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READING FICTION RHETORICALLY

Neo-rhetoric considers artistic discourse as a means of revealing various problem issues of rhetoric and argumentation. A careful rhetorical analysis of fiction is aimed at the explication of persuasive appeals and rhetorical devices and assessment of their impact on the reader thus going beyond the classical literary perspective. Involving analysis of fiction in a course of Practical Rhetoric stimulates the studies of numerous aspects of argumentation:

- reading strategies (reading as a believer and as a doubter);
- understanding the rhetorical context at the level of diegesis (the level of the characters, their thoughts and actions) and at the level of extradiegesis (the level of the narrative);
- basic concepts of rhetoric (the rhetorical triangle, the enthymeme, the warrant, a genuine argument and a pseudo-argument, etc.);
- means of creating effective logos, pathos and ethos in argumentative discourse;
- audience-based reasoning (appealing to supportive, neutral, or resistant audiences);
- logical fallacies in argumentation, etc.

The four-step strategy for dealing with fiction rhetorically includes an explication of a book's historical and social background, a group discussion of focal study questions, an individual analysis of a problem issue and presenting a final essay:

1. **Context discussion.** It is important to provide biographical information about the authors, as well as the historical, societal, and personal factors that influenced the work. It also helps identify the genre, style, tone, and other important literary elements that might turn out important while reading the literary work.

2. **Study questions.** Discussion guides should come with a handful of questions and answers that demonstrate how to go about analyzing a text. Each question is open for interpretation and argument, but can also be answered by looking directly at the text for details they can combine to produce an answer. In class, teachers can present our study questions to their students and have them write a "devil's advocate" response that differs from the traditional interpretation.

3. **Author's rhetoric.** This part of literary discussion is focused on sharing points of view on the themes, messages, characters, and the author's literary means that help reveal the ideas. You might find it useful to discuss questions connected with character analysis, symbols and allusions, themes and messages.

4. **Feedback and follow up.** Finally, it is important to provide opportunities for individual feedback, when students can summarize their feedback of the literary work in the form of a written paper. A preferable way is to give students a

chance to choose a question or a problematic, controversial issue based on their own perception of the literary work, but in our discussion guide, we also suggest topics for written presentations.

Here we provide an example of a discussion guide based on “Animal Farm” by George Orwell, but a similar plan can be used to discuss any literary work with a rhetorical potential.

I. Context Discussion

Context discussion will be more effective, if you accumulate the most important background information about 1) George Orwell’s literary career, views and contribution to literary world; 2) the genre of “Animal Farm” and its peculiarities; and 3) the historic context of the novel, which is important for further understanding of the messages.

Instructions: Find some information about one of the subjects below and then prepare a presentation of your findings.

1. G. Orwell’s biography (personal life, career, political outlook)
2. G. Orwell’s influence on the language (“newspeak”)
3. The fable (Aesop, La Fontaine, J. Thurber, peculiarities of the genre)
4. Anti-utopia (features, authors, the most famous anti-utopias)
5. J. Stalin. Stalinism (five-year plans, the purges, the personality cult)
6. L. Trotsky (Trotskism), the Stalin-Trotsky conflict
7. The Russian Revolution of 1905-1907
8. The Russian Revolution of 1917
9. World War I (the involvement of Russia)
10. The Russian Civil War (the main results)
11. World War II (the main political powers, the results, the Tehran conference)
12. Totalitarianism
13. Socialism (Karl Marx’s Communist Manifesto and theoretical basics)
14. Communism and religion (Religion in the USSR)
15. Propaganda and ideology of the USSR media

II. Study Questions

Instructions: Read chapters 1-10 and answer the following questions.

Chapter 1.

1. When and where do the events take place? Does the setting matter for the understanding of the novel?

2. Who is Mr. Jones? What can we say about Mr. Jones as a character and how can we comment on this character from the historical perspective?

3. Who is Old Major? How old is he? What does he call the animals for? What is his allegorical meaning?

4. Focus on Old Major’s speech. How is the animals’ position at the farm described? Why are the animals miserable? What is his message? How does he define the new morale? Can you notice logical fallacies in arguments against man as the source of evil and for animal revolution: false dilemmas, straw-man (oversimplification), begging the question (circular reasoning)?

5. What event at the end of Chapter 1 can be correlated with the 1905–1907 Revolution? Why?

Chapter 2.

1. Comment on the differences between Old Major's speech and the principles of Animalism as the result of the pigs' explanation. What aspects of Old Major's speech were reduced and not included into Animalism as a complete system of thought? Why does it seem important?

2. Prove that almost all the commandments are based on the binary friend-or-foe opposition? What is wrong with the ideology (ideas that keep people together) which, instead of definition criteria, provides only the rejection of the criteria typical of another ideology?

3. What were the main difficulties with the promotion of animalism among the different animals? Comment on how the different animals were receptive to animalism taking into consideration the historical context and the correlation between different kinds of animals and social classes of people: peasants, working class, intelligentsia, etc.

4. Separately, comment on the allegorical meaning of the tamed raven Moses. Why does Moses disappear after the Rebellion?

5. How is the Rebellion described in the novel? What is the allegorical meaning of the Rebellion? How do the animals behave after the Rebellion?

Chapter 3.

1. How has the life on the farm changed after the Rebellion? What did the different animals do before the Rebellion and what do they do now? Do the cows, the horses, the hens, and other animals work in the same way as they used to work? What about the pigs? What was their function before and what is it now?

2. Is the pigs' contribution adequate? Do they provide effective management of the farm? Prove your point of view.

3. Give examples of the red tape management that was initiated on the farm.

4. What is the pigs' vision of education? Comment on Napoleon's decision to take away the puppies and to bring them up in his own way.

5. Comment on the episode with the windfalls. What is the difference between the previous episode with the milk? What is Squealer's role in it? Explain the allegorical meaning of Squealer as a fable character. Identify the logical fallacies in Squealer's speech legalizing the pigs' possession of the windfalls.

Chapter 4.

1. What is the attitude of the neighboring farm owners towards Animal Farm? What is the allegorical meaning of Mr. Pilkington and Mr. Frederick? How are their farms described? Why were they frightened of the "rumors of a wonderful farm"? Comment on their behavior from the allegorical point of view.

2. What historic event does the Battle of the Cowshed symbolize? How is the Battle of the Cowshed described? Who was "the most terrifying spectacle"?

3. Were there any victims? What was Snowball's role in the battle? How did the animals celebrate their victory?

4. Who was awarded and how after the Battle?

5. By the way, what symbols does the newly created farm have? (the song, the flag, etc.) Why are symbols so important for people, in general, and what role do they play for the animals?

Chapter 5.

1. Comment on the episode with Mollie's disappearance from the farm. What is known about her further whereabouts? What is the allegorical meaning of Mollie's character?

2. Why does the political opposition between Napoleon and Snowball start to grow? How is it correlated with the historic events and the real historic personalities?

3. What were their voting slogans and promises about? How were they planning to achieve them?

4. How is their disagreement about the windmill described? Comment on Napoleon's behavior and attitude to his opponent. How did Napoleon get rid of Snowball?

5. How was it explained to the animals? Comment on Squealer's role in "rewriting history".

Chapter 6.

1. How is the building of the windmill described? How does the author help us understand that it was extremely difficult for the animals?

2. Why did Animal Farm engage in trade? Why did the animals feel "a vague uneasiness"? How did Squealer explain it to the animals?

3. How did one of the Commandments change after the pigs moved into the house? How did Squealer explain this move to the animals? What logical fallacies can you track in Squealer's speech?

4. By the way, is it possible to change the Constitution? If yes, then under what circumstances and conditions?

5. Why did the windmill fall? Why did Napoleon put the blame on Snowball?

Chapter 7.

1. Why was it important to conceal the starvation and shortages from the world? What did Napoleon order to do to hide starvation?

2. "Whenever anything went wrong it became usual to attribute it to Snowball". Why?

3. How did the story that Squealer told the animals about Snowball differ from what the animals could remember? Why did it finally seem to the animals that they did remember Squealer's version of the events?

4. What happened on the farm one day, in the late afternoon, which made Boxer say: "I would not have believed that such things could happen on our farm"? What historic events is this episode referred to?

5. Why was the song Beasts of England abolished? How was it explained? What is a more realistic explanation?

Chapter 8.

1. How was the Sixth Commandment changed? Who is supposed to decide whether the cause is good enough? How is the political system without division into different branches of power called?

2. Give examples of the text to prove the growth of Napoleon's cult in the animal society. What were the consequences for the animals?

3. Why did Napoleon want to sell the pile of timber? To whom was the timber finally sold? Why was it a surprise for the animals? What was Napoleon's secret agreement with Frederick about? What was the end of the story with the timber? What symbolic references does this episode have with historic events?

4. Summarize the information about the Battle of Windmill: the beginning of the battle, the course of the battle, the death toll, the results. Comment on Boxer's words: "What victory?" Why is it difficult to call it a victory?

5. How was the Fifth Commandment changed? Who did it? How do we know it?

Chapter 9.

1. What is pension? What was the original concept of pension in the animal society?

2. How did the life on the farm change? Prove that "life was hard". Why did Squealer never call the reduction of rations "readjustment"? Give examples of the growing gap between the pigs and the other animals.

3. Why did the pigs allow Moses the raven come back?

4. How did Squealer explain what happened to Boxer?

5. Where did the pigs "acquire the money to buy themselves a case of whiskey"? Why can the betrayal of Boxer be seen as an alternative climax of this novel?

Chapter 10.

1. Summarize the information about the life on the farm after many years. How did the life of the pigs, dogs and other animals change?

2. How was the First Commandment changed? How does it relate to the pigs walking on two legs and carrying whips?

3. Comment on Mr. Pilkington's words: "If you have your lower animals to contend with, we have our lower classes!"

4. What is the animal farm called now? Why was the name Animal Farm abolished?

5. Comment on the final sentence of the fable: "The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which." What message does it send?

III. Author's Rhetoric

Instructions: Choose one of the items below and use ideas from the text and classroom activities to construct your own presentation.

1. Discuss important symbols in the novel. Explain what they suggest and comment on their significance.

2. By referring to 3-4 incidents, show how Orwell creates different kinds of atmosphere.

3. Think about some developments in Soviet history before 1945 that have direct parallels in "Animal Farm".

4. "Animal Farm" is a fable, and therefore its characters represent more general types and specific historical figures. Discuss the most important characters, their individual characteristics, and what they represent.

5. One of Orwell's central concerns is the way in which language can be manipulated as an instrument of control. Think about the ways in which rhetoric and language can be twisted and manipulated into an instrument of social control. Include examples in your answer.

6. The story is not told from the perspective of any particular character, but from the perspective of the common animals as a whole. Discuss what human qualities enable oppression to flourish according to the author. Support your opinion by going back to the text.

7. Discuss "Animal Farm" as a dystopian novel and a fable.

8. Grotesque melodrama is the heart and soul of "Animal Farm". Explain this statement and think about the critical comments the author makes. Who receives a sympathetic portrayal in the novel?

9. Animal Farm is a miniature nation, surrounded by a county full of farms that parallel the other nations of the world. Discuss the characters of Pilkington, Frederick, Whymper, and what they represent.

10. Napoleon's psyche is a very important terrain discussed in the novel. Discuss how Napoleon gradually increases his personal power and privileges, while simultaneously tightening the control over the other animals.

11. Snowball is based on the figure of L. Trotsky. Think about the qualities Snowball displays in the novel as well as the ideas he comes up with. Include textual evidence in your answer.

12. Discuss the power struggle between Napoleon and Snowball.

13. Discuss the most important quotes in the novel. Explain what they suggest and comment on their significance.

14. Discuss the most important intertextual links in the novel (mythological archetypes, fairy-tale plots, historical events).

15. Discuss the effects of the open ending. What resolution to the conflict would you suggest now knowing the course history took?

IV. Feedback and follow up

Instructions: Write an essay of 750-800 words on a topic below or an idea of your own expressing and explaining your point of view.

1. The problem of rhetoric in Animal Farm: language as an instrument of social control and rewriting history.

2. The symbolic meaning of a character / event / imagery in the novel.

3. Logical fallacies in the pigs' rhetoric.

4. Means of creating effective pathos in the author's rhetoric.

5. Means of creating effective ethos in the author's rhetoric.

6. The importance of the historical context for the understanding of the story.

To sum it up, the suggested four-step strategy of reading fiction rhetorically accumulates both the principles of traditional literary criticism and the contemporary approaches to literary analysis concerned with context-oriented interpretation and formal structure of fiction, its language and style. On the other hand, rhetorical reading emphasizes the argumentative potential of texts opening doors for the development of new cognitive perspectives and critical thinking.