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BA English Honours | Semester VI | ENG6CJ304

Narrative Constructs in Non-Fiction

Module 3: Rhetoric of Resistance: Speeches and Canonical Essays • Comprehensive Notes

Chapter 3: The Rhetoric of Public Speeches and Essays

Public speeches and the formal essay constitute potent ideological weapons in human history. Through classical rhetorical tropes, ethical ethos, emotional pathos, and logical logos, visionary orators and essayists have mobilized millions against totalitarianism, racial apartheid, and colonial hegemony.

3.1 The Prophetic Vision of Civil Rights: Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream"

Delivered on 28 August 1963 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during the historic March on Washington, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" stands as one of the greatest orations in human history. King masterfully deploys the cadence of the African American prophetic pulpit alongside classical rhetoric:

- **Anaphora:** The rhythmic repetition of phrases ("Now is the time", "I have a dream") creates an irresistible emotional and moral crescendo.
- **Biblical Typology & Founding Documents:** King juxtaposes the promises of the US Constitution and Declaration of Independence (calling them a "promissory note" that bounced with a mark of "insufficient funds") with Old Testament prophetic calls for justice ("Let justice roll down like waters").

3.2 Postcolonial Stereotypes: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "The Danger of a Single Story"

Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's famous 2009 TED Talk "The Danger of a Single Story" analyzes how cultural power dictates narrative representation. Adichie defines power (using the Igbo word *nkali*—"to be greater than another") as the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person.

Adichie demonstrates how Western literature has historically presented Africa through a single story of poverty, war, disease, and starvation, erasing the continent's immense linguistic, cultural, and intellectual complexity. Adichie insists that multiple stories restore human dignity and challenge epistemic oppression.

3.3 The Paradox of Imperial Hegemony: George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant"

George Orwell's autobiographical essay "Shooting an Elephant" (1936) exposes the hollow absurdity and psychological corruption of British imperialism in Burma. Serving as a colonial police officer, Orwell is summoned when a tame working elephant undergoes a temporary state of "musth," rampaging through a bazaar.

When Orwell locates the elephant peacefully grazing in a paddy field, he realizes the animal is harmless. Yet, surrounded by an expectant crowd of two thousand Burmese citizens, Orwell recognizes the agonizing paradox of imperial rule: *"When the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys."* Compelled to act the ruthless tyrant to avoid looking like a fool, Orwell shoots the magnificent beast, illustrating how imperialism destroys the moral soul of the colonizer.

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Advanced Critical Theory, Hermeneutics & Literary Praxis

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1. Hermeneutic Paradigms and Textual Mechanics

Critical inquiry into Module 3: Rhetoric of Resistance: Speeches and Canonical Essays reveals how textual forms construct meaning through complex aesthetic strategies and structural choices:

- **Structuralism and Semiotic Deconstruction:** The organization of signs, tropes, and syntactical structures establishes narrative authority while simultaneously revealing internal fissures. Binary oppositions embedded within the discourse—such as center versus margin, tradition versus modernity, and subjective interiority versus objective reality—are systematically problematized through textual slippages and ambiguous signifiers.
- **Postcolonial and Subaltern Interventions:** Interrogating power dynamics, linguistic hegemony, and epistemic violence within the literature demonstrates how marginalized voices negotiate, resist, or appropriate dominant canonical modes. The representation of colonial encounters, diaspora, and regional identity operates not merely as a passive backdrop but as an active agent reshaping literary genres.
- **Feminist, Queer, and Intersectional Critique:** Analyzing the construction of gender roles, patriarchal surveillance, and non-normative subjectivities provides crucial insights into how bodily experience, domesticity, and public agency are mediated across divergent historical moments and cultural landscapes.
- **Ecocritical and Spatial Dynamics:** Physical topographies, built environments, and non-human ecologies function as active participants in the narrative economy. Space is never neutral; rather, it reflects socio-economic stratification, environmental exploitation, and geopolitical borders that delineate belonging and exile.

2. Historiographical Context and Reception Theory

Every literary text and cultural artifact is firmly situated within specific historical material conditions. Understanding Module 3: Rhetoric of Resistance: Speeches and Canonical Essays requires examining how contemporaneous social movements, intellectual revolutions, and material shifts in print and digital publishing influenced textual production. Furthermore, Hans-Robert Jauss's concept of the "horizon of expectations" demonstrates that textual reception is never static; each successive generation of readers reinterprets these works through evolving ethical, philosophical, and cultural frameworks.

3. Comparative Aesthetic and Thematic Matrix

The following analytical matrix summarizes key comparative dimensions across traditional interpretive paradigms and modern critical frameworks relevant to Module 3:

Critical Dimension	Traditional / Formalist Reading	Contemporary Critical Synthesis	Pedagogic & Interpretive Significance
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4. Pedagogical Synthesis and Scholarly Praxis

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