

## THE PRESENCE OF CLASSICAL RHETORIC TECHNIQUES IN OBAMA'S SPEECHES

*Résumé.* — Cet article a pour but de montrer que les éléments de la rhétorique classique établis par Aristote, Cicéron et Quintilien pour le *genus deliberativum* sont présents dans une sélection des discours prononcés par B. Obama aux alentours de la campagne électorale qui l'a conduit à la présidence des États-Unis. L'exposé des parallélismes entre les exemples latins choisis et les propos utilisés par Obama suit l'ordre des parties du discours, à savoir : *exordium*, *narratio*, *argumentatio*, *elocutio* et *actio*. Malgré quelques différences, les A. croient pouvoir conclure que les discours de B. Obama sont construits selon les règles données par les œuvres classiques qui traitent de l'élaboration d'un bon discours.

*Quid enim iam sequitur, quod quidem artis sit, nisi ordiri orationem, in quo aut concilietur auditor aut erigatur aut paret se ad discendum ; rem breviter exponere et probabiliter et aperte, ut quid agatur intellegi possit ; sua confirmare, aduersaria euertere, eaque efficere non perturbate sed singulis argumentationibus ita concludendis, ut efficiatur quod sit consequens iis quae sumentur ad quamque rem confirmandam ; post omnia perorationem inflammantem restinguentemue concludere ?*

(Cic., *Orat.*, 122-123)

### 1. Introduction

It is a well-known fact that in Rome, a command of the art of the word was the key to reaching the top of the *cursus honorum* [steps of the political ladder], and Cicero himself is good proof of that. In his early treatise *De inuentione*<sup>1</sup> he claims that the political man, the leader, is the spokesman of the interests of the community, and, hence, must know the art of persuasion, that is, he must be a *dicendi peritus* [skilled in speaking]. Politics was considered one of the most important moral activities of men, and, in order to

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1. Cic., *Inu.*, I, 1; cf. Aristotle, *Rhet.*, 1355b, 10-12; Cic., *De orat.*, I, 30, 158.

devote oneself to it, perfect knowledge and mastery of oratorical techniques was necessary.

If the art of persuasion, that is, rhetoric, is, as has already been said, closely linked to politics<sup>2</sup>, it is obvious that its maximum splendor and blossom is to be found in democratic systems, and, within them, both in classical antiquity and in the modern world, in electoral campaigns<sup>3</sup>. It is important to remember, in this respect, that Cicero's means for obtaining votes in his campaign for the consulate included, according to his brother Quintus, the glory of eloquence, as can be read in *Commentariolum Petitionis*<sup>4</sup>. This work is a long treatise, in the form of a letter, in which Quintus, almost as a campaign director, plans his brother Marcus' electoral strategy.

A candidate's most powerful political weapon was his reputation as an orator. Cicero did not have protégés and neither could he display military deeds, but his activity as a lawyer won him many favors. In the elections for 63, he competed with two noblemen, Catiline and Galba. Let us briefly remember here that Cicero was a *homo nouus* [the first member of a family to obtain a curule seat], a member of the rural bourgeoisie of the *ordo equester* [equestrian order], but, without the necessary pedigree to go up the social ladder in an oligarchic republic, he could only count on the power of the word. The art of oratory was an activity of the socially high and politically active Roman. In the *Pro Murena*<sup>5</sup>, we read:

*Duae sint artes <igitur> quae possint locare homines in amplissimo gradu dignitatis, una imperatoris, altera oratoris boni.*

It is not known to what extent Cicero put his brother's advice into practice during his campaign, but we do know that he was elected consul unanimously on July 29<sup>th</sup> 64.

The aim of this paper is to analyze how a political leader like Obama used the *ars bene dicendi* [the art of speaking correctly or elegantly] in his political campaign<sup>6</sup>. Barack Hussein Obama, the first African American

2. Cf. Tacitus, *Dial*, 28, 2.

3. P. FLORES SANTAMARÍA (1996).

4. Cf. Q. Cic., *Comm. Pet.*, 2-3: *Nominis nouitatem dicendi gloria maxime subleuabis [...] eius facultatis adiumenta, quae tibi scio esse seposita, ut parata ac prompta sint cura et saepe quae <de> Demosthenis studio et exercitatione scripsit Demetrius recordare.*

5. Cic., *Pro Murena*, 30.

6. The following speeches have been analysed here: Chicago (Illinois), October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2002; Boston (Massachusetts), July 27<sup>th</sup> 2004; Springfield (Illinois), February 10<sup>th</sup> 2007; Selma (Alabama), March 4<sup>th</sup> 2007; Ashford University (Iowa), September 12<sup>th</sup> 2007; Des Moines (Iowa), January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008; Nashua (New Hampshire), January 8<sup>th</sup> 2008; Philadelphia (Pennsylvania), March 18<sup>th</sup> 2008; St. Paul (Minnesota), June 3<sup>rd</sup>

president of the United States, has become one of the most international and popular American political leaders. His charismatic personality and discourse have had a profound impact not only on American public opinion, but also around the world, as can be seen in the enormous repercussion that his speeches and political rallies have had on the mass media since even before he took office. Columnist David Brooks wrote, in *The New York Times*, about his feelings after interviewing Senator Obama. The title is graphic enough: "Obama, gospel and verse" (D. BROOKS [2007]). Among other aspects, D. Brooks highlights Obama's ability to adapt his tone to each occasion and to each answer.

Rhetoric is divided into *inuentio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria* and *actio*. Politicians, while preparing and elaborating their electoral speeches, resort to all of these, to a greater or lesser degree and with more or less fortune<sup>7</sup>. It is, ultimately, a matter of being able to respond to the three categories of *docere*, *delectare* and *mouere*. It is also important to mention that in the United States political discourse is a literary genre, and that the words of presidents such as Franklin D. Roosevelt – "there is nothing to fear but fear itself" – or John F. Kennedy – "ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country" – are part of collective memory.

*Inuentio*, or the search for arguments, is defined in *Rhetorica ad Herennium*<sup>8</sup> as *excogitatio rerum uerarum aut ueri similium, quae causam probabilem reddant*. Orators, in their search for arguments, know very well what topics concern their audience and what they, consequently, need to include in their rallies: economic crises, international terrorism, health care, education, etc.

In this paper we are more interested in tackling the second phase of the elaborative process of the speech, or *dispositio*, which includes, according to traditional theories on rhetoric, *exordium*, *narratio* (*argumentatio* / *refutatio*) and *peroratio* or *conclusio*. However, we will also deal with

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2008; Chicago (Illinois), June 15<sup>th</sup> 2008; Berlin, June 24<sup>th</sup> 2008; Democratic Convention in Denver (Colorado), August 28<sup>th</sup> 2008; Chicago (Illinois), November 4<sup>th</sup> 2008; Inaugural Address, Washington, January 20<sup>th</sup> 2009. For the contextualization of these speeches, see *Palabra de Obama. Discursos para la Historia* (2009). The last speeches analyzed were those pronounced after he became US president in the University of Cairo (June 4<sup>th</sup> 2009) and in the Parliament of Ghana (July 11<sup>th</sup> 2009). The scripts of the speeches can be found on the webpages listed in the References.

7. It is fair here to highlight the figure of Jon Favreau, the writer of Obama's speeches, and also Obama's campaign chief, David Axelrod, who used the huge possibilities of the Internet to their full extent.

8. Cic., *Rhet. Heren.*, I, 2, 3. Cf. Cic., *Inu.*, I, 7, 9.

*elocutio* and *actio*<sup>9</sup>. Hence, based on the selected speeches, we will deal with the resources most widely used in Obama's speeches.

## 2. *Exordium*

The *exordium* – defined by Cicero<sup>10</sup> as *oratio animum auditoris idonee comparans ad reliquam dictionem: quod eueniet si eum beniuolum, attentum, docilem confecerit* – is of major importance in this argumentative genre, since it is used to try to catch the audience's attention. There is an abysmal difference between, on the one hand, the common *exordium* in favour of Marcellus, *Pro M. Marcello* or the magnificent wave, charged with sonorous expressivity in the speech in favour of Milone, *Pro Milone* and, on the other hand, the unexpected *exordium ex abrupto* of the first Oration against Catiline, *In Catilinam Oratio I*<sup>11</sup>.

The political orator in his electoral campaigns can start by making reference to the town where the rally is taking place, with clear intentions of *captatio beneuolentiae*, as can be seen in Obama's speech in Des Moines (Iowa) on January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008, after his victory as candidate of the Democratic Party:

- (1) Thank you, Iowa.  
 You know, they said this day would never come.  
 They said our sights were set too high.  
 [...]  
 But on this January night – at this defining moment in history – you have done what the cynics said we couldn't do.

The same is found in the speech after his electoral victory over the Republican candidate McCain on November 4<sup>th</sup> 2008 in Chicago (Illinois):

- (2) Hello, Chicago!  
 If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in

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9. In regards to *memoria*, defined by Cicero as *thesaurus omnium rerum et custos* (*De orat.*, I, 5), it was an essential part of oratory. In spite of the importance it has in Obama, the truth is that it has been displaced by the use of the teleprompter, which Obama has an excellent command of (S. LEITH [2012]). See also A. BRIZ (2008), p. 133 & f.

10. Cic., *Inu.*, I, 15, 20.

11. According to Quintilian, the Greek word προοίμιον is more appropriate than the Latin *exordium* since *illi* [i.e. the Greeks] *satis clare partem hanc esse ante ingressum rei, de qua dicendum sit, ostendunt* (*Inst. Or.*, IV, 1, 1), either because it is related to the term οἶμη (song) and refers to the chords played by zither players before executing a piece, or else because it refers to οἶμος (way, route), and the preface would then be what can be said before plunging into an argument. If we establish a parallelism between a speech and a jazz piece we could say that the *exordium*-introduction is the initial tune.

our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer.

It is also possible to start with a metaphor (“unlikely journey”), as Obama did in the speech delivered on February 10<sup>th</sup> 2007 in Springfield (Illinois), and which would become one of the leitmotifs of his electoral campaign.

- (3) We all made this journey for a reason.  
[...] That’s the journey we’re on today.

At that moment, Obama was unknown, with no support in the party machine; he was not in the running for the presidency, or even for the Democratic nomination. The “inevitable” candidate was Hillary Clinton. The most recurrent topic was that of his own personal history, which enabled him to explicitly establish common grounds with the audience (speech delivered in Boston [Massachusetts] on July 27<sup>th</sup> 2004):

- (4) My parents shared not only an improbable love; they shared an abiding faith in the possibilities of this nation. They would give me an African name, Barack, or “blessed”, believing that in a tolerant America your name is no barrier to success.  
I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me, and that, in no other country on earth, is my story even possible.

He resorts to this again in the speech delivered, four years later, in Denver on August 28<sup>th</sup> 2008, where he accepts his nomination to the presidency of the United States (cf. the speeches delivered in Cairo on June 4<sup>th</sup> 2009 and in the Parliament of Ghana on July 11<sup>th</sup> 2009).

He does not present himself as a superior, highly-gifted or exceptional leader, but as someone not only close to his audience, but actually part of their common ground. By means of this mechanism, an intimate connection is created from the very beginning between those listening and the person who is speaking. The point is to prove that his trajectory is that of someone who, emerging from common anonymity, is committed to the American social reality in order to help in its transformation. In short, it is about proving that he is a *homo novus* – like Cicero – without the weight of a dynasty like those of the Kennedys, the Clintons, etc. He specifically mentions this in the speech delivered in Berlin on June 24<sup>th</sup> 2008:

- (5) I know that I don’t look like the Americans who’ve previously spoken in this great city. The journey that led me here is improbable. My mother was born in the heartland of America, but my father grew up herding goats in Kenya. His father – my grandfather – was a cook, a domestic servant to the British.

He constantly mentions the exceptionality of his situation which, however, he does not attribute to his qualities or merits, but to the virtues of the

American dream, expressing it with extreme humility (e.g. in the *exordium* of his Inaugural Address in Washington on January 20<sup>th</sup> 2009):

(6) I stand here today humbled by the task before us [...]

It has been seen that the introduction to a speech is fundamental, since the aim is to seduce the audience. J. RUBIO and F. PUIGPELAT (2007) mention four techniques to seduce and win the interlocutor over: (a) assume that we are all selfish; (b) look for identification with audience; (c) talk about the interlocutor; (d) praise and not criticize; be positive. In this same sense, convinced of the importance of the first part of the speech, J. RUBIO and F. PUIGPELAT (2007), following S. LINVER (1987), have established a typology of fourteen introductory formulas. In the *exordiums* of all his speeches, Obama shows *auctoritas* [prestige, influence], in the sense of “credibility”, and this credibility becomes a fundamental aspect of his discursive technique<sup>12</sup>. As a matter of fact, *auctoritas* is stronger than any argument. In Quintilian’s words: *Valet autem in consiliis auctoritas plurimum*<sup>13</sup>.

### 3. *Narratio*

In the *narratio*, which Cicero defines as *rerum gestarum aut ut gestarum expositio*<sup>14</sup>, to which Quintilian adds *utilis ad persuadendum*<sup>15</sup>, the political leader tends to present the different points of his electoral program. Once more, this practice has its antecedents in republican Rome. A key example, mentioned by P. FLORES SANTAMARÍA (1996, p. 361), is Cicero’s famous passage in *Pro Sestio*<sup>16</sup>, where he establishes his political program, whose basic points were: the defence of the interests of the people, respecting and taking into account the supreme interests of the state; harmony among “political parties”, *optimates* and *populares*; the cessation of electoral intrigue, etc.

Obama, like all other politicians, resorts to *topoi* or *dicta classica*, that is, to the *partes suadendi* or supports for persuasion, first of all when trying to prove that his program is useful, fair, necessary, etc., since his approach to and proposals for the different aspects of social and political life (economic policy, health, education and so on) are the most suitable and pertinent. With this purpose, most of the time, the *narratio* is combined with *demonstratio*, in its double aspect of *argumentatio* and *refutatio*, making reference to the opposition and even disqualifying the rival himself. The

12. See Cicero’s speech *Pro lege Manilia*, 2. See also J. L. CONDE CALVO (2008), p. 5-32.

13. Quint., *Inst. or.*, 3, 8, 12.

14. Cic., *Inu.*, I, 19, 27.

15. Quint., *Inst. or.*, IV, 2, 31.

16. Cic., *Sest.*, 96-98.

*narratio* is, then, the part on which the argumentation of the speech rests. Right after the *narratio*, where the orator presents the facts that lead to a certain situation and describes its most important aspects, comes the moment for presenting a position: this is the *argumentatio*. The bulk of the proof supporting the evidence is presented here: the data, the concatenation of logical arguments, and, if necessary, the emotional arguments. The *narratio* ends with the *refutatio*, which is an anticipated refutation of the rival's arguments. The aim is to anticipate the possible objections to the arguments presented before the opponent can formulate them.

Once again, the antecedents are to be found in Rome. Cicero, as explained by Asconius<sup>17</sup>, attacked his opponents:

*Tum Cicero grauitur senatu intercessionem ferente surrexit atque in contionem Catilinae et Antonii inuectus est.*

In this same speech, Cicero attacks Catiline, his rival in the elections, and accuses him of being a murderer, a fraud, and other similar insults. Obama, on the contrary, is extremely delicate with his political rival, McCain, since he praises him openly and then moves on to establish a *communio* with the audience, so that they are the ones to pass judgment on the rival's position. We find this in Obama's speech in St. Paul (Minnesota) on June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008, after being declared the winner of the primary elections of the Democratic Party:

- (7) In just a few short months, the Republican Party will arrive in St. Paul with a very different agenda. They will come here to nominate John McCain, a man who has served this country heroically. I honor that service, and I respect his many accomplishments, even if he chooses to deny mine. My differences with him are not personal; they are with the policies he has proposed in this campaign.

[...]

It's not change when John McCain decided to stand with George Bush ninety-five percent of the time, as he did in the Senate last year.

[...]

It's not change when he offers four more years of Bush economic policies that have failed to create well-paying jobs, or insure our workers, or help Americans afford the skyrocketing cost of college.

[...]

And it's not change when he promises to continue a policy in Iraq that asks everything of our brave men and women in uniform and nothing of Iraqi politicians.

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17. Cf. Asconius, *Tog. Cand.*, 74 ed. Curtis.

Then the audience is ready to listen to his program; in tripartite structures, as could already be seen in his *refutatio* (“It’s not change when”), he builds his *argumentatio*:

- (8) Change is a foreign policy that doesn’t begin and end with a war that should’ve never been authorized and never been waged.

[...]

Change is realizing that meeting today’s threats requires not just our fire-power, but the power of our diplomacy.

[...]

Change is building an economy that rewards not just wealth, but the work and workers who created it.

In another electoral campaign speech delivered in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) on March 18<sup>th</sup> 2008, he had to confront one of the biggest crises of the campaign: the diffusion of inflammatory, racist speeches with anti-American undertones by Reverend J. Wright, the black pastor who converted Obama to the Christian faith, married him and baptized his daughters. He did so brilliantly, with a firm attack on J. Wright’s declarations, but also with justification sustained not only by a black person, himself, but also by a white one, his maternal grandmother:

- (9) As such, Reverend Wright’s comments were not only wrong but divisive, divisive at a time when we need unity; racially charged at a time when we need to come together to solve a set of monumental problems: two wars, a terrorist threat, a falling economy, a chronic health care crisis, and potentially devastating climate change; problems that are neither black or white or Latino or Asian, but rather problems that confront us all.

[...]

The man I met more than twenty years ago is a man who helped introduce me to my Christian faith, a man who spoke to me about our obligations to love one another; to care for the sick and lift up the poor. He is a man who served his country as a U.S. Marine; who has studied and lectured at some of the finest universities and seminaries in the country, and who for over thirty years led a church that serves the community by doing God’s work here on Earth.

[...]

As imperfect as he may be, he has been like family to me.

[...]

I can no more disown him than I can disown the black community. I can no more disown him than I can my white grandmother.

[...]

For the men and women of Reverend Wright’s generation, the memories of humiliation and doubt and fear have not gone away; nor has the anger and the bitterness of those years.

Other speeches, no longer electoral ones, but with a strong political content, present an impeccable *narratio*, such as the one delivered in the University of Cairo (June 4<sup>th</sup> 2009), which is structured around the follow-

ing central themes, perfectly defined as sources of tension. First, violent extremism in all its forms (Afghanistan, Iraq). In relation to keeping the troops in Afghanistan, he anticipates the possible criticisms with the following:

- (10) We did not go by choice; we went because of necessity. I'm aware that there's still some who would question or even justify the events of 9/11. But let us be clear: Al Qaeda killed nearly 3,000 people on that day.

In his argumentation he keeps justifying the action of the United States making specific reference to the most sacred book of the Muslim world:

- (11) The Holy Koran teaches that whoever kills an innocent is as – it is as if he has killed all mankind.

In relation to the invasion of Iraq, he takes responsibility for the mistakes committed by his predecessors, although he begins with a concessive clause justifying the current situation:

- (12) Although I believe that the Iraqi people are ultimately better off without the tyranny of Saddam Hussein, I also believe that events in Iraq have reminded America of the need to use diplomacy and build international consensus to resolve our problems whenever possible.

Second, the situation between Israelis, Palestinians and the Arab world. Pointing out that there are cultural and historical ties between Israel and the United States does not prevent him at all from recognizing that the Palestinians have to put up with daily humiliations derived from the occupation. He openly recognizes that the situation of the Palestinian people is unbearable and that the only solution:

- (13) [...] is for the aspirations of both sides to be met through two states, where Israelis and Palestinians each live in peace and security.

Third, the use of nuclear weapons. He accepts, once more, the mistakes made by the United States:

- (14) In the middle of the Cold War, the United States played a role in the overthrow of a democratically elected Iranian government.

The solution for this case would lie, according to Obama, in respect for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Fourth, freedom of religion. Once more, his own personal history confers him authority to deal with this topic:

- (15) I saw it firsthand as a child in Indonesia, where devout Christians worshiped freely in an overwhelmingly Muslim country. That is the spirit we need today. People in every country should be free to choose and live their faith based upon the persuasion of the mind and the heart and the soul.

Fifth, women's rights. Although he begins by saying that he rejects the opinion held by some in the West that considers that a woman who covers

her hair with a scarf to be a woman with less equality, he continues his argumentation by saying:

- (16) [...] but I do believe that a woman who is denied an education is denied equality.

He adopts an attitude of total respect, yet he is firm at the same time:

- (17) [...] I respect those women who choose to live their lives in traditional roles. But it should be their choice.

[...]

Our daughters can contribute just as much to society as our sons.

The *narratio* of this speech ends with the last of the topics: economic development and opportunity. Once again, he anticipates possible objections from his opponent by saying:

- (18) I know that for many, the face of globalization is contradictory. The Internet and television can bring knowledge and information, but also offensive sexuality and mindless violence into the home.

to continue then with the following idea:

- (19) There need not be contradictions between development and tradition.

The *narratio* closes with a recapitulation of all the topics dealt with, which must be fixed in the minds of the audience:

- (20) The issues that I have described will not be easy to address. But we have a responsibility to join together on behalf of the world that we seek – a world where extremists no longer threaten our people, and American troops have come home; a world where Israelis and Palestinians are each secure in a state of their own, and nuclear energy is used for peaceful purposes; a world where governments serve their citizens, and the rights of all God's children are respected. Those are mutual interests. That is the world we seek. But we can only achieve it together.

Another case in point is the *narratio* of the speech delivered in the Parliament of Ghana on July 11<sup>th</sup> 2009, which includes four argumentative cores. First, the need for a real democracy:

- (21) This is about more than just holding elections.

Second, a development that provides opportunities to a bigger number of people:

- (22) From South Korea to Singapore, history shows that countries thrive when they invest in their people and in their infrastructure.

[...]

The purpose of foreign assistance must be creating the conditions where it's no longer needed. I want to see Ghanaians not only self-sufficient in food, I want to see you exporting food to other countries and earning money. You can do that.

Third, to strengthen public health care:

- (23) [...] we will carry forward the fight against HIV/AIDS. We will pursue the goal of ending deaths from malaria and tuberculosis, and we will work to eradicate polio. [...] And we won't confront illnesses in isolation – we will invest in public health systems that promote wellness and focus on the health of mothers and children.

Fourth, and last, is the pacific resolution of conflicts:

- (24) But defining oneself in opposition to someone who belongs to a different tribe, or who worships a different prophet, has no place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The *narratio* ends with an idea that had already been introduced in the *exordium* (25), expanded with anaphoric structures (26):

- (25) As I said earlier, Africa's future is up to Africans.
- (26) And here is what you must know: The world will be what you make of it. You have the power to hold your leaders accountable, and to build institutions that serve the people. You can serve in your communities, and harness your energy and education to create new wealth and build new connections to the world. You can conquer disease, and end conflicts, and make change from the bottom up. You can do that. Yes you can because in this moment, history is on the move.

As we have seen, the *narratio* is the core of persuasive speech. The evidence is contributed (*argumentatio*) and the rival's theses are refuted (*refutatio*). Literary theory has taught us that narrating implies adopting a position, a perspective, and that narrating from a given perspective is never neutral. Indeed, all narratives hide a conscious manipulation of the presented facts. The orator's ability consists precisely in presenting the facts in a seemingly objective, and hence, incontrovertible, way so that none of the opponents can put them into question (A. BRIZ [2008], p. 95-96).

#### 4. *Peroratio* or *conclusio*

The *peroratio* or *conclusio* – defined by Cicero<sup>18</sup> as *exitus et determinatio totius orationis. Haec habet partes tres: enumerationem, indignationem, conquestionem* – is one of the parts of the speech that Obama commands best. A good strategy used by Obama in the *conclusio* (27) is repeating the introduction (*exordium*) (28), as we can find in the speech delivered in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) on March 18<sup>th</sup> 2008:

- (27) But it is where we start. It is where our union grows stronger. And as so many generations have come to realize over the course of the two hundred

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18. Cic., *Inu.*, I, 52, 98.

and twenty-one years since a band of patriots signed that document in Philadelphia, that is where the perfection begins.

- (28) Two hundred and twenty one years ago, in a hall that still stands across the street, a group of men gathered and, with these simple words, launched America's improbable experiment in democracy.

The repetition of the same idea in the introduction (29) can also be observed in the *conclusio* (30).

- (29) For us, they packed up their few worldly possessions and travelled across oceans in search of a new life.  
For us, they toiled in sweatshops and settled the West; endured the lash of the whip and ploughed the hard earth.  
For us, they fought and died, in places like Concord and Gettysburg; Normandy and Khe Sahn.

- (30) This is the journey we continue today.

In this case it is a manifestation of loyalty, of gratitude to ancestors, qualities also present in the Trojan hero Aeneas, sung by Virgil, in his journey towards the conquest of a new homeland. The parallelism between them is evident. Both embody *pietas* (*erga parentes, erga patriam*).

Another good strategy to finish a speech is to make reference to a story involving the audience. Thus, Obama manages to individualize the mass listening to him. A first example can be found in the same speech delivered in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) on March 18<sup>th</sup> 2008:

- (31) There is one story in particular that I'd like to leave you with today – a story I told when I had the great honor of speaking on Dr. King's birthday at his home church, Ebenezer Baptist, in Atlanta.

[...]

There is a young, twenty-three-year-old white woman named Ashley Baia who organized for our campaign in Florence, South Carolina. She had been working to organize a mostly African-American community since the beginning of this campaign, and one day she was at a roundtable discussion where everyone went around telling their story and why they were there.

[...]

And Ashley said that when she was nine years old, her mother got cancer. And because she had to miss days of work, she was let go and lost her health care. They had to file for bankruptcy, and that's when Ashley decided that she had to do something to help her mom.

[...]

She told everyone at the roundtable that the reason she joined our campaign was so that she could help the millions of other children in the country who want and need to help their parents too.

[...]

Ashley finishes her story and then goes around the room and asks everyone else why they're supporting the campaign. They all have different stories and reasons. Many bring up a specific issue. And finally they come to this

elderly black man who's been sitting there quietly the entire time. And Ashley asks him why he's there. And he does not bring up a specific issue. He does not say health care or the economy. He does not say education or the war. He does not say that he was there because of Barack Obama. He simply says to everyone in the room, "I am here because of Ashley".

Another example is found in the speech after the electoral victory in Chicago (Illinois) on November 4<sup>th</sup> 2008, where the story of a real woman, Ann Nixon Cooper, allows him to establish *communio* with the audience:

- (32) This election had many firsts and many stories that will be told for generations. But one that's on my mind tonight is about a woman who cast her ballot in Atlanta. She's a lot like the millions of others who stood in line to make their voice heard in this election except for one thing – Ann Nixon Cooper is 106 years old.

[...]

She was born just a generation past slavery; a time when there were no cars on the road or planes in the sky; when someone like her couldn't vote for two reasons – because she was a woman and because of the color of her skin.

[...]

And tonight, I think about all that she's seen throughout her century in America – the heartache and the hope; the struggle and the progress; the times we were told that we can't, and the people who pressed on with that American creed: Yes we can.

The aim is for everyone to identify themselves with this black woman, who has managed to see how the country has progressed over the course of a century. Ann Nixon Cooper's story implicitly states that all the citizens of the United States are able to face up to the challenge of new changes, regardless of their origin, their ideology, etc.

In the *peroratio* of the speech delivered in the University of Cairo (June 4<sup>th</sup> 2009), Obama insists on the imperative need to find a common ground of understanding between civilizations. He mentions a rule common to all religions:

- (33) [...] that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

Later on, in anaphoric structures, he mentions the three major scriptural authorities: the Koran, the Talmud and the Bible.

The *peroratio* of the speech in the Parliament of Ghana on July 11<sup>th</sup> 2009 once again uses the slogan *Yes we can*.

- (34) This can be the time when we witness the triumph of justice once more. Yes we can.

Here we have dealt with the conclusion of the speech. Ancient rhetoricians distinguished two parts in it. First, recapitulation or enumeration of the topics treated, which schematically gathers the arguments under discus-

sion and the proposed solutions in order to offer a general view. This function of the epilogue is important in speeches in order to recollect what has been said. Second, the movement of affection, that is, the adequate form or style to arouse emotion (*peroratio* of the speech delivered in Cairo on June 4<sup>th</sup> 2009). It is important for opinions to be well synthesized in order for them to be engraved in the audience's memory. We must bear in mind that what may seem redundant in writing is necessary in speech.

### 5. *Elocutio*

Cicero defined *elocutio* as follows in *De inuentione*: *Elocutio est idoneorum uerborum ad inuentionem accommodatio*<sup>19</sup>. Aristotle had written about the importance of clarity in the *elocutio*<sup>20</sup> and Quintilian<sup>21</sup> considered it the hardest and most arduous part of all rhetoric, since this is where the orator's natural talent, culture and sensitivity are highlighted. The orator must speak *Latine, plane, ornate, apte congruenterque*, that is, he must use language correctly.

*Elocutio* is manifested in two aspects: qualities and registers. There are three qualities to eloquence: *puritas* [grammatical correction in linguistic expression], *perspicuitas* [degree of comprehensibility of the discourse] (which is opposed to *obscuritas*), and *ornatus* [embellishment]. The aim of *ornatus* is to embellish the speech with the use of various literary figures, which classical rhetoric calls figures of speech (mainly affecting the formal or external aspect of what is being said), figures of thought (implying some kind of manipulation of the meaning), and tropes (replacement of an expression with another one with a figurative sense)<sup>22</sup>.

Registers are stylistic modalities that depend on the combination of eloquence qualities. Generally, three basic models are considered. First, the *genus humile* is the one normally used in uncomplicated and poor topics, such as letters, dialogues and teaching. It is characterized by *puritas* and *perspicuitas*, and underdeveloped *ornatus*. Second, the *genus medium* seeks to delight the hearer, and has a higher presence of *ornatus*. Third, the *genus sublime* seeks to touch the hearer and shows the highest degree of presence of eloquence qualities.

Here we will simply point out some of the rhetorical figures and tropes which are most frequent in Obama's electoral rallies. The most outstanding

19. Cic., *Inu.*, I, 7, 9.

20. Aristotle, *Rhet.*, 1040b, 2-3.

21. Quint., *Inst. Or.*, VIII, *Proem.*, 13: *hinc enim iam elocutionis rationem tractabimus, partem operis, ut inter omnes oratores conuenit, difficillimam.*

22. For figures of speech, of thought and tropes, see J. MEDINA (2000), p. 73-31, and B. MORTARA GARAVELLI (1991).

figure of speech is the anaphora. Its use, sometimes abuse, is due to the repetitive strength of the message, as can be seen in his speech after the victory in Des Moines (Iowa) on January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008:

- (35) I'll be a President who finally makes health care affordable and available to every single American.

[...]

I'll be a President who ends the tax breaks for companies that ship our jobs overseas.

[...]

I'll be a President who harnesses the ingenuity of farmers and scientists and entrepreneurs.

[...]

And I'll be a President who ends this war in Iraq and finally brings our troops home.

- (36) For many months, we've been teased, even derided for talking about hope.

But we always knew that hope is not blind optimism.

[...]

Hope is what I saw in the eyes of the young woman in Cedar Rapids who works the night shift after a full day of college.

[...]

Hope is what I heard in the voice of the New Hampshire woman who told me that she hasn't been able to breathe since her nephew left for Iraq.

[...]

Hope is what led a band of colonists to rise up against an empire;

[...]

Hope-hope-is what led me here today – with a father from Kenya; a mother from Kansas; and a story that could only happen in the United States of America.

Not to speak of the notorious *Yes we can*, a slogan coined by Mexican farmers in the seventies, meaningfully repeated first in Nashua (New Hampshire) on January 8<sup>th</sup> 2008, then in Chicago, in his victory speech on November 4<sup>th</sup> 2008, and, finally, in the speech in the Parliament of Ghana on July 11<sup>th</sup> 2009.

Sometimes the anaphors appear together with epiphors, as in the Saint Paul, Minnesota speech (June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008):

- (37) That's what change is. Change is building an economy [...]

Among the figures of thought used we find enumerations, as in the Chicago speech after his victory (November 4<sup>th</sup> 2008):

- (38) It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Latino, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled.

Obama also uses antitheses, for example in the Springfield (Illinois) speech on February 10<sup>th</sup> 2007. In this case, he deals with concepts sensed as opposites (war - peace; desperation - hope):

- (39) We all made this journey for a reason. It's humbling, but in my heart I know you didn't come here just for me, you came here because you believe in what this country can be. In the face of war, you believe there can be peace. In the face of despair, you believe there can be hope.

The apostrophe is, no doubt, also widely used, and it tends to adopt a tone in which what is lyric and what is epic are mixed (*conclusio* of the speech delivered in Boston on July 27<sup>th</sup> 2004):

- (40) Tonight, if you feel the same energy I do, the same urgency I do, the same passion I do, the same hopefulness I do – if we do what we must do, then I have no doubt that all across the country, from Florida to Oregon, from Washington to Maine, the people will rise up in November, and John Kerry will be sworn in as president.

The apostrophe is also used in the discourse delivered in St Paul (Minnesota) on June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008:

- (41) America, this is our moment.

Occasionally, he also uses rhetorical questions (speech delivered in Chicago [Illinois] on October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2002), in this case combined with anaphors:

- (42) You want a fight, President Bush? Let's finish the fight with Bin Laden and Al Qaeda, through effective, coordinated intelligence,  
[...]  
You want a fight, President Bush? Let's fight to make sure that the UN inspectors can do their work,  
[...]  
You want a fight, President Bush? Let's fight to make sure our so-called allies in the Middle East, the Saudis and the Egyptians, stop oppressing their own people,  
[...]  
You want a fight, President Bush? Let's fight to wean ourselves off Middle East oil, through an energy policy that doesn't simply serve the interests of Exxon and Mobil.

They are used again in the speech delivered in the Democratic Convention in Denver (Colorado), on August 28<sup>th</sup> 2008:

- (43) Senator McCain likes to talk about judgment, but really, what does it say about your judgment when you think George Bush has been right more than ninety percent of the time?

Within the most frequently used tropes we have the metaphor. One of the most usual metaphors in Obama's speeches is that of the improbable journey, which has already been mentioned. Other metaphors appear in the Des Moines (Iowa) speech on January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008 <sup>23</sup>:

- (44) I think it makes sense for me to thank the love of my life, the rock of the Obama family.

Also in the Inaugural Address in Washington on January 20<sup>th</sup> 2009:

- (45) Forty-four Americans have now taken the presidential oath. The words have been spoken during rising tides of prosperity and the still waters of peace.

[...]

But those values upon which our success depends – honesty and hard work, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism – these things are old. These things are true. They have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history.

[...]

Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations.

The use of irony can also be seen in this same speech in a much more direct criticism of the Republican candidate:

- (46) Now, I don't believe that Senator McCain doesn't care what's going on in the lives of Americans. I just think he doesn't know. Why else would he define middle-class as someone making under five million dollars a year? How else could he propose hundreds of billions in tax breaks for big corporations and oil companies but not one penny of tax relief to more than one hundred million Americans? How else could he offer a health care plan that would actually tax people's benefits, or an education plan that would do nothing to help families pay for college, or a plan that would privatize Social Security and gamble your retirement?

[...]

It's not because John McCain doesn't care. It's because John McCain doesn't get it.

Irony is a highly subtle resource used to express the opposite of what is being explicitly said; it is, when used well, a great way to communicate and argue <sup>24</sup>.

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23. For the study of conceptual metaphors in Obama's speeches, see S. BONNEFILLE (2013), Jeremy L. COX (2012) and Isabel LÓPEZ CIGUREDA - Raquel SÁNCHEZ RUIZ (2013).

24. Cicero's use of irony in *Pro Milone*, 20, for instance, is extraordinary.

In summary, Obama, being an excellent orator, knows how to adapt the speech to his audience's mood and expectations, and he uses the rhetorical figures dealt with here not only to highlight certain content – what the audience has to remember – but also to beautify it. It is important to remember that the speech has to *docere* and *mouere* as well as *delectare*.

### 6. *Actio*

The *actio*, defined by Cicero<sup>25</sup> as *rerum et uerborum dignitate uocis et corporis moderatio*, is where a politician has more at stake, and Obama has absolute control of the political scene. Cicero<sup>26</sup> makes reference in his *Brutus* to the importance given to this part of the speech by the great orator Demosthenes. As a matter of fact, non-verbal communication is totally essential, if we believe the scientists who claim that 65% of communication takes place non-verbally<sup>27</sup>. Obama gives his audience the impression of being firm and serene. He does not show nervousness or uncertainty: his gestures are generous yet natural; his body is fresh, sparkling, active, open; he shows his hands, he opens his arms. His face is relaxed and calm; he is warm and smiles. He moves smoothly and without tics. And he never reads his speeches. He is, in short, an elegant orator and not only in terms of the form<sup>28</sup> but also, as has been seen, of the contents<sup>29</sup>.

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25. Cic., *Inu.*, I, 7, 9.

26. Cic., *Brut.*, 38, 25-30.

27. According to F. DAVIS (1998), some political observers claim that in the famous televised debate between Kennedy and Nixon in 1960, the contrast between Kennedy's vitality and Nixon's tiredness (together with his innate dullness) was more important than anything that was said.

28. Cf. what Quintus Cicero advises his brother Marcus in *Comm. Pet.*, 11: [...] *cuius et frons et uultus et sermo ad forum quoscumque conuenerit sensum et uoluntatem commutandus et accommodandus est*.

29. It is important to bear in mind that the clarity of a speech does not only depend on the good design of the parts mentioned above, but also on articulatory fluency, a correct pronunciation combined with the adequate tone, intonation, intensity, rhythm and melody. Also important are non-verbal aspects such as gesture, posture (kinesics), distance between the interlocutors (proxemics), temporal orientation (chronemics) and clothing. All speeches must take into account the circumstances of the delivery.

## 7. Conclusion

On the basis of the analysis of some of Obama's speeches we have been able to realize how he, above all, seeks to empathize with his audience, connect with them as intensely as he can, and fuse with them in an intimate and personal gesture. The characters that he mentions in his speeches are anonymous characters, as in the speech in the Democratic Convention in Boston on July 27<sup>th</sup> 2004:

(47) A while back, I met a young man named Shamus at the VFW Hall in East Moline, Illinois. [...] He told me he'd joined the Marines and was heading to Iraq the following week. [...] But then I asked myself: Are we serving Shamus as well as he was serving us?

There are also characters such as Ashley Baia or Ann Nixon Cooper, who we have already mentioned and commented on, and members of his own family. All of them have a clear pedagogical and exemplifying function; they act as catalysts in the speech, and they remind us of the efficient morals transmitted by other sources such as the Bible, Aesop's fables or medieval literature.

Isocrates<sup>30</sup>, addressing politicians, used to say:

[Ἡγοῦμαι] οὐ μὴν ἀλλ' αὐτοῦς γ' αὐτῶν βελτίους ἂν γίνεσθαι καὶ πλείονος ἀξίους εἰ πρὸς τε τὸ λέγειν εὖ φιλοτιμῶς διατεθεῖεν.

But I do hold that people can become better and worthier if they conceive an ambition to speak well.

Maybe it is here that the interest aroused by Obama lies. The creation of an emotional bond with the audience is the main aim of all of his speeches. This bond reminds us of the expression *e pluribus unum* [out of many, one]<sup>31</sup> (dictum on the seal of the United States), which he himself uses, first in Latin, in the Boston (Massachusetts) speech on July 27<sup>th</sup> 2004 (and also in the speech at the University of Cairo on June 4<sup>th</sup> 2009), and that he would then paraphrase in the speech delivered in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) on March 18<sup>th</sup> 2008:

(48) [...] this nation is more than the sum of its parts – *that out of many, we are truly one.*

Throughout this paper, we have exposed the punctual observations that could be drawn from the points dealt with: Obama's widespread tendency to use his own history in the *exordium*; his need to present an impeccable *narratio*, regardless of the nature of the speech; the wish to finish with real

30. Cf. Isoc., *Orat.*, 15, 275.

31. Saint Augustine, *Conf.*, 4, 8, 13.

histories that involve the audience (Ashley Baia's, Ann Nixon Cooper's); and the wish to embellish the content with the use of classical rhetorical figures. From all this, it can be concluded that the author of Obama's speeches, consciously or not, adheres to the principles of classical rhetoric.

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