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OCCASION. We have become accustomed to thinking of all communicative situations as rhetorical. Aristotle (384–322 BCE) himself opines (*Rhetoric* 2.18) that rhetoric is at play even in a conversation involving only two people. This very modern-sounding notion may obscure the fact that ancient Greek theorists had very strong ideas about the occasionality of rhetoric that were profoundly rooted in their cultural institutions. The latter are especially reflected in Aristotle's three "kinds" (*eidē*) of oratory: deliberative (*symbouleutikon*), judicial (*dikanikon*), and epideictic (*epideiktikon*). [See Deliberate genre; Epideictic genre; and Forensic genre.] Each of these was appropriate to a specific type of situation/occasion in Athenian society: deliberative, based on arguments of advantage and disadvantage, for speeches in the civic assembly, where the goal was to move the audience to a course of action in the future; judicial, based on arguments of justice and injustice, for speeches in the law courts, where the goal was to induce a jury to render a judgment about events in the past; and epideictic, based on arguments of praise or blame, for ceremonial occasions where the goal was to move an audience to a certain disposition in the present. Clearly, then, although Aristotle does not say so himself, each of these kinds of oratory was elicited by, and suited to, a different sort of (civic) occasion.

While the Greek concept of appropriate occasion (*kairos*) looms large in any discussion of rhetorical occasion, its semantic field is actually broader than is sometimes acknowledged. As with many abstract concepts, it was also hypostatized as a divinity: the second-century CE geographer Pausanias (5.14.9) mentions an altar to Kairos at Olympia, and reports a tradition naming this god as the youngest son of Zeus. The sculptor Lysippus (fl. mid-fourth century BCE) depicted Kairos as a youth holding a razor (no doubt an emblem of his divine attributes), with his hair

long in front and short in back. For the poets from Hesiod to Pindar (eighth to fifth centuries BCE), *kairos* has the sense of "accurate choice and prudent restraint, the sense of what suits the circumstances, tact, discretion," or even "due measure" (Fränkel, 1973, pp. 447, 498). For the Pythagoreans, it manifested the *harmonia* that "reduces the opposite qualities in the universe to a unity" (Untersteiner, 1954, p. 82). Such conceptual dyads were fundamental to Greek thought; one may cite as examples the cosmological "love" and "strife" (*philotēs* and *neikos*) of Empedocles, the "opposing arguments" (*antikeimenoī logoi*) of Protagoras, and the "stronger" and "weaker" arguments (*kreitton* and *hēttōn logos*) mentioned by Protagoras and Aristophanes. As conflict is one of the great creators of occasion, it may be that the Pythagorean connection of *kairos* with strife or contention underscored its relevance to agonistic rhetoric.

In the work of the Sophists Gorgias, Prodicus, and Antiphon (Pindar's younger contemporaries), as in the Hippocratic writings, *kairos* also manifests a sense of time, specifically "point in time" (as opposed to *chronos*, "sequential time"; cf. Lat. *occasio* and *tempus* respectively, although the latter is sometimes also used in the sense of *kairos*). In its temporal sense, rhetorical *kairos* represents the "opportune moment" for a point to be made. Because our primary sources for the older Sophists survive only in the most exiguous fragments, we cannot establish the exact nature of their teaching on *kairos*. But Gorgias, whom ancient tradition names as a disciple of Empedocles, and who was probably influenced by Pythagorean thought, clearly considered *kairos* an important topic; he is said to have written specifically on it (Diels-Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 1952, 82 B 13). This tradition reinforces Gorgias's reputation (attested, for example, in Plato's *Gorgias*) as a skilled practitioner of extemporaneous oratory. Possibly as early as the Sophists, but certainly by the Hellenistic period, *kairos*

came to be associated with the notion of *to prepon*, that which is “fitting” (Lat. *aptum, decorum, decens*): the orator must fit his speech, not only to himself and the audience, but to the time and place of the event (see Cicero’s *Orator* 71), which are all aspects of occasion. [See *Decorum*.]

The sophistic treatise known as *Dissoi logoi* or *Dialexeis*, which apparently dates from the beginning of the fourth century BCE, enunciates a temporal kairotic ideal (2.20) as a general guide for human conduct. Alcidas, a student of Gorgias, writes of rhetorical *kairos* primarily in its temporal sense. By contrast, his contemporary Isocrates (436–338 BCE), a student of both Gorgias and Prodicus, conceived of *kairos* in oratory as proper proportion and “conformity with initially decided subject matter and presentation” (O’Sullivan, 1992, p. 93). Doubtless this reflects his work as a logographer rather than a deliverer of oral/extemporaneous discourses. Both Alcidas and Isocrates emphasize the differences between written and oral, signaling that these two modes of discourse reflect different types of occasion, thus making disparate demands upon the *rhētōr*. For oral discourse, above all in improvisatory situations, *kairos* will certainly have a temporal sense: an instantaneous awareness of, and reaction to, what the moment requires, lends power to communication. No writer can account in advance for every such need, so “occasion” for written texts must refer to the situation initially eliciting the writing, whereas *kairos* itself will pertain more to the harmonious and appropriate fashioning of a suitable text.

Depending on one’s worldview and pedagogical philosophy, one may conceptualize *kairos* either as something prescriptive, which is intended to narrow the *rhētōr*’s focus according to what is *prepon*, or as an adaptive and open-ended principle that views “the production of meaning in language as a process of continuous adjustment to and creation of the present occasion” (White, 1987, p. 14). In other words, a rigid notion of *prepon* will prescribe certain proprieties, according to categorical assessments of what formulae a given rhetorical occasion demands; for example, one should be sober and serious, rather than festive or flippant, in a funeral oration. A radical approach to *kairos*, however, suggests that, since each occasion is composed of so many factors as

to make prescription effectively impossible, the skilled *rhētōr* should be able to react in the moment itself, deciding what strategies best suit that particular situation. The latter position is usually presented as the sophistic doctrine of *kairos*. Ironically, though they are not typically aligned with the sophistic tradition, both Plato’s Socrates and Aristotle espouse this radical sort of kairotic skill: Socrates, in stipulating that the *rhētōr* should understand the minds (*psychai*) of his audience, and fit his discourse sensitively to them (*Phaedrus* 271); and Aristotle, in defining rhetoric as “the ability [*dynamis*] of discerning the available means of persuasion in each situation” (*Rhetoric* 1.2.1).

A more prescriptive approach was delineated by theorists of *stasis* (the Greek term; cf. Lat. *status, constitutio*), a system developed by later rhetoricians such as Hermagoras and Hermogenes, and fully inculcated into Roman theory by writers such as the author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Cicero, and Quintilian. [See *Stasis*.] *Stasis* theory was very widely applied, especially in judicial oratory. The word *stasis*, coming from the verb *stand*, means, literally, “stance” or “position,” and, by extension, the (rhetorical) position adopted in discourse. In political contexts, it may have the further sense of “faction” or even “discord,” which harks back to the agonistic aspect of occasionality. The purpose of *stasis* theory was to determine the question at issue, and to tailor the discourse to that. Thus, if one (or one’s client) had not committed the crime of which he was accused, one could argue this by *stasis* of *fact*. If the case was one of homicide, in which the accused was indeed involved, one could argue (by *stasis* of *definition*) that the death occurred as a matter of manslaughter and not of premeditated murder. If the murder was in fact premeditated, but there were extenuating circumstances (e.g., that the victim was a tyrant), one could argue (by *stasis* of *quality*) that the act was justified. Failing all else, one might argue (by *stasis* of *transference*) that the court was not competent to hear the case. *Stasis* theory, then, is a highly prescriptive occasion-based system, allowing nonetheless for some flexibility of approach. Cicero (106–43 BCE), for example, in his orations, often explicitly delineates the *stasis* he is (or is not) using, but sometimes he will make as if to argue more than one *stasis* simultaneously.

Of the five canons of Quintilianic rhetoric (first century CE)—invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery—all are in some respect occasion-sensitive. [See Arrangement; *article on* Traditional arrangement; Delivery; Invention; Memory; *and* Style.] Invention, the “finding” of argument, will of course be especially so. *Stasis* theory was the most popular inventional strategy in the Roman period. But Aristotle’s inventional system—the arguments based on the *rhētōr*’s perceived good character (*ēthos*), the arousal of the audience’s emotion (*pathos*), and logical inference (*logos*)—is quintessentially a matter of occasion as well, for knowing which of these arguments to use in a given situation will likely be crucial to one’s rhetorical success. [See *Ēthos*; *Logos*; *and* *Pathos*.] Arrangement, the ordering of the parts of the discourse, was probably at the heart of the sophistic system of rhetorical training (Solmsen, 1941); in such case, one would expect it to have been taught along with a theory of *kairos*. Style is to form what invention is to content, and as such is critical to the effective presentation of ideas; here as much as anywhere, the doctrine of *prepon* will have been brought into play. Memory and delivery pertain to the discursive event *per se*. One can only memorize orations for occasions that have been scheduled in advance, whereas *kairotic* skill may equip one to address rhetorical situations as they arise. Delivery, whether of memorized or extemporized discourse, is crucial for the *rhētōr*’s adaptation to the occasion; in a sense, it is the most occasion-oriented of the five canons.

In postclassical times, the most important discussions of rhetorical occasion have centered on what Lloyd Bitzer famously termed “the rhetorical situation.” [See Rhetorical situation.] Bitzer contends that this is comprised of an *exigence*, an *audience*, and certain *constraints*. He defines the rhetorical situation as “a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be . . . removed if discourse . . . can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the . . . modification of the exigence” (1968, p. 6) and, later, “a factual condition plus a relation to some interest” (1980, p. 28). The exigence itself is “an imperfection marked by urgency . . . a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be” (1968, p. 6). The audi-

ence is distinguished from “mere hearers and readers” by their capacities “of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change” (1968, p. 8). Constraints are such things as “persons, events, objects, and relations” that “have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence” (1968, p. 8). Bitzer’s influential model has elicited multifarious responses, including emulation, modification, and rejection (cf., among many others, Pomeroy, 1972; Burke, 1973; Vatz, 1973; Consigny, 1974; Patton, 1979; Garret and Xiao, 1993). The nature of rhetorical exigence (from both essentialist and constructivist perspectives) and of the audience have been especially at issue in these discussions.

Occasion has a long history in poetry as well, and is closely tied to matters of genre. [See Poetry.] Here again, we may consult the ancient Greek tradition, in which specific occasions required specific types of verse: for example, hymns for divine worship; *epithalamia* in honor of weddings; *thrēnoi* (dirges) for funeral lamentation; *epinikia* (victory songs) to celebrate winners in athletic contests like the Olympics; odes and encomiums solemnizing various other occasions. Attic drama, which developed in connection with annual religious festivals, was occasional in a more complex way. What unites all these genres is a public or social aspect to their presentation (Miner et al., 1993; Dolan, 2000).

Occasional verse is a pervasive, possibly global phenomenon; one finds it in the Islamic as well as in several Asian traditions. In some cultures, a poet (such as England’s poet laureate) may be officially designated to produce such verse. The increasing informality of much modern culture, together with the ascendancy of the private voice over the public where poetic composition is concerned, has relegated occasional verse to a very minor role in our culture; on the whole, Westerners now seem disinclined to solemnize formal occasions with the special composition of verse.

[See also Classical rhetoric; *Kairos*; *and* Sophists.]

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ORALITY AND LITERACY. The concept of orality stems from ethnographic descriptions of oral poetry in particular and of oral traditions in general. A foundational work is *The Singer of Tales*, by Albert B. Lord (2000), which documents the pioneering research of Milman Parry on oral traditions in the former Yugoslavia, from 1933 to 1935 (Parry, 1971). Parry died in 1935, at the beginning of his academic career, before he could publish the results of his research on living oral traditions; his own publications are limited almost entirely to his earlier research, which was based on the textual evidence of Homeric poetry. As a professor of ancient Greek, Parry had been seeking new answers to the so-called Homeric question, which centered on the historical circumstances that led to the composition of the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Basically, the question came down to this: were the Homeric poems composed with or without the aid of writing? Parry's project, the comparing of Homeric poetry with the living oral traditions of South Slavic heroic poetry, led him to conclude that the Homeric texts were indeed the products of oral composition. Parry's student Albert Lord conducted his own fieldwork in the former Yugoslavia after Parry's death (especially between 1950 and 1951), and *The Singer of Tales* represents the legacy of their combined efforts.

The cumulative work of Parry and Lord is generally considered to be the single most successful solution to the Homeric question, though debate among classicists continues concerning the historical contingencies of Homeric composition. The ultimate success of Parry and Lord, however, can best be measured by tracking the applicability