Extrinsic and Intrinsic Criticism

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As he contemplated the state of literary scholarship not long ago, Norman Foerster was impelled to remark that "the inclination of scholars to move out of rather than more deeply into their own subject is a symptom of a dubious state of affairs in their own subject."1 Literary scholars, he felt, had abandoned their true calling by immersing themselves in research which dealt with such matters as sources, textual validity, allusions, biography, psychology, social environment, historical data — with everything, that is, but literary criticism. Analogies are notoriously vulnerable as logical instruments; but if construed only as suggestive similarities, they can be useful. What is here proposed is a scrutiny of current methods of rhetorical criticism focused upon certain issues that may be as relevant for public address as for literature. In short, is it possible that rhetorical scholars have moved out of rather than more deeply into their own subject?

The Magna Carta for rhetorical critics, now become a classic, was embodied in a brilliant essay by H. A. Wichelns.2 Although our charter appeared scarcely more than three decades ago, already there has developed something approaching an orthodoxy of method in the criticism of public address. Stated most briefly, this methodology can be characterized as an application of rhetorical criteria to materials derived from historical research. Most of it is speaker centered, and most of it has followed the traditional patterns of investigation employed in history, biography, and literature. As Baird has described the evolution of method in rhetorical criticism, there was at first a period in which directors of research groped for valid tools and explored all the well-known approaches, including the survey, the experimental, and the quantitative; what finally prevailed was a "combination of the historical-literary-rhetorical methods" applied to the "evaluation of outstanding speakers." Hence, "the critic of speeches and of speakers became [both] a historian and a rhetorician."3

The most significant feature of this standardized methodology, derived from Wichelns’s analysis of public address as a speaker-audience event, is its heavy reliance upon historical data and historical research techniques. An examination of

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3 A. Craig Baird, "Opportunities for Research in State and Sectional Public Speaking," JISS XXIX (October 1943), 304-308.
published research confirms Whan's judgment that rhetorical scholarship is chiefly "historical in nature," and Aly's assertion, that "the biographical approach to American oratory has been the most thoroughly developed." There may be two chief reasons accounting for this biographical-historical emphasis, the first political and the second doctrinal. The political has been well expressed by Thompson when he suggested that while "speech departments were struggling to attain an academic position equal to that of departments of English, history, and mathematics," it was "probably a matter of good politics" to imitate the work of better-established fields" and to "make only minor adaptations" of historical and literary methods. The doctrinal reason is the important one and that which concerns us here. It is based upon Hudson’s definition of rhetoric, a definition applied by Wichelns to the practice of criticism—essentially it is the Aristotelian view that rhetoric is concerned with persuading an audience. Hence, as Wichelns argued, the rhetorical critic will take a "different attitude toward the orator" (different from that of the literary critic), for he will recognize the unique function of the orator: "for what it is: the art of influencing men in some concrete situation." Therefore, the point of view of the rhetorical critic, as Wichelns expounded it, is "patently single"; unlike that of the literary critic, "It is not concerned with permanence, nor yet with beauty." Rather, "It is concerned with effect. It regards a speech as a communication to a specific audience (and holds its business to be the analysis and appreciation of the orator's method of imparting his ideas to his hearers.)

The rationale of historically-oriented criticism, then, may be stated most succinctly in the familiar truism that "speeches are meaningful only when examined in the social settings of which they are a part." Reconstruction of past events means, therefore, that the critic must "summon history to the aid of criticism." There is implied here no suggestion whatever that this rationale lacks cogency. The present writer has no quarrel with the doctrine that a speech must be understood as an event taking place in history, the product of one person communicating with other persons. However, it will be suggested that some consequences of this admittedly sound premise may be called into question.

In considering whether Foerster's charge can legitimately be brought against rhetorical critics, we may find it helpful to re-examine exactly what Wichelns was attacking when he rejected the methods of literary criticism. The crucial words in his critique of the literary approach to public address are "permanence" and

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5 Bower Aly, "The History of American Public Address As a Research Field," *QJS*, XXIX (October 1943), 312.
6 Wayne N. Thompson, "Contemporary Public Address As a Research Area," *QJS*, XXXIII (October 1947), 277.
8 Wichelns, op. cit., p. 209.
9 Loren D. Reid, "The Perils of Rhetorical Criticism," *QJS*, XXX (December 1944), 417.
10 Wichelns, op. cit., p. 199.
"beauty." Now, it may be asked, to what extent do these criteria describe the research methodology of literary scholarship? The answer seems to be that they represent a point of view. They are touchstones commonly applied to an evaluation of literary materials; that is, they are criteria, rather than techniques. As such, of course, they are indeed inappropriate bases upon which to evaluate public address. But they bear no necessary relation to methodology per se. Hence it was possible for Wichelns himself to admit of rhetorical criticism that "its tools are those of literature." And it has been possible for Brigance to concede, using similar terminology, that "the tools of rhetoric may indeed be the same as those of literature"—even though "the atmosphere and purpose are different." Bryant has recently reaffirmed his conviction that there is "no need to relocate the field of rhetorical scholarship as envisioned by Hudson and Wichelns, nor to recant" the views which he first published in 1937, that "methods and materials in literary history and critical scholarship apply likewise in oratory and rhetoric. Some modifications and adaptations, of course, are necessary; but we always have an overlapping so great that method in literary history is almost the same as in rhetorical history." It should be clear, then, that the revolt declared by Wichelns and his successors has been against criteria rather than methods.

Now what have been the most important research methods utilized by literary scholars and critics? A bewildering variety of approaches will be found in the massive corpus of literary scholarship. But there is no question that the dominant and most widely approved mode of literary study has been the historical or philological. It is important to inquire why this has been so.

Departments of literature (i.e., "English" in this country), from which speech departments were eventually to spring, became established as academic entities in the late decades of the nineteenth century. For all its so-called "romanticism," the nineteenth century became the century of positivism. It was a century that witnessed the ascendency of science and technology, the worship of science and objective facts. Scholars in the humanities, imbued with the laudable desire to rescue their studies from the vagaries of subjective theorizing, looked to the natural sciences for methods to achieve the fashionable criteria of objectivity, impersonality, and certainty. Men like von Ranke, Comte, and Taine sought to create scientific history, sociology, and literary criticism. "In an age enormously impressed by the achievements of natural science, and convinced that even literature and the arts must be studied with 'scientific methods,' the historian too had to be 'scientific' at all costs."
The literary scholars, including those who may be called philologists, imported from the German universities a methodology, not of criticism, but of history; and the history was usually of the type recommended by von Ranke, who in 1828 had issued his pronouncement of "scientific history"—the historian, he said, must write an objective account of things as they really occurred. Thus, the historical approach to literature, "made fashionable by the prestige of the natural sciences," helped to perpetuate the identification of "scientific and historical method." Taine set the pattern of historically oriented literary criticism with his canons—race, moment, milieu. The result was what Wellek has called the "common nineteenth-century divorce between literary criticism and history." In other words—and here is the crux of the issue—the literary scholars pursued historical facts so tenaciously that criticism of the literary works themselves was largely ignored or relegated to the limbo of polite essays in Sunday supplements.

What was the dominant type of literary criticism, then, against which the rhetoricians rebelled, following the banner raised by Wichelns in 1925? Clearly, it was historical; it emphasized factual research; and, regardless of aesthetic criteria like permanence and beauty, it was typically extrinsic; that is, it was preoccupied with the surroundings of literature rather than with the literature itself. As recently as 1951 an English professor remarked of the current requirements for publication in most research journals: "new factual information is the sine qua non," whereas criticism contributing to an understanding of the text is at most only a "desirable accessory." And Shumaker added, "the pages of scholarly journals continue to be filled, for the most part, with studies that depend frankly on external reference frames."

But now we arrive at the focal point of this entire discussion, what Shumaker has called "one of the central issues of [all] critical theory," viz., "the relative usefulness of external and internal reference frames." Despite the dominance of extrinsic or historical methods, there have been many objectors. Especially in the last fifteen years or so there has occurred a widespread disillusionment with scientific methods, resulting in "the use of internal reference frames by large numbers of practicing critics." This modern revolt has been epitomized as "a healthy reaction . . . which recognizes that the study of literature should, first and foremost, concentrate on the actual works of art themselves." In fact, "the partisans of intrinsic analysis are just now strongly entrenched in their positions," and it may be said with confidence that a new "methodological trend is presently vigorous."
As any reader of these pages will affirm, the label, "New Criticism," has been applied to a vaguely defined point of view promulgated by a heterogeneous group of "philosophers, psychologists, critics, and poets"; although no two of the numerous "new critics" are in complete agreement, all are "united to restore the literary text to its central position amidst the welter of historical-sociological scientism whose data... [have] almost buried it."24

In our companion field of literary criticism, then, there has been a "mounting discontent with the purely historical study of literature," a questioning of the extrinsic approach, and an insistence upon "close textual analysis" which has appropriately been called the "Revolution of the Text."25 Admittedly, the nature of public address (as a practical instrument for influencing men in a place and in a moment of history) will not permit us to apply literally the arguments of the New Critics to extrinsic rhetorical criticism. For one thing, the New Criticism is frankly concerned with aesthetics, not with audience effect. This is not the place to discuss further the rationale of the New Criticism; competent writers have expounded it at length. But it is appropriate to suggest that there may be useful analogies between a rationale of intrinsic criticism for literature and a rationale of intrinsic criticism for public address.

Putting the matter bluntly, is not some re-examination in order when we find, upon examining twenty-five representative papers published since 1940, that about three-fourths of the space is typically devoted to historical and biographical information, with sometimes as little as one-tenth allotted to rhetorical analysis of speeches? It appears that in turning from inappropriate aesthetic criteria of literary scholarship, we have at the same time perpetuated two important characteristics of that same scholarship: (1) a heavy reliance upon historical data and historical methodology, and (2) a deliberate subordination of textual analysis—even when reasonably adequate speech texts are available.

The view, convincingly argued, has prevailed that rhetorical criticism is valid when it is directed principally to determining the effect of speaking. In recent years there has been a growing tendency to question this view. Space does not permit a consideration of the reasons for accepting or rejecting it. But, indisputably, the emphasis upon effect as the central concern of criticism has led to the familiar insistence that the critic of speeches "is a social historian as well as a biographer."26 We have been told that the critic's work "will be sound only when it uses the results of historical study";27 and that the critic of oratory must "know more history than we can expect the historian to know of oratory."28 Consequently, a logical corollary of the premise that "in many respects the most impor-
tant constituent of the rhetorical judgment...[is] the historical.” has been the
derogation of intensive analysis of speech content.
What will be suggested here is no abandonment of the accepted historical-critical regimen. The impressive results of this approach are to be seen all about us. Nor is it suggested that speech content can be understood in a vacuum. Historical and sociological and biographical data will always be required for a complete understanding of public address. But the following proposals are worth consideration: (1) that studies be encouraged which represent a shift in emphasis toward a more thorough analysis of speech content; and (2) that more attention be paid to developing appropriate techniques for executing such analysis.

Analytical studies are, of course, but one part of the total enterprise of criticism, defined by Shumaker as “the full, evaluated apprehension of the critical subject.” However, as historians and others have long ago discovered, severe limitation of the subject is inescapable if thorough scholarship be the goal: “the necessity of limiting each critical book or essay to some part of the total critical process has been increasingly recognized in recent years.” One—and only one—way of limiting the scope of criticism is to concentrate upon analysis rather than evaluation. Although analysis and evaluation are perhaps never completely separable, the work of the New Critics in literature and of the content analysts in the social sciences demonstrates the practical possibilities. Once more, rhetorical critics are invited to consider the reasoning of Shumaker; in a discussion too complex for summarizing here, he proposes a “dichotomy... between evaluative critical statements... and analytic or descriptive (nonevaluative) statements”—admitting that any single sentence may contain both. Without committing oneself to Shumaker’s arguable position, it is possible at least to accept it as a working hypothesis. Thus, intensive analytical studies are admissible, if as no more than explorations in methodology.

It appears that analytic studies may proceed in either of two general directions. First, they may utilize the lore of rhetorical theory and identify examples of various rhetorical canons or devices within speech content. This is a conventional approach, of course; sometimes it has been little more than a copybook exercise; sometimes it has yielded valuable information. The second direction is that of contemporary content analysis, as this term is used in a special and technical sense. In this special sense, content analysis must be differentiated, as Berelson has pointed out, from the kind of gross, unsystematic analysis that takes place “whenever someone reads a body of communication content and then summarizes and interprets what is there”—for example, traditional historical or literary criticism.

30 Shumaker, op. cit., p. 19.
31 Ibid., p. 29.
32 Ibid., pp. 35-37.
33 Bernard Berelson, Content Analysis in Communication Research (Glencoe, Ill., 1952), p. 9.
Content analysis, as a research technique, is basically a close, sentence-by-sentence scrutiny of oral or written discourse for the purpose of determining what kinds of "meanings" the words may represent. It is really a semantic analysis of symbols. It is characterized by rather elaborate systematization, with or without precise quantitative units, and with or without mathematical analysis. In brief, it is a technique for finding out how much of what is presented how. One way of looking at content analysis is to regard it as a means of putting a wide variety of different word patterns into a single category—or many categories. A formal and technical definition, not necessarily accepted by all specialists in the field, is the well-known one offered by Janis:

... any technique (a) for the classification of the sign-vehicles [i.e., lexical words or equivalent symbols], (b) which relies solely upon the judgments (which ... may range from perceptual discrimination to sheer guesses) of an analyst or group of analysts as to which sign-vehicles fall into which categories, (c) on the basis of explicitly formulated rules, (d) provided that the analyst's judgments are regarded as the reports of a scientific observer.\(^34\)

For the purpose of analysis, content may be classified under two rough but convenient headings: substance and form. Substance refers to ideas or "themes"; form refers to how a speaker presents his ideas—primarily persuasive techniques and style. This classification, commonly utilized by content analysts, has obvious deficiencies; the substance-form dichotomy is far from satisfactory for obvious reasons, but it is not without practical advantages. Merton and others have explained that the essential office performed by content analysis is a complete and systematic specification of the communicative stimulus; without such specification, it is difficult to criticize or to theorize.\(^35\) Whether the rhetorical critic be interested in assaying the effects of a speech, or whether he be chiefly concerned with the rhetorical methods or "quality" of a speech he can obviously use the precision tools of content analysis to ferret out ways in which the speaker has handled his "available means of persuasion."

Let there be no misunderstanding. Content analysis is offered as no panacea and certainly as no replacement for the more familiar extrinsic-historical approach to rhetorical criticism. But, in spite of its many limitations (especially subjectivity and difficulty in dealing with word meanings), it provides the critic of public address with a powerful instrument in his efforts to apprehend all that a speaker says. Anyone who peruses the extensive body of publications specializing in content analysis will realize that its methodology is far more subtle and sophisticated than the justly ridiculed word-and-spittoon-counting-comptometer type of research.

The burden of this paper has been that rhetorical critics can profitably re-examine the bases upon which, following Wichelns, we have rejected the "literary criticism of oratory." Such a re-examination may reveal that, while we were properly


rejecting aesthetic criteria and comptometer tabulations, we were at the same time accepting the basic methodology of literary scholarship. This methodology, stemming from nineteenth-century positivism, has been characterized until recent years by an extrinsic-historical orientation; it has tended to derogate close textual analysis and other forms of intrinsic criticism. Without discontinuing the valuable tradition of extrinsic research, we in public address may profitably consider the rationale of the New Criticism by developing our own categories and techniques for analyzing speech content.

If we hold, with Wragé, that the "basic ingredient of a speech is its content,"\^36 then we should be uncomfortable in the knowledge that non-rhetorical scholars have done most of the spade work in content analysis of persuasive discourse. This paper began with a warning to literary critics by a literary critic who was disturbed by scholars moving out of their own subject; in words startlingly similar, Parrish suggests that rhetorical critics may get "lost in a blind alley" if we stray too far from "the central core of our discipline."\^37 Surely this central core justifies a willingness, more than we have shown in the past, to explore the possibilities of intrinsic criticism.


SYMPOSIUM
Of Style

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OUR PURPOSE in this essay is to foster the nascent reassessment of the ancient third part of rhetoric, especially for rhetorical criticism. "Reassessment," of course, cannot but imply enhancement, for hardly could there be occasion at present further to depress the repute of style or to relegate style to a more distant peripheral position than it has achieved in most professional rhetorical speculations.

One of the signs of changing times is the cautious reappearance of the category, and sometimes even of the term, in textbooks intended for university classes in public speaking. In the first edition of a current popular textbook, for example, the precepts and instruction for the management of the staples of discourse — words, sentences, and paragraphs; figures, images, and rhythms — had been cautiously strewn about in such functional categories as "interest," "attention," and "suggestion." In the second "revised" edition these materials have been disengaged

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