
Abstracts

James L. Kastely, Violence and Rhetoric in Euripides's *Hecuba* 1036

Euripides's *Hecuba* contributes to a theory of rhetoric by exploring the problems created for persuasion in a world where those in power are isolated from the pain of others. For Euripides, the threat to rhetoric resides not in active suppression of speech but in an audience's indifference to a speaker. He dramatizes this threat and the personal cost to a rhetor who would challenge the security of the powerful. The result is a tenuous recovery of a rhetoric that can contend with a world governed by force and chance. (JLK)

Lyell Asher, Petrarch at the Peak of Fame 1050

In "The Ascent of Mont Ventoux," a letter to a former confessor, Petrarch famously admits to having ascended a peak for no other reason than to admire the view. As a failed conversion narrative, the letter is ultimately as gratuitous as the climb it recounts. Noting a number of similarities between climbing the mountain and composing the letter, I argue that the literal ascent he describes is a figure for his literary ascent, through this letter and other texts, to fame and notoriety. In condemning the climb, Petrarch figuratively condemns the letter, censuring what he does even as he does it. (LA)

Roger W. Herzog, Racine, Laurent, and the *Palais à Volonté* 1064

It is generally believed that the appearance of Racine's stage never varied, that all tragedies performed in seventeenth-century Paris were staged in a neutral, anonymous setting known as the "palais à volonté." However, an inventory of stage settings kept by Michel Laurent, the *décorateur* at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, where Racine's plays were first performed, shows that Racine, like Molière but unlike most other authors of tragedy, demanded visual backgrounds that were specific and appropriate to the action of the plays. Abstract and universal decors indeed had a place in the seventeenth-century theater, and they became common after Racine's retirement, but they were used for practical reasons that have little to do with the modern conception of "classicism." (RWH)

Susan E. Gustafson, Beautiful Statues, Beautiful Men: The Abjection of Feminine Imagination in Lessing's *Laokoon* 1083

In his *Laokoon* essay, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing concludes that "[b]ei uns scheint sich die zarte Einbildungskraft der Mütter nur in Ungeheuern zu äußern" 'in modern times the susceptible imagination of mothers seems to express itself solely in monsters.' In contrast, masculine imagination yields beautiful statues, beautiful men, and subsequently harmonious cultures. The idealization of classical sculpture displaces the generative power of the mother, who, if not totally impotent, is the source of the fragmented, deformed body. The *Laokoon* text incorporates and abjects the fragmented body of the woman. It is ironic that she represents both the void and the only object capable of filling the subjective vacuum. Stable masculine subjectivity is contingent on the abjection of woman and yet unattainable without her recovery. Accordingly, the *Laokoon* is based on the abjection of the feminine while simultaneously stuffed full of fragments of the woman's body and imagination. Lessing's aesthetic project fosters the circumscription of feminine imagination by the myth of the unifying function of masculine fantasy. (SEG)

Mark Jones, Double Economics: Ambivalence in Wordsworth's Pastoral 1098

Literary historians have celebrated Wordsworth's pastoral poems for their realism; more recently, new-historicist critics have criticized them for idealization. Reading the

poems as ironic, even as parodic in Bakhtin's sense, explains what makes such opposite assessments both plausible and insufficient. My chief example is "Michael." Formal symmetries in "Michael" suggest a mythic dimension, but they are subtly breached so that the poem cannot be read definitively as idealization. Conversely, while the poem's emphasis on labor suggests reality, its subtle exaggerations also discredit the use of labor as a mere device of realism. Wordsworth invites readers to consider pastoral's primary symbols, sheep, in two symbologies simultaneously: spiritual and material. Such cross-valuation, which recovers an ambivalence crucial to both biblical and classical pastoral, neither mimics nor distorts reality but rather foregrounds the way reality is constructed from symbols. Considering Wordsworth's pastoral as a version of Bakhtinian parody further illuminates the anti-interpretive functions of both modes. (MJ)

Anne Williams, An I for an Eye: "Spectral Persecution" in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* 1114

Coleridge's theory of "creative Imagination" and his description of *The Rime* as "a poem of pure imagination" have usually encouraged critics to search for the work's unity. This endeavor represses the text's manifest disjunctions of form and content, as well as slighting Coleridge's use of Gothic conventions. Freudian commentary, while addressing *The Rime's* irrational, dreamlike qualities, cannot account for the poem's emphasis on linguistic inadequacy or for the horror of the female that pervades the Mariner's tale and his identity. Julia Kristeva's theories of poetic language and of how the subject "abjects" the maternal in attaining the symbolic suggest that *The Rime* narrates the unspeakable process through which the symbolic is reached. From this perspective *The Rime* describes the creation of imagination. (AW)

Judith Ryan, More Seductive Than Phryne: Baudelaire, G r me, Rilke, and the Problem of Autonomous Art 1128

Rilke's poem "Die Flamingos" turns on a curious image in which exotic birds are compared to the Greek courtesan Phryne. By tracing the development of the Phryne motif in Baudelaire's poems "Lesbos" and "La beaut " and in G r me's painting *Phryne devant l'Ar opage*, this essay argues that Rilke's poem takes issue with the notion of autonomous art and with the aestheticist cult of beauty, for which the motif had come to stand. "Die Flamingos" not only breaks with the idea that art and aura are necessarily linked but also questions the ability of Baudelairean allegory to restore poetic wholeness. In so doing, the poem represents not a continuation of the nineteenth-century "art for art's sake" movement but a final phase in the complex history of aestheticist self-questioning. (JR)

Jahan Ramazani, "Daddy, I Have Had to Kill You": Plath, Rage, and the Modern Elegy 1142

Plath makes a major contribution to the development of the elegy with a series of poems mourning her father's death, even though they have seldom been read as elegies. More than any of her forebears, Plath intensifies the mourner's aggression toward the dead, dramatically expanding the boundaries of the genre. She summons a furious anger that most earlier elegists eschew in favor of pathos, reverence, or homosocial rivalry. At first deflecting rage inward in elegies of masochistic self-reproach, Plath dramatizes an ever more explosive grief. Although the "female elegy" has been defined as a "poem of connectedness," Plath writes elegies of violent separation and rupture, rejecting the prostrate role assigned by literary and gender codes to the female mourner. She helps to remake the elegy for the twentieth century, shifting its psychic work from consolatory mourning to the violent, contradictory, and protracted work of melancholia. (JR)