

Metaphorical Enthymeme: A Rhetorical Criticism of *Barack Obama: Son of Promise, Child of Hope*

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Abstract

The book *Barack Obama: Son of Promise, Child of Hope* merges religion and politics, two concepts that have traditionally been taught separately. The book portrays Obama as a savior, using imagery with strong religious overtones, as well as with dialogue that quotes Biblical scripture. This rhetorical criticism examines Nikki Grimes' book through the lenses of Aristotle's idea of the enthymeme and Michael Osborn's theory of rhetorical determinism through archetypal metaphor. Grimes' portrayal of Obama through the Savior metaphor serves as a tool that changes the way American children are socialized into the political arena. This essay argues that archetypal metaphor can be used to create an implied enthymematic structure. After justifying this argument, the essay provides theoretical and practical implications, as well as implications for further study.

In America, religious and political rhetoric are often intertwined – from the Pledge of Allegiance to “In God We Trust” on our dollar bills. At the same time, Americans have been taught, from a very early age, that Church and State are separate affairs. Americans have always upheld a rhetorical contract between the religious and political spheres that allows religion to make appearances in politics, but not wield direct influence over policy or major choices (Hart & Pauley, 2005). A new book by Nikki Grimes, however, ignores this concept. In *Barack Obama: Son of Promise, Child of Hope*; Barack Obama's life story is told to children with colorful pictures, and multiple references to the Bible – both implicit and explicit.

This book was published in the context of an historic election. It was released August 28, 2008, shortly after the Democratic National Convention where Barack Obama accepted that party's nomination for president. On November 5, 2008 he would be elected the first African-American president of the United States.

This book's prevalence makes it a significant artifact for analysis. It is widely available and can be found at Wal-Mart and the magazine rack at HEB – a major grocery chain in the Southern United States. Furthermore, Amazon.com reports that the book ranked number 736 on its best-seller list as of November 3, 2008 – immediately before the election (Amazon, 2008). The book merges religion and politics, two concepts that have traditionally been taught separately. The book portrays Obama as

a savior, using imagery with strong religious overtones, as well as with dialogue that quotes Biblical scripture. This essay examines Grimes' book through the lenses of Aristotle's idea of the enthymeme and Michael Osborn's theory of rhetorical determinism through archetypal metaphor. Grimes' portrayal of Obama through the Savior metaphor serves as a tool that changes the way American children are socialized into the political arena. This essay argues that archetypal metaphor can be used to create an implied enthymematic structure.

Enthymematic Structure and Archetypal Metaphor

By nature, Grimes' book is persuasion because it makes an argument. Released during the 2008 Presidential campaign, it asks the audience to vote for Barack Obama. The argument made by this book follows Aristotle's classic enthymematic structure, but does so in an untraditional way. The premises and conclusion of Grimes' enthymeme are not explicit, but presented through archetypal metaphor that relates Barack Obama to the Savior, or Christian Jesus.

The Rhetorical Enthymeme

Aristotle considers the enthymeme one of the primary structures of persuasion. The enthymeme is a rhetorical syllogism. Aristotle's syllogism is a tool of logic that pre-

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sents a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. The concept of syllogism is frequently presented with the famous “Socrates is a man. All men are mortal. Therefore Socrates is mortal.” In this example, two premises (Socrates is a man, and all men are mortal) lead to a conclusion (Socrates is mortal). Similarly, an enthymeme is a rhetorical tool that leads the audience to draw a conclusion through premises. In an enthymeme, however, part of the three-part syllogism is usually missing because it is assumed. The enthymeme serves as a persuasive technique that leads the audience into a syllogism but leaves out one piece, leaving the audience to fill in the missing link. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) write that all argumentation starts from a point of agreement. This point of agreement is why the rhetorical enthymeme works to persuade the audience. The audience agrees with one part of the enthymeme, and extends the conclusion from there.

In *Prior Analytics*, Aristotle wrote that an enthymeme may proceed from either sign or probability. In other words, the conclusion may be drawn by reading present signs, or by following a logical course that if the premise is logical, so is the conclusion. In *Prior Analysis*, Book II, chapter 27, Aristotle lays out the foundation of the enthymeme from probability with the example “wise men are good, since Pittacus is good.” In this example, Aristotle shows how the rhetorical enthymeme works, even when one premise is left unstated. This enthymeme proceeds from probability. If Pittacus is indeed a wise and good man, it is probable that all wise men are good. As a persuasive technique, Grimes takes this one step further to make her audience identify even more strongly with the enthymeme she sets up. She uses archetypal metaphor as a persuasive tool with which the audience will connect.

Archetypal Myth and Rhetorical Determinism in Rhetoric

The concept of an archetype was first introduced by Swiss psychologist Carl Jung to describe mythical themes and symbols that occur in most cultures independent of influence from other cultures. Jung postulated that these archetypal symbols are part of the human psyche itself (Jung, 1938). Humans, therefore, intensely identify with archetypes. Myths are powerful rhetorical tools that have been used in nearly all historical cultures. More than mere stories, however, myths contain themes that are easily recognized by the audience. Myths repeat familiar plots with different characters and settings across cultures (Campbell, 1988). Such repetition of themes and plots makes myths recognizable to nearly all cultures. It is the connection to these archetypal themes that give myth

persuasive power. Humans identify with archetype at a deeply psychological level (Jung, 1938). Rhetoric that uses these archetypes, thus, encourages the audience to connect or identify with the message.

Osborn’s (1968) theory of rhetorical determinism through archetypal metaphor is based on George Wilhelm Hegel’s theory of historical determinism. In a simple sense, historical determinism is like a chain of dominos. Much like a domino’s fate is determined by which way the previous dominos fall, Hegel says that free will is an illusion, because the choices we have in the present are determined by past actions and events. Osborn’s theory of rhetorical determinism, however, stops one step short of historical determinism because rhetorical determinism allows for free will based on those past actions.

Osborn’s theory has 4 major tenets. The first tenet of Osborn’s theory requires that the rhetor offer the audience a choice between two contrasting alternatives. For example, the speaker may argue that either you are with us, or you are against us, that there is no legitimate middle ground. The second tenet says that the rhetoric must frame that choice as a condition. The rhetor would say, ‘the present flowed from the past because you made these particular choices. The future I envision will flow from this present if you adopt my solution.’ The third tenet states that metaphor is used to suggest that some future series of events will occur by adopting the rhetor’s solution. The rhetor uses an archetypal metaphor, a story or a myth with which the audience is already familiar, to suggest a similar outcome. The fourth tenet of Osborn’s theory infers a moral or ethical choice and links that moral choice to material conditions. To choose the moral choice offered by the rhetor will lead to a radiant future. Likewise, to choose the opposing choice will lead to a deplorable future.

Obama as Savior: Argument by Metaphor in Grimes’ Book

Aristotle’s enthymeme and Michael Osborn’s theory of archetypal metaphor in rhetoric can be easily applied to Nikki Grimes’ book, *Barack Obama: Son of Promise, Child of Hope*. The first tenet of Osborn’s theory is fulfilled quite simply by the fact that Obama is running for president. The reader either supports Obama and a brighter future or rejects the character – because in American politics you can only vote for one candidate.

Osborn’s second tenet says that the future is determined by a person’s present choices. The reader sees an example of this when the “young Barack” sees poverty, racism, and homelessness. It is presented as the result of our past political choices. This book presents, then,

the promise of a better future through electing Barak Obama, who is portrayed as a chosen savior of the people. The title, itself, furthers this point by calling Obama a Son of Promise and Child of Hope, implying again a radiant future as a condition of voting for Obama.

This book serves as a shining example of Osborn's third tenet – the use of an archetypal metaphor. It is through metaphor that Grimes sets up an implied enthymeme. of a better future through electing Barack Obama, who is portrayed as a chosen savior of the people. The title, Grimes presents Obama as The Savior, equated in both language and images to the Christian Jesus. This metaphor, an accepted archetype in the Christian audience for which the book is written, becomes the argumentative structure of Grimes' persuasion. In this book, through scripturally toned language, Obama is again and again related to The Savior. The book uses Biblically toned language and references to scripture. First, Barack Obama is compared to the Biblical character Joseph when he "slipped on the name he'd been born with, the name of his father: Barack. For the first time in his life he wore it proudly like a coat of many colors" (p.23).

In more scripturally toned language, Barack is called a "healer" (p.28). Grimes goes on to say that Obama went "door to door preaching" (p.30), describing his work as a community organizer. Like biblical prophets, God speaks to Obama in "the still small voice" (p. 35), which is a direct quotation from 1 Kings 19:12. The actual verse reads, "And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12, King James Version). God goes on to tell Obama to "keep the past in memory but shape your own tomorrow" (p. 35), thus bestowing upon him divine power and solidifying the archetypal metaphor. Furthermore, the imagery in the book reinforces the savior metaphor. For example, the illustrator draws a picture, which prominently displays the dove in a stained-glass window while Obama prays, a tear running down his cheek (pp. 31-32). The dove is a symbol of hope in countless cultures. An image in one of the last pages of the book portrays Obama with a halo and his arms outstretched, palms up, in a pose identical to many paintings of Jesus (pp. 37-38). In yet another illustration, Obama's hands are seen joined in prayer with the people sitting next to him in Church (p. 28-29). Finally, Obama is seen praying, with a butterfly perched on his hands (pp. 25-26). All of these images serve to reinforce the Savior metaphor.

Throughout the book, the word "Hope" is capitalized, as if Hope is a living being, similar to the Christian idea of the Holy Spirit. First, Grimes writes that "Hope hummed deep inside him" (p. 10). It is capitalized again when the author writes, "Hold tight, said Hope. This strand of memory is stronger than you know" (p. 15).

Later, she writes, "He searched for courage inside himself. Hope was waiting there" (p. 20). In the next illustration she writes, "Listen, said Hope" (p. 22). While Obama is considering the historical tensions between Blacks and Whites, the author writes, "Don't worry, said Hope. I will be your bridge. In time, you will be the bridge for others" (p. 26). Next to an illustration of Obama crying in church, with a dove prominently displayed in the background, the author writes, "Hope would last long enough for him to make a difference" (p. 32). Finally, Grimes writes that, "Hope may be slim and beautiful, but she is no weak thing" (p. 38).

Barack Obama's portrayal as a savior fulfills Osborn's fourth tenet of a moral choice that leads to a material future. To choose Obama is to choose the moral choice. To reject Obama is to reject Hope – and by extension – reject God. Choosing Obama, as implied by the author, promises a radiant material future in the form of more wealth, better race relations, and a brighter future for America.

It is in her portrayal of Obama as Savior that Grimes most closely mirrors Osborn's theory and sets up her implied enthymeme. Grimes sets up an implied rhetorical enthymematic structure through the metaphorical comparison of Obama to the Christian Savior. Her implied enthymeme is: Jesus was the Savior of his people. Barack Obama is like Jesus. Therefore Barack Obama is a Savior. The argument is made through comparison of Obama to the Christian Savior. Through connection to the Savior archetype, Grimes invites her audience to similarly identify with a Presidential candidate. The metaphor becomes the main tool of Grimes' persuasion. The persuasive powers of Aristotle's enthymeme are combined with Osborn's sense of rhetorical determinism to create a strong argumentative structure. Her implied enthymeme is argued from probability. The sense of probability, like Osborn's sense of rhetorical determinism, is created by use of metaphor. The implied probability is that Jesus exhibited characteristics similar to Obama, and therefore their paths or outcomes will be similar.

Grimes demonstrates that archetypal metaphor can be used to create an implied enthymematic structure. Putting metaphor and enthymeme together creates a particularly strong form of argumentation. Obama's character fulfills all four tenets of Osborn's theory of rhetorical determinism through archetypal metaphor and thus, carries the world of politics and religion for children who are just being introduced to the American political dialogue.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

Through analysis of this artifact we see that use of meta-

phor can be extended to argumentation theory. Grimes' book demonstrates that archetypal metaphor can become not only a tool of persuasion, but the basis of enthymematic structure. As Aristotle writes that the rhetorical enthymeme can proceed from probability, analysis of Grimes' book shows that metaphor can serve as the premise that implies the probable conclusion. Grimes lends credibility to her enthymematic structure through the implied sense of the inevitability of a good outcome through the rhetorically deterministic nature of the metaphor. This essay extends the work of Osborn (1968) to show that archetypal metaphor can serve not only as a source of identification in rhetoric, but the premise of persuasion. It extends classic argumentation theory to show how a psychologically rooted archetypal metaphor can be used as a persuasive element.

Practical Implications

Grimes' use of a deeply rooted archetypal metaphor to create an enthymematic argument in a children's book has several societal implications. First, this book changes the way children in America are socialized into politics. Traditionally, children learn about religion and politics as separate concepts. The story of the Bible is taught at church; children then begin to learn about George Washington, the Constitution, and elections at school without interjecting religious topics. This book, however, blurs the line between church and state, politicizing the next generation of American citizens in a very religious manner – teaching them at a very early age to think about politics within a religious framework. In fact, the publisher, Simon & Schuster has a teacher's guide online at simon-says.com to encourage the book's use in the classroom (Zimmer, 2008).

This is particularly troublesome when children grow to become voters. Through this method of political socialization, the particular candidate now becomes the moral or ethical choice, instead of the most qualified or most to your liking on policy. Because the candidate is thought of in the context of religious principles, to vote against the moral choice becomes a vote against God. These powerful emotions and associations make it almost impossible for voters to stray from their political upbringing. Another concept this book introduces is the deification of an American political figure – a line that American politics

never crosses – and is usually only seen in dictatorships. Kim Jong Il, the Ayatollah Khomeini, or leaders who erect statues of themselves, such as Saddam Hussein or Joseph Stalin are good examples. In America, we usually wait until the President has passed on before erecting statues. Here, this book had deified Obama even before he had been elected as president. Finally, it is important to note that this book is published by Simon & Schuster – a leading publisher of children's books. The release of this book by such a major publishing company opens a Pandora's Box of children's literature, setting the stage for other authors publish similar accounts and further this melding of religion in political.

Implications for further study

This paper extends the study of argumentation and argumentative structures to non-traditional sources, such as children's literature. The analysis of children's literature as a form of persuasion reveals implications for future study. Future studies could look at the persuasive techniques applied in children's literature. Such study of children's literature could shed light on techniques that contribute to the socialization of young children. Future studies could look at children's literature to study persuasive techniques embedded in that literature. Future study should also look at non-traditional argumentative structures.

Conclusion

This essay has examined Nikki Grimes' book *Barack Obama: Son of Promise, Child of Hope* through the lenses of Michael Osborn's theory of rhetorical determinism through archetypal metaphor and Aristotle's argument through enthymeme. At a theoretical level, analysis of Grimes' book shows how use of archetypal metaphor can serve as the basis of persuasion. In the case of Grimes' book, this argument through metaphor is presented to an audience of children. On a practical level, Grimes' book changes the way we socialize children into American politics. The implications of this book reach far beyond a simple children's bedtime story – it teaches children to think of politics in religious terms of moral and immoral, and encourages a trend in political socialization that will change the way the next generation of American voters chooses our president.

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