention that S. M. Halloran challenges in his essay “On the End of Rhetoric, Classical and Modern.” Halloran questions the validity of imposing classical models of rhetorical inquiry onto acts of contemporary communication. Halloran represents a more extreme version of Ricouer’s argument, claiming that the cultural and epistemological differences obtaining between the classical and modern world prove too disparate to reconcile under a single, outmoded rhetorical system like that inherited from Athens. Halloran invokes the distinctions between classical and modern rhetorical models and asks us to examine the utility of relying on these ancient systems of thought as lenses for contemporary experience. It is his concern “simply to

point out that the cultural ideal upon which the tradition of classical rhetoric rested is today moribund if not dead” (624). To be clear, Halloran’s is not a specific argument for or against the utility of the epideictic in either modern or classical times. He is concerned with the Greco-Roman system of rhetoric as a whole. But I argue that the implications of his perspective curiously have meaning for just how epideictic functions in modern society, and in fact inscribe the epideictic with a vitality that expands the genre beyond its traditionally interpreted scope. But first, it is important to understand Halloran’s view more fully.

Halloran argues that “The assumptions about knowledge and the world that informed classical rhetoric are no longer tenable,” and “values seem arbitrary, contradictory, and ultimately groundless. Knowledge is no longer posited in locatable sites, but is diffuse and arcane.” He continues, arguing that:

The modern world is less akin to the cozy study pictured in magazine advertisements for the Great Books than to the endless successions of compartments filled with undecipherable books described by Jorge Luis Borges in “The Library of Babel.” Like the hero in that story, modern man searches for the “catalogue of catalogues” that will unlock the mystery of the library and make sense of the world once more. (624-625)

In Halloran’s view, “In the absence of a world given by a stable and coherent cultural tradition, man is compelled to construct his own” (625). Disregarding the critical importance of what he means by “stable and coherent cultural tradition,” I take Halloran to be arguing that unlike Athenian society, contemporarily the value systems of Western society

are more subject to the pressure of fragmentation, which is a byproduct of democratic societies wherein no single unifying religious or moral agenda operates to guide citizens' action. In response to this, and to continue Halloran's Borgesian metaphor, I argue that *epideixis* provides something of a selected catalogue that can grant "modern man" access to a desired portion of volumes in the library of Babel. The "catalogue of catalogues" is a myth, and has always been. But *epideixis* is one means of obtaining value, understanding, and community within a system of arguable fracture and confusion. Edwin Black underscores Halloran's argument about this distinction between ancient and modern civilization, interpreting Aristotle's *Rhetoric* as illustrating a "closer-knit society than our own, and a more attenuated range of relations between that society and each of its members" (175).

To more fully understand Halloran's view and how *epideixis* helps traverse postmodernity's "aleatoric universe," it helps to turn to Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede's essay "On Distinctions Between Classical and Modern Rhetoric." Here, Ede and Lunsford address the apparent divide between classical and contemporary rhetoric, in an attempt to clarify actual differences and find "the compelling similarities between classical and modern rhetoric," while also highlighting what they call the "qualifying distinctions" between these epochs (38). Early in the essay, Ede and Lunsford take direct issue with the conceptual divide represented in Halloran's views that contemporary life is absent of the grand, unifying values upon which the classical world was so heavily reliant. Halloran's argument is characterized by Ede and Lunsford as stating that among the key distinctions between classical and modern existence is the rhetorical definition (or assumption) of classical man as a

“rational animal” who dealt with problems of the world primarily through logic or reason and who lived during a time characterized by stable values, social cohesion, and a unified cultural ideal. In contrast, modern rhetoric defines man as essentially a “rhetorical” or “symbol-using” or “communal” animal who constitutes the world through shared and private symbols. And this modern man is said to live not in a simple, cohesive society, but in an aleatoric universe in which generally agreed upon values and unifying norms are scarce or nonexistent. In such a universe, it is argued, the bases of classical rhetoric are simply inadequate. (38)

Ede and Lunsford thus paraphrase Halloran’s argument, suggesting that this characterization constitutes an oversimplification of the historical periods. Invoking Grimaldi, they resist the alignment of the classical person with harsh rationality, arguing, “the rational man of Aristotle’s rhetoric is not a logic-chopping automaton but a language-using animal who unites reason and emotion in discourse with others.” Furthermore, the view of classical society as a place of stable, easily scrutable, monolithic ideals is troublesome for Ede and Lunsford, who argue that

far from being a highly stable society marked by agreement on all values, Aristotle’s Greece was one of upheaval: old beliefs in the gods were increasingly challenged, the political structure of the Greek city state system was under attack; the educational system was embroiled in deep controversy. (43)



And while Ede and Lunsford make a compelling case to de-simplify classical society, one might interpret the differences between classical and modern life as a matter of degrees. This is to say that I find Halloran's argument compelling, and worthy of consideration—that even simply in terms of population growth it might stand to reason that belief has undergone intense contemporary ramification in the centuries separating the ancient world from the modern. It stands to reason that value has become at least more diffuse, posited in more sites with ever-increasing division and subdivision. And to acknowledge this division is not to assent to Halloran's ultimate argument. One can recognize the bewildering and myriad contemporary value systems and still not agree with Halloran's conclusion that the fracture and absence engendered by contemporary life render classical rhetoric a hollow instrument for operating in the world, or cede to the conclusion that the life of ancient humanity was devoid of the complexity and ambiguity present in our day. Along these lines, Dale Sullivan argues that, "we no longer live in a homogeneous society," and quotes Michael Calvin McGee, who argues the limited cultural diversity of ancient society, contrasting it with our current situation where we find ourselves "in the middle...of a seventy-year movement which has fractured and fragmented American culture." ("Epidictic Character" 339)

Notably, there are obvious, marked differences between the conditions that gave rise to (as a chosen example) Athenian rhetoric and our present time. Given these differences, and directly against this assumed backdrop of fractured value, I argue that the dialogic idealities that serve as the impetus for epideictic rhetoric become all the more urgent, and as such this grasping for shared value and meaning tends to valorize the role of the epideictic in

contemporary life, at both the level of the community and state and just as meaningfully at the level of the interpersonal and quotidian. In a historical moment such as ours, it might not be so unreasonable to think that what some may categorize (incorrectly or not) as a formerly “unified cultural ideal” has become ramified to the level of the individual. The “good” has become hyper-relativized and subjective. Contemporarily, it seems increasingly difficult, if not impossible and absurd, to argue in favor of aesthetic or moral absolutes, if such things actually exist<sup>8</sup>. And such an acknowledgment should not be interpreted as a conservative lament or a call for a return of some formerly unifying ideal (illusory or not), but a commentary, an interpretation of one reading of our time. It legitimizes Halloran’s picture, at least in part, synthesizing his view with the counterdiscourse of Ede and Lunsford.

Tellingly, Halloran’s essay involves metaphors calling for both the actions of “construction” and “searching,” important modes for understanding *epideixis*. The use of the term “construction” is important, as it underscores the notion that value is not a given and stable concept, but that it involves something of individual preference, of choice, and an ability to reflect upon and modify said choice. It might be interpreted as the voluntary creation of countless idiosyncratic epistemologies, exclusive (though ideologically influenced and dialogic) frames of reference, worldviews, likes, beliefs, tastes. And this construction occurs through argumentative assent: witnessing the good or bad, believing in it or rejecting it, being convinced or unconvinced by it (either via the mechanisms of interpersonal

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<sup>8</sup> I would acknowledge that certain “goods” remain trans-historically relevant: health and the maintenance of life itself, happiness, love, security, freedom, etc. And while these core motivators remain constant, their manifestations take on more of the hue of individual subjectivity in contemporary society than perhaps anciently.

argumentation or the persuasive, extra-linguistic force of an exemplar). These are the ways in which we construct our palette of values and beliefs, and the means by which we gain entrance into disparate communities whose shared interest centers around commonly-held values, beliefs, opinions, and experiences. This “construction” suggested by Halloran is primarily inclusive of that which can be arguably perceived of as epideictic rhetoric, and this new classification invigorates the species with a crucial centrality in modern discourse. Assuming that “the good” has become generally more diffuse than in ancient times, then this scattered and dynamic existence of the good requires each person to build their own stable of value. This is not to say that ancient peoples did not experience the same problems in terms of searching for meaning, but that the respective array of choices was delimited to make this construction more manageable—the materials for construction were fewer, and the sanctions for deviation higher.

Halloran’s term of “searching” likewise carries with it connotations of desire: foremost, the unexpressed hope of locating some assumed thing; the very notion of searching invokes a host of introspective activities. Important among these activities is a sort of faith in the process of the search, an expectation of fulfillment, or what Hickey classified as “The precognitive certainty that there are sunsets and jumpshots worthy of mention” (*The Invisible Dragon* 70). This searching is based upon a subconscious certainty that desire matters, that the excellent is something worth seeking, that this given desire can be answered by an act of seeking. The choice of the word “searching” is also important, as it suggests earnestness not present in other ways of classifying the act—“searching” as opposed to “looking” or

“browsing.” Along with this searching comes a level of evaluation and judgment upon locating a sought object. There is the attendant critical assessment of whether or not the desire has been satisfactorily sated. Importantly, this is also a reflexive and dynamic process, one that is subject to the whims of individuals, to the pressures and persuasions of other community members, and as recognized in late capitalism, the interests of large corporations and organizations who often effectively marshal our desires (and in turn, our purchasing power) through compelling messages of persuasion and satisfaction.

These methods of searching and construction referenced above happen innocuously in their most simple form: in conversation, the public statement of a preference or an aesthetic determination of the good. This baseline occurrence acts as a starting point for community, for two or more individuals to initiate the process of verbal wrangling to determine the good, to hold each other’s preference up to the light, to consider the ways in which taste and desire create the bedrock for interpersonal relationship. This is contemporarily the primary way by which cultures and subcultures create and maintain “communities of desire,” through subtle yet meaningful acts of evaluation regarding questions of beauty, questions of laudable human action, and questions of excellence (*The Invisible Dragon* 71). As Dale Sullivan conceives this very situation, “People still use epideictic rhetoric, but they now use it to create, maintain, and celebrate orthodoxies, their own subcultures within a larger pluralistic society” (“The Epideictic Character” 340).

As Sullivan suggests, there remain the elements of both celebration and maintenance that have historically characterized the epideictic genre, even though I argue that even

historically speaking this was a limited view of the purpose and reach of the epideictic. The presence of these two forces is seen in what could be considered “first order” acts of contemporary *epideixis*, acts that carry with them the traditional and historical hallmarks of the genre. These are speeches that contemporarily are delivered by notable members of a given society. These speakers are enfranchised through disparate social contexts, and for given reasons have established themselves as authorities or trusted voices to act as spokespersons in commemoration of basic ideals held by a given community. Examples would be Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address,” any State of the Union address, or a speech by the president of a committee charged with initiating the Olympic Games<sup>9</sup>. These examples constitute a more historically doctrinaire interpretation of *epideixis*, and stand as common exemplars of what the species entails or “looks like.” Each of them is involved in the act of performing and vocalizing cultural value to a broad audience. Arguably, the broader the audience, the more generic and abstract become the particular ideals referenced by the speaker. Speakers on these occasions might appeal to an idealized (yet entirely undefined) set of values or beliefs to act as a linchpin between themselves and their audience. These moments of first order *epideixis* are, as suggested, still highly ceremonial, and still operating on the maintenance of widely held values and beliefs that are assumed to be beneficial for a community. As Pernot argues, “solidifying the social order is the response we can provide to

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<sup>9</sup> Some might argue that these examples are not true-form artifacts of *epideixis*. I would counter by suggesting that each example would be reliant on a deep understanding of what the audience holds as important and good, and that even though there may be a political or economic function undergirding any of these acts, that this is once again an example of the rhetorical species acting in concert one with another to achieve a multiform purpose, one of which is a shoring up of value, and an indexing of the idealities that support the community in question.

the question of the encomium's purpose" (99). And while these moments have a primarily ceremonial and preservative function, they can also be moments of invention and change.

The contemporary use of first order examples of *epideixis* afford the species a sort of generative force for building (and threatening) community, the "second order" examples of *epideixis* (those that form the basis of analysis for this project) are especially suited to the creation of community. To understand how I hope to classify second order examples of contemporary *epideixis*, it is first important to understand the arguable connections between epideictic rhetoric and contemporary criticism. It is through acts of publically voiced criticism that the epideictic mode gains notable contemporary impact. The role of the critic has become democratized, and these acts of critical determination begin to establish the tendrils of various communities as individuals and groups wrangle, often at odds with each other, concerning what is good, what is excellent, what is bad, and what is deficient.

### **Dale Sullivan and *Epideixis* as Criticism**

The notion that epideictic rhetoric is connected with acts of critical appraisal is not a new notion. Various scholarly sources have put forth the proposition that specific genres of criticism are representative of epideictic reasoning by virtue of their praise or censure of given cultural artifacts. As Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor have asserted, "arguments of literary criticism are fundamentally epideictic, celebrating the shared values of a community" (438). In *Rhetoric*, despite Renato Barilli's early dismissal of the epideictic genre as one-dimensional, reflecting once again the vestigial notion that the epideictic was a degenerate form of

argumentation, Barilli eventually recognizes that contemporarily the essential features of deliberative and forensic rhetoric are maintained in their respective spheres, while *epideixis* has become primarily a province of criticism (126). And Christine Oravec, as demonstrated earlier, has argued that Aristotle didn't conceive of the epideictic genre as consisting of simply ornament and show, but as a species of rhetoric inclusive of "the functions of judgment and education" (163). Various perspectives have accounted in small part for how the epideictic functions within certain genres of criticism, and rhetorical theorist Dale Sullivan takes the essence of these various analyses further, attempting to locate the features of how epideictic expressly functions as criticism.

In an essay titled "The Epideictic Character of Rhetorical Criticism," Sullivan undertakes an analysis of a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century debate in the scholarly literature of criticism studies as an exemplar of how "criticism is essentially epideictic rhetoric" (339). His assertion is that epideictic rhetoric is "rhetoric concerned with celebrating the cultural ideal rather than with determining the disposition of a particular case. From the perspective of those inside the culture, epideictic produces consensus, or orthodoxy" (339). This orthodoxy was (arguably) more understandable in ancient societies seemingly bound together with common national ideals and collective orientations. Faced with the ramification of contemporary value into infinite locales of meaning, Sullivan becomes interested in the same question that orients my own inquiry and project: "Given the present order of things, is it possible to modernize a concept like epideictic rhetoric? Does epideictic, which once functioned to uphold a monolithic culture, operate in the postmodern world?" (339).

Sullivan's answer to this is that epideictic rhetoric can be contemporized if viewed as the "rhetoric of orthodoxies," in the sense that these orthodoxies represent sundry "belief systems and perspectives of subgroups or subcultures within a society." Sullivan argues that the fragmentation and pluralism of modern society is representative of "a society made up of competing orthodoxies," ultimately asserting, again, that in this social reality "People still use epideictic rhetoric, but they now use it to create, maintain, and celebrate orthodoxies, their own subcultures within a larger pluralistic society." Given this assertion, Sullivan suggests that contemporary *epideixis* is found in at least 5 distinct acts: "education, legitimation, demonstration, celebration, and criticism" (340).

Before moving forward, it becomes important to acknowledge and confront a potential critique of the epideictic genre as it has operated historically and as it currently operates. Sullivan's definition, that "epideictic produces consensus, or orthodoxy" is potentially flavored with hegemony, domination, and discursive disenfranchisement. What good is *epideixis* if it constrains choice, quashes dissent, and relegates minority perspectives to an afterthought? Sullivan acknowledges this difficulty, when he paraphrases John Poulakos, stating:

From the perspective of those who do not share the benefits of being members of the orthodoxy, epideictic can be seen as hegemonic rhetoric...for, in traditional Marxist terminology, it celebrates the dominant ideology. (339)



What both Poulakos and Sullivan fail to state in this explanation is the scope for where this consensus, this orthodoxy, is produced. I argue that the resulting consensus occurs not only at the macro level of a nation or state, but also at the level of subculture. If a consensus of “the good” is arrived at through the mechanisms of epideictic reasoning, further epideictic force waits always in the wing as a potential counterdiscourse. In Bakhtinian language, the epideictic becomes a carnivalesque both creating and standing opposed to the hegemonic perspective with its own set of values, lampooning and undermining the authority of the dominant narrative. Epideictic reasoning and argumentation—what is good and what is not good—occurs at each societal strata, acting as counterbalances and checks on the domination of each other. Laurent Pernot captures this curious epideictic tension of both reification and subversion of given values when he argues that epideictic rhetoric is

the offspring of the society to which it owes its very existence, and at the same time it presents lessons in values to this society. It is not reducible to cant or flattery; it performs a social role. It delineates images and beliefs common to the group, it defines and justifies accepted values; and sometimes it grants currency to new values. (98)

The potential for epideictic discourse to grant “currency to new values” is an important consideration in light of the allegation of hegemonic discourse.

To restate the criticism, a modern contention against the epideictic would be to blame the genre for producing what Laura Nader calls “harmony ideologies” that attempt to quash dissent and counterperspective, or the hegemonic discourses cited by Poulakis. If we

allow for this reality, then we have to allow that at the same time the epideictic provides the very possibility of counternarrative in response to these structures (where conditions exist). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, similar to Christine Oravec, identify education and propaganda as important sub-genres of epideictic speech, recognizing further the implicit power of the epideictic to transgress *from* an educative to a propagandistic function (while offering important distinctions between the two). Nonetheless, they also suggest that epideictic rhetoric has the power to resist the very problems of its own making. They state, “to the extent that education increases resistance to adverse propaganda, the two activities may be advantageously regarded as forces working in opposite directions” (53-54). The force of *epideixis* becomes at once narrative and counternarrative. Pregnant within the epideictic is the constant potential to inscribe new values and challenge paradigms.

In the problem of the potentially hegemonic force of *epideixis*, the validity of the dominant perspective is contingent upon both material realities (who has the capital, the means) as well as discursive advantage (who argues the best or who controls the media), but this domination is constantly subject to being dethroned by the mechanics of the counternarrative, generated time and again through epideictic reasoning, through groups and subcultures that hold comparable ideals in regard, even if those ideals are a loathing (blame or *psogos*) of the dominant discourse. Sullivan asserts that the contemporary orthodoxies that represent epideictic reasoning are “competing.” I feel that this assertion deserves some qualification, lest the impression be made a sort of cultural teleology. Oftentimes, the orthodoxies do compete directly, and participants recognize the fissures and borders of value

systems implicit in such competition. This can take (usually) benign forms such as the discursive and symbolic agonism of fans from rival sports teams. This can also take on more politically charged forms, such as the ACLU rallying in counterdiscourse to an Aryan Nations demonstration, or the cultural shift represented by participants in the Arab Spring. While in these situations, there is a notion of competition and vying, oftentimes, the orthodoxies and suborthodoxies exist and operate discursively with complete separation as discrete value systems only bound by the linchpin of representing communities of desire, each with members and codes of decorum either internalized or externalized. In this sense, one could make the argument that orthodoxies compete for the attention and participation of adherents, given that most social systems, by their nature, seek some degree of legitimization, often symbolically embodied in the notion that more adherents, believers, or participants reflects heightened legitimacy, but this is a weak brand of competition at best. The social value derived from participation in a given orthodoxy can only be determined at the level of the individual, rendering the autonomy of an orthodoxy (and therefore an orthodoxy's ability to be "competitive" in any helpful sense) diffuse and ultimately inscrutable. It seems a feature of orthodoxy to resist monolithism, and to continually refine, redefine, recombine, and subdivide as value becomes more pointedly specific and personally compelling. But what remains important from this consideration is that *epideixis* produces orthodoxy in innumerable and disparate communities of desire, many operating in the same spaces and frames of time. Burke, when talking about ideology, approaches this very notion of the "universal fact" of "generic divisiveness...common to all men." Of this condition, he

says “Here is the basis of rhetoric. Out of this [division] emerge the motives for linguistic persuasion” (*Rhetoric of Motives* 670). While Burke sees this as the province of rhetoric broadly, I see a particular epideictic strain at work, something argued more directly in Chapter IV.

In establishing his notion that criticism has an epideictic function, Sullivan first wrestles with the contemporary view that links criticism to the forensic mode. He suggests that this is a limited view of the function of the epideictic, that seeing it this way emphasizes “the fray of criticism and downplays the celebration.” Sullivan takes exception with the assertion of Martin J. Medhurst who, referencing the prior work of Lawrence Rosenfield, says that criticism is a “reason-giving discourse” which should refer to something other than encomium or invective (qtd. in Sullivan “The Epideictic Character” 340). This assertion, according to Sullivan, overlooks the fact that argument, evidence, and propositional reasoning are components of epideictic rhetoric. “Epideictic rhetoric is not devoid of argument or evidence,” claims Sullivan, who identifies both Cicero and Aristotle presenting the evidence-based argumentation implicit in *epideixis*. He further asserts that

the implication that forensic differs from epideictic on the basis of whether or not the rhetor offers an argument or evidence is fallacious. Epideictic does argue and it does present evidence, though the structure of the argument may be different from that of forensic or deliberative rhetoric. And when we remember that forensic is supposedly concerned with justice and injustice

(Aristotle 1373b1), it becomes even harder to associate criticism with forensic. (341)

While Sullivan underscores the divisions between the species based on their formal features as stated in Aristotle and Aristotle's interpreters, I am interested in the confluence between the species. I see the above less as representing a salient distinction between the three species' purposes, but more as another indication that the rhetorical species are dependent upon each other as counterparts to perform holistically as compelling argumentation in whichever of the three genres. Sullivan, then, posits that criticism and epideictic rhetoric are aligned because the former embodies three distinctly epideictic features: "(1) it is the rhetoric of unveiling; (2) it is the rhetoric of praise and blame; and (3) it is a rhetoric with focus on the present" (341).

What does Sullivan intend by saying that the epideictic is a "rhetoric of unveiling"? One dimension of this designation claims that one purpose of the epideictic is to revitalize and reimagine (through language, and typically for a given audience) an occurrence and the phenomenological experiencing of the thing. In this way, it could be thought of as a rhetoric of simulation, of calling to the mind of the audience a lived experience and revisiting its formal features. This is a shared aspect of criticism as well: criticism often seeks to revisit the phenomenon of experience to therefore make evaluative and qualitative claims concerning that experience. In this way, both criticism and epideictic rhetoric serve as an unveiling of a phenomenon obscured by time or distance: they call the past to mind and place occurrences in the frame of the present. But both *epideixis* and criticism also work in advance to indicate

the tenor of a given experience often prior to an audience's individual experiencing of that thing. In this way, they "unveil" potentialities. As an example, a film critic might offer an appraisal of a cinematic experience—praising and/or blaming its formal features (or praising some while blaming others)—and among the purposes such an appraisal serves might be the purpose of informing an audience who is questioning whether or not to invest in the experience of viewing the film themselves. The epideictic works seamlessly as criticism in this sense, with the goal of creating some form of social cohesion through the assumption that some aspect of the phenomenological experiencing of a thing (a commemoration, a play, a statue, a book, an album, a person's character, etc.) serves as a shared experience between different people. That is to say, it takes as an assumption that there is a precondition for identification between individuals who share similar experiences, and this identification can occur because of shared affinity or aversion.

The epideictic is also unveiling in another sense. Sullivan outlines a form of textual criticism advocated by (among others) Michael Leff, who insists on a tightly focused consideration of the text. And by "text," I would assert that in potential consideration is a wide range of symbolic acts, not simply alphabetically encoded symbolic exchange. According to Sullivan, Leff "calls for close textual analysis" wherein "texts yield up unexpected secrets." In this way, criticism can operate within an epideictic mode of uncovering the tacit implications of an artifact. As Sullivan says, "unveiling a text can be an uncovering of the value systems implicit in the text." In the same way, the rhetorical unveiling inherent in epideictic rhetoric operates to identify the values ascribed to the

experiencing of a thing. Sullivan continues, “we can say that describing and interpreting, normally considered initial stages in the act of criticism, are epideictic acts of unveiling, exposing the value system of a text or person to the gaze of spectators” (“The Epideictic Character” 342).

Following along with this act of unveiling or limning the values implicit in a text, criticism also “involves praising or blaming its object” (“The Epideictic Character” 343). As Sullivan argues, the epideictic mode is rife with a sort of multidirectional form of assessment, in which the object of discussion is assessed, the manner of delivery is assessed, and subsequently the character of the speaker is assessed. Historically, epideictic rhetoric was associated with ostentation because of the assumption that it took as its only concern the aesthetic manner of the delivery of a speech. But as Sullivan points out (paraphrasing Christine Oravec), “epideictic judgment is not confined to appraising the skill of the rhetor; it also involves judging the “truth” or verisimilitude of the speech.” The “orthodoxy of the rhetor, [and] his or her ability to perceive reality in the same way that the community does” is as necessary as the considerations of how the rhetor (or critic) defines and presents the object of focus. Sullivan writes:

Through the acts of praise and blame, critics magnify the virtue of texts, perspectives, and people who display the same value system as the rhetoric, and they belittle texts, perspectives, and people who do not share the same orthodoxy. (343)

Sullivan's final point in linking the fields of *epideixis* and criticism is to focus on the temporality of each. Just as the epideictic invokes examples and scenarios from the past to inform the actions of the present (and thereby influence future action), criticism operates with a similar multi-temporality. Criticism calls forth objects that exist in the past, and "attempts to establish how we are to think of them in the present" (Sullivan 344). Some might contend that contemporary popular criticism operates within the *kairos* of the moment to critically assess current artifacts and experiences. That is to say: the focus of most contemporary criticism is not on objects located in the past, but within a more contemporaneous and ongoing literary present. A film released last week, for example, while technically "past" takes part in the ongoing experiencing of the present condition. And this is a fair critique. As discussed earlier, the designations of past, present, and future pose distinct metaphysical challenges to the understanding of how the rhetorical modes function. In response, I would offer a few points. The first is the literalist interpretation of the past, suggesting that any artifact produced and "finalized" within the expectations of its particular genre has entered the past, even though that past is very recent (but increasingly less so). This is likely an unsatisfying answer, and as such I would argue that even an artifact from last week (let's say, for continuity's sake, a film), while not in the deep past chronologically, retains a "past" by being phenomenologically past. The experience is not immediately present to the experiencer or the critic/eulogizer, and as such, the experience warrants simulation or restoration. While the focus of both the *epideixis* and criticism is the construction or identification of values in the present, created and solidified through the



involvement of the past, criticism, much like *epideixis*, carries with it a temporal focus situated in the present, because it is attuned to the interaction of values here and now. The focus does not rest with or end at the object called from the past, but on how this object restructures the values of the moment, how it may or may not reorder our perceptions. Sullivan's consideration of the critical function of epideictic rhetoric salvages the genre from being only concerned with ceremonial or ostentatious speech contexts, and imbues the genre with a contemporary practicality that not only strengthens communities, but can also marshal economic force. And while Sullivan is a language theorist with specific interest in the discursive power of the epideictic, there are other voices that offer additional perspective when considering this elusive rhetorical genre.

### **Dave Hickey, *Epideixis*, and Communities of Desire**

*Epideixis* as a specific discourse has been understandably limited to the discipline of rhetorical studies generally, and probably most notably as a focus of the study of classical rhetoric(s). However, outside of this narrow stable of theory, there have been a number of studies in the past few decades that have each in their own way attempted to account for the functions of the epideictic in contemporary life, or so I contend. Taken in full, these studies represent a compelling argument in favor of revisiting the epideictic as a meaningful and important genre, thereby countering the prevalent historical view that as the "third species" it holds less meaning in terms of meaningful communication.

Along with these above stated critiques provided by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, and Dale Sullivan, which again are culled specifically from disciplines and subdisciplines that directly invoke the terminology and methodology of rhetorical criticism and rhetorical history, I am interested in fields that enfranchise *epideixis* obliquely—fields that take as a central principle of analysis the expectations of encountering and marking rarity and excellence, and attempting to talk about those encounters through the limited medium of language. One field with compelling evidence of structures of speech and appraisal that bear a homologous resemblance to rhetorical *epideixis* is contemporary aesthetic theory<sup>10</sup>. Within this field, Dave Hickey is importantly representative of a tendency to invoke the tenets of epideictic speech without specifically going so far as to call it such.

Upon winning a MacArthur Foundation Grant in 2001 (the so-called “genius grant”), Dave Hickey’s biography statement on the MacArthur Foundation website described him quite simply as “an art critic and analyst of Western culture,” whose “sometimes quite contrarian arguments...scholars have formally debated” (“MacArthur Fellows”). The rest of the bio attempts to explain Hickey’s prowess as a writer: his ability to bridge academic and lay audiences, his deft balancing of an exhaustive, “encyclopedic knowledge of art history,” his “grace and humor on a broad range of figures.” I include this particular focus on Hickey as writer for a specific reason: his attention to and fascination with language is an abiding feature of his work. In reading Hickey, there are both explicit and implicit arguments that enthrone language, common discourse, and the telling of

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<sup>10</sup> This designation is inclusive of both art criticism generally and studies on aesthetics.

everyday experience as important civic functions that allow for communities to be constructed and enacted. These simple forms of language, often not legitimated by the academy, become the bedrock for many subtle formations of community that ultimately have real consequences and perform real actions in the world. Speech is made incarnate in communities which form around shared objects of praise or blame. Hickey's arguments appear largely in his first two collected volumes: *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy*, and *The Invisible Dragon: Essays on Beauty*.

In the prologue to *Air Guitar*, Hickey makes explicit his attention to the way that people talk about the things they love. As he explains it, he sets about to “communicate the idiosyncrasy of [his] own quotidian cultural experience in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century” via a “memoir without tears, without despair or exaltation” (*Air Guitar* 9-10). A key subtext running throughout the entirety of this memoiristic work concerns the way people talk about beauty, about the good, about the things that they hold in high esteem, and what work this sort of “soft” criticism performs in a democratic culture. As Hickey explains it, “that kind of talk...has always been the heart of the mystery, the heart of the heart: the way people talk about loving things, which things, and why” (*Air Guitar* 13). In explaining this interest, Hickey references his experiences in academia, explaining that for a majority of his life before academia he lived in what he refers to as an “underground empire,” constructed of “record stores, honky tonks, art bars, hot-rod shops, recording studios, commercial art galleries, city rooms, jazz clubs, cocktail lounges, surf shops, book stores, rock-and-roll bars, editorial offices, discos, and song factories,”

wherein discourse on the beautiful, on the good, was a crucial form of cultural capital (*Air Guitar* 11). Later in life, Hickey took various positions in academia (for the health insurance, he claims) and it was there that he recognized a vast divide between how speech about shared desires proceeded. From his non-academic life, he had become interested in the way that discussions involving beauty and the good naturally emerged on the streets in his quotidian experience, but those very forms of speech about beauty seemed stifled by the specialist-oriented strictures of the Academy. As Hickey argues, “It finally dawned on me that in this place that we had set aside to nurture culture and study its workings, culture didn’t work” (13). The arguable inoperability of “culture” in the academy existed because

all the things [Hickey] wanted to talk about—all those tokens of quotidian sociability that had opened so many doors and hearts for [him]—all those occasions for chat, from *Tristram Shandy* to *Roseanne*, from Barnett Newman to Baby Face—*belonged* to someone. But not everyone. All the treasures of culture were divvied up and owned by professors, as certainly as millionaires own the beach-fronts of Maine.

In this system where interest was staked and claimed, casual reference to the good was discouraged as a result of the specialist anxieties of academe. Here, the engendering of such speech was met, in Hickey’s experience, with “aridity and suspicion” (13).

Hickey’s assertions above—though overstated, generalized, and idiosyncratic—do a few things. For one, they subtly ignore or at least delegitimize the formalist distinctions between high and low culture, distantly echoing Kenneth Burke in *Counter-Statement*.

Hickey may very well acknowledge the social reality of these distinctions: maintaining a somewhat clear if not absolute demarcation between high and low culture is a social inevitability, by and large. But Hickey seems (both in this passage and elsewhere) to want to talk about their overlap and reflexivity one with another, and how they are both often-salient forces that affect individual and collective experience. His is a progressive cultural studies perspective, one that recognizes the interplay between assumed “high” and “low” art. For Hickey, all cultural artifacts are doing legitimate cultural work for the lives of those who pay them mind, talk about them, advocate for them, perhaps even for those who despise them. Ignore them or deride them as you will, but they matter to someone, to many “someones,” and their impact (fiscal, cultural) abides. The other important takeaway from Hickey’s commentary is that informal speech becomes enthroned as the key medium for simple aesthetic discussions that have deeper entailments than might be assumed for informal conversation. While Hickey implicitly argues for the deconstruction of a high-low artistic binary, he also establishes informal discourse as the key medium through which cultural sharing and community building are created.

As an example of this last point, Hickey references his life experiences in providing an explanation for why we have so many love songs (15). His assertion is that

We need so many love songs because the imperative rituals of flirtation, courtship, and mate selection that are required to guarantee the perpetuation of the species and the maintenance of a social order...are up for grabs in mercantile democracies. These things *need* to be done, but we don’t know

how to do them, and, being free citizens, we won't be *told* how to do them. Out of necessity, we create the institution of love songs. We saturate our society with a burgeoning, ever-changing proliferation of romantic options, a cornucopia of choices, a panoply of occasions through which these imperative functions may be facilitated...Because it's hard to find someone you love, who loves you—but you can begin, at least, by finding someone who loves your love song. (16-17)

Hickey's explanation here is telling, and I include here the quotation in full, without paraphrase or summary, because it is a helpful illustration of not only an abiding theme of Hickey's work, but it also explains in its heart how *epideixis* operates in our daily construction of identity and community. In American culture, left to our own imperatives, free from many of the monolithic harmonizing narratives of former times (or even the formerly more normalized responses of conduct and decorum), and confronted with a blizzard of options relative to identity and persona, we move through daily life in the pursuit of an ethos, in pursuit of the need of a myth in the way that Joseph Campbell suggested in the *Power of Myth* that America "has no myth"—there is no idealized, widely agreed upon form of instruction to order quotidian experience. And to qualify Campbell's position, I would argue that we have no monolithic binding myth, but infinite myths in various permutations and states of refinement. Even the law, differing between state and country, between state and state, county and county, household and household in a democratic and socially-diverse community has failed to provide a firm orientation for modern life. Given

this disparity, we bridge these gaps through the enfranchisement of language, in speaking aloud our preference for a given love song/political party/sports team/brand of car in the hopes of enacting identification, of finding those who see the things we do in a way that resonates back to us. This doesn't mean that we find those with symmetrical cultural responses: oftentimes, to be an appreciator of some cultural artifact is room enough for community to grow. So we seek, amongst myriad, ineffable choices a path toward shared aesthetic experience, and language is our key means of navigation. Democratic plurality, in its heart, seems to resist, or at least complicate, monolithic communal narratives.

Hickey's tone throughout this introduction and the entirety of *Air Guitar* is light, bemused, observatory. It doesn't carry the dogmatic weight of academic authority, and as such, becomes a practice in the theme he foregrounds so clearly in this introduction: talking about the things we love matters, probably more than we might realize. My argument is that the discourse that Hickey is invoking here, implicitly, is *epideixis*. In contemporary America, arguably shorn of harmonizing ideologies and clear normative allegiances, we are left to navigate divergent fields of competing values linguistically. We do this, initially, by talking publically about the things we love, wearing clothing that signifies something of our interests or desire or personality, seeking out beautiful or unique experiences amongst others with relatively comparable inclinations as a small act of building community. In sum, we seek out the good amidst a dazzling array of options, and hope, along the way, to validate our perceptions of goodness or badness amongst others, to see where our views measure up, fall short of, qualify, or augment the consensus view.

Regarding this form of free discourse where people are enfranchised to talk about the things they love and why, Hickey states that he loves “that kind of talk, [has] lived on it and lived by it.” For him it represents “the heart of the mystery, the heart of the heart: the way people talk about loving things, which things, and why” (*Air Guitar* 13). In Hickey’s world, these “things” most frequently represented are artistic, musical, athletic, but this should not suggest a delimitation of potential subject matter: these categories are simply reflective of Hickey’s own pallet of desire and do not constitute a complete range of potentially good things. They are starting points. “These objects,” writes Hickey, referring to books, music, art works, “were occasions for gossip—for the commerce of opinion where there is no truth. In school, they were occasions for *mastery* where there is no truth—an even more dangerous proposition” (14). In this system, Hickey argues that his colleagues were led to a sort of silence regarding beautiful things:

Exempted by their status from the whims of affection and the commerce of opinion, they could only mark territory from the podium, with footnotes, and speak in the language of authority about things they did not love—while I listened. (*Air Guitar* 14)

Hickey claims that in this time, within this cone of silence regarding common artifacts of popular culture, “we moved...among all the treasures of human invention, like spiteful monks sworn to silence...while all the joys that bind the world together kept us apart” (*Air Guitar* 14).



Even though it is in the prologue of *Air Guitar* that Hickey identifies his interest in the way that people talk about the things they love, the essays following in that volume stand more as a practiced testament to the *way* in which these principles operate in daily experience, and less as a formal explication of the mechanics of the language of desire. As an example, in an essay entitled “The Heresy of Zone Defense,” Hickey revisits his experience as a spectator for game four<sup>11</sup> of the 1980 NBA finals between the Los Angeles Lakers and the Philadelphia Seventy-Sixers. The primary focus of the essay is a famous and well-documented play by Julius Erving in which Erving, compelled by the outstanding defense of Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, leaves his feet with the ball and is forced to perform an acrobatic (and unprecedented) mid-air maneuver to swing his arm out of bounds and back under the hoop to make a layup on the opposite side of the backboard. Hickey, in the audience as a witness to this moment, relates the experience with a poetic, epideictically-charged depiction, stating,

When Erving makes this shot, I rise into the air and hang there for an instant, held aloft by sympathetic magic. When I return to earth, everybody in the room is screaming...the celestial athleticism of it is stunning...it just breaks your heart. (*Air Guitar* 155)

In detailing this event, Hickey retrospectively takes interest less in the play itself than in what he identifies as “the *joy* attendant upon Erving’s making it, because it [the joy] was well nigh universal” (*Air Guitar* 155). He cites the history surrounding this play as a paragon of excellence and novelty (that was somehow both “*new* and *fair*”) as being a topic of

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<sup>11</sup> Hickey erroneously asserts that this play occurred in game 5 of the 1980 NBA finals.

discussion, of verbal appreciation, for both sports fans and sports columnists alike. This moment becomes an artifact for sharing and comparison through the operations of aesthetic experience. As Elaine Scarry writes about the experiencing of beauty or rarity: “What is the felt experience of cognition at the moment one stands in the presence of a beautiful boy or flower or bird? It seems to incite, even to require, the act of replication” (3). And while the replication that Scarry mentions as an example is Wittgenstein’s idea of the hand drawing what the eye beholds, it is important to consider that this very replication can proceed in numerous ways, including verbally as a matter of discourse, in the attempt (always insufficient) of telling the beauty, of publicizing the normally privately-held sublime moment as an object for fellow consideration. Such instances provide us with what Hickey calls a “willingness to accost strangers with our enthusiasm, to venture among them in search of coconspirators” (*Invisible Dragon* 81).

Before closer analysis of Hickey’s telling of this event moment from the 1980 NBA finals, it might be helpful to revisit the abiding, general tenants of the epideictic. First, the epideictic is involved with praise (or its inverse) in response to excellence or rarity (or the corresponding lack thereof). Second, the epideictic can take as its concern both human objects and human actions as well as non-human objects or actions: essentially, whatever can be praised (or blamed). Third, the epideictic genre contains a trans-temporal element. In the case of Julius Erving’s play, the universality, the sudden, instantaneous thrill of the occurrence—which, as revealed in a post-game interview, was even somewhat felt by Erving’s defender, Abdul-Jabbar—embodies our cultural fascination with rarity in its varied forms,

the desire for novel experience. This thrill in reference to rarity became an object of verbal and textual appreciation. As Hickey writes, “Everyone who cares about basketball knows this play...and [has] marveled at it. Everyone who writes about basketball has written about it” (*Air Guitar* 155). Generalizations aside, what Hickey’s pronouncement suggests is a cultural reference point created by a moment of supreme, laudable rarity. Appreciation (or critique) of Erving’s play operates as one standard among countless others for the operation of a subculture—a sort of pop shibboleth whereby fans of the sport mark and gauge interpersonal overlap. In a simple sense, this moment creates what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca call a “*sense of communion* centered around particular values recognized by the audience” (51). Hickey references this same “sense of communion” in more colloquial terms, likely recognizing this moment as representing one of those “joys that bind the world together” (*Air Guitar* 14). While the world bound together by this particular joy (a novel basketball move) is a relatively small world, the larger extrapolation abides: these moments of rarity are initially captured, relived, shared, scrutinized, compared, and revisited through the act of simple verbal confirmation on an interpersonal level. This verbal or textual codification provides a benchmark of individual assessment (e.g.: “What did you think of Erving’s play?”), and these moments endure diachronically (fulfilling each tenet of *epideixis*) to solidify, redraw, and create community. The play was a rare performance by a human agent in a highly-spectated event, and it is a moment still considered a paragon within the field of sports writing and spectatorship. This epideictic impetus is demonstrated through how

something as seemingly trivial as a basketball layup can bind strangers in a specific moment in time, and to paraphrase Hickey, open doors and hearts (*Air Guitar* 13).

### Hickey's *Invisible Dragon*

In *The Invisible Dragon*, Hickey departs from what I would characterize as examples of the practical embodiment of epideictic discourse found in *Air Guitar*, and produces a more fully-formed theory of the operations of the beautiful, specifically in contemporary American society. The project seeks to account for the West's (specifically, America's) "long, pagan romance with beautiful things" (*Invisible Dragon* xiv). The "paganism" Hickey references is present in the way that America, an ostensibly rational modern country with historical Judeo-Christian roots, allows objects and non-entities (as well as living people and their actions) to be rife with a sort of aesthetic potency that ultimately renders these objects societally meaningful, powerful. Hickey suggests that this is a form of paganism, "our [America's] residual...penchant for investing objects with power" (*Invisible Dragon* 72). Hickey wants to more fully account for how this happens, and account for why it is important, ultimately making the compelling claim, "beautiful objects reorganize society, sometimes radically" (*Invisible Dragon* 81). Hickey uses the word "objects" to define what is invested with this power, and while his analysis is closely concerned with the ostensibly high-culture objects of art and music, his analysis also accounts for the popular and quotidian as potentially containing exemplars of excellence, as well as excellent examples of human behavior and action (as demonstrated continually in *Air Guitar*). For Hickey, the beautiful

can come from any direction or any layer of the social or socio-economic strata. He attempts to show why these things have social force beyond being merely amusing to experience or look at. And his assessment suggests that it is in the rhetorical appraisal or verbal consideration where community can begin to take shape.

Hickey begins his essay “American Beauty” with the pronouncement:

Americans talk all the time about the things they find beautiful...When they do, they use the word “beautiful” with consistency and precision in a very traditional way that dates back to the Renaissance and beyond that to Latin antiquity. (*Invisible Dragon* 70)

Whether Hickey’s specific lineage of this impetus (which arguably dates back to the Renaissance and beyond) is accurate or not clouds the issue: the tendency to observe the beautiful, the transcendent (the sublime), the rare, is a broadly human impulse, not captive to a given intellectual heritage. This is not to say that certain societies have not provided better conditions for such observations of the beautiful: Hickey’s very analysis invokes the specific features of American democracy as being rife with moments of epideictic exchange. He terms these moments of pronouncing something “beautiful” as “vernacular usage,” as part of everyday speech, wherein “the word “beautiful” bears no metaphysical burden,” but merely “signifies the pleasure we take in something that transcends the appropriate” (*Invisible Dragon* 70). It identifies that “something” as better, somehow, on account of its rarity. Hickey highlights the candid, exclamatory nature of the popular invocation of the word “Beautiful,” identifying it as “a demonstrative gesture to locate the source of our involuntary

pleasure in the external world.” Here, Hickey exemplifies the workings of a major form of epideictic discourse. Aesthetic experience engenders a verbal response, followed, “More often than not...by talk—by comparisons, advocacy, analysis, and dissent” (70). This attendant verbal exchange is a common feature of the experience of the beautiful<sup>12</sup>, and Elaine Scarry has also recognized and accounted for this epideictic operation. Beauty, Scarry argues (echoing Diotima to Socrates), prompts “begetting” in order “to make the beauty of the prior thing more evident, to make, in other words, the poem’s or law’s ‘clear discernibility’ even more ‘clearly discernible’” (5). This is the abiding impulse of both *epideixis* and criticism—holding up the beautiful thing, calling forth its features, praising it with a fitting textual or vocal tribute (or damning it for its failures), assessing how other co-participants might have experienced this thing, and using these moments of identification to marshal action, behavior, or perception. There is a normalizing feature of this type of endeavor, as described by both Hickey and Scarry, that operates almost at the level of the biological: this public act of ascertaining that your program and palette at least align with another of the human species is a foundational moment of identification, especially if the object of desire is unique or particularly rare/uncommon.

As established earlier, one of the common misconceptions of the epideictic genre is that it is limited to only consideration of human acts. As a discourse, the epideictic is interpreted historically at numerous points as pertaining not simply to human agents and

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<sup>12</sup> In using the word “beautiful,” I am calling forth a more Aristotelian concept of “*to kalon*,” which I would argue would be inclusive of the good, the beautiful, the fitting, the decorous, the sublime, the rare. I argue that Hickey would acknowledge that the pronouncement of “beautiful,” as he explains it, transcends simple evaluation of the formal aesthetic features of a thing, person, or act, and encompasses a wide variety of meanings, typically centered around the rarity or novelty of a given phenomenon.

actions, but anything that transcends a paradigm or norm to demonstrate rarity. On this point, Hickey is once again in step with many of the ancients, when he says, “The object we identify as beautiful may be anything from a chemical sunset to a rookie’s jump shot” (*Invisible Dragon* 70). Beauty and its effect aren’t always bound by widely-decided social imperatives, but, to invoke the old cliché, by the eye of the beholder. In this way, each pronouncement of “beautiful” is an essay in the true sense, the echolocating ping of a submarine seeking to orient itself in an ocean of infinite directions. Each pronouncement of “beautiful” is at once categorical (“my subjective aesthetic experience is genuine, needing no external validation”), but also curiously at once provisional, invitational, tentative (“do others share my assessment of this moment/object?”). Hickey suggests the same duality regarding subjective pronouncements of “beautiful,” that these exclamations acknowledge “pleasure that...is involuntary, private, and self-fulfilling” (*Invisible Dragon* 70). In one sense, they are self-contained and require no response. But then, as Hickey asks, why say “beautiful” aloud?

After explaining the basic operations of such statements of beauty, and their corresponding involvement in discursive moments of comparison and perpetuation, Hickey then addresses what he calls “the mystery,” which “resides in our precognitive certainty that there are sunsets and jump shots worthy of mention” (*Invisible Dragon* 70). Labeling this certainty as “precognitive” is telling, and approaches the ineffable drive that motivates each moment of human identification (discussed in the following chapter). It is in this quote from Hickey where we see faint traces of the psychological need for epideictic discourse, that it is not simply a means of effective and ostentatious flattery, of winning others over, but a means

of navigating the world and establishing interpersonal connection with others, and that there is something very much near the bone, or more aptly, near the brain. These aesthetic assertions, made public, fulfill some form of human need that transcends the rational. Yet, they are more than merely subjectively palliating, or there would be no need to vocalize them. As Hickey ponders, if such aesthetic projections served no purpose other than personal affirmation, then “why utter the word “beautiful” at all? And why respond when someone else does?...why make it public?”. Hickey’s asserts that we (Americans) publically share our aesthetic assessments foremost because “we are good democrats” who “aspire to transparency and consensus” (*Invisible Dragon* 70). Subtly implied here are once again the particular ideologies and forms of governance of American society—these small acts of epideictic reasoning become ideal microcosms of how we generally believe a democratic society ought to operate. Again, generally, history has shown that consensus breeds facility, in certain respects. Deep disagreement presents a barrier to be overcome, an embodiment of spent energy (rhetorical or otherwise), and the promise of a laborious and oftentimes tedious process of reconciliation. Hickey then claims that “we are citizens of a self-consciously historical society,” thus recognizing “these personal responses as votes for the way things should look or sound; we acknowledge the chance that, once made transparent, these spontaneous exclamations may presage a new consensus” (*Invisible Dragon* 70-71).

To this point, Hickey hints again at the language of Nicole Loraux, who argues that the demonstrative genre of oratory aims at ideality and the public imaginary, the way we believe things should be. Hickey also suggests a social awareness of the mutability of taste and



acceptance—that we make these pronouncements to continually gauge our position relative to what the majority holds in favor (the majority of whichever culture(s) or subculture(s) we take part in). Hickey’s concluding statement argues that another reason we deliberate in such assessments of the beautiful is “because we can, because we live in a society in which freedom of speech and the pursuit of happiness are officially sanctioned” (*Invisible Dragon* 71). Such acts of speech form a central part of American democracy as explicit rights held inviolable by national law. On this last point, concerning freedom of speech, some might argue that Hickey is being too regional, perhaps suggesting that this impulse to speak and identify the beautiful or good are uniquely American experiences. Such ability certainly isn’t harmed by the social conditions that allow Americans these expressions. As Hickey also argues, the expression of idiosyncratic preference is more of a virtue in pluralistic, commercial economies whereas these same expressions if errantly proffered in contexts with limited social liberties could be perceived as “a threat to the community” (*Invisible Dragon* 84). But I posit that such tendencies have a deeper genesis within the species. As mentioned above, the proffering of aesthetic assessments works toward interpersonal identification, serving the preservative function of testing the individual’s personal phenomenological experience with that of the larger community, seeing where overlap or incongruity might occur. The upshot is that these vocalizations take on varying degrees of risk and reward, depending on the culture or political context in which they are uttered.

As I argued earlier in this chapter, epideictic discourse has become, modernly, a way for members of American society to navigate through a form of post-modern fragmentation,

wherein value has been largely reduced to the level of the individual. Hickey shares this basic premise, acknowledging that “As Americans...we are bereft of the internalized commonalities of race, culture, language, region, and religion that traditionally define ‘peoples’” and as a result, “we are social creatures charged with inventing the conditions of our own sociability out of the fragile resource of our private pleasures and secret desires.” Given that even a universal aesthetic language eludes us, “we correlate” concerning “icons from the worlds of fashion, sports, the arts, and entertainment as we would about a hearth...We organize ourselves in nonexclusive communities of desire” (*Invisible Dragon* 74). From a formalist standpoint, or from the view of one who believes in objective standards of beauty and the good (standards to which pop culture can never, or only rarely, attain), such a social network of value creation appears at once “beguiling or appalling.” But as Hickey asserts, and as I also argue, as dismissible and apparently baseless as this form of value identification might seem, “there is no denying its efficacy, its appropriateness, or its provenance” (74-75). Our deepest interpersonal connections are commonly borne aloft on simple identifications regarding what we hold as the good or beautiful. As Rob Gordon, the elitist protagonist in Steven Frears’ film *High Fidelity* asserts, “what really matters is what you *like*, not what you *are* like... Books, records, films - these things matter” (emphasis added).

The “communities of desire,” identified by Hickey, exist to take part not only in what Scarry calls the replication of the beautiful, but in the distribution of it as well. As Scarry argues, this impulse toward replication serves to maintain the presence of the beautiful thing, but it also serves the attendant function of “distribution”—ensuring that others have

the chance of participating in the positively unsettling encounter with the beautiful artifact. And Scarry too asserts that these determinations matter at least on a social and personal level, that “How one walks through the world, the endless small adjustments of balance, is affected by the shifting weights of beautiful things” (15). Hickey more directly and forcefully argues that

beautiful objects reorganize society, sometimes radically. Random things, found to be beautiful, create polyglot constituencies. They represent for those who convene around them both who they are and what they want. (*Invisible Dragon* 81).

However the notion is phrased—“nonexclusive communities of desire” or “polyglot constituencies”—what Hickey is asserting, without reference to the critical discourse of rhetorical studies, is the community-building dynamic of public *epideixis*. Formerly considered merely a particular mode of speech for statecraft (at best) and cheap entertainment (at worst), this particular form of epideictic argument in our age is a nucleic force that gives disparate parties avenues of identification. It serves to limn subjective and collective value. It operates in a dual-form manner: first, as a critical impulse that drives or marshals consensus. Second, as a litmus operation by which people interpersonally test and evaluate their appreciation of a thing comparable to someone else’s perceptions. Members of these “communities of desire” (and I argue that we all occupy positions in any number of such communities) are macro-directed to given moments of rarity or “the good” by popular and large-format critical voices. Then, individuals refine their own aesthetic palettes through

the micro-direction of interpersonal converse regarding what was seen, experienced, or thought. All of this operates to reinforce what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca called “the contact of minds,” and this contact is conditioned upon epideictic-formed moments of identification, as discussed via Burke in the next chapter. As Hickey argues, “The simple act of liking something bears with it the inference that we have recognized our likeness in the world beyond ourselves—something to our taste, like a muffin” (*Invisible Dragon* 82).

## CHAPTER IV

### LEVERAGING *EPIDEIXIS*

The first three chapters have been largely theoretical. Chapter I looked at epideictic rhetoric as it was introduced by its most popular taxonomer, Aristotle. In that chapter, I argued that the popular interpretations of epideictic speech were too restrictive, and that there exists enough textual evidence to at least make the interpretation of the rhetorical species more fluid and ambiguous than the prevailing wisdom concerning the rhetorical species suggested. I argued that at very least, the persistent historical claim of the epideictic genre as a one-dimensional discursive act is worthy of closer scrutiny.

Chapter II continued the first chapter's project by showing the variability of epideictic rhetoric as it has been codified within a limited history, appearing as a traveling discourse that served various purposes dependent on the cultural context in which it appeared. Various discourse theorists through time have added their own distinct glosses on the rhetorical species, and many have spoken directly about the value of *epideixis*. This contrasts with a common interpretation that relegates the epideictic genre to a less important status, as something less immediate and functional than other forms of speech. Chapter II hoped to expand on the epideictic genre's reconsideration initiated in Chapter I, by showing a brief historical survey of other perspectives.

Chapter III presented a case for broadening the epideictic genre beyond its sometimes stifling scope of large-scale ceremonial address, and showed that the claims of numerous contemporary theorists support this case. My claim in Chapter III was that

because of sociological fragmentation (that our postmodern world has ramified value, the good and the bad, to an unprecedented level) that in contemporary society we are reliant upon a form of epideictic speech to encounter and construct value systems. In this modern context, epideictic speech acts as a lodestone or guide for individuals navigating various fields of competing values. In Chapter III, I linked this assertion to the contemporary theories of Dave Hickey, Elaine Scarry, and Dale Sullivan. The former two, as theorists on beauty and aesthetics, were speaking of ways that the beautiful or good engenders speech acts that subsequently construct communities. The latter, as a rhetorician, sets the groundwork for showing contemporary epideictic speech as an act of criticism, making the point that contemporary epideictic speech isn't simply celebratory but also revelatory.

In this final chapter, I will attempt to offer a more robust analysis of what Hickey referenced as the “precognitive certainty” toward identifying (and subsequent verbalizing of) aesthetic appreciation, what the fields of psychology, rhetorical studies, and sociology might call “identification.” I hope to at least approach a notion of why the motivation toward identification exists, how *epideixis* takes part in identification, what purposes it serves and what it offers human agents. I also hope to illustrate “communities of desire” and present some of their basic operations and impacts on contemporary society, in the hopes of offering evidence as to the reality and practice of epideictic discourse playing an important role in the formation of modern subcultures.

## The Need for Identification

One problem of my analysis to this point has been a reliance on an unexpressed assumption: that human agents have a desire (or a need) to gather around a shared item of appreciation or scorn. My argument to now has operated on this assumption, taking it as a fixed feature of human nature—as something that occurs in general for most people who are involved in the act of decoding symbols in some form. I hope to both account for this tendency toward identification in more directly theoretical terms in order to not only address the notion of symbolic desire as a reality, but to give critical support for the occurrence—to hope to at least point to the mechanics of *epideixis* and hint at what might be happening. This is ultimately an impossible process to account for completely, as human motivation ranges widely. What might seem to be a homoversal tendency might, in each instance, be the result of rival causes, and this recognition is difficult to deny.

Identification as a study is not the express property of any specific discipline or system of thought, but it enjoys a noticeable presence among numerous fields and throughout history. It would be impossible to account for each distinct dimension of identification as interpreted by numerous independent thinkers, but a general accounting for the term is needed before the effects of its operation can be considered more fully. Rhetorical theorist Gary C. Woodward, in *Idea of Identification*, his comprehensive treatise on the subject, offers what I find to be a helpful starting point for my purposes. Woodward considers identification as

the conscious alignment of oneself with the experiences, ideas, and expressions of others: a heightened awareness that a message or gesture is revisiting a feeling or state of mind we already “know.” (5)

“Identification is experience,” Woodward continues, explaining that when in full effect, identification “creates spikes of decisive recognition that can bind us to specific sources” (5). This latter wording of this definition curiously echoes Hickey’s determination that distinct aesthetic experiences represent the “joys that bind the world together” (14). These moments to which we bear witness, these “experiences, ideas, and expressions,” form nascent bonds that often flourish into interpersonal relations or involvement in a broader and similarly-minded community.

Any analysis interested in language, identification, and symbolic exchange must soon acknowledge the ideas of consubstantiality and identification as presented by Kenneth Burke, for it is Burke who provides the most thorough (if at times enigmatic) analysis of these phenomena in the rhetorical corpus, building from basic psychological principles introduced most notably by Freud. To understand Burke’s particular notion of identification, it is important to account first for his definition of rhetoric. In *Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke famously asserts that rhetoric is “The use of words by human agents to form attitudes or induce actions in other human agents” (565) and “the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (567). From the latter of these definitions, it is possible to detect the assumption of naturalism or a natural tendency, a preservative function that the human species employs to give order to the world.



This order serves a helpful function, as the free exchange of symbols and signs could, in theory, allow humans to remain in a state of permanent division, which, continuing on with the assumption, ultimately results in squandered energy and resources, thereby constraining or threatening the survival of the individual. Elsewhere in *Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke mentions another aspect of rhetoric, which capitalizes on such division itself. Here, Burke defines rhetoric as

*par excellence* the region of the Scramble, of insult and injury, bickering, squabbling, malice and the lie, cloaked malice and the subsidized lie...because invective, eristic, polemic, and logomachy are so pronounced an aspect of rhetoric. (543)

Much of the above quote emphasizes the popular, ultimately misguided notions of rhetoric as an agonistic practice that differentiates perspectives and people. It is also conceived in the above quote as a deceptive art, what Wayne Booth called “rhetrickery” (11). But as both Burke and Booth acknowledge, there is much more to a genuine assessment of rhetoric. Burke emphasizes that rhetoric takes as its provenance the field of human symbolic action broadly and generally (not simply antagonistic struggle and strife). Burke suggests a clear-eyed vision of rhetoric and all that it entails, arguing that

We need never deny the presence of strife, enmity, factions, as a characteristic motive of rhetorical expression. We need not close our eyes to their almost tyrannous ubiquity in human relations; we can be on the alert always to see

how such temptations to strife are implicit in the institutions that condition human relationships.... (*Rhetoric of Motives* 544)

Burke argues that we can, however, “always look beyond” the one-dimensional vision of agonistic rhetoric “to the principle of identification,” which he defines as a “terministic choice justified by the fact that the identifications in the order of love are also characteristic of rhetorical expression” (*Rhetoric of Motives* 544). Identification thereby becomes for Burke a counterargument to the negative sanctions placed upon rhetoric generally. It takes a central role in the process of superseding and transcending the agonism that often attends human discourse, particularly where differences are pronounced and consensus seems impossible.

It is perhaps worth noting that Burke refers to these counter moments to traditionally understood rhetoric as “identifications in the order of love.” Designating these moments as having some part in “love” recovers a more holistic and representative range of human experience for the domain of rhetorical inquiry. By claiming love as a legitimate exigency for rhetorical action, Burke’s designation helps to strain the simplistic and common interpretation of rhetoric as an eristic practice only. It suggests that via the mechanisms of identification, communities may be formed around their shared interests in objects, people, ideologies, etc. It also suggests that within these communities, participants not only form alliances (however concrete or diffuse) because of their love (or disdain) of given artifacts or ideas, but that there is the possibility of sentiments “in the order of love” interpersonally. Therefore, love works on at least two levels, first as directed at the artifacts of desire to create communities of desire, and second, between members themselves. Rhetoric thereby adds the

necessary dimension of being a generative force that not only marks distinction and difference in the purely eristic and agonistic sense, but as a countervailing force that draws together participants in ways unacknowledged by a limited, merely antagonistic interpretation of rhetorical art.

Burke explains identification and consubstantiality with the simple example of:

A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B. Or he may *identify himself* with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so. (*Rhetoric of Motives* 544)

Importantly, these moments of identification are structured realities that are materialized through language and other symbolic action. By “structured,” I don’t want to equate identification and persuasion (which Burke specifically avoids). I interpret this to mean that identification, while often structured through persuasive means, nonetheless retains an element of the subconscious, the subjective. Identification often operates through subtle psychological mechanisms, with ineffable qualities of attraction that exceed the bounds of a simple, contrived, rhetorical persuasion. Moments of identification nonetheless are not categorically or empirically-observed realities indexed through language as the means of coming together one with another. They are predicated on flux and change. As the above quote suggests, identification might not in fact index a reality at all—it can be a figment of imagination occurring in the mind of person A or B, a result of assumption or persuasion. The crucial wording here, that which links identification and *epideixis*, is the consideration

that between two agents their “interests are joined.” In this scenario, epideictic discourse presents an occasion for identification. The epideictic is not synonymous with identification, but is the important first step in the process of realizing identification. The initiating of this process might occur through direct verbal expression (assertions of the goodness or badness of a thing, an event, a person, an act), through joint participation in events (be they cultural, political, etc.), through particular symbolic allegiances or associations (clothing, hairstyles, bumper stickers, the habitation of places, the support or aid of given public figures), and through any number of symbolic acts that suggest value judgments. Identification occurs subjectively after internal assessment of these initial symbolic acts. *Epideixis*, over and again, leads to the potentiality of identification. And when identification is realized, and subsequently augmented, the potential for deeper involvement in a “community of desire” likely increases.

Despite the seeming overlap and personal interplay that occurs as a result of identification, Burke is also keen to suggest the mystery of identification, what he calls the “ambiguities of substance,” wherein

In being identified with B, A is “substantially one” with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, an individual locus of motives. Thus he is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another. (*Rhetoric of Motives* 545)

This state of paradox is inherent in the act of identification—by alignment with others through symbolic action, we recognize the moments of overlap while also more vividly

acknowledging radical difference and distinction (as explained further along in this chapter with de Certeau's consideration of the bridge).

After this explanation of the tension of identification and its potential for bridging gaps and marking differences, Burke then tackles something of the psychological underpinnings of his form of symbolic identification through Freudian developmental psychological terms. Burke says that

While consubstantial with its parents, with the "firsts" from which it is derived, the offspring is nonetheless apart from them. In this sense, there is nothing abstruse in the statement that the offspring both is and is not one with its parentage. Similarly, two persons may be identified in terms of some principle they share in common, an "identification" that does not deny their distinctness. (*Rhetoric of Motives* 545)

In a directly genetic, molecular sense, identification therefore shows how a person can be *apart* from another person while also *a part* of that person. Outside of the biological literalness of the above example, this helpful comparison suggests something of the mental processes at play when identification proceeds via the means of symbolic exchange.

In this first stage of identification, Burke recalls Freud's explanation of the psychological mechanics of primary identification. In "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego," Freud distinguishes identification occurring on three levels, with the first being "the original form of emotional tie with an object" (117). For Freud, this level of identification is enmeshed in complex sexual dynamics, and therefore is beyond the

reckoning or scope of this project. Freud's third level of identification, however, concerns the way that groups adhere in communities of desire. In this third level, identification "may arise with any new perception of a common quality shared with some other person who is not an object of the sexual instinct" (118). This "quality" need not be something concrete, and may proceed upon the simple recognition and appreciation of another's reckoning abilities, ideological interpretations, or "taste."

Burkean identification ultimately rests in this third level of identification as presented by Freud, wherein a "common quality shared" or a joined interest (epideictic expression) creates a moment that facilitates potential identification. But central to Burke's notion of identification is the awareness for how fraught the process of identifying can be, that "to begin with 'identification' is, by the same token, though roundabout, to confront the implications of division." The complex tension of identifying by negation is a key feature of communities bound through epideictic discourse. As Burke argues, "Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division." This "division" is not only the distinctness of literal substance (different bodies and persons), but symbolic and interpretive division, confronted with the earnestness of a desire for some degree of compatibility—which tends to defray the strife and agonism that is posited as an alternative. As Burke continues, "If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity" (*Rhetoric of Motives* 546). It is on the condition of division and being apart that the drive for identification arises, and we enact this identification, I argue through small or large, voluntary or involuntary, acts of

epideictic discourse. But as mentioned, this is often a risky undertaking, socially and politically. The expression of the wrong desires or interests in the wrong context can have disastrous effects. Oftentimes, communities of desire remain nebulous on the specifics of their shared desires or interests, yet they are easily thematically bound by what it is they deride or dislike. Often, these communities are not so much bound by what they love in specific, but by what they love to hate, what they mutually do not love. By way of example, In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau presents the symbolic ambiguity of the bridge, which might serve as a helpful corollary to understanding the dynamics in play among communities of desire. De Certeau, argues, “the bridge is ambiguous everywhere: it alternately welds together and opposes insularities. It distinguishes them and threatens them. It liberates from enclosure and destroys autonomy” (128). In this sense, the mechanism of identification allows for a “transgression” of a natural division (the interpersonal), bringing people closer in dialogue. However, this possibility can undermine its harmonizing purposes by showing distinctions, or underscoring the fact that division had to be overcome at all—the bridge alternately spans a formerly impassible distance while emphasizing the span itself. This is a central tension in the mechanisms of identification—that while communities are formed and founded on moments of congruence, this identification often underscores former distinctions, or highlights current difference in an attempt to achieve more pronounced differentiation. This essence also attests to how communities of desire themselves are constantly ramifying to create sub-communities, each specialized along certain lines of praise and blame, each constantly susceptible to further fragmentation and

articulation—much like the moving target of human desire and identity. Regardless of the attendant dangers, this is a central notion of Burkean identification: confronting the imposed limitations via symbolic exchange in the hopes of remaining in difference and distance, which often leads to a state of war and strife.

As stated above, identification is fundamental to Burke because of the reality and inevitability of division, and a central concern of Burke's philosophy concerns division and how it is mediated by the effects of identification and consubstantiality. Burke's division occurs on the basis of any barrier or impediment to free exchange of meaning. For my analysis, I argue that value fracture has rendered American society largely bereft of a large format, unifying social narrative. As such, individuals turn to epideictic discourse to bridge the gaps of division. Burke identifies this desire to transcend difference as a key concern of the field of rhetoric generally. He says,

Insofar as the individual is involved in conflict with other individuals or groups, the study of this same individual would fall under the head of *Rhetoric*. . . . The *Rhetoric* must lead us through the Scramble, the Wrangle of the Market Place, the flurries and flare-ups of the Human Barnyard, the Give and Take, the wavering line of pressure and counterpressure, the Logomachy, the onus of ownership, the War of Nerves, the War. (*Rhetoric of Motives* 547)

Rhetoric “must” lead us through these various forms of strife and division, and my argument is that the form this rhetoric frequently takes is that of its most historically-othered species: the epideictic. Identification is a central germ in the rhetorical enterprise of epideictic speech.



Richard Graff and Wendy Winn suggest certain similarities between Burke's "identification" and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's "communion," ultimately asserting that "Communion is the end of epideictic discourse, as epideictic's chief aim is to reinforce the audience's adherence to communal values and standards," which it does with an eye to "rapports" (121). Though each theorist will lacquer the meaning of their given theoretical terms with special nuance, I would argue that each is a catalyst of effective epideictic discourse.

Elin Diamond, in an article entitled "Rethinking Identification," clarified this notion, present in both *The New Rhetoric* and in Burke, when she posited that:

If we think of identity as a mark of a separate and unified subjectivity, identification is rejection of separateness; it denies the others' difference by allowing the subject the excitement of trespass, the thrill of being the other.  
(86)

This Burkean notion of the "rejection of separateness," fostered and nurtured initially by even the most minute epideictic exchange, fulfills the admirable goal of what might be identified historically as a "true rhetoric," the deferral of strife and hostility in the hopes of joining individuals in some state of positive coexistence.

The efficacy of my arguments until now might be less forcefully considered to this point, given that I have focused primarily in theory to set the groundwork for how *epideixis* operates contemporarily. In the next section, I hope to show a more concrete example of how in fact epideictic rhetoric functions as a salient aspect of contemporary society, engendered and fortified especially by Web 2.0. My chosen field of analysis for this section—

Amazon product reviews—shares key features of *epideixis* that have been perpetuated historically: it looks and acts like ancient examples of this particular rhetorical art. And I also claim that, aside from simply ascribing value or goodness (or the inverse) to particular acts, products, or people, this example of *epideixis* also radically influences commerce and culture at large. I will argue that online product reviews (specifically through the web-based retailer Amazon) are moments of contemporary *epideixis* with far-reaching economic implications. And I will close the chapter and my overall analysis by briefly considering other forms of epideictic reasoning, and offering some final consideration about why reconsidering the epideictic matters.

### ***Epideixis* in Product Ratings**

Online communities seem especially rich in providing clear examples of how epideictic speech, like Hickey’s claim about beautiful objects, does in fact reorganize society, at least discursively. In these cyber locations, epideictic speech functions handily in the creation of communities, and in a sense, the Internet is a fitting laboratory to study these emergent communities and acquire a sense of how they function and thrive. One area where epideictic rhetoric functions commonly is in product rating and reviews.

According to recent e-commerce statistics, the average American spent an estimated \$1,804 online in 2015 (“Infographic: How Much Online Shoppers...”). The lion’s share of this online spending, by all statistical estimates, was claimed by Amazon, which according to some sources surpassed Wal-Mart in 2015 to become the world’s largest retailer (Li).

Amazon has succeeded where other online retailers have failed, arguably due to the scope of its holdings, its product base. It carries a limitless array of products and services that appeal to a wide consumer base. This fact, coupled with a primarily online presence which significantly reduces its overhead costs, allows the price points on its veritable sea of merchandise to remain not only consistently competitive with more niche retailers, but quite often the lowest on the market. Amazon has become a benchmark for commercial acquisition: a gold standard against which other sourced prices for goods are often compared by money-conscious consumers.

Coupled with the attractive commercial features of an ever-expanding product base and a competitive pricing model is a robust product review system that works to inform potential customers of the inherent features of a given product. Amazon's review system allows any registered user to supply a product review, regardless of whether or not the product in question was purchased through Amazon.com. The review platform features a scale rating system in which reviewers rate items using a star scale, granting a product a star rating from 1 star to 5 stars (0 stars is not an option—a fact which has engendered a fair amount of argument on consumer review discussion boards). In addition to the star rating scale, reviewers are also encouraged to provide a narrative review of the product as well. It is important to note that a majority of these product reviews are not supplied by professional

reviewers<sup>13</sup>, but by other online consumers who ostensibly have an experience with the same product and voluntarily act as tellers of the characteristics of that product.

One unique feature of Amazon's product review model, and a feature that has made this review model the standard for ecommerce customer review platforms, is the inclusion and allowance of negative customer experiences—of reviews that employ *psogos* or “blame” regarding either the product itself, the distributor working under the auspices of the Amazon brand, or Amazon. Allowing these negative reviews right alongside their positive counterparts is a mark of pride for Amazon, an attempt of establishing a corporate *ethos* of dialogue, objectivity, and discursive inclusiveness. In the “About” section of Amazon's website is a sub-page entitled “Our Innovations” where Amazon explains that

Customer reviews were one of our earliest innovations, and many people thought we were nuts. Why would letting people post negative reviews help us sell those products? Because we're in the business of helping customers make better purchase decisions. Today, customer reviews are a critical part of Amazon. (“Customer Reviews”)

In conversational tones, Amazon lauds the value of transparent communication models that freely employ positive (praise) and negative (blame) reviews in an open market, allowing customers a wealth of information when arriving at the point of purchase. Amazon's

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<sup>13</sup> This has recently become a source of tension for Amazon, as reviews on proprietary goods and publications have come under fire as being fabricated for the purpose of inflating sales on Amazon products. In February 2016, *Consumerist*, a non-profit subsidiary of *Consumer Reports* confronted this problem in their online article, “Is Amazon Doing Anything To Fight Latest Wave Of Fake, Paid-For Reviews?”

practice also seems to contrast with standard practices of effective marketing, as indicated by Amazon's assertion that "many people thought [they] were nuts" for their novel and unanticipated approach in allowing negative feedback to contribute to product evaluations. Despite how this marketing strategy was perceived, evidence suggests that this model of consumer-based praise and blame drives the sale of commodities and enfranchises consumers in making purchases. In 2011, ecommerce consulting group Consumer Research Dynamics completed a social shopping study to determine a palette of habits and preferences of buyers at online retailers. The group's top line findings indicate that "customer reviews continue to wield the greatest influence on buying behavior" (Freedman 5). Consumers can read the experiences of other customers in an attempt to match a congruent set of circumstances or needs, allowing those findings to help determine the best product, and inversely, what products should be avoided. These reviews enact epideictic strains to create identification between past and present consumers, and supposedly assist customers in making the most of their monetary investment. Given that most potential buyers rely on consumer-generated reviews to inform their future purchases, it is no wonder that Amazon takes a particular interest in ensuring that reviews are accurate and genuine. As an example of this vested interest, Amazon recently undertook a major lawsuit against online companies who paid freelancers to write spurious product reviews in the hopes of boosting the commercial profiles of lesser-known brands and manufacturers (Soper)<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> See also *Fortune's* article "Amazon Is Cracking Down on More Fake Reviews" from October 2017.

Another important feature of Amazon's rating system is the meta-epideictic feature of review rating, whereby a shopper has the ability to rate the discrete reviews of other raters themselves. A shopper can read the reviews supplied by other shoppers and then select a "Yes" or "No" button in response to the question: "Was this review helpful to you?" (About Customer Reviews). Customers are also told how the individual reviews fared. For example, on the product page for the Deering Goodtime 5-String Banjo, there is a review posted by user T. Gorham entitled "Five stars for value and quality." This review rates the product at 5 stars, opening with an acknowledgment that the reviewer him or herself doesn't own the make of banjo in question, but has "had a number of opportunities to play them." The narrative details the various experiences the user has had with this particular model, suggesting his or her own level of musicianship by name-checking more expensive brands he/she has played for comparison's sake. Ostensibly, this almost resumé-like litany of musical experience works to solidify the reviewer's reputation as a trusted source, even though the probability that the potential buyer can vet this information is low. Anonymity would seem to do little to deter consumers from taking interest or avoiding a given product, as consumers place a sort of faith in the authenticating systems built in to Amazon's review process. In the banjo review, after some theorizing on the finer points of purchasing an entry-level banjo, the reviewer offers their opinion regarding the playability and the tonality of the banjo (which they posit as being a result of a certain combination of woods and production materials). They conclude, ironically, with a plea for readers of the review to "buy locally," citing the potential for close attention to the setup of the instrument, as well as the potential

for involvement in a “community of like minded [sic] instructors, pickers and peers” (Gorham).

At the end of a review like the one described above, an online shopper or product researcher is presented with a few options for advancing the dialogue. They may leave a comment regarding the review, and with an open-forum style, such comments could perform any number of purposes. If the review itself has been assessed by other members of the Amazon community, there is a tag line indicating its perceived effectiveness amongst the community. For example, following T. Gorham’s review of the Deering Goodtime 5-String Banjo, it suggested (at time of writing) that “103 of 108 people found this helpful,” then immediately asks the question: “Was this review helpful to you?”, offering 2 radio buttons which appear in the order of “Yes” then “No” (Gorham). Such a layered process of critique and evaluation ensures not only that reviewers have access to the variety of perspectives on each product (or at least ones that users have deemed worthy of review, positive or negative), but that they feel empowered to rate the effectiveness of the reviews themselves, independent of their decisions to purchase. Amazon, in this way, leverages the community-focused power of *epideixis* to encourage a participatory model of consumption wherein consumers feel less like “consumers” per se, and more like co-contributors. This model of review remains a salient force for private consumers looking to maximize the buying power of their dollars.

Of course various factors convene to suggest the efficacy of any of these online reviews, factors which might be considered traditionally rhetorical under analysis: the complexity of the individual reviews and the formal features of the writing itself might all

contribute to perceptions of the ethos or the reputation of the reviewer, and posit that person as a trustable source or exemplar regarding the potential investment in a given product. These factors (complexity and thoroughness of review, legibility, breadth of consideration) likely obviate the tension of whether or not the review is honest or legitimate. Consumer faith in the review itself is instilled by the knowledge that if a review is branded as “Amazon Verified,” it is the result of some larger (if yet ambiguous) vetting process. As Amazon’s website explains, an “Amazon Verified Purchase” review means we've verified that the person writing the review purchased the product at Amazon and didn't receive the product at a deep discount’ (“About Amazon Verified”). Such reviews seemingly retain a legitimacy that is not motivated by extrinsic reward—that is, the reviewer is not paid or compensated for his or her review. I argue that a crucial factor that is importantly present through the employment of verified reviews is epideictic argumentation of a form that engenders identification. Readers of reviews are seeking for some joined interest, some overlap of purpose, need, or experience to orient their own decision, and the data suggest that such reviews outpace other factors in terms of what consumers look for and respond to.

The 2011 Social Shopping Study asked interviewees to rate the impact of various ecommerce tools on their online shopping habits. The foremost effective tool to influence purchasing (or not purchasing) decisions were customer reviews (59% of respondents rated this item most highly). Second to this at 42% was Q/A opportunity—the ability of a potential consumer to ask reviewers questions about the product being examined. In regards to these two benchmarks of the ecommerce experience, the survey determined that “Amazon



is the defacto site for product reviews,” and that “Ratings and reviews remain the most critical product information desired by shoppers” (Freedman 13). Amazon also led all other major retailers in the frequency with which online shoppers actually referred to the rating system and reviews, and it was also perceived as having the most credible and trustworthy user-generated content (Freedman 14).

These two highest-rated criteria, customer reviews and product question and answer forums, exemplify a modern commonplace of *epideixis*. In chapter 2, I outlined a few salient and reoccurring features of epideictic speech, and Amazon reviews share in these features as epideictic acts that clearly reference the values of sub-communities. And while some might think it perverse to label Amazon, a global, online shopping retailer, as a community or sub-community, I would reply that even though there is a loss of direct, personal, human interaction, the stakes of these digital interactions remain high—they marshal commercial force, they deflect and attract commercial attention, they also occasionally unveil other options of appreciation through suggestions of other products and cultural experiences in the form of books, albums, etc. If one might assent to the basic notion that human life can be meaningfully affected by online interaction, then Amazon is representative of a form of community. With that as a given condition, then it is worth considering how the epideictic functions in this community. The reoccurring characterizations and features of *epideixis* that I posited were that foremost, the epideictic is involved with praise (or its inverse) in response to excellence or rarity (or the corresponding lack thereof). This can be seen in the very nature of the product reviews themselves, the entire purpose of which is to attempt an ideally

“objective” accounting for the positive and negative features of a given product. Explaining how these reviews are epideictic from this factor alone poses something of a difficulty: the entire enterprise of the Amazon product review is so thoroughly epideictic that accounting for it is akin to accounting for the “pumpkin” in pumpkin pie: they are so very closely aligned. That being said, this criterion alone is not enough to deem these reviews as moments of *epideixis*, or it at least begs the question of whether any moment of compliment, praise, or assessment is epideictic (which is another consideration entirely). But the overall venture of a review of something is inherently an epideictic quality, one shared with the notions of popular criticism as explained by Dale Sullivan. In terms both literally and figuratively commercial, late capitalism suggests that individuals are consumers looking to “invest” some form of capital into things—products, experiences, other people—with the hopes of some form of return or payout on that investment. As an illustration, if a person considers going to a film, that person will likely want the viewing of that film (and the attendant emotional rewards or aesthetic experience) to be commensurate with the “cost” (again, literal or figurative) of the experience itself. Likewise, if an individual is in the market for a specific product or item, they likely seek a “return” (durability, ease of use, function) on their literal monetary investment. To ensure these “returns” in the latter example, individuals will access the critical reviews of others who have purchased and used the very product the new consumer is considering purchasing, in the same manner that someone might access the epideictic discourse of film critic Kenneth Turan in regards to the film they were hoping to see. While a crude and potentially simplistic example, it hopefully

underscores the shared space of praise and blame-based discourse in relation to product reviews and assessment as featured on Amazon. And while the presence of such praise and blame is a necessary condition for *epideixis*, it alone is likely insufficient. The full epideictic nature of a given text can be better seen in light of whether or not the other key features of epideictic speech are importantly present.

The second important feature of *epideixis* as defined classically is that it can take as its concern both human objects and human actions as well as non-human objects or actions: essentially, whatever can be praised (or blamed). The dual nature of Amazon's review system exemplifies the range of epideictic targets: non-human products are reviewed for their functionality or lack, their overall value, their aesthetic qualities or faults, their durability or flimsiness, in fine, any appraisable feature of a given thing. While at some turns in the history of rhetoric, the epideictic has been limited to expressly human agents and actions, a majority of the genre's interpreters (notably Aristotle and Menander Rhetor) acknowledge that items of human making (and otherwise) are also worthy of praise or censure. Just as the actual products themselves and their distinct qualities form part of the epideictic function of Amazon reviews, likewise, elements of human action retain a place as one area of focus for these reviews as consumers are able to state the helpfulness of prior product eulogizers, thereby creating a standard for community conduct, as reviewers may be prone to consider what constitutes a "helpful" review, thereby indicating a shared community value—that certain formal features will attend worthy and helpful reviews.

A third feature of the epideictic genre is that it contains within it a trans-temporal element. To review, I hoped to establish that although early codifications of epideictic seemed to limit its application to the present moment alone, Aristotle and other discourse theorists undermined this limited temporal scope. Though the main orientation of the epideictic remains toward the present (in the case of Amazon reviews, to enhance the knowledge of a consumer in the very present moment of considering whether or not to click “purchase” and buy a given thing), the genre also works trans-temporally to draw on precedent in the hopes of aligning future action toward some potential outcome. The reviews themselves will oftentimes remind the audience “of the past and [project] the course of the future” (Aristotle 1358<sup>b</sup>4). The “past” in this sense is the past interaction that a reviewer has ostensibly had with the product under review. And the “course of the future” works beyond the particular moment of praise or blame contained in an online review to affect the purchasing decisions of people sometimes long removed from the moment of submitting the review. Although these reviews are accessed in the present, they seem less bound by the immediacy of the constraints originally interpreted to be hallmarks of each of the rhetorical species. The reviews themselves create commercial momentum that becomes perpetuated constantly forward, and oftentimes manufacturers will use these reviews to implement adjustments and refine their product offerings.<sup>15</sup> The trans-temporal feature is also exemplified in the very manner of product reviews, taking as granted the assumption that a

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<sup>15</sup> See Jay Lagarde’s “6 Reasons Why Amazon Product Reviews Matter to Merchants,” [www.entrepreneur.com](http://www.entrepreneur.com)

majority of the reviews on Amazon are written from legitimate encounters and experiences with the product(s) in question. Most reviews, with varying levels of detail and comprehensiveness, follow a formulaic pattern: explain the nature of the interaction with the product (past action). Reviewers then praise or blame the inherent features of the product, speaking from a present state. Despite noted outliers, all of this is ostensibly done in service of the consumer. This action incentivizes consumer habits toward a given outcome, summarized quite simply as “buy this product” or “avoid this product,” with each of these outcomes typically bearing qualifications and addendums. Regardless, the simple pattern of reliance on a precedent to shore up present value in determining a future course of action (however arguably insignificant) can be intuited from the process of accessing Amazon product reviews to inform shopping decisions.

The fourth and final abiding feature of the epideictic is in consideration of audience assent and community values. Each of the above explanations hints at this force of the epideictic—the ways in which it can establish a shared pattern of value for members of a consumer pool who in good faith are reliant on the experiences of strangers to help solidify their purposes. Value assessment is implicit in the entire process, and often, awareness of new values arises (what one “should” look for when purchasing X product). At various points in the briefly surveyed history, the epideictic is seen as having an ethical force, responding to the *endoxa* of a community not merely as a rhetorical ruse, but as a legitimation of that belief and a confirming of assent. Epideictic rhetoric is attuned to what people hold as important, and to what is in the collective best interest. And again, while the commercially-inclined

values of a sub-culture like banjo enthusiasts might seem trivial or simplistic, it is important to consider the cumulative effect of something as simple as product reviews (borne on systems of epideictic exchange) and their economic impacts.

The commercial value of such reviews has become apparent to Amazon and other reviewers, and their principle force exists because they create the perception of group participation and interaction. They democratize critical assessment and offer an avenue of evaluation that, as I mentioned, operates in the service of maximizing some form of capital investment. These moments should be considered not simply investments of money, but rhetorical and mental investments that beg time and attention of consumers. The reviews themselves function akin to how a consumer will often turn to the *epideixis* of other forms of criticism to posit an arguably more “important” decision—such as which candidate they should vote for or which local policies will affect them greatest.

## Conclusion: Why *Epidēixis*?

The above analysis of a review-based consumer model might seem idiosyncratic as a focus for investigation. In terms of the scope of epideictic study, however, more such projects are beginning to contemporize the genre and show how it uncovers and adds to discussions in a host of disparate rhetorical contexts. In a recent issue of *Communication Research Trends*, Ilon Lauer undertook a study of not only the classical origins of the epideictic genre, but also assessed contemporary scholarly investigations that centralize interest in the epideictic, concluding, “As a collective body of scholarship, contemporary studies of epideictic demonstrate the enduring vitality of this longstanding rhetorical practice” (4). The breadth of scholarly projects currently and recently investigating the epideictic genre suggests something of the epideictic’s modern ubiquity as a useful mode of discourse, a point that my inquiry has continually attempted to assert.

Included among the epideictic-based projects that Lauer identifies, we find analysis of the specifically epideictic discursive modes of president George W. Bush (Medhurst, 2010 and Bostodorff 2003), surveys of the absence of attention paid to blame (*psogos*) in the epideictic (Rountree, 2001) as well as the importance of invective in American culture (Engels, 2009), and a 2013 study by S. Ramsey of the epideictic motivations of Ambrose Bierce’s “satiric response to the 19<sup>th</sup> century lexicographers...to resist Webster’s nationalist project” (Lauer 9). Each of these projects connects with certain themes recovered for *epideixis* over the course of my analysis. Some of these projects treat moments occurring at the level of what I have called “first order” acts of epideictic rhetoric (large, high profile ceremonial occurrences that revisit and reinforce the values of larger communities), and other projects

consider more interpersonal, “second order” acts of epideictic rhetoric. Among these, Lauer identifies a compelling array of projects and investigations that arguably hint at the epideictic acting as an animating feature of numerous moments of rhetoric. For example, Lauer cites projects involving “ways that epideictic celebrations of freedom thematically guide ads promoting technological or pharmaceutical goods” (Blakely, 2011), the connections between the epideictic and “cultural spaces in which art is used for the expression of values” (Danisch, 2008), and what Jim Garrison (2003) has called “reflective epideictic” and its connections to poetry and art-based pedagogies (Lauer 15). Beyond these studies, Lauer identifies numerous object-oriented epideictic studies, which among other artifacts consider the epideictic’s connections to the lectures of Nobel laureates (Casper, 2007), stand-up comedy (Morris, 2011), presidential campaign songs (Harpine, 2004), and even political stickers (Vigsø, 2010) (Lauer 16). While this list is not assumed to be comprehensive, it does represent a noticeable degree of variety in terms of what falls under the consideration of the epideictic. As suggested, this broad array of study does more than simply identify a scholarly trend with some currency, something that may be *en vogue*. To me, this variety again suggests a ubiquity, and important presence in domains of speech where value is centralized and persuasion in favor of solidifying those values is at play. This list also represents the historical eventuality that the epideictic need not simply serve to laud or revile human comportment alone, but that important non-human objects are also fit subjects for *epideixis*. If it is hard to accede to the argument that epideictic as a stand alone genre is important for contemporary scholars of rhetoric to consider more fully, at very least a survey of recent studies in this particular subfield should suggest that the genre plays an important part as an additive



rhetorical role. It becomes increasingly difficult to dismiss the genre as altogether unimportant, or unconnected with the discourse of everyday life. As a subfield of study, further analysis of the epideictic could proceed among any number of important lines of inquiry.

As one example of where an epideictic focus might be usefully illustrative as a theoretical lens is in the field of educational theory and pedagogy. Elaine Scarry, in *On Beauty and Being Just* suggests, “The willingness to revise one’s own location in order to place oneself in the path of beauty is the basic impulse underlying education” (7). I see this claim as foregrounding important questions for pedagogy, involving the teaching of values (overtly or otherwise), the acknowledgment of motivations in the teaching enterprise, and the purpose of education generally. Such an assertion would suggest viewing pedagogy as an act with epideictic entailments. Educational practices might stand as exemplars of this claim, especially within the field of composition. Expressivist theories of composition (as embodied popularly by the work of Peter Elbow) have a marked tendency of *epideixis*, in that one of the central tenets of such theories involves an epideictic discourse. The personal narrative, rife with idiosyncratic value, is recovered as viable writing within this pedagogy, and this seems to constitute epideictic awareness. Such pedagogy can potentially enfranchise students to clarify their awareness of what constitutes “the good” for them, standing as a necessary precursor to active civic functions that occur subsequently through acts of identification, of acknowledgment of where an ostensibly idiosyncratic experience overlaps with the experience of another. Along these lines, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca extend their recognition of shared value in the contact of minds to the act of teaching, highlighting the overlap of

pedagogy and epideictic, both being rooted in the assessment and exchange of value. Of further interest might be how the general project of critical pedagogy (Freire, Shor, hooks, Geroux) operates as an attempt to “unmask” the *epideixis* occurring in the classroom—to make more overt the often veiled value orientations of teachers and institutions in an attempt to reconsider and examine those values, or at least help students locate more congruent values themselves.

Other elements of argumentation seem to have epideictic motivations; for example, enthymeme-based instruction in argumentation such as that of John Gage in *The Shape of Reason* might be thought to incorporate *epideixis* through the pedagogy’s persistent emphasizing of the role of understanding audience, and its emphasis regarding what people will assent to as reasonable warrants for claims. It seems that key to such composition heuristics is an understanding what is publically good, and what does or doesn’t have an element of relative praiseworthiness for a given audience. Along these lines, Jeffrey Walker has initiated some work that, I argue, reconsiders the enthymeme in a way that highlights the identification at play in epideictic rhetoric, arguably with consequences for the compositionist interested in teaching reasoned argumentation (“Body of Persuasion”). Again, both the enthymeme and the epideictic are participatory in their operation, both require an assessment of the values of their audience, and both thereby operate on space shared between communicator and auditor. The suggested scholarship above represents only one limited field of study that likely contains fruitful investigations of the epideictic genre. Closer analysis would suggest that the interplay between epideictic rhetoric and pedagogy is a fallow area for further inquiry. These are of course only preliminary, untested considerations,

but the field of composition theory seems rife with moments that could arguably benefit from attention to the role played by the epideictic.

Perhaps a simple counterargument to the above examples of political stickers, educational theory, or moments of interpersonal criticism is that these moments don't require the label of "epideictic." To use a more specific example, a potential objection to the above example of product reviews would be to allege that there is nothing necessarily "epideictic" about a review of a banjo, or shampoo, or a sofa table—that there are easier, more colloquial terms and means of assessment already present in everyday speech to label such simple exchanges, and that calling these moments of "epideictic discourse" is overdetermined. This might stand as a general critique of this project altogether—what does labeling these disparate public acts as *epideixis* do? What changes? To initiate a response to this criticism, I would turn first to Michael Calvin McGee, who argues that "in Aristotelian terms, professional criticism functions to persuade readers to make the same judgments of salience, attitude, belief, and action the critic made" (72). The designation of "professional" aside, McGee's response summarizes multiple contentions made in this analysis regarding the efficacy and purpose of the epideictic genre. But McGee's quote also elides crucial elements of the process of identification. It might suggest that one agent, the critic, acts upon a passive audience who is then left with the choice to accept or reject the received message. While this might in fact be the upshot of such persuasion in its simplest form, the hypothetical fails to recognize that the audience exists as auditors for this critic because of some preexisting motive toward community. Of course, critical persuasion (epideictic rhetoric) can persuade an auditor at random—this was a particular fear of Plato's regarding

the power of the *epitaphios logos* in *Menexenus*—but I would argue that epideictic rhetoric in contemporary society frequently operates on a preexisting resonance of interest or desire. The proffering of these interests, though they may seem simple, can often form the basis of an emergent community in both physical or cyber form. Returning then to the specific criticism of linguistic overdetermination, viewing even mundane verbal acts through the lens of epideictic rhetoric connects those very acts to rich, ancient considerations of values, ethics, and the superstructures underlying communities both great and small. Revisiting quotidian speech acts with an epideictic focus has the potential to legitimize numerous symbolic acts that might not typically warrant closer scrutiny by language theorists because of their perceived banality, simplicity, or popular superficiality.

Another justification of this analysis deals with what I argue as the ubiquity of praise and blame structures in both contemporary life but also as a cultural force that (with important distinctions) transcends boundaries of nationality and ideology. In *Epideictic Rhetoric*, Laurent Pernot writes that

One finds epideictic everywhere and in every age. In Europe, it flourished in antiquity and in Byzantium, but also, for example, in Renaissance Italy, in France of the Ancien Régime, and in numerous modern states. Even today, all around us, despite the appearance of formal, classical oratory, there are many occasions, great and small, where epideictic eloquence is still employed, whether in academic or university settings, in the activities of social, religious, or political life, in all sorts of ceremonies, and even in the informal speeches...that we still use to introduce ourselves or to introduce conference

speakers...Additionally, one encounters in cultures far removed from our own forms and conceptions comparable to those of ancient epideictic...The epideictic enterprise is an anthropological phenomenon found—with important distinctions, naturally—in many human societies. (120)

As Laurent suggests, the epideictic genre presents itself in limitless speech acts and contexts, whereas other more formalized speech occasions might suggest the rigor or detail of forensic or deliberative oratory. To me, this suggests a rich comparative rhetorical enterprise wherein a researcher attentive to the structures of praise and blame might find operational homologues in various cultures and speech acts. Pernot's quote above also suggests that contemporary epideictic operates with almost a "purloined letter" effect: its presence is so obvious and continual that we often fail to acknowledge the subtle yet central impact it has on everyday speech occasions. Echoing the epideictic's own limited historical consideration, identifying epideictic as an important contemporary lens beckons such moments forward for deeper analysis—it further validates myriad speech acts that might be otherwise overlooked. In the quote above, Laurent highlights three major domains of contemporary life as being specific loci of the epideictic genre: that our social connections are borne aloft through epideictic, religious pronouncements proceed from a similar set of circumstances wherein the question of the good and the good life (and discourse surrounding such questions) are central, and political affiliation and ideological alignment are preconditioned on a sense of identifying what is the good and bad. In these, and various other domains of public life, we traverse about, employing epideictic argumentation as we cast our lot with ideas or sentiments that in some way engage or mimic ours, ideas that call to us, reflect some latent

desire. That Pernot identifies the epideictic as occurring “even in...informal” contexts is important. I would take this even further to suggest that the informal is the key contemporary location for the flourishing of the epideictic. This might be an outgrowth of the historical deligitimization of the genre itself: often discursively denied direct access in any venue that suggested importance or permanence, the genre found various locales in informal exchanges. And while it is still operational within movements of statecraft and high ceremony, the epideictic thrives most directly in the privatized, personal, and interpersonal exchanges that animate so much of human life. If one can acknowledge the possibility of such acts bearing epideictic import, acknowledging the inherent historical ambiguity of the genre, then it becomes an intriguing question about just how far the epideictic reaches.

Another reason that this expansion of the domain of *epideixis* is important is that it allows for a re-visioning of Western rhetorical history extending from the present back to Aristotle. This discourse is one that traditionally, after Aristotle (and based on a reading that has proven controversial) relegated *epideixis* to the category of mere demonstration or show, not as a viable site of knowledge or value important to the functioning of daily life. A retrospective analysis of *epideixis* would reveal the degree to which certain lines of Aristotelian thought have, rightly or not, held sway over Western rhetorical history. Such a revision would offer a compelling counterdiscourse to the received wisdom of the field, and also animate prior rhetorical investigations with an added dimension of consideration. It would also offer a more empathetic reading of Aristotle, who I argue didn't concretely cordon off the field of rhetoric, but allowed that passage between the various territories would occur.

This project also rethinks the motivations traditionally identified as playing an active hand in community development (justice, equality), and an attempt to account for how alongside these given motivators ancient discourses of “the beautiful” and “the good” might still bear academic attention. I argue that this is an important designation for a few reasons. The current political and ideological climate in American society might not be an entirely new situation, as it does arguably reflect prior historical moments when private disenfranchisement was made public through the expression of countercultural values. Such a situation always provides a sort of laboratory of *epideixis*, where countervailing narratives clash in a symbolic contest hopefully in lieu of physical violence. Communities continue to be formed, reformed, and re-visioned through epideictic mechanisms.

A change in thinking about the nature of criticism as *epideixis* works toward enhancing an awareness of what Kenneth Burke called the consubstantial—the discourses that overlap and provide meaning to different people, discourses that offer promises of identification and thereby rhetorical solutions that bypass force or hostility. Rethinking criticism and other forms of contemporary discourse as acts of *epideixis* also has potential to legitimize academic texts and critical interventions beyond the academy. It offers another inroad to arguing the “use” of academic texts. If criticism's focus is implicitly on praise and blame, then criticism becomes an implement to help direct idealities or specific normative scripts. Thinking of criticism this way helps centralize the role of the humanities within a larger, more democratic contemporary moment, a moment that I argue is saturated with the epideictic. Criticism, I claim, always operates from some normative transcript, and seeing it as an act of *epideixis* allows for a more direct revelation of the values undergirding critical

assessment. Where persuasion or action might have been the original assumed impetus, a useful field of tacit values (and determinations of what constitutes “the good,” “the bad,” “the honorable,” and “the base”) is also ever present, undergirding each critical appraisal, and often going unacknowledged. When legitimized as more than just the expressions of preference, but as important vocalizations that contain the germ of community within, the transcript of values can be made more public.

When considering these interpersonal acts of criticism as more important than perhaps formerly considered, then we have a greater view of the community-forming power inherent in the informal expressions of personal desire. This can aid a potential speaker or writer to keep in mind a more fully-formed sense of audience that might address both the concrete realities of a particular audience (what Ede and Lunsford called “audience addressed”) while also looking toward the ideal of an audience that is in part imagined and constructed (the “audience invoked”). But beyond this, it might simply suggest more of communal *eros* when we as symbol-using animals encounter the expression of public desire. It might foster more empathy, recognizing that when someone, viewing some public artifact or occurrence, offers the assessment “beautiful,” that this could be more than simply a solipsistic pronouncement of taste. There is something invitational in such a moment. As Gerard Hauser argued, Epideictic rhetoric “sets up” usable warrants other forms of reasoning, rendering an audience “to a more temperate norm of shaping society’s course by weighing alternatives” (Hauser 17).

The scope and application of the genre is limitless, fulfilling, as Sullivan writes, a “constellation of purposes” (“Ethos” 116), purposes which Pernot argues, “fulfill complex



functions in consolidating the social order around shared values” (100). And this is where the epideictic ultimately rests: on questions of the sustaining ethics of communities, on moments of rarity that often transcend the occasional mundanity of life. Burke often stresses the division inherent in human affairs, in human existence. Bridging these divisions is ultimately illusory in a logical sense: consubstantiality is of course never absolute. But the enterprise of rhetoric in an idealized form accentuates the moments of congruence that exist between entities, in the hopes of avoiding discursive and physical violence. Epideictic identification takes part in this almost biological preservative function. It not only allows individuals and societies reorientation, serving as a “social order’s rejuvenating bath,” but also, “It instantiates a moment of communion, in which a community, or a microcommunity, presents itself with a show of its own unity” (Pernot 98). In the inherent division existing between each of us, separated by numberless incongruencies of ideology, tribe, speech, and intention, the epideictic serves ideally as an orientation toward one another, bridging gaps between us through simple recognition of brilliant moments of our person experience. It stands to offer immediate interpersonal identification, centering upon the value of rarity, a value that has proven adept at resisting the constraints of cultural relativism. If this is true, then the present—that rhetorical time long-reserved as the crucial moment for the third genre—requires us to reconsider the epideictic.

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