

September 2016

Rhetorical Analysis

Eleanor Raquet
eleanorraquet@cedarville.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/idea_of_an_essay



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Raquet, Eleanor (2016) "Rhetorical Analysis," *The Idea of an Essay*: Vol. 3 , Article 21.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/idea_of_an_essay/vol3/iss1/21

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English, Literature, and Modern Languages at DigitalCommons@Cedarville. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Idea of an Essay by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Cedarville. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@cedarville.edu.

Rhetorical Analysis

Eleanor Raquet

Ellen Raquet is a junior violin performance major at Cedarville University. She was born in Calgary, Canada but has lived most of her life in Dayton, Ohio. She is the third of eight children in her family. She enjoys hanging out with people, and reading.

In *The End of Solitude* by William Deresiewicz, the author claims that in our modern culture, due to suburbanization and increasingly advanced technology, we have lost our ability to value solitude. We no longer want to be alone, or can be alone. Deresiewicz argues that this is a widespread problem, and we are losing many benefits from this view of solitude. He argues for the value of solitude by pointing to the history of views toward solitude.

From longstanding tradition, Deresiewicz argues, man has looked at solitude as a way to connect spiritually with God, or self, or nature depending on the religion. This was religious solitude, a “self-correcting social mechanism” (2) that filled and guided you spiritually. According to Deresiewicz, the Reformation encouraged everyone to find God in solitude, and reading also encouraged thoughtful solitude, since reading requires interaction between the text and your soul. It was in the period of the Reformation and Romanticism that everyone sought the “divine word” (1) through solitude.

According to Deresiewicz, Romanticism drove solitude to its greatest extremes culturally, such that religious solitude had been mostly “figurative” (2) now solitude was now literal through characters like Thoreau and Woodsworth who put solitude into practice. The Romantics also came up with a dialectic of sociability and solitude. They Rom argued that solitude improved one’s social life, and the interactions one had with others improved that person’s solitude, and thus both sociability and solitude were necessary in the life of a healthy individual.

According to Deresiewicz, Modernism “decoupled this dialectic” (2) and the great thinkers and poets of that time distrusted strong friends. People were now a threat to one’s self, and solitude was the way to maintain your selfhood and identity. The greatest fear was “submersion by the mass” (3), and the cultural heroes were those who retained their selfhood against the mob.

Then, according to Deresiewicz, our views on solitude morphed. We grew increasingly urbanized, living farther and farther apart, in more space and isolation from each other. The streets became more dangerous, so children no longer played together, but rather stayed inside and watched television. So, the internet came in as a needed tool to bring everyone closer together socially and not be so lost in space. But with the rise of the internet, people have changed their focus to making themselves “miniature celebrities” (3) according to Deresiewicz. Now our goal is to be visible and our fear is “isolation from the herd”(3).

Thus according to Deresiewicz, we are replacing both sides of the Romantic Dialectic with lesser goals. We don’t have good friendships because social media prevents real connection. We also have become afraid of being alone, of solitude. We feel lonely if we are not visible and connected with people. Thus we don’t appreciate solitude, and our friendships are shallow.

Deresiewicz likens my generation’s fear of being alone to his generation’s development of the attribute of boredom. According to him, the television taught people that being idle was wrong, and that you always had to be doing something. Now, if you were sitting around with nothing to do, you were bored and thus needed to be watching television. And so the television taught everyone to be terrified of being idle. Similarly, with the “increased connectivity” that social media has allowed us, we are now afraid of loneliness, which the author pointed out, is not absence of people but rather “a grief over that absence” (4). Our culture has given us a false picture of what connectivity is like and thus we are more lonely than we need to be because our idea of loneliness is based on a false ideal anyways.

Because we are unable to be in solitude we have lost the “propensity for introspection”(5) according to Deresiewicz. And related, we have lost the ability for “sustained reading”(5). This is because when we read, we read in solitude, interacting with our soul,

and since we are afraid of solitude, we no longer desire to read for long periods of time. We also no longer have the ability to live in our own mind. Instead all of our mental space exists within the realm of social contact. The author also comments on how we have lost the desire to journal, along with the recognition that we as people are deep, and we had a depth to us that you cannot fully make known to others. Thus, we think that we can share everything about ourselves with each other.

Deresiewicz says afterwards that those who desire to maintain their sense of solitude must be able to do so by going against the crowd and not fearing the opinion of others. He then says that those who want to practice solitude must be willing to be unpopular and even seem to others to be impolite. He concludes with the argument that those who want to live in solitude must “not be afraid to stand alone”(6).

Deresiewicz has strength in his argument, by using his tools of argument well with few fallacies, and strong pathos. However, he makes a significant mistake in his use of logos and ethos such that I cannot as a critical thinker fully accept his argument.

Deresiewicz weakens his argument the most by his use of logos. He uses logos well when it comes to referring to historical figures. When he walks through the history of solitude, he references many different historical figures that strengthen his argument. I was so bombarded by the historical references that I found myself wanting to believe his argument from the sheer force of examples. Also he quotes Trilling as saying “the modern fear of being cut off from the social group even for a moment”(4) in support of his argument, showing logos by referencing a knowledgeable man.

However, all this being said, Deresiewicz does not use many statistics in his argument. This problem especially weakens his claim that we live in constant interaction with technology. The only statistic that he has is a number that comes from a relative of a teenager when he says that she informed that the teenager “had sent 3,000 text messages one recent month”(1). This is not a scholarly statistic. And this particular subject of how much technology we use regularly seems to be one that must have been researched in a scholarly way. He also does not reference sources for his facts such as his claim that “the MySpace page, with its shrieking typography and clamorous imagery, has replaced the journal and the letter as a

way of creating and communicating one's sense of self"(5). He gives no statistics to prove this point and no scholarly studies to support this claim. This is true for many of his facts in this article. Thus I am left to depend upon his ethos to decide whether his facts were accurate or not.

However, Deresiewicz uses pathos well in this paper. He uses personal examples of his student and what he was told by a relative of a teenager to prove his point(1). He also uses pathos when he argues that there is a similarity from his generation's development of boredom and the current generation's development of loneliness(4). He gives the personal example of his development of boredom as a child and how he now has to fight the constant impulse to do something as a result of this thought pattern. He then likens his attitude toward boredom to the attitude many young people have towards loneliness(4). This was a strong parallel and argument, and thus is a strong use of pathos.

Deresiewicz also used pathos well in the overall tone of the paper. He plays on the human tendency to grieve over what is lost, and to try and gain something good gone bad. Throughout the whole paper he proposes that we have lost something of great value, which leads the reader to fear the current state, and where we are heading if nothing changes. Thus as the reader travels through the arguments, the reader is pulled to an emotion of longing for what is lost, a dissatisfaction over the way that things are currently, and a fear over what is coming. This especially comes when on the fifth page of the article Deresiewicz asks the question of "losing solitude, what have they [we] lost?"(5) He then goes on to list the things that according to him, we have lost when we stopped valuing solitude, and replaced it with loneliness.

Deresiewicz also used pathos strongly when he used the metaphor of his generations like of television to produce boredom, and this generation's use of technology to produce loneliness. This argument helped the reader to clarify and understand and identify the thrust of his argument, through this analogy. Also, throughout the article, he uses repetition in the lists of names that he uses to back his historical claims. He uses these names and references to compare their opinions and to refer to pairs of friendships that he contrasts when he talks about the different periods of time. These lists of names help the reader to understand what he is saying about

the different time periods. Of course, he is using these names as logos in his argument, but by repeating the style that he says the names, he uses pathos to drive the point home. I can now picture and link the different parts of the article by the repetition, and thus, I can understand and relate to the argument as well.

Deresiewicz does establish his ethos generally pretty well. He continual listing of names as examples adds to his ethos demonstrating his knowledge. His constant references back to history help us think that he knows what he is talking about. Also, his personal examples, first found in the first two paragraphs, and later found in his analogy with the television in his generation help establish his ethos by describing his personal experience on this subject. However, he destroys some of his ethos when he does not cite his sources, or demonstrate where he got his information from. He seems to have strong ethos from the sheer weight of the names that he throws at the reader, but he still makes many claims that do not seem to have any backing to them.

Generally, Deresiewicz argues without strong fallacies. He uses his literary tools well. The greatest fallacy that he does commit is hasty generalization, or over-exaggeration. He implies that every person in my generation has this avoidance of solitude. In the last few paragraphs, he says that those who want to pursue solitude will stand alone. This may be true in a general sense, but there are people who do seek out solitude. I also think that Deresiewicz does not take into account the different personalities of people, because in our culture we have come to put people in the categories of introvert or extrovert, and those who are introverts are expected to seek solitude at times. This is hasty generalization.

Overall, the author argues in a persuasive way through his strong use of pathos. And I found myself wanting to believe his argument from my own personal experience. However, as a critical thinker, his use of logos is so weak that his argument has no strong backing. I find myself having to take his word for it when it comes to his arguments, so in that sense his argument has a weak foundation. Thus, I do not find his argument convincing from a critical thinking perspective because of his weak backing, and not giving me a good reason to believe that he knows what he is talking about.