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Reflection Paper

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Coms 168

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Rhetorical criticism was the main topic of our earlier discussion at the beginning of the semester. We defined the term in various ways, but ended up with our own definition. At the end of our night’s discussion on what rhetoric and criticism was I defined rhetoric as the ability to persuade, teach, or change another person’s thoughts, feelings, or beliefs according to one’s own credible evidence. Hart and Daughton have many definition as well, “the management of the language of discourse (or the *elocutio*), and if we do not include poetic in our system” (p. 403), “the rhetorical function is the function of adjusting ideas to people and of people to ideas” (413, and “rhetoric is method, not subject” (406)… Rhetoric, therefore, is the method, the strategy, the organon of the principles for deciding best the undecidable questions, for arriving at solutions of the unsolvable problems, for instituting method in those vital phases of human activity where no method is inherent in the total subject-matter of decision” (407). Because of these quotes that I was able to establish or come to conclusion what I thought rhetoric was defined as. I looked for specific key terms that encompassed the definition of rhetoric according to Hart and Daughton. On this day, I thought I understood what rhetoric was. Unfortunately, as time went on and our discussions in class went into more depth, the definition of rhetoric began to become more and more unclear.

The one most confusing problem for me was differentiating between rhetoric and criticism. The two words even by definition sounded very closely the same. But I learned that criticism according to Hart and Daughton is, “that essence in the comparison of an object or act with an implicit or explicit set of norms” (75) or that “rhetorical criticism is the business of identifying the complications of rhetoric, then unpacking or explaining them in a comprehensive and efficient matter” (22). So, according to our text, criticism is a systematic structure, formula, method, or process in which information shared is more than just a basic opinion. The reason for my confusion was that the last example of the definition of rhetoric in the first paragraph mentioned “method” with is like a “process” or a strategy that arrives to solutions of the unsolvable problems. The two definitions were very close in the word choice that I felt interchangeable for the two words.

So, as the discussions went further in during the semester, I remember walking out of class at the end of class feeling more and more lost. As if, the idea of understanding rhetorical criticism was out of my reach. Luckily, with all the conversations we have had in our readings and discussions on the reading comments presented I was able to think critically and analysis the text that were presented to me. I can define rhetoric as a concept now and criticism as an act. I am able to extend the limits of challenging questions that I was not able to articulate before. I can understand a text better with reasons more and less with emotions. I am able to now apply different methods in analyzing different text. For instance, I am now able apply cultural and feminism criticism to particular texts such as “Wanted, A Young Woman to Do Housework” by Barker. I can analysis this text through rhetorical lenses and gain a better understanding of the text. I am able to take a “balcony” stance to analysis a text. I can try and identify a text from an “emic” or “etic” view. After having my meetings with you I feel I have progressed my understanding in rhetorical criticism. I am more confident and have a better idea of what it is that I am doing. I am no longer lost like I once was in the beginning of the semester.

When I met with you for the first time about my term paper, I felt very confident in the direction I was heading. I drew out an outline of what it was I was going to talk about. I was going to talk about rhetorical criticism and use that idea in the texts we were presented with online and in class. Everything we talked about I was going to compose into this 15 to 20 pages term paper. Sadly, I was mistaken. I was devastated that the work I put into preparing for my meeting with you was a complete waste of time, but I was determine to do it right. You asked me to do some more research in Hart and Daughton’s text on Cultural and Feminism Criticism as well as, look into the reading of “Wanted, A Young Woman to Do Housework” by Barker again. The second time around I was able to talk to you about the connection I had with Hart and Daughton’s text with Barker’s text. I felt so much better knowing that when I am making a connection between these two texts and applying these methods to a text, it is then that I am critically analyzing a text. It was a relief to know I was finally going on the right track for this term paper.

In Cultural Criticism, I focused on its values. How they were mostly values of American men that were later valued by every American man and woman. As Americans, we value the idea of making changes to the things we are unhappy with. We strive for change that benefits our well-being. And that change, can be found with the Feminism Criticism. In the Feminism Criticism, there is a need for equality among women from men and women among other women. To overcome, oppression and inequality of treatment with others. Interestingly, both of these criticism intertwined for “Wanted, A Young Woman to Do Housework”. The cultural values that mostly held by men, but these women who are of privileged shared them as well. Barker applied those values to her writing with the intent to help other women make better decisions when choosing someone to work in her home. The tactics that she used were values and traits were deemed as masculine. I found many of the cultural values in Hart and Daughton’s list that existed in Barker’s writing. The connections between the cultural values and feminism criticism helped me realize that when I apply any method or criticism to any text I am able to read beyond the text and understand it from a different perspective without accepting the text as is. I am able to view the text through a rhetorical critics lenses. I am using a method to come to conclusion about the problems in the text without applying my personal feelings and experience.

I have come to conclusions about the writer, Barker, and the way she her thinking was for her time. In a sense, she was an advocate for feminism, because she was helping other women to make good decisions on what to consider when hiring a house worker, but her contradictions are presented when the way she went about expressing her thoughts were of those that contradicts what a feminist is. Because the way she went about it was like a business man or more appropriately a business “woman”. Her values matched those of the American men in the 1950’s. We can say that for a woman to be a woman it can be demeaning and undermining to what we can do, but when a woman portrays men values or characteristics she is questioned for her unfamiliar attitude, thinking, action and or personality.

I understand now that what I just did was a critical analysis of Barker’s text and not simply reporting my findings. It is finding out the answer to this “So, what?” question. And so, what? This analysis means that there is always going to be a battle for women. Even when they are fighting for equality, they still carry masculine values that contradicts their belief. They want to be treated equally yet, still treat women of lower economic status differently than they would want to be treated. It seems like no matter how much these women fight for their equality there is always going to be some sort of other problems arising from those fair treatments. Expectations of a woman with equal rights and treatments are view differently now. The social norms are being shifted on a wide spectrum such as economically and politically.

My attitude on the value of criticism has been altered. In the beginning of the semester, I did not have a good understanding of the use of criticism. Now I can see that it does in fact, “correct and critiques the discourse of individuals and institutional sources of rhetorical discourse in our society”. The difficult of understating the value of criticism was the lack of knowledge about criticism. My attitude was criticism was child-like. I did not think much about like, but understood the social norm of the negative connotation it carried. To be a critic in my understanding before the class was someone who beats down or tear down a text from pessimistic thinking. My thinking of criticism was not much different than those who have not been taught was it means to critic a text. When I told my friends that I was majoring in Communications with an emphasis on criticism and public communication, I was told it was not something to be proud of, because of the negative connotation they understood being a critic is. I felt defeated, because I believed learning about criticism was fun. I believed it was something we do naturally every day, but not in a scholarly way. And I wanted to learn criticism from a scholar’s point of view. Regardless, of what my friends told me I continued my journal with my education.

After a few months, I have gathered that it is the reflection about the discussions we have in class and the understanding of the text through the various methods being studied that makes us better critics. It is the ability to apply those methods to formulate ideas about the discourse happening in our culture. It is finding the closest solution we can think of for the problem and hopefully, make aware of the situation for a greater audience. It is not making sense of things or telling others what to think and feel, but to adjust those ideas, thoughts, and feelings already present. To be a rhetorical critic is to apply those rhetorical theories into a systematic process to make information readily available for scholars to then use the formula of rhetorical criticism to do the same thing as previous scholars. It is a never ending process, because we as scholars, as people, as a nation will always be changing. So, our thoughts will continue to change as our findings in our rhetorical research are developed overtime.

To be a critic involves going against the norm and not accepting the first expression we get from a text. It is to get really involved and understand the problems it holds. To speak up on the ideas of need for change or betterment of a society as a whole is not completely bad. There is deeper thinking for a greater cause. It is seeing things “outside the box” with all the information gathered from all different angles. In a sense, it is science and art that we use to evaluate criticism. “Rhetorical criticism may be defined as an artistic expression composed of statements comparing an instance of symbol inducement with an implicit or explicit model of excellence” (76). The “correcting” portion of this process is like science. We collect data to formulate conclusions and when we change or correct certain variance new conclusions are created. Then we are then able to “critique” the process and come up with new reflections. Monitoring our own thinking and finding self-interest or of a community’s interest, we can then understand with good reasons and articulate rationale choices as critics. All these variables have helped me become a better critic that I can say with joy and optimism. Being a critic is not bashing on any one thought, idea, or text, but seeing if there are any problems within those texts that need insight or awareness to help a greater social cause.