

This article was downloaded by:[Gunn, Joshua]
On: 17 January 2008
Access Details: [subscription number 789728988]
Publisher: Routledge
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954
Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Rhetoric Society Quarterly

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t716100769>

Size Matters: Polytoning Rhetoric's Perverse Apocalypse

Joshua Gunn ^a

^a Communication Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, One University
Station, Austin, Texas, USA

Online Publication Date: 01 December 2008

To cite this Article: Gunn, Joshua (2008) 'Size Matters: Polytoning Rhetoric's
Perverse Apocalypse', Rhetoric Society Quarterly, 38:1, 82 - 108

To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/02773940701779744

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02773940701779744>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article maybe used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Size Matters: Polytoning Rhetoric's Perverse Apocalypse

Joshua Gunn

Drawing on the insights of psychoanalysis and deconstruction, this article argues that the fixation of some scholars on the status, size, and identity of rhetorical studies is symptomatic of an apocalyptic perversion. An attention to the apocalyptic tone of recent discussions about "Big Rhetoric" in conference papers and journal articles bespeaks a characteristically phallogocentric ideology of discrimination between insiders and outsiders. An examination of the ubiquity and character of this tone, I suggest, forever precludes a united rhetorical studies for two reasons: (1) we enjoy our apocalyptic too much; and (2) apocalyptic is central to the identity of rhetorical studies because it is central to disciplinarity as such. Insofar as the urgency of the apocalyptic tone is sometimes a pragmatic and political necessity, an argument is made in favor of a more playful, polytonal apocalypticism that can help us better reckon with—and sometimes avoid—rhetoric that excludes.

It's the end of the world as we know it.

It's the end of the world as we know it.

It's the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine.

—Michael Stipe/R.E.M.

One begins with a love object, or rather, a series of objects that betoken a figure, and for the moment this figure is first and foremost, perhaps even inevitably, one of speech.¹ So let's begin with an allegory related by another important figure in a posthumously published piece about a petulant prepubescent and his penis. Apparently, Freud tells us, a young boy who had enjoyed sex with a slightly older girl is suddenly cut off from the fun.

¹Arguably, the first love object is not the mother's breast, but the mother's voice; the implications of this article of faith will be detailed in my later remarks on the apocalyptic (see Silverman; and Schwarz).

Joshua Gunn is Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, One University Station A1105, Austin, Texas 78712, USA. E-mail: slewfoot@mail.utexas.edu

To compensate he masturbated like crazy, even after the nanny caught him and told him to stop or his father would “cut it off.” Freud avers

the usual result of the fright of castration . . . is that, either immediately or after some considerable struggle, the boy gives way to the threat and obeys the prohibition either wholly or at least in part (that is, by no longer touching his genitals with his hand). In other words, he gives up, in whole or in part, the satisfaction of the drive. (Freud, “Splitting“ 227)

The boy did not respond as most of us do when caught with our pants down: instead of succumbing to the apocalyptic “law of the father” or the prohibition heard as “thou shalt not, or else,” instead of finding another object to play with or substituting his penis with the love of a parent, instead of getting down with neurosis, the kid got downright perverse, continuing to compulsively choke his chicken without any qualms of conscience, commandments be condemned!

It is with the pettish preteen in mind that we might re-encounter the apocalyptic arrival of another paternal figure, the tablets that he brought, and the perceived exodus such a delivery sanctioned (Gaonkar, “Idea” 25–85).² Presumably keeping all the (burning) bushes for himself, in two widely read essays Dilip Gaonkar threatens to take our happenis away by, first (seemingly) suggesting that rhetorical studies is a parasitic non-discipline and, second, by arguing that “*globalization severely undermines rhetoric’s self-representation as a situated practical art*” (“Idea” 76). In what has come to be known as the consequent (and aptly named) “Big Rhetoric” debate, like the petulant preteen’s father, Gaonkar is accused of bringing the law.³ It is for this reason that he was, however unwittingly, the prophetic

²I mean to suggest that the exodus was sanctioned in both senses: there are consequences for the enjoyment rhetoric’s supplementarity, a point Gaonkar earlier developed in terms of the uncanny (also see Gaonkar, “Rhetoric and Its Double” 341–366).

³That is, he is both celebrated and cursed for establishing order in the idiom of the negative. I should indicate that by “Big Rhetoric” I refer not only to the globalization of rhetoric (or what is sometimes termed the rhetoric of inquiry), but all the related issues that are collected under that name via anxiety about disciplinary identity, including: (1) how ought we define “rhetoric”? (2) how should we define rhetorical studies as a field? by object or recourse to method, or by pedagogical mission? (3) who “owns” rhetoric or where is rhetoric better situated, in departments of English or Communication Studies? (4) is there such a thing as a “rhetorical tradition?” if so, what constitutes that tradition? (5) who does or does not have the authority to define rhetoric and rhetorical studies? (6) is rhetoric inclusive or mutually exclusive of cultural studies? and so on. These many questions all speak to the fundamental anxiety about what rhetoric is and who we are as rhetoricians, and I am focused on the whole of this anxiety vis-à-vis discipline, not any one question in particular.

architect of the conference theme of the recent twelfth biannual meeting of the Rhetoric Society of America, “Sizing-up Rhetoric,” which purported to measure rhetoric’s prowess despite the now widely experienced trauma of (Gaonkar’s) truth: as a disciplined discipline, rhetoric was castrated to begin with.

Ever since Aristotle mediated the “fabled” encounter and eventual feud between the Older Sophists and “Platonic Socrates,” argues Gaonkar, rhetoric “was pushed into the margins of philosophy and the special sciences, and there it was forced to function as a *supplement to knowledge*” (“Double” 346). The attempts to recover a forgotten Sophistic tradition or to rehabilitate rhetoric’s “presence” in the name of “Big Rhetoric” are symptomatic of a truth that our primal horde is not yet ready to embrace (Gaonkar, “Double” 344–347).⁴ Gaonkar suggests that such reticence is obvious only when rhetoric’s lack is (re)membered, usually as a result of some external, traumatic stimulus (be it a dean’s demand for justification, or rhetoric’s globalization, or terrorist attacks, or devilish deconstructionism). Whether inside or outside the academy, “a crisis, discursive or otherwise, makes rhetoric visible,” says Gaonkar. “That is, a crisis brings to the fore the incipient rhetorical consciousness” (“Double” 363; also see Freud, *Group* 69–77). In this respect, one can reread Edward Schiappa’s widely read *Philosophy and Rhetoric* essay, “Second Thoughts on the Critiques of Big Rhetoric”⁵—as well as the many subsequent calls from Steve Fuller, William Keith, Steven Mailloux, Michael C. Leff, and others for a more (or less) disciplined and rhetorical rhetoric—as a neurotic response to a perceived crisis: in view of our imminent demise, rhetoricians have never been more aware of their rhetoricity!⁶

As an emissary running before—or catching up to, take your pick—the body, I admit that the crisis of opening(s) is indeed one of discipline: whence

⁴The primal horde refers to a mythic scenario developed by Darwin and elaborated by Freud to explain the emergence of the social contract and incest taboo: the idealized and primal father seizes all the women for himself, driving the sons away when they reach maturity. The sons, resentful of the father’s despotism but desiring his love, agree to band together, kill the father, and eat him. They do so, however, only at the price of indigestion, for they find that their ideal leader is dead and are haunted by him; consequently, they agree to live as equals and to dispossess “the women” and practice exogamy (See Freud, *Totem* 201–204).

⁵This article is the most accessible and, in my view, most accurate description of the debate surrounding rhetoric and disciplinarity. I will nevertheless take issue later with what I think is a misreading of Dilip Gaonkar’s positions.

⁶Of course, “criticism in crisis” is a tired hat, about which more shortly, but for the moment, we can trace it to Paul de Man’s “Criticism and Crisis” (in *Blindness* 3–19).

this repetitious compulsion to measure or recover or remove or insert this thing “rhetoric,” and how might we read the seemingly immeasurable (discussion of our) supplementarity as a rhetorical symptom itself? In psychoanalytic terms, the question could be rendered this way: Do we identify the uncanny persistence of the Big Rhetoric debate at scholarly conferences and in rhetorical literature as a *productive* neurosis central to our unique brand of scholarly invention? Insofar as the last decade has registered numerous self-assessments in edited collections and journals, one can easily argue our neurosis has been productive—at least on the page.⁷ Yet “productive” does not necessarily mean “productivity,” as it could also be argued that this hang-down/up has been milked for too long, especially because a number of scholars recognize that, for better or worse, rhetoric has already “globalized” or swelled itself big(-headed) or simply died away altogether.⁸ Perhaps, then, we might turn our trained, critical gaze on the rhetoric of Big Rhetoric itself as a symptom? If it is the case that “everything, or virtually everything, can be described as rhetorical” (Schiappa 260), then what can our own rhetoric about rhetorical studies tell us? Can we interpret these seemingly never-ending moments of self-measurement as something more—perhaps something Other—than an institutional or political quandary? Perhaps our own iteration of narcissism betokens a psychical structure?

Drawing on the psychoanalytic understanding of the symptom, in this article I argue that our obsession with size has become an enjoyable,

⁷For the different ways in which a more interdisciplinary yet coherent, text- or practice-centered and historically mindful rhetorical studies has been called for, see Aune, “The Politics of Rhetorical Studies” 69–76; Fuller, “Globalization”; Keith, “Identity, Rhetoric, and Myth” 106; Leff, “Rhetorical Disciplines” 83–93; Mailloux, “Disciplinary Identities” 5–29 (also see his *Disciplinary Histories* for a revised version); Mailloux, “Practices, Theories, and Traditions” 129–138; and Mailloux, “Places in Time” 53–68. For arguments in favor of “Big Rhetoric” or globalization, see Simons, “Rhetorical Hermeneutics” 86–109; and Simons, “Globalization” 260–274. For a diversity of views on the issue of disciplinarity, see Herbert W. Simons’ edited collection, *The Rhetorical Turn*, as well as the edited collection by Alan G. Gross and William M. Keith, *Rhetorical Hermeneutics*. Finally, one consequence of this decade-long discussion was the formation of the Alliance of Rhetorical Societies—initiated by Fred Antczak, Gerard Hauser, Robert Gaines, Michael Leff, and many others associated with the Rhetoric Society of America—which brought together a diverse group of rhetoricians for three days in Evanston, Illinois in the fall of 2003. Descriptions of the discussions at the conference are printed in the third issue of volume 24 of *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* (2004).

⁸For a rumination on the “death” of rhetoric, see Bender and Wellberry, *The Ends of Rhetoric*, especially the introductory essay by the editors, which argues that in modernity “rhetoric” has given way to the delightfully more-syllabic “rhetoricity.”

apocalyptic perversion.⁹ I suggest that a psychoanalytically informed understanding of the structural interrelationship among apocalypticism, phallogocentrism, and *jouissance* outlined in a lesser known monograph by Jacques Derrida provides a useful, alternative frame for reading the Big Rhetoric debate as part of a much larger apocalyptic discourse—a discourse for which the tropes of enjoyment and castration are central. I argue that the “Big Rhetoric” debate not only registers a dialectic between disciplinary adolescence and adulthood (represented in the classical Oedipal conflict between the father and son), but also that in some sense the masculinist character of the “Big Rhetoric” debate is overdetermined by the tonal qualities of apocalyptic as such. Consequently, I will argue than an attention to the *tone* of the Big Rhetoric debate is important for understanding the exclusion of the feminine from considerations of rhetoric’s disciplinary identity. To wit: I argue that the “Big Rhetoric” debate is and has been a perverse boy’s game, and I attempt to specify the larger cultural and psychical structures that have overdetermined the rules of this game by attending to *tone*. I conclude that a recognition of our perverse enjoyment of the academic apocalyptic has an important implication for rhetoricians: it may be time to adopt different, more playful tones, lest our overly serious and self-important perversions continue to blind us from our own unconscious strategies of intolerance.

Going Blind, or, Symptomology and the Drive Thing

As de Man has said of close reading, so we might say of rhetorical studies as a composite field: “Critics’ moments of greatest blindness with

⁹My argument, however, is deliberately elliptical, as it attempts to underscore the performative dynamics of the debate over “Big Rhetoric” performatively. By “performative” I mean to suggest that the frequent masturbatory, petulant tone and prose of the present essay is both “fun and games” as well as argumentative, a point that will become clearer as the essay progresses toward the analysis of “tone” as a rhetorical device. From time to time I use the word “playful” to denote this approach. As an aside, an important if sadly over-critiqued element of both deconstruction and psychoanalysis is their playful tone and wildly associative writing techniques, which are deliberately employed to accompany the more traditional, syllogistic argument (and sometimes in Derrida’s case, against the syllogistic argument). Slavoj Žižek’s work is perhaps the most accessible example of performative writing in this sense, but for a full-throttle example of this “style” of performance, see Laurence A. Rickels, *Nazi Psychoanalysis, Volume One: Only Psychoanalysis Won the War* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2002). “All you consumer fascist types, you know who you are,” opens Rickels on the topic of his style of writing, “cannot be stopped from policing the middlebrow beat to which intellectual discourse was condemned a long time ago” (xv). Although Rickels insists that his “obscurity” is less a “style of writing or argument” than the juxtapositional demand of the objects of his analysis, his rhetoric is unquestionably strategic.

regard to their own critical assumptions are also the moments at which they achieve their greatest insight" (109). Although de Man cautions that too much blindness can lead to (critical) suicide, the point is well taken: critical or scholarly success as a field, whether it is defined as the production of "good criticism" or recognition from a college or university administration, requires a degree of un-self awareness about that which it excludes for insight. Indeed, the bromide that the "best way to protect the reputation and status of rhetorical studies... is to do good work" is a similar, more familiar willed blindness (which is less about the genius of ignorance and more so the productive invention of repression; see Schiappa 272). Although the command to "do good work" is dubious precisely because it brackets the political dimensions of the presumed criteria of value, I would nevertheless suggest that too much self-reflective hand-wringing has led from a "healthy" and pragmatic self-awareness to a suicidal blindness to certain *unconscious* motives, thereby promulgating the perversion of a superior sense of self-importance to the exclusion of others. To better understand the character of this exclusion, as well as its implications for rhetorical studies, it is helpful to describe the relationship between the symptom and the drive.

In the tradition of psychoanalysis that never abandons Freud's understanding of human motivation, sometimes dubbed "classical psychoanalysis" in shorthand, humans are goaded to thinking and behaving in accord with *drives* that pulsate around or aim toward certain objects. For example, the human infant's "oral drive" aims toward the breast, the "anal drive" the feces, and so on. Although in some accounts the drives derive from hard-wired "instincts," the characteristically classical psychoanalyst tends to distinguish the drives from the instincts for two reasons that implicate the import of rhetoric: first, unlike other animals, humans at best have "incomplete" instincts in the sense that they must resort to symbolic/representational resources to satisfy them (e.g., an infant's cry for its mother's breast); second, the object of the drive is ultimately determined by nurture or culture, not by "nature" (e.g., whether the hunger cries of an infant produce a bottle or a breast is of little consequence to the satisfaction of its oral drive as long as either continues to work). Drive theory thus refers to psychoanalytic explanations for how and why people "get off" on various objects, from whole people (others or "objects" proper), to parts of people or the self ("part objects"), to fetishized, non-human things (see Krips, *Fetish*). Drive theory also provides explanations for how symbolic resources determine or overdetermine the aim or object of the drives, and how, in general,

people substitute one object for another to derive satisfaction in ways that are both conscious and unconscious.

For Freud, human drives were fundamentally *sexual*, collectively comprising “the libido,” and this was easiest to observe in the behavior of the very young—who are somewhat mindlessly driven to eat, shit, and touch themselves—as well as in the symptoms of the perverted adult.¹⁰ Returning to the case of the petulant prepubescent we reckon with a double-double whammy: not only is he young *and* a pervert, but also his masturbation is taboo *and* he doesn’t seem give a shit.¹¹ The young pervert has substituted the object of his libido, the young girl, with his own penis. As Freud explains, most of us caught and prohibited from touching ourselves would comply with a neurotic act of substitution: we might masturbate less and certainly more secretly (partial satisfaction of the drive), we might seek out a new sex partner (substitution), or we might sublimate our desire into other more socially acceptable expressions (e.g., watching people at the mall or acting on a stage, dancing at a club, manically writing for publication, and so on). The classic symptom of perversion, however, is outright obstinacy, even if one’s behavior is painful or “beyond the pleasure principle.”¹² The preteen pervert has learned to *enjoy* his symptom beyond “the law” in three important ways: (a) he enjoys his symptom even though it hurts, meaning that he violates the basic animality avoiding pain and seeking pleasure; (b) he enjoys his symptom despite social or cultural prohibition, or rather, precisely because painful pleasure is derived from someone laying down the law; and (c) he enjoys his symptom in a way that is beyond human representation or that is somewhat ineffable (*viz.*, beyond the symbolic). The pervert simply will not behave or make meaning, and at some level, she or he wants you to punish him or her, demanding both.

¹⁰Most breaks with Freud among psychoanalysts were a consequence of disagreements about drive theory. Some thinkers believed that the drives were not sexual but something else; for example, Jung believed the drives were spiritual in nature, whereas Adler eventually argued humans are driven by self-esteem. Others advocated a complete abandonment of the drive model in favor of more “relational” model, which generally goes under the name of “object relations theory.” For the classical textbook on the latter, see Greenberg and Mitchell, *Object Relations*.

¹¹The better explanation here, however, is that he does not *seem* to give a shit, when he understands his obstinacy and petulance to be precisely what the Other wants! He very much gives a shit (by hoarding his stuff, as it were) and wants to be disciplined! See Karl Abraham, “Contributions” 370–392.

¹²Initially Freud believed that the drives always aimed toward pleasure and the avoidance of pain in accord with “the pleasure principle.” Eventually, however, Freud changed his mind to suggest there is a “death drive,” or a pursuit of something beyond pleasure and life (see Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*). Freud’s thinking in this respect would lead Jacques Lacan to suggest that, in the end, all drives are death drives. I will discuss this later in terms of “*jouissance*” or “enjoyment.”

Understanding perversion in terms of the drives yields a description of the symptom that is somewhat counterintuitive. Typically in Western culture we think of symptoms as signifiers for a disease, disorder, or problem, as an outward manifestation of an occulted process that, with the right diagnosis, can eventually be eliminated. Freud argues, however, that symptoms are actually “substitute” or “compromise” satisfactions for our drives, and as such, are often temporary diversions or distractions (except, of course, for the pervert who makes the symptom work most of the time, lest she stop being, well, a pervert; Freud, “On Psycho-analysis” 208). Yet, as the case of the pervert demonstrates, sometimes the satisfaction of one’s symptoms can be painful, which creates something of a terminological problem. Bruce Fink explains:

“Satisfaction” is . . . too “clean” or “clean-cut” a term to describe the kind of pleasure symptoms provide. We all know people who are ever complaining of their lack of satisfaction in life, but who never seek therapy. This is because they obtain a certain satisfaction from their very dissatisfaction, and from complaining: from blaming others for their lack of satisfaction. So, too, certain people derive a great deal of pleasure from torturing themselves. . . . The French have fine word for this kind of pleasure in pain, or satisfaction in dissatisfaction: *jouissance*. . . . Most people deny getting pleasure or satisfaction from their symptoms, that they “get off” on their symptoms in a way that is too round-about, “dirty,” or “filthy” to be described as pleasurable or satisfying. The term “*jouissance*” nicely captures the notion of getting off by any means necessary, however clean or dirty. (*A Clinical* 8–9)

Jouissance is translated as “enjoyment,” but only in that John Cougar Mellencamp sense (“make it hurt so good”).¹³

Insofar as one might characterize the self-obsessing of rhetoricians as perverse, then “enjoyment” is the name for the final, filthy function of rhetoric’s contemporary obsession with size, identity, globalization, who “owns” rhetoric (NCA or RSA), and so on. In light of psychoanalytic drive theory and the enjoyment of something generally regarded as painful, we have now arrived at a supplemental explanation, in addition to the historical, ideational, and institutional causes that many have already advanced, for

¹³The late James P. McDaniel’s recent article, “Speaking Like a State,” identifies “political enjoyment” as the problematic *jouissance* of our time. He argues that only by owning up to satisfactions of sadism, cruelty, and pain that all of us harbor through the processes of self-knowledge and “ironic self-suspension” can we start to counter and avoid the terrible political events (and the destructive, local responses to those events) in these “times of terror” (346). In a certain sense, the critique I advance here shows how the same “psychosocial economy of enjoyment” is in play in our discussions of disciplinarity as well.

why rhetoricians have devoted so much time and space to the discussion of the ends of rhetoric: just like the preteen who washed his hands of prohibition, measuring our rhetoric gets (some) folks off—big time.¹⁴ Unlike our petulant pervert, however, sometimes roles seem reversed, for the self-appointed disciplinary custodians—we would be in error to call them nannies for many reasons—are really the ones doing the dirty work.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the perverse core of the Big Rhetoric debate is that we want to be told about our demise or irrelevance as an academic discipline over and over and over again, for such mock revelations allow us to produce substitute satisfactions over and over again in a kind of sado-masochistic frenzy (of which this article is delightfully not exempt). From a psychoanalytic vantage, some rhetoricians enjoy the ambivalence (and sometimes confusion) of father and son; there is a pleasurable pain in *both* bringing the law and ignoring it, in both revealing the lawgiver as a petulant pervert and vice versa.

Jouissance in itself, however, is not a bad thing, and we all harbor an inner pervert at some level (life would be so boring without enjoyment!). Lacan suggests that our ability to enjoy beyond instinct and representation is an answer to the question of determinism that is posed by the project of the posts (e.g., posthumanism, poststructuralism, postmodernism, and so on): if at some level subjectivity is a product of unconscious motives, the drives, discourse, performativity, and so on, then why am I not a mere automaton or zombie? The answer is that humans experience *jouissance* or enjoyment beyond that which can be represented, which is also a (if not *the*) locus of human agency (Lacan, “Subversion” 281–312). So what, then, is the problem with getting off on our disciplinary crises? Doesn’t rhetoric’s perversions in some sense constitute who we are and provide some coordinates for action/scholarship? Part of the answer, as de Man has hinted and Gaonkar has whispered, is that loving our symptom *too much* tempts a kind of

¹⁴I acknowledge that such a shift from the psychoanalytic theory of the individual psyche to the “group behavior” of rhetoricians is controversial to some readers. In his understudied monograph *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud links the two levels via the function of the “object” (understood as another person) in the individual psyche: “In the individual’s life someone else is invariably involved, as a model, as an object, as a helper, as an opponent; and so from the very first individual psychology . . . is at the same time social psychology as well” (3). My approach is similarly informed (that is, that groups behave in an analogous manner to individuals; e.g., class behavior often reflects Oedipal arrangements). For a more thoroughgoing discussion of this important theoretical tangle, see Jameson, “Imaginary and Symbolic” 338–395.

¹⁵I would be remiss not to point out that this some who enjoy tend to be gendered male, a point well made by Carole Blair, Julie R. Brown, and Leslie A. Baxter at the same disciplinary moment that Big Rhetoric became a concern. I will return to their essay later (see Blair, Brown, and Baxter, 383–409).

suicidal, kool-aid-drinking revivalism, a process of self-understanding that James Arnt Aune has likened to a “piacular rite” that distracts us from the “humble work of teaching speaking and writing” (74).¹⁶ Another and closely related part of the answer is that, as a disciplined scene of enjoyment, the Big Rhetoric debate is often misheard by many as monotonous, or worse, in monotone. I address each part of the answer in what follows.

On a Not-So-Recent Apocalyptic Tone Adopted in Rhetorical Studies

Ruminating on the politics of rhetorical studies and the civil pedagogy of democratic participation, James Arnt Aune notes that an “experience of loss and mourning pervades discussions of rhetoricians, a feeling-tone perhaps unique to the modern university” (71). He argues that our lost loved thing—dead and buried—is the “presence of rhetoric at the summit of the humanities,” and that the consequent mournful “feeling-tone” evident at the 2003 Alliance of Rhetorical Societies conference was symptomatic of a “piacular rite” whereby a community flagellates, beats, and bruises itself to restore a sense of solidarity through pain (74). He warns that unless there is a unified message, rhetoricians risk resorting to the kind of “bickering that destroys fields and departments” (74). In light of the discussion of Big Rhetoric as a symptom of *perverse enjoyment*, Aune’s characterization of the ARS conference as a piacular rite has the ring of truth. Because the Big Rhetoric debate *is* piacular in character, however, one can argue that it precludes the possibility of any unified message because it hurts so good to dwell in our end times. In fact, to be truly mournful, the rites of ARS would have achieved solidarity, came to terms with the loss of the interred, and moved on to newer objects to fall in love with (see Freud, “Mourning” 238–258). Instead, we find more and more articles in our journals and papers at our conferences about disciplinary identity and size.¹⁷ Instead, we find ourselves seemingly trapped in a kind of masochistic rehearsal, which is much more indicative of the enjoyment of melancholia, or an *inability to mourn and let (it) go*.¹⁸ So perhaps “mourning”

¹⁶For more on this evangelical riff, see Lundberg and Gunn, “‘Ouija.’”

¹⁷The most recent are Steven Mailloux (“Places in Time”) and James Arnt Aune’s (“The Politics of Rhetorical Studies”) essays in the February 2006 *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, which are revised versions of papers each delivered at the inaugural Alliance of Rhetorical Societies meeting in Evanston, Illinois in 2003. As the present essay attests, the theme of the 2006 meeting of the Rhetoric Society of America guarantees there are yet more and more to come.

¹⁸The keynote address by Steven Mailloux, “One Size Doesn’t Fit All: The Contingent Universality of Rhetoric,” revisits the Big Rhetoric debate, as did a number of papers on the 2006 RSA Convention Program.

is not the precise word, but then neither is melancholia. Aune's observation that our present mood also "accompanies an ongoing sense of quest" and progress suggests a different label for this paradoxically simultaneous mood of melancholy and hope: apocalyptic.

The apocalyptic is, of course, an eschatological genre of discourse with important discriminatory functions. Barry Brummett notes that "*apocalyptic*... is a mode of thought and discourse that empowers its audience to live in a time of disorientation and disorder by revealing to them a fundamental plan within the cosmos" (9–10). Empowering a community through the revelation of a secret plan requires identification at the level of tone—a felt recognition of urgency, that something is coming (or going to get cut off from coming), and that one should know about this coming something (e.g., the explosive arrival of a big, big, rhetoric). There are those who "get it," recognizing the truth of revelation, and then, of course, those who do not. It is in this sense of tone, something intimately tied up in the rhetoricity of utterance, that the apocalyptic extends beyond *meaningful* structures in a way that nevertheless remains within the domain of classic rhetoric.¹⁹ The point here, if one can be said to retain a point when speaking of tone (or at least a point in the key of *logos*) is that to characterize the Big Rhetoric discussion as an apocalyptic is easily done: we merely reckon with the allegory of the preteen pervert as fundamentally apocalyptic and show how a given participant in the discussion speaks or writes in the revelatory mode, surrounded by this or that sign of impending catastrophe. What is less obvious are the politics implied by the adoption of an apocalyptic tone, this voice of urgent expressivity. What is, then, an apocalyptic tone, and how does it relate to enjoyment and rhetoric?

First, a word on tone sans apocalypse: as the original edition of Thomas Sheridan's *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* points out, the notion of tone is central to rhetoric/eloquence because, along with gesture, all that is humanly "pleasurable, or affecting in elocution" depends on it (881). Because the effect of tones is fundamentally affective, tone is not reducible (or even related) to its linguistic vehicle, and yet, tone nevertheless requires the medium/materiality of speech or writing. In this respect, tone is perhaps the rhetorical symptom par excellence, most especially for locating cites of (dis)satisfaction in the symbolic. Owing to its expressive, sonorous quality, tone has been more thoroughly (and mathematically) theorized by

¹⁹For the bottom feeders such as me, the suggestion here is that tone marks an intersection of psychoanalysis and rhetoric; tone is unquestionably a rhetorical quality, but it is not a word. Tone also registers the sound of desire and enjoyment.

musicologists in terms of melody, pitch, and the like, which is one consequence of shifting the source of tone from the often unwieldy modulation of the human voice to the more stable—and therefore less apocalyptic—site of the musical instrument.²⁰ In the rhetorical tradition tone seems to have been reduced to the relay of mood in *voice*, such as the tone of one's voice in speaking, or in trope, such as the tone of one's voice in writing (e.g., the use of irony may create a sarcastic tone, a snide tone, a tone of levity or humility, and so on).²¹ The relative paucity of discussions of tone among rhetoricians—banished to either poetics or our lamentably understudied elocutionary tradition—is symptomatic of the symptomology of tone: *it slides, not just up and down, but also from side to side*. Peter Fenves details the slipperiness of tone by noting it is

not synonymous with *style*. It is doubtless linked with style insofar as it designates the manner in which a statement is made as opposed to the stated meaning, is far less stable, far more given to unexpected interruptions and disruptions of, for instance, the very opposition between the manner in which a statement is made and its meaning. For the tone of a discourse is not infrequently precisely its meaning. Not only does tone have a highly determined function in the register of sound and a less clearly defined one in the register of sight; it can also designate an utterly and indeterminate and undefinable “atmosphere”: the overall arena in which an event takes place. (3)

Fenves argues the remarkable indeterminacy of the “whatness” of tone intrigued Immanuel Kant, who shifted the concept to a “figural dimension of cognitive language” in a late essay he titled “On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy.” Arguably, Kant's attention to tone in this essay marks it as a kind of rhetorical criticism particularly relevant to our times, which has been overcome with deafening, superior tones speaking in the key of the apocalyptic both within and outside of the academy.²²

²⁰ For a Lacanian riff on a similar point (“mode”), see Dolar, “The Object Voice” 19–20.

²¹ “Voice” is a mediating, sister concept to tone, and has received closer scrutiny in rhetorical studies (see Vivian, *Being Made Strange*; and Watts, “Voice” 179–796).

²² If “mourning” is “a feeling-tone perhaps unique in the modern university,” as James Arnt Aune has suggested (“Politics” 71), then apocalypticism is what the discourse of the modern university shares with the current administration of George W. Bush. The difference between the academic and federal apocalyptic, suggests Ellen Messer-Davidow, is that conservatism truly mourns and moves on, whereas the academic Left seems stuck in its nostalgic weeping. Space limits expanding the argument I offer later beyond the local, however, I would suggest inability of rhetorical studies to “get over itself” or “its death” is the same problem of the academic humanities as well; we simply cannot reckon with our debilitating and discriminatory perversity (see Messer-Davidow 1–35).

In Kant's essay the concept of tone is "displaced from its . . . position in the register of aural sensation" in order to designate "an insensible—unmeasurable if not immense—dimension of discourse. The term thus traverses the cleft separating the sensible from the intelligible" (11). The reason for this mediation is to get at both the rhetorical (here defined as expressive and affective) and philosophical or "rational" dimensions of certain "mystagogues" or Neoplatonic philosophers who were becoming fashionable at the end of Kant's career. Kant attempts to use the tone of the mystagogues against them in order to suggest that their rhetoric will destroy philosophy (an apocalyptic, indeed). Nevertheless, as John D. Caputo tells the story, the mystagogues were "purveyors of secret, supernatural visions who dispense with the necessity for public argumentation and use their private visions to establish their 'gotic,' 'ductive,' seductive power over others" (89). These figures wrote in a rather "lordly and undemocratic" tone, claiming to have a revelation that would end the project of philosophy. Kant counters in a similar (yet insincere) tone, but also expands the concept to recommend a "low" or more reasoned and deliberative *tone of thinking*. After Kant's rumination on tone, says Fenves, "hearing tones, which is indissociable from paying attention to the dispositional and rhetorical character of every discourse, names the task of thinking in the future . . ." (15). Not only does Fenves's assessment underscore the utility of attending to and thinking through tone as the site of dispute, change, enjoyment, and so on, but it also marks another degree in the rhetorical turn of continental philosophy.

The problem with Kant's critique of the superior or overlordly tone of his enemies is that, if we understand the superior (or "high") tone of expression and thought as one of *many* apocalyptic tones, then Kant's warnings about the crypto-rhetorically induced death of reason are just as apocalyptic, only in a slightly different key (Kant 64; also see Derrida, "Newly Arisen" 138–139). If tone is any measure, Derrida is careful to point out, then the apocalyptic scene in the rhetoric of Kant and his enemies is a repetition of a familiar contest between "metaphor and concept, literary mystagogy and true philosophy," "poetry and philosophy," and we might add, rhetoric and philosophy, all of which are united in a very "old solidarity" ("Newly Arisen" 138). By way of example, Kant teaches us the inescapability of apocalyptic in the space of dispute and disagreement (someone must always assert a coming "end"), as well as to be suspicious of "those who declare the end of this or that" because, as Caputo puts it, "they have their own ends in view, and we must stay alert as to where they are going to try to lead us . . ." (90). More often than not,

the adoption of an apocalyptic tone leads to the creation of a closed community, and therefore, a discrimination between those who hear properly and those who do not:

If we imagine, by a kind of provisional fiction, that there were but one apocalyptic tone, instead of a generalized derangement (*Verstimmung*) and unmasterable polytonality of apocalypticisms . . . , it would sound something like this: I have come to unveil the truth for you about the end of the world. The end is near and I can see it; we are going to die . . . I alone can reveal the truth, the destination. We must form a closed community of those who stay awake while the others sleep. (90)

Traditional apocalyptic politics is the scene of othering, the rejection of difference. It is a characteristically occultic brand of scapegoating that rejects as alien those who either do not know or refuse to learn the secret plan or message, the correct history or definition, the proper, tonal pronunciation of the shibboleth. Traditional apocalyptic is fundamentally an operation that excludes something or someone.

What attracts Derrida's attention to Kant's apocalyptic tone, and what accounts for the solidarity between Kant and the mystagogues, is that it resonates at the level of the Same, or operates via a terministic screen that Derrida has termed logocentrism (centering discourse in *logos*), at the expense of difference and alterity. In other words, Kant speaks in the same apocalyptic *monotone* as his foes. Following Derrida's analysis yields important insights about the trouble with enjoying apocalypse—at least in traditional terms.

Not coincidentally, Derrida penetrates Kant's text at the site of a curious figure central to the apocalyptic dispute, which bears directly on our anxiety over Big Rhetoric: "Consider now that Kant first proposes the word or the image of castration . . . as one example of those 'analogies' . . . that this 'new' mystical-Platonic language abuses to manipulative ends." Kant singles out the writing of one of his mystagogic enemies, Johann Georg Schlosser, who argued that "metaphysical sublimation" and the abandonment of esoteric wisdom in Western thought posed the "danger of emasculating . . . a faculty of reason that . . . can hardly maintain itself in the struggle with vice" (Kant 64–65). Derrida argues that Kant finds castration "an inadmissible" and "scandalous" analogy for it is "those who adorn themselves with this new tone in philosophy . . . who emasculate and make a corpse of reason" ("Newly Arisen" 138). Consequently for Derrida the dispute staged in Kant's essay concerns which "of the two parties facing each other most surely castrates reason?"

The issue here is not really the answer to the question, "who castrates?" but rather, what the metaphor of castration portends for philosophy as a

frame for conflict. Kant accuses the mystagogues of perverting philosophy by unfairly wielding the apocalyptic tone of the Father, “you better stop or it [reason] will get cut off!” With nods to Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous (see Cixous, “Laugh” 875–893; Irigaray, *Speculum* 28–30 and *The Sex* 68–85), Derrida critiques these dueling monotones as logocentric and discriminatory:

And into this debate, phallogocentric on both sides, therefore throughout, we could put Freud on the scene as a third robber procuring the key (true or false), “sexual theory,” namely, that for this stage of reason in which there is only male reason, only a masculine *or* castrated organ or canon of reason, everything proceeds in this just as for that stage of infantile genital organization in which there is definitely a masculine but no feminine No sexual difference . . . as opposition, but only the masculine! This strange logic . . . unleashes what Freud calls . . . the drive for mastery. (“Newly Arisen” 139)

Although Derrida means to implicate phallogocentrism as a figural logic, his critique certainly can be brought to bear on the exclusive “boys game” of philosophy and classical psychoanalysis, as well as the real-world discrimination of the apocalyptic tone in general: the problem is not so much who claims to possess the phallus, but rather, who claims the phallus in the name of its coming castration? Derrida concludes his remarks by noting that Kant closes his essay, somewhat unexpectedly, with a seeming truce, “a concordant, a deal, a peace treaty, or a contract” that each party stop personifying “the moral law or the voice that incarnates it.” Kant suggests that the mystagogues wrongly personify the law as the veiled Isis, the goddess of morality and knowledge united. This truce, then, “proposed between the two declared defenders of a nonemasculated *logos* supposes some exclusion. It supposes some *inadmissible*. There is an excluded middle . . .” (“Newly Arisen” 143). Is this not the same sounding of exclusion and call for mastery that the Big Rhetoric discussion continues to intone?

On Seeking Substitutes, or, the Arrival of the Always Arriving

What a hunk of love . . . Gigantic, Gigantic, Gigantic/A big big love!

—The Pixies, “Gigantic”

If we understand the traditional apocalyptic as a characteristically phallogocentric enterprise, the analogies of the pervert and the apocalyptic prophet interpenetrate: it feels good to discriminate in the tone of impending

catastrophe, even when told to stop. Consequently, I have suggested that we can come to grips with Big Rhetoric as the sounding of an apocalyptic tone that is symptomatic of perversion. Such a conclusion suggests that those who continue to address the identity of rhetoric's field or undisciplined discipline might attend more studiously to the role of affect and emotions via the symptomology of tone. It also suggests that those who continue to prophesy the castration of rhetoric's prowess are themselves committing a kind of masculinist violence by excluding those who reject the monotony of death knells. How do we, as Cher once quipped in the film *Moonstruck*, "snap out of it!?" Or, insofar as the apocalyptic as such is fundamentally exclusionary, can we? Perhaps a renewed attention and rereading of the "feminist" and deconstructive arguments in respect to tone intones an answer?

Dissin' the Fem

In the key of postfeminism, some might argue that the phallogocentric character of traditional apocalyptic suggests the primary exclusion effected by rhetoric's version *was* the work of feminism, and that we seem to have overcome its exclusions thanks to important, critical work by feminist critics. Such optimism is reflected in the recent attention received by Carole Blair, Julie R. Brown, and Leslie A. Baxter for their controversial 1994 essay, "Disciplining the Feminine," which garnered the National Communication Association's 2006 Charles H. Woolbert Research Award for having "stood the test of time" and for becoming a "stimulus for new conceptualizations of communication phenomena" ("Call for Awards"). Although the essay does not address the Big Rhetoric debate, it registers the anxieties of our (seemingly) ever-expanding field and, to my knowledge, is the first essay to examine seriously the scholarly tone of discipline-related conflict. Moreover, "Disciplining the Feminine" directly engages the classically phallogocentric social-contracting of scholars in the private, hush-hush off-screen of (going-)blind review. I suggest that one can better understand the dominant, apocalyptic tone of the Big Rhetoric debate by revisiting and reframing this important, award-winning essay.

In "Disciplining the Feminine," Blair, Brown, and Baxter argue that a "masculinist disciplinary ideology" governs the norms of scholarship in rhetorical (and Communication) studies, especially the "demand for a refined, ahistorical, smoothly finished univocality" (383). They critique a 1992 report on the "Active Prolific Female Scholars in Communication" and the remarks of blind reviewers regarding their criticism of the report (Hickson, Stacks, and Amsbary 350–356). Blair, Brown, and Baxter castigate the report for,

first, advancing a postfeminist rationale that works to obscure masculinist ideology (e.g., that because there are “prolific females” working in Communication Studies, we no longer need to scrutinize male privilege), and second, for advancing a “male paradigm” that excludes thought and work that is not impersonal and abstract, that does not heed strict boundaries between disciplinary territories, that does not promote the centrality of individual autonomy, and that does not reify dominant social hierarchies. This paradigm is signaled by its chief figure, the phallus:

Equally offensive is [the authors'] description of their report as an attempt to establish a “yardstick for active, female researchers in communication.” Hickson et al.'s report-as-yardstick hearkens to the vulgar (and frequently brutal) political arrangements characterizing dominant/non-dominant group relations in times we have come to believe were “less enlightened.” The yardstick (along with its metonymic associates, such as “the ruler” and “the rod”) often functioned as the instrument used to “articulate” and reinforce the punitive politics of domination and oppression . . . The yardstick (or its equivalent) is used by one individual to *discipline* another. In so doing, *discipline* and those traditionally charged with its preservation, are maintained. (393)

The authors criticize the responses to their critique by showing how cruelly the rod was used to dismiss their arguments as embarrassing, un-scholarly, and unprofessional. “There are too many feline, petty attacks in this manuscript,” says one blinded reviewer, “and [there is] too much ball-bashing [for the essay] to be a scholarly article” (398). Insofar as the authors admit that “no conclusions offer themselves easily” and that it is “not up to the three of us alone to resolve” the tacit contracting over professional propriety, it is clear who claims the phallus in its coming castration (and, of course, which cats are blamed for posing the threat).

After Blair, Brown, and Baxter's important exposé, some rhetoricians may be tempted to argue that our phallogocentric apocalyptic has been tempered by their and related, subsequent critiques (e.g., Biesecker 140–161). That the conference planners of the most recent RSA meeting in Memphis chose “Sizing Up Rhetoric” as the theme should temper any unbridled optimism, as should an understanding of the apocalyptic tone as monotonously perverse. Although professionally recognizing “Disciplining the Feminine” contributes to an argument for feminism's acceptance, in light of the recent “sizing-up” idiom one should consider whether such recognition is merely a symptom of the very same yardstick-disciplinarity the essay is said to expose. To what extent does recognizing the essay sound like a “resolution” of the monotony it critiques? In other words, can the celebration of the essay

as a “feminist success” play into a kind of postfeminist ruse (see McRobbie), a tired, disciplinary iteration of “been there, done that?”

The threat of monotonal assimilation is easy to recognize if we take matters back to the off-screen (primal) scene where Blair, Brown, and Baxter originally bid readers to go: unquestionably, recognizing the essay over a decade after its publication is a (somewhat generationally marked) reaction to the oft-heard and overheard dismissals of the study in everyday encounters (e.g., in conversation at the RSA conference bar). For example, recently a blind reviewer for the present article described “Disciplining the Feminine” as mere “whining” (a tonally coded word if there ever was).²³ I have often heard the same sentiment from respected scholars at conferences and in casual discussions, a sentiment few would be willing to publicly voice because the essay has become a fetish of so-called political correctness. In this qualified respect, celebrating what some characterize as a critical castration is merely a variety of toothless lip service.

The problem with voicing an opposition to Blair, Brown, and Baxter’s argument is that, presumably, it would brand one as a misogynist. Such a presumption, however, is party to the binarism of exclusion and, in a sense, misses what I understand as the core of their critique: gender-coded rhetoric (“feline, petty attacks,” “ball-busting,” “whining”) intones a phallogocentric, off-screen form of the disciplinary contract—the kind of contract that Derrida has shown entails a secret exclusion. To characterize their essay as a castration, consequently, is a mistake. Blair, Brown, and Baxter’s critique has been (sometimes deliberately) *misheard*, for the critique is not only leveled at the level of the *word*, but also at the level of its expression and event—those things better discerned by an attention to tone. For example, the masculinist rules for expression they deplore demand “personae of the singular, neutral, authoritative observers who are detached from or ambivalent about their own histories and contexts” (402). Hearing/reading the tone of “detachment” is central to their arguments, which work to expose the monotone of disciplinary apocalyptic. “Our talk about ‘scholarly dialogue’ and ‘scholarly communities’ notwithstanding,” they argue, “we tend to construe our work in monologic terms” (403). Blair, Brown, and Baxter conclude their essay by calling for a rigorous attention to “patterns in our writing and speaking,” a charge to which the present essay has attempted to respond in the register of tone (403).

²³For context, the complete comment from the blind reviewer was as follows: “Blair et al., despite the circulation their essay has gotten, struck me as simply whining, and generalizing on the basis of a highly limited sample.”

To my knowledge, few have taken Blair, Brown, and Baxter's charge seriously in subsequent studies (see Schwartzman and Swartz 69–76). Insofar as prohibitions and protests have failed to put an end our perverse, apocalyptic tone in rhetorical studies, then, I shall come to an end—or better, I shall keep coming—by diagnosing why our strange brand of enjoyment is overdetermined and, perhaps, inescapable.

Rereading Gaonkar as Huldah

Whether from its institutional and political history or rhetoric's centuries-long status as a supplement, rhetorical studies is foundationally and fundamentally an apocalyptic and perverse discipline. As the Blair, Brown, and Baxter essay demonstrates, rhetoricians have been prohibited from this or that perversion many times and in many ways in the past thirty years. We can locate many more examples in meta-arguments about disciplinary identity: reacting to the rather grand (if not globalist) gesture of Lloyd Bitzer and Edwin Black's edited collection of papers from the Wingspread Conference, *The Prospect of Rhetoric*, Robert L. Scott warned that any project to "define rhetoric" would castrate its multiple prospects (Bitzer and Black, *The Prospect*; and Scott 81–96).²⁴ As the scene of violence shifted from defining rhetoric as a thing to that of Big Rhetoric, apocalyptic warnings continue to issue forth from ever bolder prophets: Steve Fuller has decried the emasculation of rhetorical studies by "upstart disciplines" (he means the nebulous "cultural studies") and warns of our imminent demise without some sort of "rhetorical reclamation" and disciplinary protectionism (paras. 18; 32–43). Herbert W. Simons counters that without a more "hospitable" attitude toward "cultural studies," rhetorical studies is cut off from academic, political, and cultural realities (see "Rhetorical" and "Globalization"). Michael Leff continues to insist that in the reality of globalization, the rhetoricians in Communication Studies have failed to "develop an interpretive frame supple enough" to mediate texts and contexts and, therefore, come empty handed to the "interdisciplinary table" ("Rhetorical Disciplines" 91). In Communication Studies at least, the phallogocentric tone of apocalyptic absolutism is nigh ubiquitous.

As the ambivalent and productive reactions to Gaonkar's double whammy attest, locating the scene of apocalypse does not necessarily recommend muffling its tone. The failure to reckon with Blair, Baxter,

²⁴For a more modest reengagement with the project of defining both rhetoric and rhetorical studies as a field, see Graff, Walzer, and Atwill's *The Viability of the Rhetorical Tradition*.

and Brown's critique of masculine ideology and academic writing suggests that muffling this tone may be impossible. In fact, Caputo stresses that losing the apocalyptic is not even preferable, for there is "nothing more useful than the shrill voice of apocalyptic outcries when the killing curtain of censorship is about to close," nothing more stirring than "a black American eschatological apocalyptic who claims to have a dream . . ." (94). We need our protest apocalyptic—we need, in other words a tone of urgency for our politics—disciplinary and otherwise. Certain apocalyptic tones, even those that reek of righteousness, are indispensable.²⁵ The pickle at this juncture is not how to avoid the unavoidable logic of discrimination. As Kenneth Burke maintained, it seems as symbol-using creatures humans cannot help but discriminate between good and bad others. Given the human tendency toward enjoyment, there is only management and substitution, not abolition.

The issue is, then, how do rhetoricians embrace or accept their disciplinary perversions via *substitution* or without always excluding alternative apocalypics? If it is the case that, as Gaonkar has argued, the apocalyptic tone has been part of rhetoric's identity since the beginning, if it is the case that we enjoy the sounding of such tones, and if it is the case that the Oedipal relation is, in effect, "hard-wired" into disciplinarity as such, then how do we work to continually and ceaselessly (re)feminize the field? In revisiting his arguments in favor of the globalization of rhetoric, Herbert W. Simons frames the problem well at the same time as he re-inscribes it:

What I most regret [about the Big Rhetoric debate] is the pressure from both camps [protectionists versus globalists] to choose sides. Much that they contribute is complementary or cross-cutting . . . [and] very little requires choosing sides. Cultural studies lack traditional rhetoric's understanding of invention, argument, and style. Rhetoric lacks the understanding of power . . . Why, then, can't those of us in Communication all get along? ("Globalization" 40–41)

In light of Derrida's critique of Kant, the answer to Simons's questions is that neither side recognizes their old solidarity in the phallogocentric mode of apocalyptic, that false binary of big and small (when there never was the thing at all).

Recognizing the powerful blindness effected by the enjoyment of the apocalyptic tone, as well as the larger contextualization of rhetoric's perverse apocalyptic within the disciplinary discourse detailed by Derrida, one must

²⁵James Darsey has suggested that erring too much on the side of deliberation emasculates protest politics and reformist rhetorics of social change (see Darsey 199–210).

answer Simons's facile question with a simple and resounding "no thanks!"²⁶ Not getting along is the fulcrum of disciplinarity and the basis of rhetoric's identity. Furthermore, if the tenor of my remarks is any measure, locating the apocalyptic is in itself an apocalyptic gesture, which returns us again to Derrida's reading of Kant's apocalyptic tone:

Kant speaks of modernity, and the mystagogues of his time, but you will have quickly perceived . . . how many transpositions we could indulge in on the side of *our* so-called modernity. I will not say that today everyone would recognize him- or herself on this or that side, purely and simply. But I am sure it could be demonstrated that today every slightly organized discourse is found or claims to be found on both sides And this inadequation, always limited itself, no doubt indicates the densest difficulty. Each of us is the mystagogue *and* the *Aufklärer* of an other. ("Newly Arisen" 142)

One tacit presumption of the Big Rhetoric debate is that rhetorical studies is alone in its inability to properly mourn its always-coming/always-already-have-been death, but Derrida teaches us that this has been the story of disciplinarity—most especially philosophy—since the pre-Socratics. In other words, apocalyptic is built-into the concept of discipline in its many senses (e.g., as punishment, as lawful order, as body of discourse, as academic enterprise, and so on). Hence, any cursory search for apocalyptic in other disciplines—even those presumed to be "established"—yields lettered hand-wringing and up-bucking in dueling tones of urgency. For example, summarizing the argument of Neil McLaughlin, Melanie White explains that "Canadian sociology is apparently in danger: it is in danger of losing its intellectual vitality and disciplinary viability as a consequence of structural shifts that threaten to undermine its unique contribution to intellectual life" (537). Such remarks from our sociologist friends up north do indeed sound familiar, and should provide some modicum of comfort that the apocalyptic is shared by many disciplines in the academy. One is tempted to argue that "the sky is falling" should abide the founding motto of any academic discipline, "in the beginning there was the error."²⁷

²⁶Once we recognize from the start that forging a contract or agreement among very different kinds of parties only threatens the hidden premise of exclusion, then we are led to a renewed responsibility to re-read our written work and be ever wary of tone. Just like a drug addict, the pervert must own her perversion to stop hurting the self and others. Owning up to one's role in the continuance of oppressive ideological norms is difficult, but as many of those who critique ideology have argued, the systemic character of ideology requires a degree of reflexivity.

²⁷That the latter is the founding motto of any academic department was an argument often told by Robert Lee Scott to his students during many of his rhetoric seminars. My thanks to Dr. Scott for this humorous truism.

When one reckons with rhetorical studies as an inherently apocalyptic field, one easily locates the tone in our earliest, celebrated “texts” about rhetorical criticism. The notion of a “recent” or “just arrived” apocalyptic tone is wrong, for we can trace this sound of urgency to the origins of rhetorical studies before the English and Speech Communication trajectories ossified. In one of the foundational texts often taught to rhetoric students, “The Literary Criticism of Oratory” originally published in 1925, Herbert A. Wichelns establishes rhetorical criticism on the *dying* art of public speech-making, all the while insisting that “it’s not dead yet!” “Oratory—the waning influence of which is often discussed in current periodicals,” says Wichelns, “has definitely lost the established place in literature that it once had” (3). Moreover, it “is true that other ways of influencing opinion have long been practiced, that oratory is no longer the chief means of communicating ideas to the masses” (4). Nevertheless, in the din of those who have proclaimed the death of oratory, Wichelns makes a space for its study in the humanities. Since the beginning there was a death, be it of “rhetoric” or “oratory” or “speech.”

Understanding rhetorical studies as always sounding or responding to an apocalyptic tone that provides a perverse satisfaction through discrimination does not relieve rhetoricians of responsibility, and this is because apocalyptic excludes. Recognizing—and even embracing—our perverse apocalyptic should lead us to ask new questions about our tone. Rhetoricians seem irrevocably wed to the apocalyptic because it is our innermost, traumatic scene of identity, so how do we keep from collapsing onto that monotone of phallogocentrism? How do we resist traditional apocalyptic? Because Derrida’s writings on the apocalyptic register his recognition that he also speaks in an apocalyptic tone, it is instructive to see how he distinguishes his tone from that of Kant and the other (good ol’) boys. The first step is in understanding how the apocalyptic tone tends toward “death” (a mood of gloomy endings recognized most succinctly by Aune in terms of the “piacular rites” of rhetorical studies). Fenves explains that, insofar as the apocalyptic is in some sense unavoidable because conflict is unavoidable, “tone” takes on an added significance:

The possibility that an announcement hides certain unspoken clauses lies in its *tone*; tonality is, in turn, the preeminent vehicle of catastrophic revelations. To hear tonality otherwise—to write in a tone and of a tone and with a tone *without the key polemical categories of inside and outside*, inclusion and exclusion—is, then, the task of Derrida’s address [the critique of Kant]. (3)

When detailing the binaries set up by Kant between “metaphor and concept, literary mystagogy and true philosophy” Derrida insists on *not taking sides* or to “come to a decision,” to side with or against death (“Newly Arisen” 138). Indeed, barring scenes of dire consequence (that is, the possible *real* death or

harm to an individual), it would seem that *not* taking sides on the issue of *death*, on a definitive and absolute end, seems the attitudinal and tonal prescription. Derrida's critical mode of deconstruction is an "apocalyptic to dislocate destinations, derail them, drive them *verstimmt*, break up concordants, . . . defy the postal police, be the outspoken advocate of what is taken to be inadmissible," says Caputo (94). "The apocalyptic tone recently adapted in deconstruction is upbeat and affirmative, expectant and hopeful" (98), and we might add, polytonal. This polytonal apocalyptic is, as Caputo puts it, "apocalypse without apocalypse."

With this affirmative apocalyptic in mind, the one that (usually) *refuses* to "take sides" or enter into (definitional) contracts, rhetoricians can better reinvestigate the tablets that Gaonkar brought.²⁸ Put bluntly: Gaonkar has been misread as sounding a phallogocentric apocalyptic ("stop it or you will go blind!") when, in fact, his contribution to the Big Rhetoric debate is better understood in the playful (yet nevertheless serious) tone of deconstruction, better understood in the company of Blair, Baxter, and Brown's "Disciplining the Feminine" than in the more straightforward discussions of rhetoric's demise or rebirth. Gaonkar's contribution is better understood as a tonal exemplar in the key self-critique and humor. In this debate many rhetoricians have been, consequently, tone deaf.

Speaking of the later tablet, "The Idea of Rhetoric in the Rhetoric of Science," Gaonkar reports he has been

criticized for opposing the globalization of rhetoric and for promoting a narrow and exclusive view of rhetoric as a civic art. This is a completely erroneous reading. I am neither for nor against globalization. I simply point out that globalization is an unavoidable consequence of the interpretive turn in contemporary rhetoric. ("Close Readings" 346)

Tellingly, rather than "take a side" and enter, of course, into the contract centered by a quest for mastery, Gaonkar proposes a "close reading of a third kind" that offers up the expanse of a body of water, alternately "opaque" and "translucent," as its guiding metaphor. Notably, the oceanic expanses of water are culturally associated with truth and the feminine.²⁹ Nevertheless,

²⁸In other words, my argument is that a recourse to a traditional apocalyptic tone—one that tempts the logic of the Same at the expense of the other—may be justifiable as a political strategy to save lives. It seems to me less justifiable as a tone in academic discussion. This would imply not taking a side with either "little rhetoric" or "Big Rhetoric," but rather, taking up the question of definition and disciplinarity solely in the institutional or political context (e.g., how to keep the program getting axed by the dean, and so on).

²⁹Stylistically, Nietzsche famously yoked the feminine to tonal hollows (wombs), water, and the oceanic (see Derrida, *Spurs*; and Irigaray, *Marine Lover*).

although acknowledging the unwillingness to be emplaced, Schiappa argues that Gaonkar “implicitly” takes Big Rhetoric to task (265), as does Simons. Simons argues that Gaonkar’s use of the “rhetoric of science as the test case for Big Rhetoric” was “fallacious,” and adds, “just why it is that Gaonkar was offering these arguments was left somewhat unclear,” but that “he had serious misgivings about the movement toward globalization” (“Globalization” para. 20). Michael Leff has noted the general confusion over Gaonkar’s stance, but discerns that “Gaonkar wants Communication-rhetoricians to distinguish their role within a discipline that sponsors grounded interpretive work and their position within a sweeping interdisciplinary movement” (“Rhetorical” 91). As for me, I am not so sure what Gaonkar wants, but I do think that I catch his tone: it is devilish, it is anticipatory, it is blissfully perverse in a sense that substitutes one blindness for another—one that does not *exclude*. The polytonal, multivoiced prophet is always announcing that something is coming—an alien encounter with exploratory probes of a third kind, perhaps—but finds cause for celebration even if that thing never arrives.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks Carole Blair, Diane Davis, Debbie Hawhee, and the blind reviewers for their helpful suggestions and wise counsel.

References

- Abraham, Karl. “Contributions to the Theory of the Anal Character.” *Selected Papers of Karl Abraham*. Eds. Trans. Douglas Bryan Alix Strachey. New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1979. 370–392.
- Aune, James Arnt. “The Politics of Rhetorical Studies: A Piacular Rite.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92 (2006): 69–76.
- Bender, John and David E. Wellbery, Eds. *The Ends of Rhetoric: History, Theory, Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.
- Biesecker, Barbara. “Coming to Terms with Recent Attempts to Write Women into the History of Rhetoric.” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 25 (1992): 140–161.
- Bitzer, Lloyd F. and Edwin Black. Eds. *The Prospect of Rhetoric: Report of the National Development Project*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971.
- Blair, Carole, Julie R. Brown, and Leslie A. Baxter. “Disciplining the Feminine.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 80 (1994): 383–409.
- Brummett, Barry. *Contemporary Apocalyptic Rhetoric*. New York: Praeger, 1991.
- “Call for Awards.” natcom.org. 2006. National Communication Association. 7 February 2007 <<http://www.natcom.org/nca/Template2.asp?bid = 5363>>.
- Caputo, John D. *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.

- Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. *Signs* 1 (1976): 875–893.
- Darsey, James. *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- de Man, Paul. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd rev. ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.
- Derrida, Jacques. "On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy." Trans. John Leavey, Jr. *Raising the Tone of Philosophy: Late Essays by Immanuel Kant, Transformative Critique by Jacques Derrida*. Ed. Peter Fenves. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. 117–171.
- Dolar, Mladen. "The Object Voice." *SIC 1: The Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*. Eds. Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996. 7–31.
- Fenves, Peter. "The Topicality of Tone" (introduction). *Raising the Tone of Philosophy: Late Essays by Immanuel Kant, Transformative Critique by Jacques Derrida*. Ed. Peter Fenves. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. 1–48.
- Fink, Bruce. *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: W.W. Norton, 1961.
- . *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: W.W. Norton, 1959.
- . "On Psycho-Analysis." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 12*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1966. 208.
- . "Mourning and Melancholia." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, XXIV*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1995. 238–258.
- . "The Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence." *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1962.
- . *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: W.W. Norton, 1950.
- Fuller, Steve. "The Globalization of Rhetoric and Its Discontents," *Poroi* 2 (2003). 22 April 2006 <<http://inpress.lib.uiowa.edu/poroi/papers/fuller031101.html>>.
- Gaonkar, Dilip Parameshwar. "Close Readings of the Third Kind: Reply to My Critics." *Rhetorical Hermeneutics: Invention and Interpretation in the Age of Science*. Eds. Alan G. Gross and William M. Keith. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997. 330–356.
- . "The Idea of Rhetoric in the Rhetoric of Science." *Rhetorical Hermeneutics: Invention and Interpretation in the Age of Science*. Eds. Alan G. Gross and William M. Keith. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997. 25–85.
- . "Rhetoric and Its Double: Reflections on the Rhetorical Turn in the Human Sciences." *The Rhetorical Turn: Invention and Persuasion in the Human Sciences*. Ed. Herbert Simons. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990. 341–366.
- Graff, Richard, Arthur E. Walzer, and Janet M. Atwill. Eds. *The Viability of the Rhetorical Tradition*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005.

- Greenberg, Jay R. and Stephen A. Mitchell. *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Gross, Alan G. and William M. Keith, Eds. *Rhetorical Hermeneutics: Invention and Interpretation in the Age of Science*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.
- Hickson, Mark, III, Don W. Stacks, and Jonathan H. Amsbary. "Active Prolific Female Scholars in Communication: An Analysis of Research Productivity, II." *Communication Quarterly* 40 (1992): 350–356.
- Irigaray, Luce. *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1991.
- . *The Sex Which is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- . *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject." *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977): 338–395.
- Kant, Immanuel. "On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy," translated by Peter Fenves. *Raising the Tone of Philosophy: Late Essays by Immanuel Kant, Transformative Critique by Jacques Derrida*. Ed. Peter Fenves. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. 51–81.
- Keith, William. "Identity, Rhetoric, and Myth: A Response to Mailloux and Leff." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 30 (2000): 95–106.
- Krips, Henry. *Fetish: An Erotics of Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.
- Lacan, Jacques. "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious." Trans. Bruce Fink. *Écrits*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004. 281–312.
- Leff, Michael. "Rhetorical Disciplines and Rhetorical Disciplinarity: A Response to Mailloux." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 30 (2000): 83–93.
- Lundberg, Christian and Joshua Gunn. "Ouija Board, Are There Any Communications? Agency, Ontotheology, and the Death of the Humanist Subject, or, Continuing the ARS Conversation." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* (Fall 2005): 83–105.
- Mailloux, Steven. *Disciplinary Identities: Rhetorical Paths of English, Speech, and Composition*. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2006.
- . "Disciplinary Identities: On the Rhetorical Paths Between English and Communication Studies." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 30 (2000): 5–29.
- . "Places in Time: The Inns and Outhouses of Rhetoric." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92 (2006): 53–68.
- . "Practices, Theories, and Traditions: Further Thoughts on the Disciplinary Identities of English and Communication Studies." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 33 (2003): 129–138.
- McDaniel, James P. "Speaking Like a State: Listening to Benjamin Franklin in Times of Terror." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 2 (2005): 324–350.
- McRobbie, Angela. "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture." *Feminist Media Studies* 4 (2004): 255–264.
- Messer-Davidow, Ellen. "Why Democracy Will Be Hard to Do." *Social Text* 86 (2006): 1–35.
- The Pixies, "Gigantic." Performed by the Pixies. *Surfer Rosa* (4AD, 1988). Compact Disk.

- Schiappa, Edward. "Second Thoughts on the Critiques of Big Rhetoric." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 34 (2001): 260–274.
- Schwarz, David. *Listening Subjects: Music, Psychoanalysis, Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Schwartzman, Roy and Omar Swartz. "Peer Review as Enforcement of Disciplinary Orthodoxy." *Southern Journal of Communication* 63 (1997): 69–76.
- Scott, Robert L. "On *Not* Defining 'Rhetoric,'" *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 6 (1973): 81–96.
- Sheridan, Thomas. *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* [excerpt]. *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, 2nd ed. Eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. Boston: Bedford Books, 2001. 881–888.
- Silverman, Kaja. *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1988.
- Simons, Herbert W. "The Globalization of Rhetoric and the Argument from Disciplinary Consequence." *Poroï* 2 (2003): 22 April 2006 <<http://inpress.lib.uiowa.edu/poroï/papers/simons031101.html>>.
- . "Rhetorical Hermeneutics and the Project of Globalization." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85 (1999): 86–109.
- . Ed. *The Rhetorical Turn: Invention and Persuasion in the Conduct of Inquiry*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Stipe, Michael. "It's the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine)." Performed by R.E.M. *Document* (Capitol, 1987). Compact Disk.
- Vivian, Bradford. *Being Made Strange: Rhetoric Beyond Representation*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004.
- Watts, Eric King. "'Voice' and 'Voicelessness' in Rhetorical Studies." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87 (2001): 179–196.
- White, Melanie. "On the Recent Apocalyptic Tone Adopted in Canadian Sociology." *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 30 (2005): 537–544.
- Wichelns, Herbert A. "The Literary Criticism of Oratory." *Readings in Modern Rhetorical Criticism*. Ed. Carl R. Burghardt. State College, PA: Strata Publishing, 1995. 3–28.