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Van der voort, Charlotte; Boogaart, Ronny; Garssen, Bart; Jansen, Henrike; Van Leeuwen, Maarten; Pilgram, Roosmaryn; Reuneker, Alex

Boogaart, R., Garssen, B. Jansen, H., Leeuwen, M. van, Pilgram, R. & Reuneker, A. (2024).
Proceedings of the Tenth Conference of the International Society for the Study of Argumentation.
Sic Sat: Amsterdam.

Speaking to a Divided Audience
The ambiguous strategic design of figured discourse

CHARLOTTE VAN DER VOORT

Leiden University Centre for Linguistics
The Netherlands
c.van.der.voort@hum.leidenuniv.nl

ABSTRACT: Classical rhetoricians theorized on ways to communicate a double message to a divided audience. This they called 'figured discourse'. This paper examines the argumentative construction of such a double-layered discourse by connecting this classical concept to the recent pragma-dialectical notion of strategic design. Figured discourse is ambiguously designed and, therefore, enables two different argumentative interpretations, as is illustrated with an example of a figured discourse in a Dutch sermon delivered during the Second World War.

KEYWORDS: classical rhetoric, divided audience, figured discourse, oratio figurata, strategic considerations, strategic design, suggestive ambiguity.

1. INTRODUCTION

How can you persuade an audience of something that is not allowed to speak openly about because it is against the prevailing opinion of a ruler, a regime, or even that of a majority in front of you? This question – and its answers – loomed at the dawn of rhetoric in classical times. Prompted by the curtailment of free speech during aristocratic and imperial governments, classical rhetoricians sought ways to convey possibly controversial messages in a veiled and ambiguous manner (Breij, 2015a, p. 261). It resulted in a theory known as 'figured discourse' (*oratio figurata* in Latin and *logos eschēmatismenos* in Greek) on producing a speech with a double message. This old theory, although relatively unknown in modern times, resonates with several modern insights in pragmatics and argumentation theory and may even bring new insights, as this paper intends to show.

The question above and the occurrence of figured discourse is not tied to classical antiquity but is of all times and places. The challenge of speaking the impermissible was faced, for instance and as a case study in this paper, on the pulpit of Leiden's Pieterskerk (St. Peter's church) on October 3 in 1941. This date is a city holiday in memory of Leiden's liberation from the Spaniards' siege (1574) at the start of the Dutch Revolt. Whereas October 3 was – and still is – a feast day for Leiden's citizens, the Nazi regime forbade all festivities during the Second World War; only the traditional memorial service in the Pieterskerk was allowed to go on. In the second year of the war, the memorial sermon was delivered by Hendrik Cornelis Touw, a reverend who was also active in the resistance of the protestant church. The commemoration of Leiden's regained liberty could have been a good occasion to show his strong opinions about the current occupiers. However, in the audience that day were Nazi sympathizers,

among whom Leiden's newly-installed mayor De Ruijter van Steveninck, who was also one of the founders of the Dutch National Socialist Party (NSB). This mayor had let the reverend know beforehand that he did not want to hear any negative remarks about the Nazis or the NSB, or else, he would leave the church and – worse – the consequences for the reverend would be dire (Touw, 1946, pp. 483-484). This threat presented the reverend with a dilemma: would he preach and plead for freedom for the occupied country, or would he yield to the Nazi command?

Touw managed to accomplish both. His speech was 'figured' according to the classical rhetorical theory, and contained a double message: he spoke about the siege of centuries earlier but made it resonate with the present situation of the Nazi occupation. One of the attendees wrote that day in his diary that he "felt reinvigorated for the future after attending the ceremony, which deeply moved everybody" (Kasten, *Diary* October 3, 1941). Conversely, the Nazi-inspired audience took no great offense to this veiled message of hope and strength for another liberation in the near future: no consequences followed for the reverend, and the Nazi mayor sat through the whole ceremony.

This paper examines the construction of a double-layered speech, and the example of Touw's sermon in particular, by connecting the old rhetorical concept of *oratio figurata* to the recent pragma-dialectical notion of strategic design. This analytical notion explain how a speaker's strategic considerations to aim for effectiveness while remaining reasonable are coherently and consistently actualized in an argumentative discourse (Van Eemeren et al., 2022). In the next section, I first introduce the theories on the *oratio figurata* and show that these contain several pragmatic insights *avant la lettre*. In the third section, I propose that connecting these classical insights with the recent pragma-dialectical notion of strategic design is fruitful for a better understanding of how figured discourse is constructed in argumentative practice. While this analytical framework helps us to deepen the analysis of the *oratio figurata*, the theory of figured speech also opens up some challenges for the pragma-dialectical concept itself. This is illustrated by an analysis of the case study, reverend Touw's memorial sermon in 1941 in the fourth section. There, I conclude that figured discourse is characterized by an ambiguous strategic design that enables two alternative argumentative reconstructions.

2. ORATIO FIGURATA AND THE ART OF SAFE CRITICISM

Perspicuity in communication has been valued highly from antiquity to the present day. For the classical rhetoricians, it was the principal stylistic virtue (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1404b.1-2; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 8.2.22). Whereas obscurity was dismissed by them as a hindrance for persuasive communication, ambiguity was not. When discussing a good style, Aristotle mentions an intriguing exception to the precept of plain language: "avoid ambiguities – unless, however, the opposite [of clarity] is deliberately sought, as speakers do when they can speak by no means, but pretend (προσποιῶνται) to convey something; such speakers express these things in a poetic way (ἐν ποιήσει)" (1407a.31-32).[1] Aristotle did not elaborate further on the use of deliberate ambiguity in argumentation, but his tentative remark can be seen as a

[1] All translations of Greek and Latin citations are by my hand.

precursor of a later, rather extensive rhetorical theory that would become influential in the Roman imperial era and after: the *oratio figurata* in Latin or the *logos eschēmatismenos* in Greek, that can be translated literally as 'figured discourse' (for overviews: Penndorf, 1902; Ahl, 1984; Hillgruber, 2000; Chiron, 2003; Ascani, 2006; Breij, 2011; 2015b). In a general sense, this theory is concerned with the construction of a speech that literally conveys one message but intends to convey a hidden message as well. The classical concept can be seen as an ancient predecessor of more recent concepts such as 'strategic ambiguity' (Eisenberg, 1984; Knape & Winkler, 2015; Zarefsky, 2019) and 'rhetorical polysemy' (Ceccarelli, 1998).

Almost a dozen rhetoricians theorized upon the technique of figured discourse in antiquity (for an overview, Breij, 2015b). In this paper, I limit myself to three – in my view, most important – sources: pseudo-Demetrius, Quintilian, and pseudo-Dionysius. All the theories on figured discourse are rooted in a technical definition of the rhetorical term 'figure' (*figura* or *schēma*) that was given by Zoïlus (Quintilian, 9.1.14), a rhetorical critic in the time of Aristotle: "figure is [defined as] to *artificially do* (προσποιεῖσθαι) one thing but *mean* (λέγειν) another thing" (fr. 1 Walz). This definition resonates with Aristotle's remark on the deliberate use of ambiguity above; there is a difference between what speakers mean to convey and what they artificially convey as a pretense (marked by the verb προσποιέω, literally 'to do in addition'). Zoïlus' definition of 'figure' has thus little to do with figures of speech (Quintilian, 9.1.13) – another technical-specific use of the term 'figure' – but rather with a discrepancy between the outer shape and the intended content of a linguistic unit. In this definition, however vague, we observe an ancient root of pragmatism and indirectness (Ascani, 2006, pp. 23-36; Breij, 2015a, pp. 266-270) for a distinction is made between sentence meaning and speaker meaning. In the case of the *oratio figurata*, it is not just one utterance that is 'figured' but an entire discourse, a whole oration (Chiron, 2003, p. 166). Why would one, however, simulate an entire discourse?

Pseudo-Demetrius, in his work *On Style*, explains that while "present-day orators employ figured speech in a ridiculous way and with a lowly and some sort of obtrusive hint, genuine figured speech is used for the following two reasons: dignity and caution" (§288) – Quintilian later adds a third reason "for the sake of elegance only" (Quintilian, 9.2.66). While one may use figured speech in a pretty conspicuous way (for example, of (sexual) innuendo, Bell, 1997) or to delude (for example, Lutz's 1989 famous 'doublespeak'), classical sources emphasize the noble ends of figured discourse. It was used whenever it was impossible to speak openly, either because of safety reasons or decency. For example (in a case of decency), Demetrius says, one can praise an ill-tempered man for his mildness yesterday and argue that others should follow this behavior (§295). Is this genuine praise? Or is it criticism? Demetrius calls it somewhere in-between (§294): on the surface, it may seem praise (to the primary addressee), but the speaker intended it to be a critique on bad temper as well, which the (secondary) audience *can* infer based on their knowledge of the context. According to Demetrius, figured speech is more forceful than direct speech because "it is the matter itself and not the speaker that manifests the force" (§288). When the audience thus infers the implied criticism, the inferred conclusion seems their own and not one imposed directly by the speaker (Ahl, 1984, p. 179).

Quintilian points out another rhetorical benefit of the indirectness of figured discourse: "You can speak successfully against […] tyrants as openly as you want, provided that it can be understood also in a different way, because it is the risk and not the offence itself that should be avoided. If this can be eluded by an ambiguous

meaning, no one would not be in favor of this trick" (9.2.67). The implicit meaning of figured discourse is not only forceful (in Demetrius' terms) but also has a shielding potential as long as a different interpretation is plausible (cf. the remarks on the rhetorical effect of implicit meaning by De Oliveira Fernandes & Oswald, 2023, p. 14). The ambiguity in figured discourse is not lexical or structural ambiguity (cf. Quintilian, 9.2.69-70) but what Douglas Walton has called "suggestive ambiguity, which has to do with implicature" (Walton, 1996, p. 226). The ambiguity in the case of figured discourse lies in the interpretation of text and context; it is "something hidden and in a way for the listener to invent" (Quintilian, 9.2.65). The veiled criticism in Demetrius' example of the eulogy on the one-time good mood of the ill-tempered is a conversational implicature in Grice's terms that is calculable and cancelable. The plausible deniability of figured discourse makes it a safe way to express a controversial message. That the implicature is calculable is, however, is the rhetorical delicacy of figured discourse: it is up to the audience to calculate *or not calculate* the implied meaning. As Quintilian noticed, the audience "is to believe that which one considers to be invented by oneself" (9.2.72). The ill-tempered target who thinks highly of himself will, therefore, believe the superficial praise, which aligns with his biased self (cf. De Oliveira Fernandes & Oswald 2023, p. 8, on cognitive bias in the rhetorical effects of implicitness). For these reasons, Frederick Ahl (1984) genuinely has called the *oratio figurata* "the art of safe criticism".

3. FIGURED DISCOURSE AS A TYPE OF STRATEGIC DESIGN

Figured discourse is not just a single sentence but an entire discourse that opens up two possible interpretations. The rhetorical critic pseudo-Dionysius of Halicarnassus was the first to write a comprehensive theory and analysis of the construction of such speeches. In his work *On Figured Discourses,* he introduced three types of figured discourse that differ in their relationship between what is said and what is meant (Breij, 2015b): "The first construction says what it wants, but it requires tact, either because of the dignity of the face to whom the speech is delivered or because of caution towards the audience […]. The second construction concerns saying something indirectly but bringing about something else in the line of reasoning. The third construction brings about the opposite of what it says to do" (8.2). In the first type, what is said and what is meant are closely related, but polite and euphemistic phrasings and a careful order of arguments are used to avoid offending the addressee. The third type concerns irony on the discourse level, where what is said is the opposite of what is meant. A modern example of this third type is the Reynolds Tobacco advertisement with the header "don't smoke" as analyzed by Van Eemeren et al. (1997, pp. 219-226). In the second type, both the superficial and the implicit meanings are relevant. Different from the other two types, speakers here convey a double message: "They put forward some main arguments for their listeners; but that of which they really want to persuade them, they mix into their propositions simultaneously. In a way, they conduct a double discussion" (8.3). In the remainder of this paper I focus on the construction of figured discourse of this second type.

The central part of pseudo-Dionysius' work consists of analyses of examples of each of his types of figured discourse. One of the examples he gives of the second type is the famous *Funeral Oration* by the Athenian statesman Pericles (as documented in Thucydides' *History* 2.35-46). Pericles honored the first to have fallen in the

Peloponnesian War in his epitaph while speaking in front of the mourning families *and* the young men who still had to go to war. His audience is divided, and therefore, as Pseudo-Dionysius remarks, the speech contains a double message: "Thucydides interweaves two issues ['standpoints' we would say] in his written *Funeral Oration*: it contains aspects of an encomium, and the deliberative aspect is intertwined with it. In fact, he no more honors the deceased than he calls the survivors to war" (8.9). Pseudo-Dionysius then analyzes how the arguments support both the demonstrative and deliberative goals. Praising the heroic lineage of the fallen, for example, magnifies their greatness and also encourages others to follow suit. The rhetorical critic concludes that Pericles "blends two standpoints […] and mingles the supporting arguments, and brings them in harmony by the mixing" (8.9). pseudo-Dionysius' analysis is intriguing but lacks the rigor an analyst would prefer nowadays. For a more precise understanding of the construction of this type of *oratio figurata*, we could connect the these classical insights to a modern analytical framework.

Whereas pseudo-Demetrius and Quintilian considered figured discourse to be a matter of style mainly, pseudo-Dionysius' analyses show that it is also a matter of argumentative content (Breij, 2015a, pp. 263-264). The classical notion of figured discourse is about *argumentative style* so to say. One of the most recent achievements of the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation is the development of a set of analytical tools to analyze argumentative style, which cumulatively consists of an analysis of the relevant argumentative moves, the dialectical routes chosen, and the strategic considerations that are consistently implemented in the discourse (Van Eemeren, 2019; 2021; Van Eemeren et al., 2022). Central to the concept of argumentative style is the notion of the strategic design, which is defined as "consist[ing] of the amalgam of strategic considerations that constitute the general rationale of the way in which the choice of argumentative moves and dialectical routes to resolve a difference of opinion in an argumentative style is shaped" (Van Eemeren, 2021, p. 17). The analytical tool for laying bare the strategic considerations is the concept of strategic maneuvering – the process and product of the speaker's delicate balance between effectiveness and reasonableness – with its three interrelated aspects: topical selection, presentational devices, and adaptation to audience demands (Van Eemeren, 2010). By analyzing the coherence and consistency of all the strategic maneuvers in the argumentative moves which are relevant in the dialectical routes taken, one can explain how an argumentative discourse is attuned in the pursuit of persuasion through reasonableness – i.e., the strategic design (Van Eemeren et al., 2022, pp. 17-20).

From a pragma-dialectical perspective, we can understand the *oratio figurata* as a type of strategic design. From a top-down approach, we could say that figured discourse is consistently shaped by the speaker's intention to send a double message, each of which is addressed to a specific part of the audience. That is motivated by the general strategic consideration underlying the need for figured discourse: to get a controversial message across while being limited to addressing it openly. The pragma-dialectical adage of strategic maneuvering is constrained in the case of speaking to a tyrant or within an oppressed society: it is not (only) the norm of critical reasonableness but a subjective norm of "reasonableness" set by the ruler that a speaker has to meet. The balance between effectiveness and what is considered reasonableness is thus even more delicate, for a derailment will not only result in a fallacious move but in personal peril. From a bottom-up approach, the analytical tools of pragma-dialectics offer a

systematic way to analyze the construction of a specific figured discourse.[2] The concept of the *oratio figurata* also challenges the pragma-dialectical framework: how is a reconstruction possible of such a Janus-faced discourse? The audience of a figured discourse consists of at least two groups that – according to the theory – should interpret the argumentative text in different ways. Is a single reconstruction possible? As pseudo-Dionysius noticed, figured discourse conducts "a double discussion" in one, and therefore, I propose that we can only understand a figured discourse properly if we try to reconstruct both the superficial and the implicit argumentation structure underlying the discourse. I illustrate this in the next section with a brief analysis of the strategic design of reverend Touw's memorial sermon.

4. TOUW'S FIGURED SERMON AND AMBIGUOUS STRATEGIC DESIGN

When reverend Touw ascended the pulpit of the Pieterskerk on October 3, 1941, he made the commemoration of the Spanish siege of the sixteenth century resonate with the Nazi occupation his audience was subjected to. To connect both may seem obvious, but Touw was the only one of the five reverends who delivered the memorial service during the war that made this connection. Speaking in front of Leiden's Nazi mayor, who had threatened him, Touw took a risk to point to the then-current significance of Leiden's past struggle for freedom. Touw had to remain ambiguous concerning his intention to give the audience hope for a similar relief from the present occupation as from the past siege. That can be seen in his presentation of the standpoint of the sermon. Touw centered his sermon around the biblical verse 2 Corinthians 1:10, in which the apostle Paul describes that he relied on God during his past suffering because:

> He has rescued us from such a great death, and he rescues us still. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to rescue us. (Touw 1941, p. 2)

To choose this as the essence of his sermon may seem risky, but Touw did not elaborate on the third aspect of this verse. He divided his sermon into two parts, the first reflecting upon God's past rescue of Leiden and the second on how this rescue continued till the present situation. That there will be a future rescue is thus not (directly) supported by the sermon's argumentation, but its suggestion echoes through the discourse, as is shown below. The two parts are reconstructed as the two sub-standpoints that support the main evaluative standpoint that God is to be thanked for his deeds, as Touw mentions at the end of the sermon in the prayer:

1. We thank God for his great deeds
1.1 God has rescued us from so great death
1.2 God rescues us still

This main structure fits the activity type of a Christian sermon, in which God's deeds are appreciated and glorified, and of the memorial service, which is about the past and

[2] I will not focus on the evaluation of figured discourse in this paper. That is another challenge for the pragma-dialectical framework since the ambiguity of figured discourse will be seen as a violation of the language-use rule. Figured discourse, therefore, would be by definition fallacious according to pragma-dialectics, which does not do justice to the concept of figured discourse as a (reasonable attempt) to resolve a difference of opinion (cf. Zarefsky, 2019, p. 113).

its meaning for the present. Because of the limited scope of this paper, I focus on the first half of the sermon (the argumentation supporting 1.1) and I can only present the key aspects and takeaways of the analysis.

After a general introduction and the interpretation of 2 Cor. 1:10, Touw proceeds with the first part of his argumentative discourse to demonstrate that God has rescued Leiden "from such a great death". To do this, he starts with a description of the city's suffering during the Spanish siege. In every topical and presentational choice he makes, Touw hints that his sermon is not only about the past. These three examples illustrate this:

(1) There comes May in the land, with all its splendor and joy, but which for Leiden will become the beginning of all suffering. (Touw, 1941 p. 4)

(2) There were the "glippers" [pejorative name for the Catholics who sneaked out of the city], a very small group of the population that moved around remarkably noisily; a handful of cowardly traitors, who, on the border of two worlds, did not know where to stand, and allowed themselves to be used as willing instruments of the enemy. (Touw, 1941 p. 4)

(3) All the more surprising that the resistance has been so stubborn, so persistent, so till the end. How can it be explained that all this hunger and disease, all this distress and death, has been endured by an entire city? […] Because it was not about inessentials, but about the main essence, about the highest thing a people can have: freedom, to live in accordance with God's Word. (Touw, 1941 p. 5)

The Spanish (second) siege started in May and lasted till October 3. Nazi-Germany invaded the Netherlands in May 1940, so the phrasing of (1) above without mention of the year made it possible for the audience to think of a much more recent past. When Touw subsequently describes how Leiden withstood the historical siege, he mentions the "glippers" in (2), a name used negatively for the catholic citizens who sneaked out of protestant Leiden to heal with the Spaniards. However, his choice to mention this particular aspect of siege and the description of "a handful of cowardly traitors" probably implicitly directs the audience's attention to the collaborators during the Second World War. The blending of past and present goes on when the reverend speaks of the resistance in (3). During the Spanish siege, Leiden resisted the capture, but the phrasing of "the resistance" is much more common in relation to the then-current Second World War. When Touw explains at the end that all the distress has been endured because it was "about the highest thing a people can have: freedom", one might think he calls for a new struggle for freedom – but then he adds "freedom, to live in accordance with God's Word".

The hinted message of the sermon is shielded by one of the constraints that the activity type of a (memorial) sermon imposes: it is a eulogy on God – and not a call for political action. The last words of example (3) emphasize this but also the argument Touw ends the first part of his sermon with: at the very end, he remarks that "there is no one who can deliver from so great a tyranny than the Lord God alone" (Touw 1941, p. 7). With a coordinate argument (1.1.1b below), Touw makes clear that the endurance was not due to humans, as one might have interpreted hearing the ambiguous statements such as (2) and (3), but to God and God alone. The argumentation can be summarized in the following argumentation structure and the dialectical route:

1	We thank God for his great deeds
1.1	God has rescued us from so great death [during the Spanish occupation]

1.1.1 a	The siege brought great suffering to the city ("Leiden became a necropolis")
1.1.1 a.(1)	(The siege went on for months)
1.1.1a.(1).1	The citizens of Leiden did not give up
1.1.1 a.(1).1.1a	Leiden resisted the enemies inside and outside the city
1.1.1a.(1).1.1b	Leiden's resistance was persistent
1.1.1 a.(1).1.1b.1	It was about the highest good: freedom, to live in accordance with God's Word
1.1.1 a.(1).1.1b.2	Leiden was supported by the Prince of Orange (from afar)
1.1.1 b	God alone liberated the city from the tyrannical rule
1.1.1 b.1	He turned the wind in an advantageous direction, allowing the Water Beggars to reach the city

1[*eval*](<1.1[*symp*]<(1.1.1a[*symp*](<1.1.1a.1[*caus*](<1.1.1a.1.1[*caus*](<1.1.1a.1.1.1a[*symp*] &1.1.1a.1.1.1b[*caus*] (<1.1.1a.1.1b.1[*caus*]);(1.1.1a.1.1b.2[*caus*])))) &1.1.1b[*symp*]<(1.1.1b.1[*caus*])))

Although Touw stresses that the liberation was due to God only, the topical choices of reverend, the way he presents his arguments so that the current situation is present in the audience's mind, and even the order of the arguments suggest till the very end that it is within the power of the people to resist the present tyrannical rule. For these reasons, the part of the audience that is hoping for a new rescue in the near future may reconstruct the argumentation differently. Not the evaluation that God is to be thanked (which is only explicitly stated at the end of the sermon) is taken as the standpoint, but a proposition that the audience heard at the very start and that did not fit the more literal reconstruction: the hope that God will continue to rescue. Sub-standpoint 1.1 can support this other main standpoint as well. The dialectical route that is followed then differs, for the sub-standpoint functions now as an argument based on analogy to support a (hopeful) descriptive prediction:

1	God (and God alone) will rescue us (from the current tyrannical regime)
1.1	God (and God alone) has rescued us in the past from a great death
(1.1')	(The past situation is similar to the present situation)
(1.1').1a	There was and is great suffering
(1.1').1b	The people didn't and won't give up
(1.1').1c	There was and is/will be resistance to the enemies inside and outside
(1.1').1d	The resistance was and is/will be persistent
(1.1').1d.1a	It was and is about the highest good: freedom, to live in accordance with God's Word
(1.1').1d.1b	Our citizens were and are supported by the royals of Orange

1[*desc*](<1.1[*ana*]^1.1'[*bridging*](<1.1'.1a[*symp*] &1.1'.1b[*symp*] &1.1'.1c[*symp*] &1.1'.1d[*symp*] (<1.1'.1d.1a[*caus*] &1.1'.1d.1b[*caus*]))) [3]

In this reconstruction, the propositions, except for the standpoint, are similar to those in the first reconstruction. Touw makes the past siege analogous to the present occupation and hoped-for relief. The propositions (1.1'.1a-d) can now be understood as a support of the bridging premise, i.e., the justification of the analogical relation (1.1').

[3] Normally, the bridging premise is not included in the dialectical route, since it the dialectical choice is already represented in the argument itself. However, since I here reconstruct the other propositions as a support for the bridging premise, I add this in the dialectical route to be comprehensive.

The argumentative content and the stylistic presentation thus enable different argumentative interpretations. Two simultaneous reconstructions may appear strange and may seem a hermeneutical problem, but it is inherent to figured discourse: beneath the more literal interpretation lurks another indirect interpretation, and both interpretations are not rivaling but simultaneously relevant to the audience. To all members of the audience it is a traditional memorial sermon to thank God, but for some the sermon argues for more: another relief. The strategic design of this particular figured discourse is strategically ambiguous: the argumentative moves are consistently shaped so that they could fit into two different dialectical routes and, thus, two different argumentative reconstructions.

In the second reconstruction that I assume to be Touw's intended main message of the sermon, the arguments 1.1'.1a-d are, in a way, a self-fulfilling prophecy. In order to fulfill the hope for another rescue by God, the present situation has to resemble the past to receive God's grace again. Touw, therefore, very indirectly encourages his hopeful audience to a similar behavior: if their situation is similar to the past, God might rescue them again (i.e., the implicit bridging premise 1.1'). Would the other part of the divided audience, the Nazi sympathizers, not have seen through this implicit message? We cannot know for sure, but the ambiguity is perhaps less apparent to them. Was, for them, May 1940 the month the suffering started? Not at all. Would the NSB-mayor identified himself with a "glipper", a collaborator? Probably not. Would they hear a call for resistance to the Nazi rule? Perhaps, but this is directly backed by Touw's emphasis that the rescue is by God and God alone. Of course, the national-socialist members of the audience could calculate the implicit message as well, but this interpretation could always be denied. Judging by the lack of bad consequences for the reverend, we may conclude that Touw mastered the art of safe criticism well enough.

5. CONCLUSION

The ancient theories on the oratio figurata show a surprisingly "modern" and pragmatic understanding of how communication works. The classical rhetoricians not only made a distinction between what is said and what is meant, but also commented upon how it is possible that members of the audience interpret figured speech differently: the indirectness of the discourse enables a biased and bipartite interpretation. Figured discourse is not something only belonging to the past, as I intended to show with the case study of reverend Touw's memorial sermon. In his sermon, Touw brings about a fusion of horizons, for past and present become blended. A part of the audience certainly heard the veiled message, for the text of this sermon was distributed amongst the Dutch resistance and was even brought over to Radio Oranje, the Dutch radio broadcast from London the Dutch government in exile had set up. Touw experienced no dire consequences, so it can be assumed that his discourse was 'figured' enough to be interpreted as just a sermon aimed at thanking God.

The ancient insight that argumentation can be a mixture of different rhetorical goals at the same time challenges the monofunctional dialectical approach. In the case of figured discourse, the argumentative moves made in the discourse can have more than one function supporting different standpoints. The strategic design of figured discourse is, therefore, ambiguous. To analyze how exactly this is realized, both possible argumentative conducts can be reconstructed. With this, it can be analyzed how both reconstructions of the argumentative discourse are interrelated. The two

different reconstructions of a single text may seem counterintuitive, but perhaps this is because the deliberate ambiguity of figured discourse brings us into the domain of poetics, as Aristotle already had noted, which cannot be captured to its fullest by the rigor of dialects.

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