

The Rhetorics of Healing Conference, Claremont Jan 24-26, 2002
at the Centre for Rhetorics & Hermeneutics
Institute for Antiquity and Christianity (Redlands) / Hunsaker Student Center (Redlands)

Thursday's 6 presentations [1/24] in Claremont focus on "Biblical Lessons of Healing"

Concluding with a panel discussion on "The Rhetoric of Healing in the First Century"

Friday's 8 presentations [1/25] in Redlands focus on "Literatures and Cultural Narratives"

No panel discussion

Saturday's 7 presentations [1/26] in Redlands focus on "Healing Narratives and Medical Ethics"

No panel discussion

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Obstacles and Promises for Reconsidering a Rhetorics of Healing :
Rhetoric – Hale and Hearty

by Wilhelm Wuellner, Thursday Jan 24, 2:30-3:15 pm.

10 Minutes of Presentation:

My main issues:

- Autobiographical soil, seed, roots, flowering, and fruit bearing of the rhetorics of my own healg
- The Two Dimensions of the Rhetorics of Healing: rhetoric of healing, and the rhetorics of healg
- 3 books cited in my Claremont paper of 2000 dealing with rhetoric's relation to healing
- Biblical Lessons of Healing; the proverb "Physician, heal yourself" in Lk 4:23; approach to healing, and to the rhetorics of healing, in the 1st Century differs from that of the 21st Century
- The Obstacles: Rhetoric – Stale and Abstract, Cold and Cancerous
- The Promises: Rhetoric – Hale and Hearty, Warm and Creative

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• Autobiographical soil, seed, roots, flowering, & fruit bearing of the rhetorics of my own healing

• Only in the course of last year (2001) did my cancer therapy come to include the therapeutic dimension of rhetorics. Hence my new interest in "The Rhetorics of Healing". But prior to 2001 I had become aware of something missing in my modern medicine-guided efforts of dealing with cancer, and the disposition to cancer which manifested itself in the 3 recurrences of my cancer since my cancer surgery in 1986 – 15 years ago. This "missing something" may be seen reflected in the quote from Harold Bloom, when he said that the perception of "an organic whole", such as a poem, depends largely on "the conventions of response that have been deeply instilled in us", whether as part of "our sleep-of-death" or of our "more capacious sense of life" (Harold Bloom, *How To Read and Why* (New York: Scribner, 2000, pp. 138-142); Bloom speaks of the "missing something" what has him "close to despair", namely the doom of "the invention of the human" (p. 25). When Bloom notes that "value, in literature as in life, has much to do with the idiosyncratic, with the excess by which meaning gets started" (p.23), I asked myself what excess (or imbalance) generated and maintained by my cancer, got me started in search of genuine healing.

A decade earlier, a Bay Area Chinese medical practitioner released me from his therapy with the words: "You are healed when you are no longer afraid to die". Indeed, the "more capacious sense of life" and "the invention of the human" works for a sick person as for a sick society

and culture **only**, if and when one learns to balance light and darkness, warmth and cold, life and death. To be sick is to be out of balance and harmony; to be healed or healing, as an embodied, empowered human being, i.e. a human being capable of the art of speaking, one has to be back in balance – Bloom’s “organic whole”. The excess, so prevalent in modern cyber-technology culture, provides the clue to the epidemic cancer culture we live in as individuals and as modern institutions (see below on “The Obstacles for Reconsidering the Rhetorics of Healing”), but also offers clues for “The Promises of Healing”.

- I am currently in the process of experiencing a version of the rhetorics of healing, known as “therapeutic speech formation”, a branch of medicine going back to classical Western antiquity (see Pedro Lain Entralgo’s book of 1958/1970) and rediscovered and reconceived only in the late 20th Century (see von Bonin and Denjean-von Stryk’s book of 2001, cited in the final section of this paper, dealing with “The Promises of a Rhetorics of Healing”). To be concerned with “the rhetorics of healing” may be taken as evidence for [what TIME magazine, Jan 21, 2002, p.69 observes] “Today the medical landscape has been transformed beyond recognition”.

- The Two Dimensions of the Rhetorics of Healing: The rhetorics of healing, and the rhetorics of healing. We have a coin before us, or a leaf, with two sides: the rhetorics of healing and the therapeutics of speaking. This polarity finds its harmony or balance of power in the human heart. Hence my revised title: Rhetoric – Hale and Hearty.

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- The rhetorics of healing focuses on the rhetorical, i.e. the art of speaking components, if not the rhetorical essence, of the art of healing.

- The Literature Cited in my Claremont paper of 2000 Highlighting the Rhetorics of Healing In my paper [“Reconceiving a Rhetoric of Religion: A Rhetoric of Power as the Power of the Sublime”] I cited 3 publications dealing with rhetoric’s relation to healing:

- Pedro Lain **Entralgo**, *The Therapy of the Word in Classical Antiquity*, Translated from the Spanish *Curación por la palabra en la antigüedad clásica* (Madrid, 1958) by L.J. Rather and John M. Sharp. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970.

- Linda **Sussman**, *The Speech of the Grail: A Journey toward Speaking that Heals and Transforms*, Studies in Imagination. Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1995.

- William **Isaacs**, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together: A Pioneering Approach to Communicating in Business and in Life*. New York: Currency/Doubleday/Ransom House, 1999, see especially pp. 208-14 on the book’s focus on the 3 languages (and voices) of [1] feeling and aesthetics (beauty, rhythm, timing), [2] thinking or meaning (hermeneutics), and [3] power (the power of action or commitment, i.e. the disposition or intentionality to action).

In the Conclusions of my Claremont paper I spoke, among other points, of “rhetorical critics as diagnosticians and as therapists”. The diagnostic component that demands the rhetorical critic’s attention are the ever-present potential for distortions, faults, imperfections and improprieties [Pseudo-Longinus’ tà ásemna] in the uses of speech which textbooks on rhetoric in Hellenistic and Roman times called rhetoric’s decadent or degenerative symptoms. I cited Pseudo-Longinus’ reference to contemporary early Imperial Roman rhetoric as “cancerous” (ógkos).

As the therapeutic component I spoke of the task of restoring health, and, as stewards, of the task of maintaining and enhancing health in the “institutional” forms of the rhetorics of

healing, e.g. in education, in politics and business, in the arts and religions, etc. I made the case in my Claremont paper of March 2000 by insisting on two main mandates for the practitioner as well as the theorist of the art of human speaking: one was the insistence of accounting for the three con-stitutive, integral elements of human speech, namely the dynamic interrelations between thinking, feeling, and willing [I referred there also to the focus on the 3 languages and voices in William Isaacs' book of 1999]. The other mandate was reflected in the motto "Physician heal thyself!" If these two mandates are ignored, any rhetorics of healing will be doomed to failure, or worse: will contribute to the social, cultural dilemma it seeks to remedy.

- Biblical Lessons of Healing

As my token contribution to the "**Biblical** Lessons of Healing" I call attention to only 3 texts

- The healing-seeking Roman centurion pleading with Jesus to "just speak the word and my [paralyzed] servant will be healed" (Mt 8:8/Lk 7:7; cf. John 4:46-54, Jesus' "second/other sign" in Cana in polarity with the "first/beginning sign" John 2:1-11). The polarity between "seeing is believing" and "believing/trusting is seeing" is brought into harmony or balance (synthesis) by circumcised ears or a circumcised heart, or when "the implanted word" is "received with meekness/humbleness [= walking without strutting]" (James 1:21). To live and speak, speak and live out of such synthesis is the actualization, realization of "the Lord, your healer" (Ex 15:26); not to attain or maintain this synthesis leads inevitably to the experience of "the protest, 'I [your God] will **not** be your healer'" (Isaiah 3:7).

- There is the Isaiah quote [from his famous throne vision in chapter 6:9-10] which appears in 3 significant New Testament texts: [1] in the collection of parables in Mark 4:12 and its Synoptic parallels [Mt 13:14-15; Lk 8:10; and an echo of it also in John 12:40]; [2] in the conclusion of Luke's Acts of the Apostles [Acts 28:26-27]; and [3] in the conclusion of the 3 chapter-long reflections on the fateful link between the privileged status of Israel as God's chosen people and the rest of humankind, the seemingly hapless Gentiles, in Paul's Letter to the Romans [11:8].

Isaiah's commission to speak on behalf of God, as were the commissions of Jesus and of Paul to speak, entail the following:

Go, and tell this people: [= a people of unclean lips]
'Keep on listening, but do not perceive
Keep on looking, but do not understand.
Render the hearts of this people insensitive,
Their ears dull
And their eyes dim,
Lest they see with their eyes,
Hear with their ears,
Understand with their hearts,
And **repent and be healed.**'

For Isaiah his commission could be issued only after he, who confessed to be "a man of unclean lips" [comparable to Moses in Exodus 6:12 confesses to be "unskilled in speech" (literally: uncircumcised of lips)], is purified in his use of language by a Seraph touching Isaiah's mouth with a burning coal from the temple's altar. He cannot heal others unless getting himself healed first.

- "Physician, heal yourself" (Lk 4:23 has Jesus cite this as a proverb/parabolê).

- The differences in the approach to healing, and to the rhetorics of healing, between the 1st Century and the 21st Century: I want to emphasize only one key difference in both the materiality of rhetoric and the materiality of healing, namely the difference which modern speech or medical

technologies make in succeeding [or rather failing] to attain and maintain what Harold Bloom calls "an organic whole".

- The Obstacles: Rhetoric – Stale, Abstract, Cold and Cancerous

- In my summary of Pseudo-Longinus' enumeration of symptoms in 1st century rhetoric that were deemed to be not just obstacles, but downright inimical to the rhetorics of healing, I listed four:

1. Superficial, inflated speech; for Pseudo-Longinus such speech is "meteoric" (*On the Sublime*, iii.2).
2. On cancerous speech he notes: "cancers are bad whether in books or bodies" (iii.4).
3. Speech manifesting emotion [páthos] which is misplaced [ákairon] and pointless [kenòn] (iii.5).
4. Speech as abstract, cold, heartless, vain, insipid [tò psychrón] (iv.1-7).

- In focusing on the cultural context for a 21st century rhetorics of healing, I reiterate what I laid out in my Claremont paper in 2000:

1. The rising tide of critical voices in alarm over the growing crisis of language, as evidenced in the increasing number of school children with speech disorders [On "The Crisis of the Word Today", see pp.19-39 in Christy MacKaye Barnes, Francis Edmunds, A.C. Harwood, Isabel Wyatt, et al., *The Love of Literature: A Celebration of Language and Imagination*. Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press 1996].

2. The dehumanizing isolation of communication technologists [in schools, business or medical offices, etc] operating in the "electro-smog" of their computer cubicles.

3. The loss of feeling in speech manifesting itself in the loss of the pictorial element, or the mental imaging integral to speaking. Speech has been reduced to mere signs signifying content or meaning [or worse: reduced to "communication" - regardless of multimedia uses], but do not embody the fullness of life. This loss of feeling has its complementary opposite extreme or excess of unrestrained feeling in speech, as in rage and rave, in scream and pain.

4. The run-away tendency of abstractions and utilitarian or ideological confinements in the uses of language affecting both language and thinking in the age information and communication technologies. The modern scientific culture, with its abstractness of thinking in the age of intellectualism and of communication technologies, enhances separation of thinking and speaking, and of thinking and mental imaging.

5. In 21st century media commodity culture, or in the entertainment industries, or in politics no less than in the education industry, alias "the academy", the very word "rhetoric" carries only negative connotations.

6. The paradox in current religious cultures the world over is still, what it has been for countless centuries, that one's religiosity invites more, rather than less, fragmentation or even conflict, aided nowadays by the spiritual enervation brought on by the beguiling contradictions of secularism, scientism, and technology.

- The Promises: Rhetoric – Hale and Hearty, Warm and Creative

The promises of restoring harmonious speech, capable of being truly creative, let alone capable of restoring health. In addition to the publications mentioned earlier, cited in my Claremont paper of 2000, I have been stimulated by the study of two publications:

- Heinz **Müller**, *Von der heilenden Kraft des Wortes und der Rhythmen*. Menschenkunde und Erziehung 22. Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben (1967), 4th ed. 1995.
- C.M. **Barnes**, F. **Edmunds**, A.C. **Harwood**, I. **Wyatt**, et al., *The Love of Literature* (1996), pp. 40-54 "Speech as Awakener [of] Healing Force".

Moreover, I am currently in the process of experiencing, in weekly one-hour long "therapies", the power of the rhetorics of healing, as laid out by -

- Dietrich **von Bonin** and Barbara **Denjean-von Stryk**, *Therapeutische Sprachgestaltung*. Stuttgart: Urachaus, 2001 (one of three other volumes in a series devoted to the therapeutic potential in the arts: sculpture, painting, music and song, speech and literature).

One of the restorative efforts to which I am being introduced is something I referred to in my Claremont paper of 2000 where I said: Cicero's "visible eloquence", the "delivery" (actio/hypókrisis) of the classical handbooks on rhetoric, was an indispensable, unavoidable aspect of rhetoric's "materiality", modeling the creative power in the bodily gestures, verbal intonations, and movements. The performance of the power of rhetoric is, and remains, essential to restoring rhetoric's creative, i.e. healing power potential.