

THEY SPOKE IN DEFENSE OF THEMSELVES: ON THE GENERIC CRITICISM OF APOLOGIA

B. L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel

WITHIN the last three decades, Richard Nixon, Adlai Stevenson, Harry Truman, and Edward Kennedy stood trial before the bar of public opinion regarding the propriety of some public or private action; each chose to take his case to the people in the form of an apologia, the speech of self-defense. In so doing, they followed a custom of Occidental culture firmly established by Socrates, Martin Luther, Robert Emmet, and thousands of lesser men. These events, separated by time and differing in particulars, are alike in that in each case the accused chose to face his accusers and to speak in defense of himself. That there are rhetorical genres and that one such may be the family of apologetic discourse occurring in situations such as those mentioned above are hardly revelations in the study of public address.¹ Yet, although most

critics assent to the existence of genres, few engage in anything which even resembles what might appropriately be called *generic* criticism. Edwin Black, whose own *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* is one of the few lengthy considerations of speech genres, contends that "critics can probably do their work better by seeing and disclosing the elements common to many discourses rather than the singularities of a few"; but he is quick to add that the history of speech criticism to date is primarily one of attempts to "gauge the effects of the single discourse on its immediate audience." In the end, however, Black is critical of his own study of a genre, the argumentative, and characterizes his work as being too "gross" in the sense that it does not discriminate "among the types of discourses within the genre."² His self-criticism is valid, as well as of considerable import to the topic of this study, in that he leaves open the question of whether the argumentative genre subsumes apologia, as Black implies,³ or whether apologetics is a genre in its own right, as others insist.⁴

We believe that apologetical discourses constitute a distinct *form* of public address, a family of speeches with sufficient elements in common so as to warrant legitimately generic status. The recurrent theme of accusation followed by

Mr. Ware is Assistant Professor of Communication at the University of Texas at Arlington. Mr. Linkugel is Professor of Speech Communication and Human Relations at the University of Kansas.

¹ Examples of criticism in the apologetic genre include James H. Jackson, "Plea in Defense of Himself," *Western Speech*, 20 (Fall 1956), 185-195; L. W. Rosenfield, "A Case Study in Speech Criticism: The Nixon-Truman Analog," *Speech Monographs*, 35 (Nov. 1968), 435-450; Wil A. Linkugel and Nancy Razak, "Sam Houston's Speech of Self-Defense in the House of Representatives," *Southern Speech Journal*, 43 (Sum. 1969), 263-275; Bower Aly, "The Gallows Speech: A Lost Genre," *Southern Speech Journal*, 34 (Spr. 1969), 204-213; David A. Ling, "A Pentadic Analysis of Senator Edward Kennedy's Address 'To the People of Massachusetts,' July 25, 1969," *Central States Speech Journal*, 21 (Sum. 1970), 81-86; and Sherry Devereaux Butler, "The Apologia, 1971 Genre," *Southern Speech Communication Journal*, 36 (Spr. 1972).

² (New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 176-177.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 150-161. Black considers John Henry Newman's *Apologia pro Vita sua* as a constituent of the argumentative genre.

apology is so prevalent in our record of public address as to be, in the words of Kenneth Burke, one of those "situations typical and recurrent enough for men to feel the need of having a name for them."⁵ In life, an attack upon a person's character, upon his worth as a human being, does seem to demand a direct response. The questioning of a man's *moral nature, motives, or reputation* is qualitatively different from the challenging of his policies. Witnesses to such a personal charge seem completely and most easily satisfied only by the most personal of responses by the accused. In the case of men and women of position, this response is usually a public speech of self-defense, the apology.⁶ Apologia appear to be as important in contemporary society as in years past, despite today's emphasis upon the legal representative and the public relations expert.

Our task in this paper is to examine a portion of the genre of speeches resulting from those occasions when men have spoken in self-defense. In the end, we hope to accomplish two goals. First, we attempt to discover those *factors* which characterize the apologetic form. Our choice of the term *factor* is problematic and requires some explanation. Factors are hypothetical variables which in various combinations account for or explain the variations in a particular kind of human behavior.⁷ They are not found within the speech; they are merely classificatory instruments that the critic brings to the speech as a means of grouping like rhetorical strategies for ease in study. The use of the term *factor*

⁵ *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 2nd ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1967), p. 3.

⁶ In recent years, only Senator Thomas Eagleton among men of national prominence has eschewed delivery of an apology when one seemed advantageous.

as a means for classifying conglomerates of like strategies that are relatively invariant across apologia is not an attempt on our part to introduce scientific rigor into the critical act; it is likewise not intended to confuse, frighten, or threaten the speech critic of a traditional bent. Factor analytic theory as it is known in the social sciences serves merely as a source for a new departure in thought with regard to the criticism of public address.⁸ For those who might find the use of the term objectionable on the grounds that it confuses "action," intended behavior on the part of sentient beings, with "motion," non-purposeful movement on the part of objects, we would remind them that no less of a humanist than Burke insists that "statistical" is another name for "symbolic," as "equations" is for "clusters" of terms, and that he speaks of the relationships among the terms of the dramatic pentad as "ratios."⁹

Second, we hope to discover the subgenres, the "types of discourses within the genre" of which Black speaks, by noting the *combinations* of factors found in speeches of self-defense. People speak in defense of themselves against diverse charges, in varied situations, and through the use of many different strategies. Each apology, therefore, is in some sense unique. The subgenres of the apologetic form, which we refer to as the *postures* of rhetorical self-defense, must not be viewed as a classification of speeches in the Aristotelian sense of *genus* and *differentia*.¹⁰ Our determina-

⁸ Such a use of scientific literature is at least implied by Wayne Brockriede, "Trends in the Study of Rhetoric: Towards a Blending of Criticism and Science," *The Prospect of Rhetoric*, ed. Lloyd F. Bitzer and Edwin Black (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), pp. 123-139.

⁹ *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, pp. 18-27; *A Grammar of Motives* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1945), pp. 15-16.

tion of the apologetic postures is a mapping of the genre, a matter of detailed comparisons of differences and resemblances, which leaves open the possibility of finding intermediate cases.¹¹ Just as the genre itself is a rough grouping of speeches on the basis of occurrence in a situation of attack and defense of character, our divisions of the genre are merely working subcategorizations of apologetic discourses.

THE FACTORS OF VERBAL SELF-DEFENSE

The nature of the resolution process occurring when a rhetor attempts to reconcile a derogatory charge with a favorable view of his character is the subject of an extensive body of psychological literature.¹² We feel, however, that the theory developed by Robert P. Abelson pertaining to the resolution of belief dilemmas is the most fruitful source of factors pertinent to the body of apologetic rhetoric.¹³ We note at the outset that we take Abelson's theory as a starting point only. We borrow certain concepts and terminology from his work, but we often adapt the meanings

of those terms for better usage in speech criticism. Much of his theory is discarded, not because it does not adequately describe psychological processes or interpersonal interaction, but because it implies a degree of predictive power which is not yet available to the critic. Abelson identifies four "modes of resolution": (1) denial, (2) bolstering, (3) differentiation, and (4) transcendence. Each of these is hereafter considered a factor commonly found in speeches of self-defense, and each is illustrated from at least one of the apologetic speeches from which we shall draw our examples for this article.¹⁴

The first factor, that of denial, is easily imagined to be important to speeches of self-defense. One may deny alleged facts, sentiments, objects, or relationships. Strategies of denial are obviously useful to the speaker only to the extent that such negations do not constitute a known distortion of reality or to the point that they conflict with other beliefs held by the audience. Denial is *reformative* in the sense that such strategies do not attempt to change the audience's meaning or affect for whatever is

Ludwig Wittgenstein's denial of the general form of propositions. See *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1971), No. 67.

¹¹ This discursive function of criticism is explained in detail in John Casey, *The Language of Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1966), pp. 16-17.

¹² For example, see T. M. Newcomb, "An Approach to the Study of Communicative Acts," *Psychological Review*, 60 (Nov. 1953), 393-404; C. E. Osgood and P. H. Tannenbaum, "The Principle of Congruity in the Prediction of Attitude Change," *Psychological Review*, 62 (Jan. 1955), 42-55; Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1957); R. P. Abelson and M. J. Rosenberg, "Symbolic Psycho-logic: A Model of Attitudinal Cognition," *Behavioral Science*, 3 (Jan. 1958), 1-13; and Bernard Kaplan and Walter H. Crockett, "Developmental Analysis of Modes of Resolution," in *Theories of Cognitive Consistency: A Sourcebook*, ed. Robert P. Abelson et al. (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1968), pp. 661-669.

¹³ "Modes of Resolution of Belief Dilemmas,"

¹⁴ Speeches examined but not used as examples for this article include: Socrates' "Apology"; Isocrates' "On the Antidotes"; Demosthenes' "On the Crown"; Sir Thomas More's "Remarks at His Trial"; Martin Luther's "Speech at the Diet of Worms"; Thomas Cranmer's "Speech at the Stake"; Thomas Harrison's "Speech from the Scaffold"; The Earl of Strafford's (Thomas Wentworth) "Speech When Impeached for High Treason"; Sir Robert Walpole's "Address to the King for His Removal"; Edmund Burke's "Bristol Election Speech Upon Certain Charges Regarding His Parliamentary Conduct"; Mirabeau's "Against the Charge of Treason"; Marat's "Defense Against the Charges"; Robespierre's "Facing the Guillotine"; John Brown's "Courtroom Speech"; Susan B. Anthony's "Is It a Crime for a United States Citizen to Vote?"; Bartolomeo Vanzetti's "I Would Live Again"; Douglas MacArthur's "Address to Congress"; Harry S. Truman's "Television Address on Harry Dexter White"; Adlai Stevenson's "The Hiss Case"; and Thomas Dodd's "Address to the Senate Concerning

in question.¹⁵ Denial consists of the simple disavowal by the speaker of any participation in, relationship to, or positive sentiment toward whatever it is that repels the audience.¹⁶ The use of such strategies has lent considerable psychological impact to a number of famous self-defense speeches.

Many apologia rely upon the denial of *intent* to achieve persuasiveness. Naive psychology dictates that people respond differently to the actions of others when they perceive those actions to be intended than when they perceive them to be merely "a part of the sequence of events."¹⁷ The person who is charged with some despicable action often finds a disclaimer of *intent* as an attractive means of escaping stigma if the denial of the existence of the action itself is too great a reformation of reality to gain acceptance. Marcus Garvey's "Address to the Jury" in the 1923 trial concerning fraud in the activities of the Universal Negro Improvement Association is illustrative.¹⁸ Garvey does not deny that people were defrauded of their investments in the Black Star Line. He does insist that he believed the steamship company to be a good investment and that, therefore, he had not intended to mislead investors.¹⁹ However,

¹⁵ The classification of strategies as "reformative" does not involve an ethical judgment on the part of the critic of the speaker's choices. Reformative strategies are those which simply revise or amend the cognitions of the audience.

¹⁶ See Abelson, *Theories of Cognitive Consistency*, pp. 344-345.

¹⁷ See Fritz Heider, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (New York: Wiley, 1958), p. 100. In the naive analysis of action, "intent" merely implies the perception of "trying."

¹⁸ Text taken from *Philosophy and Opinion of Marcus Garvey*, ed. Amy Jacques-Garvey, 2nd ed. (London: Cass, 1967), pp. 184-216. Though not a lawyer, Garvey represented himself during the trial.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 186. In 1919, Garvey had started the Black Star Line to provide employment opportunities for the Black community. Stock in the company was sold through the mails. See

the accused does not stop at this level of denial. Near the end of the speech, Garvey talks at some length concerning his race. Suddenly speaking of himself in the first instead of in the third person, as is his practice to this point, Garvey says: "I know there are certain people who do not like me because I am black; they don't like me because I am not born here, through no fault of my own."²⁰ Having established that neither his foreign birth nor his race is through his own intent, Garvey notes: "I didn't bring myself into this western world. You know the history of my race. I was brought here; I was sold to some slave master in the island of Jamaica."²¹ Finally, he denies any purpose in working with the Black Star Line other than "to redeem Africa and build up a country" for the Negro.²² Garvey cleverly uses stylistic strategies in his denials of intent to present himself as a *tragic* figure. Speaking of himself in the third person, he assumes the stance of one who is acted upon rather than one who acts with intent. Only at the end of the speech does he become an "I," but it proves to be to his own detriment when he does act, despite his good intent. The theme of the man who causes his own downfall in attempting great gain is common to tragedy, and by employing denial on several levels, Garvey manages to introduce an element of tragedy with all its implicit pathos into a speech of self-defense.²³

We should conclude, therefore, that strategies of denial are not simplistic matters to be lightly passed over by the

²⁰ "Address to the Jury," p. 213.

²¹ *Ibid.* Here, Garvey uses "I" to refer to his race; he was never personally a slave. He was, in fact, possibly a descendant of the Jamaican Maroons, runaway slaves who won their freedom and independence from England in 1739. See Cronon, p. 5.

²² "Address to the Jury," pp. 213-214.

critic. To begin with, they compose an important element of many speeches of self-defense. Though only one lengthy illustration is presented here, many others would be equally suitable examples. Clarence Darrow's "They Tried to Get Me" is noteworthy in part because of his excellent use of strategies of denial.²⁴ Richard Nixon's "Checkers" speech contains such strategies; Sam Houston's "Address to the House of Representatives" results in a tragic pose based upon denial in much the same way Garvey accomplishes this end.²⁵ Nor should we conclude that the examples here are exhaustive of all the possible uses of denial strategies, for such is certainly not the case. Due to considerations of space, however, we must now focus our attention upon the second reformatory factor of apologia, that of bolstering.

The bolstering factor is best thought of as being the obverse of denial.²⁶ Bolstering refers to any rhetorical strategy which reinforces the existence of a fact, sentiment, object, or relationship. When he bolsters, a speaker attempts to identify himself with something viewed favorably by the audience. Bolstering, like denial, is reformatory in the sense that the speaker does not totally invent the identification, nor does he try to change the audience's affect toward those things with which he can identify himself. In the case of bolstering strategies, the accused is limited to some extent by the reality the audience already perceives. Even so, this factor is an important component of the apologetic form.

Our examination of apologetic

²⁴ See *Attorney for the Damned*, ed. Arthur Weinberg (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), pp. 494-531.

²⁵ See "My Side of the Story," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 19 (15 Oct. 1952), 11-15. The text for Houston's speech is in *Gales and Seaton's Register of Debates in Congress*, Vol. 8, part 2,

speeches disclosed a number of famous persons who have made effective use of bolstering strategies when speaking on their own behalf; few, however, proved as skillful as Senator Edward Kennedy in this respect. A careful reading of his "Chappaquiddick" address discloses the Senator's attempts to reinforce a "unit relationship," a feeling of belonging, between the public and the Kennedy family.²⁷ This is particularly true with regard to the people of Massachusetts, the group with which the Senator most closely identifies his family. This theme emerges early in the address. "In the weekend of July 18th," Kennedy observes, "I was on Martha's Vineyard Island participating with my nephew, Joe Kennedy, as for thirty years my family had participated, in the annual Edgartown sailing regatta." Referring to the party for Senator Robert Kennedy's campaign staff, special notice is taken of the efforts to make Mary Joe Kopechne "feel that she still had a home with the Kennedy family." The Senator refers to the weekend of her death as "an agonizing one for me, and for the members of my family"; it is the "most recent tragedy" in the family's history, a cause for speculation "whether some awful curse did actually hang over all the Kennedys." The death of Mary Jo Kopechne becomes identified with the tragedy of the Kennedy family. The Kennedy family, in turn, is inseparably linked with the people of Massachusetts. Speaking directly to those citizens, Kennedy recalls: "You and I share many memories, some of them glorious, some have been very sad." He then requests the "advice and opinion" of the people, much as one would ask a family member "to think this through with me,"

²⁷ We take the text from "Kennedy Asks Voter Advice," *Kansas City Times*, 26 July 1969, p. 8A. For a discussion of the psychological proc-

