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ABSTRACT

In her literature and composition classes, an educator encourages students to correlate their memory and imagination to the rhetorical elements of logos, pathos, and ethos and construct regenerative structures of knowledge through a comprehensive and objective understanding of a contextualized problem. She employs Bakhtin's dialogic method of "re-accentuation" in highlighting the importance of inter-active voices that disclose the complexity and the tension latent within the contextual constraints of a specific text. With the backdrop of Aristotle's rhetorical triangle (speaker, audience, and context of an issue) as a visual aid, students discover new patterns of knowledge by analyzing literary texts as case studies of human problems. Their analysis confirms that every problem includes operational (mechanistic determinism of action and consequence), political (favorable or unfavorable viewpoints toward the course of action), and ethical considerations (responsibility for the action's outcome). This problem solving process encompasses the full spectrum of the analysis, synthesis, and the resolution of a problem. Reader-response analysis of the text empowers the reader to select from the text those details and characters that have individual appeal by focusing on a specific problem. This selection process of reader-response engages students in independent critical thinking and synthesis. Class discussions that encourage students to share preliminary interpretations prior to developing complete analysis for a portfolio assignment encourages students to re-read the text for a clear recognition of the voices and viewpoints embedded in the context of a literary piece as a work of art. (Contains 11 references.) (NKA)

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## Re-configuring Aristotle's Dialogics Through Reader-Response

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Aristotle's syllogism represents universals and absolutes of deductive reasoning, while John Locke's empiricism relies upon scientific investigation through inductive reasoning. However, neither form of reasoning denies the dialogics of Aristotelian triangle composed of the speaker, audience, and the context of a problem or an issue that becomes the nucleus of critical thinking skills. Inherent in this triangle are Aristotle's "proofs" or rhetorical elements of logos (logical information), pathos (emotional reactions), and ethos (ethical ramifications). In my literature and composition classes, I encourage my students to correlate their memory and imagination to these rhetorical elements and construct regenerative structures of knowledge through a comprehensive and objective understanding of a contextualized problem. I employ Bakhtin's dialogic method of "re-accentuation" in highlighting the importance of inter-active voices that disclose the complexity and the tension latent within the contextual constraints of a specific text (420-422).

With the backdrop of Aristotle's rhetorical triangle as a visual aid, students discover new patterns of knowledge by analyzing literary texts as case studies of human problems, and their analysis confirms that every problem includes operational (mechanistic determinism of action and consequence), political (favorable or unfavorable viewpoints toward the course of action), and ethical considerations (responsibility for the outcome of action). This problem solving process encompasses the full spectrum of the analysis, synthesis, and the resolution of a problem. (Kennedy 5). Reader-response analysis of the text empowers the reader to select from the text those details and characters that have individual appeal by focusing on a specific issue or problem; this selection process of the reader-response process engages students in independent critical thinking and synthesis (Beach 49-70). Class discussions that encourage students to share their

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preliminary interpretations prior to developing complete analysis for a portfolio assignment encourages students to re-read the text for a clear recognition of the voices and viewpoints embedded in the context of a literary piece as a work of art.

Insofar as art imitates nature, literary works record human experience and are, therefore, well suited for critical analysis as case studies of human relations, actions, and their outcome. Depending on the scope of the social and political problem presented in a literary work, the readers are likely to offer a variety of interpretations. The Aristotelian approach to reader-response criticism allows the reader to infuse a personal perspective into the text for a clear understanding and analysis of problems that are relevant to the reader's reality. Georges Poulet states that it is the reader who makes the text come to life ( 43 ). According to M. H. Abrams "Reader-response critics of all theoretical persuasions agree that, at least to some considerable degree, the meanings of a text are the 'production' or 'creation' of the individual reader." (269).

A close reading of the text engages the students in the analysis of the favorable and unfavorable forces within a given setting; it also involves the examination of human actions and relations vis a vis questions of responsibility. For example, in examining the plot of Romeo and Juliet, students note that the hero and the heroine are victims of unfavorable social forces which happen to be politically more powerful than the lovers. Even though the star-crossed lovers find some favorable social forces on their side -- i.e. Juliet's nurse and the Friar -- the overall operational planning to overcome the adverse political forces lacks the Aristotelian sagacity for a potentially sound causal analysis to carry out a well planned solution. As a result of this poor planning, the outcome is tragic for the lovers. At another level, the outcome includes the ethical realization on the part of the Capulets and the Montagues that insensitive attitudes had resulted in unjustified victimization of the star-crossed lovers.

It is important to remember that the Aristotelian approach to critical thinking requires creative thinking in confronting an issue. In The Possibilities of Society, Regina Hewitt mentions that “readers use their knowledge of genre and rhetoric to determine whether a given text has been well made to serve its political and philosophical ends” (101). To analyze the context of “a particular case” study, Aristotle urges us that we must “drag ourselves in the opposite direction to discover “a middle course” rather than confine ourselves within one extreme for a favorable context (113). Aristotle uses inductive reasoning to show that one’s capacity to see in the opposite direction is governed by one’s particular circumstance” or empirical boundaries; hence, the decision for action “lies with perception” (113). Literary works can enable the reader to stretch the epistemological boundaries of perceptions by creating an inter-active context during the act of reading. In this inter-active mode, the text is not strictly confined to the emotions, abilities, and attitudes of the author; in fact, the text becomes a piece of shared knowledge between the author and reader, transforming the acts of reading and writing into an interdependent process which synthesizes the worlds of the author and the reader.

Powerful authors leave a deep impression on readers through the Aristotelian appeals of emotions, reasoning, and ethics. In the Rhetoric of Fiction, Wayne C. Booth claims that the author’s voice is capable of molding the reader’s or perceptions or beliefs (177-182). The author’s control over the text is manifest when the reader analyzes literary techniques as rhetorical strategies in the text. For example, in Joseph Andrews, Henry Fielding relies upon the literary technique of allusions to achieve an intended reader-response that would justify his claim about this novel as “a comic epic in prose.” In the opening chapter of the novel, Fielding employs a humorous tone to attach a context of ridicule to the Biblical allusion evoked by Joseph’s name. Fielding introduces “the hero of our ensuing history” as a character who lacks the grand

ancestral glory and historical stature of the Biblical Joseph. The incongruity between the biblical and the fictional character augments the comic effect of this referential system through the narrator's voice and mocking tone as a backdrop.

By no means does reader-response criticism give free license to the reader in regard to the spatial and temporal constraints of the text. In other words, just as the author cannot alter the words of the text, the reader must remain within the constraints of the text to construct a logical analysis of the problem that is presented in the text. The reader must analyze the literary techniques, whether allusions or metaphors, to identify the author's favorable or unfavorable attitudes toward certain characters. It is necessary to keep the operational aspects of the text separate from the emotive aspects of the text. For example, when students examine the reasons for the death of Desdemona in Othello, they agree that Iago represents evil; however, with all his scheming, Iago could not have succeeded if Othello's gullibility had not aided him. As a result of this analysis, many infer that the entire responsibility of her death cannot be placed on Iago. It is Othello who must bear the blame for his misguided perceptions of Desdemona and his demanding relationship with Desdemona that denies her an opportunity to counter Iago's false accusations.

According to Aristotle, the art of rhetoric complements the dialectic method; hence, the Aristotelian reader-response seeks a holistic rather than one-sided analysis that ignores the complexity of the conflict which emerges from the recognition of diversified perspectives infused within the text e.g. the voices of the author, narrator, and contrasting dialogics of characters. Similarly, a reader who merely notices the divergent viewpoints in the text but lacks an understanding of the purpose behind this contrast is likely to engage in a superficial interpretation that amounts to a plot summary that merely traces the operational chronology of action. This type of reader-response cannot go beyond the literal level of the text. Aristotelian reader-

response requires a deeper understanding of the emotive and referential language used by the author for an analysis of the literary techniques in relation to the complexity of attitudes and perspectives within the text. These dialogics allow the students to develop independent thinking skills and to comment and propose the best solution of problems unfolded in the text. This phase of critical thinking offers new possibilities for exploratory reading and re-reading that justifies creative patterns of synthesis. It also invites students to relate the text to experiential knowledge and personal imagination for individualized analysis and synthesis of the text. Reader-response analysis, in this sense, gives students repeated practice in critical thinking skills that facilitates the connections between memory and imagination to envision creative solutions to socio-political issues. Moreover, when human problems are studied in terms of relationship between the self and the environment, the analysis of favorable and unfavorable attitudes draws attention to the issues of responsibility as to who did what to whom.

The Aristotelian approach to reader-response requires that students integrate both emotions and reasoning in their reader-response; it is thus instrumental in teaching them the value of “emotional mind” (Goleman 291-296). This concept of mind coincides with Aristotle’s definition of the soul as character or ethos. Since the author and the audience, through the acts of reading and interpretive writing mutually share the ethos of a literary text, it becomes a practicing ground for one’s emotional intelligence. According to Aristotle, human recollection lies at the center of any contextual analysis, for it is “the middle point” and “a good mnemonic starting-point” from which to reach any of the parts within the whole (693). Today, a leading reader-response proponent, Wolfgang Iser, claims that reading engages the reader in “passive synthesis” that connects images portrayed in the text with the reader’s perceptions of those images. The triangular interaction between the text, the reader, and the writer establishes the intersection

between the ethical content of the reader's and the author's perceptions of reality. If the act of reading is a process of passive synthesis, the act of interpretation is a process of conscious reflection by the reader, which may involve validation, or modification of previous perceptions. (Iser 62-63).

According to Aristotle, "memory is...neither perception nor conception, but a state or affection of one of these, conditioned by lapse of time" (690 Vol.1). It is this affection or lack of affection which defines the emotional context of a literary work as the reader deciphers the favorable and unfavorable attitudes toward the heart of a problem. Of course, this "affection" or lack of affection can also be conditioned by the lapse of time in response to the images depicted in the text as they become instrumental in serving as literary devices e.g. allusions, symbols, metaphors. The context of a literary work can thus be equated with the "particular circumstances" of individual experiences that could pose a challenge to previously held perceptions. The relationship between the reader and the text can also be conducive to shaping new perceptions emerging from new perspectives.

Problem based analysis of literary works can offer an excellent venue to examine one's own perceptions and attitudes by using emotional intelligence. On the one hand, it gauges one's aesthetic response to a specific context within its temporal and spatial limits. On the other hand, it invites the reader to focus on the complexity of moral issues embedded in the narrative by raising them from their temporal and spatial constraints to a personal framework. In the Aristotelian balance of emotions and reasoning (pathos and logos), the boundaries of knowledge connect with the boundaries of ethical responsibility because ethical choices are manifested through action and are governed by the previous knowledge available to an individual. In a literary narrative, characters who act out of ignorance, are usually exposed as objects of ridicule



because they do not realize the ethical ramifications of their actions. In the act of reading when the emotional content of human experience is juxtaposed with the epistemological limits of characters, or the author, questions of moral responsibility create new contexts of political and operational challenges through interpretive discussion and analysis.

A problem-based enquiry into literary texts encourages the reader to think in terms of possibilities and to circumvent the unjust attitudes. The author through ironic developments or voluntary actions of villainous characters depicts this injustice. The emotional mind learns to pay closer attention to the operational aspects of actions in a scientific and mechanistic framework. At the same time, the emotional mind must also be sensitive to the political undertones represented by the divergent viewpoints. Finally, the emotional mind must recognize the ethos of a work by discerning the difference between the literal meaning and the implied meaning by understanding the ironic and the metaphorical language of a literary work.

The Aristotelian approach to reader-response also enables the students to learn the distinction between value judgments, which are governed by personal criteria. They learn that sweeping generalizations can be logically unsound and merely disguise the reader's judgmental attitudes. By reading literary works as case studies of human problems, students learn that posing the entire blame on one's environment amounts to an incomplete analysis. Somewhere in the sequence of events, human choices are the cause of tragic consequences and pathos. For a more complete analysis, the emotional mind must choose between the favorable and unfavorable outcome within the context of a problem in an unbiased moral framework. They also learn that socio-political forces must not be confused with the power exercised by natural forces. They develop a clear understanding of the operational significance of natural forces that have the potential to intervene favorably or unfavorably in the life of an individual.



The Aristotelian approach to reader- response poses questions of consequences and moral responsibility in a precise context. The act of reading is like an investigative process to figure out whether a character is advocating justice --or injustice-- or ambivalent attitudes toward a social or political issue. Aristotle states: “In regard to justice and injustice, we have to inquire what sort of actions they are precisely concerned with, in what sense Justice is the observance of a mean, and what are the extremes wherein lies the mean of justice. ( The Nicomachean Ethics 253) .

Aristotelian reader-response encourages the reader to consciously seek connections between the operational, political, and ethical aspects of problems through inquiry and analysis. The reader becomes a participant observer within the plausible and credible forms of human experience that centers on socio-political issues. This experiential based reading transforms the externalized and detached form of reading into an intellectual quest that invites the reader to counterbalance the act of reading with personal experience and to relate attitudes to personal emotions and reasoning. Aristotle’s challenge of inquiry into moral virtue involves a continuing quest for the mean or the balancing act which calibrates the extremes through “a virtuous act.” It is a process that may not have full control over the consequences, yet it probes into probable and possible outcome of actions. Moreover, it underscores the need to balance human emotions and reasoning for a balanced analysis of actions. David Goleman, a Harvard psychologist, states that human passions, when well exercised, have wisdom; they guide our thinking, our values, and our survival. He goes on to say that “Aristotle saw, the problem is not with emotionality, but ... the appropriateness of emotions and ... expression in a given situation” (xiv).

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