Self-Structure as a Rhetorical Device: Modern *Ethos* and the Divisiveness of the Self

Emancipate yourself from mental slavery; none but ourselves can free our minds.

Bob Marley, "Redemption Songs"

Contemporary scholarship in English has begun to show an increasingly sophisticated attentiveness to the forces of politics and persuasion. It is not simply that Marxists like Terry Eagleton pronounce literary theory dead and rhetoric alive; many traditional scholars, people deeply committed to politically disinterested New Critical views of art, have begun to recognize political forces and rhetorical patterns in texts long considered distant from such concerns. In keeping with this new interest in the operations of rhetoric, it is useful to examine the traditional concept of *ethos*. *Ethos* seems especially fitted to advance an understanding of textual rhetoric because it focuses attention on a simple question often neglected by traditional literary theory: How do people persuade other people to change their values?

Although our understanding of *ethos* has changed over the years, one feature remains constant: Often it is not a person's *ideas* but a person's *character* that changes people. Thinkers as diverse as Aristotle and Kenneth Burke agree on this point. Aristotle formulated three modes of argumentative support (logos, *ethos*, and pathos) and discussed *ethos* (persuasion stemming from the personal qualities of the rhetor) as a highly effective rhetorical tool. A speaker's character, Aristotle points out, "may almost be called the most effective means for persuasion he [she] possesses." ¹ Like Aristotle, Kenneth Burke insists on the impor-
tance of the speaker's character: "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his." For Burke, persuasion works via mechanisms of identification or "consubstantiality." When people identify with speakers, they can be manipulated into accepting their ideas and values. For both Aristotle and Burke a key impetus for persuasion lies, not in a conscious response to logical and factual reasoning, but in the prior (more primitive, and often unconscious) gesture of identification.

In many ways identification is a fundamental narcissistic gesture. We identify with people we want to be like; we want to imagine ourselves as better or more powerful by assuming the properties of people we admire. Our identifications, because they demonstrate our need for a desirable self-image, are narcissistic modes of desire. Aristotle's insistence on the importance of *ethos* and Burke's insistence on the gesture of identification thus give powerful support to an argument linking narcissism to rhetoric.

**Theoretical Considerations**

If identification is the key to persuasion, then any response to human character is a formidable rhetorical power. This response, as many argumentation theorists see it, is not something *behind* the force of an argument; it *is* the force of an argument. This chapter attempts to clarify this claim and support it in detail.

If *ethos* refers to the manner in which the character of the speaker or writer is featured in persuasive activity, then we must examine how character can be fashioned by language to serve a rhetorical function in a text. Second, we must examine, at the most fundamental level possible, the relationships between language and human character. This examination of relationships between human character and language is crucial to the larger argument of this book. Rhetoric, as I argue, is fundamentally concerned with the way self-structures participate in, and become re-formed by, verbal structures.

What is self-structure? How is it related to a "self"? Unfortunately, contemporary discussion of relationships between language and the self is often confined within the assumptions and parameters of two models: the traditional Aristotelian theory of *ethos* and the current poststructur-
alist account of intertextuality. Neither of these models of character understand self-structure. Both lack the theoretical flexibility needed for an adequate explanation of rhetoric.

Classical consideration of *ethos* frequently links three separate ideas closely together: the development of self, the development of *ethos*, and the development of ethical habits. The classical message seems to be that people are the roles they habitually play. Rhetoricians, for both moral and practical reasons, are instructed to learn "good," or "ethical," roles. Quintilian argues that the good orator should be "a good man [woman]; and consequently we demand of him [her] not merely the possession of exceptional gifts of speech, but of all the excellence of character as well."3 This quotation works in two ways. First, Quintilian is exhorting his reader: "Be a good man [woman]." Second, Quintilian is making what he takes to be a factual statement: "A good rhetorician is a good man [woman]." Taken together, these two messages implicitly define the self. A "person" is what he or she strives and learns to be. As a "person" learns and repeatedly plays a role (a "good" role, it is assumed), he or she becomes the person embodied by that role. The self is thus an effect of learning, a coherent behavioral role acquired through repeated performances.

This idea of the self may be popular because it has flattering implications for teachers of rhetoric. In a recent article on *ethos*, for example, S. Michael Halloran supports the claim that "habituation" is the means by which both character and *ethos* develop. Because Aristotle's theory of learning seems intuitively correct, Halloran urges teachers to give students training in "rhetorical action" and to encourage the interaction between rhetorical training and self-development. Students will develop character, Halloran argues, by becoming educated through rhetorical models:

If *ethos* is manifested in rhetorical action, and if *ethos* is formed by choosing ethical modes of action, it follows that educating a person in rhetorical action, schooling him [her] in proper rhetorical habits, is a means of forming his [her] character.4

This image of the self, common among rhetoricians, may be partly true, but it is an overly simple perspective distorting the complex relations existing between rhetoric and self-structures.

Poststructuralists see the self very differently from Halloran: The self
is not a freely chosen social role, but a linguistic accident. Selves do not emerge as they choose to do things with rhetoric; rather, rhetoric continually does things to selves. Selves are not creative agents working within the inner core of the rhetorical process; instead, selves are the effects of rhetoric, a sort of epiphenomena constituted by an interplay of social, political, and linguistic forces. There is no inner entity, the self, that chooses its character. Instead, the self reflects the particular character of larger social forces that determine its nature and movement.

In addition, the self is not something that needs constancy or consistency over time. Different social situations trigger different self-structures; it is a mistake to assume that there is an inner core to the self that somehow grounds the various roles assumed by the self. Paul Smith, a theorist describing the implications of certain Lacanian and Althusserian ideas, suggests that a person can be "conceived as a colligation of multifarious and multiform subject-positions situated along, but not united by, temporal experience." Such a self is little more than a simple collector of random and diverse exposure to social interaction. Memory and "character" play no role in giving a characteristic "shape" to self experience.

Not all Aristotelian and poststructuralist perspectives on the self are as tenaciously reductive as I have described. But as these models are disseminated in a formulaic manner, they pose serious limitations to any coherent theory of ethos. Both models fail to recognize the rhetorical complexity of the human structures they seek to explain. The Aristotelian view envisions an overly strong self able to choose freely its own nature, able to become whatever model it can imagine. Such a notion is a pleasurable and at times useful fantasy, but it is unable to account for the limitations of human nature—those moments when humans encounter their lack of freedom, their inability to be and do what they imagine. The poststructuralist view emphasizes the self's lack of freedom, but in doing so it imagines an overly weak self. A self composed entirely of collected social discourse is infinitely plastic. It conforms effortlessly to textual influence, changes easily and constantly, and offers no determined or "characteristic" resistance to the discourses that assault it. This view of the self helps us appreciate the social determination of selfhood, but it implies that the self, once formed, has no organized and enduring inner structure. The traditional and poststructuralist accounts of the self are useful for some purposes, but they are not particularly useful for a theory of ethos.
I describe *ethos* as a relationship existing between the discourse structures of selves and the discourse structure of “texts.” Before I develop my argument, however, I want to clarify my claims in relation to the theoretical problems I have just raised. Aspects of my argument rely on assumptions antithetical to both traditional and poststructuralist accounts of the self. Rather than simply revealing these assumptions in the course of the argument, I want to argue in advance for their validity. I want to challenge traditional assumptions by arguing that the self is not something universal, but something deeply crafted by history and changing social formations. Second, however, I want to make it clear that my own position is not that of a poststructuralist. I want to challenge poststructuralist assumptions by suggesting that whereas various forms of the self change over time, the particular selves formed within particular historical conditions have relatively stable self-structures.

Historical perspectives on the self are important because too often we consider the self a stable entity that does not change over time. This conditions us to assume that all different perspectives on the self reflect different ideas about one and the same thing. It may well be, however, that there are many distinctly different socially conditioned versions of the self. We often think of *ethos* as a concept defining a single stable relation between language and the self. But if the nature of both language and the self undergo historical change, then it must follow that *ethos* also undergoes historical change. The concept of *ethos*, thus, should not be imagined as some fixed reality approached by different perspectives, but as something assuming different shapes and structures over time.

Our interest in Aristotle’s concept of *ethos* should reflect not only an interest in his understanding of the concept, but an interest as well in the social and psychological context that made the concept meaningful for him. Numerous scholars have increased our awareness of the historical and social context of Aristotle’s ideas. Less has been done to describe the particular historical character of the ancient Greek self. Of course, it is impossible to recover a complete description of the historically situated Greek self. Nonetheless, we need to consider the information available, seeking to understand the differences between ancient Greek and modern selves. In an essay in *The Identities of Persons*, Amelie Rorty offers help by providing a broad overview of the kinds of concerns an historical consideration of *ethos* should engage.

Rorty traces the historical changes in four different literary concepts of the self. These literary concepts, Rorty argues, reflect not simply
changes in the way we imagine selves, but changes in the phenomenon itself. She names these different entities the “character,” the “person,” the “self,” and the “individual.” In unreflective moments we describe all these differently structured entities as the self.

The early Greek world, Rorty suggests, imagined people as “characters.” Characters have a certain coherency at the level of behavior, but they have little psychological inwardness that takes responsibility for behavior. Characters

are the predictable and reliable manifestations of their dispositions; and it is by these dispositions that they are identified. Their natures form their responses to experiences, rather than being formed by them. Nor do characters have identity crises; they are not presumed to be strictly unified. Dispositional traits form an interlocking pattern, at best mutually supportive but sometimes tensed and conflicted. There is no presumption of a core that owns these dispositions.7

The concept “character” suggests a primitive structure of self-definition. Characters do not grow from experience; they are simply “manifestations” of “dispositions.” Rorty’s point is not simply that characters are primitive notions of selves, but that there is a reciprocal relation between what people really are and what other people imagine them to be. Cultures that imagine people as characters, because they have less demanding social expectations than other cultures, create different kinds of people. Characters have less “inner discipline.” Culture and society neither expect nor create the psychological structures that provide such discipline.

More complex cultures begin to define social roles in terms of the “person.”8 The person evolves primarily in a society with a more elaborate legal system. Because laws require stricter social roles, the person is given impetus to be more responsible than the character, to conform more painstakingly to publicly approved roles. Rorty explains:

The person . . . comes to stand behind his [her] roles, to select them and to be judged by his [her] choices and his [her] capacities to act out his [her] personae in a total structure that is the unfolding of his drama. The person is the idea of a unified center of choice and action, the unit of legal and theological responsibility. Only when a legal system has abandoned clan or family responsibility, and individuals are seen as primary agents, does the class of persons coincide with the class of biological individual human beings.9

Persons are more complex entities than characters. They facilitate smoother social interaction because they are predictable; they are not chaotic or undisciplined eddies of emotion held together by virtue of one’s name.
In many respects Rorty’s person resembles Aristotle’s self. This self has coherence but not self-division (that is, it is defined neither by an experience of inner conflict nor by an awareness of plural inner voices—both defining features of the “modern self”). Also, when Aristotle says that “we believe good men more fully and more readily than others,” he seems to imagine ethos as some positive quality fully identified with the speaker’s character. Ethos achieves authority by virtue of acting out a particular role (a trusted “person”); ethos is not a complex and fully particularized experience produced by the distinctive self-structure of a fully individualized speaker. It is as if, for Aristotle, character does not itself trigger a distinctive emotional response in an audience. For Aristotle, in fact, the rhetor’s ability to manipulate an audience’s emotion is not considered as ethos (an expression of character) but as pathos, an argument consciously contrived in order to appeal to emotion. Consequently, in Aristotle there is a curiously sharp and unprofitable theoretical separation between a speaker’s real person and the emotions that speaker can use to move an audience. In Aristotle’s discussion of pathos human character does not reveal in a rhetorically effective manner the real emotion it “contains”; instead speakers, quite independently of their own feelings, consciously and purposefully direct words toward another’s emotion.

To appreciate further how Aristotle’s limited concept of the self restricts his understanding of ethos, we should consider Rorty’s other categories of selfhood. The person is the characteristic mode of self that thrives before the advent of capitalism and social mobility. Capitalism provides new conditions that change the rules in the game of social status. And in changing the rules of this game, it contributes to the change of the self. As the self gains status through the acquisition of money and property, the “person” gives way to the “self” per se. “Selves” develop, Rorty says, as individuals identify with their ownership of property, not with their roles. The evolution of a self identified with property allows the “self” a certain freedom. Selves transcend the limitation of proper public roles and become able to assume various roles:

When a society has changed so that individuals acquire their rights by virtue of their powers, rather than having their powers defined by their rights, the concept of person has been transformed to a concept of self. At first, the primary possession is that of land, and a person of substance is one of the landed gentry.
But when a man's industry determines whether he is landed, the story of men's lives are told by their achievements rather than by their descent. The story of fulfilled ambition is shaped by an individual's capacity to amass goods, by the extent of his properties.  

Capitalism, by changing social and economic relationships, therefore changes the shape of selfhood. As a new culture evolves, people both expand their ability to play roles and grant socially legitimate entitlement to other people who can play a multitude of roles in culturally approved ways.

In time, new social and cultural forces encourage a different version of selfhood. The self of early capitalism gives way to the modern "individual":

From the tensions in the definition of the alienable properties of selves, and from the corruptions in societies of selves—the divergence of practice from ideological commitments—comes the invention of individuality. It begins with conscience and ends with consciousness.

Individuals actively resist typing: they represent the universal mind of rational beings, or the unique private voice. Invented as a preserve of integrity, an autonomous ens, an individual transcends and resists what is binding and oppressive in society and does so from an original natural position.

Because they are defined by their freedom, they no longer choose from their natures but choose their identities. But since such choice is itself ungrounded, they are simply the act of choosing.

The last category of self, the individual, gives Rorty's argument a strikingly evolutionary cast. The essay thus describes a self evolving by gaining greater ontological freedom from, and control of, various forms of experience.

Characters simply react to experience. They have a measure of freedom, because their lack of "self-discipline" enables them to respond "freely" to any event. But in merely reacting to experience they do not learn from it; they are forced to repeat themselves in all they do. Persons, in contrast, have self-structures that mediate between experience and personality. The social roles given to persons allow them to take "positions" in relation to experience; they are not determined by the immediate emotional power of the experience. Selves have more freedom than persons, and they can play various roles. Individuals, finally, seem to have the most freedom. They have no core being, and are free from all constraints to choose their own "inner" being.

We can imagine, from Rorty's discussion, a kind of economy in the
change or evolution of the self whereby desire, rhetoric, ideology, and social structure interact to produce the various real forms the self can take. These various agencies change as they adapt and respond to each other in their competition for power. And as they change in order to compete more successfully for power, they formulate social conditions that require evermore inventive changes and responses to change. Such a situation, perhaps, is most characteristic of contemporary life.

Rorty’s analysis of the self should not be taken as a definitive description of the evolution of the concept of the self. Many of her terms appear to be overly idealized abstractions. Clearly, more precise work needs to be done on the relationship between social reality and literary representation. The historical difference among these categories of selfhood may also be less important than Rorty suggests. One mode of self may be prominent in a certain historical period, but all modes might exist in any one period. We might imagine, also, that a culture’s discourse promotes complex relationships between rhetorical illusions that sustain conceptualizations of the self and real self-structures that are in part produced by rhetorical illusions.

Rorty’s work may be inaccurate, but it encourages us to acknowledge that different cultures not only imagine and define selves differently but also formulate social and cultural conditions that allow for the creation of disparate selves. These varied self-structures reflect distinct models of libidinal organization and utilize diversely structured self-components to organize and regulate desire. By providing for different organizations of self-components, cultures generate different strategies for structuring selves.

Social history plays a role in determining self-organization, but the individual history of a particular subjectivity also plays a powerful role in determining self-organization. While culture provides models for self-structure, selves also develop these models according to the particular workings of self-functions. Different self-structures, for example, are the consequence of particular selves responding to the cues of culture. Particular selves therefore internalize unique social ideals, unique self-images, and uniquely encountered particular role models. The individual self thus plays its own role in the development of self-structure at the same time that this role responds to the larger system of a particular culture. In all cases, the social rewards provided by a culture regulate
those libidinal investments that contribute to a suitable self-structure and within each social context, there develops a reciprocal relation between the fictional self a culture imagines and the real shape of a particular lived self-structure.

"We are different entities," Rorty argues, as we conceive ourselves in light of different concepts of the self “our powers of actions are different, our relations to one another, our properties and proprieties, our characteristic successes and defeats, our conceptions of society’s proper structures and freedoms will vary with our conception of ourselves as characters, persons, selves, individuals.” Rhetoricians will readily see that Rorty’s remarks are not simply remarks about selves. They are remarks about the nature of ethos. They implicitly suggest that ethos, as a concept, should describe relationships between differing ideas of the self and differing abilities of selves to act rhetorically in a society.

When considering the self, we must examine the various historical determinations brought to the concept. Historical consideration of the self demonstrates how models of selfhood have enormous flexibility and fluidity as the self responds to changing social conditions. Too often, however, this useful perspective on the self suggests that a particular self formed by social conditions has the same fluidity and flexibility that self-structure itself shows over centuries of change. The self, as an abstract psychological structure, indeed has enormous fluidity, but a particular self does not have the same fluidity. As a result of its relatively constant and particular organization of components, a particular individual self is much more stable in structure than that same abstract entity “the self,” considered in terms of its historical permutations.

Scholars who take an historical or sociological perspective on the self see fluidity in self-structure as a result of self-structure changing from one generation to the next. This fluidity changing across generational lines is quite different from the fluidity within the self-structure of a particular self. History and social interaction give shape to selves, but these forces do not fully explain how particular and discrete self-structures interact with particular structures of language. To understand the rhetorical nature of a particular self, we must shift from an historical to a psychoanalytic perspective.

A particular self is not, as in poststructuralist terms, a simple, random, and constantly changing collection of texts shaped by historical forces. A particular self is not an infinitely changing collection of voices housed
within a biological organism. It is a relatively stable organization of voices. Although we need not adopt the various models of the self-structure advocated by psychoanalysis, if we are sensitive to the nature of rhetoric we should acknowledge that the self has a relatively stable inner organization. Indeed, the idea of rhetoric requires a theory of a relatively stable self-structure.

The different modes of the self vary enormously according to time and place, but each self seems to have a distinctive character—a characteristic self-structure—that gives it a distinctive quality. Many poststructuralist theorists will find this claim about self-structure unsettling. New theories of language make it difficult to see the self in terms of stability, agency, or consistency—qualities we associate with self-structure. The self, thus considered, is a passive effect of language, something "subjected" to language use or a site where discourse collects. This emphasis on the self's passivity has prompted some thinkers to argue that it is time to abandon the concept "self" altogether. Other theorists retain the concept but describe the self as "dissolved." Jonathan Culler, paraphrasing claims made by Levi-Strauss, points out that whereas structuralist thought investigates the self, it also erases it: "As the self is broken down into component systems, deprived of its status as source and master of meaning, it comes to seem more and more like a construct: a result of systems of convention." The new structuralist and poststructuralist ways of accounting for the self are useful, but they oversimplify the issues most important to rhetoric theory. They fail to grasp the self as an essentially rhetorical entity, a site of conflict in discourse organization.

Although it makes good sense to see the self as an entity composed of "component systems," as Culler suggests, it is also important to see the self as a conflictual organization of such components. The idea of conflictually organized self-components explains how and why selves act rhetorically. It explains why selves sometimes "take in" or internalize discourse, but also sometimes resist and deflect the linguistic structures and social formations that surround them. Clearly, selves are not mere radio receptors for social discourse. They are not passive vehicles constantly animated in different patterns by the passing-through of ceaselessly changing social discourse. Selves do not become each and every socially constructed discourse formation they encounter; something within its own inner organization prompts the self to identify with certain social forms and to reject others.
In some ways the account of the self offered by Culler and others is compatible with the account of self-structure given by contemporary psychoanalytic thinkers. Theorists who maintain a lively interest in the self understand it, not in terms of some authoritatively unified and dominating ego, but (much like Culler) as poorly organized self-components that interact with variable consequences. These same theorists frequently maintain that the “voice” of the ego has no existence prior to the voice of others. The self is not some homunculus that stands outside and beyond all social interaction. Instead, the self gains “form” as it is “informed” by the speech of others. The self indeed is a function of self-components that participate in and reflect psychologically significant nodules of social discourse. But these components, although they change over time as a result of social interaction, nonetheless maintain relatively stable configurations within the self. The relative stability of these configurations allows the self to dialectically engage and resist—rather than passively submit to—social interaction.

Poststructuralist descriptions of the self and the accounts given by Kohut and Lacan, for example, differ in their emphasis on language. For most poststructuralists, the self is nothing but speech. For Kohut and Lacan, speech is central to self formation, but the human person is more than speech; it is a biological organism whose desires, goals, and ambitions are organized by linguistic structures that overlay and complicate more primordial biological and preverbal structures. The self is not just a “text”; it is an active and complex organization of libidinal investments. It is, as well, a process of disorganized organization, a moving, interacting effect of discordant self-components.

Rhetoric might be defined as a well-focused and carefully crafted strategy for changing self-organization. It seeks to participate in the modification of self-components in order to produce changes in human action or belief. As an activity, rhetoric requires discipline—strategy, organization, planning, complexity—because selves are not passive receptors of discourse. Selves do not simply adopt the discourse systems they encounter; they admire, resist, or reject discourse according to their own unique character. Selves are clearly organized by forces that are not fully disclosed in any purely linguistic analysis of the organization of language.

A properly complex understanding of the self is important for a theory of rhetoric. If the discipline of rhetoric is to have the coherency it
aspires to, the self must be imagined as having a self-structure held in place by organizing principles that are responsive to the forces operating in rhetorical transactions.

Major concepts in rhetoric reflect the discipline's longtime interest in relationships between self-structure and rhetorical structure. Style, for example, is an important rhetorical concept reflecting assumptions that rhetoricians hold in regard to the relative stability of self-structure. Style indicates a certain distinctiveness in the manner (as opposed to the content) of expression. At times this distinctiveness can refer to socially learned qualities, for example, when a writer is described as having a Romantic style. In this sense, style helps us to understand how human character is informed by social custom. Equally often, style posits a certain uniqueness of character itself. In this sense, style shows how each subject, although informed by social custom, also reformulates the patterns of social custom in distinctive ways. Ben Jonson, for example, insists that "this my style no living man shall touch." In a similar fashion (but using a more theoretical vocabulary) Paul Valery argues, "Style signifies the manner in which a man [woman] expresses [her-] himself, regardless of what he [she] expresses, and it is held to reveal his [her] nature, quite apart from his [her] actual thought—for thought has no style." Jane Gallop, after discussing Lacan's interest in style, suggests that "the object of psychoanalytic study reveals itself as style." Style, in this case, reflects the manner in which content of any sort is appropriated by the symptoms of subjectivity.

The self has a relatively stable self-structure, and therefore a recognizable style. Rhetoricians frequently describe and analyze this property in linguistic structures produced by writers. Style is important not simply because it is a distinctive property of selves; it is important because it describes a linguistic site where self-structure, engaging social discourse, produces rhetoric. Rhetoricians examine how the style of the self is "characteristically" carried forward (consciously and unconsciously) into language to achieve rhetorical effects. Terry Eagleton emphasizes that much of Frederic Jameson's rhetorical force derives from his personal rhetorical style. "Jameson," he observes, "composes rather than writes his texts, and his prose . . . carries an intense libidinal charge, a burnished elegance and unruffled poise, which allows him to sustain a rhetorical lucidity through the most tortuous, intractable materials." Although it expresses the "subjectivity" of the writer, style composes
also the "subject" of sentences, and at least momentarily (and, when effective, more than momentarily), a unique subjectivity within the reader.

Other facets of rhetorical study imply a similar co-responsive relationship between self-structure and rhetorical language. Because selves respond to rhetorical discourse in complicated patterns of pleasure, censorship, attention, and belief, rhetorical activity attempts to control and direct these complex interwoven patterns of response. When speakers prepare speeches, for example, they typically seek to learn the attitudes, feelings, and values of their audience in order to promote certain intended rhetorical effects. Audiences, rhetoricians argue, can be most easily moved when they are flattered by a speaker who seems to promote their own values. Flattery is not a mere ornamental device. As Burke argues, "Persuasion by flattery is but a special case of persuasion in general." This assumption indicates something important about rhetorical transactions: Rhetorical structures work best when they "fit into" or "work on" psychological structures already in place.

The beliefs of an audience are important to know because we assume that the self, as a result of deeply held beliefs, can resist rhetorical manipulation. Real people, unlike the passive creatures often conceived by structuralist theory, are not easily "subjected" to rhetorical effects of language. Real people resist that which they sense to be "rhetoric." The self seems to have a relatively stable structure that identifies with particular feelings and ideas in a predictable way, so it actively resists other opposing feelings and ideas. Rhetoricians acknowledge this fact and seek to develop rhetorical strategies that can overcome resistance.

Human value and belief—character itself—are not easily changed because of self-structure. Self-structure reflects those organizations of libidinal investment and libidinal control that define subjectivity. These organizations are durable and not easily changed. Rhetoricians, however, believe effectively planned discourse can overcome the resistance these systems have to rhetoric. When resistance is overcome, the stability of human character is an ally rather than an enemy to rhetoric.

Consider for a moment how the temporal stability of the self contributes to rhetorical effects. It seems clear that rhetoric can work—that it can have practical effects on the ways people act and behave. But what makes these effects possible? How does mere language have lasting effects on a biological organism? It must be the case that effective rhetoric is something like self-structure itself. It is not a mere collection of words
and voices, not a passive structure of language; rhetoric—like self-structure—manipulates the properties of linguistic form that organize (articulate the emotional and linguistic components of) the self. Both structures, rhetoric and the self, actively employ language to organize human feeling and behavior.

Rhetorical form "works" when it operates psychological mechanisms that inform self-structure. More importantly, rhetorical form can work only when its effect survives the temporal moment of language exposure, is preserved in certain components of self-structure, and is carried forward temporally into some larger horizon of thought and planning.

For most people, human experience is not like an afternoon at the circus, a dizzy disorganized collection of momentary rides, that once ridden, are immediately left behind. Some principle organizes and focuses human experience. Self-structure is precisely such a principle. It gives meaning, focus, and organization to diverse segments of human experience. Effective rhetoric, in a similar manner, makes use of this same principle of focus and organization. Effective rhetorical transactions, like strongly remembered experiences, stand out as an ordering center for an otherwise less impressive collection of dispersed impressions. They draw disorganized elements of memory and emotion into their patterned structure. Admittedly, people are often only momentarily moved by rhetoric. But people can be affected in ways that move them to vote or act in conformity with rhetorical aims at moments much later than the time of the rhetorical experience. Effective rhetoric is not a momentary and quickly emptied thing, and this fact requires more theoretical attention. Through language, such rhetoric taps the energy that organizes self-structure. It can radically and lastingly change people's attitudes because, much like strong experience itself, it makes use of language to build self-structure.

All these observations lead me to a simple generalization important to describing relationships between rhetoric and self-structure. There is a sense in which people change and a there is a sense in which people do not change. This assumption is essential for rhetorical theory. The self is stable enough to resist change and changeable enough to admit to rhetorical manipulation, but not so changeable as to be in constant chameleon-like response to each and every social force. Rhetoric therefore needs a theory of the self that is sufficiently complex to conceptualize these
features. A theory of rhetoric needs an understanding of the self that appreciates the relative stability and instability of self-structure.

Implications

I have argued that the self has a relatively stable self-structure. I have also argued that self-structure is given particular shape by historical processes. These claims have implications for an understanding of the nature of ethos. Let me now make these implications more explicit.

A “modern” self differs from the Aristotelian self, and, because of this, an Aristotelian ethos differs from a modern ethos. Let me be more emphatic: It is not simply that Greeks and moderns have different selves, but that the larger structure of ethos—the particular mechanisms governing how personality can itself be persuasive—is quite different in the two models.

Aristotle’s ideas are not outdated, but they are restrictive. These ideas were formulated within a particular social and psychological moment. The Greek self, Greek culture, and Greek rhetoric are interactive units that function differently than the modern self, modern culture, and modern rhetoric. Clifford Geertz argues that the human animal is an incomplete thing that finds its completion only in culture.21 We should assume that different cultures “complete” selves in different ways, and provide different structures for rhetorical interaction.

To understand the form of modern ethos (though it is difficult to give “modern” a specific date) we must first, following the implications of Rorty’s argument, consider the particular nature of modern culture in its relation to the modern self and modern rhetoric. How does modern culture give form and direction to both self-structure and self-activity?

An important aspect of modern culture is its prodigious diversity, plurality, and multiplicity. This cultural diversity is not simply something “outside” us. It is part of us, part of our consciousness. Geertz argues that “the hallmark of modern consciousness . . . is its enormous multiplicity.”22 Geertz points out that in premodern societies human actions are governed by “primordial attachments” defined by blood, race, language, region, religion, and custom. Traditionally, these attachments establish social groups, and probably also determine the values held by these groups. These traditional attachments have been very strong rhetorical tools. For most of the developed world these ties and
their corresponding rhetoric are much diminished. Racial, religious, and linguistic conflict continue, and in some areas increase in intensity, but nation states of the West have minimized or simply reformulated the terms for racial, religious, and linguistic identification.

Extreme social mobility now allows and encourages people to situate themselves within and identify with a much wider diversity of relationships. It is no longer uncommon for children to leave their parents, marry outside of their religion or race, abandon old customs, and move to new regions. As the authority of primordial ties diminish, new forces work to situate and regulate the self. One of these forces is modern culture itself, which, characterized by diversity and plurality, reduces the emphasis given to the unquestioned authority of primordial identifications.

Aristotle was aware of conflicts among authorities, but demonstrated an attachment to a “primordial” authority; he idealized “truth” both as a voice of authority and as a single voice. By comparison, modern American culture does not idealize any single voice as the fountainhead of authority. Instead, many different and distinct voices are empowered, and all clamor to speak with authority. Modern culture, as a consumer culture, has in fact become a consumer of the “truth” voices of other cultures. Just as we buy the physical products of other cultures, we commodify, in a hybridized form, the thought of other cultures. The world becomes a vast supermarket of artifacts, discourses, and values, all available for consumption.

Ihab Hassan sees “postmodern pluralism” as powerfully disruptive, insisting that “pluralism . . . has become the irritable condition of postmodern discourse.” He describes “postmodern” culture as a scene where authoritative guides for human action and value no longer preside. In place of authority, Hassan finds indeterminacy, fragmentation, decanonization of authority, irony, and hybridization. As modern or postmodern selves become caught in the conflictual linguistic codings of modern culture, they confront the psychological effects of a radical disorder.

Modern culture “informs” self-structure. The cultural and social life of the modern developed world is especially informed by plurality and diversity, and this experience characterizes the modern self. Such a self is torn and disordered by many different styles of authority and personality. It hears, remembers, and internalizes many different styles of voice.
As the modern self develops, it seeks to establish identity in relation to
the many voices competing for its attention. Rorty argues that the modern
self "is" (at the level of self-representation, anyway) nothing more
than a set of actions or choices; moderns, in other words, identify their
selves not with some concrete entity, but with the act of choosing an
identity. Postmoderns dispute the self's "freedom" to choose its identity.
Nonetheless there is agreement that the modern (and postmodern) self is
fractured by conflictual self-images. Perhaps, for this reason, the modern
self seems especially characterized by anxiety, internal diversity, and
conflict.

Heinz Kohut, a psychoanalyst, finds evidence for the fragmented
nature of the modern self in literature. Like Rorty, he believes literature
reflects self-structure. He also believes that the literary products of mod-
er culture differ markedly from older forms. He argues that whereas
artists of the past wrote drama in which a "relatively strong self" is
exposed to "loves and hates, ... triumphs and defeats," many modern
artists "have begun to deal with a new set of issues": "This set of issues,
to speak of it in the most gross terms, is the falling apart of the self and
of the world and the task of reconstituting the self and the world."24
Kohut's psychoanalytically informed observation echoes the claims lit-
erary critics have made for years. One watermark of "modern" literature
seems to be the expression of a restless and divided self. Fragmentation
and division dominate modern experience. Jurgen Habermas suggests
that an older form of ideological control, "false consciousness," required
older ideological formations. In modern societies false consciousness has
given way to a new structure called "fragmented consciousness."25

If fragmentation and ethical pluralism characterize modern culture
and the modern self, we should examine how these features play a role
in modern ethos. Traditional readings of Aristotle and other classical
thinkers describe ethos as a fairly simple interaction among selves. Ethos
presents itself as a clear voice of authority and a vigorously dominant
force presiding over a curious background of silence. Effective rhetoric
establishes authority, clearly communicates its meaning, and effectively
silences its opposition. Such thinking may effectively describe the kind
of self and society that Aristotle knew. But such a self and society is not
our own.

Consider another less tidy model to describe the modern rhetorical
context. In this option, effective rhetoric is not a clearly authoritative
and all-powerful energy in discourse; instead, it is a force always in conflict with an opposition. Effective rhetoric indeed dominates other voices. It subdues the noise of other voices and is heard above them. But in modern culture, effective rhetoric never completely silences other voices. Modern selves, it seems, suffer a certain failure of repression and can always, when they listen carefully, hear other competing noises, or voices of opposition, in the background. Modern texts, when paid some attention by modern selves, always deconstruct. A model for modern ethos should reflect this character of the modern condition described here. It should acknowledge the multiplicity of modern culture, the divided nature of the self, and the contingency of truth claims.

It is not easy, however, to redefine modern ethos in terms of textual multiplicity. If ethos is, as defined here, an argument in which rhetorical force derives not from "logical" support for what is said, but from the perceived personality of the agent behind what is said, then a modern ethos may appear theoretically inconceivable. An "author's" voice heard in a text by a reader seems to generate many different messages, and thus never appears singular or securely "itself." Increasingly, authors appear to be very unstable entities. Their characters become a function of readers' projections and their meanings become the result of ideological effects. If texts really have multiple voices, then authors disappear.

It often seems we can't have both at the same time: a theory that explains the rhetor's presence in a text and a theory that fully describes the plural disseminations of textual codes. Contemporary critical theory seems to require us to choose between two theoretical alternatives. If we embrace the multiplicity of discourse, we must abandon any notion of authorial presence and intention. If, on the other hand, we believe in the efficacy of rhetorical presence and intention, we must abandon a belief in the plurality of textual meaning.

I think we can have—at the same time—a theory of textual multiplicity and a modified theory of authorial intention. Ethos, in fact, is best understood as an interplay of two features: first an author's voice in a text and, second, that voice rhetorically manipulated by the plural nature of self, text, and context. I want to consider ethos as an externalization of various aspects of the rhetor's self-structure (present as "voice") affecting—that is, contributing to the internalization of—the reader's self-structure. I also want to consider ethos as something energized precisely by the plural, self-oppositional, and divided nature of both the self and
conflictual cultural ideologies. I discuss this last assertion in more detail later. Let us now concentrate on the earlier, more simple assertion.

In seeking to understand ethos, we should examine relationships among three things: the structure of the argument, the self-structure of the speaker, and the self-structure of the addressee. What we see and talk about in this triangular relationship will always be determined by culture, history, and personal projection. Nonetheless, we will always be able to see something in a text, and in most cases we will imagine the "real" voice of an author in relation to the rhetorical effects produced by a text. When we feel rhetorical effects, we will always tend to attribute them to the agency of another personality outside us, working the rhetorical effects of language on us.

There should be nothing objectionable in this. If we construct a more complicated notion of texts and selves, we can legitimately imagine relationships this way. If culture, through language, provides devices that structure selves, there must be links between the self-structuring effects of rhetoric on readers and the self-structures (reflective of ideological forces working through them) left in texts (and, in some marginal sense of the term, intended) by rhetoricians. Cultures, we may say, structure selves. But cultures do not speak by themselves. They speak through the selves they construct. In speaking through selves, they construct selves. Texts, thus, must contain devices that connect the self-structure of authors with the self-structure of readers.

We can imagine these issues in a more concrete way by considering relationships between the concept of ethos developed by rhetoricians and the concept of charisma developed by sociologists. Think of charisma as both an aspect of self-structure and as an agency for rhetorical force. Studies of charisma provide clear, almost empirical, descriptions of strong personalities making effective rhetorical use of self-structure.

In Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, Max Weber sought to explain how new values and institutions are introduced and supported in society. In short, he sought to explain change. He began with an analysis of the sources of a culture's authority, and maintained that leadership derives from three major sources of power: traditional, rational, and charismatic. Traditional and rational authority, he argued, have a certain permanence and are both "institutions of daily routine." Charismatic authority is a different mode of authority. Its legitimacy comes neither from special knowledge nor from the leader's special place in a social hierarchy of power. Charismatic authority is held by people who "have been neither
office-holders nor incumbents of an occupation . . . that is men who have acquired expert knowledge and who serve for remuneration." 26 Such authority derives, Weber argued, purely from the personal qualities of the leader. By virtue of their personality, charismatic leaders are "set apart from ordinary men [women] and treated as endowed with either supernatural, or superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers." 27 Weber’s emphasis on the persuasive role of personality in charisma is analogous to ethos as I have defined the term: an argument in which rhetorical force derives not from the logic of what is said, but from the perceived personality of the agent behind what is said. Considered from this perspective, the power of charisma is precisely the power of ethos. In both charisma and ethical argument, power stems directly from the personality of the speaker.

Whereas sociologists have documented the widespread occurrence of charismatic leadership, psychoanalysts and psychoanalytically trained sociologists and anthropologists have tried to explain its mode of operation. W. LaBarre argues that the charismatic leader’s message is "not new information of the structure of the world, but only of new inner emotional structuring in people’s culture-personality.” 28 Theorists argue that the self-structure of the charismatic leader plays two roles in social interaction. First, and this is all too obvious, these leaders have a particular structure of personality that appeals to their followers. Second (and this is more interesting), charismatic leaders know how to “elaborate” their personality-structure symbolically for followers to emulate. In this “elaboration,” leaders activate many messages within the more literal message of their speech. Charismatic leaders often outline a “mission” for their followers to follow. This mission may require the performance of real actions, but also encourages followers to develop a structure of defenses, desires, and repressions—a self-structure—similar to that of the leader. It is as if charismatic leaders rely on and draw rhetorical power from a certain (usually unconscious) control of the plural voices of their own text. A key component of the charismatic leader’s power, then, lies not simply in the structure of personality, but in the ability to communicate, and especially to communicate oneself (and all the various linguistic layers of oneself), in all the various layers of one’s message. As Winer, Jobe, and Ferron point out, the charismatic leader “must have extraordinary powers of communication, usually oratorical as well as written.” 29

How do the mechanisms of charisma operate within the field of
discourse? Two dimensions of psychoanalytic speculation seem to offer answers. First, numerous thinkers have linked charisma to speakers’ ability to “share” and “elaborate” an unconscious fantasy within the more obvious material of their message. Second, charisma has been linked to speakers’ power to depict, for others, their own mastery of a conflict analogous to the conflicts experienced by listeners. Charismatic leaders’ power to elaborate their fantasy might be understood in relation to Ernest Borman’s work on group decision making. Borman argues that the unconscious sharing of group fantasy often directs the path of group decisions. If group decisions are manipulated by the sharing of fantasy, then charismatic figures may be leaders who are especially adept at unconscious (and perhaps conscious) communication and elaboration of fantasy. In another context, Jean Wyatt claims that literary texts can contribute to the production of politically consequential fantasy as they invite readers to participate in their own politically relevant fantasies. Clearly, relationships between politics and fantasy are important and require more research. Here, however, I want to subordinate concerns for particular fantasies and focus sharply on the relation between charisma and the mastery of psychological conflict.

Recall the claim I made earlier: Ethos links the self-structure of the reader to the self-structure of the author. Winer, Jobe, and Ferrono suggest that people who respond to charismatic leaders (that is, to masters of ethos) respond especially to a fantasy about the mastery of conflict. However, what may be most important here is not the nature of a particular conflict, but the general structure of conflict itself. Consider this generalized human experience, the mastery of conflict, as something not present in a text in the form of a subject or content, but as a structuring device. This device indeed “structures” the language of the text, but it is able to work rhetorically because it “reflects” the linguistic structure of the author and “affects” the linguistic self-structure of the reader.

There are many ways to talk about the elements of a text. We talk about some elements as present in a literal way—for example, things an author literally names, such as places, objects, and people. Other elements we talk about are not present literally but symbolically. Psychologists, for example, analyze how literal events may represent unconscious fantasy material. I want to discuss something more primitive, not so much an entity as an event that seeks not to represent selves but to
structure selves. When texts structure the mastery of conflict as a rhetorical strategy, this event is not a “what” that the text talks about, but a “how” that structures the reader’s response to the subject of a text’s discussion.

Consider a particular aspect of a rhetor’s personality—an experience of conflict, self-opposition, and mastery of conflict. This theme of conflict can be considered as simply another fantasy theme, or as a structural principle—a principle both within texts and within selves. Imagine, first, that texts “elaborate” and “master” conflict (self-opposition) in various complex ways and, second, that textual “forms” for the mastery of conflict are at the same time “forms” for human experience that “inform” self-structure. Readers experience the conflictual nature of self-structure as they participate in the effects of conflict that they find elaborated and organized for them in texts. Authors, through the conflictual language of a text, leave traces of self-structuring devices that organize in particular ways the content of their own selves. These devices affect readers—that is, they work on the self-structure of readers—not all in the same way, but in a multitude of recognizable patterns.

A text’s rhetorical power is related to the effect it produces through its particular organization and elaboration of conflict. Certain relationships between psychological conflict and argument are obvious: An argument always participates in a conflict, because there are no arguments when there is absolute agreement. When an argument shows real power, that is, when it triggers change or increased commitment, it does two things. First, it engages a conflict. Second, it overcomes some opposition.

For example, perhaps when we read an article we agree with, we say that it is a good argument. But if the article merely restates what we already believe, it has not overcome an opposition and thus has not yet shown true argumentative force. If the self is to be changed by a piece of writing, it must participate in a conflict and be moved by argumentative force to overcome its own inner opposition, or resistance to change.

I have located the resistances to change within the structure of the self. The self resists change because self-structure tends toward homeostasis. But if self-structure explains the self’s resistance to rhetoric, it also explains the self’s seduction by rhetoric. I want to suggest that the unique psychological “torque” of modern rhetorical power can be explained as a mechanism “funded” by the divided character of modern self-struc-
ture. Modern forms of ethos can “divide” us from our habitual values because, as moderns, we are always, in advance, at a deeper level, divided, self-conflicted selves.

It may be that the central power of “modern” ethos derives not so much from a rhetor’s ability to develop unconscious fantasies and gratify unconscious needs of the self, but more primordially from the rhetor’s ability to activate the inner dynamics of self-division—to liberate repressed voices, to activate self-conflict, to reshape the linguistic form of self-components. The work of Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen suggests that self-persuasion may be the most effective form of persuasion. Self-persuasion, they argue, creates intrapersonal discrepancy as it challenges beliefs and value premises. It unbalances fixed cognitions that preserve dominant values. In self-persuasion individuals are not given an opportunity to mobilize ego defenses that easily resist the assaults of other voices. Instead, individuals are placed in a position that changes the structure of their inner self-components as they listen to their own inner voices in new ways. Self-persuasion does not come from the outside as an external “authority” goading people to accept certain values; it comes from the inside as an internal voice (both an agent and an expression of self-change) reorganizing relationships among self-components.

Fishbein and Ajzen suggest that effective persuasion creates a conflict within the self. But it may be that, given the nature of the modern self, the task of rhetoric is not to create conflict in the self, but first to bypass ego defenses that normally maintain a stable character, and then to mobilize, at a deep level of self-structure, the inherently conflictual nature of the self.

Modern theories of the self see it as, in various degrees, divided. Freud, Kohut, and Lacan see the self, not as a unified master of its actions, but as a more compromised structure presiding over negotiations among conflictual inner forces. In Freud’s early topographic model of mind, behavior is explained as the result of compromises between the unconscious push of drives and the preconscious restraining structure of the ego. As Freud’s theory evolved, three structures—id, ego, and superego—are seen in conflict within the self. In the later work of ego psychologists, psychic “structure” becomes a term that describes the relatively stable organization of the self’s restlessly unstable and conflictual inner components.

The ego would seem to be the rhetorical center of the self. Its task is
to organize, synthesize, reconcile, or otherwise repress divisive and con-
fl ictual self-components so that individuals can effectively (or somewhat
effectively) pursue their needs and desires. We normally think of the ego
as a structure that manages the conflicts of self-components clearly “in-
side” the self. In a certain sense this is true, but it is also misleading.
Psychoanalytic theorists have more than a little difficulty distinguishing
between those representations of people (often in the form of memories)
inside the self that serve to represent the outside world, and those
representations of people inside the self that structure the self’s inner
organization. Freud, for example, argued that a person’s superego often
develops from an internalized image of the father. Extrapolating from
this principle, we might say that all internal self-components are in
various degrees modeled after the self-structures of external others. A
person’s “internal world” is always something brought into the inside
from the outside world (although the act of taking in also involves a
degree of reshaping).

Psychoanalytic theory thus provides a model for understanding ethos
as the effect of a specific fluidity within self-structure being affected by
the flow of social discourse. This has implications for argument, writing,
and pedagogy. When students hear the speech of others, this speech
always has the potential to become part of their own “inner speech.”
Consider how students respond to classroom discussion. Some discus-
sion is boring, some is highly engaging. Some of the engaging classroom
speech may be remembered. Some remembered speech may be internal-
ized and, furthermore, some of the internalized speech may be so dura-
able as to become part of the student’s self-structure. However, not all
speech becomes internalized; what is internalized always reflects the
particular dynamics of a student’s self-structure. We cannot know in
advance what sort of discourse engages self-structure and what does not,
but we can say that when students confront through response to outer
voices the conflicts within their own inner voices, they are doing ego
work; they are reworking the inner organization of self-components.
They are, at once, doing the work that contributes to the formation of a
self, and doing the work of rhetoric. Indeed, when rhetoric “works,” it
works in a literal sense to construct a self.

There are further implications. When conflictual voices within the self
are heard speaking through the voices of real people outside the self,
such argument taps the deepest powers of rhetoric. Such persuasiveness
is simultaneously very public and very private. It is, like the “hypnotic” effect of highly charismatic leaders, a form of communication erasing boundaries between speaker and listener and exposing “inner” self-structure to the reformulating power of “public” rhetoric.

In summary, if the modern self is highly divided, and if reconciling the self’s inner voices of opposition is the task of both rhetoric and self-building, then texts that activate and direct these oppositions and reconciliations embody the key principles of modern ethos. More precisely, if rhetoric is always at the scene of conflict, and if the divided nature of the self participates in this conflict—and, indeed, facilitates rhetorical action—then it follows that a particular kind of representation of self-conflict (an “aesthetic manipulation,” that is, of self-divisive conflict) provides an effective formula for ethos. In short, a distinctly “modern” ethos may well be grasped as an aesthetic manipulation of self-division.

It would be instructive to illustrate this claim in a writer like Bertrand Russell, who, with his ebullient confidence in argument, seems precisely the opposite of a divided self. But I defer this more complicated case of self-division in order to focus on the more simple case of George Orwell’s “Shooting an Elephant.” Orwell does not reflect all the variations in the structural principles of self-division I have tried to describe. The ethical and argumentative strategies of his essay are a bit too obvious. Nonetheless these all-too-obvious strategies may effectively support the more controversial aspects of my description of modern ethos.

**Orwell’s Ethos as an Aesthetic Manipulation of Self-Division**

Eric Blair was not a great social leader, but as “George Orwell” Blair became a highly visible and “charismatic” journalist. Orwell’s charisma is very much a function of his writing style, one that still serves as a model for many teachers of writing. T. R. Fyvel, a later friend of Orwell, describes the effect Orwell’s writing had on him:

I had spent the nineteen-thirties for the most part abroad, but already in that decade I had come to admire Orwell’s first novels and his journalism, and I thought of him as the English writer whom upon my return to England I would above all love to meet.35

A number of critics have commented on a sense of personal presence, the presence of the living writer, experienced while reading Orwell. George Woodcock observes:
What makes almost all of Orwell's essays still so fresh and fascinating, long after the occasion for their writing has lost its original interest, is the informality, the sense of linear development, which gives one the feeling of being inside the author's mind as he is developing his thoughts.\textsuperscript{36}

Alok Rai argues that the sense of honesty that Orwell's writing conveys stems in part from an "aesthetic of acknowledged self-division," which provides a kind of "all-purpose verification principle" making Orwell "in every position, the most dependable of witnesses, an 'unwilling' one."\textsuperscript{37} Repeatedly Orwell's persona represents the experience of a thinker in the process of balancing various opposing positions in particular acts of observation and judgment.

Orwell's own self-divisions are many, various, and fully documented. Early in life he suffered as a middle-class boy trying to be part of the Eton elite. Some writers argue that this sense of class division tormented Orwell all his life. He was a police officer in Burma who admired the Burmese. Later, he was an Eton graduate living as a bum in France and England, an Englishman fighting for socialism in Spain, a socialist fighting for the nationalism of England. As a writer, Orwell uses his dual perspectives on life to give depth and immediacy to his reporting. Rai observes that Orwell's persona, charged with self-division, is "valuable not so much for the individual findings, which are often commonplace, but rather because the persona is, in itself, a living record . . . of the process of finding out, of the difficulties of knowledge and commitment."\textsuperscript{38} Eric Blair, dramatizing himself in the persona of George Orwell, uses writing as a strategy for expressing and seeking a kind of intellectual mastery over his own many internal conflicts. Rai argues that Orwell writes by "working through, and simultaneously towards a mythical persona which is constituted precisely through the stress between contending elements, between contradictory yearnings and divided loyalties."\textsuperscript{39}

In the latter part of his life Orwell was both popular and widely read. However, many critics question his stature as a literary figure. The "aesthetics of self-division" that served Orwell well as a journalist and essayist did not work terribly well in his novels. Repeatedly, Orwell's central characters are passive and self-destructive. Rai describes these characters as having a sensibility "wastefully but also innocently at war with itself."\textsuperscript{40} Raymond Williams describes Orwell not as a great artist but as a vigorous thinker, in effect, a powerful rhetorician.\textsuperscript{41} But he is
not a dated rhetorician. "We have been using him, since his death," Williams says, "as the ground for a general argument." Orwell's essays demonstrate remarkable power in prodding others to take action or rethink positions. This power has waned little over the last forty years.

"Shooting an Elephant" continues to be very popular for teachers of freshman English. The piece has many of the qualities of "great literature," and at least one of the virtues of strong propaganda: a clear and powerful argument. Orwell wrote the essay with a political purpose. He was at the time a socialist solidly identified with anti-imperialist politics. But the essay does not sound like anti-imperialist propaganda because powerfully self-divided feelings characterize the ethos of the author.

The essay does not begin with a clear position statement. Instead, it begins with a confession:

In Moulmein, in Lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people—the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me. I was subdivisional police officer of the town and in an aimless, petty kind of way anti-European feeling was very bitter. As a police officer I was an obvious target [when playing soccer] and was baited whenever it seemed safe to do so. When a Burman tripped me up, the referee looked the other way and the crowd yelled with hideous laughter. This happened more than once. In the end the sneering yellow faces of young men . . . the insults hooted after me . . . got badly on my nerves.

All this was perplexing and upsetting. For at that time I had already made up my mind that imperialism was an evil thing and the sooner I chucked up my job and got out of it the better.

I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British. As for the job I was doing, I hated it more bitterly than I can perhaps make clear.

This principle of self-division is repeated many times and in many ways. Much of this internal division is obvious:

With one part of my mind I thought of the British Raj as an unbreakable tyranny, as something clamped down, in saecula saeculorum, upon the will of prostrate peoples; with another part I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts.

But much of the "message" of self-division is not so obvious: the irony of the essay's tone; the sharp division between the present "speaker" of the essay and the actor of the unfolding narrative; Orwell's powerful conclusion that curiously imagines the "scene" of the elephant's death as vastly "distant" from the actual scene of the elephant's bleeding body—
all of these elements and many others that I do not have the space to invoke press on the reader with subtle if undeniable rhetorical pressure.

Orwell’s expression of self-division serves a strong rhetorical function in the text’s ethical argument. The text does not begin by identifying with one pole of the political argument, so both sides of the issue can identify with the story. The essay does not attack the values of a reader and does not force a reader into a rigidly reactive and self-protective response; instead, the essay invites projection, sympathy, and identification. The essay has, indeed, some of the virtues of a Rogerian argument, insofar as Orwell is sympathetic to his opposition. Though anti-imperialist himself, he concedes certain virtues to the British Empire. “I did not know,” the persona says, “that the British Empire is dying, still less that it is a great deal better than the younger empires that are going to supplant it.” But Orwell’s essay is more complicated than a Rogerian argument. The author is not a person who “listens” sympathetically and nonjudgmentally to an argument of an “other.” Instead the position of the other is an aspect balanced within the author’s own position. And just as the author balances the two perspectives in conflict, the reader is invited to do the same.

As the story develops, the author’s self-division participates in an action that sharply reveals its own inner struggle and seeks to attain a kind of mastery over the various values in opposition. Readers of the essay may initially read merely for the plot, that is, to find out what happens to the author. But when readers become engaged in the plot they begin to participate in the unique nature of Orwell’s experiences. As the suspense of the plot increases, the reader’s feelings about the action become more intense, and this promotes an increasingly intense identification with the conflict experienced by the central character. In reading about an external conflict that produces an internal conflict, the reader’s internal self-components become responsive to the textual shape of the conflict represented through many textual strategies—plot, character, irony, symbol, imagery.

The text encourages the reader to identify closely with the character and scene, thus readers soon become identified with much more than a particular character in a particular circumstance. One possible result will be that a political position—one perhaps initially excluded from the reader’s own values—will receive increased personal attention. But there are several plausible developments. For example, a reader may have never
been fully conscious of two sides to the political issue and will, only through the essay, come to “see” and appreciate an opposing position. The rhetoric of Orwell’s essay, moreover, encourages this new seeing to be a highly charged emotional event. The reader may not “think” about a logical argument, but the principle of an “other side” becomes embedded within and amplified by the reader’s vicarious experience of self-division. In another outcome, a reader already experiencing two sides to the issue finds that the essay intensifies the conflict and pushes toward a rhetorically manipulated resolution.

In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell says that “every Anglo-Indian is haunted by a sense of guilt which he usually conceals . . . because there is no freedom of speech” in his or her society. “Shooting an Elephant” is an attempt to free speech from concealment and repression, thereby putting rhetorical pressure on self-structure. Every self contains two kinds of voices: those stifled and repressed, and those heard and idealized. Orwell’s essay seeks to empower marginalized voices within the self, to give them a hearing and then to idealize, for self-structure, those repressed voices that are heard. When marginalized voices within the self are thus empowered, they exert power over the thoughts and actions taken by the self; they “speak” in such a way that the ego can identify with them. In Orwell’s text, feelings of entertainment, suspense, and aesthetic pleasure appeal to the id’s desire for pleasure; attending to this pleasure, however, has consequences for the ego. A curtain of repression that normally suppresses anti-imperialist thought and feeling is lifted. A reader, reading for pleasure, gets “involved” in the story and wants to know more about what is happening “in” the text. But in so doing, readers hear (as their own “inner voice”) voices they have not fully heard before. Wanting to know what happens “in” the text, readers become attentive to what is happening “in” themselves. Rhetorical effects are thus achieved by the pursuit of pleasure and concomitant venting (and entitling) of repressed voices.

The resolution of the plot—the shooting of the elephant—rebaltances the rhetorical forces in conflict within the narrator’s “inner” self. The story, while representing external events, also at some level “expresses” the rebalancing activity that is at work within the self. Orwell comes to recognize that it is not only the natives who are betrayed by imperialism; imperialism betrays the people it is supposed to serve. Thus motives of self-interest, and not altruism, contribute to the strength of anti-imperi-
alist feeling: "I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys." The essay represents an ironic experience where a literal example of brute mastery expresses, paradoxically, a loss of mastery. Conversely, however, the recognition of loss of mastery contributes to a rhetoric of self-understanding: "I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys." It is hard not to see in this moment of self-recognition a fantasy of mastery that captures the ego much as in Lacan’s account of the mirror stage an image captures and situates the agency of the ego.

Orwell’s idealization of this moment of recognition, his capturing, recovering, and verbally mastering this moment through the act of writing the narrative, becomes a creative act that reshapes various organizations of feeling and value within the speaker. The author begins to formulate what he now begins to experience as his “real” feelings about imperialism, and he vigorously labels this enterprise as morally wrong. The essay ends with an extended description of a dying elephant, and there is a curiously intense identification between Orwell and the elephant. In some remote and overdetermined symbolic overlay, it seems to me, it is not an elephant that Orwell has killed in the essay, but an older version of the self. The experience of shooting the elephant and the experience of thinking and writing about it change the “shape” of the author’s self.

The text presents the reader with a curious argument. It does not tell the reader what to think. There is not, as in the case of an Aristotelian ethos, a character of intelligence and good will presenting a clear case for his side. The ethos of the text does not say: “Trust me. Do this.” Instead the ethos says: “This is what happened to me.” And through a kind of plotted intricacy, the instability of the text’s initial political position promotes its rhetorical effectiveness.

I am suggesting, by way of this discussion of Orwell, that self-division can provide a rhetorically effective form of argument. I am also suggesting that most modern arguments (and perhaps also more traditional arguments), when closely examined, reveal particular structures, and particular styles, of self-division. But I should emphasize that structures of self-division are not all equivalent, not all variations on the same theme. The mere expression of self-division, for example, is not always rhetorically effective. Often a reader responds to a representation of self-
division with confusion; either readers are confused themselves (and feel no rhetorical pressure), or they feel sure that the writer is. Many composition teachers, for example, find that students identify with one belief on the first page of their paper and identify with an opposing belief on the third. When asked what they really believe, they commonly reply that they are, indeed, confused. The teacher replies, "Well, if you are confused yourself, how do expect others to be convinced by your argument?" It is one thing to experience self-division and another to develop a rhetorically effective strategy for activating a reader's self-division. Consequently, teachers often instruct students to avoid expression of self-divisive feelings. But this may be the worst advice we can give. The point is not to avoid self-division, but to make rhetorical use of it and to develop a "style" or an apparently unified "voice" that "moves" a reader's self-structure. Self-division, if it is to work effectively, must be present as an ethos. It must speak as a recognizable voice, a voice that has "worked through" and crafted a sense—or a "fantasy"—of mastery over the pain of inner conflict.

I will further elaborate on my argument about ethos and mastery in chapter 4. This brief analysis of Orwell's essay cannot entirely prove the claims made in this chapter. My arguments have been broadly historical and deeply theoretical. Nonetheless, my analysis of Orwell should clarify aspects of the theoretical position I have described. Orwell's voice speaks with a particular rhetorical style—one might say a confessional style—of self-division. This self-division has powerful rhetorical effects because it reflects a particular dynamic of self-structure that "moves" us. Rhetorical effect is related to self-structure because both are organized psychological processes that direct attention, orchestrate affect, and provide form for human experience. Rhetorical effect and self-structure are best understood, then, not as language or representation, but as dynamic forces that give form to the various contents—cultural, biological, textual, psychological—that they work on. In turn, in working on these various contents, they change them. Change, after all, is what rhetoric is about.

Notes

7. Ibid., 304-5.
8. Ibid., 309-11.
9. Ibid., 309.
12. Ibid., 313.
13. Ibid., 315-17
27. Ibid., 48.

**SELF-STRUCTURE AS A RHETORICAL DEVICE**
34. Ibid., 150.
38. Ibid., 42.
39. Ibid., 45.
40. Ibid., 44.
42. Ibid.
44. Ibid., 58.
45. Ibid., 58.
47. Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant,” 60.