

THE *ĒTHOS* FACTOR: MEMORABLE AND FORGETTABLE PRESIDENTIAL *EPIDEICTIC* ORATION

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[C]haracter is almost, so to speak, the most authoritative form of persuasion.

—Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*

I remember 28 January 1986. I don't recall the name of my fifth grade teacher, but I remember he wheeled a television into the classroom that day, excited to let my class watch the live broadcast of the first teacher in space taking off in the space shuttle *Challenger*. I'll never forget the way he reacted when we all watched that shuttle explode before it even left Earth's atmosphere; I had never before seen a teacher at a loss for answers to give a group of worried and questioning children. Later that evening, I watched the news at home with my family. At first, as usual, I was uninterested in the news, even when I saw President Reagan's face consuming the entire television screen. But I looked up when he clearly mentioned the children at school who had watched this disaster. My young mind thought he was talking just to me, trying to help me make sense out of the sad day's events.

I also remember 1 February 2003. America was still living in the fearful aftermath of 9/11. I woke that morning to a live news broadcast of the space shuttle *Columbia* exploding in the sky. The media immediately and speculatively connected this disaster to the terrorist masterminds who had attacked the U.S. eighteen months earlier. Like other Americans, I believed the tenuous connection the media had created and sat on the foot my bed, fearfully awaiting news of how the terrorists had managed this spectacular event. When President Bush finally spoke on live television, he said nothing about the terrorists, nor did he try to quell our fears. Instead, he simply stated the basic details of the event and gave the usual condolences to the astronauts' loved ones.

Reagan's speech has been hailed by many in the rhetorical community as important and successful. However, this oratorical success was, unfortunately, not duplicated by Bush. The ways in which the two speeches will be remembered can be seen in commentator Carl Cannon's 2003 article "Mourner-in-Chief." Cannon turns quickly away from Bush's recent address to the nation, offering no direct quotes from the speech. Instead, Cannon focuses on Reagan's celebrated speech from seventeen years earlier as a model of presidential oratory.

Bush himself (and his speechwriters) seems to have recognized the effectiveness of Reagan's *Challenger* speech, as there are startling parallels between the two speeches. The layout of each is organized in the same manner. Each man begins by stating the purpose of the speech. Each then names the dead, praising the astronauts for their courage. Each speaks of the dangers of space travel, though Americans so often take space missions for granted. Next, each expresses condolences to the astronauts' loved ones, NASA, and others affected by the tragedy. Finally, each president makes religious references in his final remarks. These similarities are not surprising since both speeches were a response to a major space disaster that was widely viewed on live television.

Of course, no two rhetorical situations are identical. Reagan's *Challenger* speech was delivered at the height of Cold War rivalries, and NASA played a crucial role in his "Star Wars" defense plan. Bush delivered his *Columbia* speech to a nation that was grappling with the new global threats posed by terrorist organizations. Because, though, of the similar rhetorical situations which prompted the delivery of these speeches and their differing levels of success, they create a useful site for exploring the Aristotelian concept of *ethos*. In this paper, I explore the *ethos* of each presidential orator and that *ethos* which caused one speech to be remembered and the other to be forgotten.

Since Bush was faced with the same circumstances as Reagan and gave an almost identical speech, one must question where Bush went wrong. While many would advance the theory that Bush is not and was not a well-loved president, one must recall that at that time in his presidency, he had as high an approval rating as Reagan did in 1986.¹ I would argue that the speeches themselves are more revealing than approval ratings; therefore, my analysis will focus directly on them. In reviewing those speeches, it is apparent that Bush copied Reagan's blueprint, so we might assume that his speech should have been as memorable. Yet, while Reagan's *Challenger* speech ranks number eight on the list of "Top 100 Most Memorable Speeches of the 20th Century" at the Web site *American Rhetoric* (Eidenmuller), Bush's *Columbia* speech has been largely unremarked. The *Columbia* speech is not ranked as a "bad" speech; it is simply forgotten. I argue that Bush's speech lacks the true Aristotelian notion of a tripartite ethical proof, whereas Reagan's exemplifies it.

History and Context of the Events

On 28 January 1986, the *Challenger* exploded as millions of adults and schoolchildren watched the event unfold on live television. The explosion took the lives of seven crew members, one of whom was Christa McAuliffe, the "teacher in space." McAuliffe's presence gave this particular launch a visibility unusual for shuttle launches, as "tens of thousands of teachers gathered their students around television sets in classrooms across the country [that] morning" (Maeroff). Further, many Americans were watching the launch with a sense of heightened anticipation because there had been six previous delays in the preceding weeks due to weather issues or technical difficulties, causing the mission to be "dubbed 'Mission Impossible'" (Jensen 223). That night, President Ronald Reagan was scheduled to give his annual State of the Union address, but in response to the explosion, he cancelled it and instead planned what he would say to America about the tragedy, speaking "briefly to the nation in an address that is widely considered one of his most moving" (Stuckey 57).

It is not possible to discuss Reagan's address without understanding how important NASA was, not just as the space agency, but as part of ongoing Cold War rivalries. The "space race" and the "arms race" were almost synonymous because any advances made in space were used militarily to advance arms capabilities.² A political reporter of the time stated, "We must never forget that the geopolitical realities of this century oblige us to match achievements of the Soviet Union. For better or worse, we continue to be locked in a competitive embrace with the Russians" (McConnell ix). The success of each shuttle launch was seen as the success of an entire nation and its political values. NASA was crucial to Reagan if he were to realize his missile defense plans, which were dubbed by the media the "Star Wars" program. Because of NASA's central role in Reagan's plans, the *Challenger* disaster was a major blow to his agenda. Thus, Reagan had very specific goals in

the *Challenger* speech; one was to console the bereaved audience, another was to bolster continued support of NASA to ensure that the Star Wars program would not be hampered.

Within days of the *Challenger* disaster's seventeen-year anniversary and only a year and a half after the attack on the World Trade Center, tragedy struck the NASA program again. Although the takeoff of *Columbia* was successful, its reentry into the Earth's atmosphere, which Americans watched on live television, ended in disaster. Like *Challenger*, *Columbia* had seven crew members aboard, all of whom were lost when the space shuttle burned up somewhere over Texas. During the *Challenger* disaster, America was entrenched in a silent Cold War, making the shuttle's success all the more important. In 2003 the Cold War was over, but America was "planning for a possible war in Iraq" due to the events of 9/11 (Kemper). Americans, still reeling from the fresh images and feelings of 9/11, were stunned and grieved, at first fearing that terrorists had attacked the shuttle (Cabbage and Harwood 155). Also, as with *Challenger*, the *Columbia* disaster was witnessed on live television. In both cases, the U.S. president was faced with a "rhetorical situation [that was] still emotionally unstable, and the natural emotions of anger, shame, and fear that accompany a tragedy" were present (Eidenmuller 31).

The *Epideictic* Occasion and *Ēthos*

Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* supplies directions for the genre of a speech and provides a useful taxonomy through which to analyze them. In *On Rhetoric* he classifies three types of speeches: deliberative, *epideictic*, and judicial. The *Challenger* and the *Columbia* speeches fall mainly within the definition of *epideictic*, a speech intended to praise or blame, often used to mark a formal event like a death.

Dale L. Sullivan argues that *epideictic* rhetoric "magnifies the importance of *ēthos* over *logos*," "forensic rhetoric" is linked to "enthymeme and to pathos," and deliberative rhetoric is linked to "the example and *ēthos*" (117). Further, he argues that "since *epideictic* is about character and *ethos* is the portrayal of character, there is a natural link between the two" (117). This is clearly the case with the *Columbia* and *Challenger* speeches. They are very similar in content, format, and conveyance of sentiment. Both presidents make the same logical argument for the continuation of the space program and both assert that the astronauts should be praised for their service. The emotion both men convey is the same: shock and grief. Both have clear deliberative intents in their speeches—to continue the space program. But it is clear that what is of utmost importance is the need to praise the astronauts for their service and to invest them with "dignity and nobility" (Sullivan 117). Thus, an analysis of these two *epideictic* orations must focus on the *ēthos* of each speaker—because these speeches have similar logical and pathetic proofs, the factor that accounts for their difference is, it seems, the *ēthos* that each president exhibited.

In the history of rhetoric, there have been many arguments regarding the importance of a speaker's character, or *ēthos*. Over time, those arguments have balanced between the "Isocratean conception of the orator-statesman" (Sattler 57) and Aristotelian realism, from Quintillian's "good man theory" to the Burkian idea of agent (see Golden et al.; Sattler). In more contemporary rhetorical theory, much research has been performed on the idea of "dynamism" and "source credibility" (see Delia; McCroskey and Young). My interest in this article is to examine what was perceived by the audience and what the two presidents exhibited. This paper will not answer the age-old question of whether rhetoric is used to deceive, nor will it explore whether only "good" men are capable of persuading. Rather, this paper will examine how each man created a *perception* of *ēthos*. I am not interested in making an ethical evaluation of their characters.

Further, Aristotle's concept of *ēthos* was chosen for the simplest of reasons: it is the definition which all others after him have incorporated, modified, agreed with, or disputed—but never dismissed. Golden et al. have declared that “so comprehensive and fundamental were Aristotle's views on rhetoric that it is no exaggeration to say that his treatise on the subject is the most important single work on persuasion ever written” (67).

Quintillian's theory that a truly good man is the only type of speaker who can persuade does not seem to have bearing in this case. Whether or not these two men were truly good in reality has been questioned by the media, by the American public, and probably by current readers of this paper. As Dan F. Hahn argues in regards to how likeable Reagan's personality always appeared on television, “Reagan fans will see this as a wonderful reaffirmation of their man's mastery of the office; opponents will perceive it as one more instance of Reagan acting rather than governing” (263). In the case of President Bush, he had had detractors since the controversy surrounding his 2000 election victory.

Because the legitimacy of these two men's virtue cannot be verified—and in fact, is in question—Aristotle's concept of *ēthos* becomes particularly helpful in an analysis of their speeches, specifically, Aristotle's belief that when character is used as a means of persuasion, the audience's previous knowledge about the speaker should not be considered in judging the speaker's *ēthos*.³ Therefore, the nation's existing evaluation of these presidents should be set aside in an analysis of the *Challenger* and *Columbia* speeches. This is particularly helpful considering that the perception of these men's virtue as a whole seems to be mostly dependent upon the observer's political persuasion: Reagan's speechwriter Peggy Noonan declared in her book *When Character Was King* that Reagan's public character was his true character—he was a truthful and moral man—while many others on the political left would disagree with that assertion. Regardless, for the purposes of an analysis of these speeches, Aristotle's reasoning is accepted and the previous knowledge of issues like the ridicule Reagan faced for his “Star Wars” program or the derision that Bush dealt with due to his inability to capture the mastermind of 9/11 are not part of the examination of the *ēthos* each man created at the time of his speech.

As stated previously, Aristotle's definition of *ēthos* is incredibly comprehensive; it is, according to Kennedy, “the moral character of the speaker” (316). An analysis of *On Rhetoric* makes it clear that what Aristotle means by the “moral character of the speaker,” as it pertains to rhetoric, is that character only as it is presented at the time of the speech: this character must be accepted by the audience as “fair-minded” in order to persuade. For Aristotle, the moral character of the speaker is an artistic proof he creates, his “contribution to persuasiveness” (1356a4). Aristotle does not claim that character is not relevant, only that it can be manufactured as a part of the speech.

Aristotle states that “we believe fair-minded people to a greater extent and more quickly [than we do others], on all subjects in general and completely so in cases where there is not exact knowledge but room for doubt” (1356a4). Kennedy's translation “fair-mindedness” comes from the Greek *epieikeia*. But what is *epieikeia* and why is it the quality Aristotle believes inspires belief in a rhetorical situation? Philosopher Christoph Horn provides a significant definition: “a perfect moral competence which overrides even justice” or, even more clearly, “the perfect level of moral goodness” (142). Aristotle defines *epieikeia* more clearly in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*; however, Horn explains that this term is generally translated as “equity” (142). In reference to people, the term *epieikēs* is used instead, and “Aristotle informs us that the *epieikēs* is entirely committed to the truth . . . ; the equitable never does anything wrong or bad, or anything about which

he must be ashamed” (143). Again, it is important to remember that “the speaker did not himself possess such qualities; rather, others perceived such qualities in him. It was the appearance of perfection which mattered” (Golden et al. 36).

In book 2 of *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle explains more clearly how one might exhibit himself or herself as a fair-minded person and thus appear persuasive to an audience:

There are three reasons why speakers themselves are persuasive; for there are three things we trust other than logical demonstration. These are practical wisdom [*phronēsis*] and virtue [*aretē*] and good will [*eunoia*]; for speakers make mistakes in what they say through [failure to exhibit] either all or one of these. (1378a5)

Book 2 also gives us a clearer understanding of what Aristotle intends by correlating the ideas of “character” and “fair-minded.” Aristotle correlates the first attribute of persuasive speakers, *phronēsis*, with being “prudent” (1378a6). *Aretē*, the second attribute, is the most significant, because Kennedy’s translation correlates this term back to “fair-minded” (1378a6). *Eunoia*, Aristotle says, “need[s] to be described in a discussion of the emotions” (1378a7). Thus we understand that what Aristotle means by “character” in his quote concerning *ēthos* is perceived virtue rather than past reputation.

Comparison of the Two Speeches

Now that it is clear what Aristotle means by the word “*ēthos*” and why it persuades, we can apply the three parts of *ēthos* to Reagan’s and Bush’s speeches to develop a fuller understanding of their effectiveness or lack of it.

Phronēsis

Under the heading of *phronēsis*, we must analyze how Reagan and Bush show “practical wisdom.” Rhetorician Gerard A. Hauser explains, “[W]e trust individuals who are intelligent. If we believe the person is well informed, has studied a question thoroughly, is clearheaded and reasonable in [his] beliefs, . . . does not utter exaggerated or banal opinions, . . . we are likely to have confidence in [his] advice” (154). It is difficult to point to any one particular statement Reagan makes that exhibits *phronēsis*. His general restatements of U.S. policy, administrative issues, and a past NASA disaster tell the audience that he is not blind to what has occurred and he is not going to try to make light of the moment or diminish it in some way. He exhibits his wisdom by avoiding a restatement of the grisly circumstances of the deaths of the astronauts—the nation had already watched the original event and then replay after replay all day long on every major television news station. In contrast, Bush, after noting that “great sadness” has come to our country, restates the already known details of when and how *Columbia* was lost and that none survived, although the later disaster too had been broadcast in detail: all major stations broke into their regular programming to announce and cover the event. Figure 1 shows a comparison of the opening statements of each president, and the way in which each establishes *phronēsis*.

Reagan	Bush
Ladies and Gentlemen, I'd planned to speak to you tonight to report on the state of the Union, but the events of earlier today have led me to change those plans. Today is a day for mourning and remembering. Nancy and I are pained to the core by the tragedy of the shuttle <i>Challenger</i> . We know we share this pain with all of the people of our country. This is truly a national loss. (94)	My fellow Americans, this day has brought terrible news and great sadness to our country. At nine o'clock this morning, Mission Control in Houston lost contact with our Space Shuttle <i>Columbia</i> . A short time later, debris was seen falling from the skies above Texas. The <i>Columbia</i> is lost; there are no survivors. (119)

Fig. 1. Comparison of *phronēsis*

Stuckey explains that “Reagan used language that purposely stayed away from evocative imagery and instead sought to check any such evocation” (83–84). To restate these grisly facts in a “banal” fashion as Bush chose to do in his speech did nothing to calm the emotional state of the viewers (Hauser 154). This first portion of the speech demonstrates that where Reagan showed *phronēsis* in not restating the particulars, Bush did not.

Aretē

The exhibition of *aretē*, moral virtue or “fair-mindedness,” is explained by Hauser: “We trust people who speak with integrity, who make virtuous decisions. . . . We trust these people to be truthful with us and to offer advice that will not harm others or make us regret our support” (155). In determining the virtue of a speaker, Aristotle was concerned with virtues found admirable by Athenians, such as modesty, eloquence, sincerity, and spirituality.

Reagan displays a virtuous level of modesty when he chooses to set aside his planned State of the Union address in order to attend to this critical issue. Reagan also shows proper modesty by including himself among those who have become complacent about the phenomenon of space travel. While Bush makes the same point—that space travel has become so routine that its danger is forgotten, he makes his statement in the passive voice, never including himself in the complacency, in contrast to Reagan’s inclusive first-person plural. Figure 2 demonstrates this.

Reagan	Bush
We’ve grown used to wonders in this century. It’s hard to dazzle us. But for twenty-five years the United States space program has been doing just that. We’ve grown used to the idea of space, and, perhaps we forget that we’ve only just begun. We’re still pioneers. They, the members of the <i>Challenger</i> crew, were pioneers. (94)	In an age when space flight has come to seem almost routine, it is easy to overlook the dangers of travel by rocket, and the difficulties of navigating the fierce outer atmosphere of the Earth. These astronauts knew the dangers, and they faced them willingly, knowing they had a high and noble purpose in life. Because of their courage, and daring, and idealism, we will miss them all the more. (119)

Fig. 2. Comparison of modesty

Reagan again demonstrates virtuous fair-mindedness in his eloquent use of the poem “High Flight” by American pilot John Gillespie Magee Jr., who died fighting the Nazis in WWII. Kenneth Burke writes that *epideictic* oration is the only type of rhetoric that blurs the distinction between rhetoric and poetry (295). Perhaps this is why Magee’s words became the most remembered part of Reagan’s speech and produced some of its greatest emotional moments: the astronauts “‘slipped the surly bonds of earth’ to ‘touch the face of God’” (95). Mister argues that Reagan’s use of Magee’s words created “a peaceful metaphor [that] redefined the violent fireball of death Americans had witnessed hours earlier” (162). Reagan’s adroit use of this young aviator’s words is one of the aspects that make this speech so memorable and eloquent and helped Reagan to give the public “solace” (“We Will Not Disappoint Them”). Bush does not include a poetic touch. Instead, he quotes a passage from the Bible, but it has no bearing on the issue at hand.

Where Reagan’s *aretē* seems complete, Bush’s seems to be either lacking or in excess in several areas: eloquence, uniqueness, sincerity, and spirituality. The content and delivery of Bush’s speech lack eloquence. As in many of his speeches, he stumbles over or mispronounces words. Although Reagan and Bush both had speechwriters, Reagan seems to make the words his own, whereas Bush always appears to be reading from a teleprompter. In this speech, he actually did better than usual, but he still stumbled at an important moment in the speech, distracting the listener: “May God bless the grieving families. And may—may God continue to bless America” (Bush 120). While logically we know that this kind of error is nothing more than a slip of the tongue, our gut reaction in such cases is that the speaker may not be speaking from the heart. While that is not necessarily logical, it is an issue that orators must be prepared to face. On the most basic level, it can destroy the eloquence of a speech.

Figure 3 below demonstrates an instance in which the general content of Bush’s speech is very similar to Reagan’s, but where Reagan’s words are eloquent, Bush’s are forced and brief. Bush plainly states, “Our journey into space will go on,” whereas Reagan eloquently makes his case without it feeling to the audience that it was rhetorically deliberative in nature. Bush does nothing to inspire his audience into agreement with his policy; he simply states that NASA’s work will continue.

Reagan	Bush
We’ll continue our quest in space. There will be more shuttle flights and more shuttle crews and, yes, more volunteers, more civilians, more teachers in space. Nothing ends here; our hopes and our journeys continue. (95)	Our journey into space will go on. (120)

Fig. 3. Comparison of eloquence

Bush’s attempts to mimic Reagan’s eloquence are unsuccessful. In part that may be because Bush’s speech, as a model of Reagan’s, lacks uniqueness. There is no originality; he copied the blueprint created by Reagan.

But, like all plagiarizers, he moved things around so that his speech was not an exact copy. Figure 4 shows one example of this copying and rearranging is in the naming of the dead.

Reagan	Bush
<p>We mourn seven heroes: Michael Smith, Dick Scobee, Judith Resnik, Ronald McNair, Ellison Onizuka, Gregory Jarvis, and Christa McAuliffe. We mourn their loss as a nation together. (94)</p>	<p>On board was a crew of seven: Colonel Rick Husband; Lt. Colonel Michael Anderson; Commander Laurel Clark; Captain David Brown; Commander William McCool; Dr. Kalpana Chawla; and Ilan Ramon, a Colonel in the Israeli Air Force. These men and women assumed great risk in the service to all humanity. (119)</p>

Fig. 4. Comparison of uniqueness

One difference in these statements is that Reagan introduces the fallen with the statement “We mourn seven heroes”; not only is this eloquent, but it tells us that the astronauts are “heroes.” Bush never names them as such. Instead, he simply states the obvious—there were seven astronauts on board. An additional difference is that Bush provides the military title for each astronaut, something Reagan never did. Taken in the context of the entire speech, Reagan’s choice demonstrates that he saw these people as humans and individuals who were part of a team, whose leader he never names. Bush deliberately pronounces each title; it seems that he is emphasizing that the astronauts had a duty to perform and they did it. This tactic lends a sense of personal detachment from their deaths.

Sincerity is another virtue that Bush is not entirely successful in displaying. As discussed earlier, his verbal slip at the end leaves the audience doubting his sincerity: “And may—may God continue to bless America” (120). But, more importantly, his sincerity is suspect because he never uses the word “I.” And he uses plural first-person pronouns, including himself in the category of all Americans, only three times: “Our entire nation grieves with you”; “Because of their courage, and daring, and idealism, we will miss them all the more”; and “[W]e can pray that all are safely home” (119–20). Reagan uses the pronoun “I” on eight separate occasions. And Reagan also includes himself in the category of all Americans with the use of “we” and “our,” but Reagan does it an astounding twenty-seven times. As one reporter wrote at the time, it was as if Reagan was “sharing a nation’s shock” (Saikowski). He made great use of these pronouns to solidify that he felt personally hurt by this tragedy, and that he truly shared the emotions of the American people.

Both men demonstrate the quality of spirituality, but again in different ways and to different effect. Reagan obviously understood that not all people in this melting pot of a nation are Christian. Reagan mentions God only once, at the end of his speech, in a highly affecting moment.

Reagan	Bush
<p>We will never forget them, nor the last time we saw them, this morning, as they prepared for their journey and waved goodbye and “slipped the surly bonds of earth” to “touch the face of God.” Thank you. (95)</p>	<p>In the skies today we saw destruction and tragedy. Yet farther than we can see, there is comfort and hope. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, “Lift your eyes and look to the heavens. Who created all these? He who brings out the starry hosts one by one and calls them each by name. Because of His great power, and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.” The same Creator who names the stars also knows the names of the seven souls we mourn today. The crew of the shuttle <i>Columbia</i> did not return safely to Earth; yet we can pray that all are safely home. May God bless the grieving families. And may—may God continue to bless America. (120)</p>

Fig. 5. Comparison of spirituality

Reagan’s choice of words allows anyone, regardless of faith, to relate to and feel their meaning—those astronauts live on in an afterlife. In contrast, Bush makes two statements, both demonstrating his specifically Christian spirituality. The first is a direct quote from the Bible. While there is nothing wrong with such a quote, Bush’s choice was not meant to praise the astronauts, or to indicate that they would be in heaven. Instead, Bush’s choice runs the risk of alienating a large part of the public, as he uses the moment to reinforce the supremacy of a Judeo-Christian God rather than the importance of the sacrifice the astronauts made. Bush goes on to reinforce this biblical statement with his final words, which are a prayer and blessing. The *epieikeia* must demonstrate that each aspect of their virtue is at the mean, never going too far in one direction or the other. However, Bush’s use of the biblical quote, as well as his later statement of prayer and blessing, makes it clear that there is no balance to his spirituality or recognition of spiritual viewpoints that may be different than his own. In sharp distinction, Reagan also mentions God, but does so in a way that is not only inclusive but becomes the most remembered moment of his speech.

Eunoia

Eunoia, or goodwill, is the most obvious of the three attributes of *ēthos* which Reagan displays in this speech. As one of the millions of children who watched this disaster unfold on live television, and as one who listened to Reagan speak that night to console me, I have always felt that the most compelling part of Reagan’s speech was his obvious *eunoia* for me, for the shuttle crew and their families, for the dedicated employees of NASA, and for the emotional well-being of all Americans. There are many examples of Reagan’s *eunoia*, but the most obvious, all-encompassing example, one that all audience members could connect with, are his opening comments: “Nancy and I are pained to the core by the tragedy of the shuttle *Challenger*. We know we share this pain with all of the people of our country. This is truly a national loss.”

Like Reagan, Bush expressed his goodwill toward the families of the fallen, stating, “All Americans today are thinking, as well, of the families of these men and women who have been given this sudden shock and grief. You’re not alone. Our entire nation grieves with you” (94). While this certainly demonstrates *eunoia*, it appears paltry compared to that expressed by Reagan. Reagan’s speech directly addresses not just the families of the astronauts, but also the nation’s children, as well as “every man and woman who works for NASA” (119). Beyond addressing more specific groups than Bush, Reagan’s repeated use of the personal pronouns “I,” “we,” and “us” demonstrate that he is personally invested in his statements. Although we can assume that Bush counts himself in “all Americans” and “our nation,” it is not expressly stated, and a concreteness is missing from Bush’s sentiments. Thus, Bush appears to be lacking in his expression of *eunoia*; Reagan’s, in comparison, seems to be more genuine.

At no point in the speech does Bush give the kind of personal emotional statement expressing *eunoia* in the same way that Reagan does, in a moment of perfect *eunoia*: “Nancy and I are pained to the core by the tragedy of the shuttle *Challenger*. We know we share this pain with all of the people of our country.” Reagan steps out from his presidential role for a moment and makes it clear that he was affected by this tragedy on a very personal level. Reporter R. W. Apple Jr. states that this one particular statement “established an elegiac tone” to the speech because of the specificity of naming his wife. Unfortunately, Bush never establishes that he viewed the tragedy in a personal way, thus leaving him emotionally alienated from his audience.

Conclusion

It is important to understand when judging *ēthos* that it is not the speaker who determines success, it is the audience, and the audience resoundingly felt that Reagan was successful in his speech and in the *ēthos* he exhibited. One scholar disagrees with this assessment: Steven Mister. Mister’s main problem with the speech is a reference Reagan makes to Sir Frances Drake, a historical character that Mister views as no more than a pirate. Mister is also critical of the deliberative elements of Reagan’s speech, wherein he defended NASA. Nonetheless, Mister concedes that “the success of [Reagan’s] address is demonstrated by public opinion following the speech” (164); a poll found that 80% wanted the space program to continue (“Poll Shows Doubts on NASA”), and two-thirds of students still wished to travel in space (Mister 164). Another poll reported similar findings; 73% felt that the benefit of space travel was worth the risk (“Poll: Forge Ahead”). Mister notes that even members of the media who were critical of Reagan’s presidency “praised his remarks” (164). One such assessment was made by Richard Cohen, a consistent critic of Reagan, who stated that the president “brings with him the expectation that things will turn out all right,” which Cohen hailed as a “talent” and a “gift.” On 10 February 1986, *Time* magazine hailed the speech as “poignant and graceful” and “moving” (“Space”). Even hard-hitting reporter Anthony Lewis, in a scathing review of Reagan’s policies wherein he expressed shock at Reagan’s tremendously high approval ratings, had to admit that the overwhelming approval came from “Reagan’s personality and his ability to communicate it.” Lewis’s word “personality” can easily be translated as *ēthos*, as Lewis is by no means suggesting that Reagan’s personality was real, just that he had “rare grace” when speaking on the day of the *Challenger* disaster. In an article memorializing the passing of Reagan, Nancy Gibbs recalled the speech he gave after the *Challenger* accident, which she called “eloquent.” And, in a 2003 article titled “The Mourner-in-Chief,” which should, by rights, have been about Bush’s speech, as it was prompted by the *Columbia* disaster, Carl Cannon primarily dis-

cussed Reagan, with a comment on the “memorability” of his *Challenger* speech and the fact that “even those who had no use for Ronald Reagan listened raptly as he tried to make sense of a tragedy that Americans had watched live” (438). Stuckey found in her research that “the files at the Reagan Library are full of representative wires and letters sent to the president, nearly all of them full of praise” (80–81). Peggy Noonan, Reagan’s speechwriter, describes the “calls and telegrams” that came to the White House immediately after the speech as an “avalanche,” which surprised even Reagan, as his own perception was that he had “failed” (*What I Saw* 258). Finally, the Web site *American Rhetoric* listed Reagan’s speech among the top one hundred speeches of the twentieth century, landing it in the top ten (“Top 100 Speeches”). The media, public, and political response to Reagan’s speech was instantaneous and overwhelmingly positive.

It has proven to be long-lived as well. Historically, Reagan’s speech is remembered, whereas Bush’s speech is not. When one watches Reagan speaking, the aspects of *ethos* displayed by him are not immediately discernible. However, when looked at in comparison with Bush’s *epideictic* oration, Reagan’s speech stands out as special and memorable. What is truly amazing about the *Challenger* speech, as we can see in analysis removed from the event by twenty-five years, is that Reagan’s purpose in it was to advance his own “Star Wars” program; it seems that he used the emotions of the occasion to keep the space program alive. However, Reagan’s overarching portrayal of virtue, wisdom, and goodwill and the “perfect level of moral goodness” (Horn 142) his audience perceived in him obscure that issue and demonstrate how masterful Reagan truly was as the “Great Communicator.”

Notes

¹ In a opinion piece on 26 January 2003, just days before the *Columbia* disaster, *New York Times* reporter Bill Keller stated, “While polls earlier this month showed the first flickers of doubt about Bush’s conduct, his 58 percent approval rating is identical to Reagan’s when he won his 49-state re-election victory in 1984. Bush has a few other things going for him that Reagan lacked” (34). In other polls, the men stood equally close in very high approval ratings. In July 2002, Bush’s approval rating stood at 70%, and Reagan’s was 74% in January 1986. Robin Toner of the *New York Times* reported on 25 January 1986, “In a survey earlier this month, 74 percent of Americans said they approved of the way the President was handling his job.” On 18 July 2002, Richard Stevenson and Janet Elder of the *New York Times* reported on President Bush’s approval rating: “Mr. Bush remains personally popular. His approval rating stands at 70 percent, continuing a steady decline from its peak of 89 percent after Sept. 11, but still impressive by any standard.”

² The space race began in 1952. The Soviet launch of *Sputnik* in 1957 was the first big victory, highlighting the urgency of the space race because of the potential military applications of satellites in space. Hugh Sidey writes of the American reaction to the Soviets’ making it to space first: “At the Naval Research Laboratory, which was in charge of America’s entry in the space race, Project Vanguard, the engineers bathed the roof in searchlights so they could adjust their radio dishes to pick up the defiant beep from *Sputnik*, the 184-lb. intruder that had not only humiliated the U.S. but ratcheted up the cold war. The Soviet rockets obviously were bigger and better than we knew. The White House feigned indifference, and reassured the nation about American scientific prowess. . . . Worry seeped through the nation, always uncomfortable with second place. The U.S. hurried its thin, finely engineered rocket, with a satellite, to the launching pad two months later” (A32).

³ George A. Kennedy, the foremost expert and translator of Aristotle’s *On Rhetoric*, provides an explanation for this unusual view of *ethos*, which ties into Aristotle’s opposition to the theory of Isocrates that a speaker has more *ethos* based upon his position in society (i.e., a senator is more believable than a servant). It is likely that this, as well as many of Aristotle’s other ideas, are “influenced by scorn for Isocrates” (Kennedy 22). Probably in order to challenge Isocrates’ position, Aristotle held that previous knowledge of the speaker is considered to be an “inartistic proof” (Kennedy 39). “Inartistic” proof exists prior to the speech, and consists of things like facts, witness statements, statistics, and evidence. “Artistic” proofs are created by the speaker using the inartistic proofs; these are the three means of persuasion. This part of Aristotle’s argument seems inconsistent at best, and many of his translators make a note of this idiosyncrasy in his rationale. However, Aristotle is unambiguous on the issue: “This [*ethos*] should result from the speech, not from a previous opinion that the speaker is a certain kind of person” (1356a4).

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