

THE RHETORIC OF VERISIMILITUDE

by

Kathleen Bingham

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STATEMENT OF DISSERTATION APPROVAL

The dissertation of Kathleen Bingham

has been approved by the following supervisory committee members:

Danielle Endres, Chair April 28, 2014
Date Approved

Tarla Rai Peterson, Co-Chair April 28, 2014
Date Approved

Leonard C. Hawes, Member April 28, 2014
Date Approved

Matthew Potolsky, Member April 28, 2014
Date Approved

James Anderson, Member April 28, 2014
Date Approved

and by Kent A. Ono, Chair of

the Department of Communication

and by David B. Kieda, Dean of The Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

In the dissertation, I use verisimilitude to explain first, how the force of visual rhetoric operates in works of art; second, for understanding how visual rhetoric influences audiences framed as both rhetorical and aesthetic viewing practices; and finally, how art is mediated in cognitive and emotional ways. Works of art call our attention to the power of these types of intercommunication because “as often as language teaches us to see,” Michael Ann Holly wrote, “art instructs us in telling.”

Specifically, this framework highlights that audiences of visual rhetoric rely on two types of viewing practices: first, a rhetorical practice that focuses on argument, function, and symbol and second an aesthetic practice that focuses on the sensory, emotional, and artistic features of an image. These practices help us understand how audiences historically may have experienced works of art that evoked an emotional response *and* a symbolic meaning.

This framework is simultaneously novel and traditional. It is novel because contemporary visual rhetoric scholarship has focused mainly on the functional and symbolic aspects of visual images and my dissertation (re)introduces aesthetic aspects of visual images in seeking to create a more holistic perspective on visual rhetoric. It is traditional because we can locate an aesthetic or visual theory in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, for example in the enigmatic metaphor, bringing-before-the-eyes. In two case studies in two chapters—Comparing Pity and Fear in *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* and The Rhetoric of *Vanitas*

Painting—I demonstrate that the effect of this metaphor is not explicitly cognitive but instead a perceptive and emotional capacity. Aristotle’s theory allows the audience to participate in the persuasive process and encompasses its role as the target of emotional appeals.

This dissertation offers an alternative approach to the study of visual rhetoric and reminds us that we should revive an ancient perspective on rhetoric. Ultimately, I argue that rhetoric circumscribes aesthetics, which is a challenge to the conventional assumption that rhetoric and aesthetics are different phenomena.

To Don

For his steadfastness and compassion

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CHAPTER 1

THE RHETORIC OF VERISIMILITUDE

... we prefer seeing to everything else. The reason is that [sight], most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things.
Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, 980a

... because a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing.
Kenneth Burke

Overview

It was not when I was 18 or 21 that I fell in love with Dutch 17th century painting. Then, on my semester abroad in Paris, I preferred Monet's atmospheric shores. When was it that my eye grew fond of paths crossing rutted flatlands, blasted trees, and forsaken ruins by painters whose names I could barely pronounce? Dutch realism was at first (well) just a little bit dull. Slowly and with time, Dutch art began to reveal its symbolic metaphors, its rich, complex, and exquisite aesthetic detail.

So, it is fair to question why 17th century landscape painter Aelbert Cuyp—who concentrated on naturalized realism—would paint glowing cows. Was it because they were simply there? Undoubtedly not. The cow is but one metaphor for the Dutch. Holland was the cow. Superior to any other cow, it was the source of prosperity and well-being for the nation as a whole. The pastoral beast contented on Cuyp's foreground

stands in for “freedom, security and the tranquility of living life in accord with nature.”¹ There is something of the sacramental rite in the way Cuyp chose to portray the cows and the glow hanging over the city. The motif appears as homage to scriptural motif, a reminder that the symbolic nature of Dutch art is not that far from the meditative and its Biblical antecedents.

Art is fiction. We are not perturbed that Cuyp’s cows, so neatly at home in their landscape, are not precisely the cows we may have seen, rather they are a *verisimilitude* or type of representation. The concept of verisimilitude guides this dissertation. It is the process in which fiction becomes plausible. As audience to fiction, we willingly suspend our disbelief to justify nonrealistic elements in art or literature and engage with the representation.² The process enables communication between an audience and artwork or drama. We know that we are watching an actor or looking at marks on a canvas, but we willingly accept them as representational in order to experience what the poet or artist is attempting to convey. More than a copy of nature and reality, verisimilitude is a type of truth likeness or *mimesis*.³ Verisimilitude re-presents a plausible reality in visual form, relying on both resemblances and culturally representative metaphors. To be significant for a situated audience, works of art should demonstrate a degree of reality, or verisimilitude.

In the dissertation, I use verisimilitude to explain how the force of visual rhetoric

¹ Alan Chong, Wouter Kloek, Celeste Brusati, *Still Life Paintings from the Netherlands, 1550 –1720*, (Amsterdam, Waanders Publishing, 2000); Arthur Wheelock Jr., *Aelbert Cuyp*, 2001, 16.

² The idea was put forth in English by the poet and aesthetic philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who suggested that if a writer could infuse a “human interest and a semblance of truth” into a fantastic tale, the reader would suspend judgment concerning the implausibility of the narrative. <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/biographia.html>.

³ *Poetics* is Aristotle’s treatise on mimesis. He stated that human beings are mimetic beings: they create texts (art) that reflect and represent reality. Heath, *Poetics*.

involves both rhetorical and aesthetic viewing practices and how the term is a heuristic framework for understanding how visual rhetoric influences audiences. Specifically, my claim in this framework highlights that audiences of visual rhetoric who lived in a particular milieu relied on two types of viewing practices: 1) a rhetorical practice that focuses on argument, function, and symbol and 2) an aesthetic practice that focuses on the sensory, emotional, and artistic features of an image. These practices help us understand how situated audiences may have experienced works of art that evoked an emotional response *and* a symbolic meaning.

Rather than a theory, the dissertation offers an approach to visual understanding. The lenses, concepts, and method include discussion, analysis, and evidence in case studies and demonstrate how we can frame as practices the way art might have been viewed and why this matters to visual rhetoric.

This framework is simultaneously novel and traditional. It is novel because contemporary visual rhetoric scholarship has focused mainly on the functional and symbolic aspects of visual images, and my dissertation (re)introduces aesthetic aspects of visual images in seeking to create a more holistic perspective on visual rhetoric. It is traditional because we can locate an aesthetic or visual theory in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. My dissertation offers an alternative approach to the study of visual rhetoric and reminds us that we should revive an ancient perspective on rhetoric.

Ultimately, I argue that rhetoric circumscribes aesthetics, which is a challenge to the conventional assumption that rhetoric and aesthetics are different phenomena. In this study I am interested in using verisimilitude as a lens to show how works of art can be analyzed as viewing practices mediated in visual and verbal ways. Works of art call our

attention to the power of visual and verbal intercommunication because “as often as language teaches us to see,” Michael Ann Holly wrote, “art instructs us in telling. The exchange works actively in both directions.”⁴ Sidney Zink’s remarks focus our attention on how aesthetics mediates and completes rhetoric:

I think there is a simple way out of the dilemma of the . . . [work of art’s] immediate aesthetic value and the symbolic [rhetorical] nature of its medium. This is to recognize that linguistic meanings are, like colors . . . themselves particular qualities.⁵

Much as verbal depictions rhetorically confine what we are prompted to see, visual depictions contain our verbal responses. Rhetorical viewing shapes what we imagine we see. Conversely, visual texts foster, interrogate, and display visual and expressive elements when words fail. Zink suggests we regard rhetoric and aesthetics as types of visual understanding. Symbolic concepts and experiential perceptions focus our attention on two different but important dimensions.

The above provides a brief overview of the theme of the dissertation. This dissertation is a rhetorical project. It extrapolates from certain classical theories and concepts as a way to understand aesthetic and rhetorical viewing practices and how these rhetorical viewing practices in the chapters merge form and content.

The next section explains the dissertation’s purpose, goals, and research questions. A second section establishes definitions of terms important to understanding the discussion, analysis, and case studies in the dissertation. The section is a rationale for the terms and how they will appear in the dissertation chapters. A third section presents the theoretical framework for viewing practices of works of art. The fourth section

⁴ Michael Ann Holly, *Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of Image*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 11.

⁵ Sidney Zink, “The Poetic Organism,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, (XL11 1945), 119–120.

presents a literature review of seminal works. The fifth section explains a method for viewing works of art using the heuristic of verisimilitude. The sixth section previews the case studies for chapters. A conclusion synthesizes work in a brief observation and offers directions for future work.

Goals, Purpose, and Research Questions

The dissertation's goal is to extend the scope of visual rhetoric by utilizing insights from linguistics and art history and reviving classical rhetorical concepts to better account for the role of aesthetics in visual rhetoric. The investigation expands the scope of the subfield of visual rhetoric by examining ways audiences may have viewed works of art.

The purpose of the dissertation is to examine two sides of visual rhetorical analysis: symbolic meaning and aesthetic experience. Viewing is itself a communicative artifact. So, if viewing art is a relationship between art and the viewer, then investigating the way a situated audience may have practiced viewing shows how viewing mediates works of art. Whether these particular audiences were aware of correspondences of objects—cultural, religious, and artistic *techne*—under examination depends on the criteria specific audiences discussed in the chapters used to test these discriminations. Rhetoric interprets art in symbolic ways; aesthetics evaluates artistic properties.

The key that makes possible the transmission between an artifact and its situated audience lies in the concept of perception. Perception is first a manner a particular audience may see an image and second, how that audience may perceive an idea within an image.

Intertwined in the milieus I discuss is the ancient understanding of rhetoric and

aesthetics (or art theory) as types of perceptive visualizations of images and ideas. The ancient idea of perception is the faculty of awareness, according to Aristotle: to the thinking soul, images serve *as if* [my italics] they were contents of perception. When perception operates in a rhetorical sense it enables a particular audience to discern symbolic meaning; when it operates in an aesthetic sense it relates only to *having* these discriminations. The perceptive lens creates questions of *what* (the aesthetic) and *how* (the symbolic) milieu's audience may have visualized in practice. In other words, *what* a situated audience may see is color, line, and brush strokes; *how* they may have seen is influenced by the period's cultural frame.

The dissertation will further the examination of how art is an appropriate subject of rhetorical investigation; it will suggest how examining viewing as rhetorical and aesthetic practices in historical frames contributes to the subfield of visual rhetoric. No study has yet probed an approach to art in this manner.

Research Questions

1. If, as Sonja Foss has indicated, rhetoric is defined as “the human use of symbols to communicate,”⁶ then
 - a) Is the purpose of art to communicate as rhetoric and propose meaning?
 - b) Must art be symbolic?
2. What difference does the historical or cultural framework make to our understanding of rhetorical and aesthetic viewing?
3. What difference does aesthetics make to the subfield of visual rhetoric?

⁶ Sonja K. Foss, “Theory of Visual Rhetoric.” *Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, and Media*, Ken Smith; Sandra Moriarty; Keith Barbatsis, (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2005), 4.

Definitions

This section defines the terms important to this dissertation and how they support the purpose, goals, and questions I am proposing. Each term stands in relation to other terms; the terms are the guiding concepts that will undergird dissertation chapters.

Aesthetics summons commonplace associations of feelings and sensibilities. In the dissertation, aesthetics is broadly more of an approach to the *what* of artistic content. The question of *how* things appear is generally a rhetorical question. When art engages with those who become audience to it, aesthetics enables consideration of the experience of those addressed. Aesthetics relates philosophically to the sensibility of *having* discriminations—and describing experientially—what we see through the capacity of perception. Aesthetics embraces reasoning the integrity of artistic properties. When art is judged aesthetically, artistry, form, color, and movement are important.

Aesthetics was coined in the German form *Ästhetik* by Alexander Baumgarten in 1735. Derived from the Greek, it meant esthetic, sensitive, sentient; it is the “perceptible to the senses.” Designated as a new branch of philosophic inquiry, Baumgarten defined the discipline broadly as “the science of perception.”⁷ He understood that the arts constitute a distinctive and significant realm of “sensuous cognition,” in which emotion plays an important part. He specified how artistic judgment relies on discrimination at a sensory level and examines art’s effect and affect. Overall, he was mainly concerned with the nature of perceptual knowledge conveyed through the arts.

Immanuel Kant specifies separate realms for aesthetics and reason (*Critique of Judgment* 1790). Aesthetics carries no proposition; rather it is “objective purposive.”

⁷ *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason: Background Source Materials*. Watkins, ed., Project Gutenberg, 2009). (Chapter 3 contains a partial translation of the ‘Metaphysics’), A20/B3422.

[B]y an aesthetical Idea I understand that representation of the Imagination which. . . cannot be completely compassed and made intelligible by language. . . . [It] is the counterpart (pendant) of a rational Idea. . . .

The Imagination (as a productive faculty of cognition) is very powerful in creating another nature, as it were, out of the material that actual nature gives it . . . and by it we remold experience, always indeed in accordance with analogical laws. . . .

Such representations of the Imagination we may call Ideas, partly because they at least strive after something which lies beyond the bounds of experience, and so seek to approximate to a presentation of concepts of Reason (intellectual Ideas), thus giving to the latter the appearance of objective reality.⁸

Kant speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things, similar to Zink's view. If one proclaims something to be beautiful, then one requires the same liking from others and judges not just for the self but for everyone (a variation on the Categorical Imperative).

Aesthetics could be said to originate (but is not named) as a type of visual theory in Aristotle's discussion of metaphor in *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* "vivifying language [and image] . . . the imagistic bringing-before-the-eyes,"⁹ and bringing-fear-and-pity (emotion) before-the-eyes in *Poetics* and as phantasmal viewing discussed in *De Anima*. Chapter 1 of the dissertation examines the idea of bringing-pity-and-fear-before-the-eyes by comparing how pity and fear are rendered in *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*. The texts show specifically how orators and actors use gestures and movement (*energeia*) to rhetorically perform and communicate emotions. Aesthetics functions as dialectic to rhetoric. Aristotle's theory of visualization first appears in *Poetics*, considered the older of the two books, but *Rhetoric* examines his visual theory in detail.

Ekphrasis is a literary and vivid description of a work of art. Anciently, the term referred to a description of any thing, person, or experience, as in Homer's extended

⁸ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Div. 1, part 22.

⁹ Aristotle, *Rhet.* III.

description of Achilles Shield in Iliad, Book 18, and in Horace's *ut picture poesis*¹⁰ in which one medium of art relates to another medium by defining and describing its essence and to illuminate form; it provides liveliness for audiences.

Emotion is the effect and affect that art produces in audiences in aesthetic ways such as sadness, praise, and joy. The response is associated with visual metaphor as well in *Rhetoric*.

Energeia is the human capacity to activate visual effects. Discussed in *Rhetoric*, *energeia* in metaphors signify, transfer, or associate a familiar thought; *energeia* achieves a desired effect by aiding audiences to see or visualize images. Aristotle actualizes metaphor in the term *energeia* to show how emotions come before-the-eyes in a visual sense. Aristotle does not discuss how *energeia* achieves its desired effect in metaphor, only to indicate that *metaphorai*'s origin is in perception. Two examples are analogy, such as “. . . the stone is to Sisyphus, ” (a symbolic thought in perceptive action) and “now and then the Greeks *darting* forward on their feet”¹¹ (visualized action), and transference: exchanging or associating one concept or image for another as in the exemplary Homer—“he makes everything move and live, and *energeia* is motion.”¹² “[And] In all his work, he gains his fame by creating activity . . . then to the plain rolled the ruthless stone’ and ‘the arrow flew, ’ and [the arrow was] ‘eager to fly. . . .”¹³ The vivid descriptions activate visual and cognitive mechanisms.

¹⁰ That poetry and painting might be linked was not original to Horace, though he coined the phrase, *ut pictura poesis*. Horace would have known the work of Plutarch, who attributed the quotation “Poema pictura loquens, pictura poema silens” to Simonides of Keos in his book *De Gloria Atheniesium*. Plutarch employed the association to laud historians who wrote imagistic prose so that readers could *see* the moments they were reading. (*The Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms*), 288.

¹¹ Aristotle, *Rhet.* III, 1114b, 28–9.

¹² Aristotle, *Rhet.* III, 1412a.

¹³ Aristotle, *Rhet.* III, 1412a.

Richard Moran says, “It is no exaggeration to say that the primary virtue of metaphor for Aristotle is the *ability* [my italics] to set something vividly before the eyes of the audience.”¹⁴ Richard Moran’s point emphasizes visual capacity: bringing-before-the-eyes is a gloss in terms of *energeia* and *epideictic*, the visual activity that makes inanimate things appear alive. We *see* movement; “the explication of *energeia* in metaphor is progressively refined from the representation of movement to the representation of something alive. . . .”¹⁵ John Kirby’s point is similar: “*energeia* and bringing-before-the eyes appear synonymous since metaphor and *energeia* overlap.” George Kennedy says that *energeia* is characteristic of Aristotle’s emphasis on the visual: “it is sometimes but not always personification.”¹⁶

Epideictic was historically a unified theory that intertwined aesthetic excellence *and* cultural meaning in the context of community values. In the first sense, the term relates composition and intention, artistic inventiveness and scientific order and designates excellence of technique in art and in performance. In the second sense, the term conveys civic and aesthetic virtue. *Epideictic* in the dissertation applies to both aesthetic judgment of material artifact and to symbolic rhetorical judgment of art. Each aspect conveys types of audience identity.

Jeffery Walker suggests that the *epideictic* shapes and cultivates “basic codes of values and beliefs by which a society or culture lives . . . it [*epideictic*] shapes the ideologies and imaginaries . . . the deep commitments . . . constituting the very grounds

¹⁴ Newman, *Aristotle and Style*. (Lewiston, NY, Edwin Mellon Press, 2005), 232.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 109–110.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

of culture with which a society shapes itself.”¹⁷

Lawrence Rosenfield’s reading of Aristotle shows that the purpose of *epideictic* is simply and solely to display the luminosity of timeless excellence. It makes known and *shows forth* an idea or image or techniques of excellence in order to persuade us to gaze at the presumed moral aura glowing from within works of art. The interpretation emphasizes that effects of technique combine with moral affects to edify audiences. Critically, Rosenfield asserts that the fleeting nature of the appearance of excellence is in the present rather than a sustained reality. In the 15th century, audiences understood that the term’s moral virtue was synonymous with displays of artistic merit. The practice and interpretation continued into the emerging Scientific Age in the 17th century.

Identification is the process in which a situated audience connects on a moral, personal, or experiential level. The term draws on rhetorical conditions that create powerful moments of symbolic identification with works of art. Morality and religion are types of identification: they convey a communion between art and community values. For example, 17th century Dutch audiences identify moral and nationalistic values and meaning within art.

Kenneth Burke’s *Grammar* and *A Rhetoric of Motives* shows how visual metaphors give voice to the way contemporary audiences affiliate and identify with works of art—and the ambiguity that exists between those audiences and their cherished values, especially moral identities. Burke describes as rhetorical any encounter that prompts a “persuasion ‘to attitude, ’” which would permit poetic engagement.¹⁸ Rather

¹⁷ *Rhetorics of Display*. Lawrence, J. Prelli, ed, “Introduction.” (Columbia, SC: USC, University of Carolina Press, 2006). 3, 4; 154.

¹⁸ Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1950), 144.

than rhetoric as persuasion, identification includes any experience that does the work of “symbolic inducement of social cooperation.” Burke says in *Grammar*,

. . . the simplest case of persuasion is less a sort of argument than it is a kind of human relationship, you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, *gesture* [my italics], tonality, people interact using symbols and are influenced by that interaction to understand themselves and their relation to each other differently. That different understanding prompts a change of identity, and this change may involve identification not just with mankind or the world in general, but with some kind of congregation that also implies some related norms of differentiation and segregation.¹⁹

Gregory Clark observes that “[Burke’s] . . . key term of identification teaches the lesson that rhetorical power operates well beyond the boundaries of conventional public discourse”²⁰ and includes a full range of symbols mined by audiences. In Chapter 3, entitled *The Visual Rhetoric of Vanitas*, I discuss interconnections between identities of 17th century Dutch Calvinists; how these audiences encounter symbols and align themselves with them in religion and in secular works of art. The aesthetic experiences are as rhetorical for audiences as listening to a sermon.

Mimesis is sometimes interpreted as imitation; however, ancient perspectives show that the term means much more. The concept is central to the dissertation because of its rhetorical and aesthetic significance. Aristotle emphasizes the visual and material status of works of art because the meaning of mimesis is to *embody* or *enact* likeness from an art’s material form. What we see or hear *is* art’s significance; mimesis resides in the representation of the object itself.

It is striking, for example, that Aristotle emphasizes in his discussion of perception and of metaphors that the visual action of placing *objects* (or emotion as

¹⁹ Ibid., 50.

²⁰ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 5.

object) “before-the-mind’s-eye, ” “this is that” is a mimetic action that requires *energeia* or activity to enable the transference.²¹

Nelson Goodman diverts attention away from the mimetic nature of the arts: the “cognitive turn in aesthetics” in *Languages of Art* (1968) explains that when we see a visual representation in art we are viewing a symbol system. We discover in *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, however, that the language of art is fundamentally mimetic, not symbolic.

Stephen Halliwell’s insight shows that in mimesis and in metaphor we do not so much consciously observe or make a connection; rather we *see* one thing—the material work of art—as another in the representational field of the represented world. Halliwell says,

. . . if this is correct, we see that Aristotle’s idea of mimesis allows for the necessity and centrality of the mimetic medium: representational works do not offer us deceptive pseudo realities [as Plato claimed]. . . but the fictive signification of possible [plausible] reality in artistic medium that allow such reality to be recognized and responded to coherently . . . because mimetic works need *not* [my italics] . . . represent independently attested particulars. . . aesthetic understanding cannot be limited to matching a copy with a known original, nor can it be reduced to the merely factual and immediate registering that a certain kind of thing has been represented.²²

Whereas imitation attempts a copy of an original (Plato), mimesis re-enacts and re-presents in a nonliteral yet clear way. Chapter 2 specifically discusses how in art mimesis should be clearly separated from symbolic and semiotic interpretation because it is different in kind from language: it conveys understanding of the critical nature of the form or medium to other types of representational likenesses. The term helps explain the emotional impact and visual immediacy of a protagonist’s moving performance in an

²¹ Aristotle, *Rhet.*, III, 10; *Poetics*, VX, 11.1455a22–30.

²² Stephen Halliwell, *Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2002), 190–191.

Attic play or the polished brushstrokes on a vanitas canvas.

When Baumgarten and other 18th century aesthetic theorists spoke of art they meant preeminently, the *mimetic arts*. The term mistakenly came to be known as the “fine arts.” The 18th century misreading might explain why visual rhetoric dismisses mimetic representation from its field of study.

Perception premises the *what* and *how* of viewing practices. *De Anima* describes perception as “a synthesis and retention of sense-perceptions” and “applies [directs] thought to objects of sense-perception.”²³ In the dissertation, perception is a theory of reception and a general faculty. In the theory of reception, perception is the soul’s *capacity for awareness* of sensory experience (some scholars prefer body to soul). When perception is aesthetic, seeing in the largest sense is whatever we are aware of in art, the act of noticing itself and associated experiences of emotion in visual awareness of sensory objects. As a faculty, perception is the *capacity to enform* and change the affected thing’s becoming-like.

Audiences rhetorically transform a visual image into a concept, a symbol, or an emotion. Perception then enables us to receive sensory properties of works of art: colors, textures, other visual aspects of artistic forms; and interpret symbolic meaning. If we say an object seems to contain the craftsman’s soul, it is a way of imparting to some matter made to exemplify it. “. . . the perceptive faculty is in potentiality such as the object of perception already is in actuality.”²⁴ It is clear that Aristotle has both ideas in mind: reception designates a theory and a capacity. Perception then premises how aesthetic and rhetorical viewing practices evolve from ancient rhetorical understanding of the term.

²³ Aristotle, *de Anima* ii 5, 418a3–6; ii 12, 424a17–21.

²⁴ Aristotle, *de Anima* ii 5, 418a3–6.

Phantasia is sometimes interpreted simply as imagination. However, *phantasia* always entails perception and is cognitive *and* imaginative. It is an affectation that lies in our power whenever we choose to use it because it is always possible to call up mental pictures.²⁵ Aristotle sometimes recognizes *phantasia* as a distinct capacity, on par with perception and mind and imagination,²⁶ but it is not exactly any one of these entities. Chapter 1 introduces a type of visual theory in Aristotle. In the discussion, Aristotle distinguishes *phantasia* from perception in *De Anima* iii: it is “. . . that in virtue of which an image occurs in us involved in thoughts, dreams, and memories.” It is the faculty which produces, stores, and recalls the images used in a variety of cognitive and conceptual ways including guiding action.²⁷ Because he tends to treat *phantasia* pictographically, Aristotle seems to regard the images imagined in cognitive conceptions as representations or likenesses of external objects. In this sense, *phantasia* is required for mimesis—the focus is directed toward the material form. Imaginative thought requires images so that “whenever one contemplates, one necessarily at the same time contemplates in images.”²⁸ Michael Frede captures the broad meaning of the terms:

Phantasia does triple duty. It designates the *capacity*, the activity or *process*, and the *product* or the result. . . We have no single word in English that would do all three jobs. . . ‘appearance’ in a wider sense should be regarded as the central meaning of *phantasia* to which all functions of the terms are related. It would then be (i) the capacity to experience an appearance, (ii) the on-going appearance itself, and (iii) what appears.²⁹

In the dissertation, *phantasia* incorporates Frede’s terminology and links mimesis to

²⁵ Aristotle, *Rhet.*, 427b, 16–22.

²⁶ Aristotle, *de Anima* iii, 414b, 415a.

²⁷ Aristotle, *de Anima* iii, 428aa1-2; 429a4-7, and in *De Memoria* 1, 450a22–25.

²⁸ Aristotle, *de Anima* iii 8, 432a8-9, 431a16-17; *De Memoria* 1, 449b31–450a1.

²⁹ Martha C. Nussbaum and Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, “The Cognitive Role of *Phantasia* in Aristotle,” *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*, (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 279.

tragedian play and Dutch *vanitas* painting. Phantasia enables situated audiences to experience an appearance as emotion—and it enables creating meaning (aesthetic and rhetorical)—out of the experience of being with art.

Semiotics is the study of cultural sign processes (semiosis), analogy, metaphor, signification and communication, signs, and symbols. It is the study of the structure and meaning of language. Some visual rhetors such as Marguerite Helmers assert that the image is itself a carrier of meaning.³⁰ The chapters dispute this claim: symbolic meaning is instead a function of cultural interpretation *of*, not *in* art. Symbolic viewing of art is an example.

To Charles Sanders Peirce, semiotics is not a theory of knowledge but phenomenological representation. Things exist in a reality outside of what we perceive or think about them. The triadic theory includes icon or image—the index that raises in the viewer a memory of a similar icon—and the symbol, or the mental representation in the mind’s eye. Peirce calls the symbol metaphor. Peirce’s distinctions are useful to visual rhetoricians because they establish a formal terminology that considers different types of imagistic sign systems. Roland Barthes’ insight for visual rhetoric is that the assembling of the sign (object), the signifier (points to, indicates) and the signified (the referent, the object or idea being referred to) is a rhetorical act. Semiotics, or sign-use, is antirealist. This is because the core of semiotic theory in art history is by definition the factors involved in making and interpreting signs and the development of conceptual tools that help audiences grasp that process in the study of works of art.

In one sense, semiotics articulates the frame of cultural and environmental

³⁰ *Defining Visual Rhetorics*, Charles A. Hill, Marguerite Helmers (Nahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 64.

references important to interpreting works of art conceptually. Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson posit that historical context is constructed, is itself text, “and thus consists of signs that require interpretation”³¹ because context is an illusion. Rather than context, Culler proposes the term “‘framing’ . . . how signs are constituted by various discursive practices.”³² The sign or image points out but does not tell.

Barbie Zelizer believes that representation (mimesis) subjugates itself to rhetoric through subjectivity, voice, and contingency. Zelizer says we project “altered ends” when cultures interpret representations: inserting their desires and identity.³³ In one way, Zelizer is right: as I suggest, rhetoric circumscribes mimesis and symbolic meaning. However, Zelizer misses the point in asserting that mimesis (an artistic representation) is the way a thing appears in objective reality. Because art is fiction, art begins with how a particular audience senses an object of art as plausible fiction. When locating symbolic meaning becomes the primary purpose of art, the role of human emotion may be missed altogether.

Artistic judgment both interprets symbolic meaning and evaluates aesthetic properties. And the experience of art is aesthetic. Semiotics is but one interpretation of art. Particular audiences specify the aim—extrapolate meaning *from* objects—arbitrary, culture-specific meanings when they assign meaning to symbols such as desires and identity. Like cultural framing, mimetic framing establishes the centrality of the material form of art, thereafter how it is constituted, how signs become discursive practices.

³¹ Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, “Semiotics and Art History,” *The Art Bulletin* (Vol. 73, No. 2, June 1991), 174–298.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Robert Hariman, John Louis Lucaides. *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 7.

In the dissertation, mimesis is the more expansive term than semiotics because it circumscribes rhetorical idea *and* aesthetic experience. Rhetorical reading in the dissertation is the phenomenological realities of semiotics that Peirce proposes with the important caveat that Bal, Bryson, and Culler propose: that cultural context is not simply a priori or an epistemological-cultural given fact. Semiology is rhetorical interpretation of specific sign cultural systems: it extends *from* the object and is a type of visual text that gives way to interpretation.

Verisimilitude, paradoxically intensely personal and highly social, the term represents processes of artistic creation in mimesis outlined in *Poetics* and as a visual type of discerning in the ancient *epideictic*. Evident in the expressive metaphor, bringing-before-the-eyes, verisimilitude captures the idea that an image it brought into consciousness (creation), the specific audience conceives of its form, independent of cultural meaning. Verisimilitude is vital to art in 15th and 16th century Renaissance humanism. In the dissertation the term is a type of mimesis or representation of plausible reality in visual form; it is fiction, just as works of art are fiction.

The term permits art and explicit audiences to create truth-likenesses—visual resemblances and in culturally representative metaphors—authentically without worrying about the facts. The artist or playwright represents images imaginatively yet plausibly. The reader of art enters into a discourse with an artist and the visual text and agrees to suspend disbelief.³⁴ Actual truth then becomes less important than the art that conveys images and produces ideas. Rather than *seeing* a work of art *as* another thing, that

³⁴ Aesthetic philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge suggested that if a writer could infuse a “human interest and a semblance of truth” into a fantastic tale, the reader would suspend judgment concerning the implausibility of the narrative. *Biographia Literaria*, 1817, Chapter XIV, in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by H.J. Jackson, (Oxford, 1985), 314.

audience sees the visual representation *in terms of* the represented world as Halliwell has said. Verisimilitude is an important framework for understanding rhetorical and aesthetic viewing practices predicated on perception, phantasia, and *epideictic*. Verisimilitude is the overall theme of the dissertation.

Viewing practices are aesthetic and symbolic or taken together, visual rhetoric. The practices reveal different methods and behaviors: looking at works rhetorically in semiotic interpretation is different from viewing in the aesthetics of mimetic viewing. I am trying to present the tension between the two ways audiences evaluated the *effects* of art aesthetically and interpreted the *affects* in cultural meaning in art in symbolic ways. The two approaches in their opposition represent basic types. On the one hand, aesthetics' fully material externalized description (*ekphrasis*) reveals creative expression. A situated audience becomes *aware* of image in the foreground of consciousness. The display is the unmistakable meaning of form itself.

Aesthetic viewing momentarily releases the viewer from the existential burden of not knowing. Aesthetics in the dissertation is ontological, epistemological, and historical. Ontologically, aesthetic viewing is simply that a particular audience has awareness of an image. Epistemologically, aesthetic viewing identifies the artistic properties of art. Last, aesthetics has its origins in ancient rhetoric—the critical theory informs a mimetic meaning of rhetorical understanding in *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*.

However, rhetorical viewing brings cultural meaning into high relief, the influence of the concealed or unexpressed background quality, the multiplicity of meanings, the need for interpretation, culturally specific claims, development of historical antecedents, and a preoccupation with the cultural problem. Audiences of a

milieu that practice rhetorical viewing interpret cultural values or codes *within* art as to explain art's symbolic meaning. Examples include the tradition of *reading* art as text in the ancient tradition of *ekphrasis*. In addition, rhetorical meanings reveal a good deal about the nature of visual rhetoric as a form of cultural communication and visual culture. As a viewing practice, rhetoric depends for its veracity on an explicit audience's ability to construct and display concepts, desire, and identity in works of art.

If an assumption exists that art (and genre) competes for attention through effective and affective strategies, then that audience examines selected works of art for the implication and impact of each viewing strategy.

The framework suggests that the interpretation and evaluation of art in the ancient meaning of rhetorical capacities of art embrace, rather than move beyond, aesthetic, expressive response. Emotional pleasure is more than cultural desire; rather when a particular audience reads and identifies with the object of contemplation, works reconnect the viewer with the human response to sensuous satisfactions. Aesthetic judgment *and* rhetorical judgment occur all at once but seem to occur separately. Indeed, readers of art discern and dismantle each judgment as two separate viewing practices.

Visual metaphor, notes Stephen Halliwell, is the pleasurable affect in understanding of metaphor is its *mimetic imaginative* display of linguistic and visual representations unified,

. . . our response to a *mimetic* work must always rest on the cognitive recognition of representational significance; but that such a response is necessarily a *compound reaction* [my italics] to the represented reality and to the artistic rendering of it. The compound quality of aesthetic experience has the important implication that it is wrong to regard the two components as properly independent. . .³⁵

³⁵ Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: ancient texts and moderns problems*. (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2002), 65.

Halliwell's point ties to Aristotle's exemplary trope, the metaphor in *Rhetoric* that emphasizes the visual aspect of emotion, the subject of the first chapter. When viewers of all milieus *see* pity and fear come before-the-eyes, they enjoy the experience in emotion in proper proportion to the quality of artistic representation (*epideictic teche*). They do not *first* see pity and fear as a means of persuasion and then *feel* painful emotions. Rather the affect produced is pleasure artfully portrayed. In the case of metaphor's imaginative affect in tragedy, Aristotle is analyzing what Foss might refer to as a *dimension* of its creativity. Halliwell stresses the poet's search for ". . . vividness will be served by strong imagination."³⁶ Aristotle's detail enables the rhetorical nature of metaphorical representation to fuse with aesthetic understanding of metaphor: the soul never thinks without image in the mind.³⁷

The Aesthetics of Mimesis emphasizes a compounding effect: delight and learning from metaphor. The richest metaphors enable us to see or visualize one thing in terms of another.³⁸ Cicero notes, "there is no mode of embellishment . . . that throws a greater luster upon language."³⁹ Aristotle says, "metaphor must be transferred from things related, but not obviously so as it is a sound intuition in philosophy to see similarities between things. . ."⁴⁰

In the dissertation, visual metaphor is evident in *reading into* works' cultural associations explained linguistically; the perspective enabled specific audiences to interpret and make meaning of art. A rhetorical viewing in Chapter 2 explains how

³⁶ Ibid., 25–26.

³⁷ Aristotle, *Rhet.* III; *Poet.* 21.

³⁸ Aristotle, *Rhet.* III, 1404.

³⁹ *On Orators and Oratory*, *Journal of Black Studies* (Vol. 18, No. 3, Mar., 1988), 341.

⁴⁰ Aristotle, *Rhet.*, 1412a, 10–13.

audiences of the period produced small sermons of moral import by discerning works metaphorically. For example, the metaphor, *vanity, vanity, all is vanity* is culturally and religiously linked to images of particular objects of value—such as books or swords—curiously paired with skulls and candles in Dutch *vanitas* paintings in the 17th century.

I.A. Richards explained his theory in *Tenor-Vehicle Model of Metaphor*.⁴¹ For example, the concept *vanity* is the *tenor* or the subject. The concept is the *vehicle* or image that conveys the subject—in Dutch art, painted swords, skulls, and candles. When visual metaphor ornaments an image, the vehicle and tenor intermingle visually and linguistically in the mind's eye, such as in the phrase, *bringing-fear-and-pity-before-the-eyes* in *Poetics*.

Visual rhetoric's growth is the study of visual imagery in rhetorical studies. The study has resulted in an emerging recognition that visual images provide access to a range of human experience not always available through the study of discourse alone. The major shift in the field of rhetoric has focused an increasing amount of the discipline's attention on visual objects and the rhetorical process of interpreting art. Whether particular audiences decipher the variances between practices, each subtlety does demonstrate forms of communication and responses available to audiences. Recent studies in visual rhetoric have evolved from semiotic analysis to suggest that images contain and communicate symbolic meaning and function as ideological forces in society. Moreover, the symbolic is essentially a linguistic dimension.

As currently practiced in the field of communication, visual rhetoric unhinges analysis of pleasure/expressiveness aspects in works in favor of a focus on art's

⁴¹ Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin, John Costello, trans. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 96, 258.

functionality and propositions. For example, *Defining Visual Rhetorics* explains the primary difference between the Sister Arts tradition (*ut pictura poesis*—a picture is like a poem from Horace) developed by Jean Hagstrom in 1958—and visual rhetoric. Helmers notes, visual rhetoricians are not working with correspondences between written works and visual images so much as they are asking how visual images are themselves *carriers* (not producers) of meaning.⁴²

The dissertation challenges this notion. Visual rhetorical analysis of art does make certain claims and propositions on art. The claim I am proposing is that rhetoric—dating from visual practice in ancient mimetic form examined in *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*—embraces perception and emotional expression of art in aesthetic ways while still advancing symbolic interpretation.

Works of art (art) are human-made creations such paintings, literature, and theater; art is considered in its expressive artistic effect and in its role as emotional affect on audiences. Art in the *epideictic* is contemplative and morally edifying. The term helps explain the aesthetic effect of art's luminosity: the timelessness of an image as it appears in the here and now (Rosenfield). Art's affect prompts the viewer to read into art's meaning. Foss explains artifact (art) as a cultural and creative human production. Art's effects and its affect situate audiences as mediators of cultural practices and as critics of art; response to art displays audience emotion and identity. The dissertation simply uses the word art when referring to works of art.

⁴² Hill and Helmers, *Defining Visual Rhetoric*, 65.

Theoretical Framework

Aesthetics and rhetoric identify two distinct ways audiences of a particular age engage with visual discourse. They are not opposites but consider different assumptions and methods. In the dissertation, the dilemma of art's aesthetic value and the rhetorical dimension of its medium with its symbols and values recognizes that artistic properties and cultural meanings are, as Zink has observed, "themselves particular qualities" of art and require different types of analyses.⁴³

The concepts of visualization from ancient texts expand the analysis of how rhetorical judgment and aesthetic judgment are two aspects of the rhetoric of appearances. Specifically, I will investigate the practices as types of rhetoric that display the rhetorical and aesthetic viewing practices of situated audiences. Verisimilitude is the heuristic for understanding how traditional rhetorical theory—especially mimesis— influence situated audiences. Viewing art can be seen as a contested set of practices that disputes the very definition of rhetoric itself. How practices become evident in each milieu is what becomes interesting in the chapters.

Of critical importance to both viewing approaches is the foundational concept of perception from Aristotle, not just as a viewing practice, but rather an audience's capacity to view art aesthetically and rhetorically. The approach integrates the styles or types of viewing practices: 1) rhetoric focuses on the engagement of art and particular audiences though an investigation of symbolic practice, and 2) aesthetics focuses on the experience of viewing in sensory, emotional, and artistic features of the image. The viewing practices intertwine the ways situated audiences could have viewed and experienced art

⁴³ see note 4.

by reviving the ancient meaning of rhetoric that considers both the impact of visual image and possible symbolic meanings. The theoretical framework is more an approach than a theory: it brings us closer to understanding how renewing our understanding of ancient text contributes to visual rhetoric in the 21st century. The framework includes evidence for the viewing practices that refer to examples from the Attic and the 17th century including proposed rhetorical and visual analysis for each.

Aesthetic viewing focuses on identifying the *what* of art and its particular effects on audiences. In one sense, it describes compositional and artistic elements in a work, and in another sense, shows how aesthetic experience is an independent realm; both are achieved through mimesis. When a viewer sees and studies the material nature of an image—performance on the Attic stage and daubs of paint—the analysis requires reflective skills different from those needed to identify an image’s symbolic nature. We can examine the process that condition works’ being viewed in an aesthetic manner in three ways: 1) by investigating diverse properties of the piece that make up the peculiar pictorial style and wit of an artist, 2) by the qualities that make it enduring (*epideictic*), and 3) by the emotional and conceptual appeal of the composition and material.

Rhetorical viewing compares how symbolic meaning could have been discerned from art. In traditions such as the practice of reading works of art as visual text and as cultural metaphor, rhetoric evolved beginning in the 20th century into its sister process, semiology. It too codifies art by framing symbolic meaning in historical time and place. The chapter show how works display *and* produce symbolic affect. Rhetorical viewing includes identifying cultural and religious values, identities, and philosophical propositions important to situated audiences. Context or the cultural frame is also vital to

understanding. I build on Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson's idea (discussed further on) that historical context or frame is illusion: the frame is itself a constructed text that requires interpretation of its lexicon and discursive practices. For example, names, labels, and narratives are concepts that direct attention to whatever is rhetorically and visually significant or desirable in a particular image. Thus, a skull conveys symbolic and metaphoric importance in the 17th century Dutch *vanitas*. Rhetorical *looking* designates a type of viewing as gaze and desire to see a thing as if it is another thing. James Elkins has said, "Looking is never innocent, nor is it final."⁴⁴ Visual metaphor exhibits dual characteristics: it directs the eye to both aesthetic experience and to rhetorical representations of meaning interpreted as cultural/religious concepts. The investigation of viewing practices of art is located in two historical milieus in case studies.

I suggest that the visual rhetoric of a work of art is more than analysis of discrete objects that invite propositions and questions of functionality. Rather, I infer that visual rhetoric consists both of cultural symbolic analysis and visual analysis of the material object, two distinct processes: one interpretative, the other evaluative but linked in rhetorical practice. Visual rhetoric evolves not only from the way particular audiences/critics interpret what is taken to be art's propositions; but is alternatively informed by how they discern the material nature and characteristics of art in perceptive ways without attaching symbolic meaning. The expanded definition highlights the importance of audiences having perceptual discrimination. What is more, the term now conforms to the broad discussion defined by Sonja Foss: "all the visual ways humans try to communicate."⁴⁵ Visual rhetoric designates that art and the ways audiences viewed art

⁴⁴ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 65.

⁴⁵ *Handbook of Visual Communication*, Sonja Foss, "Theory of Visual Rhetoric," 14–152.

is not limited to reason and identity, but also includes memory, expectation, imagination, and emotion. Ultimately, I will argue that rhetoric circumscribes aesthetics, which challenges the conventional assumption that rhetoric and aesthetics evolved from different phenomena.

Justification of the Framework

A historical view of material objects has generally engaged issues of spectatorship, pleasure, and desire. The aesthetic condition becomes full-blown in 18th century Enlightenment when the viewer takes hold of determining the criteria of what is beautiful. The commonplace interpretation of historical aesthetics betrays and limits an expansive view of aesthetics that includes visualization. Current scholarship in the subfield of visual rhetoric overlooks aesthetic origins which evolved from within the ancient traditions of rhetoric and is integral to it. What is at stake is the critical dialectic between the *what* of aesthetics and the *how* of rhetoric as symbolism in communication.

My concern is that visual rhetoric can analyze art symbolically without speaking of the aesthetics of art as if visual analysis has nothing to do with the special matters of hearing, seeing, imagining, or understanding. Visual rhetoric's emphasis on reductive logic and historical contextualization reduces the mimetic impulse that has undergirded analysis of art from Plato and Aristotle. In current studies of visual rhetoric, art relies on the epistemological perspective alone. Rhetorical viewing has reduced art to a Platonic facsimile in the service of cultural myths and intellectual justification.

The disputed status of aesthetic experience arises from the evolution of rhetoric to an exclusively linguistic art. Visual rhetoric often equates aesthetics of an earlier age with 21st century aesthetics. The discipline conflates changing styles—ones that come and go

along with changing social and technological conditions—with aesthetics.

The understood goal of visual rhetoric in the field of communication is to interpret art as it operates as cultural production and symbolic proposition. The symbolic response to works, although critical, leaves out the range of mimetic perspectives that analyze both the impact of the effective properties of the image and the affective response of audiences situated in a historical frame. Current rhetorical analysis of art that fails to consider the impact of aesthetic judgment is of concern to John Dewey: “If viewing works of art is not also aesthetic in nature, it is a colorless and cold recognition of what has been done, used as a stimulus to the next step in a process that is essentially mechanical.”⁴⁶

To explore the problem under the rubric of rhetoric is altogether correct because at the heart of the rhetorical tradition lies the human capacity to create and reason in and through visual text and language. Argumentation is one side of critical interpretation of art but leaves out an important part of how humans visualize art from an aesthetic perspective. The introduction of a perceptual lens as the foundation for a viewing theory remedies what I perceive to be the problem: when visual rhetoric only considers symbolism it subsumes aesthetics. Therefore, the unique approaches and problems of rhetoric should discern cultural, symbolic, *and* aesthetic perception.

Without delineating modes of viewing, visual rhetoric must rely exclusively on analysis of how visual images carry cultural meaning, and offer audiences propositions. For example, Anthony Blair claims that visual images are not capable of arguments;

⁴⁶ John Dewey, “Aesthetic Experience as a Primary Phase and as an Artistic Development,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, (9, 1950), 56–58.

rather they offer audiences propositions.⁴⁷ Margurite Helmers agrees and asserts, “. . . products [of the aesthetic tradition] bear little resemblances to what rhetoricians are now investigating”⁴⁸ What is more, she claims that cultural meaning can be accessed and examined from *within* the image.⁴⁹ I dispute the claim. I propose instead to show that visual rhetoric places too much focus on conceptual judgment and ignores how aesthetic perception contributes to visual rhetoric.

Informing the dissertation are visual rhetors who have anticipated the move from text to image: W. J. T. Mitchell, Burke (1950), Martin Jay (1993), Christian Metz (2004), Rosenfield, (2004), Elkins (1997), Foss (1994), and Hill and Helmers (2004). Kenneth Burke locates the emotional realm of identity and desire in symbolic relationships. We see or imagine resemblances *as-if* and *as-it-is* that we desire.⁵⁰ Earlier Burke articulated principles of aesthetics in nonverbal communication and symbols in *Counter-Statement* (The “poetic metaphor” closes the pages of *Permanence and Change*), which blurs the boundaries between poetics and rhetorical theory to include verbal and nonverbal “transformative symbols,” according to Burke. *Counter Statement* argues that the aesthetic (a perceptive act) is rhetorical in that it works to transform identity. The visual nature of identification advanced in the work of Christian Metz suggests that the act of asserting or imagining identity between two things that are dissimilar is based on similitude.⁵¹ Jay notes that the word “theater” has the same root as theory or *theoria*, “to look attentively, to behold,” to see with new eyes in *epideictic* expectation. “Looking is

⁴⁷ Hill and Helmers, *Defining Visual Rhetoric*, 43.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁰ Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives*, 22.

⁵¹ Barry, Ann Marie Seward. *Visual Intelligence: Perception, Image, and Manipulation in Visual Communication*. (Albany: State University Press, 1997), 121.

always framed by past experiences and learned ideas about how and what to see.”⁵²

What I take from the authors above is that the culturally imagined interpretation often supports cultural theory and may fail to synchronize with the actual material image. The tension is that image dislocates from text and the reverse: interpretation without evaluation becomes a type of misreading. From the perspective I am proposing we can appreciate how aesthetics and symbolic rhetoric are two sides of rhetoric and communicate different approaches, purposes, and goals. Symbolic communication depends on argument and proposition. Aesthetics requires visual judgment of art as a material subject.

In the next section, I present a literature review of seminal texts. I will explicitly use concepts drawn primarily from Prelli in *The Rhetorics of Display* and from Aristotle in *De Anima, Rhetoric, and Poetics* to undergird my approach to viewing practices. The study of visual rhetoric furthered its momentum with the publication of two other important texts written in 2004: *Defining Visual Rhetorics*, compiled by Charles A. Hill and Marguerite Helmers (mentioned above), and Sonja K. Foss, who subsequently tackled the visual in “Theory of Visual Rhetoric”⁵³ In the method section, I improvise from Foss.

Literature Review

The three seminal texts informing the dissertation are *Rhetorics of Display* written in 2006 by Lawrence J. Prelli and *Rhetoric and Poetics* written by Aristotle in approximately 367 to 347 BC. *Rhetorics of Display* develops the thesis that “rhetorics of

⁵² Hill and Helmers, *Defining Visual Rhetoric*, 65.

⁵³ *Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, and Media*, 141.

display have become the dominant communication practices of our time.” Prelli’s historical perspective justifies the point: “. . . questions about rhetoric and display are related and did not originate in our time but are of long-standing significance in the history of the communicative arts [as rhetoric] . . . in sketches, paintings, maps. . .” Prelli is observing that when art displays, it engages with those who become audience to it: “Works of art display rhetorically and rhetorics enact display.”⁵⁴ Prelli’s emphasis on visualization and its centerpiece, *epideictic* (in addition to the critical terms *ekphrasis* and identity), show that the rhetoric of art is a type of human experience that includes reason and emotion and is not always available through the study of discourse alone. Next, I will focus on *epideictic* and how *ekphrasis* and identity link to the term in the dissertation.

Prelli and contributor Lawrence Rosenfield explain that *epideictic* contributes to the historical aspect of the *way* image was perceived rhetorically and aesthetically. The term represents processes of artistic creation in representation or mimesis outlined in *Poetics* and as a visual type of discerning in the ancient *epideictic*. The rhetoric of the visual in the *epideictic*, “. . . from the Greek ‘show forth,’ [is to] ‘make known’ . . . not as mere display, rather it means making manifest the ‘fleeting appearances’ of excellence that otherwise would remain ‘unnoticed or invisible.’”⁵⁵ In *epideictic*, an audience becomes a “witnesses to” the image⁵⁶ in the present moment. The audience undergoes an emotional transformation when viewing the object of contemplation because aesthetics *is* (my italics) an *epideictic* encounter.⁵⁷ Thus, *epideictic* describes how perception begins with the awareness of *having* perception.

⁵⁴ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 3–7.

⁵⁵ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 3–4.

⁵⁶ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 3–4; 153.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

Rosenfield suggests that art reveals the interplay between material display and the selected meaning imposed on works. For example, moral virtue was attributed to art in the *epideictic* of artistic *techne*. Moral seeing, *techne*, and reasoning are “paradigms of virtue”⁵⁸ and open up discovery of moral truths for audiences. The concept was especially relevant to the visual culture of the 15th and 16th centuries: artists displayed excellence in *technes* such as *chiaroscuro* and other artistry of shadings, texturing, and coloring that enhanced elements of visual composition and, at the same time, displayed moral virtues.

The idea of moral painting as virtue and artist as preacher was at its height in the Dutch *vanitas* paintings of the 17th century discussed in Chapter 3. The visual image of fruit and flowers is itself virtuosity in the minutest detail of execution. Paintings were intended to lead a viewer to mirror the virtue displayed in *techne*. Ascribing virtue to image through the *epideictic* resembles Aristotle’s description of verisimilitude in the phrases, “fleeting appearance,” and “processes of artistic creation,” detailed in *Poetics*.

Chapter 3 shows how art transformed itself in the Scientific Age. The rhetoric of perspective that accompanied 13th century art began as an *epideictic* idea framed by Leon Battista Alberti in *De Pictura* in 1435. The artist introduced the first systematic presentation of fixed-point perspective by showing how precise artistic execution brought a profusion of details into proportionate, ordered, and visual perspective. Alberti’s use of science in explaining perspective demonstrates how the scientific method was a principle to be displayed and modeled for Renaissance audiences. The stance or viewing practice of the detached observer—so critical to the emergence of modernist science—invites the audience to view art as a shrewd observer of how things that are seen now appear. Prelli

⁵⁸ Ibid., 297.

captures the idea when he says art is “. . . enacting artistic creation as a visual performance for audiences.”⁵⁹ Alberti saw the art of painting as rhetorical display in that the elements of visual composition operated according to the precepts of rhetoric, and the art itself aimed at giving spectators a heightened sense of virtue comparable to the ideal orator.

The practice of reading image as text through *ekphrasis* ties intimately to *epideictic* viewing. Prelli discusses the rhetorical power of *ekphrasis* in which visual image conveys a poetic message. Seeing image as a mimesis of virtue sheds light on the practices of audiences that understood reading visuals as text and text as image. Examples of the *ekphrasis* of reading images can be seen in illuminated manuscripts, books of emblems, and crafted word pictures. From visual depictions in the Shield of Achilles to the Renaissance notion of *ut picture poesis*, painting is mute poetry and poetry is a speaking picture (as is painting, so is poetry), *ekphrasis* visually displays one thing in terms of another. The practice continued into the 18th century.

When Prelli and Rosenfield apply *epideictic* and *ekphrasis* to explain historically the important role visual image has played in displaying cultural values, audience identity is also at stake:

In whatever manifestation displays also anticipate a responding audience whose expectations might be satisfied or frustrated, their values and interests affirmed, neglected, or challenged. The identity and behavior of particular situated audiences demonstrate that “. . . whatever is revealed through display [of art] simultaneously conceals alternative possibilities . . . this is display’s rhetorical dimension.”⁶⁰

What art most often conceals is the undisclosed identity of an audience that imposed on

⁵⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁰ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 2.

art prevailing cultural and religious agendas. For example, in the chapter, “Rhetorical Display of Civic Religion” in Prelli, Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran argue from Burke, “The unconscious element of persuasion which identification describes has its source in the poetic motive.”⁶¹ The authors create an *epideictic* framework for identity that can be applied to art: “*Epideictic* rhetoric does not argue the ideas or ideals that bind people into community so much as it displays them to a witnessing public.” *Epideictic* provides an audience “the opportunity of beholding a common reality,” of “joining with our community in giving thought to what we witness,” and thereby experiencing together the “luminosity” of the values and aspirations they share.⁶²

In the dissertation, artistic images are interpreted as symbolic emblems of cultural and religious identities. In the third chapter discussing *vanitas*, I borrow Rosenfield and Clark’s insights to demonstrate that the visual experience of a work of art is best understood using Aristotle’s third category of the *epideictic*: the rhetorical work of generating and maintaining identity.

Prelli, Rosenfield, Clark, and Halloran’s discussion of *epideictic* that includes *ekphrasis* and identity remind us that *epideictic* has been a form of rhetoric that reenacts visual paradigms of virtue throughout history. The terms help explain particular audiences’ passionate and reasoned ways of viewing art and thinking about art as values and virtue. The discussion has tried to show how audiences in the epochs I discuss search to locate mirror images of treasured values in the identity of representative signs and symbols. Prelli’s attention to reinvigorating rhetoric’s ancient attention to visualization and the role of the image subject supports the heuristic of verisimilitude in the

⁶¹ Ibid., 140.

⁶² Ibid., 141.

dissertation.

The strength of *Rhetorics of Display* is that each chapter clearly establishes links to *epideictic*, visuality, and rhetoric as display. The work shows how each concept communicates what I broadly interpret as types of viewing practices. The reason the work is important to the dissertation is apparent in the title: *the Rhetoric of Display*. Rhetoric is about display—how things look or appear—a premise that insists on the full range of how displays operate rhetorically when they engage with those who become audience to them.

Another important principle for the dissertation is the aspect of how things appear to particular situated audiences. Images surround us; they “compete for our attention, and make claims upon us.”⁶³ The idea of image as rhetoric is itself a disputed term in Prelli because of the full range of ways rhetoric displays both aesthetic and persuasive *qualities* especially in art as the dissertation maintains. Prelli supports the thesis of the dissertation: aesthetics is central to visual rhetoric and ultimately rhetoric circumscribes aesthetics, rather than being different phenomena.

In the next section, I discuss Aristotle’s idea of visualization, perception, and phantasia. It is worth noting that although Rosenfield stresses the fundamental visual quality of *epideictic*, he ignores the term’s dependence on phantasia both in *Rhetoric of Display* and in an earlier discussion. His description argues that speaker and audience engage in “beholding reality impartially as *witnesses of* [my italics] Being.”⁶⁴ The description offers a contemplative, objective sense of *epideictic* but misses taking account of the term’s capacity to reveal values and identity and how *epideictic* depends on

⁶³ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 1–2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 5; 297.

phantasia as Aristotle soon shows. On the other hand, Clark and Halloran capture the way *epideictic* reveals audience identity in their discussion of the rhetorical display of civic religion in the presentation of images located in national parks.

Aristotle explains in *Rhetoric* that the *epideictic* requires phantasia (loosely translated as imagination) to transform one thing in terms of another, or image to idea.⁶⁵ Moreover, visual metaphor, *ekphrasis* (description), and *epideictic* (visualizing virtue through artistic *techne*) are interdependent tropes and concepts that require phantasia. The terms provide a visual vocabulary for consciously understanding sensory information as visual and imaginative data critical to metaphor.⁶⁶

Aristotle's theory of visualization undergirds what I am discussing as an aesthetic viewing practice with roots in visual metaphor from *Rhetoric*. The rhetoric of vision is captured in the phrase: the mind (*soul*) never thinks without an image (*de Anima*). The ancient texts propose that cognition proceeds from image: that thought and concept depend on image. The notion suggests how rhetorical understanding can evolve from visualization and vivid imagery.

When Aristotle discusses metaphor, he says that perception actualizes (*energeia*) metaphor. Newman has suggested that Aristotle's description demonstrates that metaphors activate cognitive mechanisms in spectators.⁶⁷ The question left unanswered is—if our minds emerge first with an image—how does that image transition to thought? Newman simply indicates the trope *does* activate cognitive mechanisms, but she does not discern how phantasia *determines* the transition of image to thought. *Rhetoric* III

⁶⁵ Aristotle, *Rhet.* III.

⁶⁶ Aristotle, *Rhet.* III.

⁶⁷ Sara Newman, *Aristotle and Style*. (Lewiston, NY, Edwin Mellon Press, 2005), 65.

provides some insight. It begins with a description of vivid imagery, “the source of the metaphor should be taken from the beautiful in effect or in visualization or in some form of sense perception”⁶⁸; thereafter the metaphor is within reach of the cognitive dimension. I will expand on this theory in the chapters of the dissertation. For example, we can show how Aristotle’s enigmatic bringing-before-the-eyes is both actualized image and a descriptive process that occurs by way of *phantasia* and *epideictic* and how they ornament image in Aristotle’s schema.

Phantasia in visual metaphor captures the interweaving of actualization in the terms. For example, fleeting visual appearance and excellence of properties in art require *phantasia* in human experience that otherwise would remain unnoticed or invisible. In addition, *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* frame emotion as a rhetorical aspect of viewing, visualizing produces audience affects and “ornaments ways of being affected or moved [vis-à-vis metaphor].”⁶⁹ When viewing practices are rightly understood as investigations and apprehension of how sense perception informs reason, we rediscover the critical nature of visual elements in the rhetorical tradition: the human capacity to create visions of order and to share them with others.

Method

I will explicitly use visual and philosophical concepts drawn from Aristotle, Prelli, and Foss to guide my analyses. The visual analysis of *vanitas* paintings will be based on site visits to museums. The primary framework for method is from Foss’ seminal work, *Visual Rhetoric*. A point of view for viewing painting and interpretation

⁶⁸ Aristotle, *Rhet.* III, 1450b13.

⁶⁹ Aristotle, *Rhet.* III, 4.415b25.

comes from Slavoj Žižek’s idea of retroactive memory that decides what will have been seen and how art will be analyzed and from Griselda Pollock’s “reading against the grain.”⁷⁰

The points of view help position the viewing practices. We are always rewriting history, according to Žižek. We read the past as a symbol of “historical memory . . . retroactively giving the elements their symbolic weight by including them in new textures—it is this elaboration which decides retroactively what they ‘will have been.’”⁷¹ Žižek’s idea can be explained in terms of the relationship between the symbolic and the imaginary; we can apply the principle to art. For example, we can view art in symbolic and cultural ways and in aesthetic imaginative ways. Symbolic interpretations represent ways of using language and culture to understand that which cannot be totally understood by description. We require imagination to perceive and discriminate characteristics of art. Thus, language and art have both symbolic and aesthetic aspects. Viewing audiences practice both.

Pollock describes the process of “readings against the grain.”⁷² The bias does not ignore or reconstruct historical facts; rather the readings explore ways of viewing art within the cultural dispositions, historical frame, and *epideictic* standards of the creation. The interest in viewing is not primarily, as Lynne Pearce posits, “in representational content.”⁷³ I propose instead, that works are types of engagements with a milieu’s material and visual practices. In short, audiences must fill the gap with what they know at the time of viewing art. Reading the past offers the readers of art symbolic and aesthetic

⁷⁰ Hill and Helmers, *Defining Visual Rhetoric*, 66.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

choices: 1) build a symbolic interpretation and/or narrative around the cultural knowledge at hand, and 2) explore the material and spatial aspects of the image. Both viewing types must show how symbolic and aesthetic practices work together. Although visual readers can discriminate differences, the process might take place seamlessly in the mind.

Next, I show how the chapters evaluate viewing practices as visual data and then how Sonja Foss' theory of visual rhetoric serves as the framework for the method of viewing analyses. Foss' criterion for whether an image or artifact qualifies as visual rhetoric transforms the visual and linguistic elements of visual rhetoric to establish parameters for an approach to theory and criticism. "Theory of Visual Rhetoric" has asserted that what now qualifies an image as visual rhetoric centers in its symbolic nature. Visual rhetoric involves the human action of symbol-making in the process of image creation, yet it only indirectly connects to its referent. Foss says a perspective is rhetorical when the focus is on a rhetorical (propositional) response rather on an aesthetic one.⁷⁴ She conceptualizes that visual rhetoric occurs when an agent generates visual symbols for the purpose of communicating with an audience. "It is the tangible evidence or product of the creative act, such as [a play], a painting, an advertisement . . . that constitutes the data of study for rhetorical scholars interested in visual symbols."⁷⁵ Foss sets forth three markers that must be evident for a visual image to qualify as rhetoric: 1) the image must be symbolic, 2) it must involve human intervention in the process of image creation, and 3) it must be presented to an audience for the purpose of communicating with that audience. Foss' heuristic opens an analytic window for the

⁷⁴ *Handbook of Visual Communication, Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, and Media*, 141–151.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

method I will propose. I will extend the frame of analysis to ways art not only displayed cultural and symbolic values, but also to how art could have communicated with audiences in aesthetic ways.

I elect to use Foss' interpretive markers of visual rhetorical analyses for investigating the approaches and assumptions I am proposing. The method begins with Foss' markers and proposes the variation (noted in italics): Visual rhetoric in works of art must be symbolic *and aesthetic*; it must involve human intervention in the process of creation; it must be presented to a *historically* situated audience for the purpose of communicating with that audience. Therefore, *art communicates rhetorically with an audience. It produces symbolic references and/or identities and it creates a sensory aesthetic experience.*

The method departs from Foss and requires explanation. Acts of viewing are inherently symbolic-making processes that tie audiences to an identity. Art is interpreted symbolically when audiences perceive meaning in symbolic and propositional ways, such as when audiences create metaphor from art. Art is mediated by the language of historical convention and the rhetoric that attaches to it, such as moral beliefs and nationalistic identities. Interpretative readers ask *how* visual images in art are carriers of symbolic meaning. The method is accurate and appropriate when interpretation is at stake.

Art historian Erwin Panofsky distinguishes between art's "obvious and disguised symbolism." He asserts that art is "symbol demanding decoding,"⁷⁶ a theory not completely accurate. Whether audiences were aware of cultural correspondences depended on the criteria they used to test these discriminations. I am interested in the

⁷⁶ Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), 33.

question of the kinds of symbolic meaning, such as identities. Locating meaning *within* art is the method favored by visual rhetors whose subject is art (Helmets, Blair). I dispute the point and suggest instead that audiences attach meaning to art. Finally, Foss claims that the image must only indirectly refer to its referent. Taking account of the historical frame in which art is situated is critical because symbolic and aesthetic judgment depends on a milieu; thus historical frames are always rhetorical or plausible fictions and central to creation.

When evaluation of artistic properties is important, viewing is an act of aesthetic creation or simply *having* discriminations. Moreover, audiences judge art artistically according to criteria such as composition, coloration, and perspective and test these discriminations—the *what* in art. Taken together, the capability, the properties, and the result constitute aesthetic meaning. Aesthetics will provide the missing counterpoint to Foss' exclusively symbolic cultural requirement.

This examination—which borrows ancient rhetorical approaches to viewing and visualization—will demonstrate how particular audiences *could have* employed a two-sided perspective when they viewed art. The symbolic shows how audiences may interpret meaning and function. The aesthetic method emphasizes evaluation: the role of visualization informs the way situated audiences may have judged art and how artists could have created image. Indeed, we can examine viewing perspectives as practices drawn from particular milieus and artistic images—seeing *and* looking at works' visual techniques, orientations, plausible realities, emotions, symbolic ideas, and audience identities in the domain of rhetoric. The examination in the chapters of the dissertation, as mentioned earlier, emphasize that this is a rhetorical project that extrapolates from certain

classical theories/concepts as a way to understand how a type of rhetorical viewing practice merges form and content.

Site Visits

Adding to the theoretical method are site visits in which I experienced art in a virtual laboratory. From visits to art museums and the direct observations of painting and prints, I have attempted to observe paintings and plays in symbolic and aesthetic ways. The concepts from seminal texts and the observations constitute the construct for analysis. The idea of viewing images as text and text as image took hold as I explored, researched, and tested ideas in examinations of works of art. I am fortunate to have studied with curators of painting and print rooms in two museums: the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and the Cleveland Museum of Art. I also viewed exhibits in museums that included the Dutch Baroque, a traveling exhibit at the Phoenix Museum of Art; the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (2002); the Louvre in Paris (2006); the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City; and the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. (2006, 2007).

Chapters

The dissertation includes three chapters and a conclusion. Two case studies are featured in Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 1 presents the thesis and topic of the dissertation. The conclusion synthesizes the preceding chapters. It discusses themes and general conclusions from the case studies emphasizing Prelli's discussion of *epideictic*, identity, and emotion and Aristotle's visual approach to rhetoric in *ekphrasis*, *epideictic*, and *phantasia* and the sensory/emotional impact of metaphor. Chapters 2 and 3 build from two works of art—one theatrical, the other painting—in two historical periods to clarify

how the rhetoric of the visual in art encompass emotion, how it is simultaneously read in symbolic and aesthetic ways, and evolves historically from rhetoric.

Chapter 1: The Rhetoric of Verisimilitude

In the chapter, verisimilitude is a lens to show how works of art can be analyzed through viewing practices such as *ekphrasis* and *epideictic* and mediated in visual and cultural ways. Works of art call attention to the power of visual and verbal intercommunication because “as often as language teaches us to see,” Michael Ann Holly wrote, “art instructs us in telling. The exchange works actively in both directions.”⁷⁷ Sidney Zink’s remarks focus our attention on how aesthetics mediates and completes rhetoric:

I think there is a simple way out of the dilemma of the . . . [work of art’s] immediate aesthetic value and the symbolic [rhetorical] nature of its medium. This is to recognize that linguistic meanings are, like colors. . . themselves particular qualities.⁷⁸

Much as verbal depictions rhetorically confine what we are prompted to see, visual depictions contain our verbal responses. Aesthetic and rhetorical viewing shape what we imagine we see. Conversely, visual texts foster, interrogate, and display visual and expressive elements when words fail.

Chapter 2: Comparing Pity and Fear in *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*

Aristotle says “. . . the expression of the meaning in words should be in proper proportion and appropriate to the plot and characters”⁷⁹ “. . . the end of the tragedy is to

⁷⁷ Michael Ann Holly, *Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of Image*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 11.

⁷⁸ Zink, 119–120.

⁷⁹ Aristotle, *Poet.* XI.

convincingly bring pity and fear before the eyes.”⁸⁰ The chapter discusses and analyzes how Aristotle’s vivid metaphor, bringing-before-the-eyes in *Rhetoric*, enacts as poetic tragedy as bringing-pity-and-fear-before-the-eyes discussed in *Poetics*. Emotion is effected by actors; the affect is felt by audiences. Attic drama is a product and a process; it is mimetic or a representation performed and communicated on the dramatic stage.

The chapter relies mainly on Aristotle’s seminal texts and on text in Prelli’s *Rhetorics of Display* for analysis. Aristotelian scholars such as Kennedy, Newman, Halliwell, O’Gorman, and others contribute to this analysis. Prelli has said, “. . . rhetorics of display have become the dominant communication practices of our time.”⁸¹

Investigating the rhetorics of display from the Attic perspective of dramatic tragedy is relevant to the dissertation and to the subfield of visual rhetoric. The claim in the chapter is that when Attic actors depict pity and fear on the dramatic stage, they are engaging with strategic techniques of rhetorical display. Comparing how pity and fear is rendered in *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* shows specifically how actors use gestures and movement to rhetorically perform and communicate emotions. At the same time, it shows, paradoxically, how spectators take pleasure in dramatic tragedy.

The first goal of the chapter is to compare in *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* Aristotle’s instructions to poets and orators that enable them to best convey to the spectator the emotions of pity and fear. *Poetics*⁸² and *Rhetoric* explain specific artistic and inartistic methods good actors and orators should use to elicit pity and fear in the spectator.⁸³ The

⁸⁰ Aristotle, *Poet.* XI.

⁸¹ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 2.

⁸² *Poetics* is a type of case study to justify fiction; it is also a handbook for playwrights. It was written as a way to study of all the arts—literature, drama, dance, visual art and music. *Poetics* defines a systematic study of the techniques involved in the construction of fiction for theatre.

⁸³ See note 1.

techniques are viewed and compared as rhetorical strategies for portraying emotion. The best actors enact or *perform* pity and fear mimetically. Through an actor's display of appropriate gestures, emotion is transferred from the actor to the spectator. For example, Aristotle says actors should not speak too effusively nor understate the point. Portrayals must be convincing. To say this rhetorically, the emotions of pity and fear are mediated through the actor and received mimetically by the spectator. By investigating the interweaving of pity and fear in the interaction between actors and Attic audiences in dramatic tragedy, I draw attention to sensory expressions and emotions of pity and fear.

Tragedy is drama, not narrative; tragedy shows rather than tells. "Its action should be single and complete, presenting a reversal of fortune, involving persons renowned and of superior attainments . . . [through] incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to interpret its catharsis of such emotions."⁸⁴ (By *catharsis*, Aristotle means a purging or sweeping away of the pity and fear aroused by the tragic action).

The basic difference Aristotle draws between tragedy and other genres, such as comedy and the epic, underscores the second goal of the chapter: to examine the "peculiar pleasure" described by Aristotle. The tragic pleasure of pity and fear the audience experiences from watching a dramatic tragedy is described in *Poetics* XIV ". . . for we must not demand of Tragedy any and every kind of pleasure, but only that which is proper to it."⁸⁵ The second section investigates through mimesis and the *epideictic* how the display of pity and fear creates in the spectator a peculiar pleasure. The *epideictic*

⁸⁴ Aristotle, *Poet.* IX, XI.

⁸⁵ "But to produce this effect by the mere spectacle (*opsis*) is a less artistic method . . . are strangers to the purpose of Tragedy; for we must not demand of Tragedy any and every kind of pleasure, but only that which is proper to it. And since the pleasure which the poet should afford is that which comes from pity and fear through imitation, it is evident that this quality must be impressed upon the incidents, *Poet.* XIV.

helps explain how the spectator undergoes an emotional transformation when viewing the object of aesthetic contemplation such as an actor's moving performance. *Epileictic* begins with the awareness of having aesthetic perception. Lawrence Rosenfield explains that the *epideictic* contributes to the way audiences perceived rhetorically and aesthetically. The term represents processes of artistic creation in representation or mimesis outlined in *Poetics* and as a visual type of discerning in the ancient *epideictic*.

Poetics defines a systematic study of the techniques involved in the construction of fiction as art. Viewing Attic tragedian plays using an *epideictic* frame considers emotion as “display, or showing forth of things, leading an audience [insight and desire] . . . to the formations of opinion.”⁸⁶ Tragedian plays sought to offer audiences *epideictic* opportunities to gaze upon “that which is best in human experience.”⁸⁷ Bringing-before-the-eyes shows the particular effective and affective aspects of metaphor operating in tragedian plays discussed in *Poetics*.

The concept of verisimilitude explains performance in the representational field in terms of the represented world: the mimetic medium makes possible fiction's significance in plausible realities. The rhetorical persuasive dimension that produces emotional affect evolves from action: things engaged in an activity signify cultural representations of producing pity and fear familiar to Attic audiences. Together, carefully practiced gestures displayed by the skillful actor interweave vision and knowledge in and from the spectator's experience. The two ways of viewing suggest how from image, ideas (*eidos*) of pity and fear transmit into emotions (*pathos*) of pity and fear.

According to Halliwell, *Poetics* is more ancient than *Rhetoric*. *Poetics* anticipates

⁸⁶ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 3.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

aesthetics or ideas about visualization; however, Aristotle examines visual effect and affect in detail in the discussion of metaphor and vivid imagery in *Rhetoric III. Poetics* provides a case study to justify fiction; it is also a handbook for playwrights. It was written as a way to study of all the arts—literature, drama, dance, visual art, and music. In *Poetics*, Aristotle staked the success of dramatic representation on what he calls the play’s probability (*eikos*) or in the dissertation, *verisimilitude*’s plausibility. The idea links not only to fiction, but also to the rhetorical notion of a probable proposition.

Chapter 3: The Rhetoric of *Vanitas* Painting

Memento Mori, “remember that you will die, ” describes the theme of art works created in the 17th century in the Netherlands. With the human skull as a centerpiece, the rhetorical function of these images served to remind audiences of their mortality. The *vanitas* still-life paintings explore the idea of content through metaphor—designing painting to be *read* continues the tradition of *ekphrasis* and *pictura poesis*. Allegory is not a concept used in the chapter because although it is a resource of 17th century and contemporary audiences the chapter is making rhetorical claims, not historical claims about viewing practices.

The elements that comprised good writing extended to worthy painting executed with precise detail. The rhetoric of the image was to move the viewer in a way that would be morally edifying. The understanding is a particular iteration of visual and aesthetic *epideictic*.

The meaning of Panofsky’s phrase “disguised symbolism” prompted art historians to research the meanings of image in *vanitas*. The phrase has been interpreted as part of the history of metaphor as a rhetorical device denoting a system of visual symbols. In the

chapter, I will contest this view: *vanitas* were *read*, not as allegory or as symbols to be decoded, but as a puzzle of layers of associations and resemblances of one thing to another without meaning—as a complex metaphor—more like a 20th century abstract painting. The viewer has a more demanding role than merely to observe a prescribed narrative. Rather the viewer is required to read and interpret still-life painting in the tradition of emblem books and diptychs.

In the Golden Age, objects and their arrangement can be said to be more an iconic sign than a symbol. The indigenous aesthetic of the Dutch *vanitas* long considered realism, is more abstract: skulls and books without a setting. This aesthetic requires the viewer to take an active part to complete the image. The viewer creates a personal experience, rather than being offered a set narrative. The experience is metaphysical, not narrative. *Vanitas* painting continues the tradition of diptychs: a form of worship in the Reformed Church that called for private religious experience.

One painter who specialized in this genre was Harmen Steenwyck. His delicately painted objects—water pitcher, a recorder, books, oil lamp, etc—arranged neatly on the edge of a table entice the viewer with humble realism. As the viewer is brought into the tranquility, there is little to suggest that the viewing ends serenely. Nothing is natural or realistic about the arrangement. The composition is triangular within images set in diagonal fashion. In *epideictic* fashion, an aura of metaphysical glow lights everyday objects suited for an individual and at the same time displays them as idealized objects of the universal virtuous mind. Kristine Koozin describes *vanitas* as “objects [that] exist in God’s hieroglyphic sphere.”⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Kristine Koozin, *The Vanitas Still Lifes of Harmen Steenwyck*, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990, 88.

The artist's duty is to point to objects, to clarify between real and hyperrealism, between real and the unreal, the physical/material and the metaphysical. Through reading art as complex metaphor the paradox of rhetorical and aesthetic conflicts are synthesized and finally given over to the viewer to resolve on a personal level. The metaphorical realism associated with painstaking execution of detail—in real and unreal rendering—offers the viewer a stake in making meaning aesthetically and spiritually.

Gerard de Lairese, the first theorist of still lifes laments *vanitas*; indeed all still lifes, lack meaning. Painters are guilty of not adding “thoughts to their pictures.”⁸⁹ From Lairese's reading we can imagine how *vanitas* were a paradox, pictures presented as liturgy of objects on the same plane. Paintings required the viewer to read the image as they would a frieze in a pediment—without meaning—but at the same time, as complex metaphoric signs endowed with the meaning of a personal viewer.⁹⁰

Conclusion

The concept of *verisimilitude* guides the dissertation. It puts on display the selective ways historically situated audiences viewed art through cultural lenses and through aesthetic perceptions. It aims to show the way they suspended disbelief of facts in imagination in order to apply values and beliefs to create culturally representative metaphors. The chapters' metaphorical subjects emphasize how the symbolic and imaginative perceptions are conveyed to situated audiences. As I have tried to show, effect in art turns on rhetorical strategies, cultural resemblances, and likeness to truth

⁸⁹ *Art in Theory 1648-1815: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Charles Harrison; Paul Wood, Jason Gaiger, eds. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2000), 298.

⁹⁰ Hanneke Grootenboer, *The Rhetoric of Perspective: Realism and Illusionism in Seventeenth century Dutch still-life painting*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), v.

demonstrated in symbolic metaphor. Affective response in audiences relies on the virtuosity and luminosity of *epideictic* display of art's material form, emotional display, and the experience of beholding an image.

The highlighting and muting of both effect and affect in the chapters show how different approaches to viewing art in different milieus create rhetorical implications for audiences of particular milieus. The method I improvise from Foss highlights the rhetorical mode of operation I employ in the dissertation:

Visual rhetoric in works of art must be symbolic *and aesthetic*; it must involve human intervention in the process of creation; it must be presented to a *historically* situated audience for the purpose of communicating with that audience. Therefore, *art communicates rhetorically with an audience in producing symbolic identities and in creating sensory aesthetic experience.*

A common thread ties the two approaches together: to be significant for an audience, works of art should demonstrate a degree of plausibility, or verisimilitude.

My dissertation calls on readers to judge the criticism and analysis of the practices of viewers of art as they could have been seen. While the framework and approach attempts to justify and analyze how the force of visual rhetoric involves both symbolic and aesthetic viewing practices under the rubric of rhetoric, the purpose is to offer visual rhetoric a more expansive framework to aid and advance discussion of the rhetoric of art.

The rhetorical perspective of image through the lens of ancient practices hopefully brings us closer to understanding the intertwining of ways situated audiences historically experienced works as a rhetoric that considers both the impact of visual image and symbolic meaning. Although the *epideictic* perspective evidences most in the

timelessness of luminosity in aesthetic viewing of excellent *techne*, timeliness is never absent from the *epideictic*. The question of an audience's readiness to view the luminous gleam of *techne* depends on what Rosenfield calls "[the situated-ness of audiences] beholding wonder."⁹¹

The question of the verisimilitude of rhetoric in art—the perspective of audiences, artists, and art—that display symbols and invite aesthetic experience is a provocative exploration. This is because we see only what we can see from where we stand, and there is more to be seen than any one of us can appreciate alone.

⁹¹ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 154.

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CHAPTER 2

COMPARING PITY AND FEAR

IN *RHETORIC* AND *POETICS*

Lear: But we made the world, out of our smallness and weakness . . . and we have only one thing to keep us sane: pity and the man without pity is mad.

Edward Bond, *Lear*, III.3

Pity is the deepest abyss: the deeper man looks into life, the deeper too he looks into suffering.

Nietzsche

Lawrence Prelli has said, “. . . rhetorics of display have become the dominant communication practices of our time.”¹ Investigating the rhetorics of display from the Attic perspective of dramatic tragedy is relevant to the subfield of visual rhetoric. The claim in the chapter is that when the Attic actors depict pity and fear on the dramatic stage, they are engaging with strategic techniques of rhetorical display specified by the plot. Comparing how pity and fear is rendered in *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* shows specifically how orators and actors use gestures and movement to rhetorically perform and communicate emotions. At the same time, it shows paradoxically how spectators take pleasure in dramatic tragedy.

The examination in the chapter should not to be construed to be an historical claim of actual experience; rather I am extrapolating from Aristotle and classical rhetoric

¹ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 2.

to envision how Attic audiences may have viewed the tragedian play. The first goal of the chapter is to compare in *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* Aristotle's instructions to poets and orators that enable them to best convey to the spectator the emotions of pity and fear. *Poetics*² and *Rhetoric* explain specific artistic and inartistic methods good actors and orators should use to elicit pity and fear in the spectator.³ The techniques are viewed and compared as rhetorical strategies for portraying emotion. The best actors enact or *perform* pity and fear mimetically. Through an actor's display of appropriate gestures, emotion is transferred from the actor to the spectator. For example, Aristotle says actors should not speak too effusively nor understate the point. Portrayals must be convincing. To say this rhetorically, the emotions of pity and fear are mediated through the actor and received mimetically by the spectator. By investigating the interweaving of pity and fear in the interaction between actors and audiences in dramatic tragedy I draw attention to how sensory expressions and emotions of pity and fear are communicated in performances on the dramatic stage. The process makes use of rhetorical and visual methods as compared to employing historical methods.

The basic difference Aristotle draws between tragedy and other genres, such as comedy and the epic, is the "tragic pleasure of pity and fear" the situated may experience from watching a dramatic tragedy. Aristotle says in *Poetics* XIV ". . . for we must not demand of Tragedy any and every kind of pleasure, but only that which is proper to it."⁴

² *Poetics* is a type of case study to justify fiction; it is also a handbook for playwrights. Aristotle wrote it as a way to study of all the arts—literature, drama, dance, visual art and music. *Poetics* defines a systematic study of the techniques involved in the construction of fiction for theatre.

³ See note 1.

⁴ "But to produce this effect by the mere spectacle (*opsis*) is a less artistic method . . . are strangers to the purpose of Tragedy; for we must not demand of Tragedy any and every kind of pleasure, but only that which is proper to it. And since the pleasure which the poet should afford is that which comes from pity and fear through imitation, it is evident that this quality must be impressed upon the incidents, *Poet.* XIV.

Moreover, “. . . the expression of the meaning in words should be in proper proportion and appropriate to the plot, characters . . . the end of the tragedy is to convincingly bring pity and fear before the eyes.”⁵

Tragedy is drama, not narrative; tragedy shows rather than tells. “Its action should be single and complete, presenting a reversal of fortune, involving persons renowned and of superior attainments . . . [through] incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to interpret its catharsis of such emotions.”⁶ (By *catharsis*, Aristotle means a purging or sweeping away of the pity and fear aroused by the tragic action).

An example is the tragic hero. For the tragic hero to arouse these feelings in the spectator he cannot be either all good or all evil but must be someone viewers (vs. audience) can identify with; however, if he is superior in some way, the tragic pleasure is intensified. His disastrous end results from mistaken actions that arise from a tragic flaw. The sad end arouses in the spectator pity and fear. The point emphasizes that pleasure is more than cultural desire. The vicarious emotion evoked by depictions of pity and fear produces sympathetic pleasure toward the character. The theatrical experience vicariously communicates through rhetoric the pathos and pleasure of what it means to be human.

The second goal using the rhetorical tropes of *mimesis* and *epideictic* is how the display of pity and fear creates in the spectator a peculiar pleasure. The *epideictic* helps explain how the spectator undergoes an emotional transformation when viewing the object of aesthetic contemplation such as an actor’s moving performance. *Epideictic* begins with the awareness of having aesthetic perception. Lawrence Rosenfield explains that the *epideictic* contributes to the way audiences perceived rhetorically and

⁵ Aristotle, *Poet.* XI.

⁶ Aristotle, *Poet.* IX, XI.

aesthetically. The term represents processes of artistic creation in representation or mimesis outlined in *Poetics* and as a visual type of discerning in the ancient *epideictic*.

Cara Finnegan says visual rhetoric is “a mode of inquiry, defined as a critical and theoretical orientation that makes issues of appearance and visibility relevant to rhetorical theory.”⁷ Visual rhetoric, she claims, is “sensory expressions of cultural meaning, as opposed to . . . aesthetic considerations.”⁸ I argue with Rosenfield that pity and fear are sensory expressions of cultural *and* aesthetic meaning. The claim I am proposing is that rhetoric—dating from visual practice in ancient mimetic form examined in *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*—embrace perception and emotional expression of art in aesthetic ways while still advancing symbolic interpretation.

Lawrence Prelli claims, “When art displays, it engages with those who become audience to it.” “Works of art display rhetorically and rhetorics enact display.”⁹ Questions about rhetoric and display are related and did not originate in our time but are of long-standing significance in the history of the communicative arts. The emphasis on visualization—the Attic play demonstrates rhetorical strategies in art and artistic performance—produces a type of human aesthetic experience that includes reason *and* emotion not always available through the study of discourse alone. Next, is a short discussion that examines how pity and fear captivate the emotions of the audience.

It is possible to infer from Aristotle that when audiences view a tragic play, it is never simply about the flaws of a character; rather universal emotions indispensable to being human are displayed through the particularities of the characters. Pity, for example,

⁷ Olson, Finnegan, and Hope, *Visual Rhetoric*, 197.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 3–4.

draws us toward characters; in contrast, fear makes us recoil from what threatens them. So, if Attic audiences did not feel that tragic figures were genuine individuals, then heroes would have no power to engage the emotions. It is by their particularity that these characters make emotional claims on us, as though they are a part of our own experience. It is only through the particularity of *our* feelings that we create emotional bonds with them. What we cherish in our own lives makes us pity them and fear for them. We can see how the reverse also happens: in them our feelings of pity and fear make us recognize what we cherish in them. Thus, human emotion displayed in tragedy is rooted in the fundamental order of the universe; emotion creates a cause-and-effect chain that clearly reveals what *may* happen at any time or place because that is the way the world operates.

When the hero in a tragic play is threatened, for example, the spectator fears for what lies ahead. As Aristotle says twice in *Rhetoric*, what we pity in others, we fear for ourselves.¹⁰ Fear mounts when Oedipus comes to know the truth. In this sense, audiences feel that a valued something is threatened. Tragic fear, exactly like tragic pity, displays the things audiences are willing and unwilling to lose; they fear for Oedipus because his passion for truth results in harm that will befall him as a result of his pursuit of it. To be plausible, actors should express pity and fear relative to the degree of the hero's pain in his devolving degradation. In Oedipus spectators see themselves only amplified; he is not a generalized character, but altogether particular. The suffering of the tragic figure tests the boundaries of what is human in all of us.¹¹

Aristotle directly contradicts Plato in the elder's claim that art is an inferior appeal

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Rhet.*, 1382b 26, 1386a 27.

¹¹ Halliwell stresses that the poet's search for ". . . vividness will be served by strong imagination," *Aesthetics of Mimesis*, 25–26.

to human emotions. When we experience pity and fear in actual life, says Aristotle, they are painful feelings. When they occur as a representation on the tragic stage, a mimesis; emotions are integrated into a poetic structure. Pity and fear interlink to *hamartia*, the tragic mistake or flaw in a protagonist evident in Oedipus: that the oracle was not consulted produces another condemnation in the emotional unraveling of the tragic hero. Tragedy therefore arouses both pity and fear because the ancient viewer can envision him or herself within this cause-and-effect chains—an affect response. Aristotle explains that *Oedipus Rex* is exemplary of the perfect tragedy, and Oedipus is the perfect tragic hero:

Perfect tragedy should . . . imitate actions which excite pity and fear, this being the distinctive mark of tragic imitation. . . The change of fortune presented must not be the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity: for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us. Nor . . . a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity . . . [which is] alien to the spirit of tragedy; . . . for pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves [in an event] . . . neither pitiful nor terrible. . .

The character [must be] between two extremes . . . a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty. He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous—a personage like Oedipus. . .¹²

The description of the genre that requires a catharsis of pity and fear demonstrates Aristotle's concern regarding the audiences' response. He establishes what will be the central preoccupation of rhetoric. Because of the emphasis on affect, it is apparent that his interest in literary art leads him to ask how literary art achieves its affects, and what those affects are.

At the end of the *Poetics* Aristotle presents the idea that the genre can be defined according to the spectator that it finds—a rhetorical principle also fundamental to late 20th century concepts of the reader. Genre itself determines differences in medium, what

¹² Aristotle, *Poet.* IX.

Aristotle calls (objects of) mimesis; modern readers refer this as the subject matter. The medium of imitation follows the object of imitation: form follows content.

Section Overview

The subject of this section is an investigation of rhetorical strategies recommended by Aristotle for actors and orators. Specifically, I will compare how rhetorical strategies for performing pity and fear compare in *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*. *Poetics*, the older of the two works, is a how-to treatise for playwrights: how they should construct their plots using particular visual rhetorical effects to bring emotion before the eyes of audiences.¹³ *Rhetoric* explores visual aspects of performance by orators.

In *Poetics IX* Aristotle explains why in tragedy audiences experience pity and fear:

Now tragedy is an imitation not only of a complete action, but also of objects of fear and pity, and these arise most of all when events happen contrary to expectation but in consequence of one another; for in this way they will have more *wonder* [my italics; wonder addressed in the section on pleasure] in them than if they happened by chance or by fortune, since even among things that happen by chance, the greatest sense of wonder is from those that seem to have happened by design.

Rather than exciting extreme emotion in audiences, Aristotle says the action of the plot should convey the proper degree of emotion. Emotion should be in proper proportion to the play's dramatic action.

The comparative analysis that follows investigates the notion of bringing pity-and-fear-before-the-eyes by asking how pity and fear appear before the spectator and are performances of rhetorical effect. I propose to accomplish this goal by specifically investigating Aristotle's rhetorical strategies for actors. Aristotle indicates that actors

¹³ Aristotle, *Poet.* XVII, 1455a21–24.

need essential skills and qualities to perform dramatic tragedy. I analyze how *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* instruct actors and orators to properly convey pity and fear to increase the mounting pity and fear in the spectator. By comparing the strategies of actors and the emotions of pity and fear in *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, I locate and compare individuated examples of how fear and pity function as rhetoric in each work.

The claim in the section is actors perform pity and fear as a rhetorical strategy for bringing emotion before the eyes of the audience. Acting behaviors are specific rhetorical strategies.

By investigating the interweaving of pity and fear in the interaction between actors and the Attic spectator in tragic drama I hope to draw attention to how effects are encapsulated in acted imagery and are particular to incidents that produce pity and fear. In sum, my analysis examines the nature of the pity and fear, the effective *techné* required by actors, and how it is affect compared in *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*. Pity¹⁴ is likely the most complex emotion in Aristotle's theory because it combines personal detachment with aesthetic pleasure of catharsis and imaginative emotional involvement in the suffering of another. A feature distinguishes pity from all the other emotions: *pathe* in Book II includes very specific visual components.¹⁵

Comparing Pity and Fear in *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*

Pity is held to be one of the crucial emotions identified by Aristotle in the spectator's response to tragedy. Oedipus's pursuit of truth cost him his eyes. Whereas Oedipus loses his capacity to see, in the end—although still blind—he gains *insight*. But

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Rhet.* II, 1385b13–a3.

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Rhet.* II, 1386a28–b1.

what is proper pity? It is possible to miss the mark in an excess of pity or sentimentality. Some claim that sentimental means any display of feeling or taking feeling seriously. Pity, however, is different from sentimentality of inordinate feeling; feeling that goes beyond the source that gives rise to it. Pity is one of the instruments the poet uses to show audiences who they are.¹⁶ We pity the loss of Oedipus' eyes because we know the value of eyes, but more deeply, we pity the violation of Oedipus' increasing humility compared with his earlier hubris. Aristotle perfectly sums up this idea:

If you consider that the part (of the soul) that is barely controlled in our personal misfortunes has been anxious to weep and to lament sufficiently, as it is, by nature, desirous of this, is the very part that receives fulfillment from poets and enjoys it. The part which is best in us, if not educated through rationality and habit, relaxes its guard of mourning, because it watches over the sufferings of another, and it is no shame of itself if it praises and pities another man, if he, saying that he is good, grieves excessively.

Furthermore, there is, one thinks, a certain gain, namely pleasure, and he would not like being deprived of it, by despising the whole drama. Only a few reflect, I think, that enjoyment will be transferred from the spectacle of another's suffering, to one's own, and the one who has nurtured and strengthened the part of him that feels pity at those (dramas) will not find it easy to refrain from it at the time of his own misfortune.¹⁷

Book II of *Rhetoric* introduces *pathe*, pity as a means for exhortation: "It is not right to twist the juryman by manipulating him into anger or envy or pity." Aristotle's recommendation might relate to *epideictic* argument, that civic extortion to values that occurs before a jury. Another possibility is that this view reflects a comprehensive picture of a theory of the emotions; logic and emotions are not antithetical for Aristotle. Book II sets forth specifically the nature of pity, which includes an ethical view. Ethical considerations in Aristotle's tragic theory are critical to perceiving the larger context of

¹⁶ I think that this is what Nietzsche meant when he said "pity [that]. . . deepest abyss: the deeper man looks into life, the deeper too he looks into suffering."

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Rhet.* X, 606a2–b7.

Aristotelian works, Eugene Garver suggests.¹⁸

Eleos, or pity, is defined as a certain pain at an apparently destructive or painful evil happening to one who does not deserve it, and which a person might expect himself or one of his own to suffer, and which “seems close at hand.”¹⁹ In general, someone feels pity “when his state of mind is such that he remembers such things having happened to himself or his own or expects them to happen to himself or his own.”²⁰ Although Aristotle does not use the term, the modern word empathy could be a semantic form of pity. An example of using pity in recollection is when a spectator fears the doom about to befall the hero. He imagines something similar could happen to him. Aristotle says this thought and memory process occurs through *phantasia*. *Phantasia* is imagination that makes use of mimetic interpretation; it applies to it both “feelings about another and memories about pity.”²¹

Related to bringing-before-the-eyes is Aristotle’s baffling visual phrase, “close at hand.”²² The phrase is a metaphor but seems to relate to remembering certain cultural myths and the importance of actors performing tragedy. The skill of the actors is critical in displaying the proper emotion.²³

¹⁸ Kant, *CJ*, 23: 245–246; Aristotle, *Poet.* V, 551b.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Rhet.* II, 386a1–3.

²⁰ Ibid. see above quote: *Rhet.* X, 606a2–b7.

²¹ G. Watson “*Phantasia* in Aristotle’s *De Anima* 3.3” *Classical Quarterly* 32, pp. 100–113; Sonja Foss, Karen Foss, Robert Trapp. “The Congruence of Aristotle’s Rhetoric and Poetics,” (*Southern Speech Communication Journal* 38, 1973), 362–370.

²² See note 19; also, Lawrence J. Flynn, “Rhetoric between Orality and Literacy: Culture Memory and Performance in Isocrates and Aristotle.” (*Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87, 2001), 168; Martha C Nussbaum, “Tragedy and Self-sufficiency: Plato and Aristotle on fear and pity.” (*Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 10 1992), 107–59; and G. Watson, ‘*Phantasia* in Aristotle, *De Anima* 3.3.’ (*Classical Quarterly* 32: 1982), 100–113.

²³ Lawrence J. Flynn, “Rhetoric between Orality and Literacy: Culture Memory and Performance in Isocrates and Aristotle.” (*Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87, 2001), 168; Martha C Nussbaum, “Tragedy and Self-sufficiency: Plato and Aristotle on fear and pity.” (*Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 10 1992), 107–59; and G. Watson, ‘*Phantasia* in Aristotle, *De Anima* 3.3.’ (*Classical Quarterly* 32: 1982), 100–113.

And since sufferings are pitiable when they appear near at hand and since people do not feel pity, or not in the same way, about things ten thousand years in the past or future neither anticipating nor remembering them (myth) necessarily those are more pitiable who contribute to the effect by gestures and cries and display of feelings and generally in their acting, for they make the evil seem near by making it appear before [our]eyes either as something about to happen or as something that has happen.²⁴

In the above quote from the *Rhetoric* Aristotle seems to have in mind the skills of an orator or an actor: comparable skills are needed when actors perform on the stage or when an orator performs in the courtroom; skills such as convincing gestures, voice, and a display of feeling. Aristotle mentions these same skills in the passage below from the *Poetics*.

The passage in the *Rhetoric* indicates that pity's effectiveness compromises when the playwright uses examples from thousands of years ago or the reverse or far in the future as the above quote clearly states. In this context, Aristotle's rhetor is an orator situated in the courtroom. So that emotions of pity may stir in the audience, tragedy must emphasize the mimetic representation of events "close at hand" yet remotely in myth. In other words, the recommendation to present events "close in history" probably best conveys through the skills of the tragedian actor as compared with the orator of the courtroom.

So, in the previous passage, *Rhetoric* exhibits the form of a work of literary theory. The relationships emphasized are the poet, the actors, and the audience. In *Poetics* Aristotle lays out his coherent method for producing the best tragedy, explaining how the playwright's plot, character, and dramatic action, together with the actor's skill, appeal to the audience.

Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain

²⁴ Aristotle, *Rhet.*, 1386b.

magnitude, in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament (rhythm, harmony, and song) being found in separate parts of the play, in form of action, not of narrative.²⁵

Aristotle considers poetry to be a higher art than history writing. He delineates between poetry and history writing:

It is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen—what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose. The work of Herodotus might be put into verse, and it would still be a species of history, with meter no less than without it. *The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen.* [my italics] Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular.²⁶

Aristotle provides an understanding in the *Poetics* of tragedy as literature; it appeals to the emotions as well as to the intellect. For example:

Tragedy is an imitation not only of a complete action, but also of events inspiring fear or pity. Such an effect is best produced when the events come on us by surprise; and the effect is heightened when, at the same time, they follow as cause and effect. The tragic wonder will then be greater than if they happened of themselves or by accident; for even coincidences are most striking when they have an air of design.²⁷

The relationship between emotion and mind is not well understood; “emotions themselves are not well understood,” observes Elizabeth Belfiore.²⁸ For example, the plight of Aristotle’s ideal tragic hero suggests that pity’s universal appeals to and ultimately transforms basic human instincts. Two emotions regarding pity are mentioned in the *Poetics*; however, they are not mentioned in the context of the spectator of tragic drama. Rather, Aristotle emphasizes the conditions under which plot and characters open fearful and pitiable emotions in the endeavor to convey emotion to the eye of the

²⁵ Aristotle, *Poet.* VI, 2.

²⁶ Aristotle, *Poet.*, 5.551b; G.R.F.Ferrari. “Aristotle’s Literary Aesthetics,” (*Phronesis* 44 1999), 81–98.

²⁷ Aristotle, *Poet.* IX, 156b.

²⁸ Elizabeth Belfiore, *Tragic Pleasure, Aristotle on Plot and Emotion.* (New Jersey: Princeton, 1992), 343.

beholder. The puzzle confronting the reader is Aristotle's slight explanation for the way audiences experience emotions as spectators of tragedy. Aristotle emphasizes formal structural elements of a play as the means of conveying *eleos* and *phobos*; he implies they exist for the sake of the spectator.

In a compact phrase, Aristotle introduces three ideas essential to the poet's understanding of pity. First, he elaborates the general notion of pity as memory mentioned above; he reasons that pity concerns emotion either anticipated or recognized in the past and by the suffering of others. Second, Aristotle begins to explore the reason why myth, such as Oedipus, is useful as a tragic trope. Third, in the specific visual component of pity, bringing-forth-before-the-eyes addresses the way visual tropes should be utilized as affect, to enable tragedy's fear and pity as effect, their proper aim. Aristotle emphasizes: ". . . the [visually] concentrated effect is more pleasurable than the one with a large admixture of time to dilute it. . . [a certain] unity is in the imitation."²⁹ Aristotle's visual laser opens a space to examine the actor and the experience of the spectator.

The Actor and the Spectator

Poetics emphasizes that the plot is the most important element of tragedy. However, in this section I focus on the role of effect as an artistic devise in relation to *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*. Aristotle's ideal rhetorician is someone who is able to see the available means of persuasion.³⁰ This is not to say that the rhetor will be able to convince the spectator under all circumstances. Rather, Aristotle says that he is in a similar situation as the physician who possesses a complete grasp of his art only if he neglects

²⁹ Aristotle, *Poet.*, 1462.

³⁰ Aristotle, *Topics* VI, 12, 149b25; *Rhet.* I, 2, 1355b26f.

nothing that might heal his patient, though Aristotle emphasizes that he is not able to heal every patient. The rhetor's grasp of his method is similar if he discovers every available means of persuasion, although he will not be able to convince everybody.³¹

Aristotle posits that good acting is able to increase the effects of pity. However, in other sections he laments the inability of some actors and orators to create convincing effects in their art of delivery; the inartistic display of visual effects. In tragedy, poets previously presented their artistic representations to the public. In Book III, he gives scant attention to actors and begrudgingly:

Those performers [who give attention to the delivery elements] are usually the ones who win poetic contests, and as actors are now more important than poets, so it is in political contests because of the corruption of the governments.³²

His indictment is similar to our modern sense of the popular appeal of politicians and celebrities who find they can become famous for being famous. The ancients seem plagued in much the same way. It is puzzling that Aristotle belittles actors in Book III yet he argues on their behalf in Book II. Actors do appear to be essential, particularly when artfully portrayed pity is at stake. *Poetics* gives a clue to what Aristotle might have meant:

One should, as much as possible, also work out the plot in gestures, since, by nature, those in the grip of emotions are the most convincing, and the one who is afflicted by misfortune makes others feel his affliction, and the one enraged makes others feel his anger.³³

So, Aristotle requires a particular tone of voice to accompany the language of emotion—the actor's voice must sustain a phonetic tone communicating the required emotion; anger, disgust, sadness, and joy, must be convincing. In other words, an actor

³¹ Ibid.

³² Aristotle, *Rhet.* III, 1400b32–35.

³³ Aristotle, *Poet.* XVII, 1455a29–32.

must unify voice with appropriate body language. The paired speech and language of the body transmits to the eyes literally and figuratively. In *Rhetoric* III, he offers this

instruction to orators:

. . . to express emotion, you will employ the language of anger in speaking of outrage; the language of disgust and discreet reluctance to utter a word when speaking of impiety or foulness; the language of exultation for a tale of glory, and that of humiliation for a tale of submission, and so in all other cases.³⁴

In addition to orators, skilled actors are needed to complement an excellent plot and script. Good actors enable good tragedy. Giving expression to pity, actors themselves should enter into the grip of emotions through practiced emotions. Tragic emotion, such as the pathos displayed through gestures, “expresses itself through the actor.”³⁵

Conversely, Aristotle disapproves of acting for acting’s sake, acting separated from oratory and tragedian performance. In *Poetics*, Aristotle instructs actors on the art of inducing pity and fear:

Thus whenever it is best to make them [probably the audience] experience fear he should make them realize that they are of such a sort that they can suffer, and that others better than them have suffered; and to show others like them suffering or having suffered, and at the hands of those from whom they did not expect it and suffering things they did not expect and at a time when they were not thinking of the possibility.³⁶

Aristotle adds a note of caution in *Poetics*: the appeal to the eye must not resort to “inartistic” display of visual effects; rather through plausible representation (mimesis), pleasure is affected³⁷:

The plot should be so constructed that even without seeing the play anyone hearing of the incidents happening thrills with fear and pity as a result of what

³⁴ Aristotle, *Rhet.* III, 1400b32–35.

³⁵ J.G.Warry, *Greek Aesthetic Theory: A Study of Callistic and Aesthetic Concepts in the Works of Plato and Aristotle* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1962), 42.

³⁶ Aristotle, *Rhet.* II, 1383a7–12.

³⁷ McKeon, Richard P. “Literary Criticism and the Concept of Imitation in Antiquity,” *Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern*, R. S. Crane, ed., 1952, p. 25. McKeon’s view is that these displays have nothing in common with tragedy.

occurs. . . To produce this effect by means of an appeal to the eye is inartistic and needs adventitious aid, while those who by such means produce an effect which is not fearful but merely monstrous have nothing in common with tragedy.

For one should not seek from tragedy all kind of pleasures but that which is *peculiar* [my emphasis] to tragedy, and since the poet must by ‘representation’ produce the pleasure which comes from feeling pity and fear, obviously this quality must be embodied in the incidents.³⁸

Actors should guide their performance by the action of the plot. In the above passage, Aristotle refers to “gestures, cries, and display of feelings” produced through inartistic means. This could refer to the sense of actors overacting their part, or in an overblown display of feelings. Such display could detract from the subtle rendering of tragedy as an artfully produced mimetic.

In *Rhetoric* II 1386a34, the orator or tragic actor has to convince a rhetorical audience that a past or future set of circumstances is pitiable; the audience has to “see” it. Upon seeing, the evil has appeared for the audience; the evil is about to appear or will appear in the future.

In *Poetics*, Aristotle’s ideal hero is the one most worthy of pity and most capable of encountering evil because he is noble. Aristotle demonstrates this in the visual phrase:

And it is especially pitiable when noble people are in such extremities, as someone who is unworthy [of suffering] and the suffering is evident before the eyes.³⁹

When he discusses pity in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle appears to be dealing with emotion at two levels: first, *eleos* connotes a cause and effect relationship, that dreaded sense of danger due to the threat of real events; therefore, fear is felt as a real thing. In the second sense, pity requires *phantasia*: through the imagination the spectator imagines and

³⁸ Aristotle, *Poet.* XIV.

³⁹ Aristotle, *Poet.* IX; *Rhet.* III, 1400b32–35.

experiences the pity and fear he associates with the hero. The two words link closely. A puzzle is how fear may suffocate pity in *Rhetoric*; when, at the same time, fear is required for the spectator to arrive at *katharsis* (what I refer to later as aesthetic transformation) or the state of contemplation as Aristotle predicts.

A possible solution may lie in the word itself. Eleos involves someone whose misfortunes are without cause: the hero does not deserve the status. Once again, *phantasia* is an important facilitator in fiction. The more flexible eleos in the second instance derives from an artistic mimetic representation. Eleos is aroused from the actor's speech delivered on the stage. Therefore, the more artistically conveyed pity an actor can portray, the more the transfer of emotion. To say this in another way, the more the actor's skill makes possible or brings-before-the-eyes an impending evil, the greater the emotional enjoyment for the spectator.

Anger is in another sense a form of the "anticipated pleasure of retaliation," not self-suffering and not the pathos of another.⁴⁰ Aristotle fails to explain what separates the two representations of eleos, only that the first belongs to an experiential state associated with fear itself; the second could be a type of aesthetic contemplation on the-plight of the hero's state.⁴¹

Rhetoric defines fear: "Let fear be a sort of pain or agitation, coming from imagination of a future destruction or painful evil."⁴² In *Poetics*, as noted, the person most worthy of pity is "noble": In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle adds the visual component

⁴⁰ R. Kennedy trans. 2:1,2; S. Leighton, "Aristotle's exclusion of anger from the experience of tragedy," (*Ancient Philosophy* 23, 2003), 361–81.

⁴¹ David W. E. Fenner, "Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Analysis" (*Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 37:1, Spring, 2003), 40–55.

⁴² Aristotle, *Rhet.* II, 1382a21–22; Debra Hawhee., "Agonism and Arete." *Philosophy and Rhetoric*: 35:3, (2003), 185–207.

which amplifies unjust suffering: “And it is especially pitable when noble people are in such extremities, as someone who is unworthy and the suffering is evident before the eyes.”⁴³ However, Aristotle points out that those who are in the presence of fear do not pity:

. . . [those who are afraid] who think that they have suffered all the terrible things, and have become cold toward the future ‘ . . . those who are completely destroyed do not pity.’⁴⁴

Returning to the second type of *eleos*, we can say that *eleos* as contemplation is an emotion of a removed self in the present, focused on the suffering of others. That is, the spectator may experience or may have experienced a similar state but only in and through *phantasia*. The importance of the state of mind a spectator brings to his spectatorship makes a major difference to a spectator’s aesthetic experience.⁴⁵

Pity according to the above description turns on the mythic heroic figure who possesses *hubris*. Seeming to relate to a sympathetic and humane state of mind, this idea holds that as long as the evil visits the hero, an undeserved misfortune ensues. Pity was intended to be felt at an apparent (perceived) evil happening to someone who does not deserve it.⁴⁶ And fear develops from the appearance or imagination (*phantasia*) of imminent evil⁴⁷: the imagination experiences through *phantasia*, appearance. Curiously, *phantasia* is defined as “weak perception.”⁴⁸

Aristotle continues: “Imagination would be a motion generated by actual perception . . . since sight is the principal sense, imagination [*phantasia*] has derived even

⁴³ Aristotle, *Rhet.* II, 1385b32–241386b, 6–8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ I have emphasized this point previously and will restate the point in the conclusion.

⁴⁶ Aristotle, *Rhet.* II, 21285b13.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Aristotle, *Rhet.* I, 1370a28.

its name from light (phaos), because, without light it is not possible to see.” Aristotle’s advice is directed to those writing and performing (*Poetics*). Phantasia is similarly comparable as advice to orators in the *Rhetoric*. Poets must employ phantasia that they may bring-before-the-eyes mythical events. In *Rhetoric* Aristotle recommends phantasia to orators so that they may produce “pitiabile events.”⁴⁹

Halliwell’s insight is that poetry is capable of sustaining “pleasurable or painful feelings associated with particular traits of ‘character’ and life as a whole.”⁵⁰ For Aristotle, poetry is ideally, “an imaginative enactment of possible structures of action [and suffering].”⁵¹ The emotions tragedy arouses closely link complex properties of the human experience exhibited in the play.⁵² Belfiore captures the spirit single to tragedy in the phrase: “. . . a unique ability to create visions in poetry; creators of images are also called creators of visions.”⁵³

For *Rhetoric*’s orator bringing-[pity] before-the-eyes is determined by real events “close at hand,” while the *Poetic*’s emotional transformation turns on mimetic representation of imagined events. Thus, the plausibility of emotion in each case depends for credibility on the poet’s and orator’s skill. The play’s environment should cause the spectator to experience an emotion as if the real event were occurring. Such would be the case it seems “. . . when pathos is apparent before-the- eyes.”⁵⁴

So far I have discussed the role of the actor and briefly the role of the playwright in bringing-pity-and-fear-before-the-eyes of the spectator. Together with the powerful

⁴⁹ Aristotle, *Rhet.* II, 1386a33–34); Watson, 113.

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Poet.* [text, tr.] pp.589–599.

⁵¹ Aristotle, *Rhet.* II, 1450a16–17.

⁵² Aristotle, *Poet.* XVII, 1455a21–22.

⁵³ Belfiore, 170–174.

⁵⁴ Aristotle, *Rhet.* II, 1386b.

role of speech and tone in emotion, these techniques, when portrayed artistically, deepen the spectator experience. The discussion below continues to explore in *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* and the notion of fear in tandem with the spectator's role in bringing a proper state of mind to the play.

That Aristotle links fear and pity as states of mind in imagination seems to imply that pity connects with fear in the two meanings of *eleos* mentioned. If fear is too great, however, pity cannot exist.⁵⁵ “Nor again those who are terribly afraid [can feel pity]—for those stricken by their own suffering do not feel pity.”⁵⁶ What is Aristotle's meaning? The puzzle requires examining the two extremes of fear, then working to understand the integral unity of the emotions as they tie together.

In *Poetics*, by inference, the playwright and the actor's role in creating extremes of fear include inartistic techniques and do not appeal to the eye and fail to produce the proper effect (i.e., the proper state of mind for the spectator, previously discussed in the section on pity):

. . . that . . . to produce this [visual] effect by means of an appeal to the eye is inartistic and needs adventitious aid, while those who by such means produce an effect which is not fearful but merely monstrous have nothing in common with tragedy.⁵⁷

Fear's elusiveness therefore turns on the state of being in the spectator. One should not be a spectator too full of contentment, “that they think they possess all the good things in life. . . [that they cannot imagine] the impossibility of evil befalling [them]. . . nor should a spectator be consumed by too much fear. . . panic-stricken people do not feel pity,

⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Rhet.* II, 1383a; Hawhee, 186.

⁵⁶ Aristotle, *Rhet.* II, 1385b.

⁵⁷ Aristotle, *Poet.* XIV.

because they are taken up with what is happening to themselves. . .”⁵⁸

As mentioned—although all the conditions are set through the play’s elements—fear is nonetheless conditioned by the spectator, not on the play—the state of mind the spectator brings to the play.⁵⁹ Accordingly, Aristotle’s sense of not too much, not too little, but just right recalls the mean described in ethical theory.

An additional attribute is important to Aristotle’s spectator suggested in a certain type of ethic discussed in the *Poetics*: “. . . one should come to tragedy [not only in this somewhere-in-middle state, but also]. . . believe[ing] in the goodness of at least some people. . . [and the quality of] remembering that similar misfortunes have happened to us or ours, or expecting them to happen in the future. . . only those who feel pity who are between these two extremes.”⁶⁰

Continuing the discussion of the spectator, Aristotle argues that fear and pity act freely as “complete action” (example below) in unified emotion enabling a complex reaction in the spectator. Because they are integrally connected, the ability to perceive another’s distress requires both. Spectators project on themselves that same possibility of distress:

Thus whenever it is best [for the actor] to make them [the spectator] experience fear he should make them realize that they are of such sort that they can suffer, and tht other better than them have suffered; and to show other like them suffering or having suffered, and at the hands of those from whom they did not expect if and suffering things they did not expect and at a time when they were not thinking of the possibility.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Aristotle, *Rhet.* II, 1386a–b; John M. Cooper. “An Aristotelian Theory of the Emotions,” *Essays on Aristotle’s Rhetoric*, A.O. Rorty, ed. (Princeton, N.J.:1996), 238–57.

⁵⁹ Immanuel Kant echoes Aristotle: he also thought that an aesthetic judgment was not a property of objects, but ways in which we respond to objects; for example in *Poetics*, the tragic action is intended to bring about the aesthetic disposition or experience (contemplation).

⁶⁰ Aristotle, *Poet.* XIV.

⁶¹ Aristotle, *Rhet.* II, 138a7–12.

Spectators not consumed by either extremes of fear hold another advantage. They would be more likely to be open to other artistic devices mentioned by Aristotle (i.e., “the design of chance” and of “unity of actions” associated with the best plot).⁶²

At this point, the mention of additional artistic devices, such as visual metaphors, further emphasizes how fear and pity transmit before-the-eyes.⁶³ The devices are “the marvelous,” “astonishment,” and “reversal” and the mythic devices. Aristotle includes in his description the importance of the timing of actions:

Tragedy, however, is an imitation not only a complete action, but also of incidents arousing pity and fear. Such incidents have the very effect on the mind when they occur unexpectedly and at the same time in consequences of one another; there is more of a marvelous in them than if they happened of themselves or by mere chance. Even matters of chance seem most marvelous if there is an appearance of design as it were in them. . .⁶⁴

“Astonishment,” argues Aristotle “is the imitation not just of a complete action, but also of events that evoke fear and pity. These effects occur above all when things come about contrary to expectation but because of one another. This will be more astonishing than if they come about spontaneously or by chance.”⁶⁵ An example mentioned by Aristotle is Oedipus’ astonished ignorance of the manner of Laius’ death.⁶⁶

Another creative device is reversal, “a change of the opposite in the action being performed.”⁶⁷ For example, in *Oedipus* someone comes to deliver good news and free him from his fear (about his mother). By disclosing Oedipus’ identity the messenger

⁶² See Sara Newman’s comments on page 23.

⁶³ Bringing-before-the-eyes, employed in both the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*, is a device signifying “things engaged in an activity.”

⁶⁴ Aristotle, *Rhet.* II, 1452a.

⁶⁵ Aristotle, *Poet.* VI, 151b.

⁶⁶ Aristotle, *Poet.* X, 560b.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

instead brings about the opposite result.⁶⁸ Next, a short discussion highlights how aesthetic judgment is important to the spectator's proper stance toward in tragic drama and how this stance relates to emotions of fear.

Kant does not discuss the notion of a tragic hero; however, he holds with Aristotle that human nature inherently binds conflict with inclinations toward both good and evil tendencies. Moreover, Kant says, humans use “good will, freely exercised, to pursue good and not evil.”⁶⁹ To extend the argument, if the engaged spectator finds himself in an agitated state of *eleos*, he is unable to enter the realm of objective contemplation. Kant's “purposiveness” in aesthetic theory aids this understanding: aesthetic feeling begins as contemplative and reflective, sufficient unto itself. By extension, tragedy is beautiful because it possesses the “form of finality,” that is, it appears to have been designed with a purpose.⁷⁰

Yet, judgments of taste are both subjective and universal. They are subjective because they are responses of pleasure and do not essentially involve any claims about the properties of the object itself. On the other hand, aesthetic judgments are universal and not merely personal; in a crucial way, they must be disinterested to respond to the claims of the object (plot). The ideal spectator then is free from extremes; she is prepared to enter this realm—to suspend disbelief. The rhetorical inference is—as in *Critique of Judgment*—that Aristotle's idea of tragedy and its universal subjects link creative purpose to the reflective spectator. This sense of universality in Kant echoes similarly in

⁶⁸ In *Poetics*, Aristotle says, “Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; with incidents arousing pity and fear. A great admirer of *Oedipus the King*, Aristotle considered it the perfect tragedy.”

⁶⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Judgment*. Pluhar, Werner, S., trans. Originally, Prussia, 1790, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc.), 1987, 433.

⁷⁰ Kant, *CJ*, 23: 245–246; Aristotle, *Poet.* V, 551b.

Poetics.⁷¹

Pleasure

This section uses mimesis and the *epideictic* to explore the notion of how pity and fear can produce pleasure. Through the *epideictic* lens pity and fear become tropes of rhetorical strategy that employ excellence of artistic technique. Much has been written to explain why catharsis⁷² is needed to resolve pity and fear. Aristotle uses the term as a metaphor to describe the effects of tragedy on the spectator; we still need to explain how the spectator arrives at pleasure from pity and fear. Although the cathartic theory is widely accepted, I depart from the idea advanced by Malcolm Heath and others to explore a rhetorical interpretation of how pleasure could result from the mimetic representation brought about by aesthetic contemplation. My claim that aesthetic is an aspect of rhetoric offers a reasonable and emotionally satisfying alternative.

Mimesis emphasizes the visual and material status of works of art. The meaning of mimesis is to *embody* or *enact* likeness from material form, such as the form of dramatic tragedy. In his discussion of perception and of metaphors Aristotle says that the visual action of placing *objects* (or emotion as object) before-the-mind's-eye is a mimetic action. In *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* the language of art is fundamentally mimetic, not symbolic. Halliwell says of mimesis,

. . . Aristotle's idea of mimesis [places] the mimetic medium [at the center]: representational works do not offer us deceptive pseudo realities. . . [Plato] but the fictive. . . [plausible] reality in artistic medium that allow such reality to be recognized and responded to coherently. . . aesthetic understanding cannot be limited to matching a copy with a known original, nor can it be reduced to the merely factual and immediate registering that a certain kind of thing has been

⁷¹ Kant, *CJ*, 23: 245–246; Aristotle, *Poet.* V, 551b.

⁷² Catharsis is a metaphor originally used by Aristotle in the *Poetics* to describe the effects of tragedy on the spectator.

represented.⁷³

Mimesis helps explain how the spectator suspends disbelief to enable fiction's emotional impact and visual immediacy of a protagonist's moving performance.

The *epideictic* further explains the way a spectator's emotional transformation takes place. *Epideictic* defines rhetorical strategies, the way or means audiences perceive pleasure. Artistic excellence is defined through techniques such as plausibility and the quality of an actor's performance.

Poetics explains, “. . . the structure of the best tragedy should be not simple but complex; in incidents arousing fear and pity for that is *peculiar* (italics mine) to this form of art . . . in language made pleasurable.”⁷⁴ Aristotle presents a succinct definition of tragedy that emphasizes the pleasure to be gained in dramatic tragedy through emotion:

Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is admirable, complete (composed of an introduction, a middle part and an ending), and possesses magnitude; in language made pleasurable, each of its species separated in different parts; performed by actors, not through narration; effecting through pity and fear the purification of such emotions.⁷⁵

I begin by exploring scholarly perspectives that tie literary pleasure to mimesis: artistic form, unity, *techne*, and cognitive pleasure. Next, I discuss the peculiar pleasure by comparing passages from *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*. Finally, I examine how the *epideictic* intertwines with aesthetic feeling. I show how aesthetic contemplation is a transformative process: the spectator's relationship to the hero's evolves through the tropes of pity and fear, ultimately leading to the experience of the emotional pleasure in empathic recognition of his fate. Near the end of the section, I include an excerpt from Sophocles'

⁷³ Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: ancient texts and modern problems*: Princeton UP, 2002, 190–191.

⁷⁴ Aristotle, *Poet.*, 1452b.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Oedipus at Colonus. The quote exemplifies a unifying principle in at least three elements important to Aristotle that lead to aesthetic pleasure. The discussion that follows highlights interpretations of how pleasure ties to emotion in views of modern Aristotelian scholars.

According to Malcolm Heath, it is doubtful that Aristotle had a concept that compares with the modern sense of the aesthetic. Aristotle's concept of pleasure relates to perception.⁷⁶ Moreover, Heath claims that in Aristotle we cannot find a concept of art:

It is true that he habitually groups together many of the things that we would classify as art—painting sculpture, music, dance, poetry. But the shared feature which for Aristotle makes this a coherent grouping is imitation or representation (mimesis, to which similarity is essential: these activities all, in Aristotle's view involve making likenesses).⁷⁷

Eugene Garver dismisses altogether emotion and the pleasure associated with dramatic experience. He brings into relief the tension between rhetorical and aesthetic theory by exposing what he believes is *Rhetoric's* political agenda. *Rhetoric's* purpose is, “critically political.”⁷⁸ The scholar says that some critics claim the work to be the epitome of “oppressive ideology.”⁷⁹ Garver argues instead for a reading of *Rhetoric* that emphasizes political theory engaged in moral and ethical evaluation. His convincing argument subordinates aesthetics to the political realm: “relationships flow between the body politic and the good orator.”⁸⁰

Charles Martindale argues that if the *Poetics* persuades entirely as a political theory, “it would require considerable ingenuity. Homer gives unity of action to the *Iliad*

⁷⁶ Aristotle, *DeAnima*, 431a10f.

⁷⁷ *Technosophia* (<http://www.archelogos.com>) accessed 11.2011.

⁷⁸ Eugene Garver. *Aristotle's Rhetoric: An Art of Character*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 122–123.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

by telling the wrath of Achilles, not his whole life.”⁸¹ Martindale’s argument favors a Kantian reading; he suggests that Aristotle’s “conspicuous lack of political agenda in the *Poetics*”⁸² supports an aesthetic of free will, which is Kant’s counterclaim to Plato—Plato says that literature and art corrupt. He continues with Kant that free will requires persons to be free to choose corruption, “that a just society in which different opinions are promulgated is healthier than one where such differences are suppressed, even that virtue must have something to test itself against if it is not to be a ‘fugitive and cloistered.’”⁸³

Martha Nussbaum demonstrates that *Rhetoric* does exhibit some ties to moral and political considerations. She emphasizes, instead, that emotion and experiential perceptions are pleasurable and clearly apparent in both *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*. *Poetics* focuses on theoretical analysis: ordering plot, character, and tragic action artistically arranged bring pleasure to the viewer. *Rhetoric* III sets forth artistic devices and tropes that enhance artistic representation.⁸⁴ Pleasure in the dramatic experience is thus aided by the particular form *Poetics* stipulates and by the figurative tropes that make arguments visual.

Butcher’s influential study *Aristotle’s Theory of Poetry and Fine Art* mirrors to some extent the aesthetic ideal of Kant who previously attempted to reveal the existence of systematic aesthetic ideas in Aristotle in the *Critique of Judgment*. Butcher believes that “the cardinal points of Aristotle’s aesthetic theory can be sized up with some

⁸¹ “Banishing the Poets.” *The Idea of Ancient, Literary Criticism*, Charles Martindale, Rev. Too Yun Lee, Too Yun. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. Arion: 8, 1993), 117.

⁸² Ibid. In addition, Kant’s point is that there is a kind of knowledge, neither rational, political, or ethical, which makes way for a separate realm for the aesthetic argued in *Critique of Judgment*.

⁸³ Ibid., see note 81.

⁸⁴ Martha C. Nussbaum. *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*. *Beacon*, First Things, (October 1996), 37–41; 378–94.

certainty.”⁸⁵ The claim seems overblown. I suggest instead that it is possible to identify a theory of pleasure in Aristotle—especially pleasure associated with the mimetic arts—in particular how pity and fear produce in the spectator pleasure.

The sometimes contentious tension between rhetoric and the aesthetics of emotion is made visible in the prominent debate between Jonathan Lear and Stephen Halliwell. Their exchange highlights two opinions concerning how pity and fear in dramatic tragedy may produce pleasure.

Lear asserts that pity opens the way for the situated audience to disengage from the action that takes place on the stage and thereafter to observe the logic behind tragic events that happen in the polis.⁸⁶

Replying to this argument, Halliwell counters, “I do not understand Lear’s claim that pity ‘guarantees our ability to pull ourselves back from involvement in tragedy.’ Pity is not voluntary. . . it transforms the conduct of the spectator in life, because it has the potential to contribute to the tacit redefinition of an audience’s moral identity.”⁸⁷

Lear counterargues, “Pity in Halliwell’s vision is emotionally susceptible to imaginative possibilities and might contribute to tacit redefinition of an audience’s moral identity.”⁸⁸ Lear takes the Platonic view that pity in the *Poetics* leads to apathy; it directs attention to conditions in the polis.

Conversely, Halliwell claims that emotion moves the situated and contemporary

⁸⁵ Butcher viii; Aristotle, *Poet.*, 350 B.C.E., S. H. Butcher translation, The Internet Classics Archive; Halliwell’s *Poetics*, n.1, chapter two, p. 43 refers the reader to Teichmuller vol. 2 for an exhaustive commentary on an 19th century attempts to find an aesthetic system in Aristotle.

⁸⁶ J. Lear, “Katharsis,” *Phronesis* 33 (1988), 297–326; Stephen R. Leighton, “Aristotle and the Emotions,” *Essays on Aristotle’s Rhetoric*, A.O. Rorty ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 206–37; *Essays*, “Aristotle and Moral Realism,” 85–95.

⁸⁷ Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: ancient texts and modern problems*: Princeton UP, 2002.

⁸⁸ Halliwell, “Aristotle and Moral Realism” 85–95; “Pleasure, Understanding, etc.,” 259 n. 47, Lear in Heinaman (ed).

audiences to become ethically involved in tragic performance, and by extension, in real life, a view that counters Martindale's reading. Halliwell's idea embraces the Aristotelian view that moral conceptions of pity as "good and evil" drive the action and emotion, including pleasure, in the audience.

Malcolm Heath follows Halliwell by highlighting the affective orientation of *Poetics* and how it engages the rhetorical audience "cognitively and emotionally."⁸⁹ Heath makes *wonder* cognitive by conflating it with the "desire to understand and the pleasure in learning" cited in *Poetics IV*. His claim is that pleasure is solely one of "a re-establishment [kathistasthai] of catharsis to the natural."⁹⁰ What goes missing in Heath is the transformative power of the mimetic component.⁹¹

Next, I compare passages from *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* to support the claim that through mimesis—which includes cognitive learning and recognition—the spectator transitions from a state of ignorance to a state of knowledge. This experience is pleasurable; moreover, learning accompanied by wonder (*phantasia* or imagination) evolves: concern for the hero who suffers reflects in the spectator's emotional states of pity and fear. Aristotle suggests that pleasure in tragedy, unlike comedy, develops from the spectator's increasing emotional involvement with people who are "good and noble"⁹² (e.g., kings and heroes), the pleasure mimesis delivers, and techniques of artistic portrayals.

Poetics, and to a lesser degree *Rhetoric*, articulates the visual concerns of artistic form, unity, *techné* (addressed below), and the nature of pleasure to be derived from

⁸⁹ "Aristotle and the pleasures of tragedy." *Making Sense of Aristotle: Essays in Poetic*, 145.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Mimesis is discussed in more depth in Chapter 1 of the dissertation.

⁹² "Aristotle and the pleasures of tragedy." *Making Sense of Aristotle: Essays in Poetic*, 145.

works of mimesis. This argument can be stated as an enthymeme: if the actor's portrayal of the emotions of pity and fear is plausible, then the spectator's aesthetic wonder increases in the pleasure that comes from a growing understanding of the plight of the tragic hero. As mentioned, Aristotle refers to this pleasure as the *peculiar pleasure* that he associates with wonder, often paired with recognition of the hero's tragic plight. In *Poetics* this process occurs in the spectator's recognition of characters through tropes of tokens, artistic contrivances, memory, and reasoning (including false inferences). Finally, it arises out of recognizing the emotional power of the events themselves (as in *Oedipus Rex*). Aristotle defines this recognition as a change from ignorance to knowledge.⁹³

The chapter has examined the effect of pleasure in the artful display of pity and fear depicted rhetorically by actors. But how tragic drama could produce pleasure is still puzzling.

Poetics IV is the first account of any aspect of pleasure. In the context in which Aristotle is emphasizing the basic cognitive features of poetry, he stresses that pleasure in visual and artistic representation is accessible even to the least cognitively sophisticated humans: "Understanding is extremely pleasant, not just for philosophers but for others too in the same way, despite their limited capacity for it."⁹⁴ It appears that Aristotle is forming in the above passage an understanding of how mimesis links to cognitive pleasure in order to explore more complex forms of mimesis such as artistic expression and artistic representation in tragic drama.

Within Western traditions, the concept of mimesis has been central to theorizing the essence of artistic expression, describing characteristics that distinguish works of art

⁹³ Aristotle, *Poet.* IV. Mimesis is discussed in more depth in Chapter 1 of the dissertation.

⁹⁴ Aristotle, *Poet.*, 1448b12–15.

from other phenomena and the myriad of ways in which audiences experience and respond to works of art.⁹⁵ Thus, viewing a dramatic tragedy requires the exercise of multifaceted learning capacities and contemplative perceptions for ascertaining different types of mimetic representations, such as focusing on a single character or event. This complex capability in humans produces an integrated experience of pleasure in fiction. So, Aristotle requires mimesis to produce the peculiar pleasure he most associates with tragedy.

Mimesis is a particular avenue for gaining knowledge through fictive representations that produces pleasure.

Is learning a plausible truth in the real world the same as learning from mimetic tragedy? Learning need not be true to reality: Aristotle says it may correspond to “what people say” or *doxa*.⁹⁶ So it follows that it is possible that fictional truths—mythology for example—are not automatically truths about the real world. The pleasure of learning from tragedy is not necessarily learning from reality; rather fiction (mimesis), which engenders empathy.

Cognitive pleasure is mentioned in *Poetics IV* when Aristotle says that human beings have a disposition to take pleasure in observing and in imitation. He specifies the natural capacity that comes from the pleasure of imitation. Using the visual arts as an example, he points out that someone looking at a painting must go through a process of reasoning and inference to finally reach a conclusion of the form “this is so-and-so.”⁹⁷

⁹⁵ In most cases, mimesis is defined as having two primary meanings: imitation (specifically, the imitation of nature as object, phenomena, or process) and that of artistic representation. Representation most accurately captures the more complex forms of mimesis.

⁹⁶ Aristotle, *Poet.*, 1460b10f, 1460b35–1461a1.

⁹⁷ Aristotle, *Poet.*, 1448b12–17; *Rhet.*, 1371b4–10.

One must recognize a picture of a horse as a picture of a horse. Recognition involves a capacity for cognition and is pleasurable, since Aristotle professes that learning is universally pleasant to humans: all human beings by nature desire knowledge.⁹⁸

Considering what is involved in watching a tragedy, the spectator within the Attic social context would need more than rudimentary recognitions of the form “this is so-and-so” as explained above. For example in *Oedipus*, the rhetorical audience needs to recognize the structure of the plot, the relationship among characters, the unfolding of events, and how these link from beginning to end. But the processes are not unusually demanding, so tragedy will be pleasurable for everyone. And tragedy should produce for the spectator, moral understanding of events in order to perceive, for instance, that the misfortune of the hero is not deserved.⁹⁹ So, tragedy involves cognitive processes that are more complex than basic drama, yet nonetheless produce pleasure. Aristotle uses cognitive pleasure to highlight why we enjoy metaphor: “learning is easy . . . [and] naturally pleasant to all.”¹⁰⁰

Techné

In *Poetics IV*, Aristotle investigates various pleasure(s) that come from multifaceted language and sound in tragic drama or techné. For example in the definition of tragedy, he describes its verbal language and performances as “made pleasurable” by rhythm and melody.¹⁰¹ Song is the most important of tragedy’s “pleasurable

⁹⁸ Aristotle, *Rhet.*, 1371a31–4; *Metaphysics*, Book I: Men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer seeing (one might say) to everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many difference between things.

⁹⁹ Aristotle, *Rhet.*, 1453a3–5.

¹⁰⁰ Aristotle, *Rhet.*, 1410b10f.

¹⁰¹ Aristotle, *Poet.*, 1448b17–19.

enhancements.”¹⁰² He mentions staging too. Together music and staging are mentioned as sources of intense pleasure.¹⁰³ Visual and aural performances add to the pleasures of tragedy. Plot, above all else, defines the primary pleasure mimesis accomplishes.

One of Aristotle’s major contributions to rhetoric was his systematic and thorough treatment of invention: the art of finding the available arguments in a given case. I have shown that Aristotle’s conception of mimetic art, begins with the broad idea of *techne*—craft, skill, method, or art—or “the capacity to act in accordance with reasoned procedures so as to produce designed results.”¹⁰⁴ Halliwell posits that in this statement it is possible to abstract an aesthetic theory that articulates strategic techniques.¹⁰⁵ Aristotle shows, for instance, that the job of the poet is to produce pleasure through specific emotions using specific artistic means. Aristotle says, “the poet should produce the [peculiar] pleasure which comes from pity and fear through imitation.”¹⁰⁶ In the statement we understand the appropriate *means* of achieving the peculiar pleasure is thorough the emotions of pity and fear. Aristotle says the kind of events must be suited to a tragic plot. For example, a happy ending for good characters, a bad ending for the evil character would be a distortion and would condescend to “weak audiences.”¹⁰⁷ When spectators recognize the poet’s subtlety—what is not obvious in the characters—the act provides cognitive pleasures because as Aristotle says, learning is universally pleasant to humans.

The discussion has highlighted scholarly views and compared passages in

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Aristotle, *Rhet.*, 1449b28f.

¹⁰⁴ Halliwell, *Aesthetics of Mimesis*, 47–48.

¹⁰⁵ Aristotle, *Poet.*, note 103.

¹⁰⁶ Aristotle, *Rhet.*, 1453a30–9.

¹⁰⁷ Aristotle, *Rhet.*, 1453a30–9.

Rhetoric and *Poetics* that inform understanding of the interweaving of emotion, pleasure, and *teche*. It is useful to remember that *Poetics* is a reply to Plato's *Republic*: nature, says Aristotle, not metaphysics contains truth. Art perfects imperfect nature through mimetic representation. In this sense the poet creates through verisimilitude an imaged world where the audience, situated and contemporary, experiences emotion vicariously. The poet is not a mere imitator but also creator of aesthetic experience. Since Aristotle believes the idea that the world of appearance is merely an ephemeral copy of the changeless ideas, he holds that change and the experience of change is the fundamental process of nature, which he takes as a creative force and the concept which directs *Poetics*.

Epidictic

Epidictic recognizes a systematized attribution of value to things, people, or concepts. In Attic drama, the good and the bad, virtuous and vice ridden, are prominent values. Rosenfield has shown in his rhetorical interpretation that the term is a conception of aesthetics in artistic composition and intention, inventiveness and scientific order; it designates excellence of technique in art and in performance. In a rhetorical construction, I apply *epidictic* to both aesthetic judgment and contemplation and to symbolic rhetorical judgment of the hero as dramatic tragedy shows.

Jeffery Walker suggests that the *epidictic* shapes and cultivates “. . . basic codes of values and beliefs by which a society or culture lives . . . it [*epidictic*] shapes the ideologies and imaginaries . . . the deep commitments . . . constituting the very grounds of culture with which a society shapes itself.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 4.

Rosenfield explains that the *epideictic* comes “. . . from the Greek ‘show forth,’ [it is to] ‘make known’ . . . not as mere display, rather it means making manifest the ‘fleeting appearances’ of excellence that otherwise would remain ‘unnoticed or invisible.’”¹⁰⁹ The purpose of *epideictic* in this definition is simply and solely to display the luminosity of timeless excellence. In the *epideictic*, the spectator becomes a “witnesses to” emotion¹¹⁰ in the present moment. The interpretation emphasizes that effects of *teche* or technique combine with the moral to edify audiences. Moral virtue was attributed to art in the *epideictic* *techne*. Rhetorical *techne* through the *epideictic* are “paradigms of virtue”¹¹¹ and open up the discovery of moral truths, such as empathic understanding, which progresses in the spectator, through the emotions of pity and fear.

Critically, Rosenfield asserts that the fleeting nature of the appearance of excellence is in the present rather than a sustained reality.¹¹² He suggests that art reveals the interplay between material display (theatre) and the selected meaning spectators impose on works.

The *epideictic* provides another understanding of how *teche* and *mimesis* link to aesthetic pleasure through artistic excellence. As mentioned, the term aesthetics is a modern notion. Renato Barilli’s insight is useful in showing how *teche* is a rhetorically constructed strategy. The excellent performance by actors together with the plot transforms the spectator (an aesthetic contemplation):

[R]hetoric is *techne* in the fullest sense: the activity it performs is not only cognitive but also transformative and practical as well. It does not limit itself to conveying neutral, sterilized facts (that would be *docere*), but its aim is to *carry away the audience*; [my italics] to produce an effect on them; to mold them; to

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 3–4; 153.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 297.

¹¹² Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 3; 154.

leave them different as a result of its impact.¹¹³

Finally, humans are incapable of pity and fear if personal emotions predominate. Preoccupied with their own emotions, the situated audience fails to respond empathically to the actor's portrayal of emotion. Ironically, the audience's personal detachment together with creative imagination (*phantasia*) educes a state of connection with the suffering of the tragic hero. As mentioned in the section above, the second type of *eleos*, or contemplation, is an emotion of a removed self in the present focused on the suffering of others. That is, the Attic audience may have experienced a similar state but only in a state of *phantasia* that requires *mimesis*. Thus, pity and fear produced by the skilled poet and enacted by the skilled actor induces emotion in the heart and mind of the spectator. Indeed, the spectator's willingness to submit to the actualization of emotion through *phantasia* corroborates with the audience's expectation of tragic drama.

I have proposed that catharsis is only one way for pity and fear to resolve in the spectator. But catharsis is not mentioned by Aristotle as a means of arriving at pleasure. Based on analysis of some of the scholars above and from passage in *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, there are two ways to justify pleasure in tragedy other than catharsis. Even Plato in *The Republic* testifies to this fact: “. . . even the best of us enjoy it and let ourselves be carried away by our feelings; and are full of praises for the merits of the poet who can most powerfully affect us in this way.”¹¹⁴ In Book VII [section 11–14] Aristotle discusses “pure” pleasure and “incidental” pleasure. The former is universal, carries no pain, and compares favorably with the pleasure that arises out of contemplation. Spectators of tragic drama who experience this pleasure contemplate human emotions mimetically.

¹¹³ Renato Barilli, *Rhetoric*. Trans. by Giuliana Menozzi, (Minn: UMP, 1989), 54, 93.

¹¹⁴ Plato, *Republic*, Book X.

To restate, tragic pleasure or the peculiar pleasure “[is] . . . that which comes with pity and fear through imitation.”¹¹⁵ Aristotle is clear: pleasure is affected in tragic drama through imitation (or mimesis). Imitation of itself is pleasurable for actors and spectators; the pleasure probably extends to other types of poetry as well. Tragic pleasure or specifically the peculiar pleasure refers to the genre and mode or means of persuasion in tragedy. Together these make up the specific imitative aspects of tragedy.

An elevated sense of pity and fear might have occurred when the probable events in the play take an unexpected turn. This is possible in the complex plot with the accompanying pleasure, wonder, and learning discussed above. The investigation of pity and fear in the first section when combined with mimesis¹¹⁶ lead to a convincing concept: that the pleasure peculiar to tragedy is progressive; the emotional tension mounts by way of the *epideictic*, which leads to aesthetic contemplation.

The discussion in this rhetorical examination extracted from Aristotle has endeavored to show that pity and fear require an engaged and open minded spectator: one not overcome nor consumed by the distress in the other person. The actor’s skill at bringing-pity-and-fear-before-the-eyes thus creates a triad of emotional exchanges: the poet’s play, the actors who convincingly perform pity and fear, and the spectator who

¹¹⁵ Aristotle, *Poet.*, 1453b 10–12.

¹¹⁶ Aristotle, *Poet.* IV. “First, the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated. We have evidence of this in the facts of experience. Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity: such as the forms of the most ignoble animals and of dead bodies. The cause of this again is, that to learn gives the liveliest pleasure, not only to philosophers but to men in general; whose capacity, however, of learning is more limited. Thus the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is, that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring, and saying perhaps, ‘Ah, that is he.’ For if you happen not to have seen the original, the pleasure will be due not to the imitation as such; but to the execution, the coloring, or some such other cause.”

momentarily suspends temporal disbelief.¹¹⁷ In sum, Aristotle stresses that *phantasia* makes possible emotional states through fiction. Critical technical devices include language and sound and the elements of unified action in the plot. Tragic drama also largely depends on the state of mind of the spectator.¹¹⁸

Oedipus Rex is the tragedy that most closely fits Aristotle's guidelines. Oedipus is the model tragic hero. The play highlights Oedipus' *hamartia* (mistake) and for this misdeed of unknowingly killing his father he suffers a *peripeteia* (reversal) of fortune, which includes the plague that comes upon Thebes. Together, these unfolding events are at the heart of tragedy. Although often translated as "tragic flaw," *hamartia* according to Halliwell, does not indicate a deep or abiding personality failure, such as pride or lust; rather it means a mistake of perception or recognition, although other scholars debate the precise meaning, such as Butcher, Golden, and Heath. Most tragedies witness the protagonists change from better to worse circumstances such as in the tragedy, *Oedipus*.

Sir Richard Jeff's 1889 account of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* is included here to show how Aristotle's ideal tragedy interweaves unfolding events from better to worse in mimetic verisimilitude:

At the close of *Oedipus* the self-blinded Oedipus in his first agony of horror and despair, beseeches Creon (his brother in law) to send him away from Thebes. Oedipus begs that he no longer be allowed to pollute it by his presence: let him perish in the wilds of Cithaeron. Creon replies that he cannot assume the responsibility of acquiescing unless the oracles at Delphi be consulted. If Apollo agrees, Oedipus is to be sent away from Thebes.

The long-awaited verdict, some twenty years, never materializes. The oracle was not consulted and Oedipus remained at Thebes. The lapse of time softened his anguish, the blind and discrowned sufferer learned to love the seclusion of the

¹¹⁷ Aristotle, *Poet.*, 17.1455a21–22; *Rhet.* II, 1386a33–35.

¹¹⁸ To say this differently, the situated audience's capacity for the peculiar pleasure depends on a state of mind and the degree to which *phantasia* operates in the mind and heart of the spectator—the state of readiness to receive fear and pity in the visual portrayals, such as the description of the plight of *Oedipus*.

house in which he had once reigned so brilliantly. Pity for the hero deepens as a feeling grew up that Thebes was harboring a defilement. It was determined that Oedipus should be expelled. Bitter to him above all the rest was the behavior of his two sons who, having reached manhood, never objected to their father's doom. Oedipus became the scapegoat for fear in Thebes.

Self-inflicted blindness extracted upon his person as extreme and severe punishment and atonement notwithstanding, the heroic gesture perpetuates blindness in the citizens of Thebes. A tragic fate too much to bear for an ordinary human, Oedipus, now grown old in his destitute wanderings, heard of the secret mission performed by his daughter Antigone and the oracle concerning him. Oedipus' fate, in fact, affects the future welfare of Thebes.¹¹⁹

The Thebans conceived the desire of establishing Oedipus somewhere just beyond their border. In this way they thought that they would have him under their control, while at the same time they would avoid the humiliation of confessing themselves wrong and receiving him back to dwell among them. To secure the guardianship of the grave upon his death was their main object. The new oracle created opportunity for the sons to return aid to their banished father. Apollo had condemned any person who might still be attached to Oedipus; authorizing his recall, Thebes and the sons could not be defiled by the presence of a man whom the god had declared to be the determiner of future fate.

The sons, Polyneices and Eteocles, humiliated by their sense of the curse on their family and themselves, had at first desired that Creon should become king. However, “. . . moved by some god argued by a sinful mind—compelled by the inexorable Fury of their house,” they renounced these intentions of wise self-denial and succumbed to egoism. In a reversal of hubris, they became fired with the passion for power and fell to battling with each other. Each managed a contingency of warrior loyalists; the Peloponnesus became Polyneices' allies and made ready to wage war against Thebes.

¹¹⁹ Aristotle's *Poetics* was composed at least 50 years after the death of Sophocles. Aristotle was a great admirer of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*; he considered it the perfect tragedy. His analysis of what tragedy should be aligns perfectly with *Oedipus*.

While the mighty warriors marshaled their forces, the voice of prophecy warned them that the mortal feud depended on the blind and aged beggar whom, years before, they had coldly thrust out from his own house. That side would prevail that Oedipus chose to join.

Unified Elements

The myth of Oedipus and the play depend for its unity on at least three elements valued by Aristotle. First, the mimetic form depends on the unity of plot and tragic action, the construction of the heroic character, and a pleasing performance. These are the first important elements in aesthetic pleasure: the peculiar pleasure distinctive in tragedy assuredly delights the situated viewer intellectually (reasoning and learning) through plot, characters, settings, and artistic devices and imagination (through *phantasia*). Each is a type of mimetic representation. Second is the aesthetics of an emotional nature: especially sight, Oedipus' display of physical fear, his search for justice, his self-inflicted violence against his sight, and his lonely wanderings. Aesthetic feeling ultimately conveys sight to the audience. Spectators are healed of all suffering. The peculiar kind of pleasure, intellectual, imaginative, and emotional, captivates, and enchants the spectator.

Aristotle does not explicitly resolve the paradox of the peculiar pleasure of tragedy, which comes from fear and pity, which are forms of distress. It is argued that the pleasures of the tragic text and performance—the cognitive pleasure that is common to forms of imitation—neither resolves through catharsis, nor do they provide a sufficient explanation of the characteristic pleasure. A discussion of Aristotle's account of leisure in *Poetics* VIII leads to the suggestions that since pity and fear are an ethically appropriate response to a good tragedy, the peculiar pleasure may be understood as the pleasure that the virtuous take in the exercise of their *epideictic* virtue.

Aristotle then insists on emotion's importance, but in his illusive phrase, tragic pleasure turns on strategic effects to produce affect. Aristotle does not explain how particular effects are experienced by the spectator. That the poet ought to contrive pleasure not only through mimesis but also from pity and fear does not satisfactorily resolve *how* tragedy produces such pleasure. As mentioned, Halliwell indicates that "cognition and emotion" are integrated in tragic pleasure. He introduces *oikeia*, noted in the text above, as the peculiar pleasure by way of a genus of the generic mimetic pleasure, which leads to the emphasis on the cognitive aspects indicated in the *Poetics*.¹²⁰ Too's solution in *The Idea of Ancient Literary Criticism* is to surgically remove the aesthetic altogether: her antiseptic analysis avoids aesthetic pleasure altogether by placing the *hedone* of music or literature under the category of leisure.¹²¹ Heath's *Aristotle and the Pleasure of Tragedy* defines *oikeia* as the general pleasure associated with mimetic tragedy as general pleasure.¹²²

The question remains: how do we account for that part which is the *peculiar* pleasure?

In several passages in the *Poetics*, Aristotle refers to entities that may or may not produce peculiar pleasure for the spectator: "The structure of the finest tragedy is not simple, rather is complex and imitating fearful and pitiable events, for this is the special feature of such mimesis."¹²³ The conjecture that seems most plausible is that Aristotle's term *peculiar* relates to the word mimesis, or in *Poetics*, the imitation of the "fearful and

¹²⁰ Halliwell, *Aristotle Poetic*, 76; 87–107; Fossheim, H. "Mimesis in Aristotle's Ethics" *Making Sense of Aristotle: Essays in Poetics*, 73–86.

¹²¹ Too, Yun Lee. *The Idea of Ancient Literary Criticism*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 92–94.

¹²² Heath, M. "Aristotle and the pleasures of tragedy." *Making Sense of Aristotle: Essays in Poetics* O. Andersen and J. Haarberg ed. (London, 2001), 7–23.

¹²³ Aristotle, *Poet.*, 13.1452b.

pitiable” in tragedy¹²⁴ in which pleasure is a defining aesthetic characteristic.

Conclusion

The first section has explored passages in the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric* to compare meanings and display of pity and fear. The tragic plot’s two emotions are pity and the easily confused meanings of *eleos*, fear. I conclude with Kant that fear produced from the tragic action requires the spectator’s disinterested contemplative state. The psychological state results in a sensuous aesthetic experience that unfolds cognitively and experientially.¹²⁵ Second, I have tried to show the connection between pity and fear and the peculiar pleasure. Although it is difficult to clarify the connection, the available texts suggest that peculiar pleasure can be divided into external effects and internal imagination.

Phantasia, as explained, is an element essential to the Attic spectator because, as Aristotle shows, it enables visual imagination when the medium is mimetic. Yet, inartistic devices—the monstrous for example—fail to pass the plausibility test.

Aristotle’s spectator is described as a “learner” (*cogitos*), in her “desire to know [learn] from inference [or fiction].” Though pity and fear are painful in real life, in dramatic tragedy the two emotions seem to interweave in the verisimilitude of intellectual and emotional pleasure. For example, in coming to terms with unfolding events and the fate of the tragic hero, the spectator recognizes universal and specific truths; she learns perceptually from emotional insight. Moreover learning discerns relationships between

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Kant’s discussion in *Critique of Judgment* distinguishes “purposiveness” as being composed of two sides of the same coin: “of nature” (knowledge about) and “in nature, a priori” (nature’s ontological being and our relationship to nature). Humans perceive and organize a sense of nature through recognizing the appearance of things. Kant also thought that Beauty and Sublimity were not really properties of objects, but ways in which we respond to objects. Introduction; Part A, First and Second Moment.

the particular events and certain universal elements embodied in them.

The search to link conclusively the peculiar pleasure to pity and fear is only marginally convincing. The illusive peculiar pleasure in the analysis is not judgment *about* tragedy's peculiar pleasure—although clearly present in Aristotle's works—but the peculiar pleasure that *is* tragedy: what audiences discern emotionally through the plot, convincing visual effects (*teche*), and when the actor brings pity and fear before the eyes.

The *epideictic* through mimesis invites the spectator (as Rosenfield suggested) to become a “witness” or “beholder.” Once the stage is set for the ideal tragedy and practiced actors or orators perform tragedy, the burden for discerning pleasure becomes the spectator's—the element of pleasure endowed only by the spectator's *suprasensory* in Kant's transcendental aesthetics.¹²⁶ The viewer determines, after all, whether pity and fear were portrayed in an emotionally moving way. Did the emotions produce sensory satisfaction and aesthetic pleasure?

Prelli has said, “. . . rhetorics of display have become the dominant communication practices of our time.”¹²⁷ Pity and fear compared in *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* show specifically how actors and orators employ gestures and movements to rhetorically perform and communicate pity and fear. Although Aristotle's idea of pleasure remains elusive and subjective, the chapter has offered a rhetorical construct that suggests an aesthetic solution; a plausible explanation for the way the spectator might have received pleasure through pity and fear. Through mimesis, the spectator engages with strategic

¹²⁶ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 1790. Kant's much-neglected claim is that, besides himself, “no psychologist has so much as even thought that the imagination [phantasia] might be a necessary constituent of perception,” should be construed so that even our consciousness of sensation itself (*techne*, i.e., visual, tactile, etc.) is impossible without imagination. Part A, First and Second Moment.

¹²⁷ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, ed., 2.

techniques of rhetorical display. At the same time, whether spectators take pleasure in a performance of pity and fear depends on the achievement of artistic devices and the state of mind the spectator brings to the play.

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CHAPTER 3

THE RHETORIC OF VANITAS

*Omnia Vanitas, "Vanity, vanity," declares the preacher, "all is vanity."
Ecclesiastes I*



Harmen Steenwyck
Still Life: An Allegory of the Vanities of Human Life
(oil on oak panel, 1640)
The National Gallery, London, with permission
©National Gallery Picture Library

Vanitas art is painting that uses symbolic representation. The word comes from the Latin, which means vanity¹: it is a genre of Dutch still lifes in 17th century inventories. With a skull as a centerpiece, *vanitas* art is moralistic genre painting. The enjoyment aroused by the sensuous depiction of the subject through form, however, is in a certain conflict with the moralistic message. In *vanitas* painting, the metaphor *all is vanities* is the content of the painting.² Form is the technique of displaying an assortment of unrelated material objects. The painting's metaphor is meant to be *read* through form: when audiences view the painting with its luxuriant form,³ they should consider the meaninglessness of earthly life and the transient nature of all earthly goods and pleasures. Designing a painting that was meant to be read by viewers continues the tradition of *pictura poesis* embraced by 15th and 16th century artists.⁴ *Pictura poesis* demonstrates how human beings communicate both verbally and nonverbally. For example, in Herman Steenwyck's painting above (*Vanities*) I show how these two types of communication are possible and how content and form intersect.

The rhetoric of *vanitas* is investigated in this chapter through the heuristic of verisimilitude. Verisimilitude allows for an understanding of *vanitas* as a discourse of

¹ Ecclesiastes 1:2;12:8 is from the Bible. The Vulgate renders the verse as *Vanitas vanitatum omnia vanitas*.

All biblical citations are taken from *The Authorized Version of the English Bible* 1611, 6 vols. William Aldis Wright, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1909).

² The phrase is the opening lines in Book of Ecclesiastes, *Vanitas et Omnia Vanita*, which accounts for the use of the word *vanitas* to describe these still lifes in 17th century inventories. These still lifes are also referred to as death's head because a human skull is a common centerpiece.

³ The term *form* refers to the art work's style of representation; the indigenous artistic style was understood as Dutch realism. *Content* refers to the art work's meaning through metaphor, especially how what is being depicted links to commonplace meaning.

⁴ "As is painting so is poetry," in Horaces' *Arts Poetica*. Rensselaer W. Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The humanistic theory of painting*. (New York: Norton, 1967).

intermingled content and form⁵ because the goal of the chapter is to examine how reading metaphor through form evolves from both ancient rhetorical theory—especially *ekphrasis* and *epideictic*—and the 17th century liturgical⁶ and aesthetic strategy designed to raise the status of painting to more than mere craft. Rhetoric situates understanding of the visual form and the invisible metaphor at the heart of the Dutch 17th century world.⁷

An example of *vanitas* painting is the art of 17th century Dutch painter Harmen Steenwyck. *Still Life: An Allegory of the Vanities of Human Life* (hereafter *Vanities*) reveals a religious and cultural conceit⁸ in a visual puzzle of carefully selected layers of forms. The exemplary technique in Steenwyck's *Vanities* edifies or moves the viewer toward meditation. The enigma is how the sight of books and a skull—set on a chipped wood table and pictured against a void background—could move the viewer. The argument borrowed by Steenwyck and other period artists was that painting can create an emotional response in the beholder just as powerfully as speech can; therefore, painting should be grounded in rhetoric. The idea had already been put forward by Alberti in *De Pictura* (1435).⁹ Dutch artists also borrowed the classical ideal of *bring things before the eyes*¹⁰ gleaned from *Rhetoric* to strengthen the status of *vanitas* art.

I examine *vanitas* content and form through the rhetorical terms, *ekphrasis* and

⁵ The term emphasizes that art is fiction: the difference between appearance and inner truth, illusion, and reality. For instance, the skull reminds the viewer of the appearance of a once life-like face. Verisimilitude is closely related to *mimesis*. *Vanitas* painting draws on the theoretical status of *mimesis*: an artistic representation of the visible world should use the virtue of good technique to deepen aesthetic appreciation of art.

⁶ Religious worship derived from the Reformed Church.

⁷ The divide between content and form—in rhetoric and in *vanitas* painting—is indeterminable because any attempt to create boundaries turns out to be artificial.

⁸ An extended metaphor, popular during the Renaissance: a conceit typically takes one subject and explores the metaphoric possibilities in the qualities associated with a subject.

⁹ James A.W. Heffernan, "Alberti on Apelles: Word and Image in *De Pictura*," *Journal of the Classical Tradition*, v.2, no. 3, (Winter, 1996), 345–359.

¹⁰ From Aristotle's *Rhetoric* III, 1410b. Aristotle *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civil Discourse*. George A. Kennedy, trans., (New York: Oxford Press, 1991).

epideictic. The terms function as plausible viewing practices employed by period situated audiences. *Ekphrasis* and *epideictic* are considered not only as viewing practices, but also as types of visual syntaxes that amplify metaphoric meaning and visual description in layers of elegant form.

The *ekphrasic* relationship becomes clear when *vanitas* is placed within the context of the Reformed Church together with the tradition of the *ekphrasic* trope metaphor that originated from *Rhetoric*. These paintings are as much a part of the history of metaphor as a rhetorical device as they are a part of any system of visual symbols.

The key point here for contemporary audiences is to *read* the genre not as allegory that connotes a narrative, but rather as the association of one thing to another. Objects themselves—rather than narrative and human action—speak directly to the viewer; they are the iconic voices of the painting. Metaphor in *vanitas* painting was meant to prompt in the viewer’s moral behavior. *Epideictic*¹¹ shows how visual text communicates through its appeal to the eye as discussed by Lawrence Prelli; *epideictic* praises what is virtuous or noble and “fit for display.”¹² *Epidexis* means “to shine or show forth.”¹³

Form in the foreground of *vanitas* painting is the unmistakable rhetoric of formal display of excellence.¹⁴

The viewing practices expand understanding of how audiences may have read

¹¹ *Epideictic* is ceremonial oratory, or praise-and-blame rhetoric. It is one of the three branches of rhetoric outlined in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*.

¹² *Rhetorics of Display*, Lawrence, J. Prelli, ed. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press), 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Roman Jakobson says, “It is necessary to learn the conventional language of painting in order to ‘see’ a picture, just as it is impossible to understand what is spoken without knowing the language, in “Contributions of Roman Jakobson” in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, (Vol. 16: 223–260, October 1987), 223–260.

vanitas painting through content and form, both symbolically and aesthetically. The analyses stress that the process of reading aesthetic form is as important as reading metaphoric meaning and “disguised symbolism.”¹⁵

My interest is less in presenting a unifying pictorial system of representation and cultural interpretation (art historical views) than in showing how contemporary audiences might better understand how 17th century Dutch viewers may have experienced the genre through rhetoric. I am not documenting historically how audiences of the time actually responded, rather how they might have responded.

Distinctions between allegory and metaphor are challenging where painting is concerned because the typical form of the Baroque is allegory; the trope would have been familiar to 17th century Dutch audiences. I am suggesting, however, that *vanitas* painting is not allegorical and not merely a set of disguised symbols as they often have been described. Instead, this genre of still lifes is composed of metaphoric transferences that together create the *memento mori*¹⁶ message. Nonetheless, an allegorical sensibility is present as a mode of perception that makes the reader aware that the part is always dependent on the whole.

Six sections explore the chapter’s two-part goal: understanding that the *vanitas*’ metaphor-content was *read* through form, and the enigma of how content and form could be concealed in visual images. First, the chapter begins with an outline of terms. The second section offers a brief historical background of political, religious, and economic

¹⁵ Erwin Panofsky coined the phrase “disguised symbolism,” which he applied to *vanities*. The chapter disputes this claim. *Studies in Iconography: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (Oxford University Press, 1930); (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 5–9.

¹⁶ *Memento Mori* iconographical tradition is linked to the still life genre of *vanitas*. Moreover, *memento mori* is interwoven with the notion of poetry as a speaking picture (*pictura poesis*) and alludes to the instructive power of metaphoric imagery.

conditions and discusses how the cultural context impacted the *vanitas* genre. The third section presents a case study that explores one piece of *vanitas* art, *Still Life: An Allegory of the Vanities of Human Life*, by period artist Harmen Steenwyck. I show how the artist brings the authority of rhetoric into his painting.¹⁷ The fourth section addresses how the rhetorical device, *ekphrasis*, creates the link between form and content and how the term is foundational to reading *vanitas* painting.¹⁸ A fifth section analyzes the link between ancient *epideictic* and *vanitas*' form. Finally, the conclusion interweaves *vanitas*' liturgy of encoded metaphoric meaning, symbolic forms, and aesthetic experience synthesized in four key findings.

The goal and case study are important to communication scholarship because of the way form and content in *vanitas* painting entwine in the tradition of ancient rhetoric and in the Dutch 17th century rhetorical theory employed by Dutch artists to raise the status of painting. The field of communication has largely ignored *vanitas* art: the moral authority of verbal rhetoric continues to permeate current rhetorical scholarship even in light of the ubiquity of the visual image in the 21st century. However, *vanitas* painting and ancient rhetorical tropes newly theorized, interpreted, and applied in a novel way are subjects relevant to the subfield of visual rhetoric. Visual thinking pervades current human activity from graphic representation in everyday life to the abstract and theoretical in modern art. *Vanitas* painting is a reminder that the tension between visual and verbal representation present in 17th century painting continues in the present day.

¹⁷ Rhetoric provides a complete theory—from the process of creating description up to and including producing visual effects for the viewer.

¹⁸ Many scholars make use of James Heffernan's general conception of *ekphrasis* as "the verbal representation of visual representation." James Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 3.

Vanitas painting is an ideal site to explore—through *ekphrasis* and *epideictic*—the preeminently deceptive qualities of art that express the vanity of the visible world itself and the intricate interplay between content and form—how the visual form reveals the invisible metaphor in rhetoric of invention and style through verisimilitude.¹⁹

Terms

In this section I will briefly define the key terms that emerge in the chapter and describe the context in which I use the terms.

Content is *what* is communicated through language. Aristotle phrased this as *logos* or the logical content of a speech. It is the verbal message and carries cultural meaning. Generally, content deals with three 17th century concerns: earthly existence, transient life and death, and resurrection.²⁰ Specifically, content in *vanitas* art is the metaphor *all is vanity*.

Ekphrasis is vivid description. Anciently, the term referred to a description of any thing, person, or experience. For example, Horace's *Ut pictura poesis* defines one medium of art as it relates to another medium by defining and describing its characteristics. Metaphor is a prominent ekphrastic trope. In *vanitas*, the content of the painting is the ekphrastic metaphor *all is vanity* or *vanitas et omnia vanitas* from the Book of Ecclesiastes. As used in this chapter, *ekphrasis* is cultural viewing practice that explains how it is possible for Dutch audiences to produce small sermons of moral and emotional import from content (read through form).

¹⁹ Thijs Weststeijn, *The Visible World* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press), 19.

²⁰ Ingvar Bergstrom, *Dutch Still-Life Painting in the Seventeenth Century*, trans Christian Hedstrom & Gerald Taylor (New York: Thomas Yoseloff Inc, 1956), quoted in Kristine Koozin's *Vanitas of Still Lifes*.

Epidictic, according to Aristotle, is one of the three major branches of rhetoric.²¹

It is speech or writing that praises or blames: Cicero demands it from the orator.

Epidictic includes civic virtue or *doxa* (opinion). According to Lawrence Rosenfield, *doxa* also means appearance or the skill of virtuosity, including artistic excellence.²² An example of *epideictic* is the artistic skill evident in *vanitas*' depicted forms, composition and intention, artistic inventiveness, and scientific order²³: the forms in Dutch realism were meant to complement the moral message.²⁴ As used in this chapter, *epideictic* is a theoretical criticism that rests on the assertion of the priority of sight as a sensory experience through form and more expressly through color and symbol.

Form is *how* the message is communicated. In *vanitas* painting, form is both the object in the painting and the painterly technique. Aristotle's term is *lexis* (the style and delivery of a speech). In the chapter form it is the material thing, sometimes referred to as image. The appeal of the form is obvious: meticulously executed form *is* an appeal to the eye. *Vanitas* form is mimesis (discussed below). In *vanitas*, art form is the signifier; the viewer reads the signified content through the signifier.

Identification, in *vanitas* painting, is the process whereby an audience—situated in early 17th century Holland—feels an emotional connection with the art object on an aesthetic, moral, personal, and experiential level. The term describes the rhetorical conditions that create powerful moments of symbolic identification with works of art, such as in *vanitas* painting. For example, wealth and religion are types of identifications

²¹ The other two branches are deliberative and judicial. Kathryn Tempest. "Prologue," in *Cicero: politics and persuasion in ancient Rome*. (London: Continuum, 2011), 1–7.

²² *Doxa* is that which manifests itself and is apprehended by members of a community; it is that "aspect of the whole of reality, which the individual recognizes and share with others," in *Rhetorics of Display*, Lawrence J. Prelli, ed. "Introduction" (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press), 65.

²³ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 3, 154.

²⁴ Koozin, *The Vanitas Still Lifes of Harmen Steenwyck*, v.

in the milieu²⁵ pictured in the illusive art.

Metaphor²⁶ describes one thing in terms of another. For example, in the case of *vanitas* art, *all is vanity* is a metaphor quoted in *Ecclesiastics* comprehended by 17th century Calvinist audiences to grasp earthly things through the lens of the transitory state of human nature. Historical interpretation of *vanitas* has clung to the conception that image or form is subordinate to metaphor.²⁷ This chapter disputes that notion to claim that metaphor or content and form communicate messages in both cultural and visual ways, but that form is equal in importance to metaphor in *vanitas* painting.

Memento mori originate in the 14th century.²⁸ The *memento mori* theme—remember you will die²⁹—is the reminder of death, of the brevity of earthly existence and the vanity of things material.³⁰ The tradition of *memento mori* is universal because of the inevitability that all living things must eventually die.

Mimesis, from Latin, *imago* as discussed in *Poetics*, is when an image has a similar appearance to some object or person. More important, the nature of mimesis is as an artistic depiction or representation. An example in the ancient world is when works of art correspond to the physical world understood as a model for beauty, truth, and the

²⁵ Greg Clark says, “[Burke’s] . . . key term of identification teaches the lesson that rhetorical power operates well beyond the boundaries of conventional public discourse and includes a full range of symbols mined by audiences” in *Rhetorics of Display*, 5.

²⁶ Oxford English Dictionary, 1961 ed.

²⁷ Umberto Eco says, “. . . metaphor, like art, is sovereign. . . for too long it has been thought that in order to understand metaphors it is necessary to know the code. We can assert that metaphor permits us to understand the code better.” “Metaphor, Dictionary, and Encyclopedia” *New Literary History*, (Vol. 15, No. 2, Interrelation of Interpretation and Creation, Winter, 1984), 255–271.

²⁸ Found in the paintings of religious scenes, saints, and portraits. In theory, *memento mori* comes from biblical and classical texts, such as Job, Psalms, and Proverbs, but is commonly linked to the Reformation.

²⁹ *Memento mori*, “remember that you will die,” is a theme explored in *vanitas* still life art works created from the 15th through the 17th centuries in northern Europe. The theme appears prominently by the latter 16th and early 17th centuries in the milieu of the Dutch Protestant Reformation and its aftermath.

³⁰ The theme was explored in numerous still lifes created from the 15th through the 17th centuries in northern Europe.

good. In the chapter, *vanitas* painting interweaves the forms of the visual world and the pedantic metaphor that represents the invisible world.

Symbol vanitas painting communicates its message by means of symbolic representation: a skull is a symbol and a reminder of the certainty of death. A symbol associates two things, but its meaning is both literal and figurative. A symbol is used more widely than a metaphor. The symbols in *vanitas* were rarely read at face value: the genre made possible multiple readings of symbolic connotations.³¹

Verisimilitude represents the process of artistic creation through mimesis outlined in *Poetics* and as a visual type of discerning in the ancient *epideictic*. Evident in the expression in *Poetics*, brings-before-the-eyes, verisimilitude captures the idea that when audiences bring an image into consciousness through sight, they perceive form, quite independent of cultural meaning. The term represents a plausible reality such as the way art is fiction. In *vanitas* painting viewers create truth-likenesses: a painting is like a visual poem. The artist paints forms in the highly readable style of Dutch realism. Actual truth becomes less important than the art that conveys the form and produces the metaphor. Rather than *seeing* a work of art *as* another thing, we see the mimetic visual representation *in terms of* the represented world. Verisimilitude provides a critical framework for understanding rhetorical and aesthetic viewing practices.

Historical Background

This section introduces some historical background for *vanitas* painting in the Netherlands in the early 17th century. The milieu is important because symbols of

³¹ Symbol is a mode in which the signifier does *not* resemble the signified; rather, it is fundamentally arbitrary and/or purely conventional: the relationship must be learned. The purpose of a *vanitas* symbol such as a skull is to communicate meaning such as the *memento mori* theme.

religion, economics, politics, and class are visibly displayed and read in the paintings by situated audiences. To highlight how *vanitas* were read as symbol and metaphor also reflects the age's fascination with scientific accuracy and objects of wealth: the vast majority of *vanitas* paintings display symbols of the arts and sciences (e.g., books, maps, and musical instruments), wealth and power (e.g., expensive material and jewelry, gold objects), and earthly pleasures (goblets); symbols of death or transience are represented by a skull. Dutch artists added to the prestige of their painting by representing these objects through the period's *epideictic* line of argument, especially the popular trope, *ut pictura poesis*.³²

Historical context partly describes Dutch audiences' religious identification with *vanitas* painting. Rudolf Herman Fuchs suggests that this density of morbid symbols would have appealed to the intelligentsia at Leiden University, center for the study of Calvinism.³³ For example, Calvinist dogma warned parishioners about the perils of vanity: the excessive belief in one's own abilities or attractiveness and the human tendency to succumb to illusion and sin. *Vanitas* painting was thus cast both by the artist and the viewer as a religious deceit. The example highlights the plausibility of how the ambiguous conversation between intermingled content (metaphor) and form (both the object and the painterly technique) ensued in *vanitas* painting.

Religion mirrors economic undercurrents: the abstruseness between religious values and worldly pursuits display the imprecision in two conflicted values. The unstable political climate between Spain and the Netherlands also made a difference in

³² A period artist, Van Hoogestaten, said, "The brush would succeed better than my pen in depicting the specific beauty" of scientific specimens quoted in the National Gallery display of Hoogstraten's perspective box.

³³ Rudolf Herman Fuchs, *Dutch Painting* (Thames & Hudson, 1978), 36.

the proliferation of *vanitas* still lifes.

In the political period of Spanish/ Catholic control of Europe, the Netherlands valiantly fought Spanish control. The Union of Utrecht (1579) is a landmark in the costly violent conflict between the various states of the Netherlands and Spanish/Catholic powers. While the war led to the emergence of a Dutch Republic in Northern Lowlands, it had nevertheless left many dead. The awareness of death did not disappear with the end of the Twelve Year Truce; in the 1620s the Republic suffered two outbreaks of bubonic plague. These events may account for the proliferation in Leiden of *vanitas* paintings, whose recurring motif, the skull, was a constant reminder of mortality.

Because of its political independence and relative religious tolerance, the new republic became a destination for many refugees of the period,³⁴ many of whom rose to the burgher status. The scale of the vast accumulation of wealth in Holland was concentrated in the Dutch burgher class.³⁵ Banking and trade dominated the global economy.³⁶ The lucrative but risky traffic in spices, coffee, chocolate, rum, and slaves was financed by Dutch banking firms such as the Dutch East Indies trading company in 1602.³⁷ Well into the early 17th century, the Netherlanders built up a solid trading

³⁴ The philosophers Descartes and Spinoza made the Netherlands their home. Spinoza fled Spanish persecution of the Jews. Descartes found freedom from the Catholic censor, but also access to public dissection of human corpses, which was banned in Catholic land, "René Descartes," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/accessed>, accessed, March, 2011.

³⁵ Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Richs: An interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Ages*.

³⁶ Abraham Mignon was among the prosperous whose wealth increased because of the trade and popularity of flowers. Cut flowers were luxury items up until the end of the 17th century. We know that the ordinary citizen who was somewhat prosperous did not have any flower bouquets at home, but they were interested in the fashionable commodity. In order to satisfy the demand for flowers, flower still lifes became extremely popular in the 1630s and 1640s. Such paintings were cheaper than real bouquets and kept longer at www.rijksmuseum.edu, accessed March 15, 2012.

³⁷ The company eventually owned its own standing army of 10,000 men and was effectively the governing authority in many of the regions whose resources it brought to the European market. The governors of the company were the richest individuals in the world outside of royalty. Many in this new business class

empire, taking control of trading routes in the North Sea and Baltic from the Germans while continually fighting the English for domination of southern trade routes.

For the most part Holland was Calvinist. However, because an array of religious tradition was represented in the Netherlands at this time, the question of religious tolerance was itself a central political issue. In Holland, French theologian, Jean Calvin's (1509–1564) interpretation of Christianity appealed to the small, dynamic nation of commerce in its golden age: the Dutch preferred the freedom and secular sympathies of Calvinism rather than strict orthodox Christianity.³⁸ Notably, Calvin's teaching preached the preordination of the select and salvation by grace. The doctrine included an intense distrust of worldly goods and pleasures; however, it paradoxically sanctioned commercial expansion. Simon Schama explains that the Dutch were a trading nation with a "love of gain; an island of plenty in a sea of want."³⁹ Calvinism was a driving force in Dutch commercial expansion including the art trade.⁴⁰ Still life painting grew in popularity partly as a result of the Protestant Reformation, which forbade Catholic icons.

The iconoclast movement of Calvinist religious practice effectively banned Catholic institutions from financing the icons of Catholic fine art. Many artists turned their attention to painting dead fruit and flowers in the new still lifes genre of which

(burghers) lived in a dense urban setting where land was perhaps the scarcest and a highly valued commodity.

³⁸ Johannes a Lasco Library foundation, Great Church Emden, Kirchstraße 22D 26721 Emden. <http://www.reformiert-online.net/t/eng/imp/index.jsp>, accessed March 30, 2012. .

³⁹ In *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 1–10, Schama says that the Dutch East India Company was busy with gaining control over the spice trade in the East from the Portuguese. While peasants in France, England, Spain, and the rest of Western Europe lived in squalid conditions with barely enough food to eat, everyone in the Netherlands, from the nobility to the lowliest worker, lived in comfortable (for the time) conditions and always had enough food. In fact, the Netherlands had the highest standard of living in Europe, perhaps even the world, during their golden age.

⁴⁰ Vries, J. de, and Woude, A. Vander (1997). *The First Modern Economy. Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500–1815*, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 434–35.

vanitas painting is one form. *Vanitas* art thus specifically reflects the symbolic turn away from icons of Catholicism. Still life painting reflects the simple appeal of everyday material objects. Artists had to adapt to survive in the new Protestant climate, finding patronage from the Dutch merchant classes. The character of different towns is even reflected in the town's choice of symbolic objects. The university town of Leiden, where Harmen Steenwyck studied art under his uncle David Bailly, preferred skulls and books, whereas the Hague, a market center, favored fish with its traditional Christian associations; many others used flowers, another Dutch product.

The Dutch Republic attracted scientists and other thinkers from all parts of Europe because of the country's intellectual tolerance.⁴¹ Some still lifes offer examples of scientific observation, such as magnificent collections of scientific instruments. *Vanitas* puts in perspective the milieu's fascination with science, particularly vision and sight. As the chapter discusses, the allure for Dutch artists of exactly depicting instruments and ideas of value reveals an age steeped in scientific discovery.

Case Study of Herman Steenwyck's *Vanities*

Herman Steenwyck's *Still Life* (pictured above) uses simplistic symbols and motifs to lead the viewer toward reflection on the relationship between fleeting enjoyment of material vanities in this world as they compare with spiritual things of the next. Material and metaphysical values intermingle both as metaphor and through the elegant forms in the painting. The artist presents the dilemma of beauty in objects set against a blank backdrop of sober existential nothingness; indeed, the viewer is led to

⁴¹ Christian Huygens (1629–1695) was a famous astronomer, physicist, and mathematician.

ponder the moral reason that forbade earthly pleasures.⁴² Objects (forms) of desire in the visible world contrast with the ideological virtue of eschewing vanities.

I argue, however, that *vanitas* painting should not be confined to its surface level of sermonizing metaphor, nor symbolic allegory⁴³ as Panofsky has claimed. Steenwyck's title references the vain things of the world. The forms are symbolic; however, symbol does not require an equivalent allegory. The genre is more akin to metaphor and the history of metaphor—the association of one thing to another without a supportive story—rather than allegory, as I have claimed previously. The visual syntax of the painting was created so that the metaphor or content could be read through form.

The emptiness of earthly goods represents only a small part of the sophistication of the paintings. The shrewd rhetorical-artistic display of form itself complements the larger function of these paintings as luxury objects displayed among other luxury objects in fashionable burgher homes. *Vanitas* paintings address the contradictory impulses within the early 17th century Dutch Baroque culture between Calvinist rhetoric and the impulse of visible display of worldly wealth that reduces the contradiction.

By the mid-16th century in the Dutch lowlands, the strident opposition between spirit and body, the metaphysical and the earthly that had previously informed the art of Bosch became decidedly less deadly. In the early part of the century, the Dutch had embraced a more Humanist perspective: bad behavior had become more a folly than sin.

The visual analysis in the section demonstrates how Steenwyck's painting is

⁴² Just as Plato warned of the senses' unreliability, 17th century *vanitas* signified the uncertainty of the senses—life as dream and illusion—death, however ambiguous—is certain.

⁴³ Ewin Panofsky coined the phrase, “disguised symbolism,” yet the paintings are not narrative, rather more akin to the history of metaphor.

infused with the rational framework of terms and concepts of classical rhetoric.⁴⁴ These are discussed from an *epideictic* perspective and well-articulated by period critics, Carel Van Mander and Franciscus Junius, whom I discuss in the section below.

Delft-born Steenwyck specialized in *vanitas* painting. Eloquence⁴⁵ is on display in Steenwyck's *Vanities*. The discussion highlights the painting's composition, forms, technique and color, and content. The key for the Dutch and for current audiences is to *read* Steenwyck's *Vanities*, indeed, all *vanitas* painting, as the association of one thing to another—content to form—without a supportive story—more like an abstract painting.

The viewer of 17th century *vanitas* painting has a more demanding role than merely reading a prescribed narrative. Steenwyck's *Vanities* emphasizes the Calvinist dictum of personal communication with God. Therefore, since worship in the Reformed Church calls for private religious experience,⁴⁶ the viewer takes an active part in a type of meditation through the sensory forms. Accessing the invisible world through the forms of the visible world enables this meditative respite for the viewer. Rather than being presented with a set narrative, there is the possibility of creation.⁴⁷ In the complex association of metaphor and interwoven forms, the paradox between content and form is finally given over to the viewer to resolve on a personal level.

Vanitas art thus provides an example of the greater interpretative role required of the viewer of 17th century art when audiences read both content and form. Reading form

⁴⁴ Franciscus Junius (1641) reconstructed the views of classical authors that applied the ideas on oratory of Cicero and Quintilian to visual arts, by changing the word "orator" to painter, *Art in Theory*, 18–19.

⁴⁵ In Kenneth Burke's *Counter-Statement*, the author says eloquence is not showiness. It is, rather, the result of that desire in the artist to make a work perfect by adapting in it every minute detail. Aesthetic truth is not synonymous with scientific truth: ". . . the procedure of science involves the elimination of taste, employing as a substitute the corrective norm of the pragmatic test, the empirical experiment . . . is entirely intellectual," (University of Chicago Press, [1931] 1968), 41.

⁴⁶ The diptych is a visible form of meditation displayed in the home.

⁴⁷ The involvement is metaphysical, not narrative.

as text assumes an active reader of art fully capable of linking rhetorical associations framed in the iconic artistic style.⁴⁸ The process is made easier by the static nature of *vanitas* painting, which eliminates the dimensions of movement and time generally found in the more popular history painting. *Vanitas* painting is more abstract than narrative.

Steenwyck's painting is illuminated with a rhetorical lens: good painting was compared to good writing. The artist borrowed from the Dutch tradition, which—like the Italian tradition—shows the application of rhetoric to art theory. Prominent in this lineage is Samuel Van Hoogstraten's work, *Inleyding*, which mentions “degrees of art” (the *genera pinged*) and their corresponding functions: to teach, to delight, and to move.⁴⁹ From its stated aim of raising the status of painting among the liberal arts “in praise of the art of painting,” it is clear that the text is invested in the *epideictic* tradition, “in praise of the art of painting.”⁵⁰ The text would almost certainly have been known by Steenwyck and other Dutch painters working in the same period.⁵¹ The rhetorical concepts of *imitatio*, the rhetorical theory of *ekphrasis*, and the rhetorical trope, metaphor, are used in a specific sense in art theory too. Specifically, these terms serve as lenses later in the chapter to examine *vanitas* painting generally. Informed by the literary tradition, rhetoric was meant to boost the status of art. It provides a complete theory—from the process of creating description—up to and including the production of visual effects for the viewer.⁵²

⁴⁸ The most important statement about the relationship between the metaphor and the visual arts (which Calvinist audiences understood) was from St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* (A.1 Art.9), “Whether Holy Scripture should Use Metaphors.” This reference is discussed in detail in the section, “Ekphrasis.”

⁴⁹ Weststeign, *The Visible World*, 77.

⁵⁰ On the importance of *epideictic* rhetoric, which was dominant in the early modern period, see Vickers 1989, 53–54; 61.

⁵¹ Koozin, *Metaphoric Realism*, 3, 21. Also, de Heem and P. Claesz mentioned in *The Visible World*.

⁵² Seventeenth century Dutch artists and critics working in the same period include Van Hoogstraten, Van Mander, Junius, and de Lairese, in Weststeijn, 41, 77.

Composition

Vanities features a skull, books, a shell, musical instruments, and other finery pictured against a void background. The skull is a form that symbolizes⁵³ death or the content of *vanitas*. The elegant silk, shell, and costly lute are sumptuous forms of transient riches. Secular forms of worship and worldly wealth mingle with symbols of death.⁵⁴ Human confrontation with death occurs with the most prominent symbolic form of death, the skull. Death takes on a personal meaning: for the 17th century Dutch citizen, death was close-at-hand in an epoch when few families escaped the dread of disease and early death.⁵⁵ In *Vanities*, gleaming forms interweave with symbols of death and the ominous Calvinist motto, *memento mori*: remember we die,⁵⁶ implied in the painting.

Vanities is composed of a triangular design that emphasizes a diagonal arrangement of objects on a chipped wooden table. The composition of the objects amplifies symbolic meaning. Steenwyck's method of diagonals constructs the arrangement. The objects that represent the vanities of human life fill the lower half of the work, which is split by a diagonal acting as *repoussoir* and creating an asymmetrical composition.⁵⁷ The objects are carefully chosen to communicate the *vanitas* metaphor summarized in Matthew 6:18–21:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy. . . store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. . . For where your treasure is, there

⁵³ Erwin Panofsky's phrase "disguised symbolism" raises questions about the paradox in *vanitas* prompting art historians to research the meaning of content and form in *vanitas* painting.

⁵⁴ Steenwyck's *Vanities* hangs in the Lakenhal Museum in Leyden.

⁵⁵ Richard Meyer says, "viewing emblems of death establish patterns of communication [even dynamic interaction] with those who view them . . . they allow us to achieve a better understanding of ourselves." Introduction to *Cemeteries and Gravemarkers*, in Prelli, 204.

⁵⁶ May, William F, "The Sacral Power of Death in Contemporary Experience," *Perspectives on Death*, (Liston O Mills, New York: Abingdon, 1969), 68–96.

⁵⁷ Koozin suggests that Steenwyck's standard formula for all of his still lifes is rather simple in scheme and method. They include a limited number of forms or objects, often repeated from painting to painting. The objects are meticulously placed in a diagonal/triangular arrangement on a wooded or stone table with one edge explored, 45.

your heart will be also.

Delicately displayed painted objects—a water pitcher, a recorder, books, oil lamp, and so on—are neatly arranged on the edge of a table. The books symbolize human knowledge, the musical instruments (a recorder, part of a shawm, a lute) symbolize the pleasures of the senses. The Japanese sword and the shell, both collectors' rarities, symbolize wealth. The chronometer and expiring lamp allude to the transience and frailty of human life. All are dominated by the skull, the symbol of death.⁵⁸ The items entice the viewer with the humble realism of everyday objects. As the viewer is brought into the tranquility, there is little to suggest that the viewing ends serenely. Nothing is natural or realistic about the arrangement. Luminous forms of elegance mingle easily with the image of death. The incredible realism of Steenwyck's *Vanities* is due to the artist's astonishing skill. The realistic technique is meant to enhance the truth of the metaphor and the memento message. Methods of representing forms and symbols are not only prescribed through rhetoric, but hinge on metaphoric content; the reverse is also the case.

A beam of light establishes the theatrical tone and the performativity of the work. Symbolically, the light suggests the link between this life and the life hereafter. The beam functions to illuminate the skull, an example of the artist's rhetorical strategy. It also acts as a counterbalance to the triangular arrangement of objects in the lower section of the painting. An aura of metaphysical glow lights everyday objects suited for individual viewing; at the same time, light and color present them as idealized objects of the universal virtuous mind.⁵⁹ The absence of form in the upper half of the painting could

⁵⁸ The National Gallery, Trafalgar Square, London WC2N 5DN, www.nationalgallery.org.uk, accessed May, 2013.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

symbolize spiritual existence. The empty background space and the lack of perspective could symbolize the lack of life's meaning.

The peculiar forms in Steenwyck's *Vanities* symbolize the realism and the hyperrealism of the age.⁶⁰ The scientific realism, inherited from earlier Netherlandish painting, demonstrates the artist's concern for depicting objects accurately and his interest in scientific discovery.

Form serves a cultural purpose. Symbolically, the forms in this painting, as in all *vanitas* painting, represent the pleasures of the world, but at the same time, the particular forms signal for the viewer renunciation of vanity and the pleasures in the visible world. Forms are also symbols of Dutch expressions of a deeper spiritual and moral meaning. The exacting detail represented in the shell and a jug symbolizes the brevity of life. The skull represented death and decay. Steenwyck's painting is dominated by the skull, which symbolizes belief in a spiritual life after death.⁶¹ The skull displays a double meaning: an intrusion into a world of human activity and an attribute of a scholar or philosopher. The owner may have read the skull not only was a reminder of the vanity of knowledge, but also of the knowledge of vanity. The skull's once fleshly face presses against sumptuous silk. The visual metaphor is not only personal, but provokes a sign and signifier precisely of that characteristic that metaphor uses as its structuring principle.

Objects that surround the skull are signs meant to symbolize the three parts of life: the *vita voluptuosa*, or life of delight in eating, drinking, smoking and love, represented by the musical instruments; the *vita contemplative*, or the contemplative life of study,

⁶⁰ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 2–3; See Seymour Slive, 296–7. Schama notes that the diffusion of natural specimens and the burgeoning interest in natural illustration throughout Europe resulted in the nearly simultaneous creation of still life and *vanitas* paintings around 1600.

⁶¹ The diptych is an example of hyperrealism. The genre is an antecedent to *vanitas*.

often paired with death motifs represented by the books; and finally the *vita active*, or the life of action, described by objects of battle, represented by the armor.⁶²

The wisp of smoke in the lamp and the reflections in the glass are signs that symbolically point to fleeting existence. Books symbolize human knowledge. Musical instruments (a recorder, part of a shawm, a lute) symbolize the pleasures of the senses. The Japanese sword and the shell, both collectors' rarities, symbolize wealth. The chronometer and expiring lamp allude to the transience and frailty of human life⁶³ and the artist's interest in science. The *memento mori* message is ultimately that all these things come to nothing: all is vanity.

Chronicling the pleasures of collected specimens is a Steenwyck specialty.⁶⁴ His work served as a model for painters who sought realism and novelty. Shells, insects, and exotic fruits and flowers were collected and traded; new plants such as the tulip were celebrated in still life painting. Collecting swords, shells, and books symbolize the art of war and the pursuit of knowledge.

Technique and Color

Steenwyck's *Vanities* is recognizable through techniques such as particular iconic forms, composition, brushwork, and textures and in colors selected to complement representative symbolic forms. The use of small brushes on an oak panel shows the artist's expertise and is typical of Steenwyck's technique.⁶⁵ The panel is primed and sanded to form a glass smooth ground. By building up the picture with thin glazes of oil

⁶² For a history of the moral debate between the *vita contemplative* and *vita active* and their relationship to the *vanitas* theme see Pieter Aertaen's "Inverted Paintings of Christ in the House of Martha and Mary," *Oud Holland* 97, 25–39.

⁶³ http://www.artfactory.com/art_appreciation/still_lives.htm, accessed 3.20.12.

⁶⁴ Koozin, *Metaphoric Realism*, 71.

⁶⁵ See note 44.

paint the artist manages to realistically convey the wide range of textures that the individual objects possess, such as the iridescence of the shell, the translucence of bone, the softness of leather, the smoothness of silk, the reflections of metal, the coldness of stoneware, the roughness of rope, and a variety of wood surfaces that range from a gloss varnish to a dull matt.⁶⁶

The selection of forms and textures for the objects are unified by the limited palette of tertiary colors selected to produce a rhetorical effect. Subdued colors diffuse the effect of a composition of arranged objects too complex and textures too refined to support bolder colors. The artist adds a sense of drama by highlighting each object with exaggerated tone.⁶⁷ The color scheme is frequently monochrome with the still life set against a plain flat background. This method was a popular formula for still life painters from this time as evident in painters such as de Heem, P. Claesz, and others.⁶⁸

Content

In Steenwyck's style of painting, forms become encrusted with cultural, symbolic, and metaphoric meaning: in a word, content. Reading Steenwyck's art shows how particular forms are meant to remind the viewer of the *vanitas* metaphor. Metaphor is understood as the associations of one thing to another without a supportive story. For example, Koozin says Steenwyck expresses a positive view: how the metaphor is meant to reverse in the viewer's mind from vanity itself to the "miraculous works of the Creator."⁶⁹ However, the visual form of the empty background propagates the message of

⁶⁶ See note. 114.

⁶⁷ Koozin, *Metaphoric Realism*, 71.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 71.

the emptiness of the visible world itself and imminent death. The title itself, *An Allegory of the Vanities of Human Life*, turns on the interpretation of form to symbol to metaphor. As mentioned, the allegorical is merely a reference to the vain things of the world. The message conveying the transient nature of the vanities of earthly life conversely communicates the theme of worldly accomplishments in writing, learning, and the arts. Each object in the picture has a different symbolic meaning that contributes to the overall rhetoric of the painting; thus form, symbol, and metaphor interweave to create an overall rhetorical affect for the viewer.

Consequently, *vanitas* painting is as rhetorical for audiences in this social context as listening to a sermon. In the painting, however, the interconnection between form and content seems so intertwined that it may be difficult to decipher an embedded artistic code, if a code exists at all. The visual analysis in the case study is not the definitive reading, but rather one way of viewing the art and of reading Steenwyck's particular forms, symbolism, and the content in his painting.⁷⁰ The reading is also a template germane to *vanitas* painting in general.

The next two major sections circumscribe the viewing practices for *vanitas* painting: *ekphrasis* and content, and *epideictic* and form. In the first section, I explain how *ut pictura poesis*, from the 15th and 16th centuries, dictated that painting was to be viewed as a type of reading. Specifically, *vanitas* painting is a continuation of this idea. Then, I show how the artistic method of intermingling content with form in *vanitas* painting is a rhetorical strategy exemplified in the metaphor brings-before-the-eyes.⁷¹ At the end of the section, I discuss two period art critics—Palomino y Velasco and Gerard

⁷⁰ See note 41.

⁷¹ Aristotle, *Rhet.* III, 1411.

de Larissaire—who employ metaphor in their art criticism.

The next section focuses on *epideictic*. In terms of *vanitas*, *epideictic* is praise of the art and excellence of painting. The two lenses emphasize rhetoric as a discursive framework for viewing *vanitas* painting. The rhetorical objective of the theories can be interpreted as didactic methods. Rhetoric in the 17th century situates understanding of the visual (form) and the invisible (metaphor) that was at the heart of the Dutch world.

Ekphrasis and Content

The aim of this section is to briefly explain *ekphrasis*' origins relative to its function as a viewing lens for content in *vanitas* painting. Beginning from its ancient roots *ekphrasis* occupies an odd place between the visual and the linguistic: the apparent conflict between form and content, or in other words, image and word, is central to the concept.

As mentioned, *ekphrasis* is vivid description. An example is Homer's rich account of Achilles shield in *Iliad*, Book 18,⁷² which was meant to be read. Reading a shield seems appropriate to a rhetorical device, but a second definition of *ekphrasis* from the Oxford English Dictionary is germane to *vanitas* painting. Peter Wagner clarifies, "Ekphrasis has a Janus face: as a form of mimesis, it stages a paradoxical performance, promising to give voice to the allegedly silent image even while attempting to overcome the power of the image by transforming and inscribing it."⁷³ When *vanitas* is considered

⁷² *Icons-Text-Iconotexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediary*, Peter Wagner, ed., (New York: de Gruyter, 1996).

⁷³ The Shield of Achilles is the earliest and best known example of *ekphrasis*. It describes the shield made by Hephaistos and given to Achilles by his mother Thetis. (BK 18, *Iliad*.) Low-relief sculpture embossed in metal on the surface of the shield is described in elaborate detail. Subjects include constellations, pastures, dancing, and great cities. Visual notation is so extensive that critics have commented that no actual shield in the real world would be able to contain the disparate elements mentioned. Alfred Corn, *American Poets*: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/19939>, accessed May 12, 2012.

in close reading, the observation fits perfectly the paradox of the genre. The analysis shows how *ekphrasis* investigates how it is possible for Dutch audiences to read content and to produce moral sermons in intimate painting from the *vanitas* metaphor *all is vanity*.

Pictura Poesis

The ekphrastic tradition of *pictura poesis*⁷⁴ is when one medium of art (painting) interacts with another medium (scripture) to define and describe its content and form. A picture is like a speaking poem. For example, the dialectic in *vanitas* unfolds when the content metaphor from scripture—*all is vanity*—engages with the symbolic forms of ephemerality in painting to form the *memento mori* message, *all will die*. An emotional response in the viewer results from the inevitability of death and the unknown.

Pictura poesis is a skilled way of describing art and other aesthetic objects. The trope served as the testing ground for rhetorical theories of orality and, *epideictic* (exemplary) mimesis,⁷⁵ and as the incubator for systematic aesthetics. Good writing was compared to good painting.⁷⁶ The forms of painting were regarded as language and were therefore thought to function best under the rules of language. Academic reference to

⁷⁴ Horace develops the metaphor of painting as a means of criticizing arbitrary combinations of incompatible components in a poem. The third letter of Book II of the *Epistles*, line 361, includes the phrase *ut pictura poesis*: a comparison between the two arts. Often cited as the foundational text establishing a connection between visual and verbal art, Horace describes no particular painting; rather, he refers abstractly to various aspects of the art of painting purely as a *metaphor* to get at the good or bad qualities a poem may exhibit.

⁷⁵ In the Renaissance, Erasmus of Rotterdam reiterated this foundational dichotomy for rhetorical analysis by titling his most famous textbook *On the Abundance of Verbal Expression and Ideas* (*De copier verborum ac rerum*). This division is one that has been codified within rhetorical pedagogy, reinforced, for example, by students being required in the Renaissance, according to Juan Luis Vives, to keep notebooks divided into form and content. (*Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol.58, No.1, Spring 2005), See note 24.

⁷⁶ The aesthetic idea would not become a recognized philosophical discipline until Alexander Baumbarten, considered the “father” of aesthetics and the first to employ the term in a distinctly philosophical context. The philosopher and logician would have a significant influence on Kant’s aesthetics.

pictura poesis from the Renaissance and into the Baroque period link painting with literature. Throughout this period, poetry and painting were juxtaposed as a means of defending the prestige of the visual art. Designing a painting to be read—such as *vanitas* painting—continues the ideal of *pictura poesis*.⁷⁷

Painting was assigned the same rhetorical, theoretical, didactic, and aesthetic⁷⁸ objective as poetry. *Pictura poesis* is within the long tradition of ekphrastic poetry—in which painting and literature instruct, persuade, and move the viewer through imaginative description, demonstrating that the power of language is by no means struck dumb by pictures or other nonverbal artifacts. Examples include poetry and painting that feature death.

From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance and into the 17th century, death was a common theme in poetry and painting, and the idea of humbling oneself in the hour of death was thought to be necessary to salvation.⁷⁹ Francesco Petrarca's *The Triumph of Death* is a poem (1470) that depicts the horrors of death in apocalyptic detail. Another example is a painting by Pieter Brueghel the Elder from 1562 in which armies of skeletons ravage the masses producing an image of hell on earth. In Brueghel as in Bosch, the dreadful medieval visions of death come to fruition in the early part of the Neatherlandish 17th century with the coming of the bubonic plague in 1620.

In the late 14th century spiritual writings recommend a visual medium to aid meditation in the contemplation on the *memento mori* theme. In *Imitation of Christ*, written in 1418–1427, Chapter 23 concerns “thoughts on Death.” The reader is advised,

Very soon your life here will end; consider, then what may be in store for you

⁷⁷ This idea was also espoused by 15th and 16th century artists.

⁷⁸ *Vanitas* painting was meant to *move* the viewer toward morally edifying behavior.

⁷⁹ Cohen, *Metamorphosis*, 17–18.

elsewhere. . . in every deed and every thought, act as though you were to die this vry [sic]day. . . death is the end of everyone and the life of many quickly passes awy [sic]like a shadow.⁸⁰

In the 16th century, Baroque interpretation of the notion of poetry as a speaking picture draws on the didactic power of mimesis and metaphoric imagery. Sir Philip Sidney's *Apologie for defence of Poesie* in IV Poesy (1595), for instance, references Aristotle's idea of learning and delight mentioned in *Rhetoric* III:

. . . therefore [posey] is an arte of imitation. . . that is to say, a representing, counterfetting, or figuring foorth: to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture; with this end, to teach and delight.⁸¹

Sidney's poetry makes use of mimesis, *pictura poesis*, and metaphor to amplify his description of poetry. The tropes ornament painting and poetry with the colors of rhetoric: beauty, truth, and the good.

By the 17th century, the ekphrastic idea of poetry as a speaking picture combined with didactic imagery common to the Calvinist Reformed Church to produce *vanitas* painting: the righteous are admonished through metaphor⁸² juxtaposed against forms of desire to remember that life is short and the hour of death is near.

Metaphor

In the Dutch 17th century, texts that feature metaphor are common from Aristotle to St. Thomas Aquinas, Sir Philip Sidney, Bishop Sprat, and Rene Descartes to Francis Bacon.⁸³ These texts also concern related subjects such as rhetorical theory, logic, and

⁸⁰ Thomas a Kempis (1380–1471), *The Imitation of Christ*, (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co, 1940), 39–42.

⁸¹ From Olney's 1595 edition, reprinted in O.B. Hardison, *English Literary criticism: The Renaissance* (1963). *The Defence of Poesie* was translated into Dutch. Koozin observes that Sidney made two trips to Leyden and was in close contact with Leyden scholars, notes 7, 5.

⁸² *Rhetoric* argues that metaphor is a type of transference, “. . . the application of the name of a thing to something else. . .” Aristotle admires Homer who mastered composition in vivid images.

⁸³ Since Aristotle and into the 17th century, most of what had been written about painting was taken from texts on language, Koozin, *The Vanitas Still Lifes*, v–x. Like Plato, Aristotle thinks there is a special

education. These distinguished antecedents are reason enough to the link *vanitas* painting to the history of metaphor, rather than allegorical painting.

The most important precursor for metaphoric content in *vanitas* painting is *Rhetoric* and the idea in the text that the soul never thinks without image in the mind. *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* introduce the enigmatic metaphor, *brings things before the eyes*.⁸⁴ The metaphor makes the point that writers should ornament their words so the listener can *see* things.⁸⁵ There is an element of surprise that is part of the strength of the phrase; the hearer associates (sees) in the mind one thing in term of another. “To evoke emotion is to visualize. . . [to create] delight and surprise. . . [therefore] his acquisition of the new idea impresses him all the more.”⁸⁶

The result of adding vivifying metaphors to text is that: “. . . liveliness is added [to text] by using the proportional metaphor and that the best of these should be ‘graphic.’”⁸⁷ *Poetics* emphasizes visual effect and emotional affect, “poetic language, especially metaphor.”⁸⁸

Metaphors were also commonplace in religious sermons in the Reformed Church

interactive and reciprocal communication between the body, the mind (or cognition in general), and the emotions. *Poet.*, 1448a.

⁸⁴ Aristotle, *Rhet.* III, 1404b; and “seeing things” in Book XVII of *Poetics*: the poet should attempt to visualize the scenes before composing the text, specifically, to “. . . visualize the scene before him.” In *Rhetoric* III, Aristotle admires Homer who mastered composition in vivid images.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Aristotle is drawing on the association between learning and pleasure in *Poet.* 4, 1448b2ff. Much of what was written about painting up to the 17th century was taken from *Poetics*.

⁸⁷ Aristotle, *Rhet.* III, 1404b; 1411. A powerful metaphor is affective because, as Aristotle shows, it evokes a personified human emotion and activity that the hearer can visualize. *Rhetoric* describes what metaphor does for the reader, “Metaphor, moreover, gives style clearness, charm and distinction as nothing else can . . . the best of these should be graphic.” By “graphic,” Aristotle means that writers, by extension painters, should cause the viewer to *see* things. Therefore metaphor brings about emotion when it is full of graphic description, as in “with his vigor in full bloom,” and “bringing [objects and emotions] before the eyes.”

⁸⁸ Aristotle, *Poet.* XXI, Chapter 21, 1457b1–30: “. . . metaphor [consists] in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else, the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on the grounds of analogy. . .” See also *Rhet.* III, 1404b.

and were meant to be affective. For example, the ephemeral metaphor, *all is vanity*, is biblically symbolic but transmits viscerally: concerns for the vain things of this world are bound up with the void of the world of the dead in forms of desire. The metaphor in *vanitas* paintings is clear: transitory fixation on material things corrupts, and corruption is absolute in Calvin's view of the world. This religious doctrine derives from the Augustine and the concept of original sin.⁸⁹ Only through the grace of God is one saved.⁹⁰ Danger lies in overly attending to the vain things of the world.

Vanitas painting calls on Calvinist audiences to instinctively grasp things worldly through the transitory state of human nature. Instinctively, the viewer understands the message of the brevity of life and humankind's vanity in desiring things of the world. The authority of metaphor's rhetorical sharpness strengthens *vanitas* painting as Steenwyck has shown. The irony is that the viewer must read the painting's metaphor through elegant forms of desire. In *vanitas* art, the ritual of reading painting as metaphor through form is quasi-religious but decidedly secular.

Some themes in Calvinist sermons, however, taught that an accumulation of wealth through industry would ensure God's pleasure and personal salvation.⁹¹ Wealth was considered as a sign of God's elect. After all, Abraham and Job were rich because

⁸⁹ As a consequence of the fall of Adam, all those born into the world are enslaved to sin. Unable to choose to follow God, humans cannot refrain from choosing sin.

⁹⁰ Robert Williams, "Sin and Evil," *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks* in Peter C. Hodgson, and Robert H King (Fortress Press), 201–202.

⁹¹ Milton's *Paradise Regained* could be read as the Calvinistic theory of predestination. The poem teaches us that man should learn what is indispensable for his salvation with help of light from above, which he has not completely lost yet (IV, 352). Being aware of the visual sources enriches the descriptive passages in the poem. Examples (as in the *vanitas*) correspond to and become the actual metaphors and the imageries within the text which are thick with moral symbolism. The preachers always warned their audience of the danger of wealth, since it could easily instigate indulgent luxurious life. The strongest warnings were found in 1 Timothy 6:10: Temperance against the seductively enticing lure of objects has become an indispensable virtue. Wealth then has double symbolism: the sign of God's favor and the temptation to moral depravity. Still life painting, especially *vanitas*, and *Paradise Regained* teach that wealth is favorable but full of potential sinfulness.

they were God's chosen people. Indeed, Simon Schama has shown that Neatherlandish parishioners measured personal salvation through material wealth and possessions. Wealth was considered a sign of God's elect.⁹² As the likely owners of objects of wealth, including paintings, the Dutch were accustomed to seeing beyond the mere appearance of vanity: allusions to pride and death in Calvinist sermons and pictured in painting customary appealed to the Dutch pious.⁹³

The paradox in the *vanitas* metaphor, *all is vanity*, mimics metaphor's stated purpose in *Poetics*: "To evoke emotion is to visualize. . . [to create] delight and surprise. . . [therefore] his acquisition of the new idea impresses him all the more."⁹⁴

A familiar metaphor found in Genesis conflates moral authority with the creation of wealth in an acidic observation quoted by Calvin that measures piety in Dutch character:

There was a danger that Abram might become too well pleased with his own good fortune. Therefore, God seasons the sweetness of wealth with vinegar. Although useful and tempting, wealth, as the prayer book warns, should not arouse pleasure in the mind or body.⁹⁵

Calvin's warning is phrased in the language of metaphor borrowed from St. Thomas Aquinas who wrote in the 13th century. Artists in the 17th century milieu borrowed the rhetorical effect in Aquinas' language to enhance the affective nature of *vanitas* painting.

Aquinas put forth, in the form of a scholastic argument, the use of metaphor in the scriptures as well as advancing the most important statement about the relationship between metaphors and visual content in art.⁹⁶ Because the construction of Aquinas'

⁹² Schama, iv.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Aristotle draws the association between learning and pleasure in *Poet.* 4,1448b2ff.

⁹⁵ In *Commentary on Genesis* (13: V, VII).

⁹⁶ Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, Fathers of the English Dominican Province trans. written in 1265 Q.1.

thought and style creates an affect in Calvinist sermons, the influence of Aquinas is likewise present in the content metaphor of *vanitas* art, which appeared in the same period. For example, a critical statement comes from a passage in *Summa Theologica*, “Whether Holy Scripture Should Use Metaphors?”⁹⁷ In the treatise, Aquinas recommends that it is indeed befitting Holy Scripture to offer divine and spiritual truths by “comparisons with material things.”⁹⁸ The philosopher reasons that it is humankind’s nature to obtain “intellectual truths through sensible objects,”⁹⁹ because humans receive knowledge through their senses.¹⁰⁰

In *Theologicas*¹⁰¹ Aquinas suggests that for the simple minded, spiritual truths are discovered in material things:

It is also befitting Holy Writ. . . that spiritual truths be expounded by means of figures taken from corporeal things, in order that thereby even the simple who are unable by themselves to grasp intellectual things may be able to understand it.¹⁰²

From Aristotle, Aquinas postulates that abstract ideas of the spirit are understood and learned best through study and the senses: thus, metaphor is a linguistic and visual tool as important to acquiring knowledge as the aural.¹⁰³ These scholars of secular thought and religious liturgy recommend the use of rhetoric and the metaphor to describe, warn, and to delight the senses.¹⁰⁴

In a positive turn, the Reformed church justifies their blessings to *vanitas* painting

⁹⁷ Ibid., *Art in Theory*, 9.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ In the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, the passage encourages the growth of metaphor in the visual arts. The Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Ages, Robert E. Bjork, ed., (Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Aquinas’ doctrine was adopted in the 16th and 17th centuries such as those found in precursors of *vanitas* painting (e.g., books of emblems and diptychs).

¹⁰⁴ Koozin, *Metaphoric Realism*, 3.

on the basis of symbolic and moral import: metaphor conveys metaphysical principles in material form. The country's economic investment in the booming tulip trade (flowers were sometimes used in *vanitas* painting) is not inconsequential to this justification.

Religion that sanctions the *memento mori* theme and metaphor in *vanitas* painting ease Dutch consciences where acquiring knowledge and wealth are concerned. The artistic strategy of using rhetoric, specifically metaphoric messages in art, was meant to appeal to the eyes of wealthy Calvinist burghers and to enhance the prestige of *vanitas* art. The enactment of the *vanitas* message—of communication with God caught in worldliness—is not simply a rhetorical misfortune: Calvinist audiences instinctively grasp earthly things through the lens of the transitory state of human nature.¹⁰⁵

Regardless of the ideals of devotion—intellectual, material, and social (*vanitas* were marked as forms of meditation by the Reformed Church)—artists chose to display the incongruences between religion and commodity by accentuating what would otherwise theoretically obviate their work. Consequently what initially was the most troublesome feature of *vanitas* painting—mixing religion with secular interests—became one of its strongest selling points. The purses of the wealthy patrons of art notarize the status of the genre. The culture of conspicuous display of wealth in still lifes owes much to the artistic wit and virtuosity of artists such as Steenwyck.

To rehearse, metaphor is an ekphrastic trope recommended by Aristotle that adds to language “. . . liveliness. . .and that the best of these should be ‘graphic.’”¹⁰⁶ *Rhetoric*

¹⁰⁵ See note 90 above, regarding the paradox of wealth.

¹⁰⁶ Aristotle, *Rhet.* III, 1404b; 1411. *Rhetoric* describes what metaphor does for the reader: “Metaphor, moreover, gives style clearness, charm and distinction as nothing else can . . . the best of these should be graphic. By “graphic,” Aristotle means that writers, by extension painters, should cause the viewer to *see* things. Therefore metaphor brings about emotion when it is full of graphic description, as in “with his vigor in full bloom,” and “bringing [objects and emotions] before the eyes.”

and *Poetics* emphasize that visual effect and emotional affect are produced by “. . . poetic language, especially metaphor.” Seventeenth-century art critic, Carl Van Mander creates a variation on the formulation: *vir bonus pingendi pergendi peritus* explains the affective power of painting to “sweetly move” the viewer’s eyes, heart, and feelings in terms of the painter’s capacity to make an impression of “piety and honour.”¹⁰⁷ Although images of death may not “sweetly move” the viewer, metaphor read through the elegant form in *vanitas* painting created sweet effects on the eye of the 17th century Dutch viewer.

As I have shown, the technique of applying rhetoric, specifically metaphor to artistic criticism, borrows from the authority of ancient literary tradition. Discussed next are the analyses of two period art critics who employ rhetoric to bolster their critiques; metaphor functions as the framework for their critiques. Antonio Palomino y Velasco uses science as metaphor, and Gerard de Laisaire links the pictorial mode to images in the notion of metaphoric ornament.

Velasco’s inventive comparison of painting to metaphor represents a new kind of analysis derived from poetic disposition. In *Theory of Painting* Book II, Chapter 1, mid-17th century ideas unite science, art, and moral conduct to metaphor.¹⁰⁸

Instead of the usual breakdown into idea, design, color, chiaroscuro, expression and so forth, the critic offers an elaborate exposition of different types of metaphor said to animate the work of art: the metaphoric, moral, and iconic.¹⁰⁹ Velasco’s idea of

¹⁰⁷ Dutch theoretical precedence for art critiques are found in Karl van Mander (Haarlem 1603), Franciscus Junis (Leiden, 1689), and Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627), who is concerned with techniques of description and illusion, *The Visible World*, 77.

¹⁰⁸ *Art in Theory 1648–1815*, “Antonio Palomino y Velasco,” 318. Velasco received a humanistic education in his native Cordoba intended to prepare him for a career in the Church. However, he was encouraged by a friendship with the painter Valdes Leal (1622–90) to change his plans and to study art.

¹⁰⁹ The extracts here (the total works combined to over 500 pages) have been edited and translated by Nicholas Walker, (*El Museo Pictorico, y escala optica*, Madrid: Da Sancha, 1715, vol 2), 82–83, 86–87;

metaphor is primarily rhetorical and conceptual. His ekphrastic descriptions in critiques IV, VI, IX, and X emphasize how metaphor should not call attention to the artwork's so-called internal natural truths:¹¹⁰

IV. The Metaphoric Argument: The metaphoric argument is that which reveals the idea [*concepto*] of the artist through the use of ingenious metaphor. For the metaphor is the mother of all intellectual subtlety . . . to enrich the mind along the paths of erudition. Those that directly concern the painter are five in number: natural, moral, facial, instrumental, or iconological.

VI. The Moral Metaphor: The metaphor of custom reveals the idea of the artist by means of some sign which, through custom . . . has assumed the right to a certain signification (e.g., hues of the ceremonial vestments decreed by the Church for just such an occasion) . . . such things depend upon the free interpretation, customs, and usages of men [who] belong in this class of moral metaphor.¹¹¹

The moral argument turns on a secular reading but borrows from religious rites such as the mention of “ceremonial vestments decreed by the Church.” Moreover, “men belonging to this class” should be appointed to interpret customs, ones who understand forms of “secular morality.”¹¹² Next, are the iconological arguments that link form to vigilance and vanity:

IX. The Iconological Argument is used by the painter to represent abstract matter: The Virtues, the Vices, the Sciences, the Arts, Day and Night serve to represent these things which are not themselves real physical entities as if there were indeed such; for the expression of such things many other metaphors are also employed: like the crane for Vigilance, the ostrich for Gluttony, the sword for Justice, the olive for Mercy.

Velasco connects metaphor and form to the ekphrastic argument borrowed from ancient poetry:

the fury of war in the form a raging and wrathful youth, his eyes darting fire, his

vol., 1, 56–64. The critic's work was popular throughout Europe and translated into French, English, and German, 317–25.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 317, 321–3.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 322.

mouth foaming bloody, his body covered in wounds . . . the youth is chained to the triumphal chariot of Alexander.¹¹³

X. The *Emblem* . . . is used by the painter if he is a humanist:

. . . . [emblem] is a metaphor signifying some moral matter by means of iconological, ideal or fantastical. . . representation like a motto, or a precise, penetrating and ingenious poem.¹¹⁴

The critic says this kind of “erudite allusion” is much favored in the “. . . apartments of Lords and Princes for the decoration of vaults, domes and friezes. . .”¹¹⁵

This ingenious comparison of painting to metaphor represents an entirely new critique:

. . . properly understanding the full significance that attaches to this single metaphoric task of the painting of art where no demonstration of true learning is excessive. . . [I]t encompasses the whole of history, sacred and profane . . . natural philosophy, the holy theology and the mysteries of faith . . . themselves elaborate symbols and sacred metaphors. It also encompasses rhetoric in the expression of the effects . . . customs and practices, poetry, [etc.]. . .¹¹⁶

As a critic familiar with Renaissance and early Baroque poetry, Velasco’s evaluation borrows the notion of the conceit, or the willingness to abide metaphoric deceit characteristic of *vanitas* painting.¹¹⁷ The artist holds the view that the rhetorical and visual arts should depict moral examples to aid salvation but also, at the same time, his examples show that visual arts should entice the senses.

One critic who thinks still lifes can do little else but entertain the weak minded is Gerard de Laissaire¹¹⁸ (who nevertheless brings attention to Dutch art). How should

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 325.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ In the 17th century, Dr. Johnson is synonymous with the notion of metaphysical conceit, a characteristic figure and once derogatory in John Donne (see fn.2). The conceit, according to H. M. Abrams, originally meant image but came to be the name for figures of image and speech that establish “elaborate” parallels between two apparently dissimilar things or situations. M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp, Glossary*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957).

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 298.

moral lessons occur through “. . . inanimate Things; such as dead flowers, fruits, musical instruments, dead Fish, etc.?”¹¹⁹

De Laissaire sees *vanitas* as thought painting, though he laments that *vanitas*, indeed all still lifes, do not contain meaning: “Thought painters [*vanitas*] are guilty of not adding sufficient thoughts to their pictures.”¹²⁰

Following his discussion of Histories, de Laisses reluctantly takes up the task of examining still lifes in these acidic remarks:

. . . we shall now, for the sake of weak Capacities, proceed to Still-lifes. What constitutes a good Still-life piece. . . ‘tis Weakness to think that faded Flowers should please, much less in a Picture: Or who would hang a Piece of ordinary, unripe or rotten Fruit in his best Room. . .

Such Rubbish I did formerly admire; but as they only shew the Deformities of Nature I have no Appetite to view them any more. . . it is not likely that wealthy People should be delighted with old-fashion’d Plate and Furniture, when they can have every Thing more beautiful and elegant. . .¹²¹

The critic rather affirms history painting as the highest genre.

De Laisses is interesting because his disdain of everyday and urban subjects betrays ambivalence toward emblematic pictures and particular symbols that display metaphoric meaning, such as emblems of death concealed in everyday forms. Through the very vehemence of his opposition to the genre, the critic strengthens artistic attention toward Dutch still lifes painting.

In summary, I have discussed *ekphrasis* as a type of composition intended to bring the subject—the content metaphor *all is vanity*—clearly before the eyes.¹²² *Pictura* poesis and metaphor were discussed in relationship to *vanitas* painting. The ekphrastic

¹¹⁹ *Art in Theory*, 109.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 299. Although de Laisses was French, he worked in Amsterdam.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Aristotle, *Rhet.* III, 1410b, “bringing before the eyes.”

tropes represent the content of *vanitas* painting in the dialectic between content and form. Other Dutch painters in the 17th century, such as Jan Steen, use the metaphorical contrast between the lifeless canvases versus the living form to compare the distinction between appearance and inner truth, or illusion and reality.¹²³ Although form and content coexist as different realities, the division is difficult to decipher. There is good reason that forms of the real world cohere to metaphoric content. For example, illuminated material surfaces bring to mind metaphysical reality. These two characteristics of *vanitas* painting are two types of verisimilitude—“mirrors of nature”¹²⁴—that hinge the art of Dutch realism.

As I have explained, 17th century Dutch artistic, religious, and secular perspectives emphasized contemplation of the forms of the visible world to open access to the invisible world. To say this differently, forms are themselves metaphors for the other worldly. Painters are not, however, to seek to penetrate the true nature that lies behind the world of appearances. The details of one thing—the forms of the worldly—make their comparison to the invisible world all the more acute.

Velasco and de Laissaire advocate for painting by demonstrating that painting is not a mere craft, but an intellectual pursuit that borrows from classical rhetoric.¹²⁵ They specifically argue on behalf of Dutch painting, that it should garner the attention and investment of cultivated persons of means—the burghers, or middle class—for whom

¹²³ Ibid. For example, in 1665, Jan Steen painted a scene entitled “The Life Of Man,” which depicts a tavern scene, which is typical of Steen’s work. Many people gather indulging in pleasures of the flesh such as drinking, dancing, and flirting. In the corner, barely seen, lies a boy watching the crowd, lying next to a skull and blowing bubbles out of a pipe. This particular painting does not discourage the viewer to reject pleasures in life, instead it is a moral painting reminding the viewer of the truth: that life is short and that these pleasures will not last, *The Athenaeum*, accessed Mar, 2012.

¹²⁴ Weststeijn, *The Visible World*, 83.

¹²⁵ *Art in Theory*, 9.

wealth and leisure define what it means to acquire culture that mingles with religious dogma.

The next section emphasizes how form in painting interconnects visually and rhetorically through *epideictic*.

Epideictic and Form

Dutch realism in *vanitas* designates values through metaphor and form. Art historical interpretation of *vanitas* has clung to the conception that form is subordinate to metaphor. However, my critique disputes the notion to assert, instead, that form is as critical to *vanitas* art as metaphor is.

The subject of this section is form.¹²⁶ Form is steeped in the classical rhetorical perspective that dictates that painting, like oratory, should elicit emotion. To demonstrate this perspective, this section specifically shows how *epideictic* is a theoretical criticism that rests on the assertion of the priority of sight as a sensory experience through form expressly through color and symbolic value.

Viewers draw visual information about the world of the senses from an encounter with *vanitas* form. Just as the orator uses stylish linguistic ornamentation, the artist ornaments and illuminates *vanitas* art through form. Form operates rhetorically as a type of visual syntax created so that the meaning in metaphor can be read and understood through the form itself.¹²⁷ Form on canvas is the superficial form of sensuous pleasure meant to animate metaphor.

¹²⁶ The term *form* refers to the art work's material form and indigenous style; *content* refers to art's content, how what is being depicted attaches to commonplace meaning.

¹²⁷ As was discussed above, the ekphrastic metaphor in *vanitas* painting communicates not only through didactic meaning, but is read through enticing visual form.

Form is what entices the eye in *vanitas* painting: the prime organ constantly receives information about the world. Sight is an essential conveyor of emotion. Form in *vanitas* art is visual display that makes emotional claims on the viewer—however ambivalent—including desire and repulsion. Form opens for the viewer access to the invisible world. Symbolically, form represents renunciation of the visible world in order to embrace the invisible world¹²⁸; form operates as well, in the pleasing allure of objects of desire in the worldly world.

Epidictic captures the idea of how excellence of form and technique in illuminated surface and color is an artistic tool in painting as the analysis of Steenwyck's *Vanitas* has shown, and the trope is also the unmistakable display of rhetorical virtuosity in formal display.

I show how through *epideictic*, the forms of *vanitas* operate rhetorically: both persuasively and strategically. I begin with the ancient understanding of *epideictic* as the idea of rhetorical display. Then, I show again through *epideictic* how *vanitas* is the display of form illuminated through the technique of color. Next, is a short description of how *vanitas* art conveys symbolic meaning and creates aesthetic emotion meant to *move* the emotions of the 17th century Dutch viewer.

Lawrence Rosenfield's interpretation of *epideictic* shows the critical interweaving of *epideictic* and form. At its best, *epideictic* calls for collective acknowledgment of virtue's presence: ". . . *epideictic* makes known; it means to shine or *show forth* in order

¹²⁸ Aristotle emphasizes the visual and material status of works of art: in a word, mimesis embodies or *enacts* likeness from an art's material form. The metaphoric transference from one thing to another creates a *memento mori* message. Thus, form and content illuminate for the Dutch, an interpretive reading of painting. Rather than painting that predicts a moral outcome, the viewer completes the image similar to the process of meditation in Dutch diptychs (National Gallery, "Prayers and Portraits: Unfolding the Netherlandish Diptych," Nov.12, 2006–Feb 4, 2007), Site visit.

to persuade audiences to gaze at the moral aura glowing from within a work of art.”¹²⁹ The *epideictic* brings to light art’s “[formal] characteristics and illuminative liveliness,” according to Rosenfield.¹³⁰ “*Epideixis* does not mean mere display”; rather, the term is akin to making manifest the fleeting “appearance” of excellence in human experience (including art making) that otherwise would remain “unnoticed or invisible.”¹³¹

Beginning in the 15th century, *epideiktikos* was moral virtue synonymous with displays of excellence in artistic merit. Audiences were thought to experience emotion in proper proportion to the quality of artistic representation.

In the 17th century, the art critic Franciscus Junius (1589–1677) endeavored to invest painting with a status among the liberal arts by means of the rhetorical principle of *epideictic*. Junius praises the “art of painting,”¹³² showing that the rules of painting should be enhanced by *imitatio* or mimesis: “The instruction to be gained from rules is long and arduous. . . .” claims Junius, “. . . while the instruction to be gained from examples is short and powerful.”¹³³ It is clear that the author is dealing with *epideictic* praise when he speaks of “the art of painting.”¹³⁴

Ancient rhetorical theory indicates that virtuosity through *epideictic* intertwines artistic form with the moral virtue of exemplary technique: a strategic method that continues into the Dutch milieu of the 17th century. The belief was that moral virtues are visually presentable, but are not *contained* in the objects of form; they are simply

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3, 154.

¹³⁰ “The Practical Celebration of Epideictic” *Rhetoric in Transition: Studies in the Nature and Uses of Rhetoric*, Eugene E. White, ed. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), 135.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³² B. Vickers, *In Defense of Rhetoric* (Oxford 1989), 53–54; 61 deals with the importance of *epideictic* rhetoric that was dominant in the early modern period.

¹³³ Nativel, 59; 442 concludes that in Junius’ theory, “precepts are subordinate to practice;” Weststeijn, 371.

¹³⁴ See note 19.

interpreted or *read* through form by viewers.¹³⁵ The artist's duty is to create an artistic link between form and content: to clarify between realism and hyperrealism, between real and the unreal, between the material visible world and the metaphysical invisible world.¹³⁶ To accomplish this goal, the painter, like the poet, illuminates artistic form to fill the viewer with delight, as Aristotle instructs, and to exhort virtue through emotion. In classical rhetoric, the aesthetic is rhetoric: the affective experience through the *epideictic* lens intensifies the interrelationship among the artist (speaker), his artwork, and the viewer.

The Baroque tradition of painting borrows the notion from ancient classical rhetoric to create a visual code or a type of visual syntax in *vanitas*: technical virtuosity creates emotion that interweaves with the theological message. Particular artistic facts in *vanitas* painting must not contradict the artistic code; the artistic and moral values in *vanitas* are designated predominantly by the code of Dutch realism.

Moral virtue in *vanitas* painting eschews vanity in the world *and* is the virtue through *epideictic* of how painting must be *fit for display* or the artistic virtue of excellence in execution of detail and illumination of form. The *epideictic* guides the technical execution of the code of artistic values in Dutch realism's exacting representations of codified color, composition, intention, and inventiveness of scientific order, which display in the paintings of Pieter Claesz, Johann Gruber, and Steenwyck.¹³⁷ The technique of color is a conceit of artistic virtuosity.

¹³⁵ See note 103.

¹³⁶ An example in the 16th century is poet John Donne's metaphysical descriptions quoted in John P. Doyle, "Between Transcendental and Transcendental: The Missing Link," (*Review of Metaphysics*, vol.50, 1997).

¹³⁷ According to Descartes, painters should not look down on the slavish copying of the visible world and should not direct their endeavors to conveying the ideal forms that lie behind or beyond the world of appearances.

Vanitas' indigenous form may be partly invisible because the metaphor in 17th century *vanitas* still lifes has historically taken precedence over form. Thus, it is plausible to see how for the Dutch viewer the forms of *vanitas* could be naturalized, culturally.¹³⁸ The prescribed technique of color, however muted, was a principle *epideictic* tool meant to create emotion. Color bolsters the rhetorical, moral, and emotional authority of *vanitas* painting in the 17th century. Indeed, in ancient rhetorical theory, some of the metaphoric techniques for evoking a moral lesson seem to invite an *epideictic* application to painting, such as the Cicero's recommendation to embellish speech with "colors of rhetoric."¹³⁹ It is not surprising then that 17th century art theory¹⁴⁰ and practice accords painting the same function as it does to oratory: that of persuading and *coloring* audiences' moral outlook.

Although art is verisimilitude,¹⁴¹ the reality of emotion elicited through color—in contrast to the fiction of art—is the painter's most powerful tool in his effort to invite the viewer into the painting in order to read its enticing form. The first Dutch art critic, Carel Van Mander, in the epic *Grondt* explains the affective power of color: "to . . . sweetly move the viewer's eyes, heart and feelings in terms of the painter's capacity to make an impression of 'piety and honour.'" Moreover, "colour heartens and startles people [. .]

¹³⁸ Roman Jakobson asks, can the question be raised about a higher degree of verisimilitude of this or that poetic trope? Can one say that a metaphor is conventional or figurative? The methods of projecting three-dimensional space onto a flat surface are established by convention; the use of color, the abstracting, the simplification, of the object depicted, and the choice of reproducible features is all based on convention. It is necessary to learn the conventional language of painting in order to "see" a picture, just as it is impossible to understand what is spoken without knowing the language. This conventional, traditional aspect of painting to a great extent conditions the very act of our visual perception. As tradition accumulates, the painted image becomes an ideogram, a formula, to which the object portrayed is linked by contiguity. Recognition becomes instantaneous. We no longer see a picture. See note 12.

¹³⁹ Weststeijn, *The Visible World*, 45.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*; espoused by critics such as Constantijn Huygens and Samuel Van Hoogstraten.

¹⁴¹ Verisimilitude captures the idea that when viewers bring an image into consciousness (creation) the form interconnects with content to create cultural meaning.

makes them sad and cheers them up and helps to cure melancholy.”¹⁴²

In Steenwyck’s *Vanitas*, silk, the finest of all materials, is colored purple, the most expensive color dye. Color was deliberately selected to create a rhetorical effect to produce affect and an illusionistic force.¹⁴³ Functioning as part of the visual syntax, color was meant to be read through form to heighten viewing emotion. Form through color likely creates more emotional appeal than the didactic message conveyed by the metaphor. The making and enjoyment of painting through artistic and rhetoric technique—particularly color, as I have shown—thus demonstrate how a strong affective component and technical virtuosity was required for a painting to achieve artistic distinction.¹⁴⁴

Netherlandish period critic, Jan Steppe, corroborates this view. He is “. . . not so much concern[ed] for the deeper moral [philosophical] value [of painting] . . . but rather its [painting’s] technical virtuosity.” For Steppe, “beauty and architectonic unity” is now “replaced by splendor and richness.”¹⁴⁵ The perspective reveals, where painting is concerned, that sight has arisen to a new stature—equal to thought—in the milieu.

Sight is primitive; more than language, sight in *vanitas* is a basic receptor of the

¹⁴² Carel van Mander’s *The Schilder-boeck* is part of the *Basic Library* of the *dbnl* (Dutch Canon) and considered one of the 1000 most important works in Dutch literature beginning with the Middle Ages to the 21st century. The book is a compilation of three books: the first was a translation from Giorgio Vasari’s list of artist biographies called the *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, the second was *Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters*, and the third was a translation of Ovid’s stories *Metamorphoses* followed by an explanation of figures. Van Mander’s work was translated by Constant van Wall, (NY: New York University Press, 1936), 153–157; see also, Van Mander, *Grondt* I, 30, fn. 3vm, *Visible World*, 411.

¹⁴³ Pieter Breughel, knew how to copy in color very comically and skillfully, Seymour Slive, *Dutch Painting, 1600–1800*, (Yale University Press, 1995).

¹⁴⁴ With the sophists of ancient Greece, rhetoricians have shared a profound respect for how style has affective properties.

¹⁴⁵ Ethan Matt Kavalier. “Renaissance Gothic in the Netherlands: the Uses of Ornament,” (*The Art Bulletin* 82: 2, Jun, 2000), 226–251. Critics in Netherlandish art have been slow to grant legitimacy to this [the ornamental] aesthetic. An exception is what Kavalier thinks is a curious antithesis that betrays an essentially “modernist distrust of ornament.”

values that guide Dutch painting: emotion, virtue, and truth. Sight intersects with thought; yet, the metaphor, *all is vanity*, is not enough to move the viewer. The strategic choice of the color in *vanitas* painting is ornamentation meant to move the viewer.¹⁴⁶ Artistic techniques and codes, emotion, and color are considered rhetorical practices critical to *epideictic* excellence in *vanitas* painting, as the discussion has shown.

The viewing practice of *epideictic* shows that form as virtuosity through rhetoric—form makes emotional claims on the viewer—is neither insubstantial nor incidental in *vanitas* painting. Next, I continue the topic of *epideictic*, with a discussion of the relationship between symbol and *vanitas* art.

It is difficult to see how form is not a *lexis* of external sign systems, symbols, and intentions, overlapping logos and lexis, *res* and *verba*.¹⁴⁷ Form, however, is the material visual *res* (thing). When symbol is ascribed to form in *vanitas* painting, it functions as the signifier: it points to form; therefore, symbol adds meaning.¹⁴⁸ For example, purple silk is not inherently rhetoric. Silk becomes rhetorical when viewers of *vanitas* painting use it to symbolize silk as a form of vanity.

Erwin Panofsky originated the term—“disguised symbolism,”¹⁴⁹—in relation to objects in Netherlandish painting. The influence of Panofsky has guided art historians to

¹⁴⁶ *Rhetoric* emphasizes the visual aspect of artistic *teche*, or excellence, which produces emotion.

¹⁴⁷ “Silva Rhetoricae.,” *Rhetoric*.byu.edu, accessed April, 2011; *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, Second Edition. Patricia Bizzell and Brice Herzberg, (Bedford, St. Martins, 2001), 567–88.

¹⁴⁸ Sonja Foss claims that to qualify as visual rhetoric, “. . . an image must go beyond serving as a sign. . . and be symbolic with that image only indirectly connected to its referent. The shape and color of the stop sign, for example, have no natural relationship to the act of stopping a car. . . a stop sign, then counts as visual rhetoric because it involves the use of arbitrary symbols to communicate.” Sonja K.Foss, “Theory of Visual Rhetoric.” *Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, and Media*. Ken Smith; Sandra Moriarty; Gretchen Barbatsis; Keith Kenney, eds. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2005), 144.

¹⁴⁹ Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 5–9.

research the meaning of the term. But these paintings are as much a part of the history of *epideictic* (and of *ekphrasis*) and metaphor as rhetorical devices as they are a part of any system of visual symbols.

Symbolism is, nonetheless, present in every form of still lifes, and it is never more significant than in *vanitas* painting. In the painting, realism mingles with escapism in the clash of forms and symbols. Forms are symbols that display the ephemerality of life and of the inevitability of death. Some of the commonplace forms that function as symbols are the watch or hourglass, which hints at the passage of time; the overturned glass, which connotes the emptiness of life; a violin, a vice of too much merriment; a book, which equates pride with knowledge, an artificial virtue; a sputtering candle or smoking oil lamp, which reminds the viewer that life is eventually snuffed out; rotten fruit, which symbolizes decay, like aging and the brevity of life; and a peeled lemon, which is attractive to look at but bitter to taste. The forms of *vanitas* signal to the reader a symbolic relationship to the metaphor, *all is vanity*; however, *vanitas* forms are, of themselves, unrelated.

From the perspective of *epideictic* rhetoric traced from the Greek, *epideiktikos*, ancient art reveals a prescribed symbolic code: the display of moral virtue that stems from the virtue of excellent execution in every observable detail of painting.¹⁵⁰ In the 17th century, the code in *vanitas* merged with the fervor over the emerging Scientific Age. The code insists on exacting observation through visual perception and sight: passion that elicits visual enjoyment in the 17th century Dutch viewer. The indigenous aesthetic of Dutch art aligns with an *epideictic* line of reasoning that insists on exacting realism in the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

technical execution of meticulous detail in painting. This sensibility equates with the fascination in the Dutch Golden Age with scientific investigation, innovation, and documentation.

Documenting scientific processes and epistemological facts mark the distinctiveness of the early 17th century Netherlandish aesthetic. Dutch realism is preoccupied with the task of visually labeling inanimate objects, flowers, shells, and skulls to create in art a hyperrealistic effect. Formal realism in *vanitas* paintings is testimony to this obsession with exacting technique that accurately describes every observable detail of the visible world. An artwork survives its maker, and *vanitas* thus ensures its own transcendence. The result is a genre that challenges the process of decay by methodically copying and thus maintaining nature's beauty, eternally freezing a flower in bloom. The artistic aesthetic in accuracy of depiction and representation and the Albertian metaphor of the window on the world¹⁵¹ show that form in *vanitas* painting may be as fundamental as method itself.

At the heart of the 17th century Dutch world is the notion that the form of the visual and the metaphor of the invisible intermingle. *Vanitas* mirrors this understanding in its interpretation of the indivisibility between things of an earthly nature and the metaphysical in contrast to painting that predicts a moral outcome through narrative.¹⁵² Form in *vanitas* should be understood not as narrative, but should be read as an association of one thing to another: forms of enticements require the viewer to interpret

¹⁵¹ Leone Battista Alberti. *On Painting*, Edited and Translated by Rocco Sinisgalli, (NYC, Cambridge University Press, May 2011, 1956). Alberti formulated principles of perspective in the 15th century. The geometric method renders pictorial space truthful (scientific); it is "seeing through," as if through a window (Alberti's metaphor). Perspective constructs a method for viewing the world.

¹⁵² An example is the narrative painting of Renaissance artists.

form as symbol. The paintings are more abstract than narrative: a style of representing form indigenous to the Neatherlandish aesthetic.

Epidectic offers a reason metaphoric content is overwhelmed by opulent form. Although riches are meant to signify transient things that fall to dust, when the eye of the viewer engages with the forms of *vanitas*, the mind disengages from the metaphor: the eye lingers over lustrous forms. The lure of forms is a powerful force and a rhetorical strategy for engaging the viewer. *Epidectic* expands understanding of the *physical* aspects of the genre and how emotion—associated with form’s technique of color—accomplishes this focus on aesthetics through form. *Vanitas* examined through form bids the viewer enjoy sensuous depictions of material form: a book, silk, a lute, and a shell, all of which arouse the sensory faculty of sight in aesthetic ways, distinct from the written word.

In sum, *ekphrasis* shows how metaphor or content (thought) coheres with form in the interweaving of terms and practices of classical rhetoric interpreted through 17th century Dutch sensibilities. The *epideictic* is the rhetoric of aesthetic virtuosity. Moreover, metaphor and form do not reduce at some level to literal speech or formal analysis outside historical context as contemporary rhetoric is apt to do. Instead, *vanitas*, as a genre of Dutch realism, must be examined in the context of the early 17th century.

Conclusion

Aristotle proclaimed that thought is impossible in the absence of an image, which is another way of saying that mental activity is guided by perceptual experience. In the Baroque style of meditative reading, *vanitas* shows how religious piety and spiritual truths are revealed in the delicate infusion of light illuminating from exquisitely detailed

forms in mimetic representation. The mimetic idea in the Dutch Baroque governed the creation of works of art that correspond to the physical world. *Vanitas* art was therefore modeled on the eternal virtues of beauty, truth, and the good. At the same time, the form and imagery themselves satisfy a second function of these paintings as expensive luxury display collectibles in fashionable burgher homes.

Vanitas art is created principally to satisfy not only the Dutch desires for luxury items, but also the milieu's cultural premium placed on verisimilitude. Verisimilitude allows for an understanding of *vanitas* as a discourse of intermingled content (metaphor) and form (material objects); it captures the sensibility of the genre as an illusory space between life and death, form and meaning, both empty and sensuous. Klaus Kruger terms the void background, a "veil of the invisible."¹⁵³ The phrase beautifully encapsulates how the image simultaneously reveals and conceals its referent.

This chapter has demonstrated how *vanitas*' content—the metaphor *all is vanity*¹⁵⁴ or the didactic message—was read through form. The chapter examined how reading metaphor through form evolved from ancient rhetoric, especially *ekphrasis* and *epideictic* and rhetorical strategy designed to raise the status of painting to more than mere craft. I demonstrated that the rhetoric of *vanitas* painting is not divided from aesthetic criticism; rather, the indigenous artistic method is integral to reading symbolic meaning, not linked to allegorical meaning.

The artistic method used to produce *vanitas* painting includes the rhetorical

¹⁵³ Bret L. Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting*, 82; Kruger, *Das Bild als Schleier des Unsichtbaren*, C.f. Wolf, *Schleier und Spiegel*.

¹⁵⁴ The phrase is the opening lines in the *Book of Ecclesiastes*, *Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas*, which accounts for the use of the word *vanitas* to describe these still lifes in 17th century inventories. These still lifes, are also referred to as death's head because a human skull is a common centerpiece.

strategy of bringing content and form before the eyes;¹⁵⁵ and the classical ideal that joined form and content through rhetorical concepts. For example, I interwove with content and form the ancient terms *ekphrasis* and *epideictic* to situate understanding of the invisible (metaphor) and the visual (form) at the heart of the 17th century Dutch world. Forms display the artistic ambition of depicting all things visible to access the invisible.

The conclusion synthesizes four key findings from the analyses in the chapter to summarize how the overall goal of the chapter has been accomplished. 1) Steenwyck's *Vanitas* painting compels intellectually and philosophically and as commodity through its illuminated forms of desire that align with the *memento mori* message. 2) *Vanitas* art is the most thought-provoking art. It is intellectually demanding because of the visual syntax created so that the metaphor or content could be read through form. 3) The *epideictic* lens reveals a scientific milieu deeply invested in the primacy of sight, which allows the artist's detailed and superb technique displayed in Dutch realism to support the strategy of bringing things before the viewer's eyes. 4) In order to validate this genre, painters in the 17th century Dutch milieu consciously appealed to wealthy merchants of Calvinist persuasion (generally) who understood spiritual meaning through illusion.

First, the case study of artist Harmen Steenwyck's *Vanitas* showed how the painting's complex and ambiguous form corresponds both to the demands of religious experience and the desires of a wealthy, worldly clientele. *Vanitas* religious and philosophical truths coexist in the forms of the visible world. For example, the shell and skull convey overt and repressed desire that yearns for a relationship to objects as a way

¹⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Rhet.* III, 1410b; *Aristotle On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civil Discourse*, George A. Kennedy, trans., (New York: Oxford Press, 1991).

of demystifying, or opposing the power of the word. The analysis demonstrated that Steenwyck's engagement with the material treatment of form is a consequence of composition, technique, and color that treat the form. Steenwyck sought, through rhetorical devices, to elevate the art of painting above craft, enriching it with intellectual and religious significance, and imbuing it with rhetorical meaning.

Forms without narrative link *vanitas* to its metaphor, *all is vanity*. Meaning is concealed in forms of a skull, books, and silk among other objects pictured on a chipped table set against a void background. By so resolutely vivifying metaphor, Steenwyck does more than simply make it present or lend it a mystical import. He paradoxically describes it as greater than mere imitation or naturalistic representation embodied in the muteness of the images of life and death. *Vanitas* is a mimetic representation that puts the patron in mind of reading religious imagery through everyday objects—a meditative engagement with forms of the painting and their metaphoric content sanctioned by the Reformed Church because of the enlightenment it encouraged. By reading *Vanitas*, the patron produced—and purchased—a personal reading and meditation.

Second, I showed from the ekphrastic perspective how *vanitas* painting is considered the most thought-provoking art. Reading *vanitas* painting with the *memento mori* message is as intellectually demanding as viewing a history painting, which was often considered more prestigious in the milieu. The viewer focuses on the unique type of visual syntax created so that the metaphor could be read through form. The demand is more than a simple recognition of narrative; rather, the visual syntax required the 17th century Dutch viewer in the Reformed Church to participate in the rhetorical tripartite that intermingles the roles of viewer, content, and form to create a meditation. The key is

for contemporary viewers to understand *vanitas* not as allegorical narrative, but more like abstract painting in which the viewer completes the message. Form and content ultimately are given over to the viewer's gaze.

Another aspect of the finding from *ekphrasis* is that messages are present in *vanitas* pieces and that *memento mori* and the content metaphor are part of the history of metaphor as a rhetorical device as much as any system of visual symbols. The section explored the prevalence of metaphor in the Aristotelian and Calvinist traditions that inform *vanitas* art, as well as how metaphor was employed by period art critics. *Ekphrasis* shows how the forms of *vanitas* are not merely instrumental, but fundamental to the composition of the painting's thought content, specifically, to achieve the rhetorical objective: to teach and to persuade. The paradox is that the viewer must juxtapose the objects (forms) of desire in the visible world with the ideological virtue of eschewing vanities. The *memento mori* message—*remember, all die*—establishes a distance to the genre's own origin that it never reaches. Instead, it fixes the ephemeral in the form. To decipher an object's symbolic meaning is to perceive form itself through sight.

Third, the *epideictic* lens revealed a milieu deeply invested in the primacy of sight. Sight is critical in discerning through the material form moral virtue. *Epideictic* was the visual display of moral virtue in the excellent technique of the artist. The term asserts through *vanitas* the central nature of visual experience, the material object, and the strategy of displaying composition, color, and brushwork—elegant form ornamented in meticulous details—as Steenwyck's *Vanitas* has shown. The centrality of sight contributed to the remarkable grace in the genre's visual display, a strategy for bringing things before the viewer's eyes.

Epidictic explains why *vanitas* painting is an overwhelming feast for the eyes. The choice of what to see articulates a patron's desire and identity. For example, the forms of display in *vanitas* painting—the sword, the books, expensive silk—are emotional expressions of desire painted in visual form. Amid such a profusion of things to see, viewers would necessarily have to develop a measure of visual skill including the understanding that paintings were meant to be read and understood as a relationship of one thing to another. *Epidictic* links *vanitas* to the aesthetic rhetorical objective of technique intended to delight the senses. The painting seems actively to subvert the persuasiveness of realism: the play of illusion inevitably displays the materiality of the painting.

Where Catholic painting opens effortlessly into sacred scenes and celestial spaces, Netherlandish *vanitas* has exactly no route toward the transcendental that the eye may take. Access is broken; the right-angle detour of the form through content is the expression of an ensnarement of the world, which nothing can overcome. Although Albertian painting is built on the window to the world and conveys the viewer to infinity, *vanitas* knows nothing of this escape into other worlds: its purview cannot get beyond the nearest objects. The pressing nearness of one object to another harbors a force of gravity and inertia nothing can escape. The transcendental can be sensed only in the inability to reach it. Moreover, the agonistic representation of the gravity of the word of God and the inertia of the warning in the idea of *vanitas* ensnared by the desire for things embodies a certain type of failure. On the other hand, the spectrums show the overwhelming appeal of enticements to pleasure. Ironically, *vanitas* painting exhibits an obvious weakness: the paintings appealed to a certain class and were expensive collectable commodities. As

such, the paintings assumed the status of *vanitas* objects themselves.

The viewing practices of *ekphrasis* and *epideictic* help locate the principle place of metaphor, illusion, and sight in the Dutch Baroque world. I have shown how the viewing practices functioned as dialectical types of visual syntaxes so that the metaphor could be read through form.

Fourth, in order to validate the practice of making this genre, painters in the 17th century milieu consciously and reflexively appealed to particular audiences who purchased the genre. Through its peculiar content and form, meaning and illusion, *vanitas* painting is a genre commodity culturally linked to a class of wealthy merchants. Patrons share an identity of understanding the vanity and impermanence of the visible world represented through alluring forms. The prestige is in owning the peculiar art that enables the pious, wealthy viewer to contemplate the eternal invisible world through sumptuous form. If carefully guided, the *memento mori* message and forms could put the viewer on the path to God. The fissure between *vanitas* form and content are mirrors that reflect both the acceptance and the renunciation of material things in the 17th century Dutch world.

As devotional painting, the genre not only reflects the social and religious environment, aesthetic technique, and sensibility in early 17th century Holland; it helped fuel the early art market. Bourgeois artistic and financial interests in painting direct attention to social status as well as material wealth. Since the heart of the art market before the Protestant Reformation lay in overtly religious imagery, *vanitas* painting offers the viewer a circuitous route to devotion. The struggle between the constancy of world rejection and the performance of that message as a costly work of art caught in the toils

of worldliness is not simply a rhetorical misfortune.

I have made the case that the ideological underpinning of *vanitas* art reflects and contemplates the visible world primarily from the perspective of the ancient rhetoric. The point is less to view *vanitas* as a pictorial system of visual codes and symbols than it is to examine how *vanitas* paintings function as instruments of rhetorical fissure that differentiate meaning (content) from appearance (form), but ultimately how *vanitas* relies on an intermingled blend. The terms show how the terms of classical rhetoric inform the origins of an art that was meant to instruct, to be read and enjoyed.

What happened around 1600 was that prosaic objects displayed in paintings subversively emphasize and deemphasize orders of desire. Whatever else they might be, encounters with *vanitas* paintings animate moral presumptions about what constitutes the worthwhile and worthless, the praiseworthy and blameworthy, the significant and insignificant. *Epileictic* display is beauty in the luminosity of virtuous representation juxtaposed in the ekphrastic didactic of moral values and death.

Vanitas painting seeks meaning in the odd assortment of objects. The quiet intimacy of meaning is the disquieting meditation that life is death. *Vanitas* painting is the evolution of death to beauty. The metaphor *beauty is death* is a distraction and a dislocation of aesthetic evaluation. Beauty and death suspend time—the rhetoric and verisimilitude embedded in the peculiar art.

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CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see them, depend on the Arts that influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty.

Oscar Wilde

The goal of this dissertation was to extend the scope of visual rhetoric by reviving classical rhetorical concepts to better account for the role of aesthetics in visual rhetoric, specifically in the rhetoric of works of art. The goal is important because it calls attention to aesthetics as a fundamental aspect of rhetoric; indeed, *Poetics* shows that rhetoric circumscribed aesthetics. This perspective challenged the conventional assumption that rhetoric and aesthetics were different phenomena.¹ Though they do seem oppositional, they designate two kinds of discourse and concomitant sets of assumptions about works of art. The dilemma of how art's cultural meanings and artistic properties interweave is partly resolved, as Sidney Zink observed, by recognizing that the perspectives are themselves particular qualities of art; they require different types of analyses.²

The dissertation extrapolates from specific classical theories and concepts, especially those of Aristotle, as a way to understand viewing practices from the history;

¹ Kant proposes a new relationship between rhetoric and aesthetics. He draws a contrast between rhetoric and poetry. The task of the rhetorician and the task of the poet stand in inverse relationship to one another. In Kant's estimation rhetoric and poetry are not just opposed but are also crossed in their purposes. *Critique of Judgment*, "Analytic of the Sublime," Immanuel Kant, Werner S. Pluhar, trans. (1986, 184; 1995), 207.

² "The Poetic Organism," (*The Journal of Philosophy*, XL11: 1945), 119–120.

history is nonetheless important as context for the examinations. The major claim is that audiences used rhetoric and aesthetics as unique perspectives to view and to read works of art.³ Specifically, the rhetorical lens of *ekphrasis* was used to explore cultural meaning in works of art. *Epideictic* was used as an aesthetic lens; it examined emotion and artistic technique. In the dissertation, two case studies explored actors' portrayal of pity and fear in tragedian drama and, in another case, cultural meaning (content) and aesthetic properties (form) in Dutch *vanitas* painting. The five sections in this conclusion—principal theme, strategies, vocabulary, seminal literature, and findings and contribution—explain how these particular works of art communicate rhetorically.

Investigating the way audiences may have practiced the rhetorics of viewing demonstrate how viewing is itself a communicative artifact, as Sonja Foss clarifies in “Theory of Visual Rhetoric,”⁴ “. . . human behavior operates within the domain of visual rhetoric. . . . in all the visual ways humans try to communicate.”⁵ Cara Finnegan says visual rhetoric is “a mode of inquiry defined as a critical and theoretical orientation that makes issues of appearance and visibility relevant to rhetorical theory. Visual rhetoric is sensory expression of cultural meaning, as opposed to aesthetic considerations.”⁶

I departed from Finnegan to argue with Foss and Lawrence Rosenfield that sensory expression of cultural meaning *is* aesthetic meaning. As mimetic representation examined in *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, aesthetic meaning embraces emotional and material expression in works of art in aesthetic ways while still advancing symbolic meaning and

³ Aristotle did not use the word “aesthetics”; rather, I am interpreting his theory of emotion as aesthetics taken from the word feeling.

⁴ Sonja K. Foss, “Theory of Visual Rhetoric,” *Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, and Media*, Ken Smith; Sandra Moriarty; Keith Barbatsis, (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2005), 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 141–152.

⁶ “Visual Studies and Visual Rhetoric” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90(2), 243–247.

cultural interpretation. Rather than dichotomy, the dissertation offered dialectic. Few studies have probed these issues together. The perspective expressed the dissertation's originality and how it contributed to the subfield of visual rhetoric.

I showed in the dissertation how works of art epitomized for viewers a conundrum. This is partly due to cultural and religious peculiarities and partly due to indigenous aspects of representation in certain milieus. Examining the conundrum is one of the reasons why the dissertation is important and why it matters to visual rhetoric. I have demonstrated throughout how audiences scrutinized works of art—what they thought they saw and what they thought they knew—to examine cultural perspectives and artistic intentions and to explore how artists achieved effects and how affects were produced. Moreover, I showed how situated audiences ascertained truth values in works of art. I referred to this idea of truth value as *verisimilitude*, from which the dissertation takes its name, *Rhetoric of Verisimilitude*.

Verisimilitude has its roots in Platonic and Aristotelian dramatic theory of *mimesis*, or artist representation.⁷ Aristotle observed that works of art through *mimesis* reveal their quintessence through verisimilitude.⁸ As a type of rhetorical theory, verisimilitude, together with *mimesis*, raises questions: how is one medium mediated through another medium; what is the difference between looking at art and seeing art; what are audiences looking at when they see art; how does strategy operate in works of

⁷ The classical notion of verisimilitude focused on the role of the reader and the reader's engagement in a fictional work of art. The work of art had to facilitate the reader's willingness to *suspend disbelief*, a phrase originated by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the Romantic age. Through verisimilitude then, the reader was able to glean truth even through fiction because it would reflect realistic aspects of human life. See note 45.

⁸ As fiction, art both instructs and offers pleasure according to *Poetics*. Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, gen ed. Vincent B. Leitch (W.E. Norton & Company Inc., New York), 90–117; Aristotle. *Poetics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927; Kirby, "Aristotle on Metaphor" *American Journal of Philology* 118 (1997), 517.

art to produce rhetorical affect and effect.

An early example of my experience with verisimilitude occurred when I visited my city's children's library when I was in the third grade. I was smitten by a book of paintings by the artist Diego Rivera. Rivera's art seemed ready-made for a child's eye. I checked out the book; my-eight-year old fingers tried to copy the figures. Although I could not have known it then, I later realized the chunky blocks of primary colors and thick outlines were Rivera's visual strategy for achieving a Cubist effect. From that day on, I began to understand that works of art—painting and the fine arts—could touch me and teach me about life in ways that I had never imagined.⁹

Even now I am drawn to the idea of what creates verisimilitude in works of art: in the dissertation, what makes works of art of a particular milieu resonate with its audience enabling them to think and feel a certain way. For me, the most interesting works of art display thought, look back at us, and evoke strong feelings. Lawrence Prelli captured this thought: “When art displays, it engages *with* [my italics] those who become audience to it.”¹⁰ Through verisimilitude, works of art—although they may not necessarily be realistic—may be plausible. “As often as language teaches us to see,” Michael Ann Holly wrote, “art instructs us in telling.”¹¹

Section 1: Theme

Emotion was the principal theme that reoccurred as I examined the two works of art, tragic drama and *vanitas* painting. I showed how emotion beguiled and bewildered

⁹ Most of us cannot be good at everything; recognizing that has made me work at the things I can do well. Studying rhetoric, the fine arts, and philosophy has made me want to think strategically and write better.

¹⁰ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 3–4.

¹¹ *Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 11.

the viewer. This is because artistic effects produce emotion. Particular emotions—pity and fear, desire and pleasure—are highlighted in each work of art.

“Comparing Pity and Fear in *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*,” (Chapter 2) discussed how actors in a Greek tragic play should endeavor to bring pity and fear before the eyes of the viewer. The discourse in *Poetics* instructed the playwright on how to write a tragic play. Aristotle reminded the poet what to consider: what is pity, what is fear and how should actors portray these emotions. Moreover, Aristotle defined a theory of emotion. Although he does not develop this theory at any length (a few lines in *Poetics*), his theory carried significant weight in defining tragic drama:

Tragedy, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not a narrative form. . . with incidents arousing pity and fear.¹²

One function of tragic plays is that it is an outlet for viewer feelings, especially pity and fear. Chapter 2 demonstrated how tragic plays and pity and fear created a rhetorical space for a story to be told and emotions to be communicated. The heroes' tragedy created a peculiar sympathy between actor and viewer. Aristotle suggested that to have compassion for a character is no different from having compassion for another human being. The actor's performance should convey pity and fear for what will yet befall the hero. If the actor is successful, the actor's pain becomes the viewer's pain.

For example, Oedipus is not truly noble, but who are we? Will the viewer dare to find out? The portrayals and sad end of the play arouse in the viewer pity and fear; paradoxically, it arouses pleasure as the play resolves. The universality of human suffering shows how pity or pathos is more an aesthetic emotion produced through

¹² Aristotle, *Poet.* VI.

rhetorical affects rather than culturally produced even in fiction.

In Chapter 3, I showed how intricate and intimate art works from the Dutch 17th century seduce the viewer emotionally through the use of varied textures, invisible brushstrokes, hatch marks, and rich layers of glistening paint. “Rhetoric of *Vanitas*” explains this strategy of how aesthetic forms and symbolic content engender in the viewer feelings of religious piety, at the same time, desire for wealth.

The chapter presented a similar emotional theme as that of Chapter 2. Embedded in *vanitas* painting is pity for the souls of the dead and the fear of the precariousness and brevity of earthly life. A metaphor of religious devotion from *Ecclesiastes* warns, *Vanity, vanity, all is vanity*.¹³ The message—God should be placed above things worldly—is pictured in an odd assortment of forms signifying wealth and knowledge.

The ephemeral metaphor is symbolic but, as I explain, transmits viscerally: concerns for the vain things of this world are bound up—in forms of desire—with the painting’s background void signifying the world of the dead. The metaphor becomes clear: it is intended to produce fear: transitory fixation on material things corrupts and corruption is absolute in Calvin’s view of the world. On the other hand, iconic forms—books, silk, a shell—presented not only beauty and riches but also inspired spiritual contemplation: rather like a meditation¹⁴ on the impermanence of the state of humankind in the face of the unavoidable and ever-present threat of death. The viewer understands the message of the brevity of life and humankind’s vanity in desiring things of the world. Rhetorically, however, *vanitas* painting is probably less an exhortation to virtue than to

¹³ *Authorized Version of the English Bible 1611*. 6 vols. Wright, William Aldis, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909), in Koozin, 8, note 1.

¹⁴ Diptychs were common forms of meditation for the Dutch in the later part of the 16th century.

pleasure. Irrespective of the enticement, I posited the lesson of *vanitas* painting that its viewing cannot be rushed; the peculiar art required contemplation.

Powerful metaphors aided visualization in *vanitas* painting. Indeed, Aristotle says writers should *ornament* [my italics] their words and images so the listener can *see* things.¹⁵

There is an element of surprise which is part of the strength of the phrase; the hearer associates (sees) one thing in his mind with another...To evoke emotion is to visualize...[to create] delight and surprise...[therefore] his acquisition of the new idea impresses him all the more.¹⁶ The result produces...liveliness...by using the proportional metaphor and that the best of these should be graphic.¹⁷

I presented the quote from *Poetics* to emphasize how visual effect creates emotional affect, “. . . to evoke emotion is to visualize. . . [to create] delight and surprise.”¹⁸ The case study in the chapter concerns Dutch painter, Harmen Steenwyck. The painter used the metaphoric signifier, *all is vanity*, to indicate forms of the painting: a candle, a shell, books of learning, etc. The painting’s understated tones sharpened the authority and emotional appeal of his painting. It was thought in 17th century Holland that producing a painting worthy of praise was based on the rules of rhetoric, the liberal arts, and good writing. Prelli echoed this idea: “Works of art display rhetorically and rhetorics enact display.”¹⁹

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Rhet.* III, 1404b.

¹⁶ Aristotle is drawing on the association between learning and pleasure in *Poet.* 4,1448b2ff. Much of what was written about painting up to the 17th century was taken from *Poetics*.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Rhet.* III, 1404b; 1411. A powerful metaphor is affective because, as Aristotle shows, it evokes a personified human emotion and activity that the hearer can visualize.

Rhetoric describes what metaphor does for the reader: “Metaphor, moreover, gives style clearness, charm and distinction as nothing else can . . . the best of these should be graphic. By “graphic,” Aristotle means that writers, by extension painters, should cause the viewer to *see* things. Therefore metaphor brings about emotion when it is full of graphic description, as in “with his vigor in full bloom,” and “bringing [objects and emotions] before the eyes.”

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Poet.* XXI, 21, 1457b 1–30: “. . . metaphor [consists] in giving the thing a name belongs to something else, the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on the grounds of analogy. . .”; *Rhet.* III 1404b.

¹⁹ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 3–4.

Tragedian drama and *vanitas* painting demonstrated that emotion is at the intersection of two worlds: the objective world of reality—how human behavior collides with events beyond reach—and the subjective world of desire, and choice. For example, the fateful world of reality is existential. Objective reality in nature and in institutions demonstrate the insignificance and powerlessness of humans against such powers. Humans are at the mercy of the forces of nature that would reduce them to dust. In the tragic play and in *vanitas* painting, reality presents a human condition where humans are hardly in control. Instead, humans are tiny specs in a vast design of uncertain duration living in an unpredictable world. Each work of art expressed the human desire for pleasure against the backdrop of inevitable human suffering. Audiences—then and now—view works of art as the collision between the capricious indifferent world and subjective desires. In the Attic and in the Dutch 17th century the interweaving of the two worlds through mimesis is always in play. Just as emotions produced through effects in the works of art reminded viewers of the buffetings inherent in life, modern works of art continue the tradition of reminding viewers that humans are pummeled between two worlds.

Although tragic plays are narrative and *vanitas* painting is theoretically not narrative, the analyses of the works of art showed how we are our stories. Presented through theory, visual effects and affects, the works of art in the dissertation presented journeys into the wider world of cultures and behaviors through the rhetoric of cultural and religious customs and through fraught emotions. The works of art showed how we, all of us, are beset by emotions and swayed by visual effect. Next, I discuss particular visual strategies in the chapters.

Section 2: Visual Strategies

In each case study I showed how the poet and artist increase the symbolic, artistic, and emotional impact of works of art by using particular strategies. The chapters are not making historical claims about actual audiences, rather rhetorical claims about the strategies of Attic actors performing tragedian drama and plausible responses of 17th century audiences who might have viewed displays of *vanitas* paintings. These are rhetorics of display, as Prelli says. I examined pity and fear in Chapter 2, including the ekphrasiac metaphor and briefly discussed the two lenses *ekphrasis* and *epideictic* as methods of examining visual discourse.

Through *ekphrasis* I examined a cultural symbolic perspective; through *epideictic* I explored an aesthetic perspective. The perspectives were each represented as rhetorical strategies that interwove across the chapters. Rather than antithetical, the viewing practices offer different assumptions and approaches.

Metaphor is the trope of appearance in Chapter 2 captured in the metaphorical phrase bringing-before-the-eyes.²⁰ The primary ekphrasiac device used throughout the dissertation is the metaphor, identified in both *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*. As an effective strategy for producing plausible affects, Aristotle relies on the metaphor. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle says metaphor most brings about learning and is thoroughly employed in memorable insights Aristotle admired, especially by Homer, who produced vivid imagery in well-chosen metaphoric phrases. For example, when [Homer] calls old age stubble, he creates understanding and knowledge²¹ by using “vivid metaphor.”²² Aristotle added that

²⁰ Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1410b, the Loeb translation.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

the metaphor creates not only learning, but also makes learning pleasant.

The claim in Chapter 2 is that when Attic actors depict pity and fear on the dramatic stage, they are engaging with strategic techniques of rhetorical display, especially metaphor. Comparing how pity and fear were rendered in *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, I showed specifically how actors should use gestures and movement as rhetoric to perform the emotions of pity and fear. How the metaphor operates was the critical aspect of the chapter. *Poetics IX* says that the end of the tragedy is *bringing pity and fear before the eyes*.²³ This metaphor commutes and engenders empathic understanding. When the hero is unjustly reviled, the viewer feels pity for his plight, compassion the Attic viewer could then carry into everyday life. The metaphor draws attention to how sensory expressions and emotions of pity and fear are performed and mediated by actors and communicated to the Attic viewer.²⁴

Poetics discusses *epideictic* effects of gestures, speech, song, music, stage design, and dance.²⁵ Because *Poetics* emphasizes both affect and effect, it is apparent that Aristotle's interest in literary art led him to ask what those devices are and how dramatic art should achieve them. For example, the word, *theatre* connotes special effects.²⁶ The special effects in classical drama shed light on the nature of the Theatre of Dionysus in the 5th century BCE.²⁷

²³ Aristotle, *Poet.* IX.

²⁴ Rather than being suspicious of Greek drama, as Plato was, Aristotle embraced the arts because of the way that they arouse the passions.

²⁵ Scholars consistently emphasize the elusive and protean meanings of the concept of theatricality. Postlewait and Tracy's critique attempts to produce a general theory of theatricality insisting that the term be used in analyzing cultural performances in specific times and places. *Theatricality*. Postlewait and Tracy (Boston: Cambridge University Press), 2003.

²⁶ The ancient ancestor of theatre is *theatron*. The term is defined as to see, to watch, and to observe, especially in dramatic representation, Webster's Dictionary.

²⁷ Specifically, the building opened up to reveal an interior scene. The device was called by the Greeks the *ekkyklema* (roll-out) because a wheeled platform on which an interior scene would be set rolled out from the building through the main door into the audiences' view. It is believed that Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (458

When he talked about events, Aristotle used the baffling visual phrase, “close at hand.”²⁸ The phrase might have related to drawing on certain cultural myths or on the importance of actors displaying the proper proportion of pity and fear²⁹ so that period audiences felt emotions close at hand. Another visual strategy related to actors portraying emotions. An actor should appear convincing in his portrayal.³⁰ *Poetics* says actors should not speak too effusively nor understate the point. Pity and fear should be performed in golden mean fashion, not too much emotion, not too little. Pity and fear should transmit from the Attic actor to the viewer in the same way words transfer meaning in a metaphor.³¹ Specifically, pity drew the viewer toward the hero who is propelled by his undeserved fate. In contrast, fear made the viewer recoil from what threatened him. When actors performed pity and fear, a situated audience was given a reliable way to judge the quality of the hero’s character.

In Chapter 3, I showed how the ekphrastic metaphor is considered affective, a commonplace in religious sermons of the Reformed Church of the 17th century in Holland. In reference to *vanitas* painting, I showed how the invention of symbolic meaning and iconic artistic techniques were peculiar to *vanitas* painting of the milieu. *Ekphrasis* and *epideictic* expanded the means whereby period audiences might have viewed the visual text, how cultural symbolic judgment and aesthetic judgment presented

BCE) required such a revelation; therefore, the *ekkyklema* probably came into use during the first half of the 5th century BCE. This makes it one of the earliest special effects on record.²⁷ Greek *theatron* was discussed in *Poetics* as a place where actors presented an imagined event before a live audience.

²⁸ Aristotle, *Rhet.*, 1386b.

²⁹ Lawrence J. Flynn, “Rhetoric between Orality and Literacy: Culture Memory and Performance in Isocrates and Aristotle,” (*Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87, 2001), 168; Martha C Nussbaum, “Tragedy and Self-Sufficiency: Plato and Aristotle on Fear and Pity,” (*Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 10 1992), 107–59; Gerald Watson, ‘*Phantasia* in Aristotle (*Classical Quarterly* 32, 1982), 100–113. *De Anima* 3.3.

³⁰ Aristotle, *Poet.* XIV.

³¹ Taken from the Greek *metaphora*, “transfer”; *metaphero* is to carry over, “to transfer.”

two perspectives of rhetorical analyses. I indicated how *vanitas* painting is a type of visual syntax created so that the metaphor could be read through form. Reading painting's metaphor (content) through material form is quasi-religious, but the message displayed in the form itself is decidedly secular. The ephemeral metaphor was biblically symbolic but transmitted viscerally: concerns for the vain things of this world are bound up with the void of the world of the dead and pictured in elegant forms of desire.

Allegory—although a commonplace for 17th century audiences and a reference for contemporary audiences—is not used in the chapter. This is because of my claim that *vanitas* painting was read as metaphor and not allegory that requires a supportive story.

The *epideictic* emphasized how visual effects were pictured as conspicuous appeals to the eye demonstrated in the use of indigenous visual techniques.³² In *vanitas* painting, *epideictic* signifies aesthetic excellence and cultural meaning: the most stunning visual effect in *vanitas* painting is conveyed by an immediate and universal symbol of mortality, not necessarily beautiful. The desirable wealth of the world intermingles with a symbol of transient life, a skull. The painting invites the viewer to solve an intimate rhetorical puzzle pictured in sumptuously painted forms such as those displayed in Herman Steenwyck's *Vanities* painting. The rhetorical puzzle is how delight is possible in an odd assortment of unrelated, often morbid objects. One probable answer lay in enticing and elegant techniques—subtle muted tones, simplicity of composition—painted visual effects representing forms of desire and the fragility of human existence.

³² Lawrence Rosenfield's reading of Aristotle shows that the purpose of *epideictic* is simply and solely to display the luminosity of timeless excellence. It makes known and *shows forth* an idea or image or techniques of excellence in order to persuade us to gaze at the presumed moral aura glowing from within works of art. The interpretation emphasizes that effects of technique combine with moral affects to edify audiences. Rosenfield asserts that the fleeting nature of the appearance of excellence is in the present moment rather than a sustained reality.

Visual affect is created by an unusual assortment of forms—not only the skull, but a candle, purple silk, books of science, a rare shell—that intrude abruptly before the eyes. Period audiences came to recognize these forms and the prescribed techniques of presentation as the *vanitas* effect of display. Much of *vanitas*' appeal lies in this rhetorical strategy—layers of texture, muted tones, and brushstrokes that create a glow and hyperrealistic effect—generating the painting's overall dramatic form. Perspective loses its vanishing point in the darkness of the void; the peculiar art does not glow in veneration, but instead it looks out on its audience in all of its subjectivities. What exactly are audiences observing in the representation of an odd assortment of unrelated objects set on a chipped wood table pictured against a void backdrop? The genre does not allow for a simple analysis. Uncanny in its immediacy, *vanitas* painting is at once beautiful and otherworldly. It challenges the reliability of the audiences' optical capacities: precisely the thing that mimesis provokes.

Section 3: Vocabulary

This selection of key terms that follows undergirds the dissertation's purpose, goals, and research questions. The terms cohere across chapters standing in relationship to other terms. I discuss aesthetics, *ekphrasis* and *epideictic*, mimesis, and verisimilitude.

Aesthetics, as a specific term, was not considered by Aristotle. However, he thought works of art involved imitation (*mimesis*) of events and actions. As mentioned, tragedy is an imitation “not of persons but of action and life, of happiness and misery.”³³ Therefore, tragedy may be a form of education because it provides moral insight. Concepts such as sight, perception, cognition, visualization, imagination, emotion, and

³³ Aristotle, *Poet.* VI.

form are foundational to *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* and to the chapters and can be interpreted collectively as visual and emotional theories of aesthetics.

Aesthetics summons in viewers empathy for the hero in a moving performance of dramatic tragedy. Aesthetics is the sumptuous material surface of a *vanitas* painting. In the expressive ways humans experience and respond to art, aesthetics is an emotional and sensuous aspect of rhetoric that elevates the viewer to a new level of conscious and unconscious awareness. Aesthetics and emotion present the paradox of fiction in which the viewer responds with intense emotions to art, in the same moment of knowing that the art is fiction.

Ekphrasis is the theory and rhetorical viewing practice defined as vivid description, especially metaphor. The tradition of the ekphrastic trope evolved from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*. Richard Moran says, "It is no exaggeration to say that the primary virtue of metaphor for Aristotle is the *ability* [my italics] to set something vividly before the eyes of the audience."³⁴ Moran's point emphasizes that the visual capacity of bringing-before-the-eyes³⁵ is a perceptive activity that makes inanimate things appear alive. I. A. Richards has called *bringing pity and fear before the eyes* the most enigmatic metaphor³⁶ introduced first in *Poetics*.

In Chapter 3, *ekphrasis* defines the content of *vanitas* painting and performs two purposes: 1) it describes context or identity of a particular historical culture, and 2) it concerns the symbolic content of *vanitas* painting such as the way a skull symbolizes death.

³⁴ Sara Newman, *Aristotle and Style* (Lewiston, NY, Edwin Mellon Press, 2005), 232; *Rhet.* 1410b.

³⁵ Aristotle, *Rhet.*, 1410b; *Poet.* IX.

³⁶ I.A. Richards, *Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory*.

The *epideictic* shapes and cultivates “. . . basic codes of values and beliefs by which a society or culture lives. It shapes the ideologies and imaginaries . . . the deep commitments . . . constituting the very grounds of culture with which a society shapes itself.”³⁷ According to Jeffery Walker. *Epideictic* praises what is virtuous or noble and “fit for display.”³⁸ Rosenfield explains *epideictic* is, “to shine or show forth.”³⁹

In the dissertation, *epideictic* is the lens of rhetoric’s aesthetic judgment. The term describes aesthetic virtues in Chapters 2 and 3 such as excellence in an actor’s technical performance and in artistic form of technique and skill evident in *vanitas* painting.

Epideictic is a theoretical criticism that rests on the assertion of the priority of sight: a sensory experience through form expressed through color and artistic technique that depicts symbolic content.

Mimesis is central to the dissertation’s notion of artistic expression—the characteristics that distinguish a work of art from other human phenomena. Strictly speaking, it is not a copy or imitation, rather an artistic representation. The meaning of mimesis is to *embody* or *enact* likeness from material form, such as the form of dramatic tragedy. Aristotle says that the visual action of placing objects (or emotion as object) before the mind’s eye is a mimetic action.

In *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* the language of art is fundamentally mimetic, not symbolic. Mimesis links intimately to aesthetics in that each term relates to emotion.

Stephen Halliwell says of mimesis,

. . . Aristotle’s idea of mimesis [places] the mimetic medium [at the center of] . . . aesthetic understanding. . . [Mimesis] cannot be limited to matching a copy with a known original, nor can it be reduced to the merely factual and immediate

³⁷ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, “Introduction,” 3, 4; 154.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

registering that a certain kind of thing has been represented.⁴⁰

Mimesis helps explain how the viewer suspends disbelief to enable fiction's emotional impact and visual immediacy, for example in a protagonist's emotionally moving performance.⁴¹

The "imitation of an action" is mimetic according to "the law of probability or necessity,"⁴² explained in Chapter 2. Tragedy deals with the necessary and ever-present problem of human suffering. Yet through mimesis, pity and fear may be so convincing and emotionally satisfying, the viewer feels healed of suffering. This is the peculiar pleasure⁴³ associated with dramatic tragedy.

Mimesis in Dutch *vanitas* painting has two meanings: Harmen Steenwyck's *Vanitas* demonstrates mimetic representation in its particular treatment of the subject. Second, mimesis is a moral conceit cloaked in aesthetic pleasure; it invites the viewer into a sardonic understanding of the relationship between vanity and worldly objects. In sum, mimesis emphasizes the visual representation and materiality of works of art just as the aesthetic emphasizes the viewers' response.

Verisimilitude is a theory of plausibility and appearance. Each chapter emphasizes both of these aspects and relies on bringing-before-the-eyes. *Rhetoric of Verisimilitude* (the name of the dissertation) is more theoretical than practical because

⁴⁰ *The aesthetics of mimesis: ancient texts and moderns problems* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2002), 91.

⁴¹ *Poetics* is Aristotle's treatise on mimesis. He stated that human beings are mimetic beings: they create texts (art) that reflect and represent reality. Malcolm Heath, *Poetics*, Penguin Classics (London: New York, N.Y., 1996).

⁴² Aristotle, *Poet.* IX.

⁴³ Amelie Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 255.

verisimilitude appeals to imagination and the plausibility⁴⁴ of how art is a type of fiction. I have used the term in the classical sense that focuses on the role of the situated viewer or reader of art and how that period viewer mediates—symbolically or aesthetically—works of art. More than a copy of nature and reality, verisimilitude is a type of truth likeness. In the chapters, verisimilitude re-presents a plausible reality in visual form and cultural content in ancient tragic drama and *vanitas* painting. The audience pictures the events through verisimilitude if disbelief is suspended.⁴⁵

The term defines the framework and overall theme of the dissertation: works of art caught at the intersection between material display and selective meaning imposed by situated audiences.⁴⁶

Section 4: Seminal Texts

In this section, I justify the claim that works of art are appropriate vehicles for rhetorical and aesthetic investigation by showing how seminal texts guided my research. Works of art are often overlooked in the subfield of visual rhetoric or simply appropriated as vehicles for social change. Some current literatures approach the study of works of art purely from an epistemological perspective; the study of how emotion and aesthetic feeling contribute to the rhetoric of works of art is dismissed out of hand. The three texts I reviewed in Chapter 1 supported the view that rhetoric embraces aesthetics as it pertains

⁴⁴ Martin Heidegger wrote “the possible ranks higher than the actual.” Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh, revised by Dennis J. Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), introduction.

⁴⁵ The term *suspension of disbelief* was initially suggested in 1817 by Samuel Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria*. An example of suspension of disbelief is Robert Welkos’ “From ‘King Kong’ to ‘Indecent Proposal’” quoted in *The Los Angeles Times*, 15 April, 1993. Audiences were asked to accept a premise that can make or break a film.

⁴⁶ “. . . the Greeks and the Elizabethans, in one cultural form; Hellenes and Christians, in a common activity,” as Raymond Williams puts it. Williams, 1966, 16.

to the special matters of hearing, seeing, and emotion, subjects addressed by Aristotle.

The three seminal texts that guided the dissertation are *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* by Aristotle and *Rhetorics of Display*, edited by Lawrence Prelli. The texts' discussion of mimesis, *epideictic*, and *ekphrasis* helped to narrow the scope of verisimilitude.

Selected portions of *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* emphasized the visual theory of bringing-before-the-eyes and the discussions of mimesis and metaphor. As mentioned, *Poetics* is Aristotle's theory of dramatic tragedy. I showed how this discontinuous tradition of drama played an important role in aesthetics, helped to define tragic drama in Western civilization, and was used to evoke power in cultural identity.⁴⁷ *Poetics* is the first systematic essay in literary and emotional (aesthetic) theory. The text remains the definitive blueprint for playwrights and actors: instructing them on how a tragedy should be performed, how to create a unified plot, how the characters should be revealed by action, and how the action should turn on a well-constructed plot aided by visual effects. As mentioned above, Chapter 2 examined how expressions of pity and fear compare in both *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* by specifically investigating the notion of how bringing *pity and fear* before the eyes of the viewer occurred: how pity and fear is a performance of rhetorical affect actors used to produce those affects. The tragedian play is based primarily on the foundation of the plot.

The claim in *Rhetorics of Display* is that the interdependent concepts of rhetoric and display as appearance have consequences. I framed key ideas for Chapter 3 from terms and ideas presented in the text. From Lawrence Prelli, for example, I developed the idea that images are ubiquitous; they surround us, "compete for our attention, and make

⁴⁷ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 1–2.

claims upon us.”⁴⁸ This idea was central to my theory of viewer perspectives. In what follows, I briefly mention four ideas from Prelli that guided Chapter 3: how *epideictic* and *ekphrasis* are viewing practices, insights regarding *epideictic* viewing and ekphrasic viewing, the idea of revealing and concealing, and the rhetoric of appearance as identity.

Prelli and Rosenfield’s discussion of *epideictic* and *ekphrasis* opened the approach of how *vanitas* painting might have communicated to Dutch audiences as content (metaphor) and form. The method of how the terms filtered appearance from metaphor became the basis for how I wanted to present artistic and metaphoric properties. The authors’ views made concrete the idea of these terms as lenses audiences might have used for viewing and perceiving *vanitas* painting. The discussion by Rosenfield inspired the idea of viewing practices featured prominently in Chapter 3: how viewing perception framed form and content and how form was read through content. Viewing from the perspective of form and content evidenced the interplay between material display and the selected religious meaning imposed on works, ideas at the heart of the dissertation.

Epideictic illustrated the notion of how perception for situated audiences begins with the awareness of *having* perception. Rosenfield’s *epideictic* as “artistic creation”⁴⁹ captured this idea. The iteration aided my understanding of how viewing works of art is a type of visual discerning, “. . . from the Greek ‘show forth,’ ‘make known or manifest’ . . . Not mere display, but rather making manifest the ‘fleeting appearances’ of excellence that otherwise would remain ‘unnoticed or invisible.’”⁵⁰ When viewers of a milieu “witness” art,⁵¹ they became complicit with the artifact, its effects, and with the artist. I

⁴⁸ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 3–4.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 3–4; 153.

made the claim that it is plausible that an emotional transformation or aesthetic feeling occurred when period audiences witnessed or contemplated art because of the lure of art's material display.⁵²

An example of *epideictic* through contemplation is how the term intertwined art's materiality to moral virtue. The audience's readiness to witness *vanitas*—to enter into moral seeing—hinged on the way the artist attended to *techne* and artistic judgment, considered by the viewer, “paradigms of [rhetorical] virtue.”⁵³

The chapter made the point that artists in 17th century Holland trained in classical rhetoric. For instance, Thijs Weststeijn explained that the Dutch painters Harmen Steenwyck and Rembrandt emerged as “rhetorical painters”; they were almost certainly trained in Latin rhetoric, including the techniques of *mimesis*, *enargeia*, *affectus*, and *ornatus*.⁵⁴ *Affectus* and *enargeia* are among the “virtuous techniques” in Dutch 17th century art.⁵⁵ Paintings were intended to lead a viewer to mirror the virtue displayed in excellent *techne*. Examples of *affectus techne* are *chiaroscuro*—the artistry of shading, texturing, coloring, and visual composition made familiar through Rembrandt—and color. Objects of desire, such as rare silk, were painted purple, the color favored by royalty. Fruit and flowers qualified as virtuous objects because of an artist's exactness in execution. Ascribing virtue to form through *epideictic* resembles Aristotle's description of verisimilitude⁵⁶ and in the phrases, “fleeting appearance,” and “processes of artistic creation,”⁵⁷ mentioned by Rosenfield.

⁵² Ibid., 25.

⁵³ Ibid., 297; the term is a commonplace in the visual culture of the 15th and 16th centuries.

⁵⁴ Weststeijn, 17, 182 ff.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Also, the Platonic and Aristotelian dramatic theory of *mimesis*.

⁵⁷ Prelli, 3.

Epidictic contemplation may, thus, have had the consequence of producing virtue in audiences who contemplated the excellence of form—iconic color, line, texture, and composition. Rosenfield’s idea of the *epideictic* encounter⁵⁸ informed the analysis. Although the *vanitas* is commonly known for its distinctive metaphor, the *epideictic* and the encounter articulated the critical nature of artistic method and the idea of emotional desire in *vanitas* painting. The following insight by Prelli interwove these ideas,

whether constituted through textual inscription, visual portrayal, material structure, enacted performances or some combination, rhetorical study of displays proceeds from the central idea that whatever they make manifest or appear is the culmination of selective processes that *constrain* [my italics] the range of possible meanings available to those who encounter them.⁵⁹

“Constrained meanings” in the chapter evolved from Prelli’s idea that whatever is revealed also concealed.⁶⁰ The act of revealing and concealing constitutes for Prelli the rhetorics of display. For example, a Dutch viewer’s focus on content may have concealed many details of form. The question is whether the viewer located or even dwelled on the differences. A corollary is that *vanitas* painting transmitted so hypervisually—in forms of elegant silks, shells, books, and other finery—that the verbal message could have been obscured. Regardless, the point was that the culture and religion revealed the identity of the Dutch viewer and how that viewer observed works of art. For all intent and purposes, identity constrains meaning.

The idea of how identity is revealed by means of *ekphrasis* and *epideictic* became clear in the chapter, “Rhetorical Display of Civic Religion.” Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran argue from Burke, “The unconscious element of persuasion which

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

identification describes has its source in the poetic motive.”⁶¹ The authors created an *epideictic* framework for identity that can be applied to art:

Epideictic rhetoric does not argue the ideas or ideals that bind people into community so much as it displays them to a witnessing public. . . [Epideictic provides an audience] . . . the opportunity of beholding a common reality . . . joining with our community in giving thought to what we witness. . . [thereby experiencing together] the luminosity of the values and aspirations they share.⁶²

Through *vanitas* painting’s forms and the practice of reading metaphor (content) through form, the present-day viewer of the genre could perceive religious values of Calvinist audiences. Prelli captured this idea:

Whatever manifestation displays also anticipates a responding audience whose expectations might be satisfied or frustrated, their values and interests affirmed, neglected, or challenged. The identity and behavior of particular situated audiences demonstrate that. . . whatever is revealed through display [of art] simultaneously conceals alternative possibilities . . . this is display’s rhetorical dimension.⁶³

Prelli’s short discussion of *ekphrasis* affirmed emphatically the rhetorical power of identity: “The traditional arts of rhetorical display—poetry and oratory—exhibited a decidedly visual consciousness parallel to that of the visual arts...Orators and poets...crafted examples of virtue or vice...word pictures...conducive to imaginative seeing through *ekphrasis* or detailed descriptions.”⁶⁴

The two rhetorical tropes, *ekphrasis* and *epideictic*, and the analyses in the Prelli’s text informed the notion of cocreation: how the audience practiced and engaged in viewing a painting and how painting looked back at the audience.

Prelli, Rosenfield, Clark, and Halloran’s discussion of *epideictic* that includes *ekphrasis* and identity remind the reader that *epideictic* has been throughout Western

⁶¹ Ibid., 140.

⁶² Ibid., 141.

⁶³ Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, 2.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

history a form of rhetoric that reenacts visual paradigms of virtue. *Epidictic* and *ekphrasis* helped to explain audiences' impassioned and reasoned ways of viewing art and thinking about art as value and virtue. Although the ekphrastic metaphor grounded the chapter, *The Rhetoric of Vanitas* demonstrates that the visual experience of a work of art is best understood using Aristotle's third category of the *epideictic*, as mentioned.

The strength of *Rhetorics of Display* is that the material discussed in several chapters clearly established links to *epideictic*, visuality, and viewing as rhetorics of display. The reason the text was important to the dissertation is apparent in the title: *The Rhetorics of Display*. According to Prelli, rhetoric is about display—how things look or appear—a premise that insists on the full range of how displays operate rhetorically when they engage with those who become audience to them.

The discussion in this section has tried to show how the seminal texts supported the idea of how situated audiences searched to locate mirror images of treasured values and possessions in identities of representative symbols and forms—how the genre typified, within the milieu, Dutch identity.

Prelli's attention to reinvigorating rhetoric's focus on visualization and the role of the image/subject supports the heuristic of verisimilitude in the dissertation. *Epidictic* and *ekphrasis* illuminated the idea that works of art are types of human experience that include reason, judgment, and emotion. To say this differently, works of art examined from linguistic rhetoric and the study of discourse alone fail to extract the full range of human experience available from a work of art.

Section 5: Findings and Implications

The analysis that follows briefly discusses key research findings important to each chapter. The findings support this dissertation's thesis: through verisimilitude, works of art reveal the interplay between the material display (aesthetics) and cultural meaning (rhetoric) imposed on works by situated audiences. The thesis emphasized that period audiences make use of viewing practices to perceive works of art. *Ekphrasis* and *epideictic* were considered as rhetorical methods for viewing works of art.

I became aware that cultural or symbolic practices and aesthetic practices of perception were different but not mutually exclusive. Rather, each view offered a fresh perspective for the viewer in conversation with the work of art. Investigating the way situated audiences may have practiced viewing tragic drama and *vanitas* painting showed how viewing itself mediated audience perceptions of works of art.

Chapter 2 Key Findings

Chapter 2 interweaves pity and fear by investigating how the emotions could be different but similar in meaning in *Rhetoric* as compared to *Poetics*. Chapter 4's findings support the theme of emotion, the predominant theme in the dissertation, discussed previously.

In the chapter, Aristotle shows how tragic emotions are performed by actors—in gestures and movement to communicate emotions—specifically, pity and fear. For example, Aristotle says actors should not speak too effusively nor understate the point. The chapter explained how the emotions of pity and fear are mediated through the actor

and received mimetically by the spectator.⁶⁵

The first finding interweaves Plato's refuted claim: that art is an inferior appeal to human emotions. Aristotle's rejoinder in *Poetics* shows instead that in mimetic performance on the tragic stage, emotions are integrated into a poetic structure. Aristotle shows that the focus on so-called "negative" feelings has root in our multidimensional natures, so negative feelings in the play educate human sympathies. This is one positive aspect of viewing tragic plays because dramatic tragedy mimics actual life: humans experience pity and fear, and they understand these feeling are painful.

The research revealed—in a second finding I did not anticipate—that from a viewing perspective, situated audiences may have received performance emotionally (aesthetically) *and* cognitively (rhetorically). The idea of how an audience experiences relief (through catharsis, a concept I did not discuss) of the "negative emotions" of pity and fear complemented the view that tragedy appealed to viewers' *intelligent emotions* (my term) or complemented the sympathetic response (finding 4 extends this idea). Pity and fear are not generally paired with intelligence. Aristotle shows, however, that the audience is drawn intellectually to the well-constructed, suspenseful plot. Although the viewing audience is moved emotionally, it is reasonable to conjecture that the intellect is stimulated as well: the audience has to make sense of how emotions become embedded in the well-ordered plot.

Second, where suffering is involved, the mind grasps the fear and the body responds. Fear is not simply a matter of unpleasant sensations; it involves the body.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ As stated previously, by investigating the interweaving of pity and fear in the interaction between actors and audiences in dramatic tragedy, I draw attention to how sensory expressions and emotions of pity and fear are communicated and received in performances on the dramatic stage.

⁶⁶ Aristotle, *De Anima*, 403; 16–19.

Rhetoric explains that being frightened encompasses an expectation of suffering.⁶⁷

Aristotle recognized that a drop in body temperature in old age paves the way for fearfulness.⁶⁸ Emotions thus involve a cognitive component.

A third finding in Chapter 2 aided by Prelli was that aesthetic effects and cultural awareness specifically functioned in the intersection between appearance and concealment, between truth and belief. What was interesting was to grasp that the viewer of a tragedian play knows something that a character does not; for example, Oedipus does not know his tragic flaw. Far from being comical, actors endeavor to bring the pity and fear inherent in Oedipus' actions and character before the eyes of the viewer. These actions may be construed to constitute how the material form interweaves with content in Greek tragedy.

A fourth finding was that suspenseful emotions when skillfully constructed by actors, transformed, in the end, the audiences' response of pity and fear to pleasure. The pleasure mentioned by Aristotle⁶⁹ seemed likely an emotional relief: aesthetic pleasure that includes contemplation restores a sense of wholeness. In other words, the audience is empathically healed of suffering, so beautiful are the words and emotions. The view of a homeopathic theory of relief of pity and fear—one that includes empathy, cognitive understanding, and pleasure—demonstrated that Aristotle achieved his desired results: his skillful approach successfully interwove the construction of the plot, developed visual effects, and prompted emotional affects, holistically.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Aristotle, *Rhet.*, 138 2b20–34.

⁶⁸ Insight observed by W.W. Fortenbaugh, in *Aristotle on Emotion*. London: Gerald Duckworth Ltd., 2008, 75–80. Also Aristotle, *Rhet.*, 1389b20–2.

⁶⁹ Aristotle, *Poet.* I.

⁷⁰ *Poetics* is considered to have been less influential in its time compared with what is generally understood to be its more famous contemporary, *Rhetoric*. This could likely be because of *Rhetoric's* direct importance for law and politics that it evolved to become more relevant to everyday life. However, *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*

By investigating the interweaving of pity and fear in the interaction between actors and audiences in dramatic tragedy, I drew attention to how sensory expressions and emotions of pity and fear communicated rhetorically in tragedian performances on the dramatic stage.

Chapter 3 Key Findings

Vanitas painting in the Dutch 17th century was considered a type of symbolic work of art. The method in the chapter featured the viewing practices *ekphrasis* and *epideictic* to enable study of the difference between how content and form were represented and how they operated strategically in the painting. Two key findings are emphasized here and are featured in the chapter.

The first finding highlighted the interrelationship between painting and 17th century viewer. Rather than simply observing *vanitas* painting, I posited that viewers understood the forms in the painting as associations of one thing to another—without a supportive story—more like a 20th century abstract painting. Abstract ideas of a spiritual nature communicated vis a vis implication. Religious metaphor (content) interwove with things earthly or form; content was read through form. Although *vanitas* painting is more secular than religious, familiar antecedents, such as religious diptychs and triptychs and secular emblem prints provided a reference for the viewer. Like the diptych, symbolic meaning or content was juxtaposed in sophisticated forms. Moreover, the engagement with the painting required from the period viewer a greater interpretative role than mere passive looking. The viewer was required to read the metaphor through form.

are two sides of the same coin because *Poetics* preceded *Rhetoric*: both are part of the aesthetic dimension as I have discussed. In Aristotelian philosophy, this aspect is regarded as a metaphysical aspect of things.

The second key finding I observed was that since what was thought to produce a painting worthy of praise was based on the rules of rhetoric, the liberal arts and good writing,⁷¹ it followed that Herman Steenwyck based the iconic forms of his *Vanities* on the rules of rhetoric. I showed through *ekphrasis* how *vanitas* painting conveyed a message with moral overtones—urging the 17th century viewer to relinquish vanity and earthly pleasure—pictured in odd detached objects against a void background. The chapter expressly emphasized the tension between content and form, each a type of rhetoric. Moreover, one or the other is likely foregrounded in the mind of the viewer.⁷² The case study illustrated this phenomenon. The claim was that forms dominated in Harmen Steenwyck’s *Vanities*. The painting presents a visual puzzle of carefully selected objects pictured against a bleak empty background. The Biblical metaphor is, nonetheless, apparent and powerful. By extension, if we craft a *vanitas*-style metaphor for the 21st century, it could exhort the viewer to seize the day, to eat, to drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die.⁷³ Or, possibly the nihilistic metaphor: existence is futility, the human struggle is absurd.

Through the investigation of content and form in *vanitas* painting, the chapter validated the major claim that works of art are appropriate subjects of rhetorical investigation; in other words, cultures invent and reinvent themselves to a large degree, aesthetically and rhetorically. The peculiar culture dictates the spirit of the age. *Vanitas* painting deepens understanding of how examining viewing as rhetorical practice that

⁷¹ *Rhetoric* divides *what*—the subject content—from *how*—the techniques and effects in bringing the content to life (form). Aristotle phrased this as the difference between *logos* (the logical content of a speech) and *lexis* (the style and delivery of a speech), in “Silva Rhetoricae,” by Gideon Burton.

⁷² Prelli’s insight in *Rhetorics of Display* opened the paradox of the revealed and the concealed.

⁷³ “A man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun,” Ecclesiastes 8:15.

embraces aesthetics—even in a narrowly constructed milieu—contributes to the subfield of visual rhetoric. As mentioned, no study had yet probed an approach to works of art across millennia in this manner.

The growth of the study of visual imagery in rhetorical studies has resulted in an emerging recognition that visual images and mimetic performance have provided access to a range of human experience not always available through the study of discourse alone. My dissertation offers an alternative approach to the study of visual rhetoric. It is meant to remind the contemporary reader that to revive an ancient perspective on rhetoric using fresh perspectives is worthwhile.