

## Hystericizing Huey:

### Toward a Psychoanalytic Rhetorical Criticism with the Example of Demagoguery

#### ABSTRACT

This essay advances a sketch of a psychoanalytic mode of rhetorical criticism with and through the example of a commonly encountered persona in the literature of rhetorical studies, the demagogue. After introducing a number of concepts that enrich our traditional understanding of the emotional appeal, I argue that demagogic rhetoric can be usefully understood as the dialogic interplay of the psychical structures of obsessional neurosis and hysteria. Although many scholars assume the era of the demagogue is over, psychoanalysis helps to explain how the creation and experience of two monuments erected to the memory of Huey P. Long extends the dynamics of demagoguery into contemporary life. As a figure that inheres in the popular imaginary, the demagogue lives.



Fig. 1. The New State Capitol of Louisiana

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The time has come for all good men to rise above principle.

--Huey Pierce Long, attributed

Across the street from my former home in the historic, downtown Baton Rouge neighborhood known as Spanish Town, Louisiana's so-called New State Capitol Building towers 34 stories above the Mississippi, seated in an impressive series of gardens and carefully groomed shrubbery. I had never heard of the building before moving to Baton Rouge, and shortly after my arrival in July of 2002, I walked across the street to experience the much talked about monument for myself. When I saw it, I was overcome with the kind of adolescent bemusement immortalized in the Washington Monument scene from the 1996 theatrical hit, *Beavis and Butthead Do America* (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> Aside from providing Louisianans an endless reference for jokes about the state's colorful political history, something deathly serious remains after the laughter abates.<sup>2</sup> A clue to the gravity of this unusual (or rather, all too common) monument is that it is "commented" upon by another: in front of the capitol and erected upon the grave of a popular former governor and U.S. State Senator, a statue of Huey Pierce Long beholds the New State Capitol in awe (fig. 2), its right hand thrown back in both bravado and astonishment (fig. 3), its left resting atop a scale model of the building (fig. 4). As the following excerpt from a field guide to the state capitol demonstrates, Long is inextricably wed to the building, which is sometimes referred to as "Huey's monument" or "achievement":



Fig. 2. The statute of Huey P. Long that marks his grave



Fig. 3. The left hand of the statue rests atop a scale model of the capitol



Fig. 4. The right hand of the statue is thrown behind the body.

Huey P. Long, one of the most dynamic personalities ever to flash across the American political scene, dominated Louisiana politics for seven years, serving as governor from 1928 to 1932 and as a U.S. Senator from 1932 until he was shot to death in 1935. Ironically, he was mortally wounded in a still-unexplained melee inside the capitol, the magnificent structure he conceived, rallied public support for, and pushed to completion in only two years. Even today, more than four decades after his untimely death, his presence still looms large over the entire edifice. (Jolly and Calhoun 2)

The rhetorical figure of Huey haunts the capitol and discourse about it, which is literally guaranteed by the close proximity of his interred corpse. The dialogue between these two monuments is about gifts and gifting, and consequently, the rhetoric of responsibility: the statue of Huey is admiring the New State Capitol, but also in awe of the building that the historical Long helped to erect; his phallus towers over him, symbolically oblivious to Long's likeness, as if to remind the petrified subject of his duty to "the people." In this sense, these monuments illustrate the way in which human symbolicity is in more control of us than we are of it: from a distance, the large statue of Long is dwarfed by the memorial to his political prowess (fig. 6; see end of article). In this essay, I advance a sketch of a psychoanalytic mode of rhetorical criticism that adopts a homologous posture: like the assassinated governor resting beneath series of impressive monuments, the psychoanalytic critic recognizes that the symbolic universe is more in control of us than we are of it.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, a position of humility before a symbolism that eludes us --because it is unconscious, because it is patently mystifying, or because it is misleadingly mundane--is, perhaps, the guiding ethic of any mode of psychoanalytic criticism.

More specifically, in this essay my larger goal is to describe a number of psychoanalytic concepts that scholars can use to explicate challenging discourse, from the mundane to the monumental. Because there has been some resistance to psychoanalysis among some rhetorical scholars, however, my approach will be gradual and necessarily incomplete to those readers more familiar with psychoanalytic theory.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, I would describe this project as a "sketch." Because I am attempting to introduce psychoanalysis with the example of something more familiar to rhetorical scholars, I begin with a discussion of the figure of the demagogue, whose flashy rhetoric, extreme style, and paradoxical emotional appeals lend themselves to psychoanalytic explanation. More specifically, I identify the emotional appeal as that place in rhetorical theory that is most readily supplemented by psychoanalysis. In general, rhetorical scholars have relied on a one-dimensional, instrumentalist account of the role of emotion in persuasion, and I argue that a psychoanalytic understanding of "desire" helps us to explain better the *feeling* of being moved by a rhetor's speech, most especially a demagogue.

After describing how psychoanalysis alters our understanding of the emotional appeal, I then advance a more focused argument to illustrate the kinds of insights psychoanalysis can offer rhetorical scholars: demagogic rhetoric is goaded by the psychical structures of neurosis, frequently (mis)recognized by rhetorical scholars in terms of "feminine" and "masculine" style. Gendered styles, I suggest, are actually misleading symptoms of the deeper, psychical structures of hysterical neurosis and obsessional neurosis. In distinction from the hysteric, who constantly identifies him or herself with the object of another's desire, the demagogue is an obsessional neurotic, righteously complete, frequently obscuring or erasing audiences as mere objects at the exact moment of professing his or her love for them.

Ironically, psychoanalysis suggests that the obsessional rhetor appeals to audiences precisely because of his or her apparent completeness and lack of need for them—because he *hystericizes* audiences by claiming to bring order to chaos, thereby representing strength, resolve, and absolute autonomy (viz., phallogentrism). Understanding the psychical structures of obsession and hysteria as dialectical modes of charismatic encounter, I conclude, helps us to, first, explain the complexities of the figure of the southern demagogue in interpersonal terms; second, explain how the emotional appeal (*pathos*) is inseparable from character (*ethos*) in a psychoanalytic register; and third, explain why gendered styles are really symptoms of the deeper psychical structures. I conclude by locating the tension between traditional and psychoanalytic modes of rhetorical criticism in differing conceptions of the rhetorical agent.

### **Desire and the Figure of the Demagogue**

Although scholars do not agree on the central characteristics of the demagogue, they do agree on who counts as one.<sup>5</sup> Among the many politicians that are held out as exemplars of “demagoguery,” Long is among the most popular, so much so that his figure is in many ways a measure for the rest. Drawing on past research, below I endeavor to describe the figure of the demagogue as an individual who causes the desiring of audiences with emotional appeals, using the primary exemplar of Long. As we will see, psychoanalysis provides a theory of desire that helps to explain why and how the emotional appeals of the demagogue work.

#### *Huey P. Long as the Defining Exemplar*

Most of the rhetorical scholarship on demagoguery focuses on the skills and timeliness of the rhetor. In retrospect, the combination of Long’s skills and the timeliness of his ascent to

power are so uncanny that his career has been likened to “the theme for a motion picture scenario, except for the fact that it happened” (Farley in Bormann 244).<sup>6</sup> Long is simultaneously one of the most hated and beloved political figures in the “New (or post-reconstruction) South.” The subject of numerous books, films, and documentaries, Long’s notoriety unquestionably stems from this unique style of statecraft and public address (see Boulard; Bormann; Hogan and Williams, "Rusticity"; Jeansonne; Long, *Every* ; and Williams, "The Gentleman"; Williams, *Huey*). He rose to state and national fame as an eloquent, charming, and sometimes buffoonish outsider wielding a polarizing and populist rhetorical style. For most of his political career, he attacked the unequal distribution of wealth and the lack of educational opportunities for the poor. As governor, his popularity soared as a result of many state-sponsored gifts: he abolished the poll tax; new roads were constructed and paved throughout Louisiana as a result of his policies; children in the public school system that Long championed received free textbooks; he built what was once the premiere, land and sea grant educational institution of the south, Louisiana State University, and insisted on the unparalleled excellence of its football team, the Tigers; he established free hospitals and attempted to socialize healthcare; and he rallied support for the construction of new, opulent state buildings that included a brand new governor’s mansion (which was deliberately modeled after the White House to reflect Long’s presidential ambitions) and, of course, the New State Capitol building.

Long’s oratorical skills were exceptional. Harold Mixon notes that he was renowned for “his ability to adapt his appeals with equal ease to audiences in Louisiana’s Protestant north as well as those of the Catholic south” (Mixon 184). Many scholars have suggested that his deliberately polarizing rhetoric worked by arousing the anger and hopes of the working poor, many of whom lacked the basic, everyday conveniences most of us take for granted today, such

as running water and electricity. Ernest Bormann notes that although on the national stage Long was initially received as a “clown and a typical southern demagogue,” in Louisiana “Long was taken seriously indeed” (Bormann 214). So seriously, in fact, that on a September Sunday in 1935, he was killed as a result of an assassination attempt by the son-in-law of a political rival. The monuments erected to his political career signify the significance of Long’s mystery and memory to Louisianans past and present.

Although Bormann suggests that Long is held up as a “typical southern demagogue,” the meanings of this label vary from one scholar to the next. According to the *OED*, the ancient meaning of “demagogue” is what most of us today would term a populist. The more contemporary usage, however, is “a political agitator who appeals to the passions and prejudices of the mob in order to obtain power or further his own interests.”<sup>7</sup> Bormann’s characterization of Long underscores the association of demagoguery with southern populism, and from a historical vantage, Cal M. Logue and Howard Dorgan have demonstrated that the demagogue is almost always identified as male. Further, Logue and Dorgan suggest that the study of the figure of the demagogue can be reduced to three caricatures: an insincere, immoral opportunist; a charismatic leader who inflames passions for political ends; and a kind of apocalyptic preacher who amplifies a sense of crisis in order to reveal a novel, faith-based solution (3-6). Central to both the *OED* definition and these rhetorical caricatures, then, is the role of emotional appeals, which are usually described in a pejorative manner.<sup>8</sup> In other words, no matter how one defines or characterizes the demagogue, we can at least describe the figure as a *passionate man who appeals to the emotions of an audience*. To understand demagoguery better, I argue that we need a more sophisticated account of the “emotional appeal” identified as his primary rhetorical signature.

*Demagogic Desire and the Emotional Appeal*

With few exceptions, there is little work in the theory of the rhetorical tradition that helps us to understand the way in which the emotional appeal works psychologically.<sup>9</sup> In general, since the time of Aristotle the study of the emotional appeal tends to fall into either descriptive or instrumentalist accounts. In *On Rhetoric*, for example, Aristotle discusses the emotional appeal (*pathos*) in mostly descriptive terms. Emotional appeals have psychological effects on the minds of audiences, insofar as emotions are defined as “mental states,” such as “pity, anger, shame,” and so on (Lee 67). Although the second book of *On Rhetoric* devotes large sections to the emotional appeal, the discussion takes on a pragmatic, behaviorist tone (119-215). As Lee explains, from Aristotle’s point of view, the rhetorician should “devote particular study to the range of several emotions so that each will be understood psychologically along with the practical measures necessary to evoke it” (71). Such a hydraulic model of the emotional appeal (do this to produce that) would persist until the field of psychology began to emerge in the eighteenth century and work by figures like George Campbell began to emphasize more strongly the psychological basis of emotions, appetites, and passions.

Arthur Walzer has argued that Campbell’s *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* is the most “complete and coherent account of persuasion that we have,” but that “we must shift our focus from epistemology to psychology” to understand why this is the case (84, 73). What is particularly novel about Campbell’s approach to rhetoric is the centrality he places on the passions: “when persuasion is the end, passion also must be engaged. If it is fancy which bestows brilliancy on our ideas, if it is memory which gives them stability, passion doth more, it animates them. To say that it is possible to persuade without speaking to the passions, is but at best a kind of speculative nonsense” (77). The “passions are the source of energy that enables

action and the source of values that enable choice,” meaning that without them, the human being is a mere zombie, a biological creature of pure instinct (Campbell 78).<sup>10</sup> Despite the important development Campbell’s theory of persuasion represents, however, Walzer admits that his discussion of the passions in relation to the emotions and sentiment is somewhat ambiguous, and his approach is more philosophically descriptive than explanatory (Walzer 74). I suggest that if we reframe the emotional appeal as an attempt to channel and invite a psychoanalytic understanding of desire a useful framework emerges. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the emotional appeal of a demagogue becomes that *quality, characteristic, or part* of a given speaker that is able to stimulate the desiring of an audience, something that has often been described with the elusive concept of “charisma.”<sup>11</sup>

So what, then, is desire? From the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis, desire refers to the *unconscious wishes* of an individual that, by definition, cannot be satisfied. Desire is often contrasted with human needs and demands.<sup>12</sup> Human need refers to purely biological needs (e.g., hunger). Demand refers to a request for something (an object, a deed, a gesture, and so on) from another, and varies in degrees. Demand is articulated to a position of helplessness or openness to another, and as a performative it is rooted in the attempts of infants to meet their needs in speech: insofar as human infant cannot meet its needs, it must use speech (usually nonsense “screams” and “cries”) to do so.<sup>13</sup> Later demand usually evolves from a fixation on this or that thing into symbolic demands for love (recognition by another) and other objects. In a sense, demand is thus a middle point on the way to becoming a self-conscious person open to the unconscious and therefore open to desiring. When one renounces demands or requests from specific others to be satisfied, she becomes more acutely aware of what Lacan terms desire (see Evans 34-35; Lacan, *Encore* 126).

Desire, argues Lacan, “begins to take shape in the margin in which demand rips away from need,” meaning that it is a kind of remainder or surplus that emerges at the very moment of the subject’s entry into the symbolic or linguistic world, which self-consciousness represents (Lacan, *Écrits* 299).<sup>14</sup> As a subject of language, a person can reflect on him or herself as a discrete being, and in so doing, is forever severed from infancy, from being a creature of pure biological need. The subject is necessarily a subject of the symbolic and, in a sense, can “never go back” to an assumed, mythical moment of complete harmony or oneness. A yearning to return to a prior state of harmony and completeness (e.g., that intrauterine heaven in which needs were met without demand via the umbilical chord) is desire, desire to traverse or close-up or complete or fill a vacuum or “gap.”<sup>15</sup> In short, desiring is constituted on a “lack” that the symbolic introduces; rhetoric, broadly conceived of here as representation, signification, or symbolicity, inaugurates desire.<sup>16</sup>

The general understanding of desire as “lack” alters how rhetoricians have thought of the emotional appeal. Traditionally, the emotional appeal has been discussed in terms of a rhetor’s ability to produce or promise something that the audience wants (Desire → Object). So, for example, Aristotle suggests one can enflame an audience’s anger through the symbolic destruction of a person (the object) that has insulted or belittled them (Aristotle 124-130). The psychoanalytic understanding of desire is very different insofar as *desire has no object*, but rather, is *caused* or stimulated by an object or quality (Cause → Desire).<sup>17</sup> So with the example of anger arousal, the target is really a ruse. As Fink puts it, “desire is pushed, not pulled” (Fink 51). Understood as stimulus to anger, the desirous appeal to enflame an audience has more to do with the way in which the rhetor’s manner, tone, voice, and physical characteristics stimulate the desiring of the audience by becoming a *cause* of, or at least a catalyst for, their desiring. In other

words, a rhetor's ability to turn an audience into an angry mob is not achieved by providing a target for their ire, even though the mob believes that the destruction of this target is the object of their passions. Rather, the rhetor him or herself is the *cause* and the mob identifies with *his or her* desire to have, for example, a political opponent defeated.<sup>18</sup>

I recognize that the present discussion is likely setting off the too-abstract-o-meters of some readers, so let me inject one more corollary and then move to an example: The reason why desire is not object driven is that desire would cease if it was satisfied. With regards to Mick Jagger, you can't always get what you want because, if you did, desire would disappear.<sup>19</sup> As Campbell said of the passions, so we can say of desire: without desire no action is possible and the mind is dead; desire animates thought. Hence desire is ceaselessly metonymic, moving "from one object to the next," involving "a constant slippage of movement. Desire is an end in itself; it seeks only more desire, not fixation on a specific object" (Fink 26). Again, this is not to say that individuals do not believe that their desire is about a specific object; this is what we call "fixation," and fixation is, in a sense, the ruse of the emotional appeal. Indeed, we can define the emotional appeal as the masquerade of demand for desire, the causation of a *seeming* fixation. If the rhetor actually delivered the object of desire (or rather, stopped delivering a series of them), persuasion would cease. Although the rhetor convinces the audience that they really want a given object (Desire → Object), in actuality, she is the cause of their desiring and the ostensible object is ultimately exchangeable with another (Cause → Desire).<sup>20</sup> Let us take, for example, a self-aggrandizing joke that Huey Long gave before a crowded room of dignitaries as he was readying himself for a run for the White House. In a newsreel that presumably ran in northern state theatres, an opening shot presents Huey speaking in a variety of venues inside a series of bubbles, four smaller bubbles in each corner of the screen, and a larger bubble in the middle. In

the center bubble, Long appears in a tuxedo, smiling. A voice over begins: "Presenting his Excellency, Huey Pierce Long, the dictator of Louisiana, the enigma who is making many Americans regret that the United States ever purchased Louisiana." The screen cuts to the contents of the center bubble; Huey appears in the center screen with his arms behind his back. With a smile and a lilting, southern drawl he says:

I was elected railroad commissioner in 1918 [a small smile]; and they tried to impeach me in 1920 [Long leans forward, a bigger smile appears, but his arms still behind his back; louder laughter from the audience is heard]. When they failed to impeach me in 1920, they indicted me in 1921 [Long leans forward again with a bigger smile, and louder laughter comes from the audience]. And I, when I wiggled through that I managed to become governor in 1928 . . . and they impeached me in 1929 [a big smile appears on Long's face, and there is even louder laughter].<sup>21</sup>

In this brief example Long advances a subtle pedagogy of desire in the form of a joke, and its success is measurable in the increasing laughter of the audience at each turn. Long will not give his enemies what they want, eluding them at every step, thereby creating a homology between the desiring of the audience and the desiring of Long's enemies. Mindful of being labeled a demagogue, Long's embrace of insincerity is signaled by his self-characterization as "wiggling" out of impeachments and indictments, as if he is a kind of lovable outlaw. The pull of the emotional appeal here is not reducible to simple identification (e.g., you the audience are like me, Huey, and we share a common enemy of "they"); rather, it is this element of not giving the audience what "they" want: an admission of guilt or a refutation of the charges against him. Long provides neither with a large, toothy smile, and the audience loves him for it. Long is able, in

other words, to cause the desiring of the audience by never giving them what is tacitly promised--by being a tease.

Understanding “desire” in this psychoanalytic sense thus extends a largely overlooked strand in rhetorical theory that focuses on psychological affect, such as Campbell’s understanding of “the passions” as “the energy that enables action,” but also alters the received understanding of the emotional appeal by fusing *ethos* and *pathos*. The emotional appeal is as much an appeal to character as it is to desire, insofar as desire does not exist without the Other. The success of the emotional appeal rests upon the degree to which a given rhetor can cause the audience to identify with the assumed object of *his or her* desiring. For example, Huey Long’s emotional appeals rested on his fundamental quest for political power, which, dialectically, is the desire of the Other, represented by the “people” of Louisiana in the abstract. The success of Huey Long as a demagogue had less to do with his ability arouse anger against his enemies among audiences than with his ability to become the cause of desiring with his emotional deliveries. His appeal was successful because the audience identified with his desire and wanted to become its object as well. Consequently, much like powerful parental figure, Long was loved unconditionally by some and hated passionately by others.

### **Rhetorical Styles and Psychical Structures**

So far I have suggested that the figure of the demagogue is characterized as a passionate man who moves audiences principally by means of the emotional appeal. I noted that the received rhetorical understanding of the emotional appeal tends toward either narrow description or mechanical hydraulics, both of which are unsatisfying and fail to capture the ever-elusive experience of charisma. I argued that an alternate explanation of the suasion of emotional appeal

is that it taps into the unconscious desire of audiences, understood as the push of an unfulfillable wish that is better described as the “desire for the desire of the Other.” I now turn to the issue of the sex and gender of the demagogue, which will take many pages of unpacking.<sup>22</sup> Although the demagogue is almost always identified as a man, his rhetoric is also described as partaking equally in what scholars have referred to as “masculine” and “feminine” styles of address. Unpacking the dynamics behind these assumptions is important because doing so not only helps to provide an account of the demagogue that has not, as of yet, been advanced, but also provides an explanation of demagoguery that takes into account the interpersonal dynamics of persuasion. The feeling of being in the presence of a demagogue is as important--if not more important--than the semantic content of his rhetoric.

Although it is certainly the case that one can specify and locate masculine and feminine rhetorical constructs in contemporary discourse, the long association of the mythic figure of the southern orator with, as Waldo Braden put it, “emotional histrionics,” calls into question the assumption that male orators only began to embrace feminine styles in response to the intimate logics of television in contemporary, “postmodern” campaigns (Braden 17; Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles 337). At least in caricature, the oratory of the southern demagogue of the Old and New South embodied the features Kathleen Hall Jamieson identifies as stylistically effeminate: feminine style is “personal, excessive, disorganized, and unduly ornamental” (76), and as Karlyn Kohrs Campbell has argued, is also inductive, participatory, and addressed to an audience of peers (13). Evidence of the male use of feminine style in the age of the telegraph and radio only serves to underscore that, despite a general, well-recognized “essentialist” tendency to associate gendered styles with the biological sex of the rhetor, most scholars who employ the concepts of masculine and feminine styles believe that they are protean and mobile. Indeed, it is precisely

because gendered styles are cultural constructions that enables men to appropriate “feminine” style for ideological ends: as Shawn and Trevor Parry-Giles have persuasively argued, it is more frequently the case that the contemporary use of feminine style does the work of hegemonic masculinity, masking the "patriarchy of contemporary politics" (348). In light of the anti-essentialist understanding of gendered styles, we need to consider whether their continued use as a critical category is *as* helpful or revealing as the analysis of something more fundamental, yet something that is not reducible to biological sex. I submit that a shift from a focus on style to psychical structures helps to explain the persistence of the patriarchal despite the mobility styles.

Psychoanalysis provides us with a non-essentialist category of “structure” that explains, on the one hand, why gendered styles tend to be associated with the biological sexes, but also in a way that maintains that such associations are *entirely socially constructed*. Although from its inception psychoanalysis has pursued the relationship between the cultural (gender) and biological (sex)—indeed, sexuality and sexual differentiation is central to every school of psychoanalysis—it was Lacan who once and for all jettisoned any biological basis for understanding sex. There is not space enough to detail Lacan’s theory of sexual differentiation (“sexuation”),<sup>23</sup> yet one can get a sense of the novelty of Lacan’s approach with reference to the concept of “structure” originally developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss: structures refer to fixed, *social* or symbolic relations “between *loci* which are themselves empty,” meaning that the stability of the structure—precarious as it may be—is located in the relation, not the objects at either end (Evans 194; also see Levi-Strauss 55-66). Consequently, one’s sexual position is not an all-or-nothing category, but a precarious positioning in relation to a symbolic object that is empty of content or substance.<sup>24</sup> From this perspective, rhetoric becomes a trace or symptom of

deeper psychical structures that specify *relations or positions*, not essences. Below, I will suggest that demagogic rhetoric is suggestive of the structures of obsessional neurosis and hysteria, two subject positions that manifest different kinds of rhetoric that is often read, and sometimes mistakenly, in terms of "masculine" and "feminine" style.

### *The Structures of Neurosis*

Many readers are likely familiar with print and television advertisements for the litany of mood altering drugs on the market today, which claim to alleviate the symptoms of a rapidly multiplying number of contemporary "mood disorders": from pre- and post menstrual syndromes, to adult attention deficit disorder, to panic attacks and depression, one pharmaceutical company or another has a pill for it.<sup>25</sup> Psychoanalysis elegantly simplifies this contemporary explosion of disorders, syndromes, and complexes by arguing they are all *symptoms* or traces of a limited number of deeper, psychical structures of subjectivity that form in early childhood (Evans 194-195). This is not to say there is no biological basis for mood disorders. If there is a biological basis for a given mood disorder, however, the symptom will be articulated in a meaningful manner to a psychical structure, and therefore the symbolic and social, including the mark of sex. For the analyst, a given subject's characteristic "structure" tends to fall into three, mutually exclusive categories: neurosis, psychosis, and perversion. The psychotic and perverse subject are the most unusual kinds of subject structures. To greater or lesser degrees, most of us are neurotic, and neurosis comes in two types, obsession and hysteria, which I address in turn.<sup>26</sup>

The obsessional neurotic is an individual who is convinced of his or her completeness and autonomy, and who is resolutely determined to deny the notion of an unconscious or any repressed wish.<sup>27</sup> As Bruce Fink puts it:

The obsessive, as a conscious thinker, ignores . . . that discourse we do not and cannot control which takes advantage of the ambiguities and multiple meanings of words. . . . The obsessive cannot stand the idea of sharing his mouthpiece with that foreign voice, and does his best to keep it down or at least out of earshot.

(Fink 122)

Fink uses an intriguing imaginary scenario to describe the relationship of the obsessive to the Other and the assumed object of his or her desiring: The obsessive neurotic is the kind of person who, while making love to his or her partner, arranges for another love interest to phone during the act. He or she answers the phone and has a conversation while still making love (Fink 124). Such a scenario represents an obsessive fantasy of autonomy: by answering the phone (or even by imaging one is making love to someone else) the obsessive erases or denies the Other as having some control or interest in him or her. The obsessive cannot tolerate the fact that another makes demands on him or her, and by extension, that he or she is not in complete, conscious control. The obsessive fears disappearing or “fading” (aphanisis), and for this reason the object of his desires is *never enough*. That is to say, the obsessive is like an addict of sorts, and for him others act as various, interchangeable containers for a desire that cannot be achieved—an *impossible desire*. For practicing clinicians, because masculinity is culturally associated with self-mastery and self-control, obsessives tend to be men (but not always).<sup>28</sup> Male subjectivity, in other words, is culturally articulated to the psychological structure of obsessional neurosis, and consequently, those who are assigned the role "male" at birth are socialized into obsession.

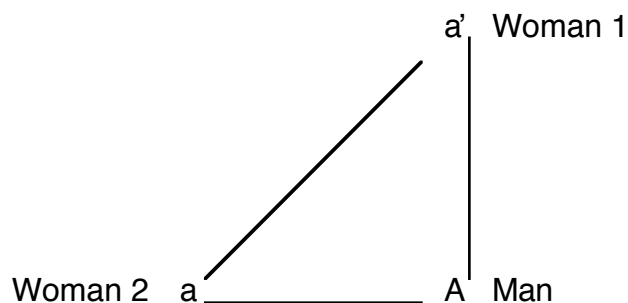


Fig. 5. The “love triangle” of the structure of hysteria

Hysterics, on the other hand, deny or erase themselves, continually establishing an unsatisfied desire.<sup>29</sup> The hysteric identifies with the Other’s desire and wants to be its object. Or in other words, the hysteric desires as if he or she were someone else, identifying with the gaze of another, kind of like an out-of-body experience. Freud paints a scenario, referred to as the “the butcher’s wife,” that helps us understand the hysteric, who, not surprisingly, is usually a woman (Freud, *Interpretation* 116-118). The butcher’s wife (tellingly, Fink underscores that she has no name) notices that her faithful and loving husband flirts with another woman one day who is not his type (Fink 125). Later that night she dreams that she *is* this other woman, literally identifying with her as her husband’s supposed object of desire. Consequently, the hysteric’s subject position “involves a detour via a man,” and the pleasure of her self-erasure is derived by self-deprivation. Whereas the obsessive is singular or monumentally phallic, the hysteric is implicated, as the immortal new wave band New Order has said, in a “bizarre love triangle,” a circuit of desire that always implicates a mediating thirdness (fig. 5).<sup>30</sup>

Insofar as desire is the desire of the Other, and insofar as most people are either hysterics or obsessives, we can already start to see how demagoguery is, on the one hand, explained by neurotic structures and, on the other, related to gendered styles. From a psychoanalytic vantage, demagoguery as such can be understood as a relation between the hysterical and the obsessive, which means that demagoguery is essentially a neurotic relationship between a given rhetor and an audience.<sup>31</sup> Insofar as demagoguery is a dialectic between an obsessional neurotic and a hysterical neurotic, no one can get what they believe that they want or persuasion ceases and the desirous charge of charisma disappears. In other words, (endlessly) delayed satisfaction is central to charisma. The demagogue presents him or herself as a complete, autonomous individual with a tantalizing, emotional power, and his rhetoric will therefore harbor all the hallmarks of a lover who answers his cell phone while making love to you. What has passed as charisma is thus better understood as a demagogue's ability not only to promise love with gifts (the ruse of the emotional appeal), but his simultaneous ability to *withhold* his love, his ability to hint to audiences that *he may be insincere*.<sup>32</sup> The desire the demagogue sets into motion is not reducible to fooling audiences with presents, which tends to be the way in which he is characterized. What has been misunderstood about the rhetorical power of the demagogue is precisely his ability to deploy and maintain suspicion among his lovers, that he may possibly be insincere, that he may have other lovers in play. For example, Long's joke about "wiggling" out of a litany of impeachments and indictments reflects the necessity of the possibility that Long is an insincere criminal; if this wasn't a possibility, the audience would not have laughed. The argument here is that charisma *requires* suspicion, conscious or not, because the magnetism of the demagogue derives power from *lack* (viz., those moved by a demagogue may very well know what is going on, and succumb to his desire anyway!). In a very real sense, this is why, allegorically speaking,

Huey P. Long *had* to be killed, because the jealous lover was an overdetermined, psychological role (and it is no mere coincidence many charismatic leaders die similarly).<sup>33</sup>

Insofar as the obsessional demagogue engenders a circuit of desire, then, charisma becomes the ability to induce or incite hysteria, when we understand hysteria as the psychological structure whereby an individual identifies with the desire of the Other (as opposed to, for example, the mindless abandon and chaos that passes for hysteria in Hollywood disaster films). The demagogue hystericizes audiences, encouraging them to *see themselves as he claims to see them*. This notion is similar, of course, to McGee's understanding of the rhetorical function of "the people" (McGee). The hystericization of the audience, however, is different in respect to the role desire plays in suturing audiences to a given demagogue: the vision of the "people" with which an audience comes to identify is *inextricably* associated with the demagogue. The true believer is not in love with an idealization of herself as a member of this or that party, or Long's famous "Share the Wealth" club, and so on (see Hogan and Williams, "Rusticity" 159-164). She is in love with *his* impossible, perfect people, self-alienated and incapable of satisfying desire. Another way to put this is that demagogues are successful and persuasive only to the extent that audiences derive pleasure from *never truly getting what they are promised*.<sup>34</sup>

In sum, so far I have advanced an understanding of demagoguery that characterizes the experience of charisma in terms of the desirous interplay of the psychological structures of obsessional neurosis and hysteria. Demagogic rhetoric reflects the attempt of a given obsessive rhetor to "hystericize" audiences with emotional appeals (understood not only in terms of the use of language, but also in terms of vocalics, gesture, and other qualities of delivery), thereby setting desire into motion within a circuit, often with the ruse of some object of fixation (real or promised) that betokens love (e.g., new buildings and roads, free textbooks for school children,

and so on). In psychoanalytic terms, charisma is *dynamic* and experienced in the "real" presence of people and objects in sensuous experience, and *cannot* be reduced to mere semantic effects (e.g., the textual meaning of a speech). Consequently, neither a written description of a speaker nor a speech text can capture the desirous dynamics of a charismatic speaker as well as a recording of his or her voice, a photograph of his appearance, or some other "text" that betokens presence, especially a film or television recording that captures the gestures and demeanor of a speaker. It is important to underscore that I am *not* claiming that written text or other forms of speech are insignificant, for all forms of charisma require a language of some sort. I am claiming, however, that some token of presence—perhaps an *imagined* body, for example—is necessary for any theory of charismatic encounter. It is for this reason that rhetorical scholars have yet to produce more than a one-dimensional account of charisma: previous accounts obsess on the skills and individual agency of the demagogue, lacking a theory of desire, which yokes textual and interpersonal elements in a dialectical, intersubjective manner. It is also for this reason that the definitive biography of Huey Long, T. Harry Williams's *Huey Long* (1969), is to a large extent constructed from the recorded accounts of interviewees, which Williams argued provided "an unusually intimate look into the past," presumably because the interpersonal dynamics of oral history better re-presented the dynamic *feeling* of encounters with Long than "conventional sources" (viii-ix).<sup>35</sup> I would suggest that the experience of monuments erected to Huey's honor also similarly better captures this dynamic, interpersonal *feeling* of demagogic charisma: when standing in between Long's grave and the New State Capitol building, one is dwarfed in the presence of something more powerful and much greater than oneself, something that the monuments betoken, yet something that is not reducible to the monuments as such.<sup>36</sup>

Witnessing these larger-than-life structures "in person," one is led to the inevitable conclusion that their creators intended an uncanny experience.

### **Hystericization and Phallic Power: Demagoguery from Speeches to Monuments**

To illustrate the explanatory power of a psychoanalytic understanding of demagoguery, as well as what a psychoanalytic rhetorical criticism might look like, I first turn to a brief examination of Long's speech craft, and then to a reading of the New State Capitol building (fig. 1). Both Long's speeches and the monuments erected to him represent the structure of obsessional neurosis and attempt to situate the auditor and/or spectator as a hysterical subject. As we shall see, solely focusing on Long's language alone fails to capture the way in which his characteristically "phallic" persona helped to engender the desiring of audiences. By taking note of the way in which both Long's discourse and the discourse about him evinces psychical structures, demagoguery coheres not so much as a stereotype as much as it does a cultural role or function that inheres in the popular imaginary.

In the most recent work published on Long and demagoguery, "The Rusticity and Religiosity of Huey P. Long," J. Michael Hogan and Glen Williams argue that many scholars have mistakenly explained away the "fierce loyalty among [Long's] supporters" and "murderous hostility among his critics" by reducing the politician to a stereotype of a southern demagogue, which they characterize as "a thoroughly unprincipled speaker who masterfully exploited the insecurities and prejudices of his ignorant, hillbilly following" (151).<sup>37</sup> By examining the "political persona" Long crafted in public speeches and his famed radio addresses (see Bormann), Hogan and Williams combat the demagogue label by showing how Long "did *not* exhibit many of the definitive characteristics of the classic Southern demagogue" (152).<sup>38</sup>

Hogan and Williams are perplexed that Long's most renowned biographer, T. Harry Williams, argued that Long's 'skill with words' [was] but a 'minor' factor in his political success," and endeavor to show that Long's way with words was, in fact, a *major* factor in two ways: first, in the construction of a plain-speaking, "rustic political persona" in his public speeches; and second, in the creation of a preacher-like persona in his radio addresses (155). Rather than demonstrate how Long crafted these personae in a text (e.g., the Aristotelian establishment of *ethos* in a single speech), Hogan and Williams range across a wide variety of texts demonstrating how Long's "rustic" and "preacherly" personae were established and maintained serially. The frequent recourse of scholars to the body of Long's rhetoric, as opposed to a singular speech, is demonstrative of the import of Long's extra- or meta-textual, parental "persona" to his emotional appeals, and, to some extent, the relative unimportance of the particular content of his speeches. Two central examples from Hogan and Williams' analysis betoken a willful misunderstanding of T. Harry Williams' claims about the limits of Long's verbal power, calling attention to the problems of obsessing on language alone as well as demonstrating the utility of psychoanalytic concepts.

Perhaps because extant, full-length stump speeches by Long are hard to come by, Hogan and Williams resort to Long's autobiography, *Every Man a King*, in search of his "self-portrait as a rube with remarkable rhetorical talents" (157). They isolate the "tear-jerking peroration" of a speech Long gave in St. Martinsville, Louisiana under the "Evangeline Oak immortalized by Longfellow" during the 1928 gubernatorial race as an representative example Long's talent:

And it is here, under this oak where Evangeline waited for her lover, Gabriel, who never came. This oak is an immortal spot, made so by Longfellow's poem, but Evangeline is not the only one who has waited here in disappointment. Where are

the schools that you have waited for your children to have, that have never come?  
 Where are the roads and the highways that you send your money to build, that are  
 no nearer now than ever before? Where are the institutions to care for the sick and  
 disabled? Evangeline wept bitter tears in her disappointment, but it lasted through  
 only one lifetime. Your tears in this country, around this oak, have lasted for  
 generations. Give me the chance to dry the eyes of those who still weep here!

(Long 99)

Although Hogan and Williams isolate this passage as an example of Long's mastery of the emotional appeal, they never explain why this passage would have moved an audience.<sup>39</sup> If we understand Long's allusion to Longfellow's *Evangeline* as establishing an allegorical relationship between an obsessive and a hysteric, however, suddenly the rhetoric's appeal begins to make sense. *Evangeline* is an 1847 epic poem, no doubt very familiar to Louisianans, which tells the story of two expelled Acadians who are separated on their wedding day, Evangeline Bellefontaine and Gabriel Lajeunesse. Once Evangeline arrives in Louisiana, she discovers that Gabriel had preceded her but departed for the Ozarks; she is overcome with sadness under an oak tree. The key to understanding the emotional appeal of Long's reference to *Evangeline* concerns how he positions himself, not as Gabriel returned, but as another lover who has the power to "dry the eyes" of generations. The implied auditor or "second persona" in this brief passage is doubly hysterical: on the one hand, it is the persona of a people *like* *Evangeline*, waiting in hope for something to arrive; on the other hand, through the vehicle of the story of romantic longing, the audience identifies with Long's desire for a "chance" to dry their eyes (see Black 109-119). Unquestionably, this emotional appeal works because of the real-life hardships experienced by the audience in St. Martinsville. Yet it also works because Long positions the audience as a

passive hysteric, as a subject of lack who desires what Long desires. In other words, the ruse of the identification is with Gabriel or some other prince charming; what the audience really identifies with is Long's vision of them as Evangeline and *his* desire to take care of them.

Yet Long's poetic allusions are not enough to explain how audiences are *moved*; the tone timbre of Long's boastful, masculine voice unquestionably played a role. Perhaps for this reason, Hogan and Williams then turn their attention to Long's preacherly tone in his many national radio addresses. "Combining colloquial, even ungrammatical language with folksy analogies and emotional appeals, he 'chatted' informally about a wide range of topics" on the radio (Hogan and Williams 159). Hogan and Williams draw special attention to how long "lived up to his reputation as a 'master' of emotional appeals" by reading newspaper stories in support of his "Share the Wealth" campaign:

It was bitterly cold. Frail Mrs. Ella Martindale huddled with her four children close to an insufficient stove. The baby, 5 months old, wailed fitfully in fever under blankets on the floor.

All awaited return of Murrian Martindale, the father, who promised when he left for his shift as a cab driver that 'I'll bring something to eat, some way.' . . . . A strangling cough wracked the infant girl. The mother acted in desperation. Whirling blankets around the baby and a ragged coat around her own shoulders, she ordered the oldest girl to watch the other children. She raced from the room, carrying the sick child.

Mrs. Martindale had no car fare but she went. She walked—six blocks— with the thermometer at 16 above zero. She stumbled on the steps to the hospital.

"My baby," she sobbed to a nurse, "she's sick." The nurse peered into the blankets, then took the little bundle.

"She's dead," she said. (Hogan and Williams 160-161)

Curiously, Hogan and Williams pass over this example as self-evident without commentary.

From a psychoanalytic vantage, however, much more is going on here than "disturbing" portraiture. First, it is important to underscore that Long did not compose this rhetoric, that these are not his words. Long merely lent these words a voice, and in doing so, hijacked the structure newspaper stories create between reporters and readers: an all-knowing subject reporting on the impotence of (its) subjects. In other words, Long is stepping into a rhetorical field that pre-figured him; he is not the source of invention. Second, the love object of the (dead) infant creates an audience identification with the mother who cannot provide for it, a variation of Evangeline. In other words, the audience is placed into an imaginary position of lack, as both the failed mother and Evangeline are feminized figures who have lost their love objects.

Indeed, when one consults Long's rhetoric in his autobiography and speech craft, one repeatedly recognizes the obsessive-hysteric structure: the second persona or idealized audience is routinely described in passive and helpless terms, while Long always positions himself as the opposite, a superhuman impervious to attack. Ultimately, hysterical subject positions demand obsessives because the structures cohere and sustain desire together. This is why Long consistently and repeatedly modeled the *opposite* of lack. In one stump speech, for example, he said:

[My enemies] will tell you that I carry a pistol. You bet your sweet life. I admit that at certain times I carry a pistol, and sometimes, two of them. . . . Not only that, but at times they will tell you I use strong language. Well, I am not going to

deny that. I just want to tell you that when you go through with what I have gone through and keep from cursing a little bit, you needn't worry about the Saints Yonder, because you will have one right here. ("Gov. Long" n.p.)

The alignment of weaponry, strong language, and Long's persona as "demagogue" is not coincidental: they connote an absence of lack or need. As T. Harry Williams argued, Long's "skill with words was only one of several factors that explain his success, and a minor one at that." He continued that "the quality above all others that a mass leader must have is audacity—a boundless self-confidence . . . a brazen courage . . . and a daring imagination" (Williams, "The Gentleman" 18-19). Williams noted that Long was "pure act," meaning that his charisma could not be reduced to his words. From a psychoanalytic vantage, this notion of "pure act," the idea that Huey was more than his words, is unmistakably "phallic" (obsessives are typically associated with the phallus, of course). Insofar as demagogic charisma is *not* reducible to Huey's "skill with words," we might look at other "texts" to get a better sense of his phallic function.

So, what is the phallus? The monuments mentioned at the opening of this essay (figs. 1 and 2) represent the structures of obsessional neurosis in characteristically phallic terms, meaning that the principle way in which a feeling of charismatic power is created concerns the fetishization of each monument as symbol of power, cultural, political, and patriarchal. Although the point is obvious, it bears repeating that that phallus is *not* a penis. In clinical practice, obsession tends to be aligned with men and hysteria with women because individuals are socialized into them from birth (just as we are "named" before birth, so too are we assigned a sex and interpellated into various ideological norms), and this alignment is often described as a relation to the "phallus," the signifier for the *power* of signification as such.<sup>40</sup> Just as the New State Capitol is not a penis, so the phallus is not a penis but, as Lacan would eventually suggest,

a symbolic form that represents the presence of desire itself. The relationship of the phallus to the penis is analogous to the vexed relationship between, for example, "feminine style" and the female biological sex: whereas the penis has been crudely and reductively construed as the biological mark of maleness, the phallus has *no essential or necessary relationship to biological sex*.<sup>41</sup> In fact, one of the key benefits of Lacanian psychoanalysis is Lacan's insistence that language or discourse and biology are radically alien to one another, a move that Freud was unwilling to make. For Lacan, the penis is a culturally privileged phallus, but it is not the phallus *per se*. The phallus represents the commonly understood notion of "power," but only in *function* (the "phallic function"). Significantly, the reason why the phallus connotes power is that when the label is associated with an object, the object appears as if it has an agency of its own. So, for example, anything that changes or moves presumably of its own accord is phallic in function for both men and women: the penis becomes flaccid and erect; the womb expands and contracts; a sports car comes and goes; the newborn wiggles uncontrollably (Hill 103-108). In its most abstract rendering, the phallus is the signifier without a signified, representing the ability of language to escape our attempts to control it. Because it moves on its own accord, we do not speak language; language speaks us.

Although the New State Capitol does not move or change of its own accord, insofar as it doubles as a signifier of state governance, it is synecdoche for an obsessive demagogue and his political regime, which expanded radically during Huey Long's seven-year stewardship of the state. In this respect, the building is also a "text," mirroring what Long frequently modeled in his speeches: an agency without *lack*, complete autonomy. Insofar as the demagogic rhetoric is structured by obsessional neurosis, it makes sense to associate the phallus with the demagogue: like the phallus, the demagogue claims to move autonomously and of his own accord (as if to

function as Aristotle's "prime mover"). It is not surprising, then, that the agency of the symbolic betokened by the phallus (as opposed to the agency of individuals in *control* of the symbolic) is strongly reflected in the history of the development of Louisiana's New State Capitol building: despite the fact that the building is overdetermined as "Huey's Monument," like many of his radio addresses in which he read newspaper stories, Long neither designed the building, nor did he oversee its construction, as is often assumed (Kubly 15). That honor goes to the architectural firm of Weiss, Dreyfous and Seiferth, and the contractor, George A. Fuller (who also oversaw the construction of the Lincoln Memorial). Occupied with a recent impeachment trial and dreams of a national office, Long "gave only two instructions to the architects: the building was to be a skyscraper, rather than the usual domed capitol, and it was to depict the history of the state" (Jolly and Calhoun 17).<sup>42</sup> Unquestionably Huey desired a steel-framed skyscraper because it was in keeping with the myth of the self-made man, an obsessional dynamic that continues to underwrite contemporary performances of masculinity (see Catano). Yet, that the monument so completely resembles the biological penis, thereby cuing the phallic function of power, is *not* a consequence of Huey's desire, but is the result of a popular hunger. In other words, Huey was not in control of the symbolic; the symbolic was in control of Huey.

The triangulation of the discursive figure of Long represented by his statue (fig. 2), Louisianans, and the phallic capitol (fig. 1) take on a psychoanalytic significance beyond what is immediately obvious, particularly when the representative of the phallic function in this triangle is understood as a gift from desperate Louisianans to Huey. Not only are these nodes homologous to the "love triangle" of hysteria (and we can also claim that *most* monuments function similarly; see fig. 5); they also betoken the intense desperation of southern poverty. Historians have documented—almost to excess—the "hopeless" and "wretched poverty" of rural

Louisianans in the early part of the twentieth century, primarily in order to explain Long's popular appeal, and secondarily the appeal of fascism (see Jeansonne).<sup>43</sup> "Huey's Monument" is a colossal phallus precisely because it represents the desperation of his constituency and the soul-deep need of the impoverished; it represents what Huey Pierce Long represented to Louisianans and to himself, a complete, energetic, self-made man impervious to want and need, a creature of absolute symbolic and economic autonomy, a masterful signifier without a signified. The New State Capitol is metonymy—or better, synecdoche—for a man whose visage rested along side none other than Jesus Christ above the fireplace mantles of many of his constituents. From a metadiscursive perspective, Louisianans gave Huey what they thought he wanted, identifying with his gaze and his object of desire, identifying what he wants. They gave him a monument that reflected the way in which he always addressed them: as an obsessional neurotic addressing a hysteric. They gave him a monument to power. They gave him an impossible, sublime object. Indeed, they gave him the gift of death.<sup>44</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks: Toward Critical Hystericization**

In this essay I have introduced a number of psychoanalytic concepts—desire, obsession, hysteria, and the phallus—in order to sketch how psychoanalytic rhetorical criticism might proceed. I have termed this introduction a "sketch" because, owing to the vast body of psychoanalytic literature and the relative paucity of psychoanalytic approaches in rhetorical studies, there is much work to be done in our field before a psychoanalytic rhetorical criticism will be allowed to stand on its own terms. Nevertheless, to demonstrate the utility of psychoanalysis for critical insight, I advanced a theory of the demagogue as an obsessional neurotic who asserts a phallic position in order to hystericize audiences. I illustrated this theory

along the way with reference to the speech craft of Long, as well as two public monuments erected to his legacy in downtown Baton Rouge, Long's grave and the so-called New State Capitol building that towers above it (see fig. 6). I argued that if we understand the demagogue as an individual who hystericizes audiences, then the mystery and allure of the demagogue, his “charisma,” is easier to explain as a function of desire in interpersonal space, which is *not* reducible to words.

In this essay I also suggested that a psychoanalytic understanding of demagoguery suggests two shifts rhetorical thinking. First, against the original Aristotelian distinction between *ethos* and *pathos*, demagogic persuasion indicates that emotional appeals are always already character appeals, and are indissolubly wed in terms of some trait or characteristic of the orator. Emotional appeals work because they function paternally at an unconscious level to stimulate the question of desire (“what does s/he want from me?”). Second, the theory of demagoguery I have outlined has implications for what has passed as “masculine” and “feminine” style. Insofar as most scholars who have worked with the categories of gendered styles believe that they are mobile, I have suggested that masculine and feminine styles are symptoms, often misleading ones, which betoken the deeper structures of neurosis. Insofar as patriarchal order is typified by the neurotic obsessive, it is easier to understand how, for example, a figure like the former president Bill Clinton evinces all the symptoms of an obsessive while addressing publics in a feminine manner (Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles). An understanding of the relation between obsessive and hysterical structures also makes it easier to understand the popularity of resolutely phallic presidents like George W. Bush.

I want to close by suggesting that a psychoanalysis implicates a *telos* for criticism that has already been called for in multiple ways, but which, perhaps, my reading of Long's



Fig. 6. The Louisiana Capitol building dwarfs the statue of Long

demagoguery helps make easier to see.<sup>45</sup> When beheld at the same time (fig. 6), Huey's likeness and the largest monument erected to his memory represents the hystericization of the obsessively neurotic: the hands of Huey's likeness are thrown back, his eyes open in awe, as he beholds the sublime object erected to *his memory*. Unlike the historical Huey, the statuesque figure of Huey is open to the phallus, the signifier of the lack of the Other. These monuments materialize the fear of the historical Huey, which is his fading or disappearing in the presence of the Other (aphanisis). Indeed, these monuments in dialogue abstractly signify the direction of the analytic treatment by a therapist of the obsessively neurotic, whereby the absent third is the analyst:

If analysis is to have any effect on the obsessive, the analyst must foster hysterization; cast in the role of Other by the analysand, the analyst must continually bring to bear his or her desire . . . in order to thwart the . . . shutting off of the obsessive. . . . Analysts who work with obsessives are quite familiar with the obsessive's tendency to talk on and on, to associate and interpret all by himself, pay no heed to the analyst's punctuations or interpretations. Indeed, the analyst often has to make a considerable effort to stop the obsessive from bulldozing right over his or her intervention . . . . (Fink 131)

As critics interested in charismatic historical figures, perhaps our homologous charge is to hystericize such figures in order to show how the symbolic—how rhetoric—is in more control of them than they are of it. For those of us who find psychoanalysis useful, one important critical task will be to show how persuasion is located neither in the speaker, nor in the audience, but in the inter- and intrasubjective field of desire. In other words, coming to terms with the subject of the symbolic implicates a theoretical program that hystericizes the most prized figure of rhetorical studies: the self-transparent agent or individual (see Biesecker 147-153; present author). In this respect the strangely phallic monuments articulated to the figure of Huey memorialize not only the death of the demagogue, but also the self-transparent, autonomous subject that subtends him.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In the film, two teenage boys, Beavis and Butthead, travel the country in search of their beloved stolen television set and, along the way, are hired by a prostitute in Las Vegas to search for her husband. In one scene, the two ninth-graders are in Washington DC and behold the Washington Monument for the first time; the boys giggle uncontrollably without dialogue.

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent account of this colorful history, see Parent's *Inside the Carnival*.

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<sup>3</sup> More specifically, I am adopting a position some would recognize as inspired by Jacques Lacan. For the broad strokes of a Lacanian approach, see Fink's *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, esp. 1-49.

<sup>4</sup> Although many scholars will declare there is room for everyone when discussing critical methods in public, blind reviewers are not so hospitable. In the latest rejection letter inspired by this essay, a reviewer wrote: "I personally rebel against authors who pontificate about 'our charge' as rhetorical critics and demand radical "shifts" in our "rhetorical thinking"—as if, in their superior wisdom, they finally have discovered the "right" way to do rhetorical criticism. And I especially resist suggestions that we must all change our 'rhetorical thinking' to embrace this sort of wacky, psychoanalytical approach."

<sup>5</sup> For the classic accounts of demagoguery, see Bennett; Larson; and Luthin.

<sup>6</sup>The films were all but destined: See *All the King's Men* (Columbia Pictures, 1950); *Lion in the Streets* (Warner Brothers, 1953), and *Kingfish: A Story of Huey P. Long* (Turner Home Entertainment, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. "demagogue."

<sup>8</sup> In his influential study, *Southern Demagogues*, Allan Louis Larson is careful not to deride emotional appeals. "For him, a demagogue is simply a political leader or public figure which operates through appeals to the passions," which may or may not be insincere (in Logue and Dorgan 5).

<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche's discussion of rhetoric in relation to the body and music is a notable exception, as well as George Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (see Campbell; Nietzsche; and Walser).

<sup>10</sup> Such observations find contemporary support in the work of cognitive neurology (see Damasio, *Descartes'*; and Damasio, *Feeling*).

<sup>11</sup> My understanding of charisma is more in keeping with those who have sought psychological accounts based on the qualities or characteristics of individual speakers. I disagree with the approach to charisma taken by J. Michael Hogan and Glen Williams, which, protests to the contrary, displaces a focus on the psyches of audiences and speakers with an attention to the charismatic "message." For them, the proper "rhetorical" approach to charisma is to focus on the content of the message. As I try to show in this essay, where charisma is concerned, the ways in which the speaker creates a circuit of desire or suasion with the materiality of speech and bodily presence is just as important as the message; in my account, vocalics and gesture *may* be more significant rhetorically than what the speaker actually says. For comparison, see Hogan and Williams, "Republican"; and Hogan and Williams, "Rusticity"). For an excellent review of the literature on charisma, see Treat.

<sup>12</sup> I should stress that the following account is an interpretation of Lacanian concepts with rhetorical ends in mind. As such, my reading of Lacan is immediately *unfaithful* to the original purpose of his theory: therapeutic practice. What follows is, therefore, necessarily a distortion.

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted, however, that reducing an infant's demand to mere biological need is a meaning that is assigned after the utterance by the parents; the cry could just as easily be interpreted as the desire for human recognition and touch. Again, I am sacrificing the complexity of Lacan's schema for clarity of introduction (see Fink 235, n4).

<sup>14</sup> For the distinction between desire and demand, see Fink 42-71; and Lacan, *Seminar II* 221-234.

<sup>15</sup> Alternately, Kenneth Burke might put it this way: to become a "symbol-using animal" one *must* become the "inventor of the negative" (see Burke, *Language* 3-22).

<sup>16</sup> Although relatively new to rhetorical studies, the theorization of desire as “lack” has a number of opponents. For the strongest and most persuasive arguments against the views I forward here, see Gilles Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*. It is my sincere belief that rhetoricians in general must have a basic understanding of psychoanalytic theory before engaging the work of Deleuze and Guattari, and that so far, there have been very few attempts in rhetorical studies to work through psychoanalysis. Most of the work conducted in rhetorical theory utilizing Deleuzian thought assumes a basic knowledge of psychoanalysis, and I worry that we are starting to run into a “throwing out the baby with the bathwater” kind of situation in respect to Freud, Lacan, Jung, and others. I conceive of my current research program, the integration of rhetorical and psychoanalytic theory, as my own working-through of psychoanalysis, perhaps so that I can better understand and integrate the thought of Deleuze in the future. In other words, we ought not rush to 3 without getting a bit intimate with number 2.

<sup>17</sup> The parenthetical diagrams here are taken from Fink 51.

<sup>18</sup> Alternately stated, the emotional appeal seeks identification of the “cunning” variety—whether or not the rhetor is aware of what she is doing (see Burke, *Rhetoric* 35-36).

<sup>19</sup> Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, “You Can’t Always Get What You Want,” performed by the Rolling Stones. *Let It Bleed*. Abkco, 1969/2002, compact disk. Also hear Robert Smith, “Never Enough,” performed by The Cure. *Mixed Up*. Elektra, 1990, compact disk.

<sup>20</sup> For Lacan, the “cause” of desire is the *objet a*, which can be anything, but it is often a quality, characteristic, or part of a person that sets desire into motion. This “cause-object,” as it were, can be mistaken for what is called a “part-object,” such as a woman’s breast, or it can be the timbre of someone’s voice, a mannerism, even a characteristic gesture. This quality, characteristic, or thing unconsciously reminds the subject of her first desiring in childhood. Fink explains that as infants we soon learn that “the more completely we satisfy [our parents’] wishes, the more love we are likely to win from them.” Unfortunately, our parents do not always “tell us what they want,” confining themselves “to telling us what they do *not* want, punishing us after the fact for a faux pas” (Fink 53-54). Consequently, desire is inaugurated in the self-conscious subject in the form of a question: “What is it they want (*Che vuoi*)?” In this respect, Lacan defines desire as a question and quest for the desire of the Other: “*Le désir de l’homme, c’est le désir de l’Autre*,” which translates variously as “man’s desire is to be desired by the Other,” “man’s desire is for the Other to desire him,” or “man desires the Other’s desire for him” (Fink 238, n11). Desire is thus *never* one’s own, insofar as it is what the Other desires (that is, one internalizes what is assumed to be the desire of the Other). One models the desiring of the Other at the same time that one wishes to *be* the object of the Other’s desiring. Technically speaking, I should add here that the big Other, denoted with the Capital “O,” represents the Symbolic and the unconscious, while the little other, denoted with a lower-case “o,” represents another person “like me.” For more detail on the complexities of this distinction, see (references omitted for purposes of review).

<sup>21</sup> The newsreel clip appears in the second chapter of Ken Burn's DVD documentary, *Huey Long* ([1985] 2002).

<sup>22</sup> And even then, I stress, only a sketch. Insofar as psychoanalysis is the signifier for a universe of conceptual terrain, the best approach anyone can achieve in an article is necessarily a partial one. What follows is, admittedly, an incomplete and beginning step.

<sup>23</sup> See both Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose's introductions to their edited collection of essays by Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality* 1-57; Fletcher; and the Master himself, Jacques Lacan, *Encore*.

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<sup>24</sup> This object is the symbolic phallus, which, again, owing to length constraints and the complexity of the theory, I leave for another essay (see Mitchell and Rose, esp. 1-85).

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of the deceptive, “biological” basis of these disorders, which are usually created for economic reasons, see (reference withheld for purposes of blind review).

<sup>26</sup> There is actually a third: phobia. However, phobic structures are not subject structures like obsession and hysteria, and operate rather as a kind of threshold for obsession, hysteria, and perversion (see Fink 163-164).

<sup>27</sup> For a description of the symptoms of obsession, see Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis 281-282.

<sup>28</sup> Incidentally, obsessives are particularly prone to the virgin/whore dialectic, another reason why Mel Gibson will eventually be destroyed, at least symbolically, for his epic *The Passion of the Christ* (2004).

<sup>29</sup> For a description of the symptoms of hysterical neurosis, see Laplanche Pontalis 195-196.

<sup>30</sup> New Order, “Bizarre Love Triangle,” performed by New Order. *Brotherhood*, Qwest, 1986, compact disk.

<sup>31</sup> I should be careful to underscore here that by characterizing demagoguery as neurosis I do not mean to pathologize the discourse, but quite the opposite. Insofar as a psychoanalytic understanding of subjectivity holds that none of us are “normal,” then demagoguery becomes a more conspicuous or pronounced example of persuasive oratory in general. In other words, while we are attempting to account for the reasons why orators such as Huey Long were persuasive and successful, there is an important sense in which the psychoanalytic theory of demagoguery explains persuasion in general as a strategy of desire. Indeed, not only are obsession and hysteria *structures*, but they can also be understood as strategies that are designed to *keep desire in play*; the neuroses are processes that work against their own closure, which is what happens by when one becomes “fixated” on some object (See Fink 51).

<sup>32</sup> I have developed this position elsewhere in terms of “the transference.” See (reference withheld for blind review).

<sup>33</sup> The reason that Long's life unfolded like a Hollywood film is precisely because the role of the demagogue, like that of a powerful parent, is scripted in the popular imaginary. Ken Burns' *America Collection* documentary, *Huey Long* (PBS Home Video, 1985) provides a number of stark examples. The film opens with footage of Long on the stump, which is followed by a series of interviews. Three separate elderly and visibly poor individuals share their loving feelings about Long, describing him as “swell” and worthy of much admiration. These scenes are followed by shots of an older woman who proclaims she cannot think of a “Saturday night . . . when we didn't talk about killing Huey Long.” Later interviewees would claim Huey “had to die.”

<sup>34</sup> Lacanian scholars would agree that I would be remiss not to note that the Real as an empty category explains theoretically why no one ever gets what they desire: the Real, that which is betokened by the *objet a*, is a gap in the symbolic. Although we may mistake it as something primordial, it nevertheless does not exist *as meaningful*.

<sup>35</sup> Of course, these presumptions fall into the trap of the dreaded “metaphysics of presence.” Although I do believe that the sensorial experience of interpersonal encounter is better expressed and described interpersonally, I also recognize the feeling of presence—as Derrida has very persuasively warned—is an “illusion.” Lacan would locate the feeling of presence in terms of the Real, a concept which is, in the last instance, meaningless and empty; the Real is a shell, as it

were, with no content inside. Nevertheless, fantasies of presence sustain us and shield us from the true horror of a bottomless lack.

<sup>36</sup> Carole Blair argues similarly for the criticism of monuments and museums in general (see Blair 271-294).

<sup>37</sup> We can, of course, explain such ambivalence by suggesting that Long represented a father figure: a disciplinarian to some and a provider to others. Nevertheless, such a characterization of demagoguery is unfair to the scholarship of Braden, Logue, Dorgan, and others who understood what Cash termed "the Southern Mind" more carefully than Hogan or Williams. A review of the introduction of Logue and Dorgan's *The Oratory of Southern Demagogues* does not comport with Hogan and William's "stereotype," nor do its many essays the sort of "elitist stereotyping" they decry (in fact, the study of southern oratory spearheaded by Waldo Braden at LSU was dedicated to both dispelling and explaining the persistence of southern stereotypes). At the very least, as a son of Georgia and three year resident of Louisiana, I would underscore "hillbilly" is a term better reserved for the great unwashed of north Georgia, Alabama, or Arkansas; there are few hills in Louisiana.

<sup>38</sup> Yet, as I argued earlier, there is no consensus among scholars concerning such "definitive" characteristics. This argument is a straw-person (see Logue and Dorgan 1-11).

<sup>39</sup> They set up the passage, "Long's gift for emotional appeal was legendary," but presume the passage itself is self-evident. This kind of analysis is representative of how rhetoricians have typically dealt with the emotional appeal (as self-evident). What's missing from our account of the emotional appeal in rhetorical studies is a theory of desire—an explanation of what fuels the emotional engine.

<sup>40</sup> The phallus is an exceedingly complex concept in Lacanian psychoanalysis, and what follows is admittedly a gross characterization (See Lacan, "The Meaning" 74-85; Žizek 87-93).

<sup>41</sup> The classic account of reductive, masculinist phallogocentrism is Eva C. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus*.

<sup>42</sup> "Other than specifying that he wanted a tower, Huey Long did not intervene in the design of the capitol. He trusted the architects and gave them a free hand to work out the specifics" (Kubly 17).

<sup>43</sup> Hogan and Williams argue that those scholars who label Long a demagogue are really resorting to a cultural bias and elitist stereotyping, and this is because they (or "we") are uncomfortable with "radical mass politics among poor, uneducated rural folk in the south" ("Rusticity" 151). The charge amounts to calling those who continue to find the term "demagogue" a useful one for describing Long arrogant, bourgeois, and lazy. This move is an *ad hominem* in the service of a straw-person argument. Reading the literature on Long and demagoguery, it is clear the authors—most especially T. Harry Williams—are trying to describe the *emotional readiness* of Louisiana's poor for charismatic leadership, *not* their stupidity or class. Similarly, I have attempted to show in this article how hardship can be quickly yoked to a subject position of hysteria and a circuit of desire established. Perhaps if Hogan and Williams understood emotions as something other than push-pull, click-click hydraulics, they would not have resorted so easily to academic fallacies.

<sup>44</sup> In this respect, the answer given to the question of Huey (indeed, all neurotics model a question) is indeed death, and this is entirely consistent with the structure of obsession. Lacan suggests that each neurotic structure has a corresponding question in respect to identity. For the hysteric, that question is, "what am I, a man or a woman?" For the obsessive, that question is

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Hamlet's: "to be, or not to be?" Extreme obsessives, in their rituals and compulsive assertions of being, always tempt death (see Lacan, *Seminar III* 195-182).

<sup>45</sup> The call is for a "posthumanist" perspective on rhetoric (see Biesecker 140-241; Stormer 257-284; present author).

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