Mihai Daniel FRUMUȘELU
University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine,
Bucharest (Romania)

A Classical Rhetorical Approach to the Petitions to the British Parliament

Abstract: The present study is an analysis of the petitions sent to the British Parliament, which are examined from the perspective offered by classical Rhetoric. The goal of a petition is to persuade, and the main goal of Rhetoric is also how to persuade. This convergence suggests the question to what extent petitions observe the principles of classical Rhetoric. Two things have been set up in order to find an answer to this question: a theoretical framework using key notions from the classical scholars who laid the foundations of classical Rhetoric — Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian — as well as from the book *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and a corpus of 100 petitions sent to the British Parliament during the sessions 2021-2022 and 2022-2023.The analysis identified the features which describe the five canons of classical Rhetoric (*Inventio, Dispositio, Elocutio, Memoria, Pronuntiatio*) and the three rhetorical appeals (ethos, logos, pathos). The result of the analysis on the corpus confirmed two of the classical Rhetorical tenets: the use of logos and the prevalence of enthymemes over syllogisms and examples. At the same time, it highlighted several features that describe petitions but not classical Rhetoric, such as the absence of syllogisms, the very seldom use of figures of speech, as well as of ethos and pathos. Petitions may be described as partly complying with the principles of classical Rhetoric in that they are succinct arguments made up of one or more enthymemes leading to a common conclusion.

Keywords: rhetoric, petition, parliament, corpus linguistics.

1. Introduction

In my previous article (Frumușelu 2023) I highlighted the features shared by a petition according to the dictionary definitions of the noun

'petition'. These features suggest that a petition, in general, aims at persuading a person or a group of persons, and that petitions to the British Parliament aim at persuading the Parliament, the Government or another British authority or official group to do or to change something (2023, 53). On the other hand, Corbett & Johnson (1999, 5) point out that the goal of Rhetoric is persuasion. These two ideas suggest that a petition may also be regarded as a document with a rhetorical content and that the petitions sent to the British Parliament may also be approached from a rhetorical perspective.

Moreover, the relatively large number of unexpressed warrants identified in the petitions analysed in Frumușelu (2023) reminds of two rhetorical figures where premises are omitted: enthymeme and epicheireme. All these remarks suggest that it would be interesting to approach the petitions from the perspective of classical Rhetoric.

2. Previous research

Concerning the previous research on the petitions sent to the British Parliament, Frumușelu (2023, 55) points out that most of the studies have approached this topic from historical, legal and political perspectives.

The theory of the Classical rhetoric and Argumentation emerged from the writings of ancient Greek and Roman scholars, particularly Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian, as well as the book *Rhetorica ad Herennium* ("Rhetoric for Herennius"). This book had been originally attributed to Cicero, but as late as in the 20th century it was proved to have another author who is still unknown. This author is therefore mentioned as 'the author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium*', a syntagm which, up to the 20th century, had been used to refer to Cicero.

The earliest use of the term 'rhetoric' occurs in Plato's (427 – 347 B.C.) dialogue *Gorgias*, where Rhetoric is mentioned as one of what he calls the 'lesser arts', i.e. arts meant to offer what is desired, whereas the 'true arts' offer what is necessary to survive (Plato 1925, 264ff).
Aristotle, the prominent Greek philosopher who may be regarded as a major founder of science and research, may be credited with the first developments of the theory of rhetoric in his writing *On rhetoric*, also known as *The Art of Rhetoric*.

Further on, the great Roman orator and statesman Cicero (106 – 43 B.C.) developed the theory of Rhetoric in his treatises *De oratore* ('On the orator'), *De inventione* ('On invention') and *Topica* ('Topics'). Also in ancient Rome, the teacher and writer Quintilian (35 – 100 A.D.) wrote

Institutio oratoria ('Institutes of Oratory'), a twelve-volume coursebook about the theory and practice of Rhetoric.

The notion of 'classical Rhetoric' is commonly used to refer to the principles and rules laid down by Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian in their works on Rhetoric. The present study will therefore use their tenets to build a theoretical framework for analysing the petitions in the corpus.

3. Material and Method

The investigation performed in the present study is done on the same corpus used in Frumușelu (2023). The corpus consists of 100 petitions sent to the British Parliament between 15 September 2021 and 26 April 2023 and is described in detail in Frumușelu (2023, 62-63). The complete list and contents of the petitions can be accessed at the Internet address https://mihai.se/cercetare/petitii/texte. For convenience, the list of the petitions mentioning their title is given in the Appendix of the present study.

Concerning the methodology of the present study, it is a corpus-based approach to the petitions in the corpus. This approach will use a theoretical framework built on the classical Rhetorical theory in order to analyse the petition from the classical Rhetoric perspective.

3.1 Theoretical framework

As pointed out by Corbett & Connors, *rhetorikē* is elliptical for *rhetorikē technē* ("the art of the rhetor or orator") (1999, 15). The term 'rhetoric' was used by Plato in his dialogue *Gorgias* to describe the art in which Gorgias was skilled. Accordingly, Gorgias was called a ῥήτωρ (*rhetor*) (Plato 1925, 264-265), a term which is rendered in English as 'rhetorician'. The Latin term 'oratory' was derived from the Latin noun *orator*, which means 'speaker, pleader', which was in its turn derived from the Latin verb *orare*, whose meanings correspond to the verbs 'to plead', 'to speak' (Guțu 2009, 411-412, my translation), as well as 'to tell' and 'to request' (Mușetescu-Telesa 2004, 321, my translation).

In *The Art of Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines Rhetoric as a 'counterpart' to Dialectic (*The Art of Rhetoric* I.1, 1354a1), identifies three kinds of rhetoric (deliberative, judicial and epideictic), the three 'appeals', also known as 'modes of persuasion' (*ethos*, *logos* and *pathos*). He also describes the structure of a discourse and the τόποι (*topoi*) (*The Art of Rhetoric* I, 2 1358a 2-35), rendered in English as 'topics' and which are general principles used to make a proof within an argument

(Corbett & Connors, 1999, 19). In Aristotle's view a discourse only needed to include two parts (the statement of the case and the proof), but, later on, the author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* would develop the structure of an argument to six parts. In their works, Cicero and Quintilian take over the notions defined by Artistotle and make detailed remarks on them and on the way a public speaker should make use of them in order to build an effective discourse.

Concerning the meaning of 'Rhetoric' nowadays, two millennia after the Greek and Roman Antiquity, Corbett & Connors (1999) give a definition that covers the present-day use of Rhetoric:

(1)   Rhetoric is the art or the discipline that deals with the use of discourse, either spoken or written, to inform or persuade or motivate an audience, whether that audience is made up of one person or a group of persons.

(Corbett & Connors 1999, 1)

Indeed, the notion of discourse has been expanded to include written texts, and even more, as contemporary researchers have come up with notions such as 'multimedia discourse', 'multimedia discourse' and 'multimodal text analysis' (O'Halloran & Smith 2013). Also noteworthy is the fact that the goal of Rhetoric is no longer confined to persuading but it includes informing or motivating the audience. However, as mentioned in the introduction of the present study, the two authors of the book point out that the main goal of Rhetoric is to persuade: "Persuasion is what rhetoric is all about." (1999, 5).

This view is similar to those expressed in dictionaries of Modern English, such as Concise Oxford English Dictionary, where Rhetoric is defined as 'the art of persuasive speaking or writing', Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, which mentions several meanings of the word 'rhetoric', two of which are particularly relevant to the present study:

(2)   (*formerly*) the study of the composition and delivery of persuasive speeches; the art of oratory
(*in classical oratory*) the art of influencing the thought and conduct of one's hearers

(Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, p. 1229)

Such definitions suggest that modern Rhetoric may be seen as an extension of classical Rhetoric, in that the principles of the latter still hold and make up the core of the former.

Concerning classical Rhetoric, an all-encompassing concept is represented by so-called 'five canons of Rhetoric', described by Cicero in *De inventione*: *Inventio* (Invention), *Dispositio* (Arrangement), *Elocutio* (Expression), *Memoria* (Memory) and *Pronuntiatio* (Delivery):

(3)   Invention is the discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one's cause plausible. Arrangement is the distribution of arguments thus discovered in the proper order. Expression is the fitting of the proper language to the invented matter. Memory is the firm mental grasp of matter and words. Delivery is the control of voice and body in a manner suitable to the dignity of the subject matter and the style.

(Cicero, *De inventione*, I, 7)

Corbett & Connors (1999) point out that *inventio* ('the discovery of arguments') is "a system or method of finding arguments" (1999, 17). As mentioned in section 3.1, a key concept in finding arguments is Aristotle's *topoi*, rendered into English as 'topics':

(4)   Topics is the English translation of the Greek word *topoi* and the Latin word *loci*. Literally, *topos* or *locus* meant "place" or "region" (note our words *topography* and *locale*). In rhetoric, a topic was a place or store or thesaurus to which one resorted to find something to say on a given subject. More specifically, a topic was a general head or line of argument which suggested material from which proofs could be made. To put it another way, the topics constituted a method of probing one's subject to discover possible ways of developing that subject. Aristotle distinguished two kinds of topics: (1) the special topics (he called them *idioi topoi* or *eidē*); (2) the common topics (*koinoi topoi*).

(Corbett & Connors 1999, 19)

Table 1 sums up the classical Rhetorical topics as listed by Corbett & Connors (1999).

Table 1. The topics used in classical Rhetoric

Common topics	Special topics

Definition
  Genus
  Division
 	
Comparison
  Similarity
  Difference
  Degree
 	
Relationship
  Cause and Effect
  Antecedent and Consequence
  Contraries
  Contradictions
 	
Circumstances
  Possible and Impossible
  Past Fact and Future Fact
 	
Testimony
  Authority
  Testimonial
  Statistics
  Maxims
  Law
  Precedent (Example)
	Deliberative
	  the good
	  the unworthy
	  the advantageous
	
	Judicial
	  justice (right)
	  injustice (wrong)
	
	Ceremonial
	  virtue (the noble)
	  vice (the base)

(Corbett & Connors 1999, 87, 120-130)

The data in Table 1 suggest that, whereas all the common topics may be appropriate for a petition, regarding the special ones, the Deliberative group of topics may be appropriate for requesting an action and the Judicial one may also be used, in invoking an act of justice as a ground for the action requested.

Dispositio ('arrangement') is a term taken over from Aristotle (*The Art of Rhetoric*, p. xliv) and which was described further on by Quintilian (*Institutio oratoria*, Book VII, Ch. 1):

(5)   The second part of rhetoric was *dispositio* (Greek, *taxis*), which may be translated as "disposition," "arrangement, organization." This was the division of rhetoric concerned with the effective and orderly arrangement of the parts of a written or spoken discourse. Once the ideas or arguments are discovered there remains the problem of selecting, marshalling, and organizing them with a view to effecting the end of the discourse. (...) Aristotle held that there were really only two essential parts of a speech: the statement of the case and the proof of the case; but he was ready to concede that in practice orators added two more parts: an introduction and a conclusion. Latin rhetoricians, like the author of the *Ad Herennium*, further refined these divisions, recognizing six parts: (I) the introduction (*exordium*); (2) the statement or exposition of the case under discussion (*narratio*); (3) the outline of the points or steps in the argument (*divisio*); (4) the proof of the case (*confirmatio*); (5) the refutation of the opposing arguments (*confutatio*); (6) the conclusion (*peroratio*).

(Corbett & Connors 1999, 20)

Concerning the petition corpus, an immediate question arises: are all these parts of the persuasive discourse present in each petition? If not, which of them are the most frequent and which are less frequent or even absent?

The third canon of classical Rhetoric, *Elocutio* (Expression) refers to the style of the discourse and is the subject of Quintilian's Book VIII (Ch. 1 'Style', Ch. 6 'Tropes') and IX (Ch. 1 'Figures of thought and speech') of *Institutio oratoria*.

(6)   The third part of rhetoric was *elocutio* (Greek, *lexis* or *hermēneia* or *phrasis*). The word *elocution* means something quite different to us from what it meant to the classical rhetorician. We associate the word with the act of speaking (hence, the elocution contest). This notion of speaking is, of course, implicit in the Latin verb from which this word stems, *loqui*, "to speak" (cf. Greek, *legein*, "to speak"). We have a number of English words based on this Latin verb: *loquacious*, *colloquial*, *eloquence*, *interlocutor*. It was after the revival of interest in delivery in the second half of the eighteenth century that the word elocution began to take on its present meaning. But for the classical rhetorician, elocutio meant "style."

(Corbett & Connors 1999, 21)

Concerning style, Quintilian identified three levels: 'plain', 'forcible' and 'florid' (Institutio oratoria, XII, Ch. 10, 58). Quintilian

associated each of this levels of style with one of the tree functions which he assigned to Rhetoric: the plain style for instructing (*docendi*); the middle for moving (*movendi*); and the high for charming (*delectandi*) (Corbett & Connors 1999, 26-27).

Memoria (Memory) was described by Quintilian in Book XI, Ch. 2 of *Institutio oratoria*, where he points out that it is not only a gift but also something which can be cultivated. *Pronuntiatio* (Delivery) was outlined by Cicero in *De Inventione*, Chapter 1.7. These two canons seem to be practically irrelevant to the study of the petitions sent to the British Parliament, as long as petitions are sent in written form.

Besides the five canons, another key notion of classical Rhetoric consists of the three kinds of persuasive discourse. As mentioned in the section on Previous research, they were defined by Aristotle in *The Art of Rhetoric*. Quintilian described them in detail in the third book of *Institutio oratoria*, as displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Type of persuasive discourse in classical Rhetoric

Discourse type	Source of description
deliberative (political, hortative, advisory - "in which we seek to persuade someone to do something or accept our point of view")	Quintilian, Book III, Ch. 8
forensic (legal or judicial – defending or condemning someone's actions)	Quintilian, Book III, Ch. 9
epideictic (demonstrative / declamatory / panegyrical / ceremonial - 'honor', i.e. praise, 'dishonour', i.e. blame)	panegyrical: Quintilian, Book III, Ch. 7

A further key concept introduced by Artistotle is represented by the classical rhetorical appeals or 'modes of persuasion': *ethos* (the ethical appeal), *logos* (the appeal to reason) and *pathos* (the emotional appeal).

Prof. José Luis Ramirez pointed out (personal communication) that these three appeals cannot be separated, but each of them implies the quality of the other two. The speaker's *ethos*, for instance, contains his or her credibility, which confirms or cancels the value of the reasoning and of the emotional appeal made by him or her. Indeed, the lack of the speaker's credibility invalidates both the reasoning, which thus becomes susceptible of being a sophism, and the emotional appeal, which may be regarded as an attempt at pulling at the hearer's heartstrings. This remark

suggests that each of the three appeals should be investigated keeping in mind the other two.

Concerning *logos*, classical thought developed a complex theory of Logic, which is the foundation for all logical theories that have been developed ever since. The notions of 'syllogism', 'enthymeme' and 'epicheireme' are used to describe the logical soundness of a discourse, whereas the notion of 'fallacy' refers to the errors of reasoning. Table 3 sums up the definitions of these notions according to Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language (1994), except for 'epicheirema', which is defined by the Merriam-Webster online dictionary:

Table 3. The main notions related to *logos* ('the appeal to reason')

Notion	Definition	Page
syllogism	Logic an argument the conclusion of which is supported by two premises, of which one (**major premise**) contains the term (**major term**) that is the predicate of the conclusion, and the other (**minor premise**) contains the term (**minor term**) that is the subject of the conclusion; common to both premises is a term (**middle term**) that is excluded from the conclusions... [< Latin *syllogism(us)* < Greek *syllogismōs*]	1440
enthymeme	Logic a syllogism in which one of the premises is unexpressed [< Latin *enthȳmēma* < Greek equivalent to *en-* + *thym(os)* spirit, thought + *ēma* eme]	476
epicheirema (*pl.* epicheiremata)	a syllogism in which some statement supporting one or both of the premises is introduced with the premises themselves [Latin *epichirema*, from Greek *epicheirēma*, from *epicheirein* to endeavor, attempt to prove, from *epi-* + *cheir* hand]	-
fallacy	Logic a failure in reasoning which renders an argument invalid [< Latin *fallaci(a)* a trick, deceit]	512

The investigation of the petition in the corpus will also check to which extent these features are present in the petitions analysed.

In the present chapter the main concepts of classical Rhetoric have been summed up. The next chapter will describe the way in which they will be analysed on the petition corpus.

3.2 Working hypotheses

The theoretical framework made up in the section 3.1 above highlights several relationships between classical Rhetorical features.

A first relationship, starting from the remarks made by Cicero and Quintilian, occurs between *divisio* and the three rhetorical appeals in that *exordium* makes use of *ethos*, as the part where the speaker asserts his or her credibility, whereas *confirmatio* is the part where *logos* plays an essential part, being the part where the proof is offered by means of logical arguments. The analysis on the petition corpus will also check if this relationship holds for the petitions sent to the British Parliament.

Another relationship relevant to the present study was established by Aristotle, who states that "[e]xamples are best suited to deliberative, enthymemes to forensic oratory" (*The Art of Rhetoric*, Book III, xvi). As mentioned, out of the three kinds of persuasive discourse (demonstrative, forensic and epideictic), the one to which petitions may be assigned to is the demonstrative one. This suggests that another feature which should be checked on the corpus is Aristotle's statement, i.e. that in the texts of the petitions examples, rather than enthymemes, should prevail.

The theoretical framework made up in section 3.1 also pointed out that Quintilian associated each level of style — 'plain', 'forcible' and 'florid' — with one of the functions of Rhetoric: instructing (*docendi*), moving (*movendi*) and charming (*delectandi*), respectively. Concerning a petition sent to the British Parliament, it the function of moving appears to be the main one, as long as a petition is meant to request an action. In addition, a petition may also instruct, to some extent, in explaining the reasons for the action requested. Accordingly, the style of the petitions should be 'forcible' and include features of the 'plain' style too, but hardly 'florid' at all. The present study will analyse if this hypothesis is confirmed by the petition corpus.

In order to perform these investigations, several preliminary analyses must be conducted on the corpus. First, concerning *inventio*, the main and the special topics should be identified. Then, regarding *dispositio*, the occurrence of the parts of the classical Rhetoric discourse (*dispositio*) in the petition should be checked. The next step is to identify the use of *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos*, and, concerning *logos*, the occurrence

of examples, enthymemes, epicheiremata and fallacies — if any — should also be examined.

Let us analyse how the main features of classical Rhetoric are present in the petitions comprised in the corpus. To do this, these features were identified and marked for each of the petitions included in the corpus.

4. Analysis and discussion

The theoretical framework established in section 3.1 will be used as a checklist for the investigation on the corpus of petitions, as the existence of the features that describe this framework should be identified in each petition.

Before performing the analysis on the corpus let us point out the fact that there are features which are valid for all petitions sent to the British Parliament. Thus, *memoria* and *pronuntiatio* are irrelevant to the investigation as long as the petitions are sent in written form, as mentioned in the previous section. These two features could be relevant to the petitions read out in front of the Parliament, but this is not within the scope of the present study. Moreover, the fact that the goal of the petitions is to persuade a person or a group of persons (as long as an institution can also be described as a group of persons) suggests another general feature of the petition: that all belong to the deliberative kind of persuasive discourse.

Another noteworthy point is that more often than not the founders of classical Rhetoric mention an 'opponent', who is a person opposing the views of the speaker and whom the speaker has to overcome using the principles of classical Rhetoric in a competent and proficient way. There were no petitions sent to the (very few) assemblies existing in the Antiquity. However, petitions to the British Parliament are not addressed to some 'opponent'. The authors of the petitions would rather expect that the Members of Parliament agree with the petition. This suggests the existence of a difference between the theoretical framework offered by classical Rhetoric and the rhetoric of the petitions analysed, in that petitions are not directly confronted with an opponent.

Let us see how the five canons of classical Rhetoric and the three classical rhetorical appeals appear in the petitions analysed.

4.1 The five canons of Rhetoric

The way in which the five canons of Rhetoric are reflected in the corpus of petitions is described in detail in the present section.

4.1.1 *Inventio*

The analysis on the corpus identified nine common topics of classical Rhetoric occurring in the petitions. Their distribution is displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. The common topics used in the petitions

Topic	Occurrences	Number of petitions
Relationship: Cause and Effect	48	40
Relationship: Contradiction	22	18
Testimony: Precedent (Example)	14	7
Testimony: Statistics	9	9
Testimony: Authority	8	8
Circumstances: Past fact and future fact	7	6
Testimony: Law	6	6
Testimony: Testimonial	3	3
Relationship: Antecedent and Consequence	1	1

The results in Table 4 suggest that in most cases petitions make use of relationship and testimony and that the most frequent relationships are 'Cause and Effect' and 'Contradictions', while the most frequent testimony is 'Precedent (Example)'. In other words, what petitions highlight is, in most cases, a causality or a contradiction, often illustrated by a precedent.

Concerning the Special topics, the petitions analysed make use of two types: the Deliberative and the Judicial, as shown in *Table 5*.

Table 5. The special topics of classical Rhetoric used in the petitions

Topic	Occurrences	Number of petitions
Deliberative: good	39	39
Deliberative: advantageous	58	58
Judicial: justice (right)	21	20
Deliberative: unworthy	1	1

The distribution displayed in Table 5 confirms the fact that petitions belong to the deliberative type of discourse, which occurs in a total of 98 out of the 100 petitions, and, in addition, may have features of the judicial type, which have been found in one-fifth of all petitions. The deliberative discourse is centred on the topics of good and advantageous and the judicial one on the topics of justice (right). In other words, petitions request that something good, advantageous or right should be done.

Whereas the presence of deliberative topics confirms the working hypothesis that petitions to the British Parliament belong to the deliberative type of discourse, the presence of judicial topics suggests that the petitions analysed share a judicial feature. Moreover, the distribution displayed in Table 5 points out that, in most cases, the goal of the action asked for in the petitions is something good, advantageous or right.

4.1.2 *Dispositio* ('arrangement')

Table 6 below shows the occurrence of the parts of the classical Rhetorical discourse for the petitions in the corpus.

Table 6. The distribution of the classical Rhetorical parts of the discourse in the petitions

Part of discourse	Number of petitions
Exordium	-
Narratio	99
Divisio	25
Confirmatio	98
Confutatio	-
Peroratio	-

It is only petition P 43 that does not have a Narratio and only P 70 and P 90 that do not have a Confirmatio. Petitions appear as a discourse reduced to the essential parts where the case and the proof are stated, but lack a detailed introduction and an emphatic final. This is obviously a difference from the classical Rhetorical discourse, where introduction and conclusion are as important as the rest.

4.1.3 *Elocutio*

The investigation on the corpus revealed just five idioms and six figures of speech. They are summed up in Table 7 and 8 respectively.

Table 7. Idioms used in the petitions

Petition	Idiom
P 17	"communities simply need a fair playing field to compete with commercial developers"
P 31	"keep inflation in the single figures"
P 31	"the biggest squeeze on living standards since the 1970s"
P 31	"fuel costs at forecourts rockets"
P 33	"fell on deaf ears"

Table 8. Figures of speech used in the petitions

Petition	Figure of speech
P 2	"the level of emergency healthcare which they **demand and deserve**" (*alliteration*)
P 32	"**rogue landlords** (*epithet*) who abuse the short-term lets 90 Day Rule in London"
P 38	"**Doncaster** is where the Mallard and Flying Scotsman were built …; **Doncaster** is located on the main line …; **Doncaster** has a great history and great people ..." (*anaphora*)
P 38	: "... the railway town of **Doncaster**; notes that **Doncaster** ..." (*anadiplosis*)
P 46	"**knock-on effects**" (i.e. indirect effects) (*metaphor*)
P 79	"**benefit cap**", "will have their **benefit capped**" (*anthimeria*)
P 80	"**to U-turn** immediately on their plans" (*metaphor*)

Metaphor, anaphora, alliteration and epithet are commonly known. Anadiplosis, it is the "repetition of the last word of one clause at the beginning of the following clause" (Corbett & Connors 1999, 392), as is the case with the town name 'Doncaster' in petition P 38. Anthimeria (also called 'antimeria') is the "substitution of one part of speech for another" (Corbett & Connors 1999, 400), as in the petition P 79, where the noun 'cap' is also used as a verb, 'to cap'. The low number of idioms and figures of speech is in accordance with the working hypothesis mentioned in section 3.2 that the level of style is hardly 'florid'.

4.1.4 *Memoria* **and** *Pronuntiatio*

As mentioned at the beginning of section 4, Memory and Delivery are irrelevant to the present study, as long as petitions to the British Parliament are sent in written format. These two canons may be regarded as relevant only to those petitions which reach 10,000 signatures and are therefore read out by an MP during the parliamentary sessions and particularly to those debates which reach 100,000 signatures and are consequently not within the scope of the present study.

4.2 The three kinds of persuasive discourse

The aim of any petition to the British Parliament belongs to what may be expressed in most general terms as 'persuading someone to do something'. A look at the three kinds of persuasive discourse in classical Rhetoric suggests that it is only the deliberative one that may be assigned to the petitions. Out of the three subtypes of the deliberative kind, i.e. 'political','hortative' and 'advisory', it is the 'political' and 'hortative' that may describe a petition, rather than the 'advisory' one. The hortative feature results from the fact that the goal of a petition is some sort of action. The political feature is given by the fact that these petitions, regardless of their subject — which may be political or not — are addressed to the Parliament, which is a political institution and which is asked to act at political level on behalf of the petitioners.

4.3 The classical rhetorical appeals: *ethos*, *logos*, *pathos*

The petitions analysed hardly make use of the ethical appeal. In a few cases the petitioners may be regarded as attempting to enhance their credibility by mentioning official sources and evidence, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Instances of *ethos* in the petitions

Petition	Text fragment
P 24	the Cumberlege Review, written by Baroness Julia Cumberlege ...
P 18	the 2019/2020 Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated that ...
P 5	key events and evidence that came to light during that time ...

Pathos is present in 27 petitions, in forms of syntagms describing persons or animals whose health and life is put at risk, as well as general principles as 'being vital' or 'being a threat to ...". Table 10 displays a summary of this use.

Table 10. The use of *pathos* in the petitions

Number of petitions	Words and phrases
7	children
4	disabled, people with disabilities
3	lifeline
3	older people, the elderly
2	vital
2	a threat to life
1	dangerous
1	life-saving
1	homeless
1	respect everyone
1	vulnerable persons and households
1	being left to go cold and hungry

Pathos is particulary present in mentioning the danger to which some species of animals are exposed, as in (7), (8) and (9).

(7)   the red deer, barn owl, tawny owl, buzzards and parakeets will be lost to the area as they try to navigate around noise and light pollution

        (P 10)

(8)   230,000 cats are killed as the result of a road traffic accident every year

        (P 16)

(9)   the RED listed Curlew which was common in the area before the spreading started but has now virtually disappeared

        (P 21)

These results suggest that *pathos* is employed to awaken people's conscience about children, older people and vulnerable animals.

Concerning *logos*, the petitions analysed make use of it ways more than of *ethos* or *pathos*. This means that the petitioners rely on rational arguments more than on enhancing their own credibility and arousing people's feelings.

Whereas the analysis on the corpus did not find any instance of syllogism or of epicheireme, the enthymeme occurs in virtually all petitions. Indeed, each petition mentions a particular reason for a request leaving the general principle in an implicit form.

This is exemplified in Tables 11 and 12 below for two petitions which have several premises each. For each expressed premise in the first column of the table, an unexpressed one is suggested in the second column.

Table 11. Expressed and unexpressed premises in petition P 3

Minor premise (expressed)	Major premise (unexpressed)
Rail links to Hull are among the poorest in the north of England.	Rail links should be kept in good condition.
The current train service reliability of 60 per cent or lower means it is quicker to travel to Leeds by road.	Reliability should aim at 100 per cent and travelling by train should be quicker than travelling by car.
Poor rail connections to Hull and the port do not encourage sustainable transport choices.	Travellers and shipping companies should have sustainable transport choices.
Electrifying the Leeds to Hull route ... will permit cleaner, faster and more reliable trains to run in and out of Hull.	Trains should run clean, fast and be reliable.
[Electrifying the Leeds to Hull route] will provide an electrified railway from east to west and allow freight to cross coast to coast more efficiently.	Electrified railways are good and efficient.
The Government has committed to a carbon neutral economy by 2050.	Governments should respect their promises.

Table 12. Expressed and unexpressed premises in petition P 10

Minor premise (expressed)	Major premise (unexpressed)
The development will destroy the Green Belt, wildlife corridors and increase flooding.	Nature should be protected and flooding are not desirable.
Protected species of badgers and bats' habitats will be destroyed.	Animals' habitats should be protected.
The red deer, barn owl, tawny owl, buzzards and parakeets will be lost to the area as they try to navigate around noise and light pollution.	No species of animals should be endangered.

Concerning the number of the premises and conclusions, the analysis on the corpus returned the structures and respective frequencies displayed in Table 13., where P stands for 'Premise' and C for 'Conclusion'. The numeric values are expressing the number of the premises and the number of parts of the conclusion, respectively.

Table 13. The number of premises and conclusions in the petitions

Argument structure	Occurrences
P C	5
P2 C	20
P2 C2	1
P3 C	19
P3 C2	3
P4 C	14
P4 C2	5
P5 C	8
P5 C2	2
P5 C3	2
P6 C	4
P7 C3	2
P9 C	1
P9 C3	1

The results shown in Table 13 prove that the most frequent argument structures are P2 C, P3 C and P4 C, in this order, i.e. the structures respectively made up of two, three and four premises and one conclusion in each case.

4.3.1 Fallacies

Concerning fallacies, the corpus investigation identified only one. It is the case of petition P 86, whose body text shown in (10).

(10)   Declares that, in the light of the significant increase to the cost of living, it would be wholly wrong for new charges on driving to be introduced by the Mayor of London; further that new charges would add to already strained household budgets; and further that petitioners strongly oppose the Mayor of London's proposal to extend the Ultra Low Emission Zone to cover Barnet and the whole of Greater London, as well as his plans for pay-per-mile road charging.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to press the Mayor of London to drop his proposals to extend the Ultra Low Emission Zone to cover Barnet and Greater London, as well as his plans for pay-per-mile road charging.

(P 86)

One may notice that the petition mentions the financial disadvantage of the charges on driving introduced by the Mayor of London but totally ignores the advantage for the environment and air quality.

This may be regarded as an instance of fallacy by omission called 'the appeal to ignorance' (*argumentum ad ignorantiam*). This fallacy is one of the 'informal fallacies' (Walton 1999, 367) and was defined by John Locke in his book *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, where he describes it as a way "to require the adversary to accept what they bring forward as a proof or to offer a better proof of the contrary position" (Locke 1690/2004, 272). Indeed, the authors of petition P 86 put forward their statement against the Mayor of London's action as if it went without saying that he was wrong in acting this way. However, the fact that petition P 86 includes a fallacy does not say anything about its authors' intention: did they do it on purpose or unintentionally? Kant (1985) classifies fallacies depending on the speaker's intention: it is called 'paralogism' if the speaker himself is deceived by it and 'sophism' if the speaker use it to deceive someone else (1985, 186). This aspect remains unclear, as the parliamentary archive does not include details on it.

As mentioned in section 3.2, one of the questions emerging from the classical Rhetoric perspective on the petitions is if the presence of *ethos* in the *exordium* and of *logos* in the *confirmatio* also occurs in the petitions analysed. The results of the investigation on the petition corpus suggest that whereas petitions virtually do not make direct use of *ethos*, they make constant use of *logos* in the *confirmatio*. This is an instance of partially complying with the principles of classical Rhetoric.

4.4 An all-encompassing description of the petitions to the British Parliament from a classical Rhetorical perspective

A first remark is that whereas each petition has an introduction and a concluding part, these two parts have a standard form and do not correspond to the definitions of *Exordium* and *Peroration*, respectively.

Concerning the structure of the argument of a petition can be summed up as a number (*n*) of enthymemes, as shown in (11):

(11)   (Enthymeme × *n*)

Each of these enthymemes consists of a pair of premises — an expressed premise and an unexpressed one — and a common conclusion, common for all *n* enthymemes, as described in (12).

(12)   (Expressed premise & Unexpressed premise × *n*)
        _____

        Conclusion

In most cases the premises occur entirely in the *Narratio*, as mentioned in section 4.1.2, except for the petitions whose *Narratio* anticipates the common conclusion, where the premises make up the *Divisio*. With the enthymeme explicit form, as pairs, and with square brackets expressing an optional part, the same structure is rendered as in (13):

(13)   {*Narratio*[*Divisio*] : ((Expressed premise & Unexpressed premise)× n)}
        _____

        {*Confirmatio* : Conclusion}

In other words, a petition mentions one or more pairs made up of expressed premises accompanied by unexpressed but implied premises, and a conclusion which is common.

5. Conclusions

From the perspective offered by classical Rhetoric, petitions sent to the British Parliament aim at persuading a group of persons — which may be an institution or an authority — and belong to the deliberative type of persuasive discourse, covering the subtypes described as 'political' and 'hortative'.

The analysis on the corpus revealed features whose occurrence had not been estimated in the working hypotheses. Thus, the forcible style had not only features of the plain style but in a few cases it was marked by 'florid' features, given by the archaic phrases used by the petitioners.

From a classical Rhetorical perspective, petitions to the British Parliament may be described as a classical discourse reduced to a basic frame. Thus, *Inventio* is reduced to two common topics — Cause and Effect and Contradictions. *Divisio* is reduced to three or even two parts — *Narratio*, *Divisio* (which is optional) and *Confirmatio*. *Elocutio* is marked by just a few rhetorical figures occurring in a few petitions. The rhetorical appeal constantly present is *logos*, whereas *ethos* and *pathos* are used in just a few cases.

Concerning *logos*, enthymeme is present in all petitions whereas syllogism and epicheireme are absent. In other words, the petitioners do not mention the general reasons of the argument (which would have been done in the major premise of a syllogism), but only the minor premise and takes it for granted that those who read the petition — the Members of Parliament as well as any other interested part — will understand the general reason supporting their objections.

Petitions to the British Parliament may consequently be regarded as a concise form of classical Rhetorical discourse, in that they make a succinct mention of several arguments leading to a common conclusion, while lots of premises are unexpressed but implied from general knowledge or common sense.

Appendix

The petitions analysed in the present study:

Name	Date	Title
P 1	2021-09-15	Proposed Heath Common
P 2	2021-09-15	Rugby Community Ambulance
P 3	2021-10-20	Electrification of the Hull to Selby railway line
P 4	2021-10-25	High Income Child Benefit Charge
P 5	2021-10-28	Inquiry into policing at Orgreave Coking Plant
P 6	2021-11-08	Chiltern Railways
P 7	2021-11-09	Ocado Zoom
P 8	2021-11-23	Pine Trees Development
P 9	2021-12-01	Off-road Vehicles in the Gwyddon Forestry
P 10	2021-12-01	Walsall Arboretum
P 11	2021-12-07	Bennetts End Road
P 12	2021-12-08	South Warwickshire Mega-Council
P 13	2021-12-08	Death by dangerous driving
P 14	2021-12-14	Aston Fence School Speed Limit Extension
P 15	2022-01-17	Breast cancer screening in Fleetwood
P 16	2022-01-25	Legal Protection of Cats
P 17	2022-01-25	Community Energy Projects
P 18	2022-01-31	Stalking advocates
P 19	2022-02-01	Proposed spur between Aylesbury and Milton Keynes
P 20	2022-02-01	The Acorn Project
P 21	2022-02-09	Industrial Waste
P 22	2022-02-28	National Insurance payments
P 23	2022-03-01	Great British Railways headquarters
P 24	2022-03-01	Sodium valproate
P 25	2022-03-10	Barnet Police Station
P 26	2022-03-15	Glossop and Ashton

P 27	2022-03-15	Great British Railways headquarters
P 28	2022-03-16	Periodontal Disease and Diabetes
P 29	2022-03-21	Bannerman High School Anti-racism Charter
P 30	2022-03-21	National Insurance Increase
P 31	2022-03-22	VAT and fuel duty on petrol and diesel
P 32	2022-03-28	Abuse of short-term letting
P 33	2022-03-29	Halton Hospital
P 34	2022-03-29	Proposed Lidsing Garden Village Development
P 35	2022-04-26	Road safety
P 36	2022-04-27	Derwent Walk
P 37	2022-04-27	Step-free Access for Chinley Station
P 38	2022-05-18	Doncaster bid for Great British Railways headquarters
P 39	2022-05-18	Carnforth bid for Great British Railways headquarters
P 40	2022-05-19	Waverley Junior Academy
P 41	2022-05-24	Corporate Travel Management
P 42	2022-06-09	Barclays Muswell Hill Branch
P 43	2022-06-21	Universal Credit Deductions
P 44	2022-06-22	Post box in Hayfield
P 45	2022-06-28	Pryzm in Watford
P 46	2022-07-05	Eligibility Period for the Cost of Living Payment
P 47	2022-07-12	Water meters for park homes
P 48	2022-07-13	Schools Bill
P 49	2022-07-18	Doncaster Sheffield airport
P 50	2022-07-19	Quarry in Preesall
P 51	2022-07-19	DWP dedicated telephone line for advice services
P 52	2022-07-20	Conviction of Yasin Malik
P 53	2022-07-20	Liberty Pressing Solutions
P 54	2022-09-07	Windfall Tax
P 55	2022-09-07	Right of Refusal of Development on Green Belt Land
P 56	2022-09-07	Communal Heating Systems

P 57	2022-09-23	National Brewery Centre in Burton upon Trent
P 58	2022-10-12	DWP services at Phoenix House in Barrow
P 59	2022-10-12	Cost of Living
P 60	2022-10-17	Access to pensions for women born in the 1950s
P 61	2022-10-17	Method of uprating social security payments
P 62	2022-10-26	Ramsgate Town Council and Manston Airport (Ramsgate)
P 63	2022-11-01	NHS Dental Care in Halifax
P 64	2022-11-02	Pitch Fees for Park Homes
P 65	2022-11-08	Early General Election
P 66	2022-11-09	Planned closure of Sedbergh's Royal Mail delivery office
P 67	2022-11-15	Planned closure of Lloyds Banking Group's Immingham Branch
P 68	2022-11-21	Planned closure of the Ambleside and Hawkshead doctors surgeries
P 69	2022-11-28	International day for the elimination of violence against women
P 70	2022-11-29	Rural bus routes in South Northamptonshire
P 71	2022-12-05	Bus services in Rotherham
P 72	2022-12-06	Access to NHS Dental Care in Blackpool
P 73	2022-12-07	Park Homes Energy Support
P 74	2022-12-13	End Serco using hotels in Stoke-on-Trent to house migrants
P 75	2022-12-13	Save the Twenty-One bus route
P 76	2023-01-10	No. 52 Barrhead circular route
P 77	2023-01-17	Pre-payment meter energy customers and self-disconnection
P 78	2023-01-18	Pre-payment meter energy customers and forcible transfer
P 79	2023-01-18	Abolition of benefit cap
P 80	2023-01-23	Keighley Household Waste and Recycling Centre
P 81	2023-01-25	North Northamptonshire Unitary Council's Care Provider

		Services Strategy
P 82	2023-01-25	Pre-payment Meter Energy Customers and Higher Costs
P 83	2023-01-31	Planned closure of Wood Green Post Office
P 84	2023-02-07	Spinneyfields Specialist Care Centre Closure
P 85	2023-02-08	Dangerous driving
P 86	2023-03-08	Ultra Low Emission Zone
P 87	2023-03-08	Planning permission for telecommunication telegraph pole installation
P 88	2023-03-13	London and Quadrant Housing Trust
P 89	2023-03-14	Cost of living
P 90	2023-03-14	Tax wealth
P 91	2023-03-14	Cost of living support for leukaemia patients
P 92	2023-03-15	Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and road tax
P 93	2023-03-21	Dangerous driving
P 94	2023-03-27	Policing and drug and alcohol treatment in Hull
P 95	2023-03-28	Anglian Water
P 96	2023-03-29	Children's centres
P 97	2023-04-18	Local post office closure
P 98	2023-04-19	Teaching real life skills
P 99	2023-04-20	Special school in Biddulph
P 100	2023-04-26	Syresham Truck Stop

References

Concise Oxford English Dictionary (11th Edition). Edited by Soanes, Catherine; Stevenson, Angus. 2009. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary. 1994. New York / Avenel: Gramercy Books.

De ratione dicendi (*Rhetorica ad Herennium*). Trans. Harry Caplan. Loeb Classical Library, 1954.

ARISTOTLE. 1982. *The Art of Rhetoric*. Trans. John Henry Freese. Loeb Classical Library.

CHAPELLE, Carol A. (Ed.). 2013. *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*. London: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

CICERO. 1949. *De inventione*. Trans. H.M. Hubbell. Loeb Classical Library.

CICERO. 1942. *De oratore*. 2 volumes. Trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham. Loeb Classical Library.

CICERO. 1949. *Topica*. Trans. H. M. Hubbell. Loeb Classical Library.

COPI, Irving M. 2005. *Introduction to logic*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall.

CORBETT, Edward P.J. & CONNORS, Robert J. 1999. *Classical rhetoric for the modern student*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.

FRUMUȘELU, Mihai Daniel. 2023. "Petitions to the British Parliament: Linguistic Features Related to Toulmin's Argument Model". *Argumentum. Journal of the Seminar of Discursive Logic, Argumentation Theory and Rhetoric* 21 (2): 51-86.

GUȚU, Gheorghe. 2009. *Dicționar latin-român*. București: Humanitas.

KANT, Immanuel. 1985. *Logica generală (Prelegeri)*. București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică.

LOCKE, John. 1690/2004. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. London & New York: Penguin Books.

MUȘETESCU-TELESA, Elena. 2004. *Dicționar latin-român de uz școlar*. Iași: Polirom.

O'HALLORAN, Kay L.; SMITH, Bradley A. 2013. "Multimodal Text Analysis". In: Chapelle, Carol A. (Ed.). 2013. *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., Wiley & Sons.

PLATO. 1925. *Lysis; Symposium; Gorgias*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

QUINTILIAN. *Institutio oratoria*. Trans. H. E. Butler. Loeb Classical Library, 1920-1922.

WALTON, Douglas. 1999. "The Appeal to Ignorance, or Argumentum Ad Ignorantiam". *Argumentation*, 13 (4), November: 367–377.

Electronic resources

The Hansard archive of the UK Parliament URL: https://hansard.parliament.uk/. Accessed: 9 January 2024

Merriam-Webster Dictionary, digital edition for Android. Accessed: 5 January 2024

Silva Rhetoricæ (The Forest of Rhetoric). URL: http://rhetoric.byu.edu/, Accessed: 9 December 2023

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Aristotle's Rhetoric. URL: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-rhetoric. Accessed: 8 January 2024