THE RELEVANCE OF ANCIENT RHETORIC TO RHETORICAL CRITICISM

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ABSTRACT

The different views on 'rhetorical situation' seems to be the cause of different ways in which ancient rhetoric is applied. Apparently scientists do not have clarity regarding the relationship between 'rhetorical' and 'historical situation'. Studies in which rhetorical situation is viewed as synonymous with historical situation, and which also make use of ancient rhetoric only, are by nature more formal than functional. In works that view rhetorical situation as textual phenomenon, function plays a much greater role. In order to be able to work in a truly functional way, modern models of communication as well as other disciplines are exploited. Ancient rhetoric is useful in the interpretation of ancient texts, but only as far as it makes us conscious of the fact that communication is universal. In order to determine the communicative function of texts, however, the results of various disciplines are essential.

1 INTRODUCTION

When the contents of the ancient rhetorical system are studied in the works of the rhetores maiores, one is struck anew by the solid foundations of this system. However, further investigation of the application of this system in the interpretation of both ancient and modern texts, gives rise to the following questions: Why is the ancient rhetorical system applied in different ways in rhetorical criticism? With which possibilities does the ancient rhetorical system present the modern scientist? Is ancient rhetoric still relevant to rhetorical criticism?

Burke (1950) asks a similar question: Where is rhetorical criticism taking us? In an attempt to answer this question, and to determine the relevance of ancient rhetorical systems, developments in rhetorical criticism are traced, and the contributions of various important researchers in this tradition critically evaluated. Specifically the way in which ancient rhetoric is employed, is considered. A hypothesis is that different interpretations of 'rhetorical situation' are responsible for the various ways in which ancient rhetoric is employed in the interpretation of texts. It would seem as if researchers are not clear on the correct relation between rhetorical situation and historical situation. For this reason, the explicit or underlying definition of rhetorical situation will be considered in the critical evaluation of every contribution.

The question is: Does ancient rhetoric still have any importance for rhetorical criticism, and if so, to what extent?
2 SURVEY OF RHETORICAL CRITICISM

Countless works on the development of rhetorical criticism have already been published. Wuellner, in his article Where is rhetorical criticism taking us? (1987), also considers the development of rhetorical criticism through the ages. He is of the opinion that rhetoric has been restricted, distorted and paralysed throughout history, while Biblical exegetes remained unaware of it (1987:451). He identifies two fragments of rhetorical criticism from Augustine (395) to Eagleton (1983): one views rhetorical analysis as synonymous with literary criticism (with the emphasis on stylistics), while the other views it as synonymous with practical criticism (Wuellner, 1987:450-453).


In order to determine the place of ancient rhetorical systems in rhetorical criticism, various approaches to rhetorical criticism will first be analysed in an attempt to identify and explain the various methods.

3 RHETORICAL CRITICISM FROM RAMUS TO THE PRESENT

The field of rhetorical criticism is so vast that it cannot be covered comprehensively in the space of one article. Only a few of the most important figures will, therefore, be discussed here.

3.1 Rhetorical criticism by Ramus

Ramus's works (cf, among others, 1964) were primarily aimed at undermining the authority of the ancient rhetoricians. According to Ramus, these traditional authorities failed to distinguish between the various kinds of discourse. Perelman (1982:3) considers Ramus to be responsible for the fact that rhetorical criticism has for years been considered to be nothing more than stylistic analysis. According to Perelman (1982:3), Ramus formulated the following three definitions:

* Grammar is the art of being able to speak well.
* Dialectics is the art of being able to reason well.
* Rhetoric is eloquence and the decorative use of language.
With dialectics as the all encompassing concept, including (in the terminology of ancient rhetoric) both the *inventio* (finding the argument) and the *dispositio* (the order), rhetoric remained as the discipline of *elocutio* (style). Perelman (1982:3) says that, in accordance with this view, Talcon published the first systematic rhetoric limited to stylistics in 1572. This was the beginning of the end of rhetoric.

For Ramus, then, rhetoric was merely a mode of expression, and included style and presentation. It was merely the formal way in which arguments are formulated. Consequently, according to Ramus's approach, rhetorical criticism entailed nothing more than stylistic analysis, while ancient rhetoric was primarily employed in a formal way.

### 3.2 Rhetorical situation according to Bitzer

I find that Bitzer (1986:6), although not part of the New Testament critical movement, swings the pendulum of rhetorical criticism to the other extreme, by distinguishing between rhetorical and historical situation. He defines the rhetorical situation as follows:

> ...a complex of persons, events, objects and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence.

Although Bitzer's definition of the rhetorical situation also had incalculable influence on New Testament studies, it would seem as if even he does not adequately distinguish between rhetorical and historical situation. He is of the opinion that the people, events and relations in a rhetorical situation are real (1986:5). According to him, this means that these elements are historically factual. What he says, therefore, is that the historical situation becomes rhetorical as soon as communication takes place.

### 3.3 Rhetorical criticism by Kennedy

Kennedy (1984:3) defines rhetoric as 'that quality in discourse by which a speaker or writer seeks to accomplish his purposes'. Although Kennedy follows Bitzer to a considerable extent in respect of the latter's definition of 'rhetoric' (1986:6), both Wuellner (1987:454) and Stamps (1993:3) consider his New Testament interpretation through rhetorical criticism a fresh approach to rhetorical criticism, especially regarding New Testament studies. Kennedy proposes the following steps of rhetorical criticism (1984:33):

* Delineation of the rhetorical unit
Kennedy's approach to a text is, therefore, purely rhetorical. He approaches the letter as an argument, considers the methods of persuasion in the various parts of the argument, and determines their functions. His analysis of the rhetorical situation entails mainly two aspects: the audience, and the rhetorical problem of the speaker (1984:25,36). Kennedy, therefore, intends to explain the form of communication by means of the rhetorical situation. Even so, he confuses his categories again when he inquires about the author's intention (1984:4,12)—according to him, this more or less corresponds to the *Sitz im Leben* (1984:34). The rhetorical critic, he says (1984:4), takes the text as it is, and considers it from the perspective of the author's intention, as well as the way in which it would have been received by a contemporary audience. When he distinguishes between rhetorical and literary criticism (1984:4-5), he explains that literary criticism researches the reception of a text by modern audiences, while he himself endeavours to read the text in the same way as it would have been read by its first readers. Thuren (1990:68) says that Kennedy (1984) employs rhetoric as an ancient version of literary criticism.

Kennedy's model is based completely on the ancient rhetorical system, which he uses both formally and functionally. One could ask: to what extent is the application of ancient rhetoric only, a limiting factor in determining the communicative function of a text?

### 3.4 Rhetorical Criticism by Schüssler-Fiorenza

Schüssler-Fiorenza (1987:387) also bases her definition of rhetorical situation on that of Bitzer (1986:6), when she says that the rhetorical situation is 'a situation where a person is or feels called to a response that has the possibility for affecting the situation'.

From the perspective of reader-response criticism, Schüssler-Fiorenza then attempts to employ rhetorical criticism in such a way as to bridge the space between 'the world of the text' and 'reality'. In order to realise this objective, she proposes three stages of rhetorical critical analysis (1987:388):

* Identification of contemporary interests and models of interpretation
* Identification of the rhetorical situation of the letter
* The 'reconstruction' of the historical situation

In her analysis of the rhetorical situation (1987:390-397), she makes use of the ancient rhetorical system. She mainly emphasises genre. On the basis of characer-
istic topoi in the letter, 1 Corinthians is identified as belonging to the deliberative genre, and the various parts of the letter are delineated. Although it would seem as if Schüssler-Fiorenza mixes the rhetorical and epistolographical categories (1987:393), in my opinion she does so in an acceptable manner. 1 Corinthians is divided in exordium, body and peroratio. It seems as if she employs exordium and peroratio as synonyms of letter opening and closing. These various parts of the letter are defined on the basis of the use of different means of persuasion. The whole argument regarding the genre of 1 Corinthians is finally continued to the identification of the rhetorical situation.

However, Stamps (1993:197) remarks that Schussler-Fiorenza only makes a historically controlled reconstruction of the rhetorical situation, despite her objective of making a clear distinction between rhetorical and historical situation. Stamps does not, however, argue this point sufficiently. Even so, I would like to agree with him to a certain extent, for the following reasons: In her rhetorical situation analysis, Schussler-Fiorenza keeps to the elements given in the text, according to her preconceived definition of the rhetorical situation. In this way she refrains from making a direct association between rhetorical and historical situations. Despite this, she refers to Dahl and Theissen (1987:349) who, according to her, reconstruct the socio-historical situation of 1 Corinthians from the text. As such, this is problematic, since it is once again a confusion of rhetorical and historical situations. She makes the same mistake when she attempts to reconstruct the historical situation of 1 Corinthians from the rhetorical situation (1987:397-400). In effect this amounts to equalising rhetorical and historical situations. The heading of the specific paragraph (1987:397) is Fourth: historical reconstruction and theological assessment, while it contains a description of the rhetorical situation presented by the text. Schussler-Fiorenza, therefore, only makes an artificial distinction between rhetorical and historical situation. My question is: Can there be any mention of a ‘reconstruction’ of the historical situation, and is it in any way possible to make a historical reconstruction from a text? The problem is that any such ‘account’ of the historical situation is already a neologism. It is only a view of reality, which is not necessarily equal to reality—not a reconstruction, therefore, but merely a construction. Schussler-Fiorenza rightly attempts to gain insight in the historical situation underlying the text from the rhetorical situation, but it is problematic simply to equalise the two situations.

However, Schüssler-Fiorenza (1987:386) does identify the great need for a comprehensive paradigm for rhetorical criticism. This new paradigm requires a balance between the historical approach, literary criticism and sociological approaches to New Testament exegesis. Although she herself is not able to maintain this balance, her work still presents an important indicator for the future direction of rhetorical criticism, and also emphasises the importance of interdisciplinary studies.
3.5 Rhetorical criticism by Perelman

Wuellner (1987:461) regards Perelman as the scholar who brought about radical change in rhetorical criticism: '...rhetorical criticism leads us away from a traditional message- or content- oriented reading of Scripture to a reading which generates and strengthens ever-deepening personal, social and cultural values.'

Arnold, who translated Perelman's work (1982), notes in the introduction of this book (1982:xvii) that the broad conception of rhetoric, as presented by Perelman, primarily originated in the USA, where students in literary prose were responsible for its birth. Baldwin's work, Rhetoric in Monroe's Cyclopaedia (1914), emphasised the fact that rhetoric is more than stylistics. At the same time, the Cornell University School (consisting of rhetoricians, and literary and classical scholars) focussed their research on the study of the theory and praxis of ancient rhetoric. Since 1914, the Speech Communication Association has emphasised the importance of rhetorical criticism from a variety of disciplines. These studies were conducted in a number of disciplines, including psychology and historical criticism. Starting with Perelman, philosophy received more and more emphasis. Arnold (Perelman, 1982:xix) clearly indicates that Perelman wrote as a philosopher. He analysed the logic of arguments in a philosophical way.

The new rhetoric, presented for the first time by Perelman (1982), entails communication directed at all kinds of audiences—on any topic. The general study of argumentation/communication should, according to Perelman (1982:5), be supported by various disciplines that may prove valuable. He does take note of the ancient rhetorical system (1982:6), but also transcends it.

3.6 Rhetorical criticism by Wuellner

Wuellner (1979) makes good use of Perelman's model. He analyses the logic of the argument of 1 Corinthians in a philosophical way. Even so, he also makes use of the rhetorical genres of ancient rhetoric. His application of ancient rhetoric in this work is, however, very limited.

Wuellner (1987:449) indicates that rhetorical criticism brings us to a greater harvest—the harvest of new attempts made in various fields of rhetoric. This rhetorical criticism goes further than the view of language as a reflection of reality. It takes us to the social aspects of language as instrument of communication and influencing.

Wuellner (1987:456 and 1991:99-100) defines the 'rhetorical situation' as the real situation, causative of the text as such. He therefore breaks completely with the historically controlled view of the rhetorical situation.

3.7 Rhetorical criticism by Thurèn

Prompted by Wuellner's thesis (1988:283-284) that there is no fixed system for rhetorical criticism, Thurèn (1990:42) defines it as a general approach, with em-
phasis on the interaction within the text. A rhetorical critic, he says (1990:43), determines the situation the author had in mind, and the author's perception of the audience's attitude, values and needs inviting him to communicate. The purpose of the critic is an attempt at understanding the author's intention regarding these values and attitudes. Thuren (1990:45) is of the opinion that rhetorical criticism within the field of Biblical exegesis is not yet based on a unified view of rhetorical criticism. Some scholars apply ancient rhetoric, while others use modern linguistics; still others do work with rhetoric, but they use new terminologies and concepts.

Thuren (1990:44) says that one should be careful not to sketch the historical conditions in the construction of the rhetorical situation of the text, but rather the situation that specific text is aimed at. His own method of rhetorical criticism is closely related to that of Kennedy (1984), and comprises the following:

* Identification of rhetorical units
* Identification of the rhetorical situation
* Study of the order
* Analysis of stylistic elements.

Within these four steps, Thuren makes full use of the ancient rhetorical system, both in the formal and the communicative-functional sense.

3.8 Rhetorical criticism by Stamps

Influenced by Wuellner and Schüssler-Fiorenza, Stamps (1993:199) defines the rhetorical situation as 'a literary construct embedded in the text as a rhetorical device or figure which contributes to the overall rhetorical aim or to the argumentation of the text'.

However, he explains the matter further, and pays attention to the relation between the rhetorical and historical situations. He is of the opinion that any text is a product of a specific historical situation which also contributed to the rhetorical situation, but also says that the text is a limited and new textualisation of the situation. It is not the historical situation which gives rise to the text, but rather the rhetorical situation present within the text.

This specific view of Stamps results in the following method: In an attempt to study the rhetorical situation, he makes use of Petersen's method (1985), when he reduces a text to a narrative text. This method entails the rewriting of a letter, for instance, as a story. In this story, the referential order of events (the probable true order) of the story, are compared with the poetic order of events (the order as presented in the text). From this comparison Stamps then reconstructs the rhetorical situation. He regards the argument of a letter as a response to the situation presented by the text (1993:210). He perceives the situation, therefore, from the
specific selection and order of events.

Although Stamps distinguishes between rhetorical and historical situations in the new direction of rhetorical situation as textual phenomenon, he does not make use of the ancient rhetorical system.

3.9 Synthesis

The above investigation shows that, although various methodologies have been evident in rhetorical criticism through the ages, there is a definite line of development. In 1964, when Ramus limited the *inventio* and *dispositio* to dialectics, and the *elocutio* to rhetoric, a new era began during which attempts would be made to rectify this error.

Muilenberg also recognised, in 1968, that rhetorical criticism can include various methodologies. In his work, he focussed attention on 'rhetoric' once again. From this point onwards, a strong process of development grew. Within the context of New Testament interpretation, Kennedy (1984), among others, turned things round by once again grouping *inventio*, *dispositio* and *elocutio* together, in the one discipline of rhetoric. Although Kennedy succeeded in working both formally and functionally with ancient rhetoric, his distinction between rhetorical and historical situation is unclear.

In 1987, two important works were published, namely that of Schüssler-Fiorenza and Perelman. To a certain extent, they both succeed in consolidating *inventio*, *dispositio* and *elocutio* under the standard of rhetoric. Schussler-Fiorenza makes use of ancient rhetoric, and even applies it in a functional way. Despite this, she falls in the same trap as Kennedy by equating rhetorical and historical situation. In my view, Perelman, on the other hand, succeeds quite well in viewing the rhetorical situation as distinct from the historical situation. It is to be noted that he also makes use of the results and theories of other disciplines.

In 1988 both Thuren and Wuellner, like Perelman, started following the new way. Like Perelman, Wuellner also started using modern models. Thuren was the first to use ancient rhetoric in a completely functional way, while still remaining true to the rhetorical situation as textual phenomenon. In 1993, Stamps attempted to make a synthesis of the approaches of Schüssler-Fiorenza and Wuellner. He also follows the new way, but does not make use of ancient rhetoric.

4 THE RELEVANCE OF ANCIENT RHETORIC

Wuellner (1987:462) answers Burke's question (1950) *Where is rhetorical criticism taking us?* as follows: '(it) takes us to interdisciplinary studies... (it) approaches all literature.' The above discussion has made it clear that rhetorical criticism makes a necessity of interdisciplinary studies. The sources mentioned make use of disciplines such as pragmatics, modern rhetoric, sociology and narratology. A clear paradigm for rhetorical criticism, as advocated by Kika-
wada (1977), has not been realised yet, and probably never will be.

The survey has shown that various scholars have decided to follow the new way of defining the rhetorical situation, that is, of the rhetorical situation as textual phenomenon. It would seem, however, as if this new direction has not yet penetrated to its practical implications. To a great extent, rhetorical critics only make use of ancient rhetoric in interpreting the New Testament. Texts are primarily approached formally, while communicative function is not emphasised enough.

The question is: Does ancient rhetoric still have a function in rhetorical criticism, or has its time passed? Kennedy says (1984:8): 'Rhetoric is a historical phenomenon and differs somewhat from culture to culture, more in matters of arrangement and style than in basic devices of invention.' He says that rhetoric is a universal phenomenon, controlled by the basic functioning of the human mind and heart, as well as the nature of all human societies (1984:10). According to Kennedy, Aristotle's purpose in writing his books on rhetoric was not to describe Greek rhetoric as such, but rather to describe the universal aspects of human communication. The ancient rhetorical system of theories could just as well be applied to communication in other cultures, because of its universal nature. What makes the ancient rhetorical system so serviceable, according to Kennedy, is the fact that the ancient Greeks created the terminology for the whole system of communication.

Kennedy also says (1984:11) that we have no other choice than to use the concepts and terminology of the ancient Greeks, if we really want to understand the rhetoric of the ancient civilisations. Although Kennedy (1984) rightly recognises that an understanding of the practice of ancient rhetoric could shed light on our understanding of texts from that era, I think that it would be foolish to cling to this in the interpretation of ancient texts.

We have to keep in mind that the authors of the ancient textbooks on rhetoric merely used a descriptive method in their description of their own practice. This is, logically, very important and useful work. Modern scholars, however, have further described the functioning of communication, that is universal according to Kennedy, from research and sciences that have developed a lot further. It would be unscientific to interpret ancient texts only with the help of ancient rhetoric. That would be like an invalid who does have two crutches, but only uses one!

The ancient rhetorical system does have a legitimate role to play in rhetorical criticism. The question is: Should it only shed light on our interpretation, or should it be the decisive element? In some studies the impression is given that the ancient rhetorical system is superimposed on the text, while determination of the communicative function is ignored.

It is noticeable that rhetorical critical studies outside of the context of New Testament interpretation have shown faster progress regarding a functional ap-
approach to texts. Andrews (1983:18) says that the rhetorical critic should inquire after the events that made communication either possible or necessary. He speaks of the reconstruction of the rhetorical imperatives: the historical and political events (1983:19). It seems as if Andrews (1983:20) makes a definite distinction between the rhetorical and historical approach. In the application of his model he analyses the argument, in which he inquires after the logic of the structure, the pragmatic function of the text, and the style used in order to communicate effectively. His model is eclectic, as it is composed of various modern theories, while ancient rhetoric has no role to play in it.

Perhaps the time has come for New Testament scholars to remain aware of ancient rhetoric, while also consulting other disciplines. Communication is influenced by so many factors that the understanding of any form of communication necessitates interdisciplinary studies.

5 CONCLUSION
The above survey has brought the following to light:

* Studies in which rhetorical situation is viewed as synonymous with historical situation, and which also make use of ancient rhetoric only, are by nature more formal than functional.
* In works that view rhetorical situation as textual phenomenon, function plays a much greater role.
* In order to be able to work in a truly functional way, modern models of communication as well as other disciplines are exploited.
* Ancient rhetoric is useful in the interpretation of ancient texts, but only in so far as it makes us conscious of the fact that communication is universal.
* In order to determine the communicative function of texts, the results of various disciplines are essential.

WORKS CONSULTED

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