# Reading Beyond the Text, Part I: Poetics, Rhetoric, and Religious Texts from the Greco-Roman World*

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In the introduction to his book, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, David Aune states that "every book of the New Testament reflects to varying degree an accomodation between Jewish religious and ethical values and traditions and Hellenistic forms of linguistic, literary, rhetorical, and conceptual expression" (Aune 1987, 12). What this statement suggests is that, if one reads and interprets an ancient religious text such as a New Testament writing in adequate ways, one must account for those various elements that are reflected in the text itself. Such concerns have not been absent from the critical study and interpretation of religious texts from the Greco-Roman era. However, with the ongoing development of contemporary literary-critical methodologies with specific application to such texts, one must also raise questions regarding *ancient* literary concerns, their influences on the texts before the critical interpreter, and their place in reading and interpretive strategies. In other words, one must inquire regarding *ancient* expectations and conventions, not necessarily articulated in the respective religious text but present in an *extratextual* sense, that contributed to the *historical* compositional process and now contribute to the *contemporary* interpretive process.[1]

* This is the first of a two-part article, with the second part (to appear in Volume 29 of *ARC*) focusing on issues of literary creativity and characterization in ancient religious texts as they relate to the reading and interpretive tasks.

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Thus, one must consider what *was* at issue in composing, writing, and presenting literary texts in the Greco-Roman world, including religious texts, if one *is* to read and interpret critically such literary works. These interpretive considerations must identify some of the literary conventions and expectations that potentially accompany and shape the writing and reception of the ancient text.

This article attempts to delineate some of these literary issues within the larger scope of Greco-Roman literature, the most general classification under which the Christian New Testament writings and other Greco-Roman religious texts fall. If such religious texts are to be interpreted from a critical perspective, one essential step of such work must include the consideration of basic issues of Greco-Roman literary thought that may be relevant to the composition, reception, and contemporary interpretation of such texts. Of primary importance is the Greco-Roman understanding of the social function of literature, particularly the potential effects of literature on the audience that move beyond the sphere of the *written* work itself.

## The Relation of Poetics and Rhetoric in the Greco-Roman Era

The suggestion that poetics (ποίησις) and rhetoric (ῥητορική) represent two of the most important subjects in ancient literary thought may be described as an understatement. The dangers of overgeneralization lurk behind every word of such a remark. However, the ancient context in which literary theory began seems to have focused largely on these two subjects. The question about the distinction and relation of these two subjects remains a difficult one to answer, and yet one must consider such issues when seeking to interpret religious texts from the Greco-Roman era.

The surviving works of Aristotle are the earliest writings that articulate a theory that delineates between poetics and rhetoric. In his works, these two subjects receive separate treatment. Some historians of ancient literary criticism suggest that Aristotle considered the distinction a most crucial one in his literary theory (Roberts 1928, 37). According to D. A. Russell, the difference between poetics and rhetoric lies in their respective functions. On the one hand, poetry func-

tions to "imitate" or pretend. Poetry possesses the inherent capacity to evoke habits of mind that would reflect themselves in human actions. On the other hand, rhetoric functions to persuade, as part of the orator's real activity in life. Rhetoric possesses the power of persuasion. To be sure, poetry and rhetoric are related: poetry may imitate the rhetorical use of language, and rhetoric may use poetics to prove one's case. Russell insists, however, that Aristotle understood these two areas of literary thought as differing and opposing arts (1981, 15–16).

The contention that Aristotle considered poetics and rhetoric as different arts or subjects is worth noting, due to the dominance of rhetoric in Greco-Roman culture and education. That rhetoric became synonymous with education and culture in the Greco-Roman world has been convincingly established (Marrou 1956). While the subordination of poetics to the dominant subject of rhetoric may be a defensible conclusion from a historical perspective, one must still consider the unique and characteristic emphases of each area of ancient literary criticism as well as their mutual concerns and functions. The unique characteristics of both areas of literary theory contribute to the ancient literary-critical interests in the social function of literature in potentially evoking responses in and from the audience—a function for which one must account in the interpretation of ancient religious texts.

## Poetics

Only a few surviving texts from the Greco-Roman era delineate some of the literary issues that are distinctive to poetics. Even within these texts, the treatment of the subject is sparse when compared to the surviving texts dealing with rhetoric. After Aristotle's *Poetics*, which itself may be fragmentary, few texts deal specifically with poetics or, for that matter, literary criticism apart from rhetoric. The major surviving Greek contributions to ancient Greco-Roman literary criticism after Aristotle, such as Dionysius's critical essays (especially *On Literary Composition*), Demetrius's *On Style*, and Longinus's *On the Sublime*, all focus on poetical aspects of rhetoric. Horace's *Ars Poetica* is the

only treatise devoted to poetics, but the work is largely Aristotelian in content. While the assessment of Aristotelian influence in the literary theory of poetics is not the focus here, his treatise articulates the basic issues with which poetics of the Greco-Roman era was concerned. Thus, Aristotle's *Poetics* provides the basis for the following discussion.

Aristotle seemed to contest Plato's insistence that poetry is dangerous to the *polis* and potentially detrimental to the morality of the citizens. For Aristotle, poetry is not inherently dangerous to society; rather, poetry is potentially useful in its social and communal function. This potential social function correlates with three crucial characteristics of poetry: μίμησις or the imitation of action, a concern for τὰ καθόλου or the "universal" human truth, and the solicitation of a response from the audience.

The general characteristic of poetry as μίμησις or *mimesis* is basic to Aristotle's understanding of poetry and its potential social function. Aristotle states in *Poetics* 1 that the different forms of poetry are the μιμήσεις τὸ σύνολον, the "representations of life" (*Poetics* 1.2).[2] Many attempts have been made to define the term *mimesis*, the most common definitions being "imitation" or "representation." Although these definitions may highlight certain aspects of the Greek term, they do not fully convey what the Aristotelian use of the term *mimesis* suggests (Woodruff 1992, 89). Although "imitation" may be the closest English term for *mimesis*, this does not satisfactorily define how different forms of poetry can convey the same objects in different ways (cf. *Poetics* 1.3). Central to the Aristotelian usage of *mimesis* is the idea of presenting action so that the audience may believe in the *possibility* of such action taking place. The point of Aristotle's *Poetics* 4 is that *mimesis* presents the audience with images that reveal what is common to the object of *mimesis*. The audience, however, would realize that what is presented is *not* real.

An important aspect of *mimesis* in poetry is the poet's creative or fictional composition. The poet is the one responsible for the poem's plot and arrangement (*Poetics* 9.9–10). The poet is the one who must select, organize, and shape the material, with the resulting work presented as a work of art, not necessarily a portrayal of actual historical

occurrence. Requirements for poetry do not include a demand for actuality or factual accuracy, but they *do* include a demand that the poem be convincing. The author possesses the license to include inaccuracies, deceptions, or any other "impossibility" (τὸ ἀδύνατον) for poetic effect, as long as the poem is convincing (*Poetics* 25.26–28). Thus, the poem is the author's creation, and the success of that work is measured by its effects experienced by the audience (see Woodruff 1992, 92–93). These effects depend on the audience's perception of the creative portrayal of action, which the literary work depicts as true to life (Grube 1965, 70–71).

Central to the poetic characteristic of *mimesis* are the interrelated roles of the author, the literary text, and the audience. The author or poet is the work's creator, and the poem is the linguistic medium through which the author expresses himself. However, the final criterion for success is not the poem *itself*, but its effects that depend on the audience's perception that what is creatively portrayed is possible and convincing as an adequate depiction of life itself (cf. Woodruff 1992, 73).

A second characteristic of poetry that is crucial to Aristotle's understanding of the potential social function of poetry is τὰ καθόλου, "the universal" (*Poetics* 9.1–3). The idea of τὰ καθόλου is critical to Aristotle's distinction between poetry and history. A significant difference between the historian and the poet is *not* the form of writing, that is, prose for the historian and verse for the poet (*Poetics* 9.2). Rather, the major difference is, "that one tells what happened and the other what might happen" (*Poetics* 9.2). The significant issue here is this comparison of the universal and the "particular," τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον (*Poetics* 9.3), the latter associated with what has already occurred (i.e., history) and the former associated with what may occur. However, one should not interpret Aristotle's assertion as a condemnation against history and historical writing. What he *is* suggesting is that the articulation of particular events and happenings for its own value is not as useful and helpful as the relation between, on the one hand, the *mimesis* of what *certain persons or groups* could do or how they could act and, on the other hand, the audience. In Aristotelian thought, the universal is not construed as typical behaviour but is the connection

between the different episodes of presented or mimetic action. Thus, the poet's task is to tell what a certain type of person "will do or say either probably or necessarily" (*Poetics* 9.4).

These aspects of probability and necessity are integral to the Aristotelian understanding both of the universal and of the potential social functions of poetry. Probability stands for the degree of likelihood that may be described as less than certain and yet still hold "for the most part," whereas necessity designates the causal relations between things that are unavoidable or inevitable in some sense (Halliwell 1989, 157). The poem should be a product of rational art, and the success of the poem depends in part on its formal coherence. Probability and necessity, as aspects of the concept of the universal, provide the causal links between the elements within the poem's structure or plot. These causal aspects of the universal join the complete *mimesis* of action in the different poetic elements. Thus, poetry is not the *mimesis* of universals or particular events. Aristotle consistently uses the verb λέγειν ("to say," "to tell") with reference to how the poet should express the universal (*Poetics* 9.1–3; cf. McKeon 1952, 161–62). The action of human life is the object of *mimesis*, whereas the universal refers to the interrelation and connection between the different poetic elements, thus creating a different level of understanding (see Else 1986, 110; cf. Russell 1981, 110–11). The coherence of the poem and its *mimesis* of action, then, are the products of the universal, with its causal aspects of probability and necessity.

The Aristotelian distinction between the universal and the particular allows and enables both the poet and the audience to transcend the basic level of human senses in understanding human existence and reality. The universal, which may be defined as "the categories and concepts which enable the mind to move beyond concrete sense-perception to the comprehension of essential and permanent features of reality" (Halliwell 1989, 155), suggests that poetry is not confined to historical observations or description. The members of the audience are not and should not be locked into what they perceive through the senses alone since the senses may be fooled. Through *mimesis*, the mind of the audience may be carried from the

particular image to a universal truth. Thus, by this understanding of the universal within poetry, Aristotle defined the cognitive value of poetry in contrast to Plato's views. On the one hand, Plato disapproved of the authoritative function of poetic texts in Greek life, because he considered philosophy as the only legitimate access to those universal truths that the Greek citizens had attributed to poetry. On the other hand, Aristotle did not convey such a bitter rivalry between poetry and philosophy. Aristotle merged the realms of philosophy and poetry that Plato condemned on the popular level; he contended that the *mimesis* of poetry opens the door for understanding and thought on a higher level that only philosophers had previously enjoyed (Halliwell 1989, 155). Poetry transfers the social and ethical function of philosophy to other individuals. Poetry, then, is "more philosophical [φιλοσοΦώτερον] and serious [σπουδαιότερον] than history" (*Poetics* 9.3) because the actions and actors in its life pictures are closer to the universals of philosophy than are the diverse particulars of actual events.

The emphasis on the universals of philosophy rather than on particular persons or events does not exclude the possibility of using historical persons or events in poetry. The use of particulars (including historical material) is not the issue for Aristotle. An author is responsible for bringing the universal to life, however he could do that most effectively. The poet, who is the creator of the literary work, composes that work with the concern for presenting the universal with probability and necessity to the audience. That *creative* activity, not the actuality of what the poem presents, is an essential criterion for the work's persuasiveness. The generality of the universal, however, is not sufficient to engage the audience's emotions, and mere facts often limit the particulars' illustration of the general or universal point (Woodruff 1992, 88). Thus, Aristotle instructed the poet in *Poetics* 17 to begin with the universal and then add the particular circumstances and names, so that the resulting product may evoke the desired emotional response (Woodruff 1992, 88). Representation of the universals as particular events and actors, through the *mimesis* of action, provides the audience with the sense that what is recited or acted out in a play is real and thereby engages the emotions in an effective way.

A literary work itself, however, is a fictional, artistic work, regardless of the particulars' actuality or historicity.

The third characteristic of poetry that is crucial to the Aristotelian understanding of the social function of poetry, to which the previous discussion has already alluded, is the concern for evoking a response from the audience. Two questions may be formulated that highlight the issues surrounding the ancient treatments of this response to poetry: (1) What kind of response may poetry evoke? and (2) What is the function of that response?

First, what kind of response may poetry evoke? Aristotle articulated what apparently was a widely-accepted view concerning poetry: poetry evokes emotions. The cognitive and perceived distance between the audience and the portrayal by the poem itself necessitates the use of particular events and persons. By reducing this distance between what the poem portrays and the audience, the action presented in the poem would potentially evoke an emotional response *in the audience* (Gill 1984, 151–53). Plato's indictment against poetry is founded on the poetic appeal to the passions and emotions, which he understood as lacking the control of reason (*Republic* 10.602c–608c). According to Plato, the poet appeals to the lowest part of the soul. An audience identifies emotionally with the author and what he presents (συμπάσχοντες), no matter how good or bad that may be (*Republic* 10.605d). This emotional response to poetry is an anticipated outcome of the poetic experience, as the poet appeals to that part of the human soul.

Other ancient critics after Plato were not as harsh in their appraisals of the emotional response that poetry stimulates. Aristotle wrote about pleasure in the context of his treatment of poetics (see *Poetics* 4.2), but he also identified fear and pity as being aroused in the audience of the tragic drama (*Poetics* 6.2). Demetrius and Dionysius both stressed the importance of poetical concerns such as style and compositional considerations in the evocation of an emotional response (see, e.g., Demetrius, *On Style* 2.39–56, 112–13; 3:130; Dionysius, *On Literary Composition* 1–5, 15; *On Lysias* 1–9, 13; and *On the Style of Demosthenes* 2). Later still, Plutarch stated that the *style* of poetry gives pleasure and the *imaginative fiction* affects the emotions

(*How a Young Man Should Study Poetry* 15c–17d). Longinus's treatment of the idea of φαντασία ("imagination" or "visualization") suggests that "the object of poetry is to enthral [ἔκπληξις], of prose writing to present things vividly, though both aim at this latter and at excited feeling" (*On the Sublime* 15.1–2).[3] These examples from ancient critics suggest that an audience's response to poetry is potentially an emotional one. That later critics such as Plutarch and Longinus also characterized the response to poetry as emotional in nature suggests that this identification, at least from the time of Plato and Aristotle, is generally consistent throughout this period.

Whereas a general agreement existed among the ancient critics regarding poetry's potential evocation of an emotional response in its audience, the interpretation of those critics' writings regarding the *function* of that response lacks such a general consensus. W. Rhys Roberts suggests that there are significant differences between the ancient answers to this question of function. Roberts states that the traditional Greek understanding of poetry perceived the response as instrumental in molding character (1928, 108–9). G. M. A. Grube suggests that a concern about poetry's moral influence is central to Plato's criticism: "To understand Plato's attitude, it is essential to keep in mind that it springs from a profound belief in the power of poetry and the fine arts to mold character and to influence the moral attitudes of the community" (1965, 46).

Such a belief in the power of poetry seems unusual to our modern perspective, but the social function of poetry was much more pronounced in ancient Greece and the early years of the Greco-Roman era. Poetry and music were the main components of education. The poet functioned as a teacher and was responsible for the social and moral effect that his work may evoke (Grube 1965, 8–9). In such a cultural setting, Plato's criticisms were valid. Although Plato did not provide a sustained discussion regarding poetry, he recognized poetry's function in the setting of the *polis* and the dangers inherent in the poetic, emotional appeal.

The traditional moral view of Greek poetry confronts the problems associated with the emotional appeals of poetry in differing ways. Plato suggested that poets, among others, be censured, "[so]

that our guardians may not be bred among symbols of evil, as it were in a pasturage of poisonous herbs, lest grazing freely and cropping from many such day by day they little by little and all unawares accumulate and build up a huge mass of evil in their own souls" (*Republic* 3.401b–c).

Plutarch, however, went beyond Plato. He recognized that poetry, as an imitation or *mimesis* of life, would inherently contain both good *and* evil (*How the Young Man Should Study Poetry* 17f–18a). Plutarch suggested that a careful reading of poetry would reveal that the poets often expressed, either implicitly or explicitly, their disapproval of the unethical conduct or words of the characters (*How the Young Man Should Study Poetry* 19a–e). He also advised that the teacher direct the students' attention to better sentiments or to the belief that evil would ultimately be defeated (*How the Young Man Should Study Poetry* 27a–e). Since both Plato and Plutarch recognized the dangers of poetry's inherent appeal to the emotions, the differences between their remedial suggestions may reflect changes in literary purposes or historical setting or both. An obvious concern about the influence of poetry and literature on the morals and education of the community or society, however, reflects itself in their writings and thought.

The Aristotelian understanding of the function of the emotional response to poetry is more difficult to interpret. On the one hand, Aristotle described in *Poetics* 4 the pleasure or enjoyment that one will *always* receive from *mimesis* and, therefore, poetry. According to Aristotle, the audience should see (or hear described) even *painful* or *unpleasant* things as pleasant because the audience *learns* something: "Learning things gives great pleasure to the philosophers but also in the same way to all other men, though they share this pleasure only to a small degree. The reason we enjoy seeing likenesses is that, as we look, we learn and infer what each is" (*Poetics* 4.4–5). Thus, Aristotle emphasized pleasure, not as an *immediate* result or response to the poem, but as a result of the *experience of learning*, as the poem and the audience confront one another (cf. Halliwell 1992, 253–54).[4]

On the other hand, Aristotle's definition of tragedy in *Poetics* 6 includes the evocation of pity (ἐλέου) and fear (φόβου), along with the κάθαρσις ("purging" or "relief") of similar emotions (*Poetics* 6.2; cf.

14.1–9). Although one may initially conclude that these negative emotions contradict the pleasure that comes from learning through *mimesis*, Aristotle's thought in *Poetics* 14 may offer a clue to another possible relation: "For one should not seek from tragedy all kinds of pleasure but that which is peculiar to tragedy, and since the poet must by 'representation' [διὰ μιμήσεως] produce the pleasure that comes from feeling pity and fear, obviously this quality must be embodied in the incidents" (*Poetics* 14.5). Thus, the two emotions of pity and fear are closely related to the experience of learning in the Aristotelian understanding of poetry and, particularly, tragedy.

The Aristotelian connection in poetics between the learning experience and the evocation of an emotional response becomes more evident when one refers to his discussion on pity and fear in *Rhetoric*. In *Rhetoric*, one must have the impression (φαντασία) that an action is evil and threatening to oneself or a friend if one will feel fear or pity. What arouses fear and pity is that which personally *appears* imminent (*Rhetoric* 2.5.1; 2.8.1–2; cf. Freeland 1992, 122–24, and Gill 1986, 258). However, these impressions and resulting emotions must be of particulars, not of universals. A personal confrontation with that which is fearful to *oneself* evokes the greatest response: "[I]f the fear of death makes your blood run cold, it is the fear of a particular death—your own, or perhaps that of someone near to you—that does it. Death in general (unless personified) is not the sort of thing that can make a vivid enough impression on me to cause genuine fear or pity" (Woodruff 1992, 86). Thus, in poetry (or, like tragedy, on the stage), the poet assists the audience to understand both the world and those who form society by bringing these universal truths to life as particular events and people.

Through poetry, Aristotle suggested that the members of the audience learn something about society and the world as the poet confronts them with at least one emotional possibility of everyday life that is ordinarily ignored. The κάθαρσις mentioned by Aristotle in *Poetics* 6.2 takes place in such a setting: the imaginative, emotional experience of learning that poetry evokes. Jonathan Lear suggests:

> The tragic poet awakens us to the fact that there are certain emotional possibilities which we ignore in ordinary life. On the one hand, these possibilities are remote, so it is not completely unreasonable to ignore them in ordinary life; on the other hand, they lend content to the idea that in ordinary life we are living "inside the plain": and they fuel our desire imaginatively to experience life outside the plain. Even if tragedy does not befall us, it goes to the root of the human condition that it is a possibility we must live with. And, even if remote, the possibility of tragedy is not so much more imminent than the skeptical possibilities, it is much more threatening. For while skeptical possibilities are so designed that they make no difference to the experience of our lives, in tragedy our lives are ripped asunder (1992, 334).

The emotional response of κάθαρσις allows the members of the audience simultaneously to learn about the universals of life and to experience the emotions that are aroused when they identify the relation of those universals to *their* lives (cf. Freeland 1992, 124). One should not understand the emotional effect of poetry, such as the κάθαρσις of tragedy, as simply a purgation of emotions or "the only effect on the audience that the tragedy aims to produce" (Lear 1992, 332).[5] Both the emotional response evoked by poetry and the learning experience carry over into everyday life and enable those persons in the audience to serve the *polis* better as citizens.[6]

Poetics in Greco-Roman literary theory, therefore, is more than the study of an art form for the sake of its beauty. Poetics is interested *both* in the author's creative contributions *and* the audience's response to the literary work. In that respect, *the poem is not an end in itself, but demands completion in the experience of its presentation to the audience.* The artistic composition of the poem serves an aesthetic and cognitive function that ultimately is social in nature.[7] The author's success depends on the response of those whom the poetic work confronts. Thus, the literary text or poem as the author's creation produces the setting whereby the response of the audience is potentially evoked, thereby shaping and molding those who experience it (i.e., the community or social group itself). If such concerns are inherent to ancient religious texts, then the interpreter must consider not only what the text states or reflects but also the potential effects and responses for which the text calls from its audience or reader.

## Rhetoric

Along with poetics, rhetoric is a major subject of interest in the literary theory of the Greco-Roman world. Beginning with the fourth century B.C.E., rhetoric progressively became the dominant subject of literary debate and education. H. I. Marrou contends that the historical evolution of Greco-Roman culture coincided with the educational concern for passing on one's tradition or literary heritage, rather than the development of one's "reasoning faculty" (1956, 161). An emphasis on the subject of rhetoric accompanied that rise in literary interests. Thus, one must examine selected historical developments that lead to rhetoric's dominance and address the issues of rhetoric that relate to literature and its persuasion of the audience. A clear understanding of these issues and developments and also an identification of the practical, social function of rhetoric are crucial both to the assessment of rhetoric's role in ancient literary theory and practice and to the critical study and interpretation of religious texts from that era.

The issue of the rhetorical nature of texts was most vigorously condemned by Plato. Plato articulated that a "literary drive" lies behind the writing of any literature (*Phaedrus* 264c). He contended that such writing involves the compelling desire to shape the individual parts of a work into a complete, living unit. The author serves as the artist, the one responsible for composing that work of art (Roberts 1928, 7). The love of ideal beauty in eloquence should be the inspiring principle behind the composition. Plato insisted that this love of beauty, not rhetorical interests, should be the motivation of all writing and speaking.

The historical development of the subject of rhetoric, however, did not reflect the Platonic deprecation of rhetorical interests. In its Greek original, τέκνη ῥητορική referred essentially to oral speaking. Rhetoric, then, or ῥητορικη in its abbreviated form, included public speaking or oratory, which for centuries had been the pattern for most cultural communication, whether it be literature or discourse. Aristotle's classic definition of rhetoric, "the faculty [δύναμις] of dis-

covering [θεωρῆσαι] the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever" (*Rhetoric* 1.2.1), reflects the potential use of persuasion and its techniques with various subjects. Rather than a subject of suspect motives and concerns, rhetoric became a scientific art that organized principles and elements of oratory into a systematized body of explanation which shows how and why oratory could achieve its specific effects (Ong 1982, 9).

The theory of rhetoric that was more fully developed in the fourth century B.C.E. was further expanded in the following centuries into a detailed system of literary criticism. George Kennedy stresses that this system of rhetoric, along with the accompanying exercises in the "practice" of rhetoric, first gained prominence in secondary education and later in advanced education (1963, 264). The practice and imitation (*mimesis*) of the rhetorical compositions of earlier orators became the pedagogical model of the classroom. The idea of *mimesis*, which is the same term that was used in poetics to articulate the idea of the creative portrayal of human action, refers here to the imitation of the style of great literary models (cf. Kennedy 1972, 347). The purpose behind this educational emphasis was the development of potential orators, who would serve in the political arena.[8]

This practical, political purpose of rhetoric, however, was not carried throughout the Greco-Roman era. One finds, for instance, that such practical purposed had been engulfed by concerns for style and "speaking well" in the first century C.E.. Fragments from Dionysius's *On Imitation* and references in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* reflect the concern for the imitation and emulation of other authors in one's own oratory and writing (Kennedy 1972, 347–48). The creative inclusion of the best qualities of many literary models into one's own work became a prominent characteristic of rhetoric. Although the practical purpose of rhetoric and education was still affirmed, these potential orators composed rhetorical works as literary and oratorical works which were characterized by eloquence and style rather than political persuasiveness.

These interests in different literary models for imitation may have contributed to the increasing concern of rhetoric with all literature, not only with oratory. Although Demetrius and Dionysius wrote with

rhetorical interests in mind, their critical essays include issues relating to poetry and history in addition to speeches (see Demetrius, *On Style* 2.67–77, 112–21; Dionysius, *On Literary Composition* 3–4, 15–18). Kennedy attributes the rhetorical concern for other literary forms to "the central position that rhetoric had acquired in education" (1963, 268). Thus, the surviving texts of literary criticism from the Greco-Roman era tend to obscure the boundaries between literary categories such as rhetoric, poetry, and even history. Because of the dominance of rhetoric, these texts focus with rhetorical interest on different forms of literature.

The development of the subject of rhetoric, therefore, evolved from the forum of oratory to include all literature. The progression from orality to literacy opened the way for more sophisticated and sustained treatments of the subject, such as the delineation of different specific speech elements (see Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*; Cicero, *De Inventione* 1). However, several basic issues were prevalent throughout the evolution of rhetoric as a discipline and subject of literary criticism. The significant contributors to rhetoric addressed these issues, which correlate with the concerns of poetics and the three constituents of the speech-act: the orator as speaker or writer, the audience, and the speech or literary work (cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.3.1; Longinus, *On the Sublime* 8.1, 4; also Gill 1984, 161). All three issues focus on such practical, social concerns.

One issue for the rhetoricians concentrated on the speaker of the speech or the orator himself.[9] The speaker, as the one seeking to persuade his audience, is responsible for conveying a sense of trustworthiness and concern for the well-being of his listeners. According to Aristotle, the speaker or writer must have the audience's confidence, and the audience must believe (πιστεύομεν) in the speaker as presented in the speech or work (*Rhetoric* 1.2.4–5, *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.7.2–4; cf. Lentz 1989, 27–28). Any preconceived ideas concerning the speaker would not ultimately matter, for "the orator persuades by moral character" (τοῦ ἤθους) as exhibited in the speech or text (*Rhetoric* 1.2.4–5). How the speaker or author portrays himself is critical to the audience's impressions and dispositions toward him. Aristotle stated: "For the orator to produce conviction [πιστοὺς]

three qualities are necessary; for, independently of demonstrations, the things that induce belief [πιστεύομεν] are three in number. These qualities are good sense, virtue, and goodwill" (*Rhetoric* 2.1.5).

To be persuasive, the speaker or writer of the literary text must present himself as a friend to the members of the audience, wishing only the good for their sake alone, and doing everything in his power to obtain that good for them (cf. *Rhetoric* 2.4.2; see also *Nicomachean Ethics* 8–9, *Eudemian Ethics* 7). Just as a friend reciprocates the love that has been received from another (*Rhetoric* 2.4.2), the audience's disposition toward the speech or text and its author corresponds to the work's conveyance of his disposition toward those in the audience. Conversely, the audience's perception of ulterior motives would render the speech or text ineffective.

This concern for the rhetorician's moral character may have reflected the Platonic concern for the danger of poetry and rhetoric. Plato's criticism was directed to the use of poetry and rhetoric by those who did *not* have the well-being of the *polis* or others in mind. This interest in the speaker of rhetoric or the orator became the dominant characteristic of what Kennedy describes as "sophistic rhetoric" (1980, 16, 25–40). Sophistic rhetoric was responsible for the description of the ideal orator who would lead society along the path toward the realization of political hopes and aspirations. The orator, above all else, was to be a good man (Kennedy 1980, 40).

Rhetoricians other than the sophists, however, also emphasized the relation between the oratory's effectiveness and the orator's character. Cicero suggested that the ideal or true orator is "an orator from whom every blemish has been taken away" (*De Oratore*, 1.26.118). Quintilian reflected the Aristotelian emphasis of the portrayal of the orator's ἦθος in oratory and the impression left on the audience (*Institutio Oratoria* 6.2.3–20). Although most of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* focuses on other issues, his insistence in the last book that an orator be a good man and that *only* a good man could even *be* an orator would leave the reader of his manuals with a sense of the importance placed in the orator's character (*Institutio Oratoria* 12.1.1–3). Thus, from Aristotle to Quintilian, the moral character or ἦθος of the speaker or orator, as the author and presenter of the rhe-

torical work, was perceived as an indispensable component of the persuasive effects sought by rhetoric.

A second issue for the rhetoricians concentrated on the audience, including both the persons who comprise the audience and the nature of the potential effects on them. The inherent purposes of rhetoric were social and political. A speaker or writer must define both *whom* he is addressing and *what* he wants to effect in them. The orator, then, could not focus merely on what effect he hoped to evoke. The rhetorical work, beginning with its conception and culminating with its presentation, must first consider the audience's beliefs and opinions. At least from the time of Aristotle, the recommendation to the orator was that "one must not argue from all possible opinions, but only from such as are definite and admitted, for instance, either by the judges themselves or by those of whose judgment they approve" (*Rhetoric* 2.22.3). The orator could not afford to disregard the audience, the ones who would listen to him. Not only do audiences differ in terms of beliefs and opinions, they also differ in terms of the role performed by the audience addressed. This difference in the audience's role is critical in the recognition of the three types of oratory: the deliberative, the forensic, and the epideictic (see, e.g., Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.3.1–6). The situational character of the audience in rhetoric forces the orator to define the audience which he wishes to influence and the nature of that influence, as the rhetorical work is composed as a literary text (cf. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 19–21).[10]

The persuasion of that audience occurs largely through the audience's emotions. Aristotle recognized that the emotions (πάθη) affect judgment (cf., e.g., *Rhetoric* 1.1.7; 1.2.5; 2.1.1–9). In particular, he defined emotions as "all those affections which cause men to change their opinion in regard to their judgments, and are accompanied by pleasure and pain; such are anger, pity, fear, and all similar emotions and their contraries" (*Rhetoric* 2.1.8). A correct understanding of emotions is essential for the orator or writer who wants to create the proper and appropriate effect. A further clarification of this definition of emotions, however, was critical to Aristotle's thought. Using anger as an example, he delineated three aspects of emotions: "the disposi-

tion of mind which makes men angry, the persons with whom they are usually angry, and the occasions which give rise to anger" (*Rhetoric* 2.1.8). The mention of both the object and the grounds of emotion is important here; it shows that Aristotle did not separate cognition from emotion, for only thoughts and beliefs have objects. The distinction was made between the πάθη that involve belief, thought, or imagination and the bodily drives such as hunger and thirst (see Fortenbaugh 1974, 211–18). Thus, the emotional responses such as anger, pity, and fear may also be intelligent and reasonable actions, if based upon a reasoned consideration of the situation. The emotional effect becomes critical to the task of persuasion, as success in evoking an appropriate emotional response may reflect success in convincing the audience about what is presented.

An accompanying result of the emotional effect is the evocation of thought. The confrontation with concerns that intersect with one's life causes the arousal of the emotions, as in poetry. These emotions, in turn, create opportunities for the audience to ponder the impending situation. Without a personal or corporate sense of the possibilities of the presented situation, the audience would have little interest. This particular sense of immediacy, as created in and reflected by the arousal of emotions such as fear, enables the audience to "deliberate" (βουλευτικοὺς ποιεῖ; *Rhetoric* 2.5.14). The orator, therefore, persuades the audience in part by appealing to the emotions that are appropriate to the subject at hand, convincing those persons of the probability of his argument.[11]

The later work of Longinus reflects similar concerns for the cognitive and affective elements of rhetoric. Although Longinus emphasized the possibility of the audience being led *beyond* the effect of persuasion "into ecstasy" (εἰς ἔκστασιν; *On the Sublime* 1.4; cf. Grube 1965, 342–43), the cognitive element is integral to his concept of greatness in a rhetorical work: "what is truly great gives abundant food for thought [ἡ ἀναθεώρησις]" (*On the Sublime* 7.3). Longinus contended that the effects (ἡ κατεξανάστασις) of such a work are almost impossible to withstand (cf. Gill 1984, 160–61; Olson 1952, 238, 241). While the ideas of Aristotle and Longinus are very different (see Gill 1984, 164), both seemingly held a general interest in the

effect of a work on its audience and the cognitive dimension of that effect.

The final issue for the rhetoricians that will be considered here concentrated on the speech or rhetorical work. Since the orator seeks to persuade a particular audience in specific ways, the composition of the speech or text becomes the communicative link between the two parties of the rhetorical setting. The interest in the composition of the rhetorical work was most keenly cultivated in what Kennedy describes as "technical rhetoric" (1980, 16, 18–24). Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, for instance, covers five main subjects regarding techniques of composition: invention, arrangement, diction or expression, delivery, and memory.[12] Although each subject has important contributions to the "art of rhetoric," the systematic treatment of these subjects is the product of later Latin rhetoricians. However, the subject of diction or expression seems to have been a significant issue with rhetoricians throughout the Greco-Roman era and intersects with issues arising in the literary criticism of poetics and history.

The interest in the diction or expression of the rhetorical work is based on what has already been discussed: the ἦθος or moral character of the orator is reflected in the work itself. If the members of the audience do not perceive the orator or writer as having their goodwill or interests in mind, the work will not elicit the desired emotional and persuasive effects from the audience. Also, the rhetoricians recognized that word choice and arrangement within the sentences all contribute to the desired effect.[13] Diction, then, taken from the Latin *dictio*, refers to the Greek literary concept of λέξις or "style." Verbal or literary style through which the orator expresses himself is the means by which he seeks to persuade his audience.

Rhetorical theorists wrestled with the difficulties associated with λέξις or diction. As important as this subject was for the study of rhetoric, excessive concern with style could also compromise the effect that the orator seeks. Aristotle stated: "In regard to style [λέξεως], one of its chief merits may be defined as perspicuity [i.e., clarity]. This is shown by the fact that the speech, if it does not make the meaning clear, will not perform its proper function; neither must it be mean, nor above the dignity of the subject, but appropriate to

it; for the poetic style maybe is not mean, but it is not appropriate to prose" (*Rhetoric* 3.2.1). In prose or rhetoric, Aristotle distrusted artificial and inappropriate embellishment. He discounted the value of such obvious embellishment because it arouses suspicions of deliberate manipulation.[14] Aristotle believed that the art or style of the writer would achieve its purposes more effectively if it is concealed (*Rhetoric* 3.2.4–5; cf. Longinus, *On the Sublime* 17.2). Dionysius, in his critique of Isocrates, complained similarly that Isocrates's excessiveness in "smoothness of style" and embellishment limits the value of his work. Dionysius contended that style is a tool for composition and not the purpose of it (*On Isocrates* 13–14; cf. *On the Style of Demosthenes* 18, 32). Thus, the common view of rhetoricians was that, while the orator or writer is still permitted and expected to be creative when necessary (*Rhetoric* 2.20.2), one's style must enhance and not obscure the possibilities of persuasion through the work.

Rhetoric, therefore, is concerned with the means by which the orator could persuade an audience. The orator's character, an understanding of emotion and the audience, and skills in composition are essential elements in the process of persuasion. However, the composition and the possible presentation of the resultant work do not encompass all the aims of rhetoric. Rhetoric, despite its stress on composition and the means of persuasion, is not complete until the orator presents his work and an audience responds (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 17). The chief concern of rhetoric is the persuasion of an audience to the views and course of action that the orator or author advocates. Thus, an adequate understanding of ancient rhetoric must not neglect its inherent, social dimension. In addition, if such concerns are inherent to ancient religious texts, then these concerns that go beyond the text itself must be considered in the interpretive task.

## The Common Social Function of Poetics and Rhetoric

How much of a distinction, then, did ancient literary theorists make between poetics and rhetoric? To be sure, the criticisms against artificiality and embellishment in rhetoric reflect a view that rhetoric is

limited to its acceptance and use of poetical techniques. Charles Baldwin suggests that one should view the distinction in the following manner:

> Rhetoric meant to the ancient world the art of instructing and moving men in their affairs, poetic the art of sharpening and expanding their vision... [T]he one is composition of ideas; the other, composition of images. In the one field life is discussed; in the other it is presented. The type of the one is a public address, moving us to assent and action, the type of the other is a play, showing us in action moving to an end of character. The one argues and urges; the other represents. Though both appeal to imagination, the method of rhetoric is logical; the method of poetic, as well as its detail, is imaginative (1924, 134–35).

Kennedy asserts that the distinction between these two subjects of ancient literary thought lies in the "authorial intent and how that is transmitted by artistic techniques through the text to the audience" (1989, 191). These historians of ancient literary thought and practice make a clear case for understanding the historical distinction between poetics and rhetoric.

This distinction between poetics and rhetoric, however, must not distort the relation of these two subjects of ancient literary thought. The historical evolution of the interests of rhetoric inevitably led to the study of *all* literature within the rubric of rhetoric, not just texts of oration. Also, the increasing interest in stylistic and compositional features of the rhetorical work indicates an inclusion of poetical techniques in rhetoric. The point must be made, then, that the dominant subject of rhetoric included the study and critique of poetical works for the enhancement of rhetorical work.

If such a relation is defensible, then one must consider the commonality of poetics and rhetoric on the critical issue of persuasion, both in literature and oration. Both poetics and rhetoric, in their ancient expressions, sought to create an effect in an audience. This central issue is perhaps a key link between the two disciplines. But in what ways may this commonality of social function be maintained? Three emphases in both poetry and rhetoric suggest the similarities in their respective social functions: the understanding of the power of

language, the concern for affecting the audience, and the creative role of the author in composing a text that functions in these social ways.

One emphasis in both poetry and rhetoric in the Greco-Roman world is the understanding of the power of the spoken word. Both poetry and rhetoric were disciplines of oral communication. Although texts were written and composed, the ancient texts on literary theory (i.e., on poetics and rhetoric) focused on the impressions or effects created in an audience that hears the work presented (or, in the case of the tragedy or comedy, hears *and* sees). Literary texts were available to very few members of the populace, and those who were literate usually read aloud (cf. Grube 1965, 39; Kelber 1983, 17; Lentz 1989, 7; Malitz 1990, 323–24; and Roberts 1928, 98–99). The presentation of these words, whether as a poem, speech, or literary text, was perceived as a powerful, influential event for the audience or reader. The power of the communicated word was behind both Plato's critique of poetry and Cicero's confidence in the influence of rhetoric in shaping community: "To come, however, at length to the highest achievements of eloquence, what other power could have been strong enough either to gather scattered humanity into one place, or to lead it out of its brutish existence in the wilderness up to our present condition of civilization as men and as citizens, or, after the establishment of community, to give shape to laws, tribunals, and civic rights?" (*De Oratore* 1.8.33).

The communicated word, particularly as it confronts an audience in a social and communal setting, was perceived to have the potential power to affect its recipient. That power to influence and persuade was at the core of Greco-Roman literary thought. Whether written or spoken, the power of language to shape and mold the behaviour of individuals and communities was not only assumed but celebrated.

A second emphasis that is similar in both poetics and rhetoric follows closely after what has just preceded. The central issue within these literary-critical subjects is the creation of an effect in the recipient of the work. Of course, these responses are not identical. Both poetics and rhetoric, however, were concerned with the emotional effect that may be created in the audience. As has been emphasized here, both areas were interested in the cognitive dimensions of the

emotions, so that the effect and response to the work are more than elements of entertainment. For poetry, the lasting value of the experience is the understanding and expression of emotions that would reshape at least some aspect of the life and behaviour of that corporate audience. For rhetoric, the audience is persuaded to make decisions and to act on certain matters as a social entity. Although the social functions of poetry and rhetoric were largely different, both share a common function in the formative influence of the experience on corporate life. Ancient literary thought and practice reflect an understanding that literature, whether presented publicly (as was the usual manner) or read aloud privately, possesses this inherent, social dimension. The authors of ancient literary texts, including ancient *religious* texts, assumed this social function, and their success depended on these social considerations.

The third emphasis that both poetry and rhetoric stress is the creative role of the author in composing a text that potentially functions to shape the community or social group. The literary text or speech is critical in eliciting the desired response from the audience. However, ancient literary criticism made it clear that the author as creator of that text or speech is the central figure in the communicative act. The moral character of the author, his motives for writing, and the manner of expression all contribute to the effectiveness in eliciting a positive response from the audience. Responsibility for the text itself, along with its portrayal of life and human action, belong to the author. Thus, the author's creativity in composing the text is critical to the potential effectiveness of the text. That creative license, somewhat more limited in rhetoric than in poetry, is a prominent characteristic of ancient literary thought and practice.

This communal character of both poetry and rhetoric should not be minimized. Although what has survived the centuries are ancient literary texts, one must not ignore the social dimensions that these texts represent. Tragedies were performed in a public theater. In Athens, the Theatre of Dionysus was large enough to accommodate over fourteen thousand people. Theatre benches had no divisions, so that emotions literally raced through the audience (see Beye 1987, 127). The experience was not private but communal. In a sense, emotions

were shared by all. The poet was successful if his poetry assisted in the cohesion of the *polis* by guiding those in his audience toward insight into reality and themselves. A rhetorician was successful if his audience left the oration with a common decision and action. These poets and rhetoricians addressed audiences, and they sought to affect these audiences as social groups. The corporate dimension of the aims of poetry and rhetoric carried over into the writing of literature. Therefore, the social element cannot be ignored in considering the effects of these areas of ancient literary thought and practice.

The focus here has been the critical issues of literary theory in the Greco-Roman world as they would relate potentially to the interpretation of ancient religious texts, such as the Christian New Testament writings. This exploration of literary thought from that period suggests that the author's creativity and the elicited response from the audience are the two crucial issues facing these theorists. Given these two issues, the interpretation of ancient religious texts from the Greco-Roman era must proceed with the assumption that, at least in part, the composition and reception of such writings reflect these concerns and expectations, which focus not only on the text itself but what happens in and after the encounter of that text by those in the audience. To be sure, little if any evidence in the text states explicitly that such matters are at work. However, one may contend that, given the concerns addressed in the ancient discussions regarding poetics and rhetoric, such issues are extratextual elements that are woven yet hidden in the *text*ure of ancient religious writings. Thus, readings and interpretations of ancient religious texts must move beyond the written words themselves, thereby seeking to account for not only what the text *states* but what the text potentially *does* in the life of those to whom it was directed.

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Notes

[1] See the works of Wolfgang Iser (1974, 1978) for useful delineation of the reading process. Iser emphasizes that it is essential that the reader or interpreter identify and even reconstruct historical matters and values, especially those unfamiliar to her, in the reading of the text (1978, 69, 152).

[2] Quotations of ancient sources are from the Loeb Classical Library, unless otherwise noted.

[3] The term ἔκπληξις is a synonym for "ecstasy" and speaks of the impact that results either from the direct experience of fantastic or horrible situations or from the production of such images. Cf. comments by James A. Arieti in Longinus 1985, 87.

[4] Contra Roberts 1928, 108–9, who maintains that "Aristotle holds that poetry is meant, above all, to give pleasure."

[5] Cf. Halliwell 1989, 163–64. Contra Baldwin 1924, 147–48; and Grube 1965, 75.

[6] See Aristotle, *Politics* 7–8, in particular, for his emphasis on learning and education for the citizen. Cf. Gill 1986, 261.

[7] See Gentili 1988, 55: "[P]oetry became the principle means for integrating the individual into his social context.... Poetic performance, whether epic or lyric, was conceived as more than a means for allowing audiences to see themselves in the mirror of mythical or contemporary events; it could also serve to arouse in them a new perception of reality and broaden their awareness to include the new modes of social and political activity which new needs and goals demanded."

[8] E.g., see Longinus, *On the Sublime* 1.2, where the concern apparently was for the usefulness of rhetoric in public oratory: "[L]et us then see whether our views have any real value for public speakers [ἀνδράσι πολιτικοῖς, literally 'political men']."

[9] Throughout this section on Greco-Roman rhetoric, the orator not only delivered speeches but also wrote literary texts. The same issues reflected in the speech were found in the literary text. Thus, "the orator," "the speaker," "the author," and "the writer" were all designations of the same individual, and are used interchangeably in this study.

[10] This concern for defining the audience and its role is not dissimilar to the issue of the "ideal reader" in modern literary criticism.

[11] Of course, the revealed character of the orator is also important in persuasion, as has already been discussed. The appeal to the emotions, then, and the revealed character of the orator are interrelated in the task of convincing and persuading the audience.

[12] Cf. Cicero, *De Inventione* 1.7.9: "Invention is the discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one's cause plausible. Arrangement is the distribution of arguments thus discovered in the proper order. Expression is the fitting of the proper language to the invented matter. Memory is the firm mental grasp of matter and words. Delivery is the control of voice and body in a manner suitable to the dignity of the subject matter and the style."

[13] Cf., e.g., Demetrius, *On Style* 2.39: "Anyhow, we all remember in a special degree, and are stirred by, the words that come first and the words that come last, whereas those that come between them have less effect upon us, as though they were obscured or hidden among the others." Cf. also Dionysius, *On Literary Composition* 2: "Composition [ἡ σύνθεσις] is, as the name itself indicates, a certain process of arranging the parts of speech, or the elements of diction, as some call them." This composition is further described in chapter 15: "The most elegant writers of poetry or prose have understood these facts well, and both arrange their words by weaving them together with deliberate care, and with elaborate artistic skill adapt the syllables and the letters to the emotions they wish to portray."

[14] Cf. Roberts 1928, 51–52, who seems to miss the point when he states that, in Aristotle's thought, such embellishment "is apt to obscure the meaning and to lead to fine writing and flamboyant speaking."

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