ANTECEDENT GENRE AS RHETORICAL CONSTRAINT

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IN the essay "Tradition and The Individual Talent," T. S. Eliot argued that a writer must actively cultivate "the historical sense" which "involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence."[1] A writer may indeed submerge himself in the great literature of the past and emerge compelled "to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his whole country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order."[2]

In rhetorical transactions too, the past may abide as a living presence. Indeed, even where immediate circumstance may seem clearly to solicit a certain form of rhetorical response, it is sometimes a different, even incompatible form that comes, through stubborn habituation, to rhetorical expression. Three bodies of discourse may serve as evidence for the thesis that it is sometimes rhetorical genres and not rhetorical situations that are decisively formative. These bodies of discourse are the papal encyclical, the early state of the union addresses, and their congressional replies. I will argue that these discourses bear the chromosomal imprint of ancestral genres. Specifically, I propose to trace essential elements of the contemporary papal encyclical to Roman imperial documents and the apostolic epistles, essential elements of the early state of the union addresses to the "King's Speech" from the throne, and essential elements of the early congressional replies to the parliamentary replies to the King.[3] Implicit in this entire procedure, of course, are the assumptions that the critical method itself—genre criticism—may be heuristically redeemed, and that Donald Bryant was mistaken in his claim that "genre criticism at best has limited usefulness."[4] I hope rather to dignify with evidence the contention that "The critic who ignores genre risks clouding rather

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1 *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920), p. 49.

2 Ibid.

3 These contentions elaborate on Bitzer's notion that a form of discourse may come "to have a power of its own—the tradition itself tends to function as a constraint upon any new response in the form" (Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, I (1968), 13). If one adds to Bitzer's contention the conclusion that "the proper response to an unprecedented rhetorical situation grows *not merely from the situation* but also from antecedent rhetorical forms" (Kathleen M. Hall Jamieson, "Generic Constraints and the Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 6 (1973), 163), the notion that a contemporary piece of discourse may bear the imprint of the past emerges.

Rhetoric is indeed situational, as Bitzer contends, but the situation controlling the rhetoric is not, in all instances, as immediate as Bitzer's analysis suggests. A rhetorical work may obtain its character "from the circumstances of the historical context" ("The Rhetorical Situation," 3) in which it occurs, as Bitzer argues, or it may obtain its character from a past historical context.

4 Donald Bryant, *Rhetorical Dimensions in Criticism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1973), p. 12.

than clarifying the rhetoric he is attempting to explain."[5]

I

In July 1968, Paul VI, Roman Catholic Pontiff, proscribed artificial methods of birth regulation in a papal encyclical titled, *Humanae Vitae*. *Humanae Vitae* is a syntactically complex, didactic letter, written in a declarative tone in classical Latin, freighted with imperial protocols and an apostolic salutation and exhortations. These characteristics bear witness to the powerful rhetorical constraints imposed by antecedent genres.

The papal encyclical is a didactic letter addressed to bishops, priests, the Catholic faithful, and, recently, to all men of good will. In an encyclical, the pope, speaking as Christ's visible representative on earth, addresses his intended audience on matters of serious moral concern.

The didactic letter has held a place in the papal repertoire of response since the early Church. The New Testament epistles were letters directed to provincial churches. They were circulated both within the parish addressed and among neighboring churches. The wide use of epistles gave the early Church "its corporate unity and enabled it to develop into a highly organized and disciplined state within the State."[6]

The content, intent, and form of the papal encyclical betray its apostolic ancestry. The imprint of those early epistles is particularly evident in the salutation and concluding exhortations of the contemporary encyclical. The greeting "Salutem et Apostolicam Benedictionem" with which most of the encyclicals open is reminiscent of the greeting "Grace to you and peace . . ." found in the introductions of most New Testament epistles. Both the contemporary encyclicals and the apostolic epistles conclude with exhortations to the reader. Just as Paul VI counselled readers to accept his ruling on birth control, John concluded his first epistle (1 John 5:21) by pleading"little children, keep yourselves from idols."

The apostolic epistles and papal encyclicals dichotomize their audiences in a similar fashion. The papal encyclical addresses bishops as "honored brothers" and priests and laymen as "dear sons." Bishops and laymen are addressed on different family levels because they are perceived in different hierarchical relationships to the pope. The tone of the encyclical is at times fraternal and at times paternal: paternal in the pope's insistence that his ruling is binding and should not be questioned; fraternal in his request for assistance from the bishops in conveying the encyclical to the laity. The New Testament epistles share a similar tone. The readers are referred to as "brethren" throughout the epistles (see 1 Corinthians 7:29, 10:1; 15:50; James 1:2; 1:19; 2:1; 2:14). Yet, in other passages, the writer abandons the egalitarian posture for a paternal tone. John's first epistle, for example, addresses its audience as "little children" (2:1; 2:18). Employing the affectionate "dilecti" before "sons," as Pope Paul VI does in *Humanae Vitae,* recalls the New Testament epistles' use of the phrase "dearly beloved" (see 1 John 4:1; 3:21; Jude 1:3; 1:17).

On a more general level, both the encyclicals and the apostolic epistles are didactic letters issued by a representative of the Church and purporting to communicate Christ's wishes to that Church.

The comparability of the apostolic epistle and the contemporary papal en-

[5] "Generic Constraints and the Rhetorical Situation," 169.

[6] W. R. Halliday, *The Pagan Background of Early Christianity* (New York: Cooper Square 1970), p. 65.

cyclical can be attributed to generic calcification and to essential similarities in the rhetorical function of pope and apostles. The apostolic epistle and the papal encyclical are, however, by no means identical. Although the rhetorical situations confronted by pope and apostles are in some respects similar, they are, in other respects, radically different.

The contemporary encyclicals' use of a curial Latin, authoritative tone and use of protocols are by-products of an imperial age. When the Catholic Church rose to fill the vacuum left by the decline of the Roman Empire, the changed rhetorical situation demanded a more formal mode of communication. The emperors had not instructed, they had declared; with the advent of emperor-popes, the Church adopted not only the form and structure of the Roman government but its style as well. Official Church documents were modelled on imperial Roman documents. The residue of that influence is evident in the contemporary papal encyclicals. Mohrmann observes: "The curial style was modelled on the imperial style, on the language of the imperial official documents. This specialized language provided not only part of the technical vocabulary, but also the artificial, juridical style, embellished by quantitative and accentual clausulae and other traditional Roman stylistic features."[7]

The title *pontifex maximus* was adopted from the Roman emperors; the syntactic complexity of the encyclicals, their use of the Latin language, their authoritative tone and their imperial protocols[8] were drawn from the Roman imperial documents.

The impact of the imperial style on papal documents should not surprise us. In an unprecedented rhetorical situation, a rhetor will draw on his past experience and on the genres formed by others in response to similar situations.[9] After the decline of Rome, the pope viewed himself as the successor of the Roman emperor as well as of the apostles; consequently, the papal forms which emerged fused the apostolic and the imperial.

Because the popes perceived their role as generically comparable to that of the Roman emperor, they adopted the artificial humanistic Latin which characterized imperial rhetoric. In so doing they rejected the Latin of the common people which would give birth to the Romance languages. At the same time, the popes adopted a Latin more stilted than that in which education, administration, and international diplomacy would be carried out for centuries, even after Latin had ceased to be the spoken language of Western Europe.[10]

The conflict over *Humanae Vitae* was in part attributable to those choices made centuries ago. The syntactic and stylistic friction between the Romance languages, which color our world, and curial Latin, which shades the world of the popes, has its roots in the third century B.C. That was the century when the Latin language

7 C. Mohrmann, "Latin," *New Catholic Encyclopedia,* VIII (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), p. 415.

8 Papal encyclicals conclude, for example, by specifying date, place of issue, and the year of the pontificate of the rhetor. This parallels the manner in which imperial edicts and mandates are concluded. The mandate of Justinian on Donations for Pious Purposes or to Religious Persons closes by stating: "Given on 18 March at Constantinople, the most distinguished Lampadius and the most distinguished Orestes being consuls." In his essay, "Imperial Influences on the Forms of Papal Documents," R. L. Poole, *Studies in Chronology and History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), pp. 172-184, examines in detail the ways in which changing relations among the Papacy, the Empire and the Frankish Kings are reflected in the form of papal documents.

9 "Generic Constraints and the Rhetorical Situation," 163-165.

10 See Paul Oscar Kristeller, "Preface," *Catalogus Translationum Et Commentariorum: Mediaeval and Renaissance Latin Translations and Commentaries,* I (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Univ. Press, 1960), x; Paul Oscar Kristeller, *Renaissance Concepts of Man* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 119.

bifurcated. Side by side, classical or Ciceronian Latin and the *lingua quotidiana* or Vulgar Latin developed. Vulgar Latin was "as free and picturesque, unconstrained and simple in structure as its counterpart, the precisely regulated and defined language of the rhetoricians, orators and poets, is ultra-conservative, jealously guarded, balanced and complex."[11] Vulgar Latin was the Latin of the early Christians who "regarded language as essentially a means by which they might most effectively convey their new doctrine. So far from worshipping diction and style, they were in this region sheer utilitarians."[12] Classical Latin flourished meanwhile in "the literary salons of the Imperial period [where] the Latin language was regarded as a quasi-sacred instrument that had at all costs to be kept pure."[13] Classical or Ciceronian Latin was filtered through imperial documents to the papal encyclicals. Vulgar Latin, on the other hand, was the Latin "from which French and all the other Romance languages are derived."[14] The sense of discomfort felt by speakers of the Romance languages when confronting contemporary Latin encyclicals has its roots in the papal rejection of *latina quotidiana* centuries ago.

The Latin of the emperors was not only generically convenient, it also served the Church's situation. Classical Latin underscores the papal worldview and complements the authoritative tone inherent in the rhetoric of dogma.[15] Moreover, insofar as Vulgar Latin variegated itself into scores of fluid, competing dialects, it became less useful to the universal communication demanded of official papal documents.

Some accidents of history, together with the dictates of the antecedent genre and of the situation, brought the Church to use the juridical style of the imperial decrees. Pope Gelasius I (492-496), who prior to his election drafted the papal letters of Felix III[16] (483-492), was schooled "in the Classical traditions of the most conservative rhetorical schools."[17] To the extent that rhetorical exchanges tend to sustain a style that they once achieve, the correspondence of popes like Gelasius with the emperors should have rehearsed the popes' sense of appropriate imperial form and thus habituated them to those stylistic tendencies already inculcated in the popes through their rhetorical schooling. In addition, the so-called Carolingian Renaissance of Pippin and Charlemagne, which in the middle of the eighth century "aimed at a return to the classical rules"[18] and the revival of classical learn-

[11] M. K. Pope, *From Latin to Modern French* (1934; rpt. London: Manchester Univ. Press, 1966), p. 2.

[12] C. Mohrmann, *Études Sur Le Latin Des Chrétiens*, II (Roma: Edizioni di storia e Litteratura, 1961), p. 118.

[13] Ibid.

[14] *From Latin to Modern French*, p. 2.

[15] Kathleen M. Jamieson, "The Quagmire of Translation: A Case Study," *Speech Monographs*, 41 (1974), 362-363.

[16] Walter Ullmann, *The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1962), pp. 14-15. Ullmann writes: "The emergence, in the second half of the fifth century, of caesaro-papism, the regal-sacerdotal system . . . peremptorily demanded from the papacy a theoretical clarification of the function, the *raison d'etre*, and the standing of the emperor *within* the corporate union of Christians, that is, *within* the Church. This theoretical clarification was undertaken by Gelasius I, first as the draftsman of Felix III's letters, and then as pope."

[17] Rev. Phillip V. Bagan, O.S.B., *The Syntax of the Letters of Pope Gelasius I* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Univ. Press, 1945), p. 218. Bagan writes: " . . his syntax is highly artificial and indicative of the fact that he must have been thoroughly trained in the Classical traditions of the most conservative rhetorical schools. The frequency of common Classical syntactical usages, and the presence of many stereotyped constructions, betray a writer Classical in training and taste, but one inevitably lacking in the spontaneity of expression of the Classical and Silver authors who wrote a literary Latin far more closely in touch with living speech.

In fine, Gelasius, as a writer, belongs to a literary tradition of artificiality that goes back to the Classical Age."

[18] Einar Lofstedt, *Late Latin* (Oslo: H. Aschehoug, 1959), p. 3.

ing, probably served to refreshen the classical tint of official papal correspondence.

The characteristics of the apostolic epistles and the Roman imperial documents were embedded in the papal reflexes by a rhetorical tendency inherent in long-lived institutions, by the prescriptions of the papal formularies, and by the tendency of the Catholic Church to formulate doctrine for the present in terms of past doctrine. The papal letters "formed the instrument by which the Papal authority was exercised."[19] "When in the eleventh century the Pope sought to operate in a more extended sphere than he had previously been wont to do," writes Poole, safeguarding the authenticity of papal letters became imperative.[20] Formularies were written to define the rhetorical characteristics of papal correspondence. The *Cursus Curiae Romanae* in the eleventh century established rules governing "balance and cadence in the period" and these "soon became a distinguishing mark of documents proceeding from the Papal Chancery."[21] Given the generic antecedents of the papal documents, Poole's conclusion is not surprising: the *Cursus* was "an adaptation to a changed mode of accentuation—of a system of rhetoric which had prevailed in the ancient world to the early part of the sixth century and which can be traced in principle back to the Athenian orators."[22] In a world relying on letters for official information, tests of authenticity must be established to guard against forgery. Consequently, the *Cursus* and the dictamen of the papal Chancery governed even the most trivial aspects of papal letter writing. In so doing, they set the mold for the papal encyclical as we know it today.

Finally, one must add to all the historical influences that have shaped the form of papal encyclicals the very historicity of the Church itself. The Church's own claim to having been guided by the Holy Spirit throughout its long history entails that any of its spokesmen are inspired sources of truth. Hence, a modern pope is disposed to invoke the pronouncements of his predecessors in responding to current moral questions, and in this process of rhetorical introversion, he will internalize generic constraints.[23]

What is important to note is how obsolete are the formative influences on the encyclical. Latin is now a dead language. The syntactic complexity of the encyclical is alien to the speaker of the Romance languages as is the "humanistic" style of the document. Presses around the world now print thousands of copies of an encyclical within hours of its issuance in Rome. Its authenticity can be verified within minutes. Nonetheless, like most other contemporary papal encyclicals, *Humanae Vitae* is a syntactically complex, didactic letter, written in a declarative tone in classical Latin, freighted with imperial protocols and an apostolic salutation and exhortations. These characteristics testify to the momentum of form alone.

If ecclesiastical Latin prose is "pompous and turgid" as McKenzie contends,[24] it can be attributed in large part to the generic constraints of Western civilization's oldest surviving institution.

II

The papal encyclical is not a singular

19 Reginald L. Poole, *Lectures on the History of the Papal Chancery* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1915), p. 1.

20 Ibid., pp. 1-2.

21 Ibid., p. 3.

22 Ibid., pp. 3-4.

23 Kathleen M. Jamieson, "Interpretation of Natural Law in the Conflict over *Humanae Vitae*," *QJS*, 60 (1974), 201-211.

24 *The Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 208.

case of the power of genre. The American state of the union address will also illumine our inquiry.

Having successfully rebelled against the mother country, the colonists sought actively to divest themselves of the customs of monarchy, for many of them feared that the new government would assume a monarchical form. In the sixty-seventh *Federalist Paper,* Hamilton noted that writers against the Constitution were capitalizing on "the aversion of the people to monarchy,"[25] and asserted: "It is impossible not to bestow the imputation of deliberate imposture and deception upon the gross pretence of a similitude between a King of Great Britain and a magistrate of the character marked out for that of the President of the United States."[26]

The umbilical ties were stronger than the framers of the Constitution suspected. Faced with an unprecedented rhetorical situation, Washington responded to the Constitutional enjoinder that the president from time to time report to Congress on the state of the union and recommend necessary and expedient legislation, by delivering a speech rooted in the monarch's speech from the throne. The Congress, which had rejected as too monarchical the title "His Highness the President of the United States of America and Protector of the Rights of the Same,"[27] promptly reacted as Parliament traditionally reacted to the King, and drafted, debated, and delivered an "echoing speech" in reply.

The King's statement of "Cause of Summons," known as the "King's Speech" was delivered after a majority of the members of Parliament had been sworn in. In the hands of a powerful monarch, the speech constituted a legislative mandate. After the "King's Speech" had been debated in both Houses of Parliament, replies were voted and delivered in person to the King. Traditionally, the reply address was "an elaborate answer to the Speech, paragraph by paragraph, expressing approval of its every declaration, and thanking the Sovereign in each instance for the great condescension and wisdom of his words."[28] The nature of the reply was dictated by Parliament's relation to the King. The King did not represent a coequal branch of government but was instead the source of parliamentary authority. Parliament was forced to treat as privileges, activities which Congress regarded as rights. Thus the reply speech of March 19, 1627 asked on behalf of "the humble suitours to your *Majestie*"

> . . . since that in all Great Councells where difference of opinion is, truth is best discovered by free debates, your *Majestie,* according to our like ancient use and priviledge, will be graciously pleased to allow us liberty and freedome of speech, and I assure my shelf we shall not passe the latitude of duty and discretion.
>
> That upon all occurrences of moment, fit for resort to your owne person, your *Majestie,* upon humble suit, at your best leisure, will vouchsafe us accesse to your royall person.
>
> And lastly, that all our proceedings being lodged in your royall heart with belief of our zeal and loyalty, we may reap the fruits of it by your *Majestie's* gracious and favourable interpretation.[29]

The generic and situational constraints operating on the replies were not sufficiently severe to mute dissent. Yet even

[25] *The Federalist* in *Great Books of the Western World,* 43 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 1952), p. 203.

[26] Ibid.

[27] William Maclay, *The Journal of William Maclay* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1927), p. 25.

[28] Michael MacDonagh, *The Pageant of Parliament* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1921), p. 222.

[29] *The Sovereigns Prerogative and the Subjects Priviledge; Discussed betwixt Courtiers and Patriots in Parliament, the third and fourth yeares of the reign of King Charles Together with the Grand Mysteries of State then in Agitation* (London: Printed for Martha Harrison, 1657), pp. 12-13.

when taking exception to the "King's Speech," the reply evinced a subservient tone. A reply delivered on February 27, 1663, for example, praised the King's wisdom but cautioned:

> . . . we most humbly beseech your Majesty to believe, that it is with extreme unwillingness and reluctancy of heart, that we are brought to differ from anything which your Majesty hath thought fit to propose . . . Nevertheless your Majesties most Dutiful and Loyal Subjects, who are now returned to serve in Parliament from those several parts and places of your Kingdom for which we were chosen, do humbly offer it to your Majesty's great Wisdom, that it is in no sort advisable, that there be any Indulgence to such persons who presume to dissent from the Act of Uniformity and Religion established, for these Reasons.[30]

The colonists carried British expectations *ex lacte* from the mother country. After administering the oath of office to Washington, the Chancellor of New York proclaimed: "Long live George Washington, President of the United States."[31] The debate over providing Washington with a throne came to nothing;[32] nonetheless, just as members of the House of Commons attended to the "King's Speech" in the House of Lords, members of the House of Representatives heard the address in the Senate chamber.

Washington's address to the first session of Congress was "couched somewhat in the style of the speech from the throne."[33] His state of the union address was delivered at the beginning of the legislative session, as the "King's Speech" had been. So obvious was Washington's dependence on the "King's Speech" that Maclay wrote: "It is evident from the President's speech that he wishes everything to fall into the British mode of business."[34]

Accustomed to the speeches from the throne and their colonial counterparts, the speeches delivered by the Royal Governors, Congress reacted to Washington's state of the union address as it had to his unexpected inaugural by drafting, debating, and delivering an echoing speech in reply. In debate over the first reply, the Congress struck reference to "His most gracious speech,"[35] the phrase used in referring to the speech from the throne. Nonetheless, the replies bore the chromosomal imprint of their ancestral genre, the echoing speeches of Parliament. "A few hundred words in length, the reply uniformly repeated the recommendations made by the President—almost word for word—and pledged the co-operation of each House."[36] Should Fortune eradicate the annual messages of Washington and Adams, scholars could reconstruct them from their mirror images, the reply speeches.[37]

[30] *A True and Perfect Collection of all Messages, Addresses etc. from the House of Commons to the Kings Most Excellent Majestie, with his Majesties gracious Answers* (London: n.d., 1680), p. 6.

[31] *The Debates and Proceedings of the Congress of the United States,,* comp. Joseph Gales, Sr., I (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1834), p. 27.

[32] Maclay, pp. 20-21.

[33] Henry Ford Jones, *Washington and His Colleagues* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1920), p. 20.

[34] Maclay, p. 172.

[35] Maclay, pp. 9-11.

[36] Seymour H. Fersh, *The View from the White House* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1961), p. 11.

[37] See, for example, the reply of the House of Representatives to Washington's first message (James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897,* I (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1899), p. 61-62. It reads, in part:

> "We reciprocate your congratulations on the accession of the State of North Carolina, an event which . . . can not fail to give additional dignity and strength to the American Republic . . .
>
> The information that our measures of the last session have not proved dissatisfactory to our constituents affords us much encouragement . . .
>
> We concur with you in the sentiment that agriculture, commerce, and manufactures are entitled to legislative protection . . .
>
> The various and weighty matters which you have judged necessary to recommend to our attention appear to us essential to the tranquility and welfare of the Union, and claim our early and most serious consideration. We shall proceed without delay to bestow on them

The parliamentary antecedent had transfused the congressional reply with inappropriate characteristics. "Presidents referred to controversial questions in their addresses, and replies suggested a degree of approval which was not felt by all members."[38]

Patterned on a genre designed to pay homage and secure privileges, the congressional replies suffered a second rhetorical incongruity for they carried a subservient tone inappropriate to a coequal branch of a democratic government. "No man can turn over the Journals of the First Six Congresses of the United States," noted John Randolph, "without being fairly sickened with the adulation often replied by the Houses of Congress to the President's Communication."[39] "The most servile echo I ever heard," scoffed William Maclay, in reference to the congressional reply to Washington's first address of 1790.[40]

Even a cursory examination of the replies can reveal the provocation for such reaction. "In the course of our deliberation upon every subject," the Senate assured Washington in the reply issued December 10, 1790, "we shall rely upon that cooperation which an undiminished zeal and incessant anxiety for the public welfare on your part so thoroughly insure."[41] "We observe, sir," stated the Senate on October 28, 1791, "the constancy and activity of your zeal for the public good. The example will animate our efforts to promote the happiness of our country."[42] Following Washington's reelection, the reply address of the House on December 6, 1793 expressed its confidence "in the purity and patriotism of the motives which have produced this obedience to the voice of your country." The reply continued: "It is to virtues which have commanded long and universal reverence and services from which have flowed great and lasting benefits that the tribute of praise may be paid without the reproach of flattery, and it is from the same sources that the fairest anticipations may be derived in favor of the public happiness."[43]

As the state of the union addresses became more controversial, debate over the content and tone of the replies increased. Washington's address to the opening of the second session of the third congress was the first state of the union address to become "the subject of direct attack."[44] Despite dissent over that address, Congress, bound by the manacles of the antecedent genre, presented a traditional reply. This prompted a writer in an anti-Federalist paper to ask: "Have we any certainty that future Presidents can do no wrong? None. . . . Is it the duty of Congress, are they in conscience bound, to endanger the political system by paying compliments?"[45]

The practice of issuing a reply continued through the Sixth Congress in 1800. In 1801, Jefferson assumed the presidency pledged to "a return to simple, republican forms of Government."[46] His messages to Congress were sent by

that calm discussion which their importance requires.

We regret that the pacific arrangements pursued with regard to certain hostile tribes of Indians have not been attended with that success which we had reason to expect from them. We shall not hesitate to concur in such further measures as may best obviate any ill effects which might be apprehended from the failure of those negotiations.

Your approbation of the vote of this House at the last session respecting the provision for the public creditors is very acceptable to us. . . ."

[38] Dumas Malone, *Jefferson the President, First Term, 1801-1805* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), p. 92.

[39] *Annals of Congress*, 11th Congress, 1st Session, p. 92.

[40] Maclay, p. 170.

[41] *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, I, p. 77.

[42] Ibid., p. 101.

[43] Ibid., p. 136.

[44] Charles Warren, *Odd Byways in American History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1942), p. 144.

[45] Quoted by Warren in *Odd Byways*, p. 145.

[46] Ibid., p. 154.

messenger in writing and "since it was seen that a reply by Congress in person to a message delivered in writing would be entirely inappropriate, no suggestion or effort was made in either House or Senate to appoint a committee to draft such a reply."[47] Subjected to criticism from its inception as a congressional genre, the reply, a mode of address singularly inappropriate in a democracy, was discarded.

So interwoven was the oral delivery of the state of the union message and the distasteful British tradition, however, that Woodrow Wilson, a student of history and the first president to deliver orally the state of the union address since Adams, felt the need to divorce the delivered address from its monarchical past in 1913. The day before Wilson's appearance, Senator John Sharp Williams of Mississippi stated that the proposed speech was "a cheap and tawdry imitation of the pomposities and cavalcadings of Monarchial countries."[48] Cognizant of such criticism, Wilson minimized the pomp and ceremony of the occasion by arriving accompanied by a single secret service agent. In addition, Wilson let it be known that he did not expect a formal answer from Congress except in enactment of the legislation he recommended.[49] The address was well received, indicating that after 123 years, Congress, the President, and the people had successfully broken with an inappropriate generic antecedent.

I have contended elsewhere that "perception of the proper response to an unprecedented rhetorical situation grows *not merely from the situation* but also from antecedent rhetorical forms."[50] That contention should be qualified to include those cases in which response is controlled by an inappropriate antecedent genre. Choice of an appropriate antecedent genre guides the rhetor toward a response consonant with situational demands. Patterning the first presidential inaugural on the sermonic lectures of the theocratic leaders[51] prompted an address consonant with situational demands. Patterning the congressional replies on parliamentary replies yielded addresses dissonant with situational demands.

Analysis of the contemporary encyclical, the early state of the union addresses and their replies suggests that rhetors do perceive unprecedented situations through antecedent genres, that the antecedent genres chosen may not be appropriate to the situation, that severe constraints are imposed on rhetor and audience once a generic antecedent is permitted to anchor response, and that the manacles of an inappropriate genre may be broken with varying degrees of difficulty.

Antecedent genres are capable of imposing powerful constraints. The demonstrable existence of these constraints mandates the question, How free is the rhetor's choice from among the available means of persuasion? An answer to that question is essential to fair critical judgment. To hold that "the rhetor is personally responsible for his rhetoric regardless of 'genres',"[52] is, at least in the cases examined here, to become mired in paradoxes. We would by that dictum have to interpret our founding fathers as deliberately choosing monarchical forms while disavowing monarchy, and we would have to interpret the Catholic popes as willing bearers of pagan forms;

47 Ibid., p. 157.

48 *New York Times*, 8 Apr. 1913, p. 1, col. 6.

49 Ibid.

50 "Generic Constraints and the Rhetorical Situation," 163.

51 Ibid., 164.

52 Richard E. Vatz and Ron Rabin, "Dan Rather at George Washington University Law Commencement—Stroking and Nothingness," *Exetasi*, 2 June 1975, p. 5.

but these rhetors would be held "personally responsible" for rhetorical choices that in fact they did not freely make. The question of the extent to which rhetorical response is determined by situation, audience expectations, antecedent rhetoric or other factors requires determined inquiry. It has no a priori answer.

Northrop Frye has suggested that generic criticism is able to elucidate "a large number of relationships that would not be noticed as long as there were no context established for them."[53] Without recourse to generic method, the early state of the union addresses and their replies as well as the contemporary papal encyclical would be in some important ways inexplicable. An understanding of genre, useful in all critical encounters, is indispensable in some.

53 *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 247-248.