

Fantasy Theme Analysis in Competitive Rhetorical Criticism

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One of the newer methods of criticism was postulated by Ernest Bormann in 1972.¹ His seminal piece has spawned more than 40 works of published scholarship and the concepts he set forth have been expanded and grounded as the symbolic convergence theory of communication.² No one, however, has offered extended advice to assist coaches and participants in the use of this method in competitive rhetorical criticism.³ The aim of this essay is to provide such advice.

To assist in assimilating the advice offered in this essay, the following division of materials is presented. First, the assumptions underlying fantasy theme analysis are identified. Second, the theory's nomenclature is defined. Finally, the method is applied to three diverse kinds of rhetorical artifacts.

THE ASSUMPTIONS OF FANTASY THEME ANALYSIS

Most good critical methods provide a clear schemata for analyzing rhetorical material. In the case of fantasy theme analysis, the schemata is used to describe, interpret, and evaluate the rhetorical materials (persuasive postures, specific movements, campaigns, speeches, and conversations) that comprise the symbolic reality of groups of people, be they small groups, organizational work units, political parties, or other rhetorical communities.

One's use of fantasy theme analysis is based on several assumptions. Assumption 1: Through conversations, speeches, and messages, people build a shared view of reality that, while not

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¹Ernest G. Bormann, "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 58(1972), 396-407.

²Bormann, "The Symbolic Convergence Theory of Communication: Applications and Implications for Teachers and Consultants," *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 10 (1982), 50-61.

³Of course, bits and pieces of practical advice can be gleaned from the various published materials concerning rhetorical visions and fantasy theme analysis.

necessarily objective, is created symbolically. People often initiate, embellish, and evolve an explanation of events that can catch fire and chain-out through a collectivity of people. Eventually, such a symbolically created explanation may encompass greater and greater numbers of people into a common rhetorical community possessing a prevalent rhetorical vision.⁴

Assumption 2: A rhetorical community's shared view of reality is best analyzed through a rhetorical concept called a fantasy theme, or complete dramatistic rhetorical statement. Typically, fantasy theme statements range from a phrase, to a sentence, to a paragraph in length.⁵

Assumption 3: Meaning, emotion, and motive for action are not necessarily in the intent, nor hidden in the skulls and viscera, of people. Rather, meaning, emotion, and motive are in the message, i.e., the dramatistic statements intrinsic to the vision, thereby providing a direct link between one's symbolic manifestation of reality (the rhetorical vision) and one's behavior.⁶

Assumption 4: As people begin to share and extend fantasy explanations of people's actions, things, objects, and events, they build up a composite dramatistic explanation of reality that is filled with heroes, villains, plotlines, scenic description and sanctioning

⁴This is not to say that everyone's symbolically created view of reality will eventually or always be the same. Nor is it to say that people come to participate in one and only one rhetorical vision. Indeed, participants in different or competing rhetorical visions often express opposing or contrary thoughts, ideas, and conclusions (expressed through fantasy themes) to explain the exact same phenomenon. For example, participants in one rhetorical vision look at President Reagan's attempts to remove restrictions on the industrialization of public lands and offer a symbolically created view of his policy as "getting the government off the backs of the people." Others view the same policy and describe it as "allowing the robber barons to pollute and ravage the environment."

⁵Consider the revivalist's phrase, "time is of the essence if you are to receive salvation." The more complete rhetorical statement to describe the same rhetorical reality is: "God's patience is wearing thin. God accepts only those who are prepared to accept his righteousness. God will let a base sinner suffer eternal damnation should he have missed the opportunity that God is providing here tonight." The point is that the presence of either the abbreviated or the more complete rhetorical statement is representative of the method's unit of analysis called a fantasy theme.

⁶For example, there is self-evident *meaning* in the fantasy theme, "I don't feel like a person when I'm around you. You never acknowledge me." Similarly, *emotion* is bursting forth from the following fantasy theme: "I hate men. They just use you. I gave him 18 years of my life. I put him through graduate school and he abandoned me for some little chippy who's young enough to be his daughter!" Finally, *motive for action* is apparent in the fantasy theme that goes: "I've lost my job, my family, my self-respect. Nobody loves me. Nobody cares. I just can't go on living."

agents for maintaining and promulgating the rhetorical vision.⁷

Assumption 5: Rhetorical visions are often in competition about the same issues. For example, two of Bormann's associates have described the nature of competing archetypal rhetorical visions concerning the role of the U.S. in conducting foreign affairs: "Cold War," "Neo-Isolation," and "Power Politics."⁸

THE METHOD'S NOMENCLATURE

Twelve technical terms undergird the method of fantasy theme analysis.⁹ While these terms may not exhaust the listing provided by all of the method's collaborators, they do provide the necessary terms to enable the competitive rhetorical critic to do criticism from a fantasy theme perspective.¹⁰ These terms will be introduced via the discussion of basic concepts, structural concepts, and evaluative concepts from a fantasy theme perspective.

Basic Concepts. Three concepts are basic to using fantasy theme analysis in competitive rhetorical criticism: **fantasy theme**, **fantasy type**, and **modal societal fantasy**. The *fantasy theme* is the smallest unit of analysis, although it may vary in length from a phrase to a sentence or two to a paragraph in length. The fantasy

⁷Such a complete symbolically created reality for one rhetorical collectivity is succinctly illustrated by the 1870s Rhetorical Vision of "Manifest Destiny": "The rich and beautiful valleys of Wyoming are destined for the occupancy and sustenance of the Anglo-Saxon race. The wealth that for untold ages has lain hidden beneath the snow-capped summits of our mountains has been placed there by Providence to reward the brave spirits whose lot it is to compose the advance-guard of civilization. The Indians must stand aside or be overwhelmed by the ever advancing and ever increasing tide of emigration. The destiny of the aborigines is written in characters not to be mistaken. The same inscrutable Arbiter that decreed the downfall of Rome has pronounced the doom of extinction on the red men of America." This editorial from the *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, March 3, 1870, as cited in Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), p. 184, exhibits all the structural elements of a rhetorical vision: *dramatis personae*, plotlines, scene and sanctioning agent.

⁸John F. Cragan and Donald C. Shields, "Foreign Policy Communication Dramas: How Mediated Rhetoric Played in Peoria in Campaign '76," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 63 (1977), pp. 275-289.

⁹These technical terms are: fantasy theme, fantasy type, modal societal fantasy (basic concepts); rhetorical vision, *dramatis personae*, plotline(s), scene(s), sanctioning agent (structural concepts); and rhetorical community, reality link to here-and-now phenomenon, and rhetorical strategy (evaluative concepts).

¹⁰For an account of the development of some of these technical terms, see Bormann, "Symbolic Convergence," and "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: Ten Years Later," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 63 (1982), pp. 288-305.

theme functions to allow individuals to present or show to the group-mind a common experience and serves to shape that experience rhetorically into social knowledge.¹¹ Fantasy themes are the unit of analysis that depicts the structural elements of rhetorical visions, i.e., the *dramatis personae*, plotlines, scenes, and sanctioning agents. Indeed, a fantasy theme may even mirror a complete rhetorical vision in a kind of abbreviated form (as can be seen from the paragraph length depiction of the "Manifest Destiny" Rhetorical Vision in footnote 7).

A *fantasy type* is a kind of archetypal fantasy theme that becomes archetypal because it represents a common plotline depiction across a number of visions. Another way of saying this is that fantasy types are fantasy themes that emit the same structure across the rhetorical visions of differing rhetorical communities. Typically, fantasy types are represented by comments that are more abstract, or cryptic, or more general than what has initially been characterized as a fantasy theme.¹² Quite often, a fantasy type appears to be a shorthand label for a more complete fantasy theme that depicts the major plotline of some rhetorical vision in which large groups of people participate. Shorthand phrases like "fetching good out of evil," "the proof is in the pudding," "the dawn of a new day," "they're out to get us" (conspiracy), "we can work it out," "might makes right," and "there you go again," while not an exhaustive list, may all be thought of as examples of fantasy themes that may appear as plotlines in a diversity of rhetorical visions and are thus deserving of the concept label "fantasy type."¹³

A *Modal Societal Fantasy* is a fantasy theme so intrinsic to the rhetoric of our society that it exists as a general pattern in the symbolic reality structure of individuals regardless of their association with a particular rhetorical community, stemming from longstanding values, public dreams, and rhetorical visions. What is often spoken of as the "work ethic" represents a modal societal fantasy. The work ethic's roots lie in the Puritans' rhetorical vision regarding salvation. For the Puritans, the success of hard work

¹¹Bormann, "Symbolic Convergence," p. 52.

¹²Bormann, "Fantasy: Ten Years," p. 295.

¹³Of course, this is not to say that there are not heroic or villainous fantasy types, or scenic or sanctioning agent fantasy types. It is to say that plotline fantasy types will be encountered most often by the competitive rhetorical critic. For an example of an extended rhetorical criticism using the concept of fantasy type, see Bormann, "Fetching Good Out of Evil: A Rhetorical Use of Calamity," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 63 (1977), pp. 130-139.

was proof that they were among God's elect. Although the Puritans are no longer an identifiable segment of our country, the "work ethic" as a fantasy theme has continued to be accepted for long periods of time by major(modal) segments of our society, even as the initial Puritan rhetorical vision, of which the work ethic was only a part, has diminished in impact.¹⁴

Structural Concepts. Five concepts comprise the structural elements of the method: **rhetorical vision**, **dramatis personae**, **plotline**, **scene**, and **sanctioning agent**. A *rhetorical vision* is a composite drama in which large groups of people participate. The drama is composite because the rhetorical embellishments of numbers of people have contributed to the descriptions of the *dramatis personae*, the plotlines, the scene, and the sanctioning agent(s). One may best think of a rhetorical vision as a kind of merging of various shared fantasy themes, fantasy types, and modal societal fantasies to provide a broader view of a culture's or rhetorical community's symbolic reality.¹⁵ Typically, well understood rhetorical visions are identified by some tag label such as "Black Power," "The New Deal," "Manifest Destiny," "Secular Humanism," "The New Politics," "The 'Me' Generation," "Radical Feminism," "Reaganomics," "Social Economic Justice," etc.¹⁶ On the other hand, some symbolic realities are always being newly created. Thus, there may be important rhetorical artifacts available for criticism that are not yet characterizable or identifiable by a tag label.

The *dramatis personae* are the characters that are given life within the drama (vision). These characters are attributed certain qualities, depicted as taking certain actions, represented as appearing within a certain scene, and their actions are motivated or justified by the sanctioning of a certain agent. Depending upon the complexity of the vision, the characters identifiable within a vision may include both heroic and villainous *personae*, and minor and

¹⁴For an example of an extended rhetorical criticism using the concept of modal societal fantasy, see Donald C. Shields, "Malcolm X's Black Unity Addresses: Espousing Middle-Class Fantasy Themes as American as Apple-Pie," in John F. Cragan and Donald C. Shields (Eds.), *Applied Communication Research: A Dramatistic Approach* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1981), pp. 79-91. Other modal societal fantasy themes that have their roots in older visions, but may be present in a variety of present day visions include "the power of the ballot box," "the value of education," "the great experiment in democracy," "the spirit of entrepreneurship," etc.

¹⁵Bormann, "Symbolic Convergence," p. 53.

¹⁶For an example of the "New Politics" Vision criticized from a fantasy theme analysis, see Bormann, "The Eagleton Affair: A Fantasy Theme Analysis," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 59 (1973), pp. 143-159.

supporting players. The characters within a drama are called "personae" to enable distinctions to be made between the qualities attributed to a real person and the qualities that may or may not be possessed by that person.¹⁷

Plotline is a concept within the method that refers to the action of the drama or vision. Action simply means who is doing what, to whom, and how? Often called "scenarios," plotlines can be identified as those fantasy themes that depict the action of the drama: "good versus evil," "underdog versus colossus," "acceptance of what fate brings," "pull yourself up by the bootstraps," "business as usual," "conspiracy," etc.¹⁸ The list is extensive, although not so exhaustive that recurring "fantasy types" cannot be found.

Scene as a concept within the schemata serves much the same purpose as the word itself implies when thinking about a play. The scene is the setting, the place where the action occurs, the place where the actors or personae act out their roles. Thus, some fantasy themes within a rhetorical vision will graphically describe the scene by telling its scope, describing its elements, identifying the vital props, etc.

Sometimes, in some dramas, the scene becomes so important that it appears to influence both the qualities attributed to the actors or characters and the plotlines within the vision. Some examples of rhetorical visions where the exigencies of the scene have been deemed sufficiently powerful to lead to the formation of a rhetorical vision include "the American frontier," "the Iron Curtain," "the Berlin Wall," "the Dark Continent," and "the Holocaust."¹⁹

The **sanctioning agent** is the source that justifies the acceptance

¹⁷Bormann, "Fantasy: Ten Years," p. 300. A current example of the difference between the real life personality and the *persona* is made by Serge Klarsfeld. Klarsfeld is a lawyer representing the families of relatives who were deported to Nazi death camps by war criminal Klaus Barbie, the former Gestapo Chief and "Butcher of Lyon," France. Klarsfeld is quoted by the Associated Press in March, 1985 as saying: "Barbie was a local chief who dealt very harshly with the French Resistance movement and Jews. He was not a figure of the magnitude of other Nazis who have been brought to trial. The Barbie persona is greater than the real personality that will face the court. The Barbie who hid in South America, the Barbie who is accused of killing the head of the Resistance movement (Jean Moulin), he won't be on trial."

¹⁸For a discussion of plotline, also see, Shields, "A Dramatistic Approach to Applied Communication Research: Theory, Methods, and Applications," appearing in Cragan and Shields, *Applied Communication Research*, p. 6.

¹⁹One word of caution is in order. Even those visions in which scene is paramount also possess *dramatis personae*, plotlines, and sanctioning agents. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the scene in some rhetorical visions can be as dramatic as an "airport" or "hotel" or "space" for an author.

and promulgation of a rhetorical vision. Sometimes the sanctioning agent is a higher power (God, justice, democracy, etc.). At other times the sanctioning agent is a particularly salient here-and-now phenomena (the atomic bomb, a warring conflict, a crucifixion and resurrection, etc). The sanctioning agent may also be a legitimizing or moralistic framework (the Constitution, the Code-of-the-West, the Cadet Code, etc.).²⁰

Critical Evaluation Concepts. Three concepts are essential to critical evaluation from a fantasy theme perspective: **rhetorical community, reality link to here-and-now phenomena, and dramatistic rhetorical strategy.** A *rhetorical community* from the perspective of fantasy theme analysis is comprised of those people who participate in a common rhetorical vision. Thus, it is vision participation and not locality or "groupness" that indicates whether or not one is a member of a rhetorical community. Bormann indicates that members of a rhetorical community will share "inside jokes" and will respond to shorthand fantasy themes and messages in ways that are in tune with their common rhetorical vision.²¹ Thus, it may be important for the critic to distinguish between those shorthand fantasy themes that indicate the stability of participation in a rhetorical community from fantasies that are "chaining out" and catching up new participants in a rhetorical vision. Similarly, the critic might want to differentiate the preceding from fantasies that are "chaining out" and catching up participants in a new rhetorical vision.

Many rhetorical visions contain fantasy themes with strong links to reality. *Reality links* are the *here-and-now phenomena* that add credibility to the dramatistic interpretation presented within the rhetoric of a vision. As such, the reality links serve to make the vision more believable and thus make symbolic participation within the vision more acceptable. It might, however, be suggested that some visions so lack any links to the reality of here-and-now phenomena that they are often labeled "cults." Further, such cults may be so labeled, not because of the insignificant numbers of people who participate in them, but because non-participants do not see credibility in their reality links.

While the concept of *rhetorical strategy* is not new to practitioners of rhetorical criticism, the concept possesses sufficiently subtle nuances from the perspective of fantasy theme analysis to be worthy of comment.²² Whereas "strategy" when viewed from the

²⁰Shields, "A Dramatistic Approach," p. 7.

²¹Bormann, "Symbolic Convergence," p. 53.

²²For an example of an extended rhetorical criticism using the concept of dramatistic rhetorical strategy, see Cragan, "Rhetorical Strategy: A

assumptions of some rhetorical theories denotes concepts like "plainfolks," "common ground" or "consubstantiation" and refers to a rhetor's attempts to enhance his/her *ethos* with the audience, the concept is defined quite differently when viewed from a dramatic fantasy theme perspective. Since rhetorical visions are created through a process of symbolic give and take, it is difficult to speak of visions from a mechanistic, rhetor-makes-choices perspective. Thus, with fantasy theme analysis, rhetorical strategy refers to the critical assessment of whether or not the message (the drama or vision) exhibits greater emphasis on character or plotline or scene or sanctioning agent. With fantasy theme analysis as well, rhetorical strategy refers to the critic's assessment of the degree of consistency between certain reality links and here-and-now phenomena and the symbolically depicted character attributes, scenic elements, and plotline actions.

SUGGESTED APPLICATIONS

To illustrate the range of applications of fantasy theme analysis to rhetorical material, we offer three abbreviated applications: a speech, a presentation of an issue within a series of messages, and a body of material that reflects the rhetoric of a specific movement.

Speech. President Reagan's "Address to the National Press Club," November 18, 1981, on arms control and reduction illustrates how a student might apply fantasy theme analysis to a single speech.²³ In this talk, Reagan introduced the acronym "START"—Strategic Arms Reduction Talks—as a dramatic label for his program of disarmament. In beginning a fantasy theme analysis of this talk a student could attempt to characterize the vision implied by the acronym START. A student might first characterize Reagan's vision of a world in which nuclear disarmament might be possible. In so doing, the student could look at the players in the drama, the plotlines cited for disarmament to occur, the international scene in which arms reduction would be carried out, and the legitimizing influence that would sanction disarmament or arms reduction.

When viewing the START talk as a rhetorical artifact suitable for fantasy theme analysis, the student could note that *dramatis personae* are present including both heroes and villains. The

Dramatic Interpretation and Application," *Central States Speech Journal* 26 (1975), pp. 4-11.

²³Ronald Reagan, "Arms Reduction and Nuclear Weaponry," Address to the National Press Club, November 18, 1981, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 17 (October-December, 1981), pp. 1273-78.

contestant could give a description of the attributes assigned by Reagan to the characters in the START drama, and explain what values, qualities, and vices are manifested in the descriptions of the characters in the speech. For example, the student might point out that Reagan depicted the Soviets and their satellite nations as "aggressive," "expansionist" and "threatening" communist governments.²⁴ Conversely, the contestant could indicate that the qualities attributed to the U.S. as heroic persona are juxtaposed against those of the communist nations:

. . .the United States followed a different course, one unique in all the history of mankind. We used our power and wealth to rebuild the war-ravished economies of the world, including those of the nations who had been our enemies. . . .There is absolutely no substance to charges that the U.S. is guilty of imperialism or attempts to impose its will on other countries by use of force.²⁵

Based on Reagan's conceptions of the good United States and the devious Soviet Union and satellites, the contestant could then describe Reagan's plotline that the U.S. should immediately build up its defenses. Reagan could be quoted as saying that the U.S. must come up with "a comparable threat to Soviet threats; in other words, a deterrent preventing the use of Soviet weapons by the counter threat of a like response against their own territory."²⁶ This action line is offered by Reagan to cope with a scene in which he describes a world filled with nuclear weaponry—mainly the Soviet Union's—as demonstrated by his detailed description of the Soviet nuclear build-up in Eastern Europe.²⁷ The student rhetorical critic might then conclude the discussion of the elements of the START vision by noting that "detering the Soviet threat" provides the sanctioning agent for President Reagan's START program, i.e. build up now and reduce later.

Having discussed the elements of the vision, the student could then interpret the meanings, emotions, and motives for action conveyed by participation in the START vision. The critic could argue that an important meaning inherent in the rhetoric is the conclusion that there will be no arms reduction unless the Soviets act first—they must START even though that is Reagan's label for the American approach to disarmament. Finally, the critic could note that there is no motive for the U.S. to act alone or START first, since such an action would be a "rash departure from tried and true policies."²⁸

²⁴Reagan, p. 1274.

²⁵Reagan, p. 1274.

²⁶Reagan, p. 1275.

²⁷Reagan, pp. 1275-76.

²⁸Reagan, p. 1275.

With the discussion of vision elements and interpretation completed, the contestant could evaluate the extent to which the vision depicted by Reagan was conducive to achieving the rhetorical ends sought by him. Clearly, Reagan's fantasy of deterrence through strength is an impactful one; however, the contestant might note that the logic of disarmament or arms control through arms build up may appear spurious to those who don't get caught up in the START vision. Similarly, the critic might discuss the fantasy themes that are not present in the talk. For example, Reagan never mentions the dangers inherent in the nuclear age—nuclear winter, nuclear holocaust, pre-emptive strike—that provide some of the tried and true sanctioning agents for disarmament and arms control.

Series of Messages. The Korean Airline Incident of September 1, 1983, the military downing of a KAL Flight 007, provides illustrative material to demonstrate how a series of messages may be used to create a dramatic explanation of a here-and-now event. In this instance, the contestant might show how the United States government reacted to the downing of the airliner through a series of statements and messages throughout the month of September, 1983. Prominent among these messages are statements from President Reagan on September 2 and September 5 and from Secretary of State, George Shultz, on September 2 and at the Madrid Meeting on September 8. These statements range from Shultz's terse remarks of September 2 which conclude that "No cover-up, however brazen can absolve the Soviet Union of responsibility to explain its behavior"²⁹ to Ronald Reagan's 18 minute televised address of September 5.³⁰

The student could analyze President Reagan's September 2 message on the attack. Here, the student might note how Reagan labeled the Soviet attack a "barbaric act" that "shocks the sensibilities of people everywhere" as he indicated that the act was more base than "events in Afghanistan and elsewhere." The President asked "What can we think of a regime that so broadly trumpets its vision of peace and global disarmament and yet so callously and quickly commits a terrorist act to sacrifice the lives of innocent human beings."³¹

The critic might then indicate that by September 5, Reagan's dramatic explanation of the event had become full blown. Here,

²⁹George Shultz, in William R. Doerner and Ed Magnuson, "Atrocity in the Skies," *Time*, September 12, 1983, p. 11.

³⁰Reagan, "The Downing of a Korean Airliner," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 49 (October 1, 1983), pp. 738-40.

³¹Reagan, as cited in Doerner and Magnuson, p. 10.

the barbaric act theme had been expanded: "It was an act of barbarism born of a society which wantonly disregards individual rights and the value of human life and seeks constantly to expand and dominate other nations."³² Indeed, the "attack was not just against ourselves or the Republic of Korea. This was the Soviet Union against the world and the moral precepts which guide human relations among people everywhere."³³

The critic might then establish that the plotline of Reagan's message might be described as "there they (the Soviets) go again." It could be mentioned that Reagan equates this incident with a litany of Soviet barbarous acts: "But we shouldn't be surprised by such inhuman brutality. Memories come back of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, the gassing of villages in Afghanistan."³⁴

In evaluating the discourse, the critic might find that, surprisingly, Reagan does not call for vengeance or retaliation. Instead, the President calls for atonement in the form of restitution and assurances such an act will not occur again. As such, the KAL tragedy becomes the sanctioning agent for a future vision: "Our immediate challenge to this atrocity is to insure that we make the skies safer and that we seek just compensation for the families of those who were killed."³⁵ To that end, Secretary Shultz "is going to present him (Gromyko) with our demands for disclosure of the facts, corrective action and concrete assurances that such a thing will not happen again—and that restitution be made."³⁶

Overall, the contestant might conclude that the President and the State Department used the KAL incident to legitimize their vision of the Soviets and what the appropriate response to the incident should be. For, as one administration official said of the incident, "It is further evidence that the President was right when he said that the Soviet Union is a country that is essentially evil."³⁷

Movement Rhetoric. The Clamshell Alliance Movement, 1976 to 1978. Students may also find fantasy theme analysis useful in analyzing discourse from several rhetors as they flesh out the rhetoric of a social movement. The rhetoric of the Clamshell

³²Reagan, "Korean Airliner," p. 739.

³³Reagan, p. 739.

³⁴Reagan, p. 739.

³⁵Reagan, p. 739.

³⁶Reagan, p. 740.

³⁷Although his competitive rhetorical criticism did not use fantasy theme analysis, Roger C. Aden in the 1984 N.F.A. Final Round of Rhetorical Criticism used this quote to illustrate how the KAL Incident "gave credence to Reagan's posture." For the statement by the administration official see Doerner and Magnuson, p. 11.

alliance group against construction of a nuclear power plant in Seabrook, NH, might provide an excellent topic for competitive rhetorical criticism.³⁸ The Clamshell alliance, an umbrella organization encompassing numerous anti-nuclear and environmental groups in New England, was the forerunner, if not the prototype, for antinuclear organizations during the late 1970's. Its rhetorical actions drew the first national attention to the antinuclear energy protest movement in the United States.

In applying this method, the student critic might first describe the Alliance's depiction of the *dramatis personae* within the vision. Participants in the movement might be branded big business, elite private interests as the villains, and anti-nuclear activists as the heroes within the drama. In so doing, the contestant could provide various excerpts from Clamshell rhetoric. For example, THE DECLARATION OF NUCLEAR RESISTANCE, a document published by a "consensus" of Clamshell members in 1976, states that "the present direction in energy research is based on corporate efforts to maximize profits and recoup past investments, rather than on meeting our real energy needs."³⁹ The critic could further support this depiction from one of the Alliance's rally songs, "No Nukes," by citing the lyrics which state that nuclear energy "rests upon the profits hungry people cannot eat" and "the darkness of its shadow gives us warning of the greed that tries to sell us more electric power than we need."⁴⁰ The student critic might then juxtapose this depiction against the Alliance's characterization of the valiant efforts of its members. For example, the contestant could note that in terming the Alliance "an affiliation of a wide range of groups and individuals" it is claiming the grassroots support of the many versus the controlling wishes of the few who want nuclear energy.⁴¹

The contestant might then go on to describe the plotline of the Clamshell vision. In this case, the student might indicate that the plotline consisted of a common fantasy type, the conspiracy scenario. The Clamshell vision participants viewed the elites in

³⁸The Clamshell Alliance was formed in 1976 by numerous environmental and anti-nuclear groups in New England. While its primary purpose was to end construction plans for a nuclear power plant at Seabrook, New Hampshire, its rhetoric and confrontational protest techniques made it a forerunner of the anti-nuclear organizations comprising the American anti-nuclear energy movement.

³⁹Clamshell Alliance, *Declaration of Nuclear Resistance* (Portsmouth: Clamshell Alliance, 1977), p. 1.

⁴⁰Pat Decou and Tex LaMountain, "No Nukes," Clamshell Alliance, Portsmouth, 1977.

⁴¹Clamshell Alliance, *Declaration*, p. 1.

society (big business and private interests) as conspiring to control the masses through nuclear power by "condemning democracy to extinction." They viewed nuclear energy as representing "the ultimate concentration of political and economic power that in turn may control our personal lives, freedoms, and social fabric."⁴² To the Clamshell adherents, nuclear power was inherently incompatible with a democratic society. To assist in describing the plotline of the vision, the contestant could cite "Nuclear Power and Its Alternatives," distributed by the Clamshell organizers in 1977, in which the conspiracy scenario is developed and readers are warned that nuclear energy is the "dictator of our political future."⁴³

Having described the characters and the plotline of the movement drama, the contestant might note that two kinds of scenes are emphasized in the movement rhetoric. One concerns "the balanced eco-system of a non-nuclear energy world."⁴⁴ The other concerns "the effects of nuclear hazards and disruptions to the eco-system from nuclear energy."⁴⁵

The rhetorical critic might also choose to emphasize the importance of the sanctioning agents of "safety," "preservation of the environment," and "activism" to the promulgation of this vision. The contestant could support this analysis by quoting from Rosalie Bertell of the Roswell Cancer Institute in Buffalo, New York, as she spoke at a Clamshell rally: "We have learned much about the danger of radiation, and at this point in time no one would protest the fact that any exposure to it is as harmful as anything to any life system."⁴⁶ The contestant could also point out that the DECLARATION stresses the links of nuclear energy to cancer, genetic disorders, and death. The contestant could also cite the slogan appearing on most Alliance flyers during the period that states "Better active today than radioactive tomorrow."

SUMMARY

This essay has explained how students may use Bormann's Fantasy Theme Analysis in competitive rhetorical criticism. This essay has identified the assumptions underlying fantasy theme analysis, described the method's concepts and presented the

⁴²Syracuse Peace Council, *Nuclear Power and Its Alternatives* (Syracuse: Syracuse Peace Council, 1977), p. 13.

⁴³Syracuse Peace Council, p. 10.

⁴⁴Clamshell Alliance, *Declaration*, p. 1.

⁴⁵Clamshell Alliance, *Labor Solidarity Resolution* (Portsmouth: Clamshell Alliance, 1977), p. 1.

⁴⁶Syracuse Peace Council, p. 7.

nomenclature that a student may use for setting up the "method section" of the rhetorical criticism, and presented illustrative examples that show how the method may be used to analyze various rhetorical artifacts, including a single speech, a series of messages, and the rhetoric of a social movement. By allowing the student to explore alternative realities, fantasy theme analysis provides a method whereby the student can achieve both interest and depth in competitive rhetorical criticism.