

1-1-1999

## The canons of television: An application of the five canons of classical rhetoric to television program development

Jamey Todd Combs  
*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/rtds>

---

### Repository Citation

Combs, Jamey Todd, "The canons of television: An application of the five canons of classical rhetoric to television program development" (1999). *UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations*. 1111.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.25669/ynu91-f0tc>

This Thesis is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Scholarship@UNLV with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Thesis in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact [digitalscholarship@unlv.edu](mailto:digitalscholarship@unlv.edu).

## **INFORMATION TO USERS**

**This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.**

**The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.**

**In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.**

**Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.**

**Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.**

**Bell & Howell Information and Learning  
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA  
800-521-0600**

**UMI<sup>®</sup>**



## **NOTE TO USERS**

**This reproduction is the best copy available.**

**UMI**



THE CANONS OF TELEVISION: AN APPLICATION OF  
THE FIVE CANONS OF CLASSICAL RHETORIC TO  
TELEVISION PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

by

Jamey Todd Combs

Bachelor of Science  
Northwest Missouri State University  
1995

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

**Master of Arts Degree**  
**Hank Greenspun Department of Communication**  
**Greenspun College of Urban Affairs**

**Graduate College**  
**University of Nevada, Las Vegas**  
**May 2000**

UMI Number: 1399884

Copyright 2000 by  
Combs, Jamey Todd

All rights reserved.

UMI<sup>®</sup>

---

UMI Microform 1399884

Copyright 2000 by Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against  
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

---

Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company  
300 North Zeeb Road  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

© 2000 Jamey T. Combs  
All Rights Reserved





## Thesis Approval

The Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

4/14, 20 00

The Thesis prepared by

Jamey T. Combs

Entitled

The Canons of Television: An Application of the

Five Parts of Rhetoric to Television Program Development

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Communication

Examination Committee Chair

Dean of the Graduate College

Examination Committee Member

Examination Committee Member

Graduate College Faculty Representative

ABSTRACT

**The Canons of Television: An Application of the Five Canons  
of Classical Rhetoric to Television Program Development**

by

Jamey T. Combs

Dr. Lawrence Mullen, Examination Committee Chair  
Assistant Professor of Communication  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

This study constructs a methodology of television program development based on the five canons of classical rhetoric. Ronald Primeau (1979) first introduced the canons to the electronic media. His book uses the canons as a guide to television viewing. He argues that by understanding the television industry, an audience can better enjoy the medium. Expanding from Primeau's work, this study creates a method of program development based on the canons and uses the process to design a synopsis for a new television series.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT . . . . .	iii
CHAPTER 1 . . . . .	1
Introduction . . . . .	1
Purpose . . . . .	4
Justification . . . . .	6
Literature Review . . . . .	13
From Rome to Hollywood . . . . .	13
CHAPTER 2 THE CANONS OF TV . . . . .	26
Media Literacy . . . . .	26
Where Do They Get Those Ideas . . . . .	29
It's The Order That Counts . . . . .	36
Media Style . . . . .	45
Delivery . . . . .	55
The Lost Art Of Memory . . . . .	59
Conclusions . . . . .	62
CHAPTER 3 THE CANONS OF TV DEVELOPMENT . . . . .	66
Television Programming Development . . . . .	66
The Canons . . . . .	69
Invention . . . . .	70
Arrangement . . . . .	73
Style . . . . .	74
Delivery . . . . .	75
Memory . . . . .	78
The Synopsis . . . . .	79
CHAPTER 4 ANGELS & DEVILS. . . . .	81
Invention . . . . .	81
Arrangement . . . . .	83
Style . . . . .	85
Delivery . . . . .	86
Memory . . . . .	87

CHAPTER 5 SYNOPSIS . . . . .	89
Angels & Devils . . . . .	89
Conclusions . . . . .	91
Future Studies . . . . .	93
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	95
VITA . . . . .	98

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In 1986, Keith Rupert Murdoch prepared to make one of the biggest gambles in the history of broadcast television - the launch of a fourth national broadcast network. He assembled a group of young and talented television executives, who undertook the task of "convincing the industry that there was room for another player in broadcast television" (Rice, 1997, p. 36). Murdoch's band of executives realized this would not be an easy feat and, in fact, most of Murdoch's bunch did not fully grasp the difficulty of the task at hand. Sandy Grushow, currently president of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Television, recalls, "I don't think anybody fully appreciated the mountain we had to climb. Because if we had [understood], I don't think we would have been able to sustain the level of commitment we had to the journey" (p. 36).

To fulfill their dream of creating what would one day be a full-service network, Murdoch and his executive team faced three major obstacles: the American Broadcast Network (ABC), The Columbia Broadcast Network (CBS) and the National

Broadcasting Company (NBC). ABC, CBS and NBC, known as the 'Big Three,' found their niches during radio's 'heyday' and were firmly rooted before commercial television even existed (Bittner, 1989). In fact, the three networks played vital roles in the rapid acceptance of television into American households. NBC is often credited with actually providing the first regular television service in the United States, beginning the service "with a telecast of President [Franklin D.] Roosevelt opening the [1939] New York World's Fair" ("The Image of NBC," 1986, p. 52).

Given their long dominance, the Big Three were not about to move over and make room for a fourth network, but Murdoch and his people were determined. On April 5, 1987, Murdoch rolled the dice and the Fox Broadcasting Company launched a full night of programming (Rice, 1997). Fox's chance for success against the Big Three depended heavily on the programming the new network would provide ("No Problems," 1988). More than ten years later, with a long list of both successful shows (*21 Jump Street*, *Married... with Children*, and *90210*) and failures (*Women in Prison*, *Mr. President*, and *Beans Baxter*), Murdoch's venture has been declared a success.

His [Murdoch's] original dream of not only programming seven nights a week but becoming a formidable opponent to the Big Three has become a

reality, witness comments made last year by NBC chairman Don Ohlmeyer. He said NBC's chief competition for the adults 18-49 demographic came from Fox. (Rice, 1997, p. 36-7)

In hindsight, many critics and industry professionals say that the time was right for a fourth network to enter the national market (Rice, 1997). Cable had a small, dedicated audience, but no channels had established themselves as a major force. However, during the same year that Murdoch made his move, cable made a commitment to provide original programs, in hopes of drawing a bigger share of the audience. Over the last fourteen years, cable's move has also been deemed a success (Higgins, 1997).

In retrospect, 1986 was a big year for the television industry. Since Murdoch's launch of the Fox network, two new networks, the United Paramount Network (UPN) and the Warner Brothers Network (WB), have entered the market ("Syndicators Face," 1993). Also, a seventh network, PaxNet, has launched a national broadcast (McClellan & Schlosser, 1997), and more cable channels are providing original programming (Higgins, 1997).

The question remains; what does all this mean to the television industry? One clear result is an ever-expanding need for original television programs; if this need cannot

be met, many of the new networks and cable outlets will fail.

### Purpose

The aim of this study is to design and implement a technique of television series development based on the five canons of classical rhetoric -- invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and memory. Specifically, this technique will focus on producing a series synopsis including character summaries, plot outlines, a series timeline and specifics on program genre and style. As with any creative process, television series development cannot be condensed into a purely mechanical and systematic method. However, using the five elements of classical rhetoric as a basis for a treatment provides a unique and efficient heuristic for the creative process.

The ideas of classical rhetoric were first introduced to the study of mass media by Ronald Primeau (1979). In The Rhetoric of Television, Primeau notes that everyone who is upset with the effects of television "should look to the common-sense wisdom of the ancients" (p. viii). He refers to classical rhetoric "as a survival tool for viewers who are trying to understand and improve their own TV watching" (p. ix). Primeau makes a convincing case that classical



rhetoric provides a solid groundwork for exploring mass media.

As students of human communication, the classical rhetoricians described techniques and values that are broad enough to cover classical orations as well as modern electronic media. Classical rhetoric brings the study of communication back to the basics, frees media consumers from the clutter of distracting approaches, and makes it easier to cross lines of specialization to see the similarities and differences that might otherwise go unnoticed. (Primeau, 1979, p. viii)

Primeau continues by explaining the five-part model of classical rhetoric and its application to television viewing.

Primeau's (1979) approach, using classical rhetoric to explain media and media effects, is designed to break down and examine existing television programs. This study works from the other side of the coin, utilizing the five parts of classical rhetoric in the development of television programming. The literature review explores the history of the five-part model of classical rhetoric up to Primeau's application of this model to television. Chapter 2 explores Primeau's concepts by applying his ideas to modern television programming. Chapter 3 describes a method of

television program development based on the canons of classical rhetoric: invention or the formulation of initial concept including character summaries and plot development; arrangement or an outline for the series as well as basic guidelines for each episode; style, delivery and memory or the framework for discussing the overall genre, structure and format of the series. In chapter 4, this new methodology is used to build an outline for a new program. Chapter 5 summarizes the outline in a program synopsis and explores future studies involving the canons.

#### Justification

With seven networks (McClellan & Schlosser, 1997) and more cable channels moving toward original programming (Higgins, 1997), the television industry is following the basic economic principles of supply and demand. The increasing demand for programming has produced a large and ever-expanding market for original television programs. Also, members of the television industry agree that in this day and age a key part of drawing in an audience, and maintaining it, is innovative and original programming (Rice, 1997; "Syndicators Face," 1993; "The Thinking Man's," 1987). In part, the need for innovative programming is due to the continual education of the television audience and the audience's demand for quality programming. According to

Peter Chernin, the president of News Corp. and CEO of the Fox group, the audience of the 1990s "is an incredibly smart, sophisticated audience with a broad array of choices" (Rice, 1997, p. 37). Peter Roth, once the head of programming for the Fox Entertainment Group, adds that the growing intelligence of the television audience has created "a clear appetite and hunger for original product" (p. 37). Thus, to create a new network, or in the case of cable networks, to gain viewers, television executives must fill their programming schedules with original shows and these shows must be both entertaining and creative.

Chernin, who was the head of Fox programming from 1989-92, notes that a key part of Fox's success stems from the fact that the network learned the importance of innovative programming early on: "This network [Fox] out of necessity learned that the only way to be really successful was with breakthrough shows" (p. 37). He continues explaining Rupert Murdoch's philosophies and strategies behind the Fox network: "In some ways, Rupert's ideas have been simple. If you have good shows and you do a good job of putting on the shows, generally you're going to be fine. And if you don't, you're not" (p. 37). The Fox network continues to follow the simple but effective ideas that Murdoch laid out ten years ago when the network was created, relying on such

inventive programming as *The X-Files*, *King of the Hill*, and *Ally McBeal*.

Two new networks, the United Paramount Network (UPN) and the Warner Brothers Network (WB), have entered the arena of national broadcasting and executives at both networks agree that their success rides on the ability to provide creative programming. WB Executive Vice President Barry Meyer, one of the key architects in the construction of The WB, notes that stations seek network affiliation and first run syndicated programming because today's television audience would rather "watch original programming than rerun programming" ("Syndicators Face," 1993, p.26). Meyer added that WB is willing to go with the flow, stating, "It's an entertainment network -- comedy, drama, a younger demographic audience, and its identification will be the first one or two shows that end up working" (p. 26). UPN relied on the innovations of "Star Trek" and its spin-offs to help launch the network. The "Star Trek" strategy has helped UPN compete with the major networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox) on one or two nights, but television executives note that if the fledgling network is to become a serious contender additional breakthrough shows will be necessary (1993).

Broadcast networks are not the only television outlets looking for original programming. In 1986, cable channels

made a commitment to provide original programming as well. In a speech made in February of 1986, National Cable Television Association President Jim Mooney said "the [cable] industry was on the threshold of 'the great age of growth in made-for-cable programming'" ("Cable at the," 1987, p. 172). Over the last ten years, Mooney's bold statement has proven true.

Cable channels such as the Home Box Office (HBO), Nickelodeon and the USA network have led the way, "investing heavily in original series and movies" (Sternberg, 1997, p. 17), and their investments are paying off. Over the last three years, the cable audience has grown 40 percent (1997). This growth has cable network executives excited and many believe it is only a matter of time before "cable viewership will rise to the level of broadcast" (Rice, 1996, p. 27-8).

The hope of competing with the broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox) has cable executives fueling the fires of original programming.

In 1990, HBO's budget for original programming totaled about \$50 million, allowing the pay network to crank out series including *Tales From the Crypt* and *Dream On*.... This year [1997], that \$50 million is buying HBO a single project, *Earth to Moon*, a 12-hour miniseries on the race into space. (Higgins, 1997, p. 28)

The USA network also invested in a big-budget project in 1997, a \$20 million dollar remake of *Moby Dick*, and Discovery produced *Titanic: Anatomy of a Disaster*, an original documentary, last spring [1997] for an estimated \$700,000 per hour. Other cable networks, although on lower budgets, continued moving into the realm of original programming: *Biography* on Lifetime, *Last Stand at Saber River* on TNT, *Silk Stalkings* and *La Femme Nikita* on USA, *Rugrats* on Nickelodeon, and *South Park* on Comedy Central (Higgins, 1997).

An increase in audience is not the only benefit of original programming on cable networks. According to John Higgins (1997) of Broadcasting and Cable, "advertisers are willing to pay premium rates for eyeballs glued to originals" (p. 32). In some cases, Cable networks are able to double the amount they are paid for commercial space.

The cachet of original movies on TNT fetches ad rates of \$13-\$16 per thousand viewing households... That's double or more the network's average cost-per-thousand (CPMs) of about \$6 and higher, and also up from the \$8 CPMs it received for original movies three years ago. (Higgins, 1997, p. 32)

Therefore, cable networks can justify the cost of producing original programs with higher revenue from advertising as well as an increased share of television's overall audience.

Thus, a discriminating and sophisticated audience, cable's move toward increasing its audience and a total of seven national broadcast networks, with more on the horizon, have all led to dramatic growth in demand for programming. This demand for programming has, in turn, created a large market for original program development.

Professional sports leagues at the time of an expansion have created similar situations. For example, when baseball expanded into Colorado and Florida in 1993, demand immediately increased for quality players. Major League Baseball (MLB) had to devise a plan to develop professional-level ball players; thus, the expansion included new farm teams designed to shape and mold players for the majors. These new farm teams provided a standard process for developing ball players, supplying baseball's new teams with ample talent; the Florida Marlin won the 1997 World Series fielding many prospects from its farm teams. Applying this line of thought to the television industry, one sees that the growth of cable and networks has created a high demand for programming which in turn has created a large market for program development. Consequently, a similar approach to developing television programming may prove equally fruitful.

As discussed before, this paper will attempt to create a standardized method of television program development

based on the five parts of classical rhetoric. This method has three main benefits.

First, the five parts of classical rhetoric have already been applied to television from a critical standpoint (Primeau, 1979). Hence, by doing case studies of existing programs the key elements in successful shows can be identified and these elements can be emphasized in the creation of new shows.

Second, a creative process is similar to a journey down a long and twisting road. Often is the case on this journey, that 'where to start?' provides the greatest challenge. This standardized method will not only give creators a place to begin but also outlines specific questions and factors to be taken into consideration along the way.

Third is an issue of money. With single episodes of television series escalating into the multi-million dollar bracket, monetary concerns play a major role in decisions made by television executives and producers. Using a standardized method of television series development, such as an application of the five canons of classical rhetoric, will provide similar synopses covering the same elements for different types of shows. This similarity in synopses will allow executives and producers to compare a variety of shows based on production costs versus end product value.



An additional benefit of using the canons for television program development is that the method can easily be adapted for news stories or segment ideas for such shows as *20/20*, *The Today Show*, and *Entertainment Tonight*.

Segment or story producers in this genre must pitch their ideas to executives before production on the piece can begin. The canons provide a standardized process for this step, giving producers defined guidelines to follow and providing similarity in story or segment synopses, so that executives can compare concepts more efficiently.

#### Literature Review

Since this study approaches television series development through methods of classical rhetoric, the literature review considers the five canons of classical rhetoric including a brief history of the canons, definitions and purposes of each canon as well as a glimpse into the modern interpretations. Also, Ronald Primeau's (1979) application of the canons to the exploration and criticism of existing television programming is reviewed.

#### From Rome to Hollywood

According to James Murphy and Richard Katula (1994) in A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric, the actual history of the five canons of classical rhetoric is quite vague.

The canons were elements of Roman rhetoric by 90 B.C. However there is "little direct evidence as to how it [Roman rhetoric] had been crystallized into the completed form" (1994, p. 111).

In the period after Aristotle's death (332 B.C.), scholars divided the topic of rhetoric into five main parts -- invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and memory. To this day, it remains a mystery as to how "rhetorical engineers" (Murphy & Katula, 1994, p. 111) constructed this method of rhetoric, as well as whom these engineers actually were. Nonetheless, the method they developed became the common practice in Rome and has had a strong influence on Western rhetoric (1994).

As this approach to rhetoric became standardized in Rome, the concepts behind the five parts, often called the five canons of rhetoric, also became standardized. Murphy and Katula (1994) note that, "No doubt centuries of practical experience in law courts and assemblies had reinforced or refined concepts inherited from Aristotle and other Greeks" (p. 111). The Roman Empire was quite skilled in the ability to organize; they were able to mass-produce military chariots by utilizing standardized, interchangeable parts. The five canons of rhetoric became the Roman method designed to organize Greek rhetoric into a standard, mechanical practice.

Although the evolution of this standardized approach to rhetoric remains, for the most part, a mystery to modern scholars, it is important to note two works which helped cement the five part approach as a fundamental concept in Roman rhetoric. The first was actually written by the Greek rhetorician Hermagoras of Temnos. His work the doctrine of *stasis* ("state of the argument") is believed to have been a major influence on the Roman ideas of invention, the first canon. Hermagoras expounded upon Aristotle's four key questions of any dispute and developed a four-part method for identifying the thesis of an argument. In fact, his work is considered to be "the link between Greek rhetorical theory and Roman rhetoric" (Murphy & Katula, 1994, p. 115).

The author of the second work, *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (90 B.C.), is unknown. However, the book "is so close in tone to Cicero's *De inventione*, that for fifteen hundred years it was regarded as a book actually written by Cicero. Hence, the unknown author is frequently termed 'Pseudo-Cicero" (p. 116). Although this book had little direct influence on the ancient world, the topics covered became the cornerstones of Roman rhetoric and many of Rome's rhetoricians used a similar curriculum for writing and teaching (note Quintilian's work in A.D. 95). Also, *Rhetorica ad Herennium* became the book of choice for rhetoricians at the beginning of the Christian intellectual

movement and remained the popular choice for more than a thousand years. The importance of this work lies in the fact that *Rhetorica ad Herennium* was "the first book to present a full-blown discussion of the complete five-part system" (p. 116) of Roman rhetoric. Murphy and Katula note that this fact alone ranks this particular book "as one of the major works in the Roman rhetorical tradition" (p. 116). According to *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, the five canons of rhetoric are defined as follows:

Table 1

<i>Inventio</i> (invention)	the devising of matter, true or plausible, that would make the case convincing
<i>Dispositio</i> (arrangement)	the ordering and distribution of the matter, making clear the place to which each thing is to be assigned
<i>Elocutio</i> (style)	the adaptation of suitable words and sentences to the matter invented
<i>pronuntio</i> (delivery)	the graceful (venustate) regulation of voice, countenance, and gesture
<i>memoria</i> (memory)	the firm retention in the mind of the matter, words, and arrangement

(Murphy & Katula, 1994, p. 117)

*Rhetorica ad Herennium* continues explaining each canon in full. Invention is divided into six parts: "introduction, statement of facts, division, proof, refutation and conclusion" (Murphy & Katula, 1994, p. 117). Each part of invention is explored individually. Also, the relationship between the cause of the argument and the canon

of invention is examined. Pseudo-Cicero notes that, "invention is the most difficult and the most important of the speaker's tasks" (p. 118). Before continuing with an elucidation of the additional canons, Pseudo-Cicero explores the "most complete and perfect argument" (p. 118) of any given cause, noting that such an argument is comprised of five components: proposition, reason, proof of reason, embellishment, and conclusion. Attention is then turned to the canon of arrangement; "there are two kinds of arrangement, one from rhetoric (six parts of speech and five parts of an argument) and the other from the particular circumstances of the case" (p. 118). Also pertaining to arrangement, Pseudo-Cicero states that it is best to open and close with the strongest of the speaker's arguments. The canon of delivery is said to be "the faculty of greatest use to the speaker" (p. 119). By mastering techniques of good delivery, a speaker can best convince his audience that what he speaks comes from the heart. The next canon, memory, is considered "the guardian of all parts of rhetoric" (p. 119). There are two types of memory. First is natural memory, which can be enhanced by training and discipline. Second is artificial memory, which involves the use of association techniques. The final canon discussed in *Rhetorica ad Herennium* is style. Style is also discussed in two separate parts: first, the kinds of style and second,

the qualities of style. Pseudo-Cicero identifies three kinds of style: grand or high style, middle style and simple or plain style. High style is defined as a smooth, ornate arrangement of splendid words, middle is a lower combination of words and arrangement, and simple is lowest form of speech, intended to communicate on a level understood by every class. Pseudo-Cicero notes that a speaker should attempt to use a variety of style and also, capture the qualities of taste (*elegantia*), artistic composition (*compositio*), and distinction (*dignitas*). Pseudo-Cicero spends the rest of the book discussing specific types of speech and thought.

The definitions of the canons provided by *Rhetorica ad Herennium* have withstood the test of time and still form the core of how many modern scholars teach the disciplines of speaking and writing. However, the five canons are no longer the focus of contemporary textbooks of rhetoric. The canons are more commonly discussed at the beginning of such a text. These texts have also slightly modified the definition of each canon to meet the needs of modern times. These modern interpretations of the canons are aimed toward public speaking in general and provide a better understanding of each canon:

Table 2

invention	the process of the speaker's choosing an appropriate topic and discovering the ideas and proof to use
arrangement	the final selection of ideas and proof that would best fit the speaker's purpose, audience, and occasion; the decision about how to sequence these ideas and proof, and the amount of time to be devoted to each
style	the speaker's grammatical usage, choice of language, and the expressive devices used to present ideas
delivery	the speaker's use of voice and body movement in the oral presentation
memory	the codes and mnemonic devices the speaker relied on to recall lengthy speeches

(Rybacki &amp; Rybacki, 1991, p. 40)

Over the years the canons have also become a tool of rhetorical criticism, 'the traditional approach.' Text such as Communication Criticism: Approaches and Genres (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991) outline a method in which the canons are used to dissect existing works (speeches, essays, letters, etc.). For the most part, the canons retain similar meanings as when used for constructing rhetoric. Invention still focuses on identifying the topic and method of proof used by the rhetor, and arrangement focuses on "the sequence in which units of argument and other materials are presented" (p. 60). When used in criticism, not only must the canon be clearly identified but the critic must also evaluate the rhetor's use of the canon. For instance, when analyzing the

style of the rhetoric act, the critic must not only identify sentence structure, language use and vocabulary, but must also evaluate the rhetor's use of style and "determine how it contributed to achieving the rhetor's purpose and ability to manage the rhetorical situation"(p. 61). In addition to identifying and evaluating a rhetor's use of each canon, a critic is concerned with the consequences of the rhetorical act. Rybacki and Rybacki (1991) identify "four standards of judgement" used to identify and judge the consequences of an act. First is the results standard; a critic must examine what happened to "the rhetor, the audience and society at large as a result of the rhetorical act" (p.63). For the second, a critic must determine if the rhetor was able to create a probable truth. Known as the truth standard, this involves evaluating the rhetor's logic and testing the quality of evidence. The third, the ethical standard, involves the examination of the rhetor's background and ethics which helps create credibility in the rhetorical act. The fourth standard is known as the aesthetic standard. Here, the critic focuses on "the artistic elements of the rhetorical act" (p. 63).

Rybacki and Rybacki (1991) note several works that have used the traditional approach effectively. Zarefsky (1986) analyzed the Lincoln-Douglas debates, focusing on each man's use of invention. Henry (1988) dissected Mario Cuomo's 1984



keynote address, explaining "how Cuomo's speech was a fitting response to multiple audiences and how Cuomo's use of invention made the speech memorable" (1991, p. 65). Medhurst (1987) focused on the style and delivery techniques used by Eisenhower and his speechwriters for the "Atoms for Peace" speech. Fulkerson (1979) used the traditional approach to analyze Martin Luther King's "Letters from Birmingham Jail." Rybacki and Rybacki (1991) note this work as "an excellent adaptation of the traditional approach to the study of a social movement and a significant rhetorical event from it" (p. 65). As can be seen from these examples, by using the traditional approach a critic may focus on a single rhetorical event and the relationship between rhetor and audience (Rybacki and Rybacki, 1991).

Although the main content of the canons as presented in *Rhetorica ad Herennium* has been preserved over the years, even when used as a form of criticism, one scholar has provided a complete retooling of the canons. In 1979, Nancy Harper renamed and redefined each canon to better fit "their contemporary functions" (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991). Her definitions, provided in Human Communication Theory, are as follows:

Table 3

<i>conceptualization</i> (invention)	the rhetor's acquisition and interpretation of information, involving interpreting social reality
<i>organization</i> (arrangement)	the rhetor's adaptation of units of argument to the situation, consisting of both message structure and the relationships among rhetor, audience, and context
<i>symbolization</i> (style)	the use of symbols, words, actions, and contexts that cue recall in the minds of an audience
<i>operationalization</i> (delivery)	the physical form of the message's presentation; live speech, printed essay, video, film, et cetera
<i>categorization</i> (memory)	the perception, storage and recall of information

(Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991, p. 41)

Harper continues by exploring each 'modern' canon in detail. The common thread throughout her definitions is the relationship between rhetor and audience. In her discussion of conceptualization, she notes, "to address an audience, the rhetor must know and interpret their beliefs, attitudes, and values, their culture, and the kinds of arguments and evidence that are most likely to be acceptable to them" (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991, p. 41). Also on the topic of the audience, she acknowledges that audiences are more likely to favor a message that fits into their concepts of "message structure" (organization) and that personal experiences play into an audience's ability to recall information as well as

the meaning and degree of importance associated with certain symbols, words or phrases (categorization) (1991).

Harper's ideas are not only relevant to this study due to her work with the canons, but also because of her emphasis on the relationship between rhetor and audience. The television industry relies heavily on ratings and shares, which are measurements of people watching a certain network or program at any given time. Without a substantial share of the audience, television shows and networks cannot survive. Thus, it is important for television professionals to identify their audience and build an on-going relationship with them. If television is assumed to be the rhetor, Harper's concepts are then easily applied to the medium. For example, *The Wonder Years* captured the essence of growing up in America during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The subject matter of this particular show attracted a large portion of the 30 to 40 year-old demographic, which consequently grew-up during the same era. Also, the 30 to 40 year-old demographic is key in television because that age group is considered to have the most expendable income, which attracts advertisers. Hence, the producers of *The Wonder Years* identified their target audience (conceptualization), built an on-going relationship with the audience (organization), and used storylines and settings

that had emotional appeal and a high degree of importance for the audience (categorization).

Although Harper discusses the medium used to convey the message in her examination of the modern canon of operationalization (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991), the canons, both modern and classical, relate most to the rhetoric of public speaking or other forms of communication that closely resemble public speaking. The major criticisms of the traditional approach are based on this fact (1991).

In 1965, Edwin Black... attacked the traditional approach because it limits criticism to oral discourse.... He neither advocated abandoning the traditional approach nor claimed that studying public speaking was a pointless endeavor. Black's goal was to force critics to think about adapting and expanding the traditional approach to fit changes in our culture. (p. 64)

Over the last 90 years, our culture has changed dramatically with the advent of mass communication and the electronic media. In 1979, Ronald Primeau adopted the canons to the Twentieth Century by applying them to electronic media. Primeau (1979) argues that the canons of classical rhetoric provide a vast insight into the realms of mass media, which are not clouded by overly complicated theories and models.

Some of the clearest explanations of how human beings communicate were provided centuries ago by philosophers in ancient Greece and Rome. The communication strategies described then still provide an uncomplicated and workable model for studying the electronic media today. Everything from TV, radio and movies to... lavishly equipped media centers can be more understandable and enjoyable... with the help of a few simple tools.

(p. 20)

Primeau (1979) continues by exploring the canons independently and applying each to television from a critical standpoint. In the process, he develops modified definitions for each canon, providing audiences with a critical guide to electronic media.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CANONS OF TV

#### Media Literacy

Ronald Primeau (1979) marries the concepts of classical rhetoric with the electronic media in his book The Rhetoric of Television. Primeau's (1979) focus is to provide the audiences of electronic media, specifically television, with a means to understand what they are watching or hearing.

Rather than pulling the plug, concerned viewers should continue to watch TV (and at the same time help their children learn how to watch) but with a greater awareness of what is happening to them as they watch. This book proposes, then, that TV "addiction" can be cured without total withdrawal. (p. 6)

Scholars have long pointed out the problems associated with television viewing: "TV viewing damages reading ability, destroys imagination, creates anxiety and

aggression, and becomes a substitute for invaluable developmental activities" (p. 4). According to some scholars these problems correlate to the "addiction and sedation" caused by television viewing and Primeau notes, "what is most dangerous in the addiction is not what TV does to us but what it teaches us to do to ourselves" (p. 5). He argues that the addiction is not caused by the *act of watching* but rather the way the audience watches with "little understanding or enjoyment and almost no critical sense" (p. 5). His solution to overcome TV addiction is to provide the mass audience with a modern version of the canons of classical rhetoric, arming the audience with a means to understand what they watch.

Aware viewers can be less vulnerable to influences of all sorts. Equipped with a basic understanding of how human beings send messages to each other, TV audiences can gain control over their own viewing and replace addiction with an enjoyable, stimulating resource. (p. 6)

The canons provide a simple and effective way to watch television with a critical eye, creating a "media literate" audience.

The electronic media have created in our culture a third form of "literacy" - a combination of

visual and oral signs that might best be named "media literacy." To be "media literate" one must be able to "read," "write," "listen," and "speak," through the channels of the electronic media. (p. 9-10)

By restructuring each canon, Primeau (1979) is able to give the elements of classical rhetoric meaning in the critical review of television. He begins with invention and the creation of ideas, progressing through each canon - arrangement, delivery, style and memory - in great detail. For each canon, Primeau (1979) also provides a series of questions designed to help the audience further understand the program or medium.

According to Primeau (1979), classical rhetoric provides a clear and simple explanation of how humans communicate whether it is in a public forum or through the electronic media. By understanding how to use the canons, Primeau (1979) hopes that the audience will become media literate and television will become an enjoyable and positive resource rather than a destructive force.



### Where Do They Get Those Ideas?

Chapter 4 of Primeau's book tackles the first canon - invention. Invention is where the ideas are conceived and developed. Invention is the creative process.

Obviously someone created the ideas and format for the show. But too often that process of creativity remains a deep mystery. Perhaps we need to demystify the techniques used to create mass entertainment. We need to understand.

(Primeau, 1997, p. 36)

No one can clearly identify the ability that enables some to write, paint or compose. Many people believe that artists in any medium "are wild, undisciplined geniuses" who are struck by "lightning bolts of inspiration" (p. 37). Primeau (1979) identifies this belief as the "genius theory." He notes that ancient scholars did not ignore this theory when exploring invention or "the process speakers use to discover what they wanted to say" (p. 35). But scholars did concentrate more on the creative process used by speakers who were not considered geniuses. These speakers used a more systematic approach, identified their audience and took full advantage of their resources.

Whether considered a genius or not, to take on the creative process in any medium requires an extensive

understanding of the medium and its audience. Creativity is not a magical event; creativity is the result of dedication and hard work.

Mastering accumulated knowledge, gathering new facts, observing, exploring, experimenting, developing technique and skill, sensibility, and discrimination, are all more or less conscious and voluntary activities. The sheer labor of preparing technically for creative work, consciously acquiring the requisite of knowledge of a medium and skill in its use, is extensive and arduous enough to repel man from achievement.

(Ghiselin, 1952)

Even with dedication and hard work, Primeau (1979) notes that the creative process takes an undefined, and perhaps unconscious, ability to evolve all that has been learned and acquired into a new idea and communicate it to others.

Artists are generally limited by two factors, "the medium in which he or she is working" and "the desires and abilities of their audience" (Primeau, 1979, p. 38). The medium affects all artists, i.e., a photographer can only capture what the lens sees and a painter must work in two-dimensions. The effect of the audience on an artist depends upon the commercialization of the medium. "TV is a

commercial entertainment medium. To be successful, programs must be popular with audiences" (p. 39).

Filmmakers and television producers work in media dominated by the audience and this greatly influences their approach to the creative process. Creators of TV and film often rely on material that has been successful in the past. The film industry loves sequels. ABC's recent success with *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* has led to the development of several new game shows offering generous amounts of prize money. With the success of *Seinfeld* in the early '90s, the networks developed a slew of sitcoms starring stand-up comedians; *The Drew Carey Show*, *Everybody Loves Raymond* and *Grace Under Fire*.

Spin-offs are another popular forum for ideas in the television world. *Cheers* gave us *Frasier*, *Happy Days* gave us *Laverne and Shirley* and *Mork and Mindy*, and *Hercules* gave us *Xena: Warrior Princess* to name a few.

Personal experiences can also be a source of creative insight. Tom Schulman, author of *Dead Poets Society*, credits a dynamic and inspirational speaker at an actor's workshop for the idea behind the hit movie. "After hearing him talk, the next day we would all get together with renewed resolve, saying, 'I've got to form my own theatre, I've got to get involved, I've got to change the world!'"

(Wolff & Cox, 1993, p. 263). Oliver Stone won an Academy Award in 1986 for *Platoon*, a movie based on his experiences in Vietnam.

Another source of ideas for television and film is newspapers and magazines. Almost every made for TV movie has been taken from the headlines. Movie producer and director Jerry Bruckheimer borrowed the idea for *Top Gun* from an article highlighting the navy pilots' school at Miramar (Wolff & Cox, 1993).

Inspiration for an idea may come from anywhere, but to germinate the idea into a viable product takes knowledge of the craft. Schulman sat on the idea for *Dead Poets Society* for three years. "It took quite a few screenplays before I reached the point where I both enjoyed writing them and felt like I had some idea about what I was doing" (Wolff & Cox, 1993, p. 261). William Kelly learned his craft by writing for television. Kelly wrote for over 180 programs before he penned *Witness*. The result was a well-structured screenplay with deep characterizations and an Academy Award (1993).

It is important for the audience to understand that the creators of television and film are not magicians, the creative process is not mystical. Filmmakers and TV producers know their craft, are passionate for their medium

and have a gift for creative insight. The audience must also realize that they are a powerful force in both media and have great impact on the creative process.

Understanding these two points better equips the audience to explore the invention of a film or television program.

Primeau's book is no more than a guide television audiences and he argues that understanding the invention behind a program will make better TV viewers. To help the audience better understand invention Primeau supplies a worksheet and asks viewers to use a set of questions as a starting point to analyze the invention of a particular program (1979). For this study the popular sci-fi program *X-Files* was chosen.

**Does the material seem original or is it an adaptation of material from another medium?**

A supernatural, UFO-minded detective series which debuted to little fanfare in fall 1993, then quietly built a fanatical following. Languidly paced, hazily lit, often open-ended, and dolorously soundtracked, the *X-files* has prospered by ignoring many of TV's commonly held tenets. (Daly and Wice, 1995)

Today, the *X-files* remain one of the most original programs on TV. However, certain elements of the program have a familiarity to television of the past. Most notably is the sexual tension between the two stars.

The protagonists, a charismatic pair of FBI agents named Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson), view their paranormal beat with varying degrees of skepticism (he's open-minded, she's less so) - which provides one of old TV reliable, unresolved sexual tension.

(Daly and Wice, 1995)

Also familiar in the series are the following: the stars rebel against the system they work for, the driving force behind the series is paranormal activity and aliens, and a continued story line from week to week is a conspiracy operation deep in the U.S. government. All of these elements have been used before and yet the *X-files* manages to develop its characters and twist its plots in a way that is quite original.

**Is some of the material based on investigations or obvious research?**

Yes. As with most science fiction programs, many of the episodes are based on material that requires research.

Also, the writers seem to have knowledge of the FBI and its structure.

**Is the material imitative? Is it like other programs or films of its kind? If so, does the similarity help or hinder?**

The *X-files* combines popular elements from TV's past. At times it reflects a police drama. It contains elements of classic sci-fi. The deep characterizations and entangled, on-going story lines give the series a soap opera feel.

The *X-files* might be summarized as *Dragnet* meets *The Twilight Zone* with a touch of *Days of Our Lives*, but the series is more. By combining these elements, the series stands out as a unique program.

**Does thinking about how material for the film or program was invented (or how the show was made) improve your enjoyment or understanding? Describe.**

No. The program does not need additional research. In fact, research might hinder the effectiveness of the program. To understand every aspect of the *X-files* and its story arcs may break the reality the series has created. Mystery is a big part of the program's appeal.

**Is the show especially enjoyable? Does it offer some special insight? If so, can you identify how it is creative in a special way? What role does invention appear to have in its success?**

The *X-files* either captures a viewer or doesn't. The show has reached a cult status, creating a loyalty among its fan base. People do not generally enjoy periodically tuning into an individual episode; to fully enjoy the *X-files* one must watch the show as a series. One must become lost in the on-going story lines and develop relationships, whether it's love or hate, with the program's characters. These elements, well-developed characters and on-going plot lines, have played a key part in the show's success.

#### It's The Order That Counts

Arrangement has long been considered the most important of the rhetorical canons and has consistently received the most meticulous study. The method in which material is presented plays a key role in how the material affects the audience. Order influences how an audience is persuaded. Without order, audiences would be lost in a sea of information and confusion would overshadow the message (Primeau, 1979).



Arrangement is equally important in the effectiveness of the electronic media. The opening sequence sets the mood for the entire program. The order of scenes creates specific meaning and builds suspense. The timing of a character's introduction may influence the audience's perceptions of that character.

The classical rhetoricians' tried-and-true emphasis on organization strategies remains important for understanding and appreciation of today's electronic media. TV viewers or moviegoers look for an introduction that eases them into the material and prepares them for what is to follow, an orderly listing and division of the facts, a setting forth of proof for arguments and an elaboration of the evidence with detailed support, and finally a conclusion that ties together what had been separated into that meaningful arrangement of parts. (p. 52)

Arrangement plays a vital role of the electronic media. In fact, television and film often have a predetermined arrangement or order for each minute or even second. In television commercials, a producer has thirty seconds to tell his/her story and every second counts. A producer must use arrangement to emphasize and clarify the

message. If the message is lost in the arrangement, the commercial has failed. If the producer has not fully conveyed the message in thirty seconds, the commercial has failed. If the images are not built in a memorable fashion, the commercial has failed.

"Even when there appears to be no order to a presentation, most likely a careful arrangement of material is there behind the scenes" (Primeau, 1979, p. 50). Television producers and filmmakers utilize several types of arrangement. A popular method for a thirty-second commercial is arrangement through association. Images of the product might be juxtaposed with an image sequence of a cool mountain spring to create a refreshing and clean concept of the product. Another popular method is collage arrangement, a popular choice for music videos. The collage method is also used in *Millennium* allowing the audience to see into the mind of the show's lead character, an ex-FBI profiler. Familiarity will create a recognizable arrangement. Viewers of *Saturday Night Live* expect a host stand-up followed by a series of unrelated comedy sketches and two performances by a musical act. The most common method of arrangement is the chronological sequencing of events (1979).

There are several proven techniques of arrangement existing on all levels of the electronic media. However, there is no concrete rule governing the order of a particular film or television program. In fact, a current trend in Hollywood is to break from traditional arrangement methods. The new breed of filmmaker, raised on an appetite of video games, twists the fundamental ideas of scripting and arrangement, creating faster movies that jump timelines, distort realities and establish alternate worlds (Gordinier, 1999).

If Hollywood's old guard tends to kneel before the Ten Commandments of screenwriting ("Thou shalt insert a plot point on page 17") the new guard behaves with blissful sacrilege - even when it comes to the laws of physics. In these new films there is no such thing as death... Time doesn't move in a straight line. (p. 39)

Quentin Tarantino broke from the mold of typical Hollywood arrangement in 1994. His film, *Pulp Fiction*, jumped around the timeline telling three different stories that intersected on several levels and concluded with the scene that actually opened the movie. The film was made for less than eight million dollars and grossed more than a 100 million dollars at the box office proving that all

stories do not need a linear timeline. The movies *Go* and *The Limey* use similar methods of arrangement to tell their stories. *The Matrix*, *Fight Club* and *The Sixth Sense* are among 1999 films that do not take the audience by the hand and lead them from scene to scene rather these films construct alternate realities and keep the audience shroud in mystery until the film's climax. Filmmakers are also utilizing more of the movies' actual run time, arranging sequences down to the very second. A normal film contains 600 to 800 edits; Darren Aronofsky's, director of 1998's *Pi*, latest film contains more than 2,000 edits. "Images riff off themselves in a kind of synaptic spray. 'We call them Hip-hop montages,' Aronofsky says" (p. 40). "This is not unspooling your tale," says David Fincher, director of *Seven* and *Fight Club*, "This is downloading" (p. 38).

With the next wave of film makers intent on changing the face of cinematic arrangement, the need to understand and create order is stronger than ever. M. Night Shyamalan, writer and director of *The Sixth Sense*, was careful with his film's arrangement to create a reality that preserved the surprise ending and made the ending both credible and believable. Although this new wave of films looks to have no distinct arrangement, in actuality the arrangement is a key component. The story lines are much

more complex and must still be conveyed to the audience in a method they can understand (Gordinier, 1999).

Even with the more complex structure of these new films, Primeau's (1979) basic method of exploring arrangement can still be used. Besides the arrangement of most films and television programs continues to follow more traditional guidelines and are easily explored using Primeau's (1979) method. Just as arrangement in classical rhetoric had six parts (*exordium*, *narratio*, *divisio*, *confirmatio*, *confutatio* and *peroratio*), Primeau's (1979) adaptation to the electronic media has six basic parts.

First is the introduction (*exordium*). As the name indicates this is where the subject matter is introduced and the context of the rhetorical act is set forth. In television, the opening minutes are used to set the tone of a program, capture the audience's interest and introduce the plot. "Crime shows bait with intrigue. The evening news will often announce the line-up of features for the show. Soap operas ease back into 'where we left off yesterday'" (p. 52).

After the introduction, it is time to narrate. Narration (*narratio*) is where the facts are listed and experiences are shared. "The narration is that part of the show in which things start happening: the comic lines come

fast, the guests make their appearance, the crime unfolds, the game begins" (p. 53).

The third stage of arrangement is division (*divisio*). Here, the material is separated into smaller units and a pattern is formed giving the whole more clarity and impact. "Almost every kind of TV show has recognizable parts that add up to the total product. Viewers learn these parts, and when they tune in late they find it easy to catch up" (p. 53).

Next is confirmation (*confirmatio*), a time to prove that the material conveyed is reliable and credible. Audiences need to believe in the story they are witnessing. *ER* is believable because the show closely mimics a true to life emergency room. *Friends* is believable because much of what the characters experience is rooted in real life. *Star Trek* is believable because it has constructed its universe in a logical and detailed manner (1979).

Fifth is the refutation stage (*confutatio*). An extension of confirmation, here the opposing voice is heard and refuted. Although the television audience is not provided a channel of immediate feedback, TV producers include the refutation stage in their story arcs. "Reporters challenge politicians. The bad guy loses.

Opposing views are examined closely in documentaries" (p. 54).

The final stage of arrangement is the conclusion (*peroratio*). The facts are summarized, the parts are reassembled and a conclusion is drawn. Closure is achieved. "Humorous or thriller plots are unraveled. Soap operas break off at a moment of suspense, to be continued tomorrow. In sports, the contest has a victor" (p. 54).

Primeau (1979) uses these six parts as groundwork for exploring the arrangement in electronic media. Again he provides viewers with a worksheet to examine particular programs. Included in this program is the category of "transitions between parts," used to examine how a story flows. For this study, the examination of Chris Carter's *X-files* continues.

### **Introduction:**

To examine the entire series is difficult; the introduction from episode to episode varies. However, the basic structure is similar in most episodes. In the first few minutes a crime is committed or an unexplained phenomenon occurs luring the audience in. The series is very good at teasing an audience and capturing its attention.

**Presentation of facts or unfolding of plot:**

Two FBI agents, Fox Mulder and Dana Scully, arrive on the scene. A forensics investigation is started, witnesses are questioned and hypotheses are formed. Mulder, the male lead, usually forms an explanation based on the paranormal. Scully, the female lead, explores the crime on a more scientific bases.

**Division into parts:**

The agents go their separate ways in exploring the crime. Scully typically performs autopsies while Mulder chases ghosts and monsters. The individual leads are followed and evidence is gathered.

**Credibility, proof, evidence:**

Autopsies reveal vital information. A witness talks. Lab results return. Mulder finds additional cases backing his theory and usually discovers something that was missed in the initial investigation.

**Refutation of opposition:**

The agents convince their superiors that they are on the right track. Scully argues the scientific explanation



based on empirical evidence. Mulder explains his supernatural theories using history and hard evidence.

**Conclusion:**

Nine times out of ten Mulder is proved to be correct. Sometimes the agents catch the culprit, but most often even with the mystery solved the agents are left with no conclusive evidence and no bad guy. The series also has on-going story lines that are left open ended at the end of many episodes. In early episodes, Scully concludes each episode with a brief narrative.

**Transitions between parts:**

The stories typically flow in a linear fashion and require usual transitions. Occasionally, the series will use flashbacks to explain situations and characters. Also, the series has used narration as a method to move stories along.

**Media Style**

Style exists in all forms of media. Rock bands typically have a bad-boy style. Movie stars live a glamorous life-style. Stanley Kubrick's films have a different style than Steven Spielberg's. McDonalds is

stylized by fast food, Styrofoam boxes and a clown whereas Benihanas has a more up-scale style featuring a Japanese atmosphere and knife-wielding chefs who cook at your table. Style is easy to identify but actually defining style can be difficult (Primeau, 1979).

Although the word style is hard to define, examining certain aspects of a film or TV program lends insight into the style of that particular production and examining style is important when looking at electronic media for two main reasons. First, style is a tool of persuasion. Audiences are influenced by the style portrayed in films, television and commercials. Second, style becomes a part of the message. *The Blair Witch*, one of 1999's biggest films, used a shaky, hand-held style of camera work to persuade audiences that the events they were watching were real. The shaky, hand-held style also created the illusion that the cast was scared, running and lost solidifying the movie's message.

In electronic media, style can materialize in a variety of ways (Primeau, 1979, p. 63). In film, style may be associated with a director or actor. Genre can influence style. Production elements such as transitions, camera angles and lighting can influence style. Primeau

(1979) has identified six elements useful in exploring style in electronic media.

First, personality of characters is an important element in any story-telling medium. Characters drive stories; conflict erupts between characters, love blooms between characters, characters react to the situations created around them. Characters are essential to the story and thus are key in the development of the story's style.

Since the invention of radio and celluloid film, stars have greatly influenced the style of a program or film (1979). *I Love Lucy* would not be the same without Lucille Ball. John Wayne was America's rough and tough cowboy. Tom Cruise's name on a movie poster is enough for a ten million dollar opening weekend.

Third, publicity plays a key role in style. The Blair Witch used a website and a made for TV docudrama to build belief in the realism of the story. Also, public opinion can influence the style of a program or film (1979).

Medical dramas, police dramas and lawyer dramas use the languages of the profession centered in the drama. Sci-fi builds a language and jargon that helps create and define stories. Language and the style of language greatly influence the style of a film or program (1979).

Finally, setting and tone play key roles in style. *Battle Star Galactica* would have been less believable if it had been set on a planet rather than a convoy of spaceships. Music, lighting and camera angles help define tone creating humorous moods, dramatic overtones or sympathy.

According to Primeau (1979), these six items; personality of characters, image of star, publicity, style of language, setting and tone; are key elements in discovering the style of a certain program or film. Using Primeau's concepts of style in the electronic media, the *X-files* is further dissected.

#### **Personality of characters:**

The *X-Files* follows the escapades of two main characters, a man named Fox Mulder and a woman named Dana Scully. Mulder and Scully are FBI agents. Originally, Scully is teamed with Mulder to add scientific method to his unorthodox style of exploring the supernatural. The "powers that be" also want her to disprove Mulder's beliefs in aliens, psychic ability, paranormal activity and government conspiracy. Mulder's passion for his beliefs and the extraordinary circumstances surrounding most of their cases eventually wins Scully over and the two form an

intimately close partnership. However, Scully still sides with scientific explanation and searches for empirical evidence as Mulder follows gut feelings and searches for the less obvious answer.

Both characters are passionate in their work. Mulder has little life outside his work on the X-files. His quest to find proof of alien life and uncover a massive government conspiracy is driven by the disappearance of his sister. He is truly a man on a mission. Mulder can best be described as a passionate man, both arrogant and cocky, with a dead-pan sense of humor.

Scully is a doctor of medicine and believes that all things can be explained by science. Contradicting this belief, Scully is also a religious person. Several episodes have brought Scully's faith into question, testing her belief system. Mulder's passion has worn off on Scully over the course of the series. She believes in Mulder.

A driving force in the series is the relationship between Scully and Mulder. They have developed a deep love for one another, that has built between them strong sexual tension. Many episodes have seen their relationship head toward a climax, only to acknowledge that the love between them may never be recognized.

The supporting cast of the *X-files* is strong and deep. The series has many recurring characters as well as one-episode characters. The Lone Gunmen are made up of three conspiracy-theory geeks who help Scully and Mulder when called upon. Skinner is the by-the-book FBI head with a soft spot for Mulder and his quest. The Smoking Man is a key-figure of the government conspiracy shrouded in mystery and darkness. He may be the only true evil character on the series and at times even he has been given more humanistic qualities. Alex Krycek is a double agent, sometimes helping Mulder and other times he is bent on destroying Mulder. The list of on-going characters continues, each with a unique personality showing up on occasion to add something to either that single episode or the series as a whole. The creators of the show are also not afraid to write-off an on-going character. The list of casualties includes Deep-Throat, Agent Spender, Diana Fowley and the men involved in the conspiracy to name a few.

Each episode is also riddled with a vast array on one-time characters, from victims to witnesses to suspects. The subject matter of the *X-files* allows the writers of the show to create eccentric and unique characters that are not always completely human. In the first season alone,

audiences were introduced to *The Jersey Devil*, a prehistoric caveman, and Eugene Victor Tooms, a man who hibernates for up to thirty years awakened only by his hunger for human liver. In year two, audiences meet the Flukeworm, a creature living in the city's sewer system. In "Hungry," a seemingly normal man is actually a monster who eats human brains and in "Post-modern Prometheus," the audience is introduced to a kind, yet lonely, modern-day Frankenstein who enjoys listening to Cher. And in a fan favorite, "Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose," Clyde is introduced as a kind old man who is cursed with the ability to see the time and method of people's death.

The creators of the *X-files* have managed to create some of television's most loved and most hated characters, not to mention some of the strangest. Each episode continues to explore the depths of on-going characters and also introduces new and exciting characters. The characters of the show are normally the focal point and the story merely unfolds about them.

### **Image of star:**

At the beginning of the series, the *X-files* boasted no true star. During the course of the series, the lead character's Mulder and Scully, played by David Duchovny

and Gillian Anderson respectively, have become stars. This has been a great benefit to the series although perhaps detrimental to the stars' careers. When people see Duchovony or Anderson they are instantly recognized as the Agents on the *X-files*. This brings great publicity to the series, but has created a situation where Duchovony and Anderson have fallen into a trap of type casting.

**Publicity:**

The series and the main cast have normally been seen in good light by the public eye. The creators of the show and the cast promote the show by interviews and guest appearances. The show has seen its share of bad press, including a period where Duchovony was a favorite of the tabloids and nude pictures of Anderson surfaced, but the integrity of the show remain intact and the show actually grew in popularity. Also, the show has benefited from great critical response and numerous awards including Emmys and Golden Globes. In just seven years, the show has created a massive cult following that has led to a blockbuster motion picture, several dedicated fanzines and numerous websites. In fact, typing *X-files* on a search engine results in more than 40,000 hits.



**Style of language:**

The series is very good about creating a true sense of realism. Episodes are researched and the series is careful not to contradict itself. The jargon used in the show's dialogue is borrowed from law enforcement, science and every day life.

**Setting:**

The show is shot primarily on-location. However, Mulder's apartment, Scully's apartment, their office in the basement of the FBI building and the interior of the FBI building have served as recurring sets. Normally an episode begins at a crime scene and then moves in accordance to the investigation. When in different cities the agents work out of the local law enforcement facilities; autopsies are done in morgues and interrogations are performed in isolated rooms. The settings are generally believable and aid in the stories and themes set forth by the series.

**Tone:**

The series combines elements of a police drama and sci-fi. The program often creates a serious atmosphere revolving around issues ranging from alien abductions to

witchcraft to religious sacrifice to government conspiracy. The writers of the *X-files* excel at creating the proper mood for the unfolding events of a storyline.

In year six of the series, three unique episodes aired back to back to back, demonstrating the range in tone of which the series was capable. In the first, "Rain King," the agents investigate strange weather patterns in a small Kansas town. Mulder and Scully find that the weather is affected by the emotions of the local weatherman, who has been pining over his high school sweetheart for the last twenty years. The episode is light hearted and full of quirky small town characters, climaxing at the local high school's homecoming dance. The next Sunday, "S.R. 819" aired. A more serious and tense episode as Agent Skinner lay on his deathbed with only 24 hours to live. The episode is dramatic taking on tones of life and death. Knowing that the series has killed off recurring characters before added to the suspense. The climax introduces double agent Alex Krycek as the controlling figure in a biogenetic experiment used on Skinner. The third episode, "Tithonus," is also serious in nature but centers more on a supernatural premise. A photographer, who has cheated death, has the ability to predict people's death with his camera. Scully investigates and with Mulder's help, learns

that the suspect is over 100 years old. In a twist of events, Scully is shot by another FBI agent and saved when the photographer steps in allowing death to take him in her place.

Although most episodes are centered around crimes and situations that are serious in nature, the program also adds a quirky sense of humor to the mix. Scully's straight woman is a perfect blend to Mulder's off-hand remarks, which lighten the mood in the gloomiest of circumstances. Also, appearances by the Lone Gunmen add an element of comic relief. The unique factor of the *X-files*' style is the ability to take on the tone of the story at hand, the result of a well-planned, well-written television series.

### Delivery

In ancient times, orators relied on techniques of face-to-face communication to deliver their message: eye contact, gestures, stance and dramatic presence. Orators also manipulated the setting, lighting and even room temperature to create a more ideal environment for communication. These techniques fall under the canon of delivery and greatly influenced an orator's message in meaning and acceptance (Primeau, 1979).

Delivery also affects communication through electronic media. In television, the production techniques used to create a program greatly influence the message of that program (1979). The style, narrative and story are in essence "a function of the production techniques used in its creation" (Barker, 1985, p. 235). By manipulating camera angles, framing, lighting, transitions and pacing, a director has great impact on the end product: a low camera angle creates a more powerful image than a high camera angle, extreme close-ups add to dramatic effect, dissolves are used to symbolize the passage of time and pacing is a vital element of action and comedy. The creation of a message in electronic media "greatly impacts what the message becomes and the way it is decoded" (p. 244).

Again, Primeau arms the audience with a list of production techniques to watch for in a television program. The continuing examination of the *X-Files* follows.

### **Camera angles:**

The *X-Files* uses camera angles to draw the audience in. The series attempts to build a reality around the agents and thus does not break the illusion created by the story with unnecessary camera angles or moves. The series

utilizes a good mix of close-ups, long shots and mid-shots to pace the show and establish drama.

**Split screens, wipes and dissolves:**

Generally, the series does not use these types of transitions with the exception of an occasional dissolve. Dissolves have been used to create jumps in time. In one episode, "Triangles," all three transitions were used.

**Color patterns:**

Overall the series uses muted colors and earth tones. The series is very dark visually and more than one episode has been done in black and white.

**Sound quality, pitch and volume:**

In creating a believable world and story arc, the sound is of normal pitch and volume. The program broadcasts in stereo and has outstanding sound quality.

**Coordination of sound and visuals:**

Generally the sound matches the on-screen action and dialogue. However there have been episodes that use sound to look into a person's mind or delve into something not seen on the screen. In the season six finale,

"Biogenesis," Mulder reacts to an artifact discovered in Africa. The audience aurally shares Mulders experience.

**Montage:**

The X-Files opening sequence is a montage of still images cut to the theme music. Both the images and the music create a memorable beginning that establishes the mood for the entire program. The images introduce the agents and hint at paranormal activity. Additional montages are used on occasion to establish history or create emotional tie-ins.

**Lighting:**

Lighting is a very important element in the series. The lighting is generally hard and creates an element of mystery. The program is full of shadows, leaving the audience to wonder what might be lurking just out of visual range. Although the storylines change on a weekly basis, the lighting remains consistent helping give the show its own identity.

**Editing techniques:**

The editing of the program is primarily cuts only, with an occasional dissolve. The stories normally follow a

linear timeline and the editing follows suite. The show is edited following action and dialogue. As with the camera angles, the editing helps create the realism of the *X-Files* not distract from it.

### The Lost Art of Memory

To classical rhetoricians the canon of memory was a way to absorb and recall information plus the ability to understand and interpret the information. Ancient orators did not have the luxuries of books, tape recorders and videos. A speaker in ancient Greece relied on his knowledge of the subject and mnemonic devices or methods of prompting memory. Primeau (1979) explains that memory is much different in modern society.

We let everything from note taking to tape recording and the TV instant replay take the place of what memory used to do for us. Consider the difficulties we would have remembering without the devices we take for granted to store and retrieve information for us. (p. 91)

Although the art of memory has changed with technology, it is still an important component of the electronic media. While watching TV, viewers carry on conversations, walk in and out of the room and surf from

channel to channel. This creates a unique problem for television producers; how do you get the audience to remember your show or product?

To explore the memory techniques used by TV producers, Primeau provides a chart of five elements: memorable slogans, jingles and trademarks; predictable format; repetition of phrases, scenes and characters; striking or intense images; suspense and impact. For this study these five elements are applied to the *X-Files*.

**Memorable slogans, jingles and trademarks:**

The opening sequence and theme music are memorable components found in every episode. Also, the eerie green glow of the show's logo has become a trademark of the series although the actual logo has changed. The series' slogan, "the truth is out there," has also become one of the more recognizable catch phrases from the early 1990s.

**Predictable format:**

The show centers on the work of two FBI agents, so much of their daily routines is predictable. However, the twist and turns of each unique story are usually fresh and unpredictable.



**Repetition of phrases, scenes and characters:**

The agents refer to one another by last name: Mulder and Scully. Their names are used twenty or more times in an episode and embedded in the audience's mind at the end of an episode. Mulder's apartment and basement office are familiar scenes, seen on a regular basis. Also, the agents' cellular phones are recurring props, often as important as the agents' pistols. The series has a host of repeat characters including the Smoking Man, Agent Skinner, Alex Krycek and the Lone Gunmen to name a few.

**Striking or intense images:**

The series has numerous images that are left in the audience's mind for days after the broadcast. There are murder victims, autopsies, aliens and monsters. In one episode, Mulder explores the burnt remains of more than thirty abductees while looking for Scully. In another episode, Scully is performing an autopsy on a victim's head when his eyes open.

**Suspense and impact:**

The series is very good at building suspense. Each episode has a level of suspense ranging from enough to keep you interested to sitting on the edge of your seat and

biting your nails. Also, series has an over-all suspense building from the on-going story of a super government conspiracy and the existence of an alien race.

### Conclusions

Media literacy is still an infantile field in academics, but it is growing and has drawn great attention over the last few years (Silverblatt 1995). Primeau (1979) was ahead of his time in his effort to provide a formulaic method of exploring media aimed at increasing visual literacy. However, in his attempt to arm the general public with a tool to become more media literate, Primeau (1979) over simplified the concepts of media literacy.

Primeau (1979) began his endeavor on the assumption that the mass audiences of electronic media would accept the task of increasing their own media literacy. Art Silverblatt (1995), Chair of the Department of Media Communications at Webster University in Saint Louis, Missouri, notes that, "individuals may cling to media content as a retreat from reality" (p. 5). Audiences may not feel inclined to analyze the media they watch or listen to. "Media programming has created an alternative reality - an unreality - that is simplistic, entertaining and satisfying" (p. 5). As a general rule, people are not

concerned with researching the media and the programs they watch, they simply want to enjoy them.

Also, the effort required to fully understand media, especially television, is considerable. Silverblatt (1995) warns the readers of his book, *Media Literacy: Keys to Interpreting Media Messages*:

To be sure, media literacy requires a degree of energy and concentration. It initially may feel awkward to analyze films or television programs. However, as in any activity the more you practice, the easier the process becomes. (p. ix)

Silverblatt's (1995) definition of media literacy stresses the following:

An awareness of the impact of the media on the individual and society; an understanding of the process of mass communication; the development strategies with which to analyze and discuss media messages; an awareness of media content as a "text" that provides insight into our contemporary culture and ourselves; the cultivation of an enhanced enjoyment, understanding and appreciation of media content. (p. 318)

Compared to Primeau's (1979) definition as "a combination of visual and oral signs" (p. 9-10), it is easy to see media literacy as a much more complex subject than Primeau (1979) had initially assumed. However, the canons are not completely ineffective in the study of electronic media. The canons might prove useful as a method of content analysis, helping to define media content, an important element of media literacy. Also, the canons might prove a better tool to explore a single episode in detail rather than a series as a whole. Combined with other techniques, the canons as a media research tool may provide insight in the areas of aesthetics or audience behavior.

**Is the general public sitting ducks waiting to be bombarded with malicious messages from the media?**

The media are simply neutral channels through which information is conveyed to large groups of people. The media can be used for many purposes and either used well or badly, depending on the intention - and skill - of the media communicator. (Silverblatt, 1995, p. x)

Thus media literacy is an important field of study in today's society and the exploration of media literacy rests on the shoulders of academics. Scholars must continue to research electronic media and its impact. To educate a

mass audience, media literacy must be taught in formal academic settings and classrooms.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE CANONS OF TV DEVELOPMENT

#### Television Programming Development

Television programming begins with an idea whether sparked by a personal experience, a literary source or the imagination. The idea provides a starting point for the creative journey. However, the idea alone is not enough; "in its raw and undeveloped form, an idea or concept has no real value" (Blumenthal & Goodenough, 1998, p. 202). A concept must be developed into a presentable form, either a treatment or synopsis, so that it can be pitched to an agent, a syndicator, a network or another potential source of financing.

The first stage of television program development is turning the idea or concept into a synopsis or a treatment, a longer more detailed form of the synopsis.

This short, preliminary version of the script is often the key selling point in a presentation.

If oral it is called a pitch.... The synopsis

should summarize the key elements, actions and events in the plot while highlighting the theme in terms of both category and subject matter... It represents a balance between simplicity and sophistication. Mystery and poetry do not work here. This is a report defining the subject. (Zaza, 1993, p. 15)

A synopsis should include information about genre, the medium to be used, running time and subject. This brief (one to three pages) script outline gives the writer or agent a marketable commodity that can be pitched to financiers (Zaza, 1993).

After financing has been secured, most deals move forward on a *step deal* basis. The next step is to further develop the idea into a more detailed treatment or a first draft script. If the financiers are still happy with the concept, the project then moves forward until a final draft of the script is approved. For a television series, this script is typically for the pilot episode of that series. Budget limits are worked into this final draft (Blumenthal & Goodenough, 1998).

At this point, the financiers decide whether to go into production or table the project.

The financing source may decide not to proceed with the next step, and may cancel development at any point.... In this case, the project can be frozen with the financier, it can revert to the producer with no strings attached, or (most commonly) it can go into *turnaround*. In turnaround, the financier pulls out of the deal, so the producer once again owns the rights to a script and is free to seek an alternate source of financing. (1998, p. 208)

If the producer is successful, he or she then repays some of the original development costs and usually the original financier receives some "back end" compensation (1998).

If the project's financiers give the green light, production begins. For a television series, a pilot episode is produced. The pilot is the most expensive and complex phase of development, but is necessary to test the impact of the program.

Scripts can be read, concepts discussed and embellished, designs reviewed, and casts auditioned and put through the paces in a rehearsal hall - but so much depends on chemistry and how the elements work together that producing



a sample of the show is the only way to gauge the program's chances. (1998, P. 210)

Thus, before a network or syndicator will commit to multiple episodes they almost always want to see a pilot.

The pilot is shown to the network or syndicator first, then to potential sponsors, the press and marketing people. The pilot is also tested with audiences. If the pilot is successful in all these venues, a network or syndicator will commit to a certain number of episodes, usually six or thirteen (Zaza, 1994). The series' future then rests in the hands of Neilson numbers.

The American people are not the ones that determine what goes on television. I know that the fallacy is that they are, but they aren't. The people who determine what goes on television are called the Nielsons. (Kassel, 1993, p. 107)

### The Canons

This study focuses on the process of turning an idea into a marketable commodity using the five canons of ancient rhetoric. The canons were originally developed in ancient times as a method of developing arguments in both the written and spoken form (Murphy & Katula, 1994). Over time, modern scholars began to use the canons as a form of

rhetorical criticism, using the canons to dissect and explore the message and method used in letters, speeches and essays. This approach to criticism is known as "the traditional approach" (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991).

Primeau (1979) merged the canons with the electronic media, developing a method of media criticism based on the canons' classical definitions. Now, turning full circle, this study uses the canons as a form of television program development. Used primarily as a means to develop a concept into a synopsis or treatment; invention, arrangement, style, delivery and memory create a path from idea to presentable format.

### Invention

The first and considered the most difficult canon, invention is where ideas are conceived and developed. In classical rhetoric, invention is defined as "the devising of matter, true or plausible, that would make the case convincing" (Murphy & Katula, 1994, p. 117) or the process of choosing and exploring a topic (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991). For television development, the canon of invention does not differ much from classical rhetoric. Invention is the discovery and exploration of an idea in detail including the creation of plot, characters and settings

that help transform the idea into a quality television program.

The idea for a television program or film is "the central image that defines an experience" (Zaza, 1993, p. xi). The first stage of invention is to state the central image as "a one-line explanation of the story line that conveys a sense of the familiar, the universal" (p. 7). For example, Hugh Wilson, the creator of WKRP, defined the program as "a character comedy concerning a radio station" (Kassel, 1993, p. 6). The key is to state the central image as simple and concise as possible.

After the central image has been clearly identified, a few questions must be answered about the idea: *Can the idea be written as a script? Will the script translate to screen? Will it work best on television or film? As a series or as a feature? Will people watch?* These questions need not be vocalized, but must be considered in determining if the project is worth pursuing for further development. Unfortunately, certain ideas do not work well on television and as the idea is explored in broader detail, this fact may come to light (Zaza, 1993).

With a one-line description of the concept in hand, it is time to define the central conflict and develop the main set of characters. The central conflict is the driving

point behind the plot and events that unfold in a program. Conflict can be simple and concise as in the movie *Twister*, where the primary conflict is man versus nature. There may be multiple conflicts as in the episodic drama *ER*. The conflicts of *ER* revolve around life versus death, hospital politics and the many personalities of the characters. In situation comedies varying personalities can be the primary conflict of the program. For example, *The Odd Couples'* consistent bickering between Felix and Oscar or NBC's *Stark Raving Mad* as it follows the on-going battles between a horror novelist (Ian) and his editor (Henry). Sexual tension has also proven a valid conflict for television and film. Who can forget Maddy and David on *Moonlighting* or Angela and Tony on *Who's the Boss*. The central conflict is essential and provides the foundation of a television program.

Along with conflict, television programs need characters. Characters can be defined on several planes: physically, mentally, emotionally, ethically and morally. The main goal is to define a character clearly, so that producers, directors, actors and the audience understands who the character is. Well-developed, interesting, three-dimensional characters are vital to television (Kassel 1993).

Along with the central conflict and characters, the primary settings of the story should be considered - both locations and time period. After determining the primary settings of the story, invention is complete. The 'who, what and where' have been identified.

### Arrangement

The second canon is arrangement, defined in classical rhetoric as "the ordering and distribution of the matter" (Murphy & Katula, 1994, p. 117). Here, the rhetor decides how to sequence the facts and determines the amount of time each is allocated (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991). Regarding television development, the canon of arrangement again relates to the sequencing of events. The events, actions and moments of the story must be organized (Zaza, 1993).

For episodic television, arrangement exists on two entwined levels. First, the events of each episode must have order. Second, the pacing of the series must be determined. A program such as *The Sopranos* must not only entertain its viewers for an hour each week, the show must also entertain viewers from episode to episode. The show's creators must determine when to reveal new events and characters throughout the entire series as well as each individual hour.

Arrangement is a significant and on-going element of television. Audiences must be entertained immediately and have a reason to come back next week. The NBC hit sitcom *Friends* paced the Ross-Rachael affair over three seasons, using it to entice or tease viewers back each week.

Arrangement must be mulled over in the early stages of television development and certain decisions will be made. However, these decisions should not be written in stone. Arrangement is a varying element in television and will continue to evolve with the program.

### Style

Style, the third canon, is defined in classical rhetoric as the "adaptation of suitable words and sentences to the matter invented" (Murphy & Katula, 1994, p. 117). As applied to television, style relates not only to the words and dialogue but also to mood and genre.

Dialogue and interaction between characters helps establish mood and thus influences style. In Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*, the fast-paced, dirty-mouthed banter between John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson created a cool, powerful mood that typified the 'gangsta' lifestyle. In the opening sequences of the movie, their dialogue set the mood for the rest of the film. Because

dialogue can play a key role in the style of a program, it must be taken into consideration. It may even be beneficial to include sample dialogue between main characters.

Another component of style to be considered is mood. Is the overall feel of the show creepy and tense or happy and go-lucky? Does the show have dark overtones? Is the show funny or serious? Decisions on mood will also affect the choice on genre. Is the show a comedy? A drama? A dramedy? Sci-fi?

Style is an important consideration in determining a target audience and what networks might be interested in the show. Style will also influence decisions concerning the next canon, delivery.

### Delivery

The fourth canon of classical rhetoric is delivery, defined as "the graceful regulation of voice, countenance and gesture" (Murphy & Katula, 1994, p. 117). Delivery is said to be a speaker's greatest weapon, by mastering techniques of good delivery a speaker can persuade and manipulate his/her audience (1994).

In the television industry, the act of delivery falls primarily into the hands of the director, cinematographer

and editor. Delivery is the production techniques and transitions used to lace a program together including camera angles, lighting, sound and editing. Although delivery is the process of actually building the program, it is greatly influenced during the development stages.

Decisions on style affect decisions on delivery. If the mood of a program is bright and cheery, the color and lighting should reflect that mood. Tension can be heightened by camera angles and moves. The impact of a sitcom punch line can be increased or buried by editing.

In the development stage of a program, conscious decisions can be made about delivery. *Homicide* is edited in a manner that intentionally breaks continuity, in essence building a level of drama and intensity. Chris Carter manipulates lighting on the *X-files* to create drama and tension. He also uses shadows to hide evidence and facts from both the agents and the audience. The short-lived, critically raved Fox sitcom *Action* created the sleaze-ball world of a Hollywood producer by opting for raw, profanity riddled dialogue that was intentionally 'bleeped' out. Michael Davies, executive producer of ABC's runaway hit *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, opted for intense music and an austere lighting scheme to increase the tension and drama of the program (Snierson, 1999).



These are all decisions made by the shows' producers in the early stages of development.

Another factor affecting delivery is the decision to shoot on film or tape. Film has a softer, more appealing look but is costly. Fancy transitions are much cheaper on video. ABC's *Home Improvement* was shot on video, allowing editors to freely use digital video effects as transitions. For a sitcom, this editing technique would have been prohibitive on film. Often the decision of tape or film is a purely financial one and may be altered further into the development process. Hugh Wilson wanted to shoot *WKRP* on film, but later opted for video: "Wilson wanted to use current popular tunes and classic rock songs in the show's soundtrack, but it would cost a great deal more money to show a record being played on film than on tape. The decision to go to tape was purely financial" (Kassel, 1993, p. 36).

Similar to classical rhetoric, delivery is a powerful tool in television. Delivery can greatly help or hinder a story line. Several factors should be considered when initially discussing delivery including target audience, budget and style (mood and genre). As with arrangement, certain decisions on delivery should be made early but these decisions should be pliable. The primary elements of

delivery that should be discussed initially are lighting, shooting style, editing, special effects, audio and medium.

### Memory

The final canon of classical rhetoric, memory, is defined as "the firm retention in the mind of the matter, words and arrangement" (Murphy and Katula, 1994, p. 177). Ironically, with the advent of new technologies such as audio recordings and video, memory is not as vital to the encoding of a message as it once was. However, memory in terms of decoding is a significant element of electronic media. Radio stations and TV networks must embed their schedules and call letters into the minds of the audience, advertisers must get an audience to remember their product and television programs strive to create memorable events enticing viewers to join in again next week.

The key components of memory in television are soundtrack, title, opening sequences, slogans and catch phrases. Soundtracks have become a more popular method of sparking memory and cross-promoting television programs. *X-files*, *Beverly Hills 90210* and *Ally McBeal* have gone so far as to release the music featured in episodes as CDs. Titles and opening sequences catch an audiences' eye and help set the mood for the program. Slogans and catch

phrases help build a cult status for characters and programs, engraining images into the audience's mind. The *X-files*' "The truth is out there," slogan is among the most popular slogans of the 90s. Who can forget Desi's "Lucy, I'm home," or Ralph's "One of these days Alice, POW right in the kisser," or Butthead's "Huh, huh, huh cool."

Events are an additional way to increase memory in television. On *Friends*, Ross and Rachael's first big kiss became an event, *Seinfeld*'s masturbation episode highlighted a forbidden event, and the last episodes of *M.A.S.H.* and *Cheers* landed among the most watched events in television history.

Audiences are bombarded with images and information. It is important to separate a program from the hundreds of others that exist on television. Although memory may not be fully addressed in the development stages of a program, it should be considered. What type of music will the program use? What is the title? What feel will the open create? Will there be a slogan?

### The Synopsis

After using the canons to explore the idea for a new television program in detail, it is time to summarize in the form of a synopsis. All of the information discovered

my not be in the initial synopsis, however this information will benefit more advanced stages of program development. Knowing the subject thoroughly, will aid in a pitch meeting, the scripting process and the actual production of a pilot episode.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANGELS & DEVILS

#### Invention

*Central image.* A drama centralized on angels and devils living among us, battling for each individual soul.

*Central conflict.* The primary conflict is a classic confrontation of good versus evil. The angels are sent to save humankind and the devils are here to corrupt, leading souls toward a path of damnation. The 'catch' is that each man, woman or child must ultimately make his\her own choice. The angels and devils are here only to influence, there is suppose to be no physical interaction. However, the story follows the longest reigning devil and he doesn't play by the rules.

*The characters.* The protagonist is Nathaniel, an angel who has returned to earth after 125 years of absence. He has been sent back to take on evil's greatest achievement. Nathaniel is an attractive male, over 600 years old although he appears to be in his mid-thirties.

He loves the earth, interaction with humans and the smell of coffee. He has been sent to battle Thomas, the antagonist. Nathaniel is a powerful angel, willing to play by Thomas' rules when necessary.

Thomas is as bad as they come. He ignores the rules and plays to win. Thomas has been on the earth for more than 300 years and has tallied more than 12,000 souls. He has faced seven different angels, and now he faces Nathaniel.

Jacob is an angel, new to the game and acts as Nathaniel's confidant. Jacob is matched against Jenna, a sinister devil in the form of a beautiful woman.

James, older in appearance, is a devil spending his time on earth as a bartender. Thomas often confides in James.

Thomas has enlisted a human, Harold. Harold is a heroin junkie that Thomas found on the streets.

Sara is human. She works as a police psychologist and often runs into Nathaniel at crime scenes, raising her curiosity.

Our final player is Nick. He is human and works as a freelance photographer. He has captured Nathaniel's true being on film.

These eight characters comprise the core cast. However, each episode introduces a variety of new characters - humans, angels and devils. Most will be one-time appearances involved in the story at hand. Some will be recurring characters, adding to the on-going story line as necessary.

*The setting.* *Angels & Devils* is a contemporary drama rooted in a large unidentified city, with dreary weather. Recurring sets include James' bar, a coffee house where Jacob and Nathaniel visit, Thomas' dwelling, police headquarters and Nick's studio. The program also has the freedom to follow stories into different cities, places and times.

### Arrangement

*Angels & Devils* is told in narrative time and space. The story unfolds in a chronological fashion with each episode revolving around an ethereal battle for an individual or multiple souls. Most episodes will follow a typical arc: exposition (tease), opening incident, rising action, climax and conclusion.

In addition to following the events surrounding Nathaniel and Thomas, some plotlines continue throughout the series. These plotlines include James' story, Jacob's

battles with Jenna, Nathaniel's relationship with Sara and Nathaniel's relationship with Nick.

Concepts for the first few episodes include:

1. *In the Beginning*. Nathaniel returns to Earth.

Using "the stranger as guide" (Kassel, 1993, p. 39) method, the audience is introduced to the main cast and storylines. The basis for the series is presented to the audience through conversations between Nathaniel and Jacob, and Thomas and James. *Sub-plots*. In the opening scenes, Nick captures Nathaniel's true essence on film. Also, Nathaniel encounters Sara for the first time.

2. *The Schoolyard*. Nathaniel and Thomas battle for the soul of a troubled teen holding his classmates hostage.

3. *Jenna*. Jacob's counterpart is introduced. Jacob feels out matched as he fights to save a man from the sins of infidelity.

4. *Birth of a Serial Killer*. Thomas finds Scott, a loner who hangs out in strip bars. Thomas leads him down a road of darkness. An open ending allows for Scott's return. Also, Thomas befriends Harold.

5. *Cult Status*. Thomas invades a cult, leading the group into a variety of sin.



6. *Vegas*. Thomas and Harold take a road trip to the original Sin City.

### Style

*Angels & Devils* is a serious and dramatic series, dark and cold in style. The evil is pure and the good is flawed. Human weaknesses are exposed and preyed upon by the devils. Although the angels fight for the good of humankind, a dark side crawls from the shadows when called upon.

Nathaniel lives by the creed that the end justifies the means, thus he is willing to blur lines in his battles with Thomas. Equally, Thomas plays by his own rules, allowing little to stand in his way.

Dialogue is a key element to the series. Both the angels and devils are silver tongued and words are typically their most powerful weapon. The rule is that each human maintains freewill and has a choice in the path he/she follows. The angels and devils use words as a tool of persuasion, however Thomas, as well as most devils, often ignores the rule. It is obvious that the angels and devils despise one another. They are curt in their conversations and brutal with the words.

The style of this program targets a 30-45 primarily male demographic. Secondary demographics are 30-45 females and under 30 males and females. This program could easily work in a late prime time slot on a network, but might best be suited for Sci-Fi or USA. Also, the series could be more cutting edge and raw if aired on a pay channel such as HBO or Showtime.

### Delivery

*Lighting.* Manipulation of the lighting is a key element of the series. Generally, the lighting will be hard, with dark shadows. Also the lighting will be used to maintain and focus the audience's attention on certain elements in the frame.

*Shooting style.* The series will be shot in one-camera, film style. By maintaining the look of a motion picture, the series will increase credibility with an audience and also seem more dramatic.

*Editing.* The series will primarily be edited in a manner to preserve continuity and maintain the reality at hand.

*Special effects.* The series will utilize stop motion and blur effects. These effects will build the over-all ethereal feel of the series. Also, these effects will help

create an immortal aura about the angels and devils separating them from the humans.

*Audio.* The series will focus mainly on the on-screen audio. However, music will be an important element in creating the mood of the series.

*Medium.* Unless restricted by budget, the series should be shot on 35 mm film. Shooting on film will help maintain a motion picture look.

### Memory

More elements of memory for *Angels & Devils* will become better defined as pre-production moves into the scripting phase. Music will play a key role in establishing memory for the series. Not only the title track of the series, but also the music played within the series will help identify characters and create mood. For instance, playing on the audience's past memories, the Rolling Stones "Sympathy for the Devil" may be used when first introducing Thomas. Although the song has been used before and is almost cliché for this situation, it will help the audience better understand who he is.

The opening sequence should also be a memorable event. The current concept employs Nathaniel as a voice over with an acoustical soundtrack. The voice over reads: "I am an

angel. One of many, walking among you. Battling for the good of humankind. With all good there is an evil. In the form of a devil. Living on your earth. Breathing your air. Preying on your freewill. These are the stories..."

The visuals juxtapose images from the series with memorable images of humankind's past - the Hindenberg, Nazi Germany, the JFK assassination and war.

## CHAPTER 5

### SYNOPSIS

#### *Angels & Devils*

Angels & Devils is a contemporary drama centering on a classic confrontation of good versus evil. The angels are on earth to save humankind. The devils prey on human souls, leading them down a path of corruption. Each angel is matched one on one with a devil battling over human souls. The 'catch' is that each man, woman and child must ultimately make his/her own decision. The angels and devils can only influence and persuade, they are to have no physical interaction nor can they force humans into action.

The story is set in a large unidentified city masked with dark clouds and dreary weather. Here, we meet our hero... Nathaniel. An angel sent back to earth after a 125-year absence. He has been sent back to take on evil's greatest triumph... Thomas. A devil who has walked the earth for more than 300 years; he has faced seven different angels and defeated them all.

Nathaniel is more than 600 years old, however, he appears as an attractive man in his early thirties. He enjoys his time on earth. Nathaniel loves the simple pleasures of life - listening to music, the smell of coffee and the vivid colors of sunrise. He spends afternoons with Jacob, an angel new to the game, sitting in a park or a coffee house observing human nature. Nathaniel is humankind's biggest fan and he will battle Thomas at all cost to save just one human soul.

Thomas has one objective... the destruction of humankind one soul at a time and he does not play by the rules. Thomas lives his existence on earth like a rock star basking in the vices of mortal life. Thomas has two acquaintances. Harold is a drug addict that Thomas has taken in to do his bidding. James is an old and wise devil disguised as the barkeep of Thomas' favorite hangout. He is Thomas' only confidant.

Along his journeys, Nathaniel becomes involved with two humans. Sara is a police psychologist who continues to meet Nathaniel at crime scenes. Nick is a freelance photographer. He captures Nathaniel's true being on film.

Our final recurring player is Jenna, a devil masquerading as a beautiful woman. She is Jacob's immortal rival.

The angels and devils have a deep-rooted hatred for one another. Nathaniel and Thomas more than others. Their hatred can be seen in their actions, in the way they look at each other and in the brutality of their words.

This is the story of good versus evil but it is also a story of human nature. And good does not always triumph.

### Conclusions

As a method of producing a synopsis, the canons offer a jumpstart for the creative process. Often writing the first word is the most difficult. Writers use a variety of methods to get over this first hurdle. Lew Hunter, a professor of screenwriting at UCLA, proposes a step outline on note cards. Hugh Wilson, producer of *WKRP in Cincinnati*, creates and writes from experience (Kassel 1993). The canons also provide a structure that makes writing the first word a little easier.

According to Tony Zaza (1993), a writer should always "have a firm grasp on the primary structures that help clarify the essence of the subject. When the subject of a story is not adequately structured or described, the writing, packaging, selling, or promotion of the project may fail due to misrepresentation" (p. 5-6). In television program development, the canons help to clarify the subject

matter and provide a means to evolve an idea into a presentable format.

In its raw and undeveloped form, an idea or concept has no real value. There are far more ideas than there are programs produced. Program development adds value to an idea. (Blumenthal and Goodenough, 1998, p. 202)

Exploring an idea in detail is a key element in program development. "Agents and programming executives warn that many different individuals generate similar ideas, dreams and the details of experience are what create distinctive concepts" (Zaza, 1993, p. 1). By fully understanding an idea or concept, a person can create a more complete and concise synopsis. A synopsis is a report defining the subject and good reports are both well organized and concise. The canons provide a method to explore an idea in detail, allowing a person to organize his/her thoughts and prepare to write a synopsis. The result is a well-structured and succinct synopsis.

The synopsis must encapsulate the central image and the key events and characters in one to three pages... Describe images briefly but vividly... It represents a balance between simplicity and sophistication. Mystery and poetry do not work



here. This is a report defining the subject.

(Zaza, 1993, p. 15)

The canons help organize and explore ideas but actually provide more information than is necessary at the synopsis level. However, this information, including ideas for episodes and concepts on production techniques, is beneficial later in the pre-production process. Also, the information may be helpful when fielding questions in a pitch meeting. It is better to be prepared to discuss plots for episodes and production techniques than to be caught off guard.

#### Future Studies

Primeau (1979) over simplified media criticism in his efforts based on the canons of classical rhetoric. However, if his concepts are explored in more detail and combined with principles of media literacy, the canons may prove a valuable tool in the realm of media criticism. After all the canons have proven useful in rhetorical criticism (Murphy & Katula, 1994 and Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991).

The canons may also have value as a tool for case study. Modifying Primeau's (1979) method to focus in more

detail on individual episodes of a series may shed light on that series in particular as well as television as a whole.

The canons as a form of development translate into additional areas of electronic media. For instance, the canons may prove valuable as a tool in advertising. Invention is the exploration of the product or service and determination of method used - humor, bandwagon, sex appeal, testimonial. Arrangement applies not only to the structure of 30-second spots, but also to the entire campaign, scheduling the print and radio ads in conjunction with television. Style and delivery determine how to reach the audience. Memory is the most important element of advertising - how do you get an audience to remember the product or service? Memory includes jingles, slogans and tag lines. Conversely, the canons may provide an interesting method to explore advertising, both specific ads and entire campaigns.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barker, D. (1985). Television Production Techniques as Communication. Critical Studies in Mass Communications, 2(1985), 234-246.
- Bittner, J. (1989). Mass Communication; an Introduction. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Blumenthal, H. and Goodenough. (1991). This Business of Television. New York, New York: Billboard Books.
- Burns, G. and Thompson, R. (1990). Making Television. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger.
- Cable at the Crossroads in 1987*. (1987, January 5). Broadcasting, 112(1), 172-176.
- Cox, K. and Wolff, J. (1993). Top Secrets: Screenwriting. Los Angeles, California: Lone Eagle Publishing Co.
- Dominick, J. and Fletcher, J. (1985). Broadcasting Research Methods. Boston, Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.
- Ghiselin, B. (1952). The Creative Process. New York, New York: Mentor.
- Gordinier, J. (1999). *1999: The Year That Changed Movies*. Entertainment Weekly, November 26, 1999.
- Harper, N. (1979). Human Communication Theory: The History of a Paradigm. Rochelle Park, NJ: Hayden Book Co.
- Higgins, J. (1997, October 20). *Big Ticket Originals Pay Off for Cable*. Broadcasting & Cable, 127(43), 28-34.
- Jarvis, P. (1996). The Essential Television Handbook. Great Britain: Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn.

- Kassel, M. (1993). America's Favorite Radio Station: WKRP in Cincinnati. Bowling Green, Ohio: Popular Press.
- Lavery, D., Hague, A. and Cartwright M. (1996). Deny All Knowledge: Reading the X-Files. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press.
- McClellan, S. and Schlosser, J. (1997, October 27). Paxson Goes Forward. Broadcasting & Cable, 127(44), 4-6.
- Murphy, J. and Katula, R. (1995). A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric. Davis, California: Hermagoras Press.
- Network Celebrates Its 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*. (1986, June 9). Broadcasting, 110(23), 50-54.
- No Problems That Programming Can't Cure*. (1988, January 4). Broadcasting, 114(1), 90-91.
- Primeau, R. (1979). The Rhetoric of Television. London: Longman.
- Rice, L. (1997, September 22). *10 Years from Wannabe to Big Four*. Broadcasting & Cable, 127(39), 36-38.
- Rice, L. (1996, September 30). *Moonves Urges Broadcast Solidarity*. Broadcasting & Cable, 126(41), 27-28.
- Rybacki, K. and Rybacki, D. (1991). Communication Criticism; Approaches and Genres. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Silverblatt, A. (1995). Media Literacy: Keys to Interpreting Media Messages. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger.
- Sternberg, S. (1997, June 2). *Opinion, Random Thoughts on Prime Time*. Mediaweek, 7(22), 16-17.
- Syndicators Face Fifth-Net Squeeze*. (1993, November 15). Broadcasting & Cable, 123(46), 23 & 26.
- The Thinking Man's Media Baron*. (1987, April 13). Broadcasting, 112(15), 68-75.

Varan, D. (1991). Mass Media Studies. Austin, TX:  
Paradigm Books.

Zaza, T. (1993). Script Planning: Positioning and  
Developing Scripts for TV and Film. Boston,  
Massachusetts: Focal Press.

## VITA

Graduate College  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Jamey T. Combs

### Address:

1839 Vista Pointe  
Henderson, NV 89012

### Degrees:

Bachelor of Science, Broadcasting, 1995  
Northwest Missouri State University

### Special Honors and Awards:

*20<sup>th</sup> Annual Telly Awards.*

Bronze, "Drip Torture," commercial, 1999.

Bronze, "97.1 the Point," use of graphics, 1999.

*Community Broadcasters' Association.*

First place, "Plumber's Number," commercial, 1999.

First place, "Dale Promos," station promotion, 1999.

First Place, "Rio People," local show, 1998.

*Electronic Media Awards.*

Finalist, "The Big Screen," local program, 1999.

Finalist, "CEO Golfer," direct TV commercial, 1999.

Thesis Title: The Canons of Television: An Application of  
the Five Parts of Rhetoric to Television Program  
Development.

### Thesis Examination Committee:

Chairperson, Dr. Lawrence Mullen, Ph.D.

Committee Member, Dr. Richard Jenson, Ph.D.

Committee Member, Dr. Paul Traudt, Ph.D.

Graduate Faculty Representative,

Dr. Christopher Hudgins, Ph.D.