

**Public Language and the Construction of Meaning: A Poetics of Recent
American Presidential Inauguration Speeches**

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Abstract

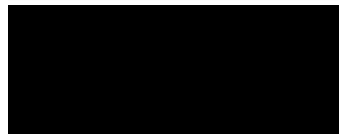
This thesis investigates how public language constructs and communicates meaning by focusing on the 21st-century American presidential inauguration speeches of Presidents George Walker Bush, Barack Hussein Obama, Donald John Trump, and Joseph Robinette Biden. This research examines the poetic and rhetorical devices, patterns of repetition and variation, and the evolution of the inauguration speech as a genre through a case study approach using close poetic readings informed by the analysis of poetry. This research is significant because it contributes to understanding meaning construction in public language, the evolution of the inauguration speech genre, and the significant power of poetry and poetics in enhancing message delivery in what might be described as non-poetic language. Employing the Inaugural Speech Genre Theory developed by Campbell and Jamieson, this study sheds light on the intricate interplay between language, power, and meaning in the context of presidential inaugurations. It draws upon previous studies on political rhetoric, public discourse, and speech genre analysis and provides new perspectives and methodologies, offering valuable insights into the construction and communication of meaning in public language. By examining the poetic elements, rhetorical strategies, and patterns of repetition and variation in the selected speeches, this research enriches the field of presidential inaugurations and contributes to the broader literature on political rhetoric and public discourse. This study provides a framework for analysing the aesthetic and persuasive dimensions of public language, opening avenues for further research in the analysis of meaning construction in diverse communicative contexts.

Declaration

“I, Mohammed Fath Addin, declare that the Ph.D. thesis entitled ‘Public Language and the Construction of Meaning: A Reading of Recent American Presidential Inauguration Speeches’ is no more than 82, 981 words in length, including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

“I have conducted my research in alignment with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Victoria University’s Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures.”

Signature:

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the author.

Date: 17/12/2024

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Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, said, *“He who does not thank people, does not thank Allah”* —(Ahmad, Tirmidhi).

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Dedication

To My Father

I love you and miss you so much.

Epigraph

And He taught Adam the names - all of them. Then He showed them to the angels and said, 'Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful.' They said, 'Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who is the Knowing, the Wise.'

- Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah (2:31-32).

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Introduction

Uncovering the Power of Public Language: The Dynamics of Meaning-Making

This thesis situates itself in the analysis of public language by employing poetic reading techniques to examine the American presidential inauguration speeches of Presidents George Walker Bush, Barack Hussein Obama, Donald John Trump, and Joseph Robinette Biden. The overarching goal of this project is to answer the following primary question:

In what ways can the analysis of the 21st-century American presidential inauguration speeches, understood as akin to poetry, provide significant and novel insights into the construction and communication of meaning in public language?

This thesis also addresses an interconnected sub-question: In what ways can the analysis of these 21st-century American presidential inauguration speeches as a distinctive form of presidential oratory provide insights into their commonalities and differences? By drawing upon the Inaugural Speech Genre Theory developed by Karlyn Campbell and Kathleen Jamieson, as well as other genre theorists, the project examines the unique characteristics of these speeches. This investigation highlights recurring elements and themes that emerge when these speeches are analysed as a genre. By identifying and analysing these recurrent elements, this study seeks to uncover the continuity and change that characterises the inauguration speech genre. By doing so, this research extends the understanding of genre as a structure of meaning across a variety of texts.

Introducing the Phenomenon

Presidential rhetoric can transcend the boundaries of ordinary political discourse and become a tool for artistic and emotional engagement. For instance, President Kennedy's 1961 inaugural speech provides an iconic case of that phenomenon. One of the most famous lines, "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country," illustrates the astute use of poetic devices in political speech as discussed in Chapter One. The structure of the sentence itself, employing chiasmus and antithesis, exemplifies how rhetorical figures typically associated with poetry are incorporated into presidential speeches to create a lasting emotional impact. The use of chiasmus and antithesis in Kennedy's speech mirrors techniques employed in oral traditions to craft memorable, repeatable phrases that resonate across time. These patterns not only reinforce the message but also help the audience retain and recall it, solidifying the speech's influence on the public.

The gap in the current scholarly conversation lies in the lack of attention paid to reading presidential inaugural speech as akin to poetry. A notable exception is the works of Tom Clark who reads public political speech as a form of poetry, a thinking that will be discussed in Chapter One. The rhetorical significance of presidential speeches such as Kennedy's has been widely acknowledged. For instance, some studies investigate the rhetorical techniques of the speeches—such as rhythm, metaphor, repetition, etc—that contribute to their effectiveness (Fahnestock; Glover; Medhurst et al.). However, the exploration of inaugural addresses through a poetics framework—focusing on "literariness," defining characteristic of literary works and its defamiliarising, foregrounding effects—remains underexplored. This thesis addresses that gap by applying poetics terms, techniques, and concepts to the analysis of presidential rhetoric.

This thesis aims to fill this gap by focusing on the intersection between poetics and political rhetoric, contributing to the field by treating inaugural speeches as texts that operate within both political and poetic frameworks. This study reveals how poetic qualities are not merely aesthetic flourishes but are instrumental in impacting the emotional and intellectual reception of presidential messages. It highlights the profound impact of poetry and poetics on maximising the effectiveness of message delivery in non-poetic language. Current literature on political speech, especially regarding the American presidential inaugural address, often lacks an analysis of how these speeches utilise the formal techniques of poetry to enhance their emotional and rhetorical power. As will be discussed in this Introduction, traditionally inaugural speeches are examined through a generic lens, focusing on their recurrent elements, political significance, and constitutional and historical context. This approach, however, often overlooks the crucial role of poetic artistry in impacting audience response, particularly in how presidents employ artistic strategies to fulfil the four key symbolic functions of the inaugural speech genre. The absence of this focus in the literature is what my thesis addresses—by extending the study of rhetorical forms to include a detailed analysis of the poetic elements, I argue that these features contribute significantly to the construction of meaning in these speeches.

Moreover, by approaching the contemporary American presidential inauguration address from an interdisciplinary perspective, this thesis contributes to ongoing discussions in literary studies, poetics, presidential rhetoric, generic criticism and communication studies. By positioning itself within this existing literature, this Ph.D. thesis enriches the understanding of language, power, and meaning in the field of presidential inaugurations. It draws upon key fields of study while providing new perspectives and methodologies. The observations of this project provide an

opportunity for further research and encourage ongoing scholarly debates, establishing its significance in the field. Moreover, by focusing on the continuity and change in the American presidential inaugural address over the past 21 years, this project provides an overview of the evolution of presidential rhetoric and the presidency in the contemporary American context.

This thesis intervenes in several key fields of study, primarily focusing on rhetorical studies and political communication, genre theory in rhetoric, poetics, linguistics, literary criticism and studies, and political science. By drawing on these areas, the research employs theoretical frameworks to analyse the inaugural speeches. This interdisciplinary approach not only enhances the analysis but also highlights the novelty of the thesis in integrating these diverse perspectives to offer a deeper understanding of presidential rhetoric.

Intervening in the fields of rhetorical studies and political communication, this thesis examines how the four U.S. presidents use rhetoric to perform various functions of governance, such as uniting the country. Engaging with American political culture, this research draws on David Ericson's identification of recurrent inaugural themes, which align closely with the four symbolic functions outlined by Campbell and Jamieson. These themes serve as mechanisms by which presidents address the common components of the inaugural speech genre. The contribution of this research lies in its integration of Ericson's themes with the artistic and symbolic dimensions of presidential rhetoric, revealing how shared conventions are adapted to unique political contexts.

This thesis bridges rhetorical studies and political communication, highlighting inaugural speeches as performative acts that redefine political realities and cultural narratives. It incorporates David Zarefsky's insights into presidential rhetoric to analyse

how presidents use rhetorical tools, such as definitions and framing, to redefine key terms and influence public perception. Zarefsky's concept of the power of definition is instrumental in analysing the inaugural addresses, particularly in how they expand traditional concepts to align with their political objectives. For instance, Bush's redefinition of liberty as a global imperative reframed the War on Terror, aligning national security with foreign interventions. Similarly, Obama's historical analogies and Biden's emphasis on unity illustrate how presidents employ rhetorical strategies to redefine political reality and influence public discourse.

The field of presidential rhetoric is also explored in this research by critically engaging with Elvin Lim's *The Anti-Intellectual Presidency: The Decline of Presidential Rhetoric from George Washington to George W. Bush*. Lim critiques modern presidential rhetoric for its shift toward emotionally charged, simplified discourse, marked by platitudes and partisan slogans, which he views as indicative of anti-intellectualism and a decline in constructive public deliberation. Building on Lim's insights, this thesis employs a poetics approach to analyse presidential inaugural addresses, reframing these trends not as a decay but as a strategic use of rhetorical and aesthetic elements. By focusing on how presidents craft emotionally resonant and memorable messages, this research reveals how such speeches can shape public perception and reinforce the president's role as a persuasive and symbolic leader.

This project engages with the field of poetics by advancing Tzvetan Todorov's theoretical insights from *Introduction to Poetics*. Todorov's conception of poetics as the study of general laws governing text creation provides a foundational framework for analysing presidential inaugural speeches. This research extends Todorov's approach by applying it to political discourse, examining how recurring elements in the inaugural genre interact with individual rhetorical choices. Rather than treating these speeches as

rigid forms bound by “abstract laws,” the analysis reveals how they blend tradition and individuality, fulfilling genre expectations while reflecting each president’s unique style.

The field of linguistics is also involved in the investigation of this thesis. It draws upon Roman Jakobson’s theory of poetics, specifically the poetic function of language. By focusing on the form and aesthetic qualities of language, Jakobson’s theory enhances the understanding of how rhetorical impact is achieved. Applying his concept of poetics to inaugural speeches, this research bridges linguistics and rhetorical studies, offering a novel perspective on how presidents use poetic structures to heighten persuasiveness, memorability, and emotional resonance in their speeches.

Literary criticism is a key field involved in this thesis analysis. Terry Eagleton’s “language of becoming” notion highlights the creative potential of language in shaping meaning in the present moment, emphasising the nexus between language, experience, and meaning construction. This intervention is valuable in its application of poetic theory to political speech, offering insights into how rhetorical strategies can help create unity and foster change through emotionally resonant language.

The field of literary studies is also engaged in, focusing on the concept of “literariness” as articulated by scholars like Jonathan Culler and Terry Eagleton, challenging the traditional distinction between literary and non-literary texts. By approaching presidential speeches through a poetic lens, the thesis aims to illuminate the intrinsic connections between the artistry of poetry and the strategic crafting of presidential rhetoric. This perspective entails the foregrounding of language, which creates an effect of estrangement and defamiliarisation, drawing attention to the form and artistry of the speech and inviting deeper engagement from the reader or listener.

My investigation incorporates insights from oral literature and oral tradition studies by investigating the ways in which the presidents' speeches can be read through Milman Parry's work on the "poetic formula" to explore how presidents' speeches employ repetitive and formulaic techniques. By examining the intersection of political rhetoric and poetic composition, the study highlights how these techniques enhance the memorability, emotional resonance, and persuasive power of presidential inaugurals.

Building upon Walter Ong's exploration of orality and literacy, I begin by analysing Kennedy's famous "ask not" statement, demonstrating how it employs techniques akin to oral poetry. This approach extends to the six inaugural speeches in this study, revealing how rhythm and repetition reflect the influence of orality in political communication. Ong's concept of primary oral culture provides a framework for understanding the performative and aesthetic elements in these speeches.

The analysis is informed by Nicholas Abraham's concept of "Rhythmising Consciousness," which elucidates how the temporal rhythms of poetic language shape audience interpretation and anticipation. In Chapter Seven, this framework is applied to President Biden's inaugural speech to demonstrate how his use of rhetorical strategies, including rhythmic repetition and evocation of past heritage, might have contributed to a sense of continuity and inspired aspirations for a shared future. This framework is applied in Chapter Seven to examine President Biden's use of rhetorical strategies to evoke past heritage and inspire future aspirations.

By drawing upon Carol Johnson's concept of "affective citizenship," this thesis engages with political science to explore how political actors employ emotional appeals strategically to shape collective identities and elicit public responses. Johnson's framework highlights the relationship between emotion and identity, providing a foundation for analysing the intersection of language, emotion, and political discourse

in American presidential speeches. In Chapter Four, I apply this framework to President Obama's first inaugural address, demonstrating how his emotional appeals cultivated unity, inspired action, and reinforced national identity. This analysis illuminates the affective dimension of political rhetoric and its role in shaping audience perceptions and collective identities.

The field of political science is also engaged by applying Maurice Charland's notion of "constitutive rhetoric" to explore how political narratives shape collective identities and mobilise audiences towards specific ideological positions. In Chapter Six, I shed light on the influence of contemporary political discourse, revealing how rhetorical strategies are employed to perpetuate ideological positions and incite political action within targeted audiences. Trump's inaugural speech presents a distinct case for applying Charland's framework due to its overt and polarising identity construction. Unlike the other three presidents, whose inaugural addresses generally forge unifying identities, Trump's rhetoric segmented audiences, positioning a particular group of them against the political establishment. This divisive approach underscores the relevance of constitutive rhetoric, as his narrative created a stark 'us versus them' dichotomy. By illuminating the role of "constitutive rhetoric" in Trump's inaugural speech, this study contributes to the understanding of the role of political rhetoric and its implications for societal change.

Contributing to this domain of political science, I apply the theoretical framework of the two metaphorical conceptions of unity: "oneness" and "wholeness" outlined by Danielle Allen. While the former entails assimilation and exclusion, the latter embraces diversity and promotes unity despite individual differences. This thesis highlights how Trump's rhetoric diverged from the traditional approach of fostering "wholeness" in inaugural speeches, instead prioritising "oneness" to consolidate a

specific ideological base. The singular application of these theories to Trump's speech reflects the unprecedented rhetorical choices that distinguished his address, contrasting sharply with the conventions of inclusivity and unity often observed in the inaugural addresses of his predecessors. This focused analysis underscores the extent to which Trump's rhetoric challenges established norms and redefines the function of inaugural speech in shaping identity and fostering political action.

In its intervening with the field of political science, this study builds upon the theoretical foundation laid by Jeffrey Tulis in *The Rhetorical Presidency*. Tulis's work underscores the transition in presidential communication from a formal, institutionally-bound role to a more direct, public-oriented rhetorical style. By emphasising the shift from the type of presidential communication that was marked by restraint and adherence to constitutional norms, to the one characterised by the use of rhetoric to directly engage with the public and shape policy, Tulis provides a critical lens through which to understand modern presidential discourse. This thesis extends Tulis's exploration by applying a poetics approach to analyse President Trump's departure from traditional norms of the US presidency and presidential rhetoric. This study contributes to the broader understanding of how modern presidential rhetoric has evolved to both engage and disrupt traditional expectations of inauguration speech. This thesis's poetics-centred analysis not only underscores Trump's departure from conventional norms but also illuminates how poetic devices in his rhetoric amplify his departure.

Further, my analysis of the inauguration speeches discusses the intersection of philosophy and linguistics by advancing the speech act theory as articulated by John Austin and further developed by Bach and Harnish. I consider how performatives and illocutionary acts can shape the meaning and effect of presidential rhetoric. Drawing

from Austin's assertion that utterances perform actions, this research explores how President Obama's repetitive use of modal verbs like "must" and "will" in Chapter Five functions as directives and commissives, respectively. By applying Bach and Harnish's framework of communicative illocutionary acts, the project emphasises how Obama and political speech more generally - constructs a sense of obligation and commitment, urging collective action and promising future endeavours. Through this analysis, the thesis contributes to the broader field of political communication by elucidating the performative dimension of presidential speeches and their implications for civic engagement.

This intersection is extended in this project by exploring the utilisation of metaphorical language in political discourse. Drawing upon George Lakoff's concept of "The Nation as a Family Metaphor," my research examines how Biden's invocation of familial imagery aligns with Lakoff's "Nurturant Parent Morality" model, contrasting it with the authoritarian tone of the previous administration. This comparison contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of metaphorical language in shaping political morality and fostering national unity.

Significance of the Thesis

This Ph.D. thesis offers significant insights into the power and impact of public language by framing presidential inaugural speeches as quasi-poetic texts. Through the application of poetic reading techniques, it demonstrates how rhetorical devices, rhythmic structures, and stylistic choices construct meaning, shape public perception, and foster emotional engagement. It reveals how poetic devices function not merely as aesthetic features but as strategic tools in political communication. The findings provide students of rhetoric, literary studies, and political communication with an

understanding of how language inspires, engages, and persuades audiences in the context of inaugural addresses. Moreover, the comparative analysis across the speeches of four recent presidents illuminates the evolution of the genre, offering perspectives on its adaptability to different political contexts.

The American Inauguration Speech: An Exemplar of Public Language

Campbell and Jamieson conclude that the presidential inaugural address constitutes “a major part of the presidency as an institution and of individual presidencies” (36). In this light, it constitutes the one of most significant occasions of presidential rhetoric from which one can deduce a broad narrative about presidential rhetoric in the past twenty-one years. Moreover, the inaugural address can be a general indicative of the whole presidency and of the president’s rhetorical and governing style.

In this view, American presidential inauguration speeches are significant because of their constitutive function in shaping the relationship between the president and the public. As Lee Sigelman emphasises, these speeches provide presidents-elect with their “first official opportunity to wield the power of language” as leaders of the United States (81). They serve as a moment of “national reconciliation” and the recreation of the national community “in terms specific to and chosen by the new president,” employing affirmative rhetoric, as highlighted by Mary Stuckey (“Inaugural Addresses” 261). Historian Arthur Schlesinger highlights their importance by noting that during inaugurations, “the nation listens for a moment as one people to the words of the man they have chosen for the highest office in the land” (vi). In their seminal study, *Deeds Done in Words: Presidential Rhetoric and the Genres of Governance*, Campbell and Jamieson describe inaugural speeches as “an essential element in a ritual of transition in which the covenant between the citizenry and their leaders is renewed”

(14). By investigating how presidents construct and reunite their audiences through their inaugural speeches, this thesis explores the symbiotic functions of these speeches.

The analysis of American presidential inauguration speeches allows for an exploration of the evolution of the inauguration speech genre within the context of the 21st century. A close reading analysis of the speeches of Presidents Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden enables the identification of patterns of continuity and change within the genre, thus highlighting how rhetorical strategies, stylistic features, and thematic elements have evolved since the turn of the century. This examination contributes to a deeper understanding of the genre's evolving nature by revealing new perspectives on how inaugural speeches have transformed and continue to shape the understanding of the presidency and its role in shaping national identity, particularly in the context of the post-9/11 era.

As discussed in the subsection entitled “American Inauguration Presidential Speech as a Genre,” the type of presidential speech is epideictic, which is a form of ceremonial discourse that, along with its various characteristics, largely employs noble, elegant, and literary language to persuade the audience. The focus on the poetic approach in this study highlights the different presidents' use of these elements. By unpacking the elevated and literary style present in these speeches, this study reveals how these rhetorical techniques optimise the impact of the message being delivered. Furthermore, it adds depth and nuance to the understanding of the role of poetic and rhetorical techniques in political communication, which exhibits their effect impact on the reception and interpretation of inaugural speeches.

American Presidential Political Rhetoric: Unique Rhetorical Traditions and Impactful Power of Public Discourse

This research defines political rhetoric, considered a sub-set of public language, as the language (spoken or written) employed by politicians, including political leaders, in public situations to influence the audience and promote their political agendas and objectives. In “Ideology and Political Rhetoric,” Alan Finlayson provides crucial insight, establishing that political rhetoric is a strategic tool used to shape public opinion (242). In light of its symbolic power, distinct rhetorical traditions, and global influence, I have chosen to focus on the context of American presidential political rhetoric. The American presidency carries vast symbolic power, with the president serving as a representative of the nation and embodying its ideals and values. The rhetoric employed by presidents during their terms reflects and shapes the public perception of leadership, authority, and national identity, thus influencing how citizens view their leaders and the country as a whole. The focus on the context of the American presidential political rhetoric reveals the symbolic dimensions of presidential speeches and their effect on public perception.

I maintain that American presidents exhibit a rhetorical style that sets them apart from other political leaders, characterised by the blend of lofty ideas and practical concerns. Roderick et al. note in *Modern Rhetorical Criticism* that “one of the most distinctive things about American rhetoric is its curious combination of Transcendental and Pragmatic themes.” They add, “The transcendent strain in discourse gives it an elevating tone, the sort of tone one hears in inspiring sermons or especially moving speeches.” The authors expound that this transcendent dimension of American political rhetoric traces its origins to the nation’s “Puritan roots” (Hart et al. 250-251).

Within this thesis, the term “transcendental” refers to a broader theme in which American presidents speak of a higher ideal or purpose, aiming to inspire both the nation and the world to strive for something greater. This distinctive style of rhetoric uplifts the discourse and resonates with the nation’s collective values. One of the most prominent traditions of this transcendental theme of American presidential rhetoric is the use of and emphasis on moral and religious elements. These two concepts constitute a crucial element of American presidential rhetoric and have been prominent in presidential speech and leadership. Colleen Shogan, in *The Moral Rhetoric of American Presidents*, contends that “in the past several decades, presidents have highlighted the moral and religious dimensions of their leadership through expanded media outlets” (4). She adds, “moral and religious argumentation can be viewed as a strategic political tool used by presidents to augment their formal, constitutional powers” (4). By drawing on Shogan’s research on the moral aspects of the rhetoric of the inauguration speech, this thesis explores the deep-rooted connection between moral and religious argumentation.

US presidents often present America as an iconic representation and believe it is their mission to fight for global freedom and peace. According to Lee Marsden, this idea dates back to when the first settlers, i.e., colonial settlers from Europe, arrived in the country. These settlers were Christian protestants who left England to freely practice their faith. According to Will James, in his book *The Universal God: Justice, Love, and Peace in the Global Village*, the Puritans were “a people roused and stirred to its innermost depth, feelings upon its shoulders the mission of history, of being chosen to do great things” (201). The way Americans look upon themselves, which is heavily influenced by the first settlers, implies a sense of America as a “morally superior nation chosen by God” (James 201). According to Marsden, this concept “has become deeply

ingrained within the American psyche and frequently quoted by presidents and politicians across the ages and political spectrum” (328). It still prevails within American society and is part of the collection of values that Americans live by. The concept of America as a morally superior nation chosen by God and the president as the “pastor-in-chief” during times of crisis exemplifies the symbolic power associated with American presidential rhetoric.

Furthermore, the rhetoric of American presidents has a global reach and impact. The United States of America holds a prominent position on the world stage, and the words and actions of its presidents echo internationally. Exploring this aspect highlights how these speeches contribute to shaping global narratives, influencing international relations, and setting global agendas. This focus is motivated by the exceptional attention American presidential political rhetoric draws within the United States and across the globe. As Dante Germino asserts in his book *The Inaugural Addresses of American Presidents: The Public Philosophy and Rhetoric*, presidential speech commands extraordinary attention from both the press and the public within the American political system (1). This observation resonates with Michael Warner’s argument in *Publics and Counterpublics*, where he highlights that discourse addressing publics is defined by the mere attention it generates, or as he puts it, “a public is constituted through mere attention” (87). Thus, the choice to analyse American presidential rhetoric stems from the understanding that public speech not only constitutes a public but also shapes it. As Warner establishes, “a public comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation” (66). In this context, American presidential rhetoric becomes an ideal subject for investigation, as it draws significant attention both locally and internationally.

The 21st Century and Post-9/11 American Presidents

The choice to examine the inaugural speeches of four Post-9/11 American presidents is justified by several pivotal reasons that underscore their unique value in uncovering insights into contemporary American political discourse, including recentness, the transition of power, and diverse perspectives. The four presidents represent the most recent 21st-century American leaders. The significance of this scope lies in the unprecedented changes that have shaped the American political landscape in this century. Investigating these inauguration speeches allows for a deeper understanding of the ideological foundations that underpin contemporary American politics. This can provide valuable insights into how they addressed the challenges of their respective eras. Examining these speeches can also uncover the evolving nature of modern American politics, identifying how these leaders navigated societal shifts, international relations, and the changing expectations of the American people.

The post-9/11 era holds profound significance for this project as it represents a period in American history that profoundly altered the very fabric of American society. The 9/11 terrorist attacks serve as a defining historical landmark, creating a clear before-and-after moment in the United States timeline. This pivotal event significantly influenced how Americans perceived themselves and their nation. The 9/11 attacks triggered a profound shift in American self-conception, particularly in terms of national security and invincibility. Roxane Silver comments on the Americans' self-conception after the attacks. She claims that the terrorist attacks "did far more than destroy buildings and kill thousands of innocent people. They shattered a sense of security and perceptions of invulnerability among residents of the United States and the Western world" (427). As a result, the American people endured a collective re-evaluation of their national identity and their place in the world. While Bush's first inaugural speech

pre-dated the 9/11 attacks, his two terms as president were profoundly shaped by the aftermath of these tragic events. In this sense, the 9/11 attacks can be understood as marking a turning point in his leadership – as well as American, even world, history - necessitating a significant shift in policy, rhetoric, and approach, as evidenced within the concentration of the inauguration speech.

This era also holds significant relevance for this project, as the terrorist attacks intensified a sense of xenophobia in American society, fostering an insider/outsider dichotomy. As Powell notes, the launch of the War on Terror and the invasion of Iraq were “the contemporary beginning of an Us versus Them, or the United States versus Islam that created animosity between East and West and sustained a climate of fear of terrorism that is linked repeatedly to Muslims” (90). Through close readings of the inauguration speeches of these four American presidents, this research investigates how they evoke America as a global model or the leading country in the fight against terrorism.

As a Saudi Muslim researcher who has studied in both the USA and Australia, my particular perspective brings a dimension to this thesis. It allows me to understand how different cultural contexts influence the interpretation of language and meaning. My background and experiences provide me with an insight into how public speeches may be perceived and interpreted by diverse audiences. Looking at the inauguration speeches through an outsider’s lens, I aim to uncover nuances that shape the communication of meaning in this type of speech. This examination is particularly relevant given the significance of the post-9/11 era and its implications on perceptions of American presidential rhetoric, including how it may be received in the Arab Muslim world.

Another crucial rationale for investigating the inaugural speeches of these four presidents is that their comparison provides insights into the peaceful – or otherwise - transition of power in the United States as a hallmark of American democracy. Each president's inaugural speech represents a crucial moment of leadership transition and sets the tone for their administration's priorities and agenda. However, the study of inaugural speeches also raises questions about the challenges to this democratic tradition. As I discuss in Chapter Six, the attempted insurrection by some of President Trump's supporters at the Capitol Building in 2021 to disrupt the certification of President Biden's election victory exemplifies the fragility of the democratic process.

In addition, the selection of the four presidents offers a diverse range of political ideologies, rhetorical styles, and policy approaches. Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden represent different political parties, and there are significant differences in ideologies and approaches even within these parties. This diversity allows for an in-depth examination of how each president's inaugural speech conveyed their unique visions and addressed the concerns of the American people. These speeches are not only shaped by the presidents' personal inclinations but also by past conventions, party politics, individual personalities and agendas, and the specific historical context in which they assumed office. In this light, this selection provides a balance for the investigation of this thesis. It includes two Republicans and two Democrats, presenting a deep understanding of how public language constructs meaning across both political parties.

Revealing Poetic Dimensions: Case Studies of American Presidential Inauguration Speeches

This research utilises a series of case studies as its main method, focusing on six inaugural speeches delivered by four different American presidents. Analysing patterns of variation and repetition across multiple cases or examples allows for an examination of the strategic use of rhetorical and poetic devices. The focus on multiple cases, rather than just one, enhances the understanding of the differences and commonalities within the genre. Each president's speech is investigated individually and is dedicated to a separate chapter. This strategy allows for a focused and in-depth exploration of the speeches, highlighting patterns of repetition and variation not only within individual presidents' speeches but also in relation to those of their counterparts. The analysis of these recent inaugural speeches, brought together within one study, provides an addition to the field of political rhetoric. Going beyond the exploration of only the rhetorical strategies or historical contexts, this study investigates deeply the intersection of poetics and political discourse, offering a new overview to understanding how presidents utilise language and symbolic functions in their inaugural addresses to construct meaning and resonate with their audiences.

For data gathering, transcripts of the speeches are accessed and assembled from the American Presidency Project website hosted by the University of California in Santa Barbara (The American Presidency Project). This web-based resource is an authoritative and comprehensive archive of presidential speeches, making it an ideal source for the study of inaugural addresses. The accuracy of the transcripts has been cross-checked against the corresponding video recordings of the speeches to ensure precision. In addition to textual analysis, I have also extensively engaged with the video recordings of the speeches, allowing for an investigation into the poetics of

performativity. By closely observing the delivery of the speeches, including the presidents' tone of voice, pauses and body gestures, I attempt to discern how meaning is amplified and intensified in these public speeches. I also investigate how features such as pauses, pitch shifts, and rhythmic intonation units highlight the poem-like qualities of these speeches. This multimodal approach acknowledges the significance of verbal and non-verbal elements in political discourse. For the audience and contemporary reception of the speeches, I incorporate evidence to substantiate the rhetorical impact of the speeches. Through various scholarly commentaries and critical responses, I provide insights into how the speeches resonated with their audiences. This includes assessments of how rhetorical devices such as metaphors, repetitions, cadence, and performative elements contribute to evoking emotions and engaging listeners at a deeper level. The integration of such external perspectives provides additional nuances regarding the speeches' impact and significance in meaning-making.

American Inauguration Presidential Speech as a Genre

Analysing the inaugural addresses as a genre, it is imperative to investigate the essential commonalities and key elements that characterise this specific type of presidential discourse. To achieve this, the project draws upon the seminal work of Campbell and Jamieson on American presidential speech genres. Campbell and Jamieson's *Deeds Done in Words* examines the ways in which American presidents utilise rhetoric to shape policy, influence public opinion, and govern. The book analyses multiple genres of presidential rhetoric. This includes Inaugural Addresses, State of the Union Addresses, Veto Messages, War Rhetoric, Rhetoric to Forestall Impeachment, The Rhetoric of Impeachment, and Pardoning Rhetoric, all of which outline and execute key presidential functions. In addition, it also describes Farewell

Addresses, which mark the end of the president's constitutional term. This extensive analysis of different presidential rhetoric genres offers a broad understanding of how presidents communicate and fulfil their roles. By providing historical examples, they contextualise how presidential rhetoric has evolved, offering insights into the changes and continuities in presidential communication over time.

Campbell and Jamieson acknowledge the apparent differences among inaugural speeches and recognise them as a genre to uncover their underlying significant similarities. They define genre as “a kind, a sort, a species, a category” (7). In this view, they identify and emphasise the substantive, stylistic, and strategic similarities between two centuries of inaugural speeches because similarities are what makes a particular rhetorical genre distinct from others. Furthermore, they recognise the inaugural speech as a species of discourse known as epideictic, as defined by Aristotle. This classification aligns with their study of the inauguration speech genre. In this thesis, I employ the term “genre” to encompass a nuanced collection of conventions that share similarities and exhibit variations, which play a vital role in the process of meaning-making. The given speech is always influenced by previous similar speeches in some ways, yet it also seeks to indicate difference, specificity, and a needful response to a present context. This perspective acknowledges the relationship between established conventions and the necessary adaptability of the genre in response to the evolving context.

In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle categorises rhetoric into three divisions based on the types of listeners to speeches: “political, forensic, the ceremonial oratory of display” (*Rhetoric* 32). Epideictic discourse falls into the third category:

A form of rhetoric that praises or blames on ceremonial occasions, invites the audience to evaluate the speaker's performance, recalls the past and speculates about the future while focusing on the present, employs a noble, dignified literary style, and amplifies or rehearses admitted facts. (14)

Drawing on Aristotle's conception of epideictic discourse, Campbell and Jamieson define the epideictic nature of presidential inaugural speeches, emphasising that they are:

Delivered on ceremonial occasions, link past and future in present contemplation, affirm or praise the shared principles that will guide the incoming administration, ask the audience to gaze upon traditional values, employ elegant, literary language, and rely on heightening the effect by amplification and reaffirmation of what is already known and believed. (15)

These definitions characterise the contemplative impact of epideictic discourse on its audience and highlight its eloquent and aesthetic language. Campbell and Jamieson propose that these common qualities generate four interconnected components that define presidential inaugural speeches and distinguish them from other forms of epideictic rhetoric. According to their findings, the inaugural speech:

(1) unifies the audience by reconstituting its members as 'the people', who can witness and ratify the ceremony; (2) rehearses communal values drawn from the past; (3) sets forth the political principles that will guide the new administration;

and (4) demonstrates through enactment that the president appreciates the requirements and limitations of executive functions. (15)

My research is also based on the premise that presidential speech genres play a significant role in shaping the presidency as an institution and defining individual presidencies. However, it extends this idea by providing a detailed analysis of the inaugural addresses delivered by four recent presidents, which Campbell and Jamieson's work did not cover. This approach not only highlights the rhetorical strategies used in these speeches but also reveals insights into the evolving nature of the modern American presidency and the distinct leadership styles and visions of the presidents. Moreover, this thesis takes a novel approach by integrating insights from the analysis of poetry, offering a new perspective for the study of presidential rhetoric. The use of poetic reading techniques, methods, and theories enhances Campbell and Jamieson's genre framework by uncovering the aesthetic dimension of presidential rhetoric, providing an understanding of how these speeches function both rhetorically and aesthetically.

Campbell and Jamieson's analysis focuses on the constitutional and historical aspects of presidential rhetoric. They explain:

Because we are attempting to explore the link between rhetoric and the institution, we have examined presidential discourse from our nation's inception to the present and, in particular, analyzed those forms grounded in constitutional provisions, or clearly entailed in fulfilling the constitutional functions of the executive, or have become accepted as customary. (3-4)

Their holistic historical perspective and focus on constitutionally-derived forms of presidential rhetoric lead them to miss the evolution of rhetoric in the context of the digital age and modern media. In my thesis, I examine the video recording of the presidents' inaugural speeches, investigating their poetics of performativity, such as tone of voice, pauses, and body gestures, uncovering their quasi-poetic rhythm. In this sense, I explore how presidents make and convey meaning through verbal and non-verbal communication. These elements are crucial for crafting a message that can resonate with the public, especially in the age of media where visual and auditory cues are as significant as spoken words. Moreover, the way presidents perform their speeches, including their body language and vocal delivery, can be seen as symbolic actions designed to convey certain messages and evoke specific emotions. For instance, an intentional pause can signify importance or contemplation, while a firm tone can convey authority and confidence. These symbolic actions are strategically used to enhance the message.

The Poetic Reading Approach to 21st-Century Inaugurals and the Evolution of the Genre

This study builds upon Campbell and Jamieson's genre-based analysis of presidential rhetoric by applying poetic reading techniques to inaugural speeches of the 21st century, offering perspectives on the development of this genre. Campbell and Jamieson analyse the genres that most clearly demonstrate the "link between rhetorical action and the maintenance and development of the institution"(4). The rhetorical genres serve as "the structural supports for the edifice of the presidency," focusing on how presidents "perform functions essential to maintaining the presidency as an institution" (4). Building on this framework, my analysis of the inaugural speeches of

Presidents Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden reveals how these presidents attempted to maintain and develop the presidency through their distinct rhetorical strategies.

As noted, Campbell and Jamieson emphasise the continuity and change of the inaugural genre over time, my research offers a nuanced view of how this genre has adapted in response to the distinct political and social contexts of the 21st century. By scrutinising how these four presidents performed the key symbolic functions of the inaugural discussed earlier, my work provides an overview of the “continuity within change” that characterises the inaugural speech genre today (8). This focus also allows for a detailed examination of Campbell and Jamieson’s study of the ways rhetoric serves “institutional ends and enables an evaluation to be made of how well presidents have used rhetoric to sustain the presidency as an institution and to adapt it to changing circumstances”(12-13). Thus, my approach contributes to Campbell and Jamieson’s investigation of this phenomenon of genre adaptation to changing contexts they have conducted in their analysis of the American presidential genres from the past two centuries.

My thesis also illuminates new rhetorical strategies and artistic techniques used by these presidents to achieve the objectives of their inaugurals. Campbell and Jamieson propose that genre has a “pragmatic meaning,” where rhetorical strategies are employed to achieve specific ends. To put it differently, they argue that the generic criticism “operates pragmatically to consider ends, that is, the functions or purposes of discourse, and means, the strategies of language and argument through which such rhetorical ends can be achieved”(8). Their generic approach suggests that some of the genres have changed “as their exercise redefined institutional boundaries,” whereas other genres “have remained relatively stable from the time of George Washington to the present [the time of George H.W. Bush], illustrated by the fundamental continuity

of the inaugural” (8). My analysis reveals how these speeches have evolved both rhetorically and poetically in the last two decades to meet contemporary challenges. By focusing on the “recurrent and the variable” elements in these six inaugurals (14), I highlight the process of change within the continuous tradition of the inaugural genre, in terms of the meaning-making of this public speech.

Furthermore, Campbell and Jamieson argue that “the recurrence of certain presidential functions invites a rhetoric of stability and continuity, at the same time the flexibility offered to presidents by those genres ensures adaptability” (217). In this view, through their use of established genres, presidents affirm the ongoing legacy of their office; their individual approaches and variations in these genres reveal their styles and how they adapt to changing circumstances. In terms of Campbell and Jamieson’s observations about the genres’ evolution over the past two hundred years, they have found that adaptation involved emphasising a specific generic element. For instance, Washington’s second inaugural speech highlighted the “role of the audience as witness and the address as an extension of the oath of office” (217). My research draws on this idea of adaptability by demonstrating how the four presidents utilised the inaugural genre’s flexibility to address the altered circumstances of their times. Through a detailed examination of their rhetorical patterns, my thesis sheds light on the implications of these variations for the evolution of the inaugural genre in the modern era.

Campbell and Jamieson’s generic perspective focuses more on continuity than the significance of any individual speech. They are interested in “characteristics that transcend individual responses to conditions at a particular moment” (9). They examine individual speeches only as they are “paradigmatic instances of the type we [Campbell and Jamieson] analyzing or because their deviation from the norm tests the generic

perspective [they] have taken and requires special comment” (9). My thesis adds to this notion by not only providing an in-depth examination of Trump’s inaugural address, which deviated from the rhetorical norms observed in the other three presidents’ speeches but also highlighting the aesthetic ways in which he attempted to achieve the symbolic functions of his speech. This deviation, explored through a poetic lens, marked a significant shift in the nature of the inaugural speech, highlighting how Trump’s rhetoric challenged established conventions.

Finally, my thesis contributes to the evaluations that Campbell and Jamieson’s generic approach enables. They argue that the generic approach “facilitates identification of outstanding examples” of rhetoric that not only “fulfill generic functions” but also “do so in innovative and memorable ways, ways that render them unique rhetorical acts with the power to initiate generic change” (12). By applying theories from poetry and poetics, this thesis provides new insights that such theories illuminate and foreground the ways in which the presidents endeavoured to achieve the four recurrent functions of the inaugural aesthetically. In so doing, my research adds another layer of significance to Campbell and Jamieson’s generic approach which they argue “empowers a critic to ask how well an individual work is adapted to achieve its ends” (12). In this sense, the poetic approach this research project employs contributes to the generic framework in understanding how “a given work transcended the customary and the cliché to achieve that [rhetorical] end in an affecting and enduring way” (13). In the world of this thesis, I attempt, through the lens of poetics concepts, to highlight the ways the president transcended the customary and the cliché to achieve their rhetorical ends in artistic and memorable ways.

Uncovering New Insights Through a Poetics-Centered Approach to Presidential Inaugural Addresses

While *Deeds Done in Words* provides valuable insights into the aesthetic quality of presidential inaugurals, it only superficially engages with the poetic qualities of these speeches they explore. Campbell and Jamieson note that epideictic rhetoric, characteristic of inaugurals, employs a refined literary style designed to connect the past and future through contemplation. This aligns with Cicero's view of this contemplative character of the epideictic rhetoric in *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, where he suggests that while in judicial and deliberative causes the speaker attempts to move his listeners to a decision or specific course of action, in epideictic discourse the speaker's objective is, through artistic means "to impress his ideas upon them, without action as a goal" (173). Campbell and Jamieson further assert that "stylistically and structurally, great presidential inaugurals are suited to contemplation" and that the language of adept inaugurals "captures complex, resonant ideas in memorable phrases" (28).

Whereas Campbell and Jamieson analyse the inaugural addresses by George Washington to George H.W. Bush, they provide some insights into this aspect by alluding only to a few examples from President John Kennedy's inaugural address, their analysis primarily focuses on rhetorical devices rather than the broader poetics of the speech. They highlight how Kennedy effectively reinvigorated America's enduring dedication to defending freedom using parallelism, notably when he declared: "We shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and success of liberty." Moreover, they add that his striking use of antithesis in the phrase, "Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate," vividly rearticulated America's longstanding approach to international relations. According to them, Kennedy employed this technique also in the

more famous antithesis “Ask not what your country can do for you” which challenged citizens to rethink their identity based on the concept of sacrifice. He highlighted the threat of nuclear weapons through assonance in his reference to “the steady spread of the deadly atom” (28-29). Campbell and Jamieson note that by capturing attention, “literary devices invite listeners and readers to ponder these ideas, ideas less suited to contemplation when stated in more mundane language” (29).

Drawing on these foundational insights about epideictic rhetoric and its contemplative quality, my analysis offers several new contributions. First, it expands the historical scope of Campbell and Jamieson’s work by exploring the inaugural addresses of the most four recent U.S. presidents. This approach allows for a more detailed and comparative analysis and understanding of how these speeches convey the four essential functions of the inaugural because Campbell and Jamison emphasise that these “four elements must be adapted to the character of epideictic rhetoric that symbolically constitute the presidential inaugural” (27). By doing this, my work provides an understanding of the artistry involved, its effectiveness, and its persuasive power.

In addition, my research reframes the concept of contemplation within epideictic discourse by linking it to the literary concept of foregrounding, a quality peculiar to literary works that is discussed deeply in Chapter 1. Following literary critics who argue that literary text evokes foregrounding via stylistic variations, my research seeks to investigate how such differences in styles in the inaugurals foreground and defamiliarise the messages being delivered. Similarly, I attempt to emphasise that these artistic devices not only draw the audience’s attention to the message but also invite deeper contemplation. This connection between poetics and

presidential rhetoric reveals new dimensions of how public presidential speech functions to convey meaning, particularly in the context of the last twenty-one years.

It is worth noting that genre theory is also utilised in diverse fields, such as literary and film studies, as demonstrated by scholars like Mikhail Bakhtin and Stephen Neale. Genre theory, a critical tool in these fields, explores how texts tend to develop within certain patterns of repetition and variation. These patterns are shaped by changing contexts and audience expectations, which in turn influence how meaning is derived. Genres are not static; they evolve over time, responding to what audiences have grown habituated to while also introducing elements that challenge or refresh these expectations. In his seminal work in literary theory and philosophy of language, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Bakhtin explores the nature and function of novelistic discourse, contributing to the “theory of the novel”(IV). He argues that, unlike other genres which “are constituted by a set of formal features for fixing language that pre-exist any specific utterance within the genre,” the novel’s relationship to languages is different compared to other genres (xxix). The novel continually explores new forms to reflect the wide range and immediacy of various styles of speech. Bakhtin suggests perceiving the novel as a “supergenre, whose power consists in its ability to engulf and ingest all other genres, together with other stylized but nonliterary forms of language; or not a genre in any strict, traditional sense at all” (xxix). In approaching the novel as a genre, he does not focus on the “functional definition of the novelistic canon in literary history” which would make it “a system of fixed generic characteristics” (11). Instead, Bakhtin delineates the “basic structural characteristics” that highlight the novel’s “peculiar capacity for change and of its influence and effect on the rest of literature” (11).

This PhD project reframes Bakhtin's conceptualisation of the novel by applying its defining role of inclusiveness to the inaugural speech investigated in this research. As noted above, the novel has the ability to incorporate and absorb elements from other genres. Similarly, I will apply Bakhtin's novelistic element of "heteroglossia" in my analysis of presidential speech. This term refers to the existence in a language of a diversity of "points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values" (292). This concept highlights the presence of multiple perspectives or voices within a text and provides a framework for understanding the ways in which the presidents convey various political and national viewpoints to their distinct audiences. For example, Bush's rhetoric invoked a sense of a divine mission, framing America's role on the global stage as a moral imperative. Conversely, Trump's speeches frequently focused on populist themes, drawing sharp lines between 'US Vs. Them' to stir his base. Biden, on the other hand, aimed to foster unity by emphasising common values and collective resilience, seeking to heal the divisions exacerbated by his predecessor. These differing rhetorical approaches illustrate the diverse strategies presidents use to connect with their audiences, reflecting Bakhtin's heteroglossia through the multiplicity of voices and perspectives they highlight. By integrating this concept, this project extends the understanding of how presidential rhetoric accommodates ideological and stylistic diversity while maintaining the unifying function of the inaugural genre.

Neale, in his introduction to genre studies, *Genre and Hollywood*, covers all the major concepts, theories, and accounts related to classical Hollywood cinema and genre. He also discusses the key genres that theorists have written about, including horror, musicals and Western. Neale contends that many current analyses of Hollywood genres are incomplete and potentially misleading (1). He advocates for a broader, more

flexible understanding of genre and introduces new perspectives on the significance and role of genre in analysing Hollywood films.

This research extends two of Neal's arguments. The first argument justifies the application of Neal's thinking to the presidential speech in this project. He argues that genre "is ubiquitous, a phenomenon common to all instances of discourse: there is a generic aspect to all texts; all texts participate in one or several genres"(2). This sense of recurrent elements of genres and the ability to read a specific genre through the lens of another one aligns with key ideas in this thesis, applying a poetic reading analysis to non-poetic texts. The other argument of Neale is that genre is "a multi-dimensional phenomenon," which contains "systems of expectation, categories, discourses, texts, and the conventions that govern them all"(2). Specifically, the PhD study builds upon the concept of "verisimilitude," which centres around audience expectations and established conventions. As Neale puts it, this dimension highlights the "importance of audience knowledge and audience expectation on the one hand, and of the industry and film reviewers on the other" (15). According to Neale, the understanding that genre is multifaceted suggests a need to focus not only on the films themselves but equally on the influences shaping audience expectations, and the development of genre categories (27). In his view, genres encompass more than just films; they also include specific "systems of expectation and hypothesis which spectators bring with them to the cinema and which interact with films themselves during the course of the viewing process" (27). Neale's investigation of genre conventions and their role in creating audience expectations provides a lens for investigating the ways in which presidents utilise rhetoric in their inaugural speeches to meet or break from the audiences' expectations. Presidents might adhere to or challenge the inauguration speech genre conventions to resonate with their audience or signal a shift in political direction. This idea will be

investigated in chapter Six in which President Trump managed to follow the rhetorical mores of the inauguration speech but eschewed its conventional expectations during the ceremony of investiture.

Defining the term “verisimilitude” as “probable, plausible or likely, ” Neale holds that this concept involves ideas of “propriety,” of what is appropriate and thus likely, or likely and therefore appropriate (28). For example, he contends that in a musical, bursting into song is seen as fitting, and therefore it is considered likely—making it credible within that context, therefore “spectators are likely to hypothesize that the film is a musical”(29). Neale’s argument of “flaunting or transgression of cultural verisimilitude” which is typical of some genres such as “murder mystery” (30) is also of significance to this research. He suggests that in a murder mystery, the genre itself allows for deviations from what is typically considered culturally acceptable. This means that actions that might seem implausible or unreasonable in real life are accepted as normal within the context of the genre. As put by Neale, such transgression might comprise “deviations from the norms of sense and logic, or departures from dominant cultural models of action, speech and behaviour”(30).

In the empirical chapters of this thesis, the concept of “verisimilitude” as discussed by Neale provides a critical framework for analysing presidential inauguration addresses. Neale’s delineation of “propriety” and “transgression” within specific genres offers a lens through which to view how presidents conform to or deviate from the rhetorical norms expected in these ceremonial addresses. Presidents (such as Bush, Obama, and Biden) adhered to these conventions, demonstrating propriety by aligning their rhetoric with what was culturally and rhetorically expected, in so doing reinforcing the plausibility and credibility of their message within the genre of inaugural speech. In stark contrast, Trump’s inauguration speech represented a

notable transgression of the norms. His rhetorical approach broke from traditional presidential discourse, challenging established models of propriety in a way that mirrored the genre-breaking elements typical in a murder mystery as outlined by Neale. This deviation from the norm not only marked his speech as distinct (anomaly) but also could reshape the expectations and reception of presidential rhetoric, much like how deviations in genre conventions redefine audience perceptions in film.

From the literary studies area, John Frow's work *Genre* provides valuable insights into the analysis of the inauguration speech. Frow refers to genre as a "universal dimension of textuality" (2). The author defines genre as "a matter of discrimination and taxonomy: of organising things into recognisable classes" (56). He explores how genres are organised around certain conventions, expectations, and functions that shape their communicative purposes and effects (13,113,130). According to Frow, "genre is one of the forms that organisation takes, making patterns of meaning relative to particular communicative functions and situations"(91). Viewing the inauguration presidential speeches through Frow's literary framework can provide valuable insights into the underlying principles that structure and influence the production and reception of speeches. For example, this theoretical lens is beneficial in examining how speeches under study conform to genre conventions such as the use of persuasive appeals (ethos, pathos, logos), rhetorical devices (metaphor, repetition, alliteration), and thematic elements (calls for unity, appeals to national identity). Frow's insights enhance the analysis of inaugural speeches by emphasising the genre conventions and rhetorical creativity, complementing Campbell and Jamieson's focus on the ceremonial and symbolic functions of these addresses.

Evaluation of the Inaugural Address Genre Theory

As I discussed earlier, the genre approach proposed by Campbell and Jamieson in their analysis of the presidential inaugural speech offers valuable insights into its distinctive qualities and recurring elements. However, researchers have taken divergent stances on this genre theory concerning political speech. Proponents of the genre rhetoric, such as Venessa Beasley, Elvin Lim, Lee Sigelman, and Robert Rowland support Campbell and Jamieson's ideas. These scholars argue that the inaugural speech genre has unique characteristics that distinguish it from other types of political discourse and underscore its ceremonial and symbolic functions. For example, Beasley supported the idea of combining previously overlooked pieces of presidential rhetoric and investigating them for similarities, differences, and rhetorical association. She discusses common elements that are found in the inaugural address that link one to another. Building upon Campbell and Jamieson's theory Beasley justifies the commonalities among the presidential inaugural speeches by explaining the need to reassure the audience of the shared beliefs and values. When the beliefs and values are repeated, the audiences continue to understand and take them as their own. In her article "The Rhetoric of Ideological Consensus in the United States: American Principles and American Pose in Presidential Inaugurals," Beasley discusses the ways in which American presidential inaugural addresses have historically been used to establish a sense of national identity and ideological consensus around core American values and principles. She contends that presidents have not only encouraged the American public to "think of themselves as sharing certain ideals, but also as sharing a particular attitudinal disposition, thus defining American character in terms of both principles and pose" ("The Rhetoric" 169). Beasley explores what she calls "shared beliefs" in political discourse by focusing on the inauguration address because

“ritualized instances of presidential speech can be expected to affirm idealized cultural norms”(“The Rhetoric” 175). This element is also what Campbell and Jamison found to be a key recurrent theme of the inaugural address, which is the reaffirmation of shared values. She argues that the presidential inaugural utilises the “didactic function” in that it “teaches American culture to its listeners, consistently reminding them how they ought to know or believe” (“The Rhetoric” 175). This function is evident in inaugural addresses, as presidents must advance certain basic understandings of American political culture that can go beyond their own personal agendas or partisan views.

Throughout her analysis of the inaugural speeches, Beasley found that presidents depicted American ideals in terms of “civil religious themes,” such as “distinctly Puritanical logic”(“The Rhetoric” 175). To promote civil religious principles, presidents also advance a particular mental stance essential to hold the supposedly American ideals. As put by Beasley, in inaugural addresses, presidents frequently “describe American identity in terms of both an attitudinal pose and civil religious principle”(“The Rhetoric” 176). In her analysis of President’s Thomas Jefferson first inaugural speech, Beasley draws upon the characteristics that Jefferson evoked as distinctive to the American people. These traits were “high-minded” and “enlightened,” and “honesty, truth, temperance, gratitude, and the love of man.” According to Beasley, the latter series of qualities is “less ideational than attitudinal, suggesting a characteristically American mental discipline and self-restraint” (“The Rhetoric” 177).

My thesis builds upon Beasley’s examination of presidential inaugural speeches by extending her analysis through the application of a poetics approach. While Beasley identifies how such speeches establish a sense of national identity and ideological consensus, my research probes deeper into the artistic devices used to evoke emotional

responses and reinforce these ideological themes. This poetics-based analysis not only enhances the understanding of the rhetorical construction of American identity but also reveals how the stylistic and aesthetic elements of these speeches contribute to their rhetorical effectiveness.

Like Beasley, I explore how presidents employ civil religious principles, such as “Puritanical logic” and the notion of Americans as “God’s chosen people,” to reaffirm shared values—as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Three concerning Bush’s promotion of a sense of Puritan mission to reaffirm shared values. However, I extend this analysis by examining how recent presidents have adapted different strategies to resonate with contemporary audiences. For instance, my research explores Obama’s use of rhetorical analogies and Trump’s appeal to populism, transgression, and anti-establishment rhetoric as a means of evoking national ideals.

In addition, my study offers more contemporary insights into presidents’ deployment of the models of principled-and-posed national character Beasley discusses in her article. Similar to the examples she draws upon from speeches by George Washington, Jefferson, Woodrow Wilson, Warren Harding, and Lyndon Johnson, the analysis of the speeches of the four most recent presidents provides a valuable overview of such attitudinal postures and their characterisations. This analysis provides an in-depth understanding of Beasley’s argument that presidents might also attempt to “shape and even change” cultural beliefs rather than only affirm them (“The Rhetoric” 175). In this sense, my analysis adds to the discourse that presidential rhetoric is instrumental in both affirming and transforming national character. For example, in his 2001 inaugural speech, Bush reaffirmed the values of “civility, courage, compassion, and character” in his attempt to promote “compassionate conservatism” as leadership. In so doing, he attempted to create an attitudinal stance characterised by mental

discipline for his audience as if being true to the nation's virtue would induce the people to unite and continue to participate in the greater good.

Lim also responded positively to the conceptual framework of the inaugural address genre theory, recognising its relevance to the rhetorical shifts that occurred when the presidency evolved into a more rhetorical institution. In "Five Trends in Presidential Rhetoric: An Analysis of Rhetoric from George Washington to Bill Clinton," he argues that the American presidency had a substantial transformation at the beginning of the twentieth century "from a traditional, administrative, and unrhetorical office into a modern, expansive, and stridently rhetorical one in which incumbents routinely speak over the head of Congress and to the public to lead and to govern" ("Five Trends" 329). He applies computer-assisted content analysis to the inaugural addresses and annual messages delivered between 1789 and 2000. Lim identifies and investigates five significant changes in twentieth-century presidential rhetoric that define the rhetorical dimension of the transformation. He found that contemporary American presidential rhetoric "has become comprehensively more anti-intellectual, abstract, assertive, democratic, and conversational" ("Five Trends" 326).

Reflecting a similar thought to that of Campbell and Jesmieson, Lim maintains that inaugural speeches are a genre of presidential rhetoric that is not only essential but also "powerfully constrained by custom and ritual" ("Five Trends" 330). This suggests that inaugural addresses are designed to align with American traditions and ceremonies, leading to commonalities across these speeches. In this view, Lim states he investigates "two genres of rhetoric in which significant change is not expected: the inaugural address and State of the Union" ("Five Trends" 330). This also implies the presence of commonalities in the inaugural address genre. Moreover, Lim found that presidential inaugural addresses have become more "people-oriented," exhibit a sense of "Kinship,"

“familiar references” (“Five Trends” 339), and “intimacy between the president and his audience,” and “focused on the trustworthiness of the rhetor” (“Five Trends” 343).

These manifestations confirm the genre theory and the conceptual ideas that Campbell and Jamieson offer, regarding key shared features of the inaugural speech— the need to reconstruct the audience as the people, venerate the American public and past, and enact the presidential role.

This PhD thesis builds upon Lim’s analysis by offering a deeper identification and exploration of the commonalities and recurrent elements in recent inaugural addresses, thus providing a view of how the genre has evolved and how presidential communication has shifted over the past two decades. By incorporating a poetics approach, this research goes beyond Lim’s computer-assisted content analysis, adding a layer of insight into the artistic qualities used within these speeches. This method not only highlights the shifts in rhetorical strategies but also elucidates how the expectations for presidential rhetoric have transformed, particularly in the context of the evolving political and cultural landscape.

In “Presidential Inaugurals: The Modernization of a Genre,” Sigelman utilises content analysis to examine the fifty-two inaugural addresses delivered from 1789-1993. He focuses on “the evolution of the use of the inaugural address to perform what Campbell and Jamieson consider its basic generic functions” which are “the unification of the audience and the veneration of traditional values”(83). He supports the usefulness of the inaugural address genre theory. Sigelman analysis compliments the work of Campbell and Jamieson to understand the evolution of the basic generic functions of the inaugurals. He emphasises the benefit of the genre theory:

There is no question about the utility of a generic approach to the study of presidential rhetoric in general and the inaugural address in particular, for the generic approach casts light on commonalities of form and function that may otherwise pass unnoticed. (89)

Similar to Campbell and Jamieson's findings, Sigelman found that the inaugural genre was not static over time. Rather, the inaugurals have developed into "more and more likely to employ language that is accessible to the masses, have invoked more and more unity symbols, and have done more to establish links with traditional American values" (90). These observations relate directly to those of Campbell and Jamieson and reinforce the ideas presented in the genre theory. Campbell and Jamieson have developed their genre theory of inaugural addresses to highlight commonalities in presidential rhetoric that were previously overlooked due to perceptions of lacking rhetorical depth.

This present project builds upon Sigelman's study by extending it in several significant ways. While Sigelman primarily focuses on the two most influential elements of inaugural addresses—unifying the nation and revering traditional values—this thesis broadens the scope to include all four elements outlined by Campbell and Jamieson in their inaugural speech genre theory. This approach allows for a more detailed examination of the evolution of contemporary inaugurals within this genre.

In exploring the task of national reunification, Sigelman identifies the use of "symbols of unification," such as "personal pronouns" and "potent collective terms like 'America,' 'nation,' and 'the people'" (83). My research not only builds on these observations but also introduces additional strategies through which presidents attempt to establish unity. By integrating poetic theory, the theory of constitutive rhetoric, the

use of historical and religious analogies, and the employment of speech acts, my work offers new perspectives on how national identity is shaped and reinforced through inaugural rhetoric.

Furthermore, this thesis adds depth to Sigelman's analysis of traditional values by examining how the four recent presidents reaffirmed traditional values in their inaugurals. This focus highlights the epideictic function of the inaugural genre, providing valuable perspective on how the most recent presidents sought to create a sense of continuity between the honours of the past and the challenges of the present. Finally, akin to my evaluation of Lim's study, the poetics approach in this thesis surpasses Sigelman's content analysis by uncovering the artistic characteristics embedded within contemporary inaugurals.

Conversely, Campbell and Jamieson's genre theory of inaugural addresses has faced some criticism. Opponents like Arthur Schlesinger, Halford Ryan, Richard Joslyn, and Kenneth Thompson challenge the notion of a fixed genre for inaugural speeches. Schlesinger, for instance, acknowledges the ceremonial aspect of the inaugural address, but he sees little value in it, stating:

Even in the field of political oratory, the inaugural address is an inferior art form. It is rarely an occasion for original thought or stimulating reflection. The platitude quotient tends to be high, the rhetoric stately and self-serving, the ritual obsessive, and the surprises few. (vii)

He critiques the genre dismissing it as a lesser form of art filled with platitudes, predictable rhetoric, and lacking in originality or intellectual depth. In contrast, Campbell and Jamieson's genre theory presents a more nuanced understanding of the

inaugural address, arguing that its ceremonial elements serve essential rhetorical functions. According to them, the genre's conventions are not limitations but necessary features that fulfil the address's key elements and purposes, as discussed earlier in this chapter. While Schlesinger highlights the genre's constraints, Campbell and Jamieson defend its utility, asserting that the inaugural address plays a critical role in the democratic process by reinforcing continuity and stability in governance (215). This thesis builds upon Campbell and Jamieson's theory, exploring how the inaugural address, despite its formulaic structure, continues to evolve and effectively construct and communicate meaning.

Other critics view the genre as more flexible and subject to variations, depending on the individual president's rhetorical style and the socio-political context. In his work *The Inaugural Addresses of Twentieth-Century American Presidents*, Ryan contends that the inaugural address is a lesser form of rhetoric, lacking in symbolism, and highly repetitive compared to other inaugural addresses. His primary focus is on challenging Campbell and Jamieson's inaugural address theory, which he argues oversimplifies the complexity of these speeches. Ryan questions the claim that all presidents address the same recurring components in their speeches, suggesting that "such a claim assumes that diverse presidents, from different partisan perspectives, facing disparate factional exigencies, grounded in a distinctive political milieu, on Inaugural Day respond with recurring generic rhetoric. Such a claim is startling" (xvi). Critics like Ryan find it problematic to generalise an inaugural address from the 20th century to one from the 21st century, arguing that categorising all inaugural addresses under a single genre overly restricts the rhetoric and ideas they express. According to Ryan, "the ever-changing nexus between a president, an inaugural text, and the historical context" plays a crucial role in shaping the content and style of each speech

(xvi). He critiques the genre theory for imposing preconceived ideas that might overlook other significant rhetorical features of inaugural speeches because it is more of an obstacle than a benefit. The genre he argues:

Invites the critic to confirm, which is usually the case, or to confute, which is rarely the case, certain generic tenets at the expense of examining the inaugural speech *in situ*. It entices the commentator to make a priori assumptions about an inaugural before beginning to analyze it; therefore, one may miss other significant rhetorical features of the inaugural under investigation. (xvii)

Ryan argues that not all inaugural addresses share generic elements and suggests that a more effective analytical approach would be to adopt a *tabula rasa* perspective. In this approach, the critic should “utilize the methodology of the case study to treat a president’s responses to political exigencies at a juncture in U.S. history” (xvii). He advocates for analysing each speech individually, focusing on the unique rhetoric of each address rather than grouping them under a common genre.

Ryan challenges Campbell and Jamieson’s assertion that inaugural addresses function as Aristotelian epideictic rhetoric, expounding “the inaugural address is not an instance of Aristotelian epideictic rhetoric” adding, “a plain reading of Aristotle’s Rhetoric reveals that his characterization does not describe a presidential inaugural address” (xvii). This opponent supports his argument by emphasising that “all twentieth-century inaugural addresses do not contain all generic elements” (xvii). He also suggests that the inaugural speeches of the twentieth century have not functioned as epideictic speeches, and even after careful analysis, he asserts that even the most ceremonial inaugurals fall short of meeting the essential requirements. His critique

offers a compelling counterpoint to Campbell and Jamieson's genre theory, highlighting the importance of context and individual analysis over broad generalisations. Ryan's perspective adds depth to the ongoing debate about how presidential rhetoric should be studied and challenges researchers to reconsider the ways in which they sort and interpret these significant political texts. His strong criticism of the inaugural address genre theory has garnered a following among those who share his belief that each inaugural should be understood as a distinct rhetorical event, rather than being constrained by generic expectations.

In my thesis, I draw upon Ryan's critique, particularly his argument that one may miss other significant rhetorical characteristics of the inaugurals if an observer makes a priori postulations before beginning the analysis. While I recognise the value in Campbell and Jamieson's genre theory and its identification of recurring elements within inaugural addresses, I contend that their approach can, at times, lead critics to overlook important rhetorical nuances by encouraging prior assumptions about the genre. Building on their framework, my research goes beyond merely identifying and exploring the four recurrent elements of the inaugural genre. I incorporate theories, concepts, and ideas from poetry and poetics to investigate deeper into the rhetorical and stylistic choices in the inaugural speeches of the four most recent American presidents. This poetic and rhetorical analysis allows one to uncover layers of meaning that might otherwise be missed if one were to solely rely on traditional genre analysis.

Moreover, my project differs from Campbell and Jamieson's approach and aligns with Ryan's by emphasising the importance of context. I examine each inaugural speech within its specific historical and political context, acknowledging how these factors shape the rhetoric, style, and approach of each president. Additionally, I compare the shifting contexts of a president's first and second inaugurals (when

applicable) to gain insights into how these changes inform the evolution of his rhetoric, leadership style, and overall approach. This method not only respects the genre's established elements but also provides a more nuanced understanding of how inaugural addresses function as dynamic rhetorical acts that respond to the unique challenges and expectations of their time.

Another outspoken critic of Campbell and Jamieson's inaugural address genre theory is Joslyn. In *Form, genre, and the Study of Political Discourse*, He initiated his critique by stating that Campbell and Jamieson make bold assertions about the genre theory. Joslyn selected specific quotes from *Deeds Done in Words* to build an argument that the authors tried to prove their claims but ultimately fell short. He further argues that the genre theory raises two key questions: "Do all inaugurals contain all four of the specified elements?" and "Does any other class of speech also contain the four elements?" (303). This critic claims that Campbell and Jamieson do not adequately address the first question and provide an unclear response to the second. Joslyn also suggests that other forms of discourse could fit within the generic framework they propose. Therefore, this undermines the exclusivity of the genre theory to inaugural addresses. In addition, Joslyn critiques the theory by pointing out that reconstituting the audience and rehearsing communal values are merely variations of broader presidential rhetoric, which are also present in many other speeches, including those not delivered by the president. He concludes that Campbell and Jamieson are "fairly casual about supporting their claim that the interrelationships among four rhetorical elements uniquely define this class of political rhetoric"(336). In general, this challenger strongly disagreed with the genre theory proposed by Campbell and Jamieson, believing that their claims were unsubstantiated and did not possess the exclusivity necessary for a legitimate genre theory.

Thomas Conley is another critic of Campbell and Jamieson's genre theory. In "The Linnaean Blues: Thoughts on the Genre Approach," Conley argued that genre theories can divert the rhetor's focus away from the specific details of a speech, confining it to a particular genre and preventing it from fully showcasing its complete range of rhetorical elements. He also asserts that genre theories are restrictive because they are overly systematic and can easily misrepresent the true nature of the speech. In this light, Conley explains that a "fixation on genre identity may, in fact, obfuscate more than it illuminates" and "making speeches fit into classificatory schemes inevitably involves radical abridgement" (71-72). He argues that classifying speeches within a genre often oversimplifies the content, which may be helpful for some audiences. However, he claims that this oversimplification comes at the cost of losing significant material. This critic suggests that there are better approaches to analysing speeches, as genre theory risks forcing rhetoric into a category that may not fully capture its complexity. Together, the critiques from Ryan, Joslyn, and Conley highlight the flaws in genre theory, making it unsuitable for studying inaugural addresses.

Despite the opposition to the genre theory, I choose to build upon Campbell and Jamieson's theoretical framework in this thesis because this project acknowledges the evident similarities in inaugural addresses, which necessitate the analysis of shared elements. Scholars who support genre theory have demonstrated that inaugural addresses are connected by specific details, underscoring the need for further exploration in this area of research. For the enquiry of the thesis, their approach provides a valuable lens through which to understand the nuanced construction and communication of meaning in presidential inaugural speeches, engage with their audiences, and reflect the evolving nature of political communication in the United States in the last twenty-one years. Highlighting and examining their distinctive

features and recurrent elements as a distinct group of speeches, I compare their similarities and interpret their variations because they tend to display a certain compositional similarity, with previous studies revealing striking resemblances in content and language. In this light, general themes are repeated, and verbal formulas are used consistently across US presidents' speeches, transcending partisan affiliations and other factors that might differentiate one administration from another (Hart; Hinckley).

The critiques of the inaugural speech theory are unfounded, as they stem from the fact that genre theory operates as a deductive framework. These critics object to grouping the speeches within a rhetorical framework, preferring instead that each speech be analysed individually. While the critics acknowledge that some inaugural addresses share similarities, they argue against applying a uniform rhetorical framework to all of them. When developing a genre theory, a rhetorical framework applies to speeches classified as inaugural addresses. The essence of the genre lies in recurring forms. With repeated performances, such as second inaugural addresses, it's inevitable to encounter recurring themes, styles, and language because people normally respond to and expect familiar patterns. In *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, Kenneth Burke's argument addresses the idea that literature and language are forms of symbolic action, acting as tools for individuals and societies to navigate and make sense of the world. He argues that literary forms are not merely aesthetic but function as strategies for coping with human experience, allowing people to symbolically act within cultural and social contexts. Burke's concept of symbolic action supports the idea that recurring forms in language, such as those found in inaugural addresses, are strategies that help societies cope with transitions of power, reinforcing collective understanding and continuity. He explains "The situations are real; the strategies for handling them have public content; and in so far as situations

overlap from individual to individual, or from one historical period to another, the strategies possess universal relevance”(1). Burke underscores that while each situation is unique, the overlapping similarities in situations and people lead to consistent forms across strategies. Audiences anticipate this form, so presidents are likely to deliver a second inaugural address that follows a familiar structure. Therefore, scrutinising form and recognising similarities through genre theory is justified.

Ryan, Joslyn, and Conley misunderstand genre theory by expecting all inaugural speeches to strictly follow the elements outlined by Campbell and Jamieson while overlooking the variations that Campbell and Jamieson themselves acknowledge. Campbell and Jamieson explicitly allow for differences within the genre, but the critics ignore this key point. Ryan and Conley claim that Campbell and Jamieson have forced a deductive ideal on the speeches, yet fail to engage with the literature discussing these acknowledged variations. By focusing on dissimilarities, the critics miss how Campbell and Jamieson account for both similarities and differences in their theory.

Ryan and Conley argue that genre theory imposes a rigid rhetorical framework that limits the potential for variation in inaugural addresses, preventing them from fully expressing all rhetorical possibilities. However, this critique oversimplifies Campbell and Jamieson’s theory, which acknowledges the influence of external factors, such as audience involvement. Campbell and Jamieson underline that while their genre theory identifies four key elements, it does not restrict inaugural addresses to just these elements; they recognise that other rhetorical features and variations will also be present.

Ryan, Joslyn, and Conley’s critiques lack structure and fail to account for many influences on inaugural addresses. Joslyn, in particular, focuses narrowly on Campbell and Jamieson’s concepts of rehearsing national values and reconstituting the audience,

overlooking the broader scope of their genre theory. By focusing exclusively on two functions of the inaugural address genre theory, Joslyn constructs a critical argument that is not comprehensive. By stressing rhetorical differences, the critics miss an opportunity to create a broad opposing theory that acknowledges the similarities present in every address. Although they attribute these similarities to presidents imitating predecessors, Campbell and Jamieson's theory accounts for these commonalities within the genre.

While the critics' one-by-one analysis highlights rhetorical differences, Campbell and Jamieson's genre theory considers both differences and commonalities. Their theory provides a stronger foundation for probing the inaugural address, revealing overlooked aspects of presidential rhetoric. By combining Campbell and Jamieson's theory with supporting research, this study examines the formal similarities and differences between and against the inaugural speeches of Presidents Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden, exploring potential continuity and change between their political rhetoric.

Scholars like David Ericson have also identified additional recurrent elements in inaugural speeches that align with Campbell and Jamieson's genre theory. In "Presidential Inaugural Addresses and American Political Culture," Ericson's study of fifty-two American inaugural speeches delivered over three centuries reveals eleven prominent themes evoked by the majority of the speeches. These themes include:

Civic virtue, non-partisanship, national unity, general policy principles, cooperation with Congress, popular support, a providential supreme being, the American mission, political continuity, the president's role as the defender of the

Constitution and union, and federalism. (728-729)

While not all themes appear in every inaugural address, Ericson argues that they are “definitive of the more permanent, cultural features of American politics” (727). This thesis recognises the significance of these recurrent inaugural themes, which apply to the 21st-century inauguration speeches, as they align with the four recurrent genre components delineated by Campbell and Jamieson. As noted by Tammy Vigil, these themes often “show how the ends outlined by Campbell and Jamieson are usually met” (492). By examining how each president’s speech may incorporate these themes, this research aims to uncover the distinct approaches used to reinforce the impact of their speeches and persuade the audience.

Thesis Structure

In addition to this Introduction Chapter, which provides a conceptual and structural framework for the project, this thesis comprises seven chapters and a Conclusion. Chapter One, titled “Poetics for Reading Presidential Speech,” analyses prominent theories concerning poetry and poetics, which are then applied to the examination of presidential speeches as instances of poetic texts. It builds upon the works of Tzvetan Todorov, Stein Olsen, and Roman Jakobson, who have established poetics as an approach applicable to both literary and non-literary texts. This chapter extends the understanding of the so-called quality of “literariness” by arguing that this characteristic is not exclusive to literature but is also evident in presidential speeches, highlighting their poetic style and rhetorical significance. As a point of initial examination – and comparison with my key case studies - I conduct a poetic analysis of a famous statement from President John F. Kennedy’s 1961 inauguration speech,

“Ask not.” Through this analysis, I highlight how Kennedy’s speech incorporated foregrounding elements of language that resonate with the techniques often found in poetry.

Chapter Two, entitled “President George W. Bush’s First Inaugural Speech: A Compassionate Conservative Rhetoric,” investigates Bush’s use of “compassionate conservatism” as a rhetorical tool to reposition the Republican party and depict himself as a distinct Republican leader—one who demonstrated genuine empathy and concern for the plight of less fortunate citizens. In this chapter, I will explore how Bush’s compassionate rhetoric aimed to address the concerns of a changing nation and appeal to voters seeking a more empathetic and understanding leadership.

Chapter Three, “President George W. Bush’s Second Inaugural Speech: A Call for the Cause of Freedom” investigates Bush’s construction of a sense of mission akin to the mission of the Puritans - an early American religious group known for their strong conviction in promoting freedom and justice - to promote freedom on a global scale. This chapter will provide a comparative overview of President Bush’s first and second inaugural speeches. By juxtaposing his two inaugural speeches, I aim to highlight the evolution of his political ideology and communication style over time. This comparative study will shed light on how President Bush’s priorities and strategies shifted between the two inaugural moments, offering insights into his presidency’s trajectory.

Chapter Four, “President Barack Obama’s First Inaugural Speech: A Rhetoric of Reminiscence” investigates Obama’s intense emphasis on the nation’s ancestors and rich heritage as a persuasive tool to rally collective action. I examine how his powerful evocation of the nation’s ancestors and historical moments aimed to inspire hope and optimism for the future. This speech highlights the profound power of rhetoric that taps

into a nation's shared heritage, connecting past, present, and future in a narrative of unity and purpose.

Chapter Five, "President Barack Obama's Second Inaugural Speech: An Emphasis on America's Founding Principles," examines Obama's resolute emphasis on America's foundational principles. It analyses how he weaved the inalienable rights of equality, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness into a call to address the pressing challenges of the contemporary era. This chapter provides a comparative analysis of President Obama's two inaugural speeches, highlighting the thematic contrasts and common threads that emerge across the speeches.

Chapter Six, "President Donald J. Trump's Inaugural Speech: A Paradigm Changer," investigates Trump's significant departures from the established norms and conventions of the inaugural speech genre. It argues that Trump's speech marks a paradigm shift, redefining the role of a leader and orator in the context of the American inauguration speech and presidency. Departing from the traditional rhetorical norms of this genre, he forged his own path and introduced novel forms and strategies to convey his message. I also compare President Trump's inaugural address with those of his predecessors, Presidents Bush and Obama. Contrasting his speech with the historical backdrop of inaugural traditions highlights how his speech stands apart from the established precedents, challenging the assumptions and expectations surrounding inaugural speeches.

Chapter Seven, "President Joseph Biden's Inaugural Speech: An Appeal to Emotions," investigates Biden's utilisation of what I consider as "emotive rhetoric" to appeal to the emotions of his audiences to bridge the national divide caused by the preceding Trump administration. This chapter highlights Biden's emphasis on the symbolic role of the President and the traditional understanding of the inauguration

speech genre, which he saw as essential in restoring a sense of stability and continuity to the nation. By comparing and contrasting President Biden's inaugural speech with that of his predecessor, President Trump, I explore how Biden's rhetoric, aimed at restoring the established paradigm, was distinct from Trump's paradigm-changing style.

In the thesis conclusion, entitled "Constructing Meaning through Public Language: Insights from 21st Century American Presidential Inauguration Speeches," I synthesise and critique the key observations derived from this thesis' analysis, a close poetic textual and discourse approach of the speeches. By comparing and contrasting these formal speeches, I reveal recurring patterns and notable variations that shed light on the intricate process of constructing and communicating meaning within this unique speech genre. This synthesis reveals how it has evolved over time, reflecting its adaptability and responsiveness to the changing political and societal landscape of the United States. This chapter also discusses the significance of using the poetic approach in reading presidential speeches, the contributions of this thesis, and suggests further areas of enquiry.

This thesis also includes appendices. Included are the full transcripts of the six inaugural speeches being analysed. The appendices provide readers with an overview of the full speeches since the poetic analysis conducted in this thesis does not cover the selected speeches entirely.

Chapter 1: A Poetics for Reading Presidential Speech

Chapter Overview

This chapter explores the heuristic role of poetics and poetry in understanding American presidential speeches to uncover new and significant insights into how public presidential speeches construct and communicate meaning. The definition of poetics in this thesis encompasses both the traditional view of poetics as the study of a text's form, content, and context to uncover its underlying meaning, as well as the broader perspective where poetics is understood as the style or making of language. The use of rhetorical tools, artistic devices, body gestures, tone of voice, and recurrent genre elements in presidential speeches all fall within the scope of this broader notion of poetics, where style and meaning-making play a central role.

Tzvetan Todorov: Literary Perspective to Poetics

In his book *Introduction to Poetics*, Todorov associates poetics primarily with the analysis of literature; this does not align with my approach to reading inaugural speeches. Rather than viewing them as literary works, I see them as public texts imbued with poetic elements. He argues that poetics “should be a discipline derived from the study of literature, not some other field of knowledge that claims to explain literature.” In his view, poetics provide “a systematic understanding of literary discourse as that which comprehends its individual manifestations” (ix). Todorov introduces the notion of poetics as understanding the general laws governing the creation of texts. He contends that poetics “is not the description of the particular work, the designation of its meaning, but the establishment of general laws of which the particular text is the

product” (ix). He claims:

Poetics aims at a knowledge of the general laws that preside over the birth of each work. Each work is therefore regarded only as the manifestation of an abstract and general structure, of which it is but one of the possible realisations.

(6-7)

While Todorov’s poetics emphasises abstract laws and general structures governing literary texts, I adapt this concept to the analysis of the inaugural speech genre by focusing on the recurring symbolic functions and themes that characterise this form of political discourse. My analysis offers new insights in that it applies this sense of poetics to investigate the general and recurrent elements of which each inaugural speech text is the product., or as Todorov puts it, “a theory that affords a list of literary possibilities, so that existing literary works appear as achieved particular cases”(7). This poetics-based perspective enables the investigation of how meaning is produced in these speeches through their epideictic rhetoric, key components, and recurrent themes.

Rather than proposing that the inaugural speech genre itself operates under fixed laws in a Todorovian sense, I treat their recurrent generic components as the guiding principles for the genre’s structure, helping to create a sense of continuity while allowing for individual variation in rhetorical style. In this way, the commonalities governing the inaugural speech genre are not rigid but are instead dynamic conventions that frame the audience’s expectations and the political meanings conveyed by each president.

Stein Olsen: Inclusive Perspective to Poetics of Literary Works

In “What is Poetics?” Olsen challenges Todorov’s definition of poetics, which focuses solely on the abstract qualities and structure of literary works. This thesis embraces Olsen’s approach, which goes beyond the text itself. This is important to this research project because the heuristic approach of poetics I use in this thesis is also concerned with understanding how and why something is said or written. Olsen defines poetics as “an objective and systematic or, indeed, even a scientific study of literature” (338) and criticises the “axiom of objectivity” used by Todorov and structuralist critics, as it limits observers to analysing the text alone. Olsen explains the concept of this axiom as follows:

The literary work is a piece of discourse, a text, possessing certain characteristics which make it what it is: a literary work. As a piece of discourse, it is accessible to all the speakers of the language; its qualities can be observed and classified by interested observers, and if, in a particular case, there is dispute about what these qualities are, it can be settled by reference to the text itself. (338)

This axiom may not fully capture the complications of presidential speech, where context, speaker, audience, and effects play pivotal roles. As an alternative, Olsen advocates for a poetics that considers the relationships between literary works and the world, authors, and readers. Olsen explains this as follows:

A poetics based on the axiom of objectivity will have no tool for dealing with these types of relationships – between literary works and the world, between

literary works and their authors or literary works and their readers – nor, indeed, will it recognise any questions concerning them as falling within poetics. (341)

My thesis builds upon Olsen’s expanded view of poetics by moving beyond a text-centric analysis. My research investigates not only the speeches themselves but also the broader rhetorical contexts (rhetorical situations) in which they were delivered. This includes analysing the relationship between the inaugural addresses and the presidents who delivered them, focusing on how their personal ethos—such as Bush’s emphasis on “compassionate conservatism,” Trump’s identity as a populist outsider and champion of “forgotten Americans,” Obama’s and Biden’s shared ethos as unifiers—and their delivery styles and rhetorical strategies shaped the speeches. Additionally, this study examines the speeches’ potential rhetorical effects on their distinct audiences. By doing so, I explore how these speeches operate as acts of public language that are deeply embedded in their historical, political, and cultural contexts. This approach offers an understanding of the multi-dimensional aspects of presidential inauguration speech, expanding the scope of poetics to include the text, speaker, audience, and context.

Roman Jakobson: A Poetics Approach to Non-Literary Discourse

Jakobson’s theory of poetics offers a more comprehensive approach, extending beyond the confines of literary works. Unlike the restricted view of poetics, Jakobson, in “Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics,” argues against the confinement of the concept of poetics to the analysis of literary works alone. He contends that poetics can be used as a methodology to analyse any text, literary or otherwise, arguing that the poetic function can be observed in various forms of language use.

Jakobson's view challenges the notion that linguistics alone suffices as a methodology for studying literature, including the poetic function of language. He asserts, "The linguistic study of the poetic function must overstep the limits of poetry, and, on the other hand, the linguistic scrutiny of poetry cannot limit itself to the poetic function" ("Closing Statement" 357). According to Jakobson, understanding language requires investigating its diverse functions comprehensively. The poetic function "cannot be productively studied out of touch with the general problems of language. Any attempt to reduce the sphere of the poetic function to poetry or to confine poetry to the poetic function would be a delusive oversimplification" ("Closing Statement" 356). For him, poetics is an integral part of linguistics, aiming to answer the following question: "What makes a verbal message a work of art" ("Closing Statement" 350).

Building upon this concept, this project investigates the ways the four presidents utilise poetic resources to create a persuasive and memorable discourse that resonates with their audience. According to Jakobson, "the poetic function of language" operates when a verbal message focuses on the message itself. In Jakobson's consideration, the poetic is any message that exists "for its own sake" ("Closing Statement" 356). To illustrate this, I draw upon Jakobson's example of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's campaign slogan, "I like Ike." The slogan's concise and symmetrically structured composition, along with its use of rhyme and alliteration, creates a paronomastic image that reinforces its impressiveness and efficacy. Jakobson explains:

The political slogan 'I like Ike' /ay layk ayk/, succinctly structured, consists of three monosyllables and counts three diphthongs /ay/, each of them symmetrically followed by one consonantal phoneme, / .. l .. k .. k /. The makeup of the three words presents a variation: no consonantal phonemes in the first

word, two around the diphthong in the second, and one final consonant in the third. (“Closing Statement” 357)

In this quote, Jakobson explicates how the poetic qualities of the slogan reinforce its effectiveness as a political message. The repetition and structure of the slogan make it memorable and impactful, helping to create a strong emotional connection between the audience and the political candidate, Dwight Eisenhower, nicknamed Ike.

My research extends Jakobson’s expanded view of poetics by applying his concept of the poetic function to the analysis of six contemporary inaugural speeches. Jakobson’s assertion that the poetic function operates when a verbal message focuses on itself serves as a foundation for this study. This thesis broadens its scope by investigating how presidents’ inaugurals deploy poetic resources—such as rhythm, repetition, and rhetorical devices—not merely for aesthetic appeal but to enhance persuasiveness, memorability, and emotional resonance. While my analysis does not necessarily replicate Jakobson’s detailed phonetic exploration of the “I like Ike” slogan, it aligns with his approach in highlighting the artistic construction of political messages. For example, but not limited to, I explore the presidents’ use of literary qualities such as alliteration, assonance, anaphora, antithesis, and parallelism, as well as the layered metaphors that resonate with Jakobson’s emphasis on form and meaning.

As discussed in the subsection ‘Public Presidential Speech as Akin to Poetry,’ this project also draws upon the concepts of literariness, foregrounding and defamiliarisation, traditionally associated with literary works, to argue that these poetic elements heighten the speeches’ effect by inviting the audience into contemplation of what is said. This focus adds to Jakobson’s idea that a poetic verbal message focuses on its form to achieve heightened effect.

Comparison of Poetics and Rhetorical Figures/Schemes

Poetics and rhetoric, though closely related, serve distinct yet complementary purposes in analysing language. Poetics, as discussed by theorists like Todorov, Jakobson, and Olsen provides a framework for understanding the structural, symbolic functions, and contextual aspects of discourse. Todorov emphasises the underlying systems that shape meaning within texts, while Olsen extends this perspective by advocating for a broader, relational approach to poetics, which considers not only the text itself but also its connection to the speaker, audience, and cultural context. Jakobson argues that the poetic function of language operates whenever a message foregrounds its form. This perspective allows for the analysis of public speeches as structured acts of language, highlighting recurring patterns, and stylistic choices, while also considering their rhetorical effect and connection to the audience's reception.

On the other hand, the rhetorical tradition of figures and schemes, which originated in classical rhetoric, specifically addresses the techniques used to persuade and create emphasis within a speech. In *Figures of Speech: 60 Ways to Turn a Phrase*, Arthur Quinn defines the figure of speech as “an intended deviation from ordinary usage”(6). Utilising rhetorical figures effectively can help to “strike that happy balance between the obvious and the obscure,” enabling audiences to both understand the ideas presented and be more inclined to accept the arguments (Corbett 377). Figures of rhetoric are traditionally divided into schemes and tropes. In *A Handbook to Literature*, Hugh Holman explains that in rhetoric, the scheme is “an unusual arrangement or rearrangement of words in which the literal sense of the words is not modified by the arrangement. It is thus a pattern of words in which sound rather than sense is changed” (478). Trope, on the other hand, according to Holman, is “a figure of speech involving a turn or change of sense — the use of a word in a sense other than its proper or literal

one”(540). In *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, Richard Lanham explores the complexities and disagreements among theorists in defining the term trope. He explains that while some theorists distinguish a trope as a figure that changes the meaning of a word (as opposed to merely arranging words, which would be a scheme), there is little consensus on the exact scope of this definition (154-155). Quintilian, for instance, differentiates between changes in meaning (trope) and changes in form (figure), though he acknowledges that meaning can shift on a larger scale than just individual words (155). Lanham concludes that the trope-scheme distinction, while historically significant, may not be flexible enough to do justice to the complexity of literary analysis.

Tropes and schemes are tools used to manipulate language, enhance style, and achieve rhetorical effect. In this light, the rhetorical strategy of “deviating from the normal way of presentation” (Peer 28), or the “conspicuous elements [forms and structures] that stand out in a text “arouse the reader’s interest and emotion (Verdonk 6), which makes it easier for the audience to remember. Tropes like metaphor, simile, and personification, and schemes such as parallelism, alliteration and anaphora, play a crucial role in shaping the audience’s perception and emotional response by enhancing the impact and memorability of the language used.

While poetics provides a broader theoretical framework for understanding how meaning is constructed through language, the rhetorical tradition offers more focused tools for investigating the persuasive elements of language. However, poetics may risk overlooking the immediate political and cultural significance of public speeches. For example, without situating Bush’s use of alliteration within the post-9/11 context, the poetic elements could appear as mere stylistic flourish rather than, say, as a reflection of the president’s attempt to rally a grieving and uncertain nation. Similarly, Obama’s use

of hopeful and inclusive language analysed through repeated poetic formula gains greater significance when contextualised within his historic rise as the first African American president. These examples highlight how poetics when combined with contextual analysis, illuminates the deeper cultural and historical resonance of rhetorical choices.

On the other hand, the rhetorical tradition of figures and schemes, with its focus on the persuasive tools employed by speakers, may risk reducing the richness of language to its functional elements, neglecting the broader symbolic and contextual influences that shape public discourse. For instance, analysing Trump's anaphora "We will make America" purely as a rhetorical device might miss how this repetition symbolically reinforced his populist narrative of restoration, challenging the establishment and reshaping expectations for inaugural speeches. Likewise, Biden's empathetic and unifying tone, grounded in "emotionally sensitive" rhetoric, transcended mere persuasion by addressing the deeply fractured political and cultural landscape of America post-Trump.

Both approaches are complementary: poetics examines the overarching patterns in discourse, while rhetorical figures and schemes provide the detailed mechanisms that contribute to the effectiveness of that discourse. By integrating these perspectives, this PhD thesis bridges the theoretical and practical dimensions of language analysis. It applies the poetic lens of Todorov, Olsen, and Jakobson to uncover recurring patterns, rhythmic structures, and contextual factors while employing rhetorical analysis to highlight the specific techniques presidents use to communicate the shared symbolic functions of their speeches. This dual approach reveals how inaugural speeches function both as symbolic acts, imbued with poetic resonance, and as vehicles of persuasion, carefully crafted to inspire and mobilise the audience.

Authorship of Presidential Speeches

To clarify the notion of speech authorship within the context of American presidential speeches, it is essential to recognise that the president ultimately holds ownership of the speech and its intended message, even though the drafting process of these speeches may involve multiple individuals. Theodor Sorensen, a presidential advisor and a speech writer for President Kennedy, emphasised this authorship of speech to the speaker. Although Sorensen was the primary writer of some of Kennedy's eloquent and influential speeches, including his inaugural address, he asserted that Kennedy was the "true author." In *White House Ghosts: Presidents and Their Speechwriters*, historian Albert Schlesinger notes that Sorensen maintained in 2006 that "all the ideas, policies and decisions conveyed in every speech were [Kennedy's], not mine. Sorensen added: "If a man in a high office speaks words which convey his principles and policies and ideas and he's willing to stand behind them and take whatever blame or therefore credit go with them, [the speech is] his" (143).

Presidential speeches are typically composed by professional writers in the White House, serving as the White House director of speechwriting ("The Office"), or by the presidents themselves. Notably, evidence suggests that some presidents have personally written their inaugural speeches. For instance, in "Measuring the Motives of Public Officials at a Distance: An Exploratory Study of American Presidents," Richard Donely and David Winter indicate that presidents such as William Taft and Franklin Roosevelt took an active role in crafting their own inaugural speeches (229). The authors also expound that "all Presidents retain great control over the content of their inaugural speeches: they select the writers; they give ideas, they approve or disapprove of wording; and they add the final touches, phrasing, and imagery" to ensure that the speech aligns with their vision and objectives (229). This thesis advances the concept of

speech authorship in this manner. Understanding this aspect is crucial in analysing the presidential inaugural speeches, as it helps to perceive how the speeches reflect the individual president's values, intentions, and political strategies.

In the foreword to *Advancing Australia: The Speeches of Paul Keating, Prime Minister*, Don Watson helpfully explains the relationship between the politician, the people who might play a significant role in the drafting of the speech, and the designation of the authorship of the speech. While the context of this book pertains to Australian political speech, its principles hold relevance to the analysis of American presidential inauguration speeches. Watson's perspective emphasises the role of speechwriters and the involvement of various individuals in the speech drafting process, offering a universal framework for understanding political speech creation across different countries and contexts. His emphasis on connecting with the audience, engaging them, and tailoring the message to the specific context directly aligns with the analysis of American presidential speeches. He contends that the task of the speechwriter is to "find the means by which politicians can touch the audience, move them, interest them, help them understand, enrage them, engage them, please them" (xv).

Crucially, Watson supports this thesis's claim that the president, as the political speaker, is the ultimate author of the final draft of the speech. Although multiple individuals may contribute to the drafting process, including "political advisers, media advisers, department officials [who] are all likely to have some say in it"(xv), ownership, according to him, "resides with the speaker"(xiv). Speechwriters collaborate with these stakeholders to shape "the speech's content, shape, and context, and the time at which the speech is given," but the president gives the final approval and adds his personal touches. This insight strengthens the understanding that the

president's intentionality and persona are channelled through the speechwriting process, lending authority and authenticity to the delivered speech. As Watson states, "after their suggestions are considered and some incorporated, the prime minister reads it and makes whatever changes he thinks fit"(xv). This confirms the president's central role in shaping and delivering an effective inaugural speech, ensuring meaningful engagement with the audience and leaving a lasting impact.

Speech Definition

This Ph.D. study goes beyond the conventional notion of "speech" as mere written words on a page, recognising its multifaceted nature, encompassing live delivery, delivery style, context, and performativity. In this regard, I draw upon William Safire's definition of speech, as outlined in his book, *Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History*. Safire emphasises the vital distinction between a written text and the act of delivering a speech, asserting that a speech becomes truly meaningful when spoken and received by an audience. He highlights that the essence of a speech lies in its oral delivery and that it remains a mere draft until it is articulated. He expounds:

When did a speech become a speech—when it was drafted or when it was given? Words on a page do not a speech make. Nor is a script a play, nor a screenplay a movie. What makes a draft speech a real speech is the speaking of it; but without that articulation, without the strong presence of the deliverer, without the audience to be aroused or moved, all you have is a polemic on a page. A speech is an event. (*Lend Me* 15)

Safire's insights resonate with my approach to the American presidential inauguration speech genre. By employing poetic reading techniques and viewing inaugural speeches as dynamic events rather than static texts, I emphasise the significance of their oral delivery. Safire's notion of the "strong presence of the deliverer" aligns with my research objective, which seeks to explore how concepts of poetry and poetics can enhance message delivery in non-poetic language. This research conducts an in-depth examination of rhetorical techniques, poetic elements, recurrent genre components, the audience's reception of resonant phrases from the speeches, and the speaker's delivery—such as tone of voice and body language—to demonstrate how these factors work together to fulfil the key symbolic functions of the inaugural speech genre, namely establishing national identity, revering the past, and setting a tone for the administration.

The Aesthetic Advantages of Poetic Style in Public Language

I define poetic as having or expressing the characteristics of poetry, such as aesthetic, syntactic, semantic, and rhythmic effects. The use of what I describe as poetic style in public language illuminates its aesthetics, including the aesthetics of its syntax and semantics. The employment of poetic elements and other types of figurative language, in language used in public discourse, such as speeches, advertisements, or political slogans, implies the intended departure from ordinary or mundane language to create a more artistic form of communication. This advantage enables public speakers and writers to create a distinctive, effective language that lingers in the memory.

The question of "what is poetry?" has been differently interpreted. See, for example (Aristotle *The Poetics*; Eagleton *How To*; Müller-Zettelmann and Rubik). Some scholars have defined poetry based on its form because it is what makes it

distinct from ordinary language. By ordinary language, I mean everyday language that people use in their daily lives, which lacks the linguistic creativity, artistry, intentionality, and well-craftedness that are intensively found in the language of literature. Ordinary language is often more straightforward, typically focused on communicating information and achieving specific goals, rather than on creating aesthetic or emotional effects. In literary language, these elements of aesthetics and emotional evocations come into being through the employment of specific tools, such as sound, imagery, rhythm, metre, rhyme, syntax, and, in fact, the whole stock of formal literary devices.

In *What is Poetry?: Language and Memory in the Poems of the World*, Nigel Fabb argues that a “poem can be defined as a text divided into sections (such as lines), which are not determined by linguistic structure” (1). To explain Fabb’s argument, here is some part of the song of the witches from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, Act IV, Scene 1 (Shakespeare) as an example:

Double, double toil and trouble

Fire burn and caldron bubble.

This well-known text can be identified as poetic because it has characteristics that are not found in ordinary language. It is divided into lines. Although the syntactic structures of these lines relatively resemble the syntax of ordinary language, these lines have features that are not found in ordinary language. These lines are metrical, and each line ends with a word that rhymes. The witches’ lines are sung in trochaic tetrametre, which consists of four feet of trochees. In this metre, an accented syllable is followed by an unaccented syllable. This rapid metre makes the witches’ song sound like a

frightening chant. The lines also have a rhyme scheme that is not found in ordinary language. This text incorporates repetitions—such as alliteration, assonance, consonance, and refrain. It has vivid imagery to help readers/listeners visualise the witches as they toss animals in the cauldron. This short close reading of the Shakespearean text illustrates how these formal literary devices heighten the distinction between ordinary and literary languages. They reflect the deviation of the language of literature from any other form of discourse, which estranges and defamiliarises the language of literary texts. In the following section, I will discuss the so-called “literariness” of literature and the “estrangement” and “defamiliarisation” effects that set the language of literary texts apart from ordinary language.

Public Presidential Speech as Akin to Poetry

Although poetry and presidential speech do not exhibit the same structural forms, they still have some characteristics in common. They share common elements and qualities that are crucial to their operation, such as those of aesthetics, stylistics, syntax, and semantics. Central to this likeness is the concept of “literariness,” a defining characteristic of literature and formal poetry (although some poetry does not necessarily use or incorporate this element), which I contend can also be present in presidential discourse. The quality of literariness distinguishes the language of literature from language used for other purposes. To clarify this sense of likeness between the two kinds of text, this research draws on several theorists who explicate what makes a piece of text literary and what distinguishes literary texts from non-literary ones.

The term “literature” has been approached differently in existing literature. In his book, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Jonathan Culler argues that the

recent distinction between literary and non-literary texts does not seem critical. He contends that “both literary and non-literary works can be studied together and in similar ways” (18). He stresses that “literariness” is also found in non-literary texts: “literariness” is a quality peculiar to the language of literature. To put it differently, Culler holds that this quality resides in “the organization of language that makes literature distinguishable from language used for other purposes”(28). Terry Eagleton takes a similar theoretical position to Culler about what can be understood as a literary work. In *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Eagleton asserts that a piece of writing can be or stop being literature, depending upon a certain ideology that promotes it. According to him, literature “cannot in fact be objectively defined. It leaves the definition of literature up to how somebody decides to read it, not to the nature of what is written” (*Literary Theory* 7). Building upon Culler’s and Eagleton’s insights, this thesis argues that the quality of “literariness” can extend beyond traditional literary texts to include political speeches. By approaching presidential speeches through a poetic lens, this research aims to illuminate the intrinsic connections between the artistry of poetry and the strategic crafting of presidential rhetoric. It acknowledges that political speech may also be liable to poetic analysis, just as literature can be read and interpreted through various lenses.

I investigate the ways in which this concept of “literariness” is a crucial element that bridges the worlds of poetry and presidential speech. According to Culler, “literariness” entails the “foregrounding” of language, creating an effect of “estrangement” and “defamiliarisation” in literary works. In other words, stylistic variations, often referred to as foregrounding, are theorised to trigger defamiliarisation, elicit emotional responses, and encourage the audience to engage in interpretation. In their article “Foregrounding, Defamiliarization, and Affect: Response to Literary

Stories,” David Miall and Don Kuiken argue that this quality of literature refers to the variety of stylistic variations that appear in literature, “whether at the phonetic level (e.g., alliteration, rhyme), the grammatical level (e.g., inversion, ellipsis), or the semantic level (e.g., metaphor, irony)” (“Foregrounding” 390). Tess Salvicova explains the effect of such strategies as follows: “Addressees may be startled or amused by varying degrees of deviation from a linguistic norm by the unexpected aesthetic frisson, caused by grammatical, phonological or semantic signifiers, that motivates the listener to invest more effort in elaboration” (233). This notion highlights how poetry, through aesthetic and literary devices, draws attention to itself, demanding a specific degree of engagement from the reader or listener (Culler 28). In “Lines on Feeling: Foregrounding, Aesthetics and Meaning,” the authors argue that in this poetic feature of the language, “the message draws attention to itself rather than, for instance, the context it refers to” (Van Peer et al. 198). The peculiarity of poetic language emphasises verbal messages themselves rather than just the context they refer to, prompting readers to invest more effort in interpretation.

René Wellek and Austin Warren, in their book, *Theory of Literature*, further elaborate on this effect, explaining how “poetic language organizes, tightens, the resources of everyday language, and sometimes does even violence to them, in an effort to force us into awareness and attention” (14). While Eagleton acknowledges that “literariness meant language which is peculiarly conscious of itself as such – or, to put it another way, language which has been made strange, so that it becomes newly perceptible to the reader or listener,” he also argues for a different perspective (*Literary Theory* 48). Eagleton contends that not all deviations from ordinary language “always and everywhere” lead to “literariness.” He takes slang as an example; slangs deviate from ordinary language but cannot be considered literary. In his opinion, the quality of

literariness is a function that we assign to a text to treat it as literary (*Literary Theory* 5). The Czech theorist Jan Mukaiovsky shares with Engleton the idea that the foregrounding effect of “literariness” might occur “in normal, everyday language, such as spoken discourse or journalistic prose,” but he argues that this happens “sporadically without systematic design” (“A Prague” 20). In *A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure, and Style*, he distinguishes between the working of foregrounding in literary and non-literary texts. According to him, foregrounding in literary texts is “structured: it tends to be both systematic and hierarchical. That is, similar features may recur, such as a pattern of assonance or a related group of metaphors, and one set of features will dominate the others” (“A Prague” 20). This phenomenon Jakobson called “the dominant” (*Language* 41-46). Mukaiovsky argued that in everyday language, the primary goal is communication, so foregrounding techniques are typically absent. However, in literature, foregrounding is intentionally used to disrupt ordinary communication. He explains:

Foregrounding is the opposite of automatization, that is, the deautomatization of an act; the more an act is automatized, the less it is consciously executed; the more it is foregrounded, the more completely conscious does it become. Objectively speaking: automatization schematizes an event; foregrounding means the violation of the scheme. (“A Prague” 19)

Mukaiovsky proposes that when an act of expression is automatised, it becomes routine and doesn’t require much conscious thought. But when it is “foregrounded,” it breaks away from the routine and makes audiences fully aware of it, forcing them to pay attention and think about it. Thus, in literature, the act of communication becomes

subordinate, with the audience's primary attention directed toward the stylistic elements of the text. As Mukaiovsky puts it:

In poetic language foregrounding achieves maximum intensity to the extent of pushing communication into the background as the objective of expression and of being used for its own sake; it is not used in the services of communication, but in order to place in the foreground the act of expression, the act of speech itself. ("A Prague" 19)

This does not imply that literature lacks a communicative function; instead, foregrounding allows it to convey meanings with a level of intricacy and complexity that ordinary language typically cannot achieve. Poetic language prioritises the aesthetics and style of the language itself, to the point where the actual message or communication becomes secondary. The reader or listener is meant to focus on the artistic qualities of the language.

Viktor Shklovsky, the Russian Formalist critic, has offered a comparable analysis regarding the impact of stylistic elements. He expounds that stylistic devices serve a purpose beyond merely conveying familiar meanings. In *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, he contends that the function of the literary image "is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object - it creates a vision of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it"(18). This kind of vision emerges from a process similar to the deautomatisation described by Mukafovsky. Shklovsky observed that art exists:

That one may recover the sensation of life. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (12)

From this perspective, the immediate impact of foregrounding is to make the familiar unfamiliar, thereby achieving defamiliarisation. In this regard, Mukaiovsky and Shklovsky demonstrate a continuation of ideas established by earlier thinkers like Coleridge and Shelley.

In *Shelley's Prose, Or, The Trumpet of a Prophecy*, Shelley depicts the power of poetry as it “purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being” (295). Moreover, it is evident from various sections of Coleridge’s writings that he associated the process of defamiliarisation with evoking feeling. In *Biographia Literaria*, his renowned definition of poetic imagination highlights this idea, describing how it “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create”(304). Furthermore, when discussing the aims of the poetry, Coleridge emphasised that imagination has the power to evoke feelings of sympathy and interest. He identified the “two cardinal points of poetry” as “the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of the imagination” (5). Similarly, Shklovsky regarded defamiliarisation as closely linked with feeling, noting that stylistic devices in literary texts “emphasize the emotional effect of an expression” (9). In *The Word and Verbal Art*, Mukaiovsky agrees, stating that “when used

poetically, words and groups of words evoke a greater richness of images and feelings than if they were to occur in a communicative utterance” (*The Word* 73).

Miall and Kuiken also conducted an empirical study to explore how students respond to reading a specific poem. This study offers a more focused perspective on the concept of “literariness.” In their article “What is Literariness? Three Components of Literary Reading,” They identify three key components of the response to a literary work. The first component is the “occurrence of stylistic variations in the text,” which encompasses the distinct use of stylistic elements. The second component is the “occurrence of defamiliarisation” in the reader’s mind, where readers encounter unfamiliar and unexpected elements that challenge their typical patterns of thought and perception. The third component involves the process of interpretation that follows the defamiliarising effect, leading to “the modification or transformation of conventional feeling or concept” (“What is Literariness” 122-123).

This thesis puts forth a hypothesis that explicitly posits political speech as a form of poetry. While Clark shares a similar perspective, stating that “public language is a type of poetry, and that public speaking is therefore a type of performance poetry” (“Ideology” 71), this thesis sets itself apart from Clark’s viewpoint concerning American presidential inauguration speeches. In contrast to Clark’s position, this thesis does not categorise political speech as poetry; instead, it regards it as a distinct public mode of communication. It emphasises that the application of poetics - encompassing both the study of a text’s content and form, as well as the understanding of poetics as the style or making of language – allows for an in-depth understanding of its meaning. While both Clark and this thesis recognise the significance of poetic elements in public language, this research further focuses on how poetics can enrich the understanding of the construction and delivery of the inaugural addresses. Drawing upon Clark’s ideas,

this thesis explores how the four US presidents employ poetic performance techniques in their inaugural speeches - techniques that are commonly associated with oral poetry. By adopting this perspective, this research seeks to reveal the poetic dimensions of presidential discourse, thus highlighting the artful strategies employed by the presidents to engage their audience, shape perceptions, and resonate with the public.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework for Analysing Poetic Language in Political Discourse

This thesis situates itself within the framework of “foregrounding” and the notion of language drawing attention to itself, offering new insights by applying these concepts to inaugural speeches. As discussed in the Introduction, inaugurals often employ noble, dignified, and literary language, making it crucial to identify and explore the foregrounding elements present in these speeches to understand the ways in which inaugural addresses construct and convey meaning. This aligns with Mukarovsky’s concept of foregrounding in literature, where stylistic choices are structured, systematic, and hierarchical. Just as certain stylistic features may recur in literary texts, similar patterns can be found within and among inaugurals, where particular features may dominate.

Building on Campbell and Jamieson’s identification of four key functions common to all inaugurals, this study focuses on these recurrent elements to investigate how foregrounding operates within them. Since these elements are realised through epideictic discourse, inaugurals invite the audience to reflect on the past, present, and future. In this context, foregrounding and defamiliarization—through phonetic, grammatical, or semantic variations—serve to capture the audience’s attention and provoke deeper contemplation. Defamiliarisation, as discussed earlier, is the result of

linguistic variations that make the familiar language seem strange, thereby engaging the audience in more active interpretation and evoking emotional responses. This process is particularly effective in inaugural speeches because foregrounding the message being conveyed can urge the audience to reflect more deeply on it. As Miall and Kuiken suggest “defamiliarization evokes feeling in a way that makes it not merely incidental but actually a constructive part of the reading process” (“Foregrounding” 392).

Miall and Kuiken suggest that when readers engage with foregrounded text, they often experience a process they refer to as “refamiliarization” (“Foregrounding” 394). This process involves revisiting the surrounding context of the text to “discern, delimit, or develop the novel meanings” that the foregrounded section presents. For instance, at the phonetic level, readers might reassess the context that “enables identification of the feeling connotations of alliterative or assonant passages.” At the grammatical level, it could involve reconsidering the context to determine “the absent referent of an ellipsis”(“Foregrounding” 394). Although this thesis does not empirically investigate whether readers of inaugural speeches engage in refamiliarisation, it highlights the significance of foregrounding in political discourse. As Miall and Kuiken note, unexpected linguistic variations induce defamiliarisation, which in turn evokes feelings, and these feelings then guide “refamiliarizing interpretative effort” (“Foregrounding” 392). Given this experience during close reading, it is reasonable to consider that a similar process of defamiliarisation and refamiliarisation could occur during a live audience’s engagement with an inaugural speech.

Some scholars, such as Willie Peer and Frank Hakemulder, confine foregrounding to specific stylistic devices. In their article “Foregrounding,” they contend that “the term foregrounding refers to specific linguistic devices, i.e., deviation and parallelism, that are used in literary texts in a functional and condensed way”

(546). Parallelism, another poetic device, involves the use of repetitive or contrasted structures, such as alliteration, meter, and anaphora, to draw the audience's attention.

In my work, I extend Willie Peer and Frank Hakemulder's analysis in that I encompass a wider range of the use of artistic devices, such as metaphors, allusions, rhythm, cadence, tone of voice, and mood, as evoking foregrounding. In this view, I draw upon the concept of poetics and the rhetorical tradition of figures and schemes to identify and explore the various stylistic variations in the speeches. By exploring this intersection of literariness and political discourse, my analysis reveals how presidents harness poetic elements to captivate their audience, create lasting impressions, and elevate the discourse beyond mundane language. Embracing this perspective highlights the artistic dimensions of presidential speech and provides new insights into the construction and interpretation of these significant public speeches.

President Kennedy's Renowned Phrase in the 1961 Inauguration Speech: A Poetics Application

Kennedy's powerful statement, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country," demonstrates the foregrounding elements of language, evoking a sense of "defamiliarisation" or "estrangement" used in his inaugural speech. This quote from a public presidential address exhibits the quality of "literariness" present in literature in two significant ways. First, the distinct language used in Kennedy's speech sets it apart from ordinary language. Kennedy's famous phrase, structured as a chiasmus, employs parallelism that draws attention to its form and content, making it memorable and emotionally resonant. The balanced repetition of that phrase disrupts typical language structures, creating a sense of poetic rhythm that can capture the audience's attention. This use of parallelism and the inversion of

expectations would have forced the listener to reflect more deeply on the message, aligning with the Russian Formalist concept of “defamiliarization.” The particular structure of his sentence, with “ask not” instead of “do not ask,” deviates from the norms of everyday language. This departure from the linguistic norm may be seen as an archaic or distinctly literary expression, further separating it from ordinary speech. These stylistic choices, combined with Kennedy’s use of a carefully structured rhetorical strategy, elicited emotional and reflective responses from key public figures and the general audience alike.

In *American Orators of the Twentieth Century*, Bernard Ryan Duffy and Halford assert Kennedy’s inaugural speech was a motivational call to action that would resonate even today. They posit that it was “one of the few truly memorable inaugural addresses in U.S. history,” adding the speech’s “elegant lyricism, its power, and its idealism called Americans to action and inspired real change” (247). Moreover, in his book, *Ask Not: The Inauguration of John F. Kennedy and the Speech That Changed America*, Thurston Clarke alleges that Kennedy understood that his speech was a significant chance to showcase himself as he desired to be remembered “for the pages of history, and few presidents in the twentieth century cared more about history, or its perspective, than Kennedy” (10). Clarke documents the reactions of distinguished writers, thinkers, and admirers who later disclosed how profoundly affected and impressed they were by Kennedy’s inaugural speech. For example, he quotes Novelist Carson McCullers, in a note addressed to the president included in a commemorative scrapbook of the inauguration. McCuller wrote “I think that I have never been moved by words more than I was by your inaugural address. It reminded me of the great speeches of FDR and Winston Churchill. Indeed, it is one of the greatest addresses of our age”(206). In addition, Clarke records that the former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt sent Kennedy a

handwritten note stating, “I think gratitude best describes the kind of liberation & lift to the listener which you gave. I have reread your words several times & I have been filled with thankfulness”(207). The speech’s resonance and effectiveness in making the audience reflect on the message’s deeper meaning suggests that stylistic deviations in Kennedy’s speech likely created a sense of estrangement for his audience, drawing attention to his words, and inviting the audience to contemplation and interpretation. By highlighting some audience reactions like these, it is clear that Kennedy’s deliberate stylistic choices enhanced the emotional and reflective engagement of listeners.

In this quote, Kennedy attempted to unify the audience by reconstructing them as people of sacrifice. By emphasising the themes of civil virtue and popular support, the president aimed to underscore a sense of urgency in his audience and deliver a powerful call to action, inspiring the nation to step up and serve their country. Through this, Kennedy reaffirmed the significance of civic duty, selflessness, sacrifice, and public service as fundamental and shared values among the American people. This section only touches upon the first two of the four major recurrent symbolic functions of the inaugural speech genre, which are the unification of the audience and reaffirming shared values, because I am only probing a specific short quote from Kennedy’s speech rather than the entire text. This allows me to demonstrate the application of poetics concepts in a focused manner.

President Kennedy’s quote not only evokes the characteristic of literariness through the recurrence of stylistic variations but also utilises poetic qualities to captivate the audience’s attention and leave a lasting impression. This particular quote, which became emblematic of his entire speech, stands out for its abundant aesthetic qualities, exhibiting an artful use of repetition and structure to create a striking impact on the listeners. He employs an antithesis combined with a chiasmus to reinforce what

Trisnowati Tanto refers to as an “aphoristic effect” (7). Antithesis, according to David Mikics, is “a rhetorical contrast between opposing ideas, often reinforced by parallel syntax”(19). He also defines chiasmus as “a crossing or inversion of the order of words or sounds”(55). By emphasising two opposing concepts and concluding with a directive for action, Kennedy masterfully creates an aphorism that urges the nation to demonstrate wisdom and support their country amid the challenges faced by America at that time.

His renowned phrase goes beyond the use of antithesis and chiasmus; it also employs resounding rhythm through the strategic use of cadence, anaphora, and alliteration. This exploration of rhythmic aspects in presidential speech challenges the insufficiency axiom of objectivity, which confines observers to the written text alone. Kennedy’s careful consideration of rhythm and delivery elevates his memorable phrase, making it resonate with the audience and leaving a lasting impact for years to come. The beat cadence used by Kennedy during his delivery creates a distinct rising and falling rhythm in his speech. As he paused at strategic points in his delivery of this phrase, the words stood out and registered deeply in the minds of his listeners. Chris Baldick’s definition of cadence is “the rising and falling rhythm of speech, especially that of the balanced phrases in free verse or in prose. Also, the fall or rise in pitch at the end of a phrase or sentence” (32). In the video recording of his speech, Kennedy’s use of pause and beat cadence is evident: “And so, [pause] my fellow Americans: [pause] ask not what your country can do for you [pause] — ask what you can do for your country [pause].” This rhythmic delivery not only appealed to the audience’s emotions, igniting excitement and fervour but also conveyed a sense of control and confidence in Kennedy’s message. This was especially crucial given the challenging times America was facing, with crises like the Cuban Missile and Vietnam War adding to the nation’s

uncertainties . Building upon this focus on rhythm, the following case-study chapters expand this analysis by examining how subsequent presidents employ quasi-metrical phrasing, segmentation, and intonation units to produce a poem-like cadence, empowering the delivery of their messages.

The pauses help the audience grasp the weight of Kennedy's words, emphasising his call for wisdom and action. Furthermore, his artful delivery serves to reassure the people that they had chosen the right leader to guide the country through difficult times. Through the effective use of rhythm and cadence, President Kennedy turned his inaugural speech into a captivating and memorable performance, one that transcended written words only and became an artistic expression of his vision for America's future.

The rhythmic powerfulness of Kennedy's well-known phrase is further reinforced by the use of anaphora and alliteration, contributing to its sense of importance and effectiveness. As defined by Baldick, Anaphora involves "the repetition of the same word or phrase of successive lines, clauses, or sentences"(11). In Kennedy's speech, the repetition of "ask not" and "ask" at the beginning of the two-part phrase serves to emphasise and evoke descriptive and emotional effects. By urging Americans not to be self-centred in their approach to their country but rather to consider how their actions can benefit the nation, Kennedy uses anaphora to deliver his message persuasively.

This idea of emphasising what was important is also employed through the use of alliteration. Alliteration, according to Baldick, is "the repetition of the same sounds—usually initial consonants of words or of stressed syllables—in any sequence of neighbouring words"(6). The rhythmic repetition of the initial sounds of the words "country," "can," "you," and "your" can be interpreted as a strategy to allow Kennedy

to emphasise his call for a needed national shift in action to change the society for the better. It also served as a mnemonic device to make his argument memorable and last for a long time in the mind of his nation. This strategic use of poetic elements elevates Kennedy's inaugural speech from a mere political speech to a timeless and impactful expression of national responsibility and unity.

The stylistic qualities found in President Kennedy's memorable phrase demonstrate the influence of techniques used in oral poetry performance. Walter Ong, in his book *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, explores the distinctions between orality and literacy, which I extend to argue how spoken language, with its emphasis on rhythm, repetition, and audience engagement, often utilises techniques similar to those used in oral poetry. While Kennedy delivered his inaugural speech in a literate society in 1961, it is essential to acknowledge that orality and literacy are not mutually exclusive. Even in literate societies, orality continues to play a significant role in communication, particularly in public speeches designed to be heard and remembered by a large audience. Ong defines primary oral cultures as those "untouched by writing"(31), where mnemonic techniques are relied upon to preserve and restore spoken thoughts. In such cultures, he explicates:

[Their] thought must come into being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulaic expressions, in standard thematic settings, in proverbs which are constantly heard by everyone so that they come to mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall, or in other mnemonic form[s]. Serious thought is intertwined with memory system. (34)

Drawing from Ong's insights, the analysis of his speech suggests that Kennedy's speech incorporated performative and improvised techniques reminiscent of primarily oral cultures. Despite reading from a script, Kennedy's use of mnemonic techniques gave his speeches a quality akin to oral poetry. This approach highlights the aesthetic nature of political speech, as it utilises various poetic techniques to resonate with the audience.

Implications of Kennedy's Inaugural Speech Analysis

The observations from the analysis of Kennedy's speech provide crucial implications for this project. First, the analysis of his speech supports the thesis's main argument that American inauguration presidential speeches can be read as a distinct genre that shares similarities with poetry as artfully constructed texts. The examination of the poetic qualities and foregrounding effects present in Kennedy's speech demonstrates how the use of language, rhetorical devices, and performative techniques contribute to the "literariness" of these speeches.

Second, the exploration of poetics in reading presidential speeches provides new and important insights into how these speeches construct and communicate meaning. By investigating the stylistic variations, defamiliarisation, and interpretive processes identified by Miall and Kuiken and the other critics discussed in this chapter, this analysis uncovers the depth and effect of presidential communication and highlights the role of poetic elements in conveying messages effectively.

Third, the analysis of Kennedy's speech serves as a foundation for understanding the subsequent inaugural speeches of the four post-9/11 US presidents studied in this thesis. The demonstration of how Kennedy's speech embodies recurrent symbolic functions, such as unifying the audience, reaffirming shared values, and

employing poetic devices, allows me to establish a framework for examining how these elements may be employed and vary in the speeches of Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden. By intertwining poetic elements with political discourse, these speeches are crafted to construct meaning and adapt to the evolving political and historical landscape over time.

Chapter 2: President George W. Bush's First Inaugural Speech: A Compassionate Conservative Rhetoric

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I continue to treat 21st-century American presidential inauguration speeches as artistic compositions imbued with poetic qualities, enabling the exploration of how public language constructs and communicates meaning. I will investigate how President George W. Bush attempted to rhetorically establish a new brand of leadership that blended conservatism with compassion as a means to reposition the Republican Party in the aftermath of its unpopular policies towards disadvantaged Americans. I examine the following poetic devices through which I expound President Bush's endeavour to advance compassionate conservatism as a governing philosophy to his audience: mood, tone, style, allusion, antithesis, parallelism, epithet metaphor, imagery, anaphora, refrain, oral poetic formula, and religious and rhetorical references.

Other critics have discussed the notion of 'compassionate conservatism' in Bush's inaugural speeches and American political rhetoric more broadly (Holtzman; Kuypers et al.; Olasky). For example, in *Compassionate Conservatism: What It Is, What It Does, and How It Can Transform America*, Marvin Olasky a prominent advocate of compassionate conservatism, provides an in-depth exploration of the notion and its potential impact on American society. Drawing on historical precedents and contemporary examples, he makes a case for a compassionate approach to governance that combines conservative values with a focus on social welfare and community empowerment. Olasky commented on George W. Bush's use of this concept during his 1988 election night when Bush was the Governor of Texas. Bush proposed that he "hoped to give the GOP a compassionate conservative face"(2). According to the

author, Bush was “working off a redefinition of compassion that had been a decade or more in the making” (2). However, the analysis of Bush’s first inaugural speech provided in this chapter advances and deepens Olasky’s support for compassionate governance by exploring the ways in which Bush, as president, attempted to incorporate this notion in his speech to redefine the republican party and address social challenges while promoting individual responsibility and community engagement. The study also broadens the exploration of ‘compassionate conservatism’ in Bush’s 2001 inaugural speech by investigating both the poetic and political dimensions of the speech to understand the ways he attempted to foster this new governing philosophy to his audience.

Lauren Turek in his article “Religious Rhetoric and the Evolution of George W. Bush’s Political Philosophy” explores how Bush’s use of religious rhetoric evolved throughout his political career, especially during his time as governor of Texas and later as president. Specifically, she investigates public statements Bush delivered from 1993 to 2001. Turek argues that while Bush had demonstrated a strong “evangelical faith” long before his gubernatorial campaign, he did not initially present himself as a distinctly Christian leader in politics. However, during his “governorship, he gradually incorporated Christian tropes in his speeches to develop, explain, and gain support for his compassionate conservative policies and to build rapport with voters”(975). According to Turek, in his initial public statements as governor, Bush did not employ religious language to connect with the people of Texas. Instead, his rhetoric during his first term as a governor was shaped more by political values than by religious ones (982). Over his first term as governor, Bush gradually and tentatively introduced Christian language into his public discourse. By 1997, the fusion of “evangelical rhetoric” with “conservative orthodoxy,” which defined his compassionate

conservatism, had taken shape. This approach only solidified because it proved to resonate effectively with the voters (990).

This chapter builds on Turek's analysis by focusing on Bush's first inaugural speech, offering new insights into how he utilised religious rhetoric to reinforce his philosophy of "compassionate conservatism." By applying a poetics-centered approach, this chapter uncovers the aesthetic and rhetorical strategies that aid in making his religious references more persuasive and emotionally resonant. This analysis deepens the understanding of how Bush's use of religious language functioned not only as political messaging but as a crafted tool to evoke compassion and unity within his audience.

In "Compassionate Conservatism: The Rhetorical Reconstruction of Conservative Rhetoric," the authors examine how compassionate conservatism has been rhetorically constructed and how its achievements have influenced contemporary America. They explore "the ten rhetorical themes inherent within the speeches of compassionate conservatism" with an emphasis on the key addresses of George W. Bush from July 1999 to February 2001 (Kuypers et al. 7). The recurrent themes outlined in this article outlines are "justice and fairness; entrepreneurship; universal opportunity; freedom of choice; responsibility; character; tolerance; faith; moral leadership; and American idealism" (Kuypers et al. 7). They serve as an expressive of "the values of compassionate conservatism and a reflection of the underlying traditional conservative principles upon which compassionate conservatism was founded" (Kuypers et al. 7). Importantly, these themes differ from the eleven recurrent inauguration themes discussed in the Introduction of this thesis, alongside the key four inauguration elements. Therefore, this chapter contributes to the broader scholarly in this field of 'Compassionate Conservatism' by providing a focused investigation into

the ways in which the repetitive inauguration themes reinforced this president's promotion of his new compassionate agendas.

Context: Rebranding the Republican Party

President Bush delivered his first inauguration speech on Saturday, 20 January 2001 (see Appendix 1). Douglas Harris and Lonce Bailey, in their book, *The Republican Party: Documents Decoded*, provide an analysis of the political circumstances that led to President Bush's adoption of what they describe as a "compassionate conservative" leadership style. They contend:

During the Reagan years, Republican strategists worried that the party was seen as callous and uncaring in regard to the difficulties confronted by America's poor. When Bush's father ran for president, he sought to counter these negative images with promises of a kinder, gentler presidency. Following this course, George W. Bush promises to be a compassionate conservative, likely reflecting both personal commitments to policy change and a keen understanding of the continuing challenges that Republicans faced in the court of American public opinion. With this touching rhetoric, Bush committed his administration to alleviating social ills. (196)

This leadership approach depicted President Bush as a different kind of Conservative leader, compared to his father's leadership style, because it was more focused on social engagement than on conventional Republican conservatism. In "Calculating Compassion," Kathleen Woodward contends that "it was widely remarked that President Bush's inaugural speech of January 20, 2001, was long on the rhetoric of

compassion and short on the principles of conservatism”(225). Bush’s compassionate rhetoric was less evident in the speeches of the Republican presidents who preceded him. Sara Fritz, a writer for *Tampa Bay Times*, reflected in 2006 on Bush’s compassionate first inaugural speech. She writes, “It was a speech that almost any Democrat could have delivered and, as such, it set a much different tone than the one his father, George H.W. Bush, delivered from the same podium just 12 years ago.” By incorporating compassionate conservative rhetoric and leadership, Bush aimed to distance himself from the policies and approaches of past Republican presidents. According to Fritz, Bush was attempting to “draw a distinction between his views and the more hard-hearted conservative politics that have been the hallmark of the Republican Party since the presidency of Ronald Reagan” (Fritz). President Bush attempted to send a message that conveyed a double meaning. He aimed to tell conservatives that he was deeply religious while wanting liberals to feel that he was not deeply conservative. In a 2002 press remark, President Bush defined and outlined what he meant by Compassionate Conservatism as his governing ideology. In a press release on *the White House* website, a page titled “Fact Sheet: Compassionate Conservatism” shows his definition of this term. He explained:

I call my philosophy and approach compassionate conservatism. It is compassionate to actively help our fellow citizens in need. It is conservative to insist on responsibility and results. And with this hopeful approach, we will make a real difference in people’s lives. (“Fact Sheet”)

Building upon the above claims, the analysis of Bush’s speech explores how he used “compassionate conservatism” as a leadership philosophy in order to distinguish

him as a different kind of Republican who was sympathetic to the situation of less fortunate citizens in American society, build national unity after the highly disputed presidential election of 2000, reassure his people that he would ground his decisions on principles derived from the nation's shared values, and to seek their alignment with his philosophy.

The Context Dictates the Outcome

Bush adopted compassionate conservatism to change negative perceptions of Republican presidents (such as Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush) as indifferent towards the poor. He sought to gain public trust and support in addressing important issues during his presidency, including healthcare, education, tax cuts, poverty, and immigration. This strategy contributed to the effectiveness of his speech because rhetoric is situational. By this claim, I mean that rhetoric comes into existence as a response to a particular situation and its meaning is constructed within the context of that situation. Its situation or context dictates why public speakers say things and how they say them. In "The Rhetorical Situation," Lloyd Bitzer contends that "it is the situation which calls the discourse into existence"(2). Put differently, the situation comes before the creation of rhetoric, summons its utterances, provides it with meaning, and supplies the context within which its effectiveness (as an appropriate response to the circumstance). The task for a rhetorical leader is to craft and employ language that adequately addresses the intricacy of what Bitzer dubbed the "rhetorical situation," which comprises "a natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence" (i.e., need, urgency, opportunity), requiring a rhetorical response (6).

Bitzer's concept of rhetorical situation is defined by three key components: "exigence," which is an issue, problem, or situation that prompts someone to write or

speak. It is something that can be positively modified by discourse (6). The second element is “audience,” which refers to the group of people who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being “mediators of change”(7). Finally, the “constraints,” are the factors that can limit or shape the communication process and the decision-making of the audience, such as “beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives,” and so on (8).

In the context of American inaugural speech, Bitzer’s concept of the “rhetorical situation” provides a vital framework for understanding how presidents craft their addresses to respond to specific moments in history. He claims that a rhetorical audience differs from a general group of listeners or readers; it specifically comprises individuals who can be influenced by the discourse and act as mediators of change. The inaugural address manifests this distinction and requirement as Campbell and Jamieson describe it as “an essential element in a ritual of transition in which the covenant between the citizenry and their leaders is renewed” (14). As noted earlier, the first function of the inaugural is to unify the audience by reconstituting it as ‘the people’, who can witness and ratify the transition of power. In his sense, the audience of the inauguration is featured as a mediator of the change that the president’s discourse serves to produce.

Moreover, Bitzer maintains that the rhetorical discourse emerges in response to a particular situation. Therefore, the “rhetorical situation invites a fitting response, a response that fits the situation” (10). As I mentioned above, context dictates what, how, and why public speakers might say things; thus the situation “dictates the purpose, theme, matter, and style of the response”(10). In the context of the American inauguration address, I build upon Bitzer’s idea to elaborate on the power of this situation to constrain a fitting response, by exploring the context of each inaugural.

Given the fact that the rhetorical situation of President Trump's inauguration did not result in a fitting rhetorical response as noted by his predecessor (see Chapter Six), his deviation might be understood as a result of Bitzer's claim that "one might say metaphorically that every situation prescribes its fitting response; the rhetor may or may not read the prescription accurately"(10).

Applying Bitzer's framework, his research investigates the ways in which each presidential inaugural address was a response to the particular exigencies of its time. In the case study chapters, I probe how Bush's second inaugural address occurred in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks and during the ongoing War on Terror. The exigence here was the need to address national security, unite a country facing external threats, and justify ongoing military actions. Similarly, Obama's first inaugural address came during a period of economic crisis. The exigence was to restore confidence in the American economy and provide hope for recovery. Trump's inaugural address represented a significant deviation from traditional norms of the inauguration speech genre. The exigence was the deep political and social divisions within the country. Instead of constructing a fitting response to his rhetorical situation, Trump's rhetoric amplified these divisions by presenting himself as an outsider fighting against a corrupt establishment. In contrast, Biden's inaugural address focused on healing and unity in the wake of Trump's divisive presidency and the Capitol insurrection. Biden's response to the situation generated by the event was fitting. The exigence here was to mend a fractured nation and restore faith in democratic institutions.

By integrating Bitzer's ideas with Campbell and Jamieson's genre framework, this research provides a deeper understanding of how presidential rhetoric evolves to meet the needs of its time. This combined approach reveals the strategic choices presidents make in addressing their audiences and the broader context. It underscores

the nature of inaugural speeches as both reflections of and responses to their historical moments, shaped by the exigencies, audiences, and constraints of their times. The investigation of genre theory uncovers that the American inaugural address adheres to specific conventions and expectations. As noted, this presidential speech aims to unify the audience, articulate national values, and set forth a vision for the future. However, each president's unique rhetorical situation demands a tailored approach to these conventions. This is because the situation that invites the inaugural speech occurs every four years, a type of discourse is not only created but also gains its own influence and authority. This tradition itself acts as "a constraint upon any new response in the form"(13).

Thus, the genre itself acts as a constraint, prescribing stylistic and thematic conventions while allowing for presidential adaptations that reflect specific historical exigencies. This emphasises how rhetorical constraints also serve as aesthetic imperatives, influencing how presidents structure their speeches using stylistic elements to help fulfil the inaugural speech's symbolic functions while addressing the situational needs of each historical moment.

In "Rhetorical Leadership and the Presidency: A Situational Taxonomy," Martin Medhurst suggests that the concept of the rhetorical situation serves as a useful framework for examining presidential rhetorical leadership because "it parallels the political situation faced by all presidents who must daily deal with people, events, objects, and relationships and the various problems or exigencies they present" ("Rhetorical Leadership" 61). Therefore, analysing presidential rhetoric from a situational perspective entails analysing a president's capacity to interpret and address these situations using appropriate rhetoric. Medhurst emphasises that the exigencies, constraints, and audiences inherent in a rhetorical situation are "constantly shifting and

evolving,” necessitating presidents to continually adjust to meet these dynamic conditions ("Rhetorical Leadership" 81). Consequently, a president's ability to interpret these developments and select effective responses is crucial.

This undertaking is exceedingly intricate. The context in which a president operates is filled with pressing needs that demand rhetorical attention. These exigencies persist consistently, arising continuously, and forming complex combinations. Moreover, in addressing them, a president must acknowledge the constraints inherent in the rhetorical situation. Consequently, in addition to these interpretive challenges, presidents must thoughtfully determine which rhetorical abilities and resources to employ. These decisions hinge on the specific audiences that must be engaged to meet the exigence defining the rhetorical situation.

In this chapter, I will focus on examining the ways Bush utilised and promoted the rhetoric of 'compassionate conservatism' to address various pressing needs on the day of his inauguration. Such needs, as Medhurst contends, are rhetorical in nature because they create situations where "discourse not only can be used, but must be used" to tackle these exigencies ("Rhetorical Leadership" 71). Consequently, in "A Tale of Two Constructs: The Rhetorical Presidency Versus Presidential Rhetoric," as Medhurst elucidates, "the exigence is the engine that drives the rhetorical action—the part of the situation that is in need of remedy or resolution" ("Tale" xv). Informed by these theoretical frameworks on the rhetorical situation, this thesis contributes to this notion by providing a new and valuable overview of the ways in which changing rhetorical situations played a pivotal role in shifting each president's political philosophy investigated in this project.

Expanding on this rhetorical perspective, I also draw on a poetic perspective to emphasise the importance of context in analysing political speeches. This is because I

consider these speeches as poetic texts that can exhibit qualities of poetry, such as linguistic and aesthetic qualities, including the use of figurative language, symbolism, and rhythmic elements. As a result, readers and listeners of presidential speeches can also expect to experience similar effects to those experienced in the reading/reception of powerful poetry; such techniques aid the impact and memorability of a speech. In his book *Stay on Message: Poetry and Truthfulness in Political Speech*, Tom Clark describes the context of public speaking as “situational imperatives” and treats them in this sense as “prosodies—formal rules of poetic arrangement.” According to Clark, the situation “dictates the tasks that a given speech has to fulfil and the aesthetic rules it has to comply with” (*Stay* 65). Building upon Clark’s poetic perspective on public political speech context, I examine the context of Bush’s first inauguration speech and analyse how he utilised the key elements of the inaugural speech genre and artistic devices to effectively engage his audience, create an emotional impact, and leave a lasting impression. This broad approach draws upon Olsen’s poetics, which transcends the text itself and challenges the axiom of objectivity proposed by Todorov. Considering the connections between these speeches and their contexts, the dynamic between these speeches and their speakers, and their influence on the audience.

The 2000 presidential election and the long-standing controversy surrounding its final results could also be why Bush adopted compassionate conservatism as his governing philosophy. It might have been a means through which Bush attempted to make the audience believe in him as a leader who would fulfil the change in people’s lives he called for - a change that would redeem the nation from the comparatively harsh politics that had characterised previous administrations of the Republican Party. Andrew Glass, a writer on *Politico*, commented in 2018 that in this election between Bush and Al Gore, Bush lost the popular vote but won the Electoral College vote; thus,

his winning raised doubts about the legitimacy of his presidency (Glass). In “The 2000 Presidential Election: Why Gore Lost,” Gerald Pomper, Board of Governors Professor of Political Science, comments that “the presidential election of 2000 stands at best as a paradox, at worst as a scandal, of American democracy” (201). Pomper attributes the controversy surrounding Bush’s win in the 2000 election to the following reasons:

Many minority voters were denied the vote, ballots were confusing, and recounts were mishandled and manipulated. The choice of their leader came not from the citizens of the nation, but from lawyers battling for five weeks. The final decision was made not by 105 million voters, but by a 5-4 majority of the unelected U.S. Supreme Court, issuing a tainted and partisan verdict. (201)

Wade Payson-Denney, a writer on *CNN Politico*, revisited the 2000 election. In 2015, he commented that the controversy began on election night. It was uncertain who had won, with the State of Florida’s electoral votes still undetermined. The election results revealed that Bush had won Florida by such a small margin that state law mandated a recount. A month of lawsuits culminated in the very divisive 5–4 Supreme Court ruling Bush the presidential election winner, which put an end to the manual recount in Florida that could have resulted in a different outcome (Payson-Denney).

Bush’s controversial victory in the 2000 election is significant to this research because it can provide important insights into how he constructed his first inaugural speech to address the political repercussions of this issue. Given that the nation was deeply divided because President Bush took office “with half of the nation questioning his legitimate title to the White House” (Pomper 218), this could play an important role in understanding how Bush attempted to unify the country, conciliate with his

opposition, gain trust and support of his nation, evoke a personal character of himself as a compassionate conservative leader, and depict the American nation.

Mood: Crafting a Message of Compassion through Allusion and Antithesis

As I have shown above, the context surrounding Bush's speech was divisive because there was much uncertainty about his election victory. President Bush emphasised unity but also hinted at underlying anxieties about division and conflict within the nation. In this light, Sianne Ngai's book *Ugly Feelings* is worth drawing upon because the investigation of tone in her book is valuable for analysing the mood in Bush's speech (and the subsequent speeches in this thesis) because it can be useful in highlighting the affective states it might evoke in the audience. Drawing on Ngai's thinking can shed light on valuable insights into how the use of tone in political speech influences public perception, shapes emotional responses, and impacts political engagement. Ngai investigates the "aesthetics of negative emotions" such as "envy, anxiety, paranoia, irritation, animatedness, and a strange stuplimity" and explores the "politically ambiguous work" of these emotions" (2-3). She argues that such emotions can be considered as "a mediation between the aesthetic and the political"(3). She examines how these unpleasant feelings manifest in literary language and cultural texts, exploring their political implications and significance. She defines emotions as "signs that not only render visible different registers of problem (formal, ideological, sociohistorical) but conjoin these problems in a distinctive manner" (3). Ngai refers to tone as:

A literary or cultural artifact's feeling tone: its global or organizing affect, its general disposition or orientation toward its audience and the world. I mean the

formal aspect of a literary work that makes it possible for critics to describe a text as, say, euphoric or melancholic, and, what is much more important, the category that makes these affective values meaningful with regard to how one understands the text as a totality within an equally holistic matrix of social relations. (28)

Although I am analysing mood in his discussion, Ngai's definition of tone is closely similar to how this thesis defines and advances how others describe mood. By mood here, I mean a device of poetry that poets use to create an overall feeling for the readers and listeners towards the poetic work. Some literary scholars, such as Meyer Abrams, define this poetic device in the sense that it creates an overall feeling that can be synonymous with the term atmosphere. Abrams defines mood as "the emotional tone pervading a section or the whole of a literary work, which fosters in the reader expectations as to the course of events"(14). I explore the poetic device of mood in Bush's speech because public political leaders, like poets, might endeavour to evoke an emotional feeling or atmosphere for their audience through word choice, tone, and literary devices, to convey meaning. The examination of the affective states evoked by Bush's rhetoric exhibits their political implications. Although at different passages of the speech this president evoked a mood that was compassionate, religious, and lofty, more frequently it conveyed resolve and determination in the face of adversity that reflected his political agenda of promoting national unity and rallying support for his administration's policies, particularly in the aftermath of a contentious election.

Advancing Ngai's framework can help in analysing the power dynamics at play in Bush's speech. His invocation of patriotic sentiment and collective identity can be considered to serve to reinforce his authority as a leader and mobilise public support for his agenda, demonstrating how affective language can be used to consolidate political

power. Ngai's concept of tone as quoted above can also be applied to President Bush's inaugural address to analyse its potential emotional effect on the audience and its effectiveness in shaping public opinion and attitudes towards his presidency.

Considering tone as "a literary text's affective bearing, orientation, or set toward its audience and world" (43), the mood conveyed elements of patriotism. It emphasised themes of national identity and collective responsibility, appealing to the audience's sense of pride and duty as American citizens. This positive and uplifting feeling could be considered as aiming to inspire a sense of national unity and foster a spirit of civic engagement among listeners.

Bush utilised allusion to evoke caring. He used religious sentiments in his speech, using this literary device to convey a message of compassion towards the poor and marginalised in American society. By claiming that "many in our country do not know the pain of poverty" and calling on the people to "listen to those who do," Bush made an implicit reference to the biblical character in the story of the good Samaritan ("Samaritan"). Allusions are a powerful tool for speakers and writers because they enable them to communicate complex ideas and emotions by referencing well-known stories or characters that their audience is likely to be familiar with. Edward Quinn's definition corresponds with how Bush's speech utilised this literary device. Quinn defines this literary term as "a reference within a literary text to some person, place, or event outside the text"(20). The president stated, "I can pledge our Nation to a goal: When we see that wounded traveller on the road to Jericho, we will not pass to the other side." The allusion Bush employed was indirectly referring to a specific person, which Quinn describes as "personal allusions"(20).

Bush's allusion to the Good Samaritan, while functioning as a cultural and ideological signal, also operates as a poetic device within his inaugural speech. By

invoking this biblical story, Bush attempted to tap into a cultural reservoir that resonates with both secular and religious audiences. In Bush's speech context, the secular audience members might interpret his remark as an artistic sentence evoking imagery, depicting Americans who suffered the pain of poverty as the wounded who needed to be taken care of. The religious audience, on the other hand, would recognise it as a Biblical allusion, tapping into shared cultural heritage and suggesting that Bush was guided by timeless and universal values.

This dual function of the allusion—both as a cultural reference and a poetic device—served to enhance the rhetorical effect of Bush's speech. Thus, the allusion enriched the speech by operating on multiple levels, engaging different segments of the audience in different ways. By examining this allusion through a poetics-centered lens, Bush's rhetoric not only communicated his message but also invited deeper reflection on the values he was espousing. This approach to poetics reveals the subtlety of Bush's rhetorical strategy, demonstrating how his use of that story contributes to the overall effectiveness of his inaugural address.

Bush also attempted to create a lofty and unifying feeling through the use of an antithesis to intensify his commitment to alleviating the ills of society. Abrams explains antithesis as “a contrast or opposition in the meanings of contiguous phrases or clauses that manifest parallelism—that is, a similar word-order and structure—in their syntax”(11). By claiming that Americans “are not strangers; they are citizens—not problems but priorities,” President Bush attempted to alter the negative images of his party. In *George W. Bush: In the Whirlwind*, Bryan LaBerge argues that “so often in the past conservatives were positioned by the opposition as anti-poor, anti-sick, anti-helpless, and-homeless” (117). Thus, Bush presented himself as a different kind of conservative leader who would lead the nation with compassion and care about the

sufferings of Americans in need. The use of contrasting ideas between strangers and citizens, and problems and priorities, can have a powerful and lasting rhetorical effect on the audience, leaving a strong impression of the speaker's message in their minds. In "Constructing a New Political Spectacle: Tactics of Chen Shui-Bian's 2000 and 2004 Inaugural Speeches," Maria Cheng argues that "the mind has a natural love for antithesis, which creates a definite and systematic relationship between ideas"(603). Bush aimed to reinforce the notion that the plight of the poor would no longer be overlooked, as this message had favourable associations with them.

Tone: Inspiring Hope and Confidence in American Potential

The tone of Bush's speech incorporated the use of alliteration, parallelism and antithesis to create a sense of admiration for the American people. Tone is defined by Anthony Cuddon as "the reflection of a writer's attitude (especially towards his readers), his manner, mood and moral outlook in his work; even, perhaps, the way his personality pervades the work"(920). Bush emphasised his complimentary attitude towards his audience by using three positive adjectives in immediate succession. By stating, "Americans are generous and strong and decent, not because we believe in ourselves but because we hold beliefs beyond ourselves," Bush's use of alliteration, parallelism, and antithesis endowed his remark with greater noticeability, appeal, and aesthetics. By repeating the same initial consonant sounds in neighbouring words such as "because," "believe," "but," "beliefs," and "beyond" in the latter half of the sentence, he added rhythmic effect. This technique would captivate the audience's attention more effectively and encourage them to reflect deeply on why Bush attributed the three adjectives to Americans.

Style: Concise and Charged

The style of Bush's speech will undoubtedly have contributed to the audience's comprehension of his remarks. I will also use Cuddon's explanation of this term to investigate the style of Bush's inaugural speech. He defines style as:

The characteristic manner of expression in Prose or verse; how a particular writer says things. The analysis and assessment of style involves examination of a writer's choice of words, his figures of speech, the devices (rhetorical and otherwise), the shape of his sentences (whether they be loose or periodic), the shape of his paragraphs - indeed, of every conceivable aspect of his language and the way in which he uses it. (688)

Bush's first inaugural speech was brief, consisting of 1592 words. He used formal language to address his audience throughout his speech. His sentences and paragraphs were short, which made the speech clear, concise, straightforward, and easily comprehensible. Some paragraphs had only two or three sentences. Bush's choice of words was simple; a great number of the words consisted of one or two syllables. Notably, the speech was highly charged, more than the other literary devices, with the use of indirect religious references and antitheses. He also employed the first-person singular pronoun "I" eleven times, which was relatively unusual for an inauguration speech, which typically focuses more on collective pronouns to promote unity. This inauguration speech suggested a future presidency promising directness, transparency and social cohesion.

In addition to the factors that contributed to the clarity and comprehensibility of Bush's first inaugural speech, his tone of voice was also a crucial component. In the

video recording of the speech, President Bush maintained a low and slow tone of voice constantly while speaking, which made him seem and sound calm and confident about what he was saying. At some points in his speech, he raised his tone to emphasise some remarks. For example, when he reached the third paragraph, his tone of voice was low, but in the second sentence of the same paragraph, he raised his voice when he said, “We have a place, all of us [Bush raised his tone of voice], in a long story, a story we continue but whose end we will not see.” By doing this, the president attempted to create and emphasise the audience’s involvement in the course of this story of history and nation-building and the recognition that actions now would continue to impact the future.

Bush’s effective use of strategic pauses and purposeful body gestures commanded his audience’s attention and encouraged contemplation on the significance of his words. For example, he claimed that “some seem to believe that our politics can afford to be petty [paused] because in a time of peace the stakes of our debates appear small. But the stakes for America [paused] are never small.” The president not only paused to emphasise the dividing force of politics but also shook his head and waved his index finger to highlight the divisive nature of politics and the gravity of the challenges facing the country. He expounded that “if our country does not lead the cause of freedom, [shook his head] it will not be led. If we do not turn the hearts of children toward knowledge and character, we will lose their gifts and undermine their idealism. If we permit our economy to drift and decline [paused], the vulnerable will suffer most.” By using contrasting ideas, Bush emphasised the urgency of the challenges facing the country and the need for a collaborative effort to overcome them. The repetition of these ideas not only effectively highlighted their importance but also emphasised the consequences of inaction.

This exploration of Bush's tonal shifts and pauses suggests that political speakers can speak in poetic rhythms in their speeches, embracing a cadence and a metrical structure reminiscent of poetry. By incorporating elements such as cadence, repetition, and contrasts, Bush's delivery evokes poem-like qualities found in oral traditions. I am drawing upon Deborah Tannen's concept of discourse analysis to investigate the quasi-poetic quality of the inaugural speeches. Tannen's work on reverend Jesse Jackson's 1988 Democratic National Convention speech demonstrates that the political oratory can adopt quasi-metrication. In *Talking Voices: Repetition, Dialogue, and Imagery in Conversational Discourse*, she argues that everyday conversation incorporates linguistic techniques traditionally regarded as inherently literary. These techniques, which "are shaped and elaborated in literary discourse, are pervasive, spontaneous, and functional in ordinary conversation" (1). Tannen's analysis of transcripts of tape-recorded conversations illustrates that ordinary speech contains features commonly linked to literary discourse, such as "repetition, dialogue, and detail," which she refers to as "involvement strategies" that evoke imagery (10). In her analysis of Jackson's speech, Tannen demonstrates the interplay of these and other involvement strategies in the speech (167).

Tannen's investigation of Jackson's speech highlights how repetition, metaphor, and rhythmic structures generated emotional impact, producing a "crescendo of audience applause at the time of delivery" (176). For example, Jackson's bird metaphor—"Whether you're a hawk or a dove, you're just a bird, living in the same environment, the same world"—conveys unity and shared responsibility (Jackson). By transcribing this excerpt from Jackson's speech, Tannen observes that "phonological and metric repetition" lends the bird metaphor a "poem-like" frame. She explains that the sound repetition produces a "near rhyme: between the words "bird" and "world."

Additionally, the structure of the metaphor follows a rhythmic pattern with “beats” per line arranged in a 3-2-3-2 sequence:

Whéther you’re a háwk or a dóve,
you’re júst a bírd,
líving in the sáme envíronment,
the sáme wórld, (181)

As shown above, Tannen employs lineated transcripts to capture the quasi-metric, spurt-like quality of spoken discourse. Her method reveals that speech is segmented not into full sentences but rather into smaller sub-sentential clumps, which align with what the discourse analyst Wallace Chafe terms “intonation units.”

According to Tannen, the segmentation of the conversational discourse and public oration in “poetic lines rather than prosaic blocks better captures their rhythm and makes the text easier to read” (193). She explains that the lines are formatted as intonation units to reflect the natural segmentation observed in speech, which is accomplished through a blend of “intonation, prosody, and pausing” (193).

Building upon the methodological insights of Tannen to discourse, treating intonation units as essential for understanding the quasi-metric qualities of spoken language. Using intonation units—identifiable through natural pauses, pitch shifts, and prosody—allows for dissecting how these presidential speeches adopt poetic rhythms. This concept will inform the investigation of the poetic rhythm of Bush’s speech and the other presidents’ inaugural speeches, showing how rhythmic units contribute to understanding how meaning can be constructed and conveyed in public speech.

In *Discourse, Consciousness, and Time*, Chafe elaborates on the role of intonation units in speech as they serve a “functional role in the production and comprehension of language” (62). Chafe argues that spoken discourse consists of short bursts or clauses, rather than complete sentences, with each intonation unit marking a distinct prosodic boundary. He notes that one “who listens objectively to speech will quickly notice that it is not produced in a continuous, uninterrupted flow but in spurts (57). He suggests that the understanding of the flow of consciousness and language is closely tied to prosody because prosody will be found to “contribute in ways that cannot be ignored for spoken language or even, perhaps surprisingly, for written” (57). He notes that intonation units can be recognised based on multiple factors, including “pauses or breaks in timing, acceleration and deceleration, changes in overall pitch level, terminal pitch contours, and changes in voice quality” (69).

While Tannen’s focus on intonation, prosody, and pausing aligns closely with Chafe’s framework, I will adopt her approach to identify intonation units. This allows me to concentrate on accessible elements such as pauses and pitch shifts, without delving into more complex transcription techniques that require advanced software skills to capture the more nuanced features Chafe describes. Chafe’s observations—such as his claim that speech flows in bursts rather than continuous sentences—further inform this study.

In this sense, I am relying on what Walker in *The Handbook of Conversation Analysis* refers to as “auditory analysis.” He notes that phonetic analysis (which he also refers to as prosodic (473)) can be divided into two approaches: “auditory,” which involves analysis through meticulous and repeated listening, and “acoustic,” where analysis is based on data from machine-generated acoustic records (456). Similar to what Tannen suggests, Walker notes that auditory analysis requires attention to aspects

such as “pitch,” “loudness,” “duration,” “rhythm,” and “tempo” (456). My focus aligns with Walker’s approach, concentrating on the accessible auditory features of speech to reveal how inaugural addresses exhibit poetic rhythms.

Returning to Bush’s delivery and rhetorical style, the excerpt from his speech “And our duty is fulfilled in service to one another. Never tiring, never yielding, never finishing,” demonstrates how his delivery employs quasi-poetic elements, with notable reliance on repetition, cadence, and pausing. The use of intonation units, structured by slight pauses, reinforces the rhythmic sway of his speech. Each line becomes a self-contained thought, mirroring the metrical quality of poetry:

.. And our duty is ful=filled in service,
.. to one another,
. . . (2) Néver tíring,
.. Néver yíelding,
.. Néver finishing↓,

These strategic pauses—marked by two dots for shorter pauses and three dots for longer pauses of more than half a second (Tannen 193)—shape the flow of the speech, lending it a rhythm that aims to engage the audience. The first intonational unit ends with an elongated second syllable in “fulfilled,” symbolised by the equals mark (Chafe 59) which mimics the effect of a stressed beat in poetry, giving weight to the concept of fulfilment and allowing the audience time to absorb its significance.

In highlighting the significance of the expressive vocal elements in Bush’s delivery of this example, I am drawing on Dennis Tedlock’s emphasis on the importance performer’s voice. In “Toward an Oral Poetics,” Tedlock advocates for a

poetics that honours the richness and complexity of oral narratives, moving beyond the limitations of text-based analysis. He critiques the conventional reliance on written texts, such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which have undergone numerous edits and transcriptions, thereby losing elements of their original oral performances. He highlights the importance of capturing the nuances of oral storytelling—intonation, rhythm, pauses, and audience interaction—that are often absent in written forms. Tedlock argues that the performers' delivery in primary oral cultures utilises “all the power of the human voice.” In so doing, they might “pause now in one place and now in another, stress this word or that word” (508). The conventional written text eliminates these abilities.

Bush's repetition of the phrase “Never + adjective” functioned similarly to anaphora. The sign ‘(2)’—referred to as a “measured pause” of two seconds (Chafe xii) highlights a deliberate rhetorical strategy, preparing the audience for the emotionally significant trio to follow. By inserting a longer pause here, Bush signalled a transition to a key thematic moment, ensuring the listeners are attuned to the rhythmic repetition that underscores the speech's central message. This aspect of Bush's delivery reflected Tedlock's insights on oral tradition. He argues that spoken narrative draws upon repetitive patterns at various levels, “ranging from word to parallel phrases” which he considers more typical of poetry and song than prose (513). Bush's use of repetition thus resonated with Tedlock's view of spoken storytelling, where these oral patterns serve to reinforce key themes and establish a memorable cadence.

The rhythmic trio offers a balanced structure akin to metrical poetry, with each unit carrying roughly two beats. The repeated structure creates a rhythmic cadence that evokes momentum and emotional intensity. Each unit follows a two-beat pattern, with “Néver” receiving primary stress at the start of each line followed by a softer trailing

syllable. This pattern gives the delivery a powerful and forward-driving thrust. The combination of stressed and unstressed syllables reflects a trochaic rhythm, which enhances the musicality and gives an emphatic and commanding feel, which suits Bush's tone of urgency and determination. His varied pitch slightly between units: the intonation rises slightly on "tiring" and "yielding," then falls on "finishing." This dynamic rise and fall can evoke a rhythmic sway similar to a musical cadence, enhancing the speech's quasi-poetic feel. Bush's employment of vocal modulation in this trio to add layers of emphasis reflected what Tedlock describes as the "power of the human voice" in oral performance, where the speaker uses tonal shifts and pauses to guide listeners' emotional responses.

The consonant patterns in Bush's speech, particularly the repeated /n/ and /r/ sounds in words like "Never," establish a sense of euphony—a pleasant, harmonious sound (Baldick 87). Although these patterns do not form strict alliteration, the recurring consonants subtly bind the phrases together, enhancing their flow and cohesiveness. In addition, the use of sibilance—the soft /s/ and /f/ sounds in words such as "service," "fulfilled," and "finishing"—creates a gentle, reflective tone. This phonetic texture heightens the effect of the speech by softening the delivery, adding nuance to Bush's emphasis on service and perseverance.

Unification: Embracing Virtue and American Exceptionalism

As a rhetorical tradition in the ceremony of investiture, it could be said that inaugurated presidents attempt to unify the audience by reconstructing them as a particular kind of people who possess a certain set of values. In this light, President Bush attempted to unify the audience by reconstructing them as a people of virtue who would accept and embrace change and strive to make a difference for their country and

fellow citizens. In so doing, Bush addressed the story of American Exceptionalism in detail to underscore national unity. In “On American Exceptionalism,” Harlond Koh comments on the idea of this concept. He argues that American exceptionalism “has historically referred to the perception that the United States differs qualitatively from other developed nations, because of its unique origins, national credo, historical evolution, and distinctive political and religious institutions” (1481). The idealism of American Exceptionalism, according to Deborah Madsen in her book *American Exceptionalism*, centres around the following concept:

America and Americans are special, exceptional, because they are charged with saving the world from itself and, at the same time America and Americans must sustain a high level of spiritual, political and moral commitment to this exceptional destiny. (2)

Bush incorporated an intense use of antitheses to underline three fundamental ideas. First, by arguing that Americans would not see the end of this American story, Bush attempted to explain that this holy story of Americans was not only the work of particular people but the work of every generation to come. Second, the president sought to make his call for national change for the better more resonant by contrasting the American past with the present. Finally, the contrasting words “protect” vs. “possess” and “defend” vs. “conquer” intensified America’s superiority and moral commitment to itself and the world.

Employing the device of epithets, Bush strategically cast American history and principles in a positive light, a tool that can be linked to the concept of oral-formulaic

poetics. According to Ilia Galperin in *English Stylistics*, an epithet is defined as:

A stylistic device based on the interplay of emotive and logical meaning in an attributive word, phrase or even sentence, used to characterize an object and pointing out to the reader, and frequently imposing on him, some of the properties or features of the object with the aim of giving an individual perception an evaluation of these features or properties. (143)

Bush incorporated epithets to evoke a positive emotional tone in praising the nation's "grand and enduring ideals" that united the "flawed and fallible people" across the generations who then had strived to make a difference for their nation in the story he evoked. By assigning positive epithets such as friendly, liberator, servant of freedom, protect, and defend to them, Bush attempted to inspire the audience to continue to believe in their past and values to band together and maintain American Exceptionalism.

Shared Values: The Foundation of Unification

Following the inauguration ceremony convention of rehearsing selected and framed traditional values in ways that unify the audience, President Bush relied heavily on the recurrent inaugural theme of civic virtue to reaffirm the nation's commonly shared values of civility, courage, compassion, and character.

Bush's emphasis on these shared values throughout his speech was made even more effective through his use of poetic devices such as metaphors and repetitions. He employed a metaphor to depict America as a person to encourage Americans to be active in fulfilling the nation's promise. In *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and

Mark Johnson describe this type of metaphor as personification and define it as “a general category that covers a wide range of metaphors, each picking out different aspects of a person or ways of looking at a person”(34). In the context of Bush’s quote, he evoked America as a person who made a promise to the people to live out through civility, courage, compassion, and character. Although a nation cannot literally make promises, this use of metaphor can have a significant effect on the audience. As Lakoff and Johnson elucidate, the reason for depicting various things in human terms is that people can understand them “on the basis of our own motivations, goals, actions, characteristics”(34). Building upon that idea, Bush presented America as a caring and decision-making “person” who would anticipate things in return. He attempted to encourage the American people to take responsibility and support America’s promise and democracy.

This inaugurated president also combined the themes of the American mission and civic virtue to indirectly reaffirm the nation’s core values discussed above. This theme of the American mission in Bush’s speech corresponds to Ericson’s argument that “eighteenth and nineteenth-century presidents emphasised that the nation must lead by example” (737). President Bush metaphorically evoked the nation as a family to highlight its unique values. In “Metaphor, Morality, and Politics, or, Why Conservatives Have Left Liberals In the Dust,” Lakoff explains that in this metaphor, “the nation is seen as a family, the government as a parent, and the citizens as children”(“Metaphor, Morality” 195). He outlines the two different models of the family used in this metaphor that Conservatives and Democrats in America use to present their views of the family as “a Strict Father Model and a Nurturant Parent Model.” In the nation as a family metaphor evoked by Bush, he did not use the first model, which forms the political thought of Republicans. Instead, he used the

“Nurturant Parent model” that matched the Democrats’ views of the family. By doing this, he sought to emphasise his compassionate conservative leadership and reassure his people that he would ground his decisions on principles derived from the nation’s shared values. President Bush aimed to let his fellow citizens perceive the nation as a parent or a guardian who promises to take care of the children (citizens).

In this sense, he attempted to define compassionate conservatism as a national goal. This new brand of leadership aimed at creating inclusiveness and promoting equality and respect. Bush’s statement intensified these qualities by incorporating what Chris Baldick refers to as parallelism:

The arrangement of similarly constructed clauses, sentences, or verse lines in a pairing or other sequence suggesting some correspondence between them. The effect of parallelism is usually one of balanced arrangement achieved through repetition of the same syntactic forms. (183)

This rhetorical technique reinforced his proposal of compassionate conservatism as a style of leadership characterised by civility, courage, compassion, and character. In *The Conservatives in Crisis*, Mark Garnett and Philip Lynch argue that Bush’s emphasis on “compassionate conservatism” during the 2000 campaign was pivotal in expanding his appeal. They dispute that it “broadened Bush’s appeal to moderate voters, a significant proportion of whom had backed Clinton,” adding that this political vision aided him “to seek higher levels of support from Roman Catholic voters”(42). David Frum, a political commentator and a former speechwriter for President George W. Bush, emphasises the appeal of this philosophy. In 2001, he observed that the “phrase itself [was] wonderful,”

adding that it “combin[ed] the left’s favorite adjective with the right’s favorite noun” which created “an almost irresistible popular appeal”(2).

This rhetorical approach resonated particularly strongly in Bush’s inaugural speech. In 2001, James Humes, a former presidential speechwriter for Eisenhower, Nixon, Ford, Reagan, and Bush, noted in *The Pueblo Chieftain* that Bush’s “theme of compassionate conservatism did resonate like the dominant chord of a Beethoven symphony.” Humes points out that some commentators referred to it as “the four C’s inaugural,” referencing Bush’s pledge for civility, courage, compassion, and character. Humes emphasised that Bush’s speech evoked a powerful effect, arguing its “words, to borrow Lincoln’s famous phrase, ‘touched the better angels of our nature.’” The speech, according to Humes, “registered in our souls and like any masterful prose improved on each rereading. It was philosophical and drew upon Count De Tocqueville and St. Augustine” (Humes). Thus, the deployment of metaphor, repetition, parallelism and rhythm in his pledge of America’s promise of civility, courage, compassion, and character heightened its emotional effect, creating a resonance with listeners.

Bush’s speech incorporated two uses of repetition to make the reaffirmation of the values more effective and noticeable. He made use of a rhythmic technique characterised by alliteration. In *Rhetorical Style: The Uses of Language in Persuasion*, Jeanne Fahnestock notes that this literary device “produces the effect of a coherent set,” a drawing together into the relationship of otherwise disparate elements (136-137). The rhythmic quality achieved through alliteration can enhance the auditory appeal of Bush’s speech. Bush’s use of the alliterative set “courage, compassion, and character” created a coherent and rhythmic effect. This not only had an aesthetic effect but also implicitly highlighted the theme of the new administration’s leadership and values. As Fahnestock notes, alliteration produces a sense of unity that resonates with the

audience, making the message memorable and registering with them long after the speech's delivery.

The other type of repetition Bush's speech employed to emphasise the key national values was in the form of a refrain. I use Abram's definition to define refrain because it matches how this poetic device was constructed in Bush's speech. Baldick defines it as "a line, or part of a line, which is repeated in the course of a poem, sometimes with slight changes" (263). In the speech, Bush repeatedly used the following line as an anaphora: "America at its best is" to reaffirm each of the four core national values discussed above. This strategy is important for Bush to emphasise the main ideas or themes in his speech, especially for the term "compassion," which he used four times in his speech alongside its adjective form, compassionate, to either characterise Americans or the style of leadership he pledged to follow as president. This repetition made his message more memorable for the audience.

The lasting impact of Bush's phrase is evident in later political discourse. In a 2021 report, Dan Balz, chief correspondent at The Washington Post, highlighted how Biden, in a speech commemorating the lives lost in the 9/11 attacks, echoed Bush's words. Balz noted that Biden quoted Bush's assertion that the attacks had united the country, representing "America at its best" (Balz). This suggests that Bush's strategic use of repetition not only resonated with listeners at the moment but also influenced political rhetoric years later.

Moreover, in *The God Strategy*, David Domke and Kevin Coe also discuss how Bush's rhythmic use of the phrase was integral to shaping the tone of his inaugural speech. They highlight the way Bush repeated the phrase four times to emphasise virtuous national traits, giving America a central position in his rhetoric. They argue that President Bush "made overt [America's] mythic nature by rhythmically focusing

the speech on a series of passages that described ‘America, at its best’” (55). Bush’s repeated invocation of the nation, 31 times, and the rhythmic refrain in his speech solidified his message, which would make it “one of the most remembered speeches of his presidency” (56).

Bush’s use of alliteration and refrain mirrors techniques in traditional poetry, such as in Robert Frost’s poetry. The repetition of the hard “c” sound reinforced the strength of the ideals he was emphasising. Similarly, in Frost’s poem “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” the alliteration in lines such as: “He gives his harness bells a shake,” the repetition of the “h” sound creates a fluid, rhythmic quality, echoing the peaceful yet deliberate atmosphere of the poem (213). Just as Bush used alliteration to give weight to core values in his speech, Frost uses it to reinforce the quiet intensity of the moment in his poem. In addition, Bush’s repeated use of the refrain, especially in combination with variations, e.g., “America at its best is compassionate,” and “America at its best is also courageous” is similar to how poets use a refrain to emphasise the central theme of a poem. An example of this can be seen in Alexander Pope’s *An Essay on Man*, where the line: “Hope springs eternal in the human breast” is echoed in several variations across the text, reinforcing the theme of hope and human endurance (6). Both Bush and Pope employ repetition to solidify the core messages of their respective works. In both texts, these devices are designed to make the message resonate emotionally, enhancing their impact on the audience.

Bush’s use of repetition aligns with Milman Parry’s theory of oral poetic formulas, where repeated phrases aid in retention and emphasis. Unlike researchers who focus on written text, this study highlights the significance of oral repetition in modern political rhetoric, contributing a fresh perspective to the field of rhetorical studies. Oral bards use poetic formulas to compose and improvise their songs. In

“Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making. I. Homer and Homeric Style,” Parry defines the oral formula as “a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea”(80). By utilising refrains in the form of poetic formulas, Bush employed a powerful tactic that transformed his remarks into catchy and memorable phrases. The brevity and rhythm of these refrains in Bush’s speech added to their effectiveness, making them more likely to stick with the audience long after the speech had concluded. They can stand out with the audience, especially when promulgated by the media as sound bites - the brief section of a speech/recording that is typically selected by the media to be reported as rapidly as possible.

For the validity of the poetic approach to be conducted on the inauguration speeches in this project, it is important to elucidate that political speech, like poetic text, can be promulgated in different forms—written, spoken, and disseminated through different media, including both live broadcasts and recorded presentations. This is important because the mnemonic and persuasive effect of catchy phrases from political speeches is evident in reported speech. When reporting on any given speech, the audience will pick out what is important to them. In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Valentin Voloshinov defines reported speech as “speech within speech, utterance within utterance, and at the same time also speech about speech, utterance about utterance” (115). According to Voloshinov, “indirect speech has two modifications, reference and texture.” In the first modification, the reporter repeats what the speaker uttered; that is, “an utterance may be received as a certain particular ideational position of the speaker. In that case, its exact referential makeup (what the speaker said)” (129-130). In the second modification, “an utterance may be received and analytically transmitted as an expression characterizing not only the referent but

also, or even more so, the speaker himself—his manner of speech; his state of mind as expressed not in the content but in the forms of his speech (disconnectedness, pauses between words, and expressive intonation)” (130). In terms of Bush’s inaugural speech, if his live audiences (and news reporters) happened to report the poetic formulas or refrains he employed to someone else, they would choose either of the modifications Voloshinov classifies. This could be either what Bush said or how he said it, more likely including the reporting of his Southern accent.

Proposed Political Agendas: Creating a Sense of Shared Purpose

President Bush proposed the political principles that would govern his new administration through the inaugural theme of general policy principles. Although Bush’s speech laid down abstract political principles, he sought to create a sense of involvement with the audience in enacting compassionate policies. This was evident in the use of a plethora of collaborative and collective language. As previously defined in Chapter 1, anaphora involves a repetition of words or phrases at the beginning of sentences. Bush’s use of anaphora and collective language created a sense of shared purpose and responsibility, making the policies more actionable and meaningful for the American people. The repetition of the anaphora “we will” in Bush’s proposed policies also conveyed a sense of mutual determination between the president and the people.

Presidential Role: Balancing Power and Humility in Bush’s Inaugural Speech

As part of this transformation, the president-elect must demonstrate mastery and understanding of the responsibilities, limitations, and requirements of the executive office. Bush incorporated two recurrent inauguration themes: seeking popular support and calling upon a providential supreme being. He sought to ease the nation’s fears of

the potential misuse of his presidential power. Bush echoed President Kennedy's 1961 inaugural speech, in which Kennedy focused on the theme of collective responsibility for the service of the country. President Bush emphasised the involvement of his fellow citizens as active and responsible contributors to their society. By focusing on the national collective responsibilities for fulfilling reforms, Bush avoided being seen as establishing what might be described as an incipient tyrant leadership.

To acknowledge his constitutional limitations, President Bush invoked a supreme being as a source of guidance and strength for the country. He metaphorically characterised the power guiding the nation as an object to which he attributed grandeur. The invocation of a providential supreme being was important to acknowledge the limitations of the presidency because, by doing so, Bush avoided being conceived as an incompetent or an enfeebled leader.

Implications for the Inauguration Speech Genre

The close poetic reading of President Bush's 2001 inauguration speech provided in this chapter investigated the reason behind his adoption of "compassionate conservatism" as a principle for leading the nation in the years to come. To this end, Bush strategically employed a range of artistic devices, including mood, tone, style, allusion, antithesis, parallelism, epithet, metaphor, imagery, anaphora, refrain, oral poetic formula, and religious and rhetorical references. These carefully selected devices were integrated to effectively promote "compassionate conservatism" as a unifying vision, offering a solution to heal the divisions stemming from the 2000 controversial presidential election and redefining the Republican Party in response to the shifting public sentiment towards previous Republican policies. This diverse array of devices

worked in harmony to resonate with the audience and create a cohesive narrative that underlined Bush's governing philosophy.

President Bush's first inaugural speech is a compelling case study that demonstrates the relationship between public language, poetics, and political rhetoric. Several key insights emerged in the analysis of this speech, highlighting the ways public language constructs and communicates meaning and how the genre of the inauguration speech has evolved. President Bush attempted to advance "compassionate conservatism" as a unifying philosophy for the nation through the deliberate use of these devices; he endeavoured to connect with both secular and religious audiences, invoking shared cultural heritage and timeless values.

Additionally, the speech's tone and structure played a pivotal role in conveying President Bush's message effectively. The use of alliteration, parallelism, and antithesis enhanced the admiration for the American people, accentuating their generosity, strength, and decency. The president's careful choice of simple language and short sentences contributed to the speech's clarity, making it easily comprehensible for the audience. Moreover, the strategic positioning of a low and slow tone of voice projected a sense of calmness and confidence, reassuring the nation amidst a highly contested political climate.

The analysis of President Bush's first inaugural speech not only underscores the significance of poetics in the construction of public language but also provides valuable insights into the evolution of the inauguration speech genre. By embracing poetic techniques, presidents can imbue their speeches with layers of meaning beyond the literal words, drawing upon shared cultural references and invoking emotive responses from the audience. Moreover, the exploration of compassionate conservatism as a

governing philosophy illustrates how inauguration speeches can serve as platforms to shape political ideologies and seek national unity.

Significant insights emerge in examining Bush's first inaugural speech and comparing it to President Kennedy's inaugural speech discussed in Chapter One. This juxtaposition illuminates how the inauguration speech genre has evolved. While both speeches demonstrate the use of poetics and rhetorical strategies to convey their respective messages, they do so within distinct historical and political contexts. The analysis of Kennedy's inaugural speech in Chapter One revealed his masterful use of poetic language, allusions, and shared cultural references, evoking a sense of national unity and responsibility, which emphasised his audience's role as guardians of liberty and progress. His inaugural speech reflected the eloquence of the mid-20th century American presidency, demonstrating how public language can inspire the nation when imbued with poetic qualities. As we advanced to President Bush's first inaugural speech, I encountered a different style and tone that reflected the unique challenges and aspirations of the 21st century. Bush faced a nation divided and a world in turmoil. His approach to the inauguration speech genre was marked by "compassionate conservatism," a governing philosophy that aimed to blend conservative principles with a commitment to social welfare. In this context, Bush's speech utilised a simpler and more assertive tone, employing alliteration, parallelism, and antithesis to underscore shared values of generosity, strength, and decency.

Comparing these two inaugural speeches, it becomes evident that the inauguration speech genre has evolved to adapt to the changing times and political landscapes. While poetic language and shared cultural references remain essential tools for inspiring the nation, the rhetoric and style have evolved to address each era's unique challenges and priorities. As discussed in the Introduction Chapter, this project

continues to analyse how each president performs the four symbolic functions of the inaugural genre through rhetorical and poetic strategies, adapting them to their political climates.

Chapter 3: President George W. Bush's Second Inaugural Speech: A Call for the Cause of Freedom

Comparison and Contrast

The close reading I have used to analyse President George W. Bush's 2001 in Chapter Two and the investigation of his 2005 inaugural speech in this chapter set out a comparative examination of them. While President Bush's two inaugural speeches share certain contextual factors, such as being delivered by the same speaker, delivered to a similar audience, held at the same time of the year, held in the same city, and for the same ceremonial event, they were different in their historical contexts, thus necessitating a closer examination of their similarities and differences.

Chapter Overview

As noted above, the contexts of President George W. Bush's inauguration speeches differed drastically. The close poetic reading used to read President Bush's second inaugural speech highlights the extent to which the repercussions of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on America caused significant changes in the styles of rhetoric in his speech. This chapter illuminates the pivotal shift in focus, as President Bush moved from emphasising "compassionate conservatism" to crafting a more assertive and mission-oriented rhetoric. I argue that, in his 2005 inaugural speech, President Bush constructed a "mission" that resembles the mission of Puritans in order to emphasise the importance of spreading freedom and individual liberties to other nations. While this "mission" encompassed the broader context of American values and ideals, it resonated with the challenges posed by the War on Terrorism and Operation Enduring Freedom. I explore the ways in which Bush reinforced the evocation of a Puritan sense of a mission for America through poetic qualities while also eliciting the key recurrent

components of the inaugural speech genre: mood, sound repetitions, presupposition, implicature, allusion, tone, style, epithets, references to the Constitution, rhetorical reference, parallelism, and antithesis.

This discussion of Bush's utilisation of a sense of a Puritan mission to promote the War on Terror contributes to existing literature regarding his appeal to Puritan roots (Bostdorff; West and Carey). For example, in "George W. Bush's Post-September 11 Rhetoric of Covenant Renewal: Upholding the Faith of the Greatest Generation," Denise Bostdorff attributes the appeal of Bush's rhetoric in the months directly following the 9/11 attacks to "its similarities with the Puritan rhetoric of covenant renewal" (293). The author discusses the ways in which President Bush's speech exhibited the appeals and forms of the covenant of renewal rhetoric in ways that resonated with the American public. This chapter contributes to the research of the utilisation of aspects of Puritanism in political speech in several ways: First, it explores a range of stylistic variations that heightened and advanced Bush's evocation of this mission. It also provides a comparable overview of the changing situations among the president's two inaugural speeches which adds to the extant scholarship regarding the dynamic nature/elasticity of this speech genre.

As Harry Scout also notes the Puritan rhetoric of covenant renewal is a type of epideictic discourse (97), which shares similarities with the inaugural speech in its focus on blame and praise. This chapter's analysis of Bush's rhetoric highlights how both forms of discourse link the past and future through present contemplation. By shedding light on these rhetorical elements, this analysis affirms the inaugural speech as a ritual of transition, renewing the covenant between the leader and the people and reinforcing its recurring key components.

The Puritan Heritage: America's Enduring Mission for a Better World

When I refer to the concept of Puritanism, I am specifically alluding to the core belief that the early colonial settlers in America held, perceiving themselves as a chosen group by God. These settlers, often labelled Puritans, were Christian Protestants seeking religious freedom and a space to practice their faith according to their own convictions. While the term “Puritans” encompasses various subgroups with differing interpretations, for this thesis, as I have discussed in the Introduction, I focus on one key principle shared among them: self-perception as God's chosen people. The Puritans believed that they held a historical mission, entailing the pursuit of “great things” for themselves and the world at large (James 201). In *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*, Noll Mark provides further insights, explaining how the Puritans interpreted their duty as a profound obligation to God, forged under the covenant they established upon their arrival in the New World (15). Drawing upon this, I investigate how Bush's second inaugural speech echoed the Puritan's divine mission, both sharing a sense of grander purpose in his attempt to advance freedom.

This sense of a mission for a better world has predominated in the American mind and politics in modern America. It emerged as the nation's existence began with the first settlers and has remained significant to the present day. In their book *Politics and Religion in the United States*, Michael Corbett and Julia Corbett-Hemeyer explain that this kind of ideology has persisted in modern America. They argue that “Americans often view themselves as having a special mission to serve as an example for the rest of the world”(33). Americans, following the Puritan heritage, as Fredrik Mark suggests, perceived their mission was to strive for the betterment of all, themselves, and the world. Across generations, Americans incorporated changes to the

nature of the mission they inherited from the first settlers. Mark, in *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History*, contends that the spirit of a mission “appeared in successive generations of Americans with changes in the type of mission but the sense of mission unaltered”(3). In this light, I examine the ways in which President Bush evoked a type of Puritan mission (although he did not overtly express the idea of Puritanism in this speech) for the betterment of the world.

Context: The Quest for Security in the Face of Fear

President Bush delivered his second inaugural speech on Thursday, 20 January 2005 (see Appendix 2). The context in which the president delivered this speech made it worth investigating because the 9/11 attacks, three years earlier, had negatively affected the status of American Exceptionalism and the Americans’ sense of invincibility. The terrorist attacks demolished these two ideas in the minds of Americans and the public world. Mick Milford, in “National Identity, Crisis and the Inaugural Genre: George W. Bush and 9/11,” argues that “events such as 9/11 have a tangible effect on national identity because they strike at the roots of American Exceptionalism, one of its core tenets”(19). The attacks shook Americans’ firm belief in the supremacy of their country and as being somehow beyond the reach of international terrorist threats and attack. In “Terrorism as Breaking News: Attack on America,” Brigitte Nacos points out that the 9/11 attacks called the United States’ long-held belief in its immunity from foreign terrorism into question. Thus, “America after the terror attacks was not the same as it was before.” According to Nacos, Americans were “stunned by the velocity and audacity of the 2001 strike”(24). Jonathan Franzen, a novelist and writer for *The New Yorker*, noted in 2001 that America bemoaned the

absence of “the ordinary, the trivial, and even the ridiculous in the face of instability and dread” in the midst of uncertainty and anxiety (Franzen).

Mood: Missionary Zeal

In his first 2001 inaugural speech, President Bush aimed to evoke a compassionate, religious, and unifying mood. He employed allusion, referencing the biblical story of the good Samaritan, to convey a message of compassion for the poor and marginalised in American society. This allusion, a symbol of compassion and care for one’s neighbour, likely resonated with a predominantly Christian audience, fostering a sense of empathy and moral obligation. As Turek notes religious language in political rhetoric can invoke shared cultural values, reinforcing a sense of collective responsibility and urging audiences to act by these principles. She emphasises the influence of religiosity in political rhetoric expounding that when Bush approached the “religious voters, rather than a national audience, he reverted to using faith-based rhetoric to garner support” (995). Bush realised that this rhetorical strategy of deploying religious rhetoric and conservative beliefs connected with voters. In other words, Bush’s “cloaking his conservative economic values with passionate religious language gave him a political edge in Texas, allowing him to win substantial support among minorities, women, and conservative Democrats” (998). In the context of Bush’s address, the invocation of this biblical story would have heightened the emotional appeal, especially as it aligned with his broader message of compassionate conservatism.

In contrast, his second inaugural speech took on a different mood. I argue that he created an atmosphere akin to a missionary fervour in his speech about ending tyranny in this context. As discussed earlier, I am using the poetic term “mood” here as

the general feeling or an emotional atmosphere a poet and/or public speaker creates for the audience in the text and/or speech. President Bush evoked a missionary feeling in his audience by expounding that “the survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands.” This sentence incorporated phonological repetitions such as alliteration and assonance to aid its appeal to the audience in terms of evoking a globally liberating mission for America. The alliterative sounds in Bush’s sentence came in words such as “liberty, land, survival, and success.” This alliterative technique underscored the idea that the survival of liberty in America was intricately tied to the success of liberty in other nations. Bush’s remark displayed a recurrent use of assonance. According to John Peck and Martin Coyle in their book *Literary Terms and Criticism: A Students’ Guide*, assonance is the “repetition of the same vowel sound in two or more words in a line of poetry”(19), such as in the repetitive use of the vowels in the prepositions “in” and “of” and the noun “land.” By creating a rhythmic and rhyming effect, the repetition of vowel sounds would facilitate a smooth and memorable speech delivery.

In his rhetorical endeavour to shape the public’s perception of political reality regarding tyranny elimination, President Bush attempted to make the liberating mission he evoked for America resounding and persuasive by framing the status of liberty in “other lands” in a way that was favourable to him. In this view, I draw upon David Zarefsky’s discussion of presidential rhetoric and its potency to define. In “Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition,” Zarefsky contends presidential political discourse plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and policy by defining key terms and framing issues in specific ways. As put by him, a primary role of presidential rhetoric is to define “political reality” (“Presidential Rhetoric” 611). In so doing, presidents can influence how people understand and respond to various political and

social issues. In his analysis of the ways in which presidents can exercise their power of definition, Zaresky introduces the concept of creating “associations with other terms” which involves “expanding the meaning of a term to cover the new case at hand” (“Presidential Rhetoric” 612). Proclaiming that the continuation of freedom in America was increasingly reliant on the spread and success of freedom abroad, I interpret Bush’s statement as an attempt to expand the traditional understanding of liberty. By linking the concept of American liberty with global freedom, he broadened the definition of liberty to encompass not only the protection of individual rights at home but also the promotion of democratic values abroad. This association framed the War on Terror and U.S. foreign policy as essential components of America’s own national security and ideological mission. This redefinition of liberty in this expansive way, suggested to justify international intervention and rally domestic support for his administration’s foreign policies, positioning the spread of freedom as a moral and strategic imperative integral to the nation’s identity and survival.

Another concept from Zarefsky’s analysis that applies to Bush’s assertion is “frame shifting.” This method involves postulating a different frame of reference from the one in which the subject is normally viewed” (“Presidential Rhetoric” 613). By linking domestic liberty to the spread of freedom globally, this president postulated a different frame of reference for understanding national security and foreign policy. Normally, the preservation of American liberty is enacted through internal governance and domestic policies. However, Bush reframed this notion by suggesting that American liberty is intrinsically tied to global democratic efforts. This shift in perspective invited the audience to see U.S. foreign interventions not as separate or extraneous actions but as vital to maintaining their freedoms.

This president employed the rhetorical devices of presupposition and implicature to implicitly depict liberty in nations led by so-called tyrants and oppressors as failing. These tools can influence the audience to assume further information not explicitly stated by the speaker but inferable from what he or she said. President Bush endeavoured to make his claim convincing because these tools make it difficult for the audience to question the validity of views communicated to them. In *Language, Society and Power*, Linds Thomas et al. explain presuppositions as “background assumptions, embedded in a sentence or phrase, which are taken for granted to be true regardless of whether the whole sentence is true”(Thomas et al. 42). By framing it that way, the president sought to persuade his audience to take that assumption for granted or perceive it as self-evident in order to convey a sense of mission for America and to justify the war he launched against terrorism. By doing this, he attempted to persuade the audience with his claim, which could be open for debate and interpretation.

Bush’s use of presupposition was most likely effective in persuading the audience about the failing status of liberty in other nations ruled by suspect regimes because it also incorporated implicature. As I have argued above, this rhetorical tool also influences the audience to deduce further information not explicitly communicated by a speaker. What is more, implicatures “are much more dependent on shared knowledge between the speaker and the hearer and on the context of the discourse” (Thomas et al. 42). Building upon this idea, Bush, in this inaugural speech and in prior speeches to his second inauguration, portrayed terrorists and tyrant leaders as denying freedom to others (“Bush's Capture of Saddam”; “Address--September 11”). In this sense, the president and his audience had shared knowledge about oppressors, making his remark about the topic of liberty in other nations appear self-evidently true.

Tone: A Message of Gratitude and Resolve

In his 2001 inaugural speech, Bush employed a tone characterised by admiration and optimism. He used rhetorical devices such as alliteration, parallelism, and antithesis to convey a sense of respect and appreciation for the American people, affirming. The tone was reflective of a nation seeking to come together, highlighting shared values and ideals.

In light of the changed landscape during his second term, the tone reflected the challenges and responsibilities posed by the post-9/11 world. Bush's speech exuded a sense of resolute determination towards the subject matter of promoting freedom globally. He conveyed this determination through the use of bold and confident language. I am referring to advancing freedom as Bush's speech subject matter because this ideology dominated Bush's entire speech. William Safire, an author and journalist with *The New York Times*, commented in 2005 that President Bush informed his longstanding chief speechwriter, Michael Gerson, to make the theme of the second inaugural speech centre on the idea of freedom as he left the first cabinet meeting following his re-election. According to Safire, the president said, "I want this to be the freedom speech" ("Bush's 'Freedom Speech'"). Again, the speech incorporated the rhetorical tools of presupposition and implicature to make his ideology persuasive. The president expounded, "the best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world." In this speech act, Bush established an ideological assumption for the audience to take for granted that the work of advancing freedom around the globe was still unfinished - a notion that was shaped by his perspective - and it was America's mission to overcome tyrants by defending human freedom.

Style: The Impact of Bush's Speech Delivery on His Call for Freedom Promotion

I am exploring the style of Bush's 2005 inaugural similarly to how I have explored his 2001 inaugural speech to highlight the changes the 9/11 attacks and war on terror caused to his style of rhetoric. Noting the similarities and differences between these two speeches holds significant implications for understanding how the historical events of 9/11 and the succeeding war on terror influenced Bush's approach to public speaking. By drawing connections between the two speeches, we gain insights into how Bush adapted his communication strategies to address the challenges and demands of a post-9/11 America. President Bush's 2005 inaugural speech consisted of 2071 words (479 words longer than the first). However, perhaps reflective of his personal style, he kept his speech simple, straightforward, and focused on the message of advancing freedom that underscored the importance of this mission. The speech incorporated an intensive use of words that intensified the theme of Bush's speech. For instance, the word "freedom" appeared twenty-seven times, "liberty" fifteen times, and "free" six times.

Not only did the words of Bush's speech text heighten a sense of a Puritan mission for America, but the president's manner of speaking and body gestures emphasised the need for vigorously and proactively promoting freedom. He artfully utilised his tone of voice to accentuate the key points of his speech. He performed some of his sentences in a choppy manner of articulation. By choppy here, I mean he paused abruptly at every main word in the sentence and paused a bit longer before the verb "is" before he paused again at the main word in the complement of the sentence: "the best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world." This technique emphasised each concept and created a rhythm that focused the audience's attention. The impact of this rhetorical technique was evident in the public's reception.

In 2005 Fareed Zakaria, writing for *Newsweek*, highlighted the effectiveness of Bush's sentence called Bush's address one that was "composed for the ages," and argued that it would "live in history as a powerful affirmation of American ideas and ideals." Zakaria highlighted Bush's delivery of this line as a "culmination in style and substance" of his foreign policy vision, arguing that the speech solidified America's role in promoting the expansion of liberty as the best hope for the globe (Zakaria).

Moreover, Bush's framing of liberty as a universal cause also resonated with key figures in political and diplomatic circles. Jim Steinberg, deputy national security adviser under President Clinton, described the statement as "quite remarkable." Speaking to *The Guardian* in 2005, Steinberg acknowledged that Bush's embrace of the idea of global interdependence marked a significant shift in Republican thinking. He explained that Bush's recognition that "tyranny anywhere threaten[ed] freedom anywhere" encapsulated a broader ideological pivot toward accepting the interconnected nature of global freedom and security (Steinberg).

In other sentences, the use of body language reinforced Bush's employment of the disconnected manner of speaking. In contending that "the survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands," President Bush tapped his index finger on the podium at the end of every main word of the sentence he paused at. This way of speaking further heightened the president's main ideas and created a cadence in the remark, making it more memorable to the audience. Elisabeth Bumiller, in her coverage of the inaugural speech in 2005, noted Bush's personal conviction in the profound impact of liberty's ability to bring about significant change, writing that the speech "bore a strong personal stamp of Mr. Bush in its optimism and its belief in the transforming powers of freedom" (Bumiller). This optimism, reinforced by Bush's powerful delivery, added weight to his message. Further emphasising the

memorability of Bush's call, Dick Morris, a political consultant to President Clinton, remarked in *The Hill* that the speech was "great not only for its words, phrases and sounds but for its policy as well." He highlighted that specific line as "fundamentally true," observing that statements like this "just roll off the tongue and lodge in the mind, probably forever" (Morris).

Unification: From Crisis to Commitment

In the 2001 inaugural speech, President Bush aimed to unify the American people by emphasising their virtuous history and shared commitment to American Exceptionalism. He employed antitheses, such as "protect" versus "possess" and "defend" versus "conquer," to intensify America's superiority and moral commitment.

As President Bush began his second term, he, like any other president, faced the challenge of unifying a nation divided by a contentious presidential election. However, as Campbell and Jamieson suggest, the source of national disunity might not always be limited to partisan politics alone. They argue that "partisan politicking is not the only source of division. Occasionally a major crisis or a war creates a disharmony that must be set aside if the president is to govern all the people"(16). I will draw upon this claim to investigate how Bush established a sense of a Puritan mission in order to unify the country in light of the impact of the 9/11 attacks and the contentious War on Terror that he launched.

In order to construct unity, the inaugural speech must unify the audience by recreating a "mutual covenant" that reconstitutes the "audience as the people and constitutes the citizenry as a people in some new way"(Campbell and Jamieson 17). In this sense, Bush sought to unify the nation behind a common cause as a people of freedom. He focused on the ethos of the nation to frame the US response to the attack

as a moral one driven by the nation's character. In his article "Our Mission and Our Moment": George W. Bush and September 11," John Murphy argues that Bush's rhetoric, through the use of "choice of genre, visual imagery, and the creation of a unified American identity, established his authority to "dominate the public interpretations" of the 9/11 events ("Our Mission" 608). This analysis highlights how Bush's speeches in the period following the events of September 11 constructed a narrative that positioned the United States as a nation with a mission to combat terrorism and defend freedom. The author holds that tapping into the profound roots of American heritage, Bush "interpreted the attacks much as a Puritan would have done" and forged the attacks as a "biblical test of a chosen people" ("Our Mission" 611). Similarly his inaugural speech, Bush emphasised the unity and collective mission of the American people. His rhetoric echoed Bush's earlier framing of the 9/11 attacks as a biblical test, highlighting the nation's character and unity in the face of adversity. By reminding the American public of their character and shared purpose, he framed both the attacks and the ongoing fight for freedom as tests of a chosen people.

Murphy's analysis of Bush's rhetoric in the aftermath of the September 11 incident uncovered that he consistently utilised "amplification" to frame threats of Al Qaeda to mobilise public opinion ("Our Mission" 615). As an epideictic speech deploying praise and blame in the event of presidential investiture, Bush in his second inaugural speech commended the nation-abiding values while amplifying the evil of the terrorists. Murphy expounds that Bush amplified the threat of Al Qaeda with vivid descriptions of their actions and intentions to target Christians and Jews, eliminate all Americans, and engage in acts of malevolence and destruction ("Our Mission" 615). In his inaugural, Bush amplified the threat of the terrorists and tyrannies to freedom and democracy by framing it as a global struggle. He described the spread of freedom as a

powerful force, a “fire in the minds of men,” which “burns those who fight its progress.” This metaphor amplified the opposition to freedom as inherently dangerous and destructive, suggesting a clear moral dichotomy between those who support freedom and those who resist it.

In attempting to bring the nation together around the shared ideal of freedom, Bush was not merely persuading his audience but shaping their self-perception and collective identity. In his view, I am drawing upon Murphy’s concept of identification, in which he argues rhetoric “transforms identity” by fostering a shared sense of substance among individuals (“Our Mission” 620). This means that discourse plays a crucial role in shaping collective identity, evolving from the discourses the public commonly experiences. The epideictic act of praise and blame discussed earlier established a distinct moral dichotomy (good Vs. evil) for those who advocate for freedom and those who oppose it, through which the audience was to interpret its identity. In so doing, Bush attempted to reconstruct his audience by “endowing it with the qualities needed to support the war on terror” (“Our Mission” 620). The recurrent inaugural speech theme of national unity emphasised the nation’s commitment to unity and the cause of freedom. This theme has different uses based on what would stand in the way of the nation’s unity. The theme of national unity in Bush’s speech was to “insist that the American people are one people and that their exceptional unity will eventually subdue whatever threatens it” (Ericson 732).

Bush emphasised that the American people are a people who are dedicated to their beliefs and values. This reference to the Constitution had two significant functions. First, he acknowledged the Constitution’s role as the origin of the inaugural ceremony. By doing this, he also exhibited his commitment to the oath itself, implicitly highlighting his commitment to keeping the American people and country safe. Second,

Bush's allusion to the Constitution could have a pivotal impact on the audience in terms of how he reconstituted them because he utilised this term as a unity-creating device. To this end, he might have attempted to use the country's commitment to the Constitution to intensify his reconstitution of the country's commitment to unity and the nation's deep commitments in general. In *The Great American Scaffold: Intertextuality and Identity in American Presidential Discourse*, Frank Austermühl explains the function of references to the Constitution in inaugural speeches. He explains such allusions "serve to fulfil a central function of inaugural addresses in general, i.e., the reconstruction or reconstitution of an American citizenry divided by a long partisan campaign into one American union" (249).

Shared Values: Puritan Legacy and Divine Responsibility

President Bush reaffirmed rights, equality, dignity, democracy, and liberty as shared values. Contrasted with his first inaugural speech, Bush endeavoured to reaffirm the commonly shared values of the nation, emphasising virtues like civility, courage, compassion, and character. These values were presented as the foundation upon which Americans should unite and continue to participate in the greater good under his administration. The first inaugural speech focused on civic virtues, while the second centred on the nation's divine calling, reflecting the shift in emphasis brought about by the changed post-9/11 environment, where national unity and the protection of shared values took on a renewed significance.

The utilisation of Puritanism in American presidential inaugural speeches is significant in shaping the audience's perception of their responsibility towards the nation's mission. Merk explains that "a truer expression of the national spirit was a mission. This was present from the beginning of American history, and is present

clearly today”(26). According to Barbara Hinckley, presidents might use the concept of Puritanism in their speeches as a means to “influence people,” aiming to inspire the public to share their singular focus and vision (130). In this speech, President Bush utilised a narrative of the nation’s past to emphasise its core values. He explained the American mission by drawing it back to the values the Puritans had introduced and spread since their arrival. Their values were equality, human freedom, including freedom of religious practices, and independent government. Corbett and Corbett-Hemeyer explain that this set of values constituted the legacy of the Puritans, which contributed to the groundwork for democracy in America (38). By bringing back the American mission to the values introduced and propagated by the Puritans, President Bush imbued his fellow citizens with a strong sense of the American mission to protect these values. The recurring inaugural themes of the American Mission and civic virtue reaffirm these deeply held national values and served as a call to Americans to answer the nation’s call and make sacrifices for the greater good to maintain their shared values. Through the theme of civic virtue, “the new president professes confidence that the American people will, as they always have in the past, answer his call” (Ericson 729).

Proposed Political Principles: Advancing America as a Preeminent Global Power

There was a notable shift in focus in Bush’s second inaugural speech compared to his first inaugural speech. While the first inaugural speech underscored domestic policies, such as education reform, Social Security, and tax reduction, the second inaugural speech primarily revolved around a foreign policy agenda. The second inaugural speech provided insights into how President Bush adapted his agenda to address the dramatically changed international landscape post-9/11, positioning

America as a preeminent global power with a moral duty to advance democracy and liberty worldwide.

Through the recurring inaugural themes of general policy principles and the American mission, he proposed set America as a model for the world as it was carrying out a mission for the betterment of the entire world, or as Madsen puts it in the Puritans' words, "for the entire community"(6). In doing this, the president implicitly echoed the renowned expression of John Winthrop, the Puritan leader, to place America as "a City upon a Hill. The eyes of people are upon us"(Winthrop). The nature of the American mission I am referring to in Bush's speech was similar to the one US presidents used at the end of World War II to address foreign policy agenda. As Eriscon explains, this nature of the American mission focused on "positively promoting democracy around the world"(737). This mission was central to the American vision for global harmony and international relations.

Throughout his speech, President Bush did not explicitly state who America's enemies were. Instead, he used words such as "tyranny" and "tyrant" to describe enemies. Todd Purdum, a writer for *The New York Times*, commented in 2005 on Bush's refrain from clearly specifying or mentioning the enemies and the political benefit for him. Purdum wrote:

President Bush began his second term without uttering the words Iraq, Afghanistan, Sept. 11 or terrorism. But those omissions seemed to be precisely the point, allowing him to cast the crises and controversies of his first four years - and the ones he welcomes in the next - as a seamless struggle in defense of the nation's founding creed: freedom. (Purdum)

Bush's avoidance of articulating clear and specific policies for fighting specific enemies was to make them appear uncontroversial and not be misunderstood by his audience. Doing this allowed him to avoid possible national divisions, which was important for his political support. Instead, Bush focused on connecting his people to the nation's core creed of promoting liberty.

How Bush emphasised America's role in the world's pursuit of liberty and freedom could reveal his doctrine of casting America as a superior global force in the context of the global war on terror. This was evident in how he spent most of his speech advocating America's mission for spreading democracy around the world. In *Presidents: A Biographical Dictionary*, Neil Hamilton comments on how energetically Bush emphasised that it was America's role to carry out the world mission to liberate the world. Hamilton argues, "Bush seems to cast the worldwide pursuit of liberty and democracy as more than rhetoric; it had become a mission" (392). Hamilton elaborates on how Bush's depiction of America's global role in the war on terror serves as a proclamation of his doctrine. According to Hamilton, Bush's doctrine revolves around two crucial elements: "First, the United States would wage preventive war against any group or country that threatened American interest, and it would maintain military supremacy by preventing any other nation from emerging its rival" (389).

President Bush was most likely implicitly underlining the idea that the Americans' ancestors (the Puritans) were God's chosen people with a world mission, or as Madsen puts it, "the elected nation" was to "work the salvation not only of individuals but also entire communities and nations" (3). This reinforced the idea that America would lead the charge in advocating for all efforts to end tyranny, as their forefathers did in the Old World.

President Bush employed the device of antithesis to emphasise the moral difference between oppression and freedom. He portrayed freedom as an inborn right for people that oppression would deprive them of. President Bush quoted a line from a letter that Abraham Lincoln (before he became president) wrote on April 6, 1859, to Henry L. Pierce (a United States representative) to intensify and reinforce the moral difference between oppression and freedom (“Letter to Pierce”). Bush argued that “ the rulers of outlaw regimes can know that we still believe as Abraham Lincoln did: ‘Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves and, under the rule of a just God, cannot long retain it.’” The excerpt Bush quoted was in the letter Lincoln wrote to decline an invitation to a celebration in Boston honouring Thomas Jefferson’s birthday. In the letter, he examined the political history of Jefferson’s party in connection to the ideas of personal rights, slavery, and a free society. Lincoln addressed the enduring contributions to American society Jefferson had made. He criticised slavery as incompatible with American ideals. He also commented on how Jefferson’s political party successors rejected the core values of their founder - liberty and equality of all people. Bush quoted Lincoln to argue that reformers of democracy targeted with persecution, exile, or imprisonment must be the “future leaders” of their countries, rather than the “outlaw regimes.”

Presidential Role: Exemplifying Duty and Embracing Constitutional Constraints

In his second inaugural speech, there were distinct shifts in the way he addressed the presidential role compared to his first inaugural speech. While both speeches emphasised the importance of understanding the responsibilities and limitations of the presidency, the second speech underlined the heightened sense of duty and the need to embrace constitutional constraints in the face of evolving threats.

Bush acknowledged the significance of his position and the authority it held, employing the syntactic feature of parallelism in which he utilised a three-part sentence to clarify his understanding of the presidency requirements, acknowledge the weight of threats facing America, and evoke a sense of the president's humility. He professed, "I am grateful for the honor of this hour, mindful of the consequential times in which we live, and determined to fulfil the oath that I have sworn and you have witnessed." This rhetorical technique not only created a rhythm that would appeal to the ears of the audience but also emphasised the importance and gravity of the moment, as well as the president's sense of duty and commitment to fulfilling his oath.

The theme of seeking popular support conveyed President Bush's acknowledgement of the limitations of his presidential office. By addressing the national security topic and stating "From all of you, I have asked patience in the hard task of securing America, which you have granted in good measure," Bush not only recognised the public's role in the challenges of national security but also revealed his need for their patience and support. This heightened the inherent limitations of the presidency and highlighted that even the highest office requires the cooperation and understanding of the people. The two inaugural themes of calling upon a providential supreme being and the American mission further heightened the president's understanding of the constitutional limitations of his presidency. Bush referred to a higher deity as a source of guidance and support for the country's mission of spreading human freedom. In this sense, the president evoked a sense of the American people as God's agents rather than God's chosen people.

Although Bush claimed Americans did not "consider [themselves] a chosen nation," the ideology that America was a chosen nation could still be evident in his speech. It can still be interpreted as God choosing America to advance his will in the

world. In *Christian America and the Kingdom of God*, Richard Hughes supports this reading by stating:

The inescapable conclusion is this: God chose the United States to advance his will for the world. If we offer the most innocuous interpretation of Bush's words possible, it would be this: The United States has rightly discerned God's will for the world and seeks to act as God's agent in that regard. Either way, it is clear that Bush believed that American foreign policy was a response to a divine directive. (164)

Implications for the Inauguration Speech Genre

In this chapter, I have used close poetic reading techniques to analyse President George W. Bush's 2005 inaugural speech and investigate the impact of historical context change on his style of rhetoric. Specifically, I scrutinised how President Bush constructed a global mission for the United States to advance freedom and democracy around the world, shaped by the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, which echoed aspects of the Puritans' divine mission. In this investigation, I have explored certain artistic and rhetorical tools through which Bush fervently promoted freedom and democracy around the world to put an end to tyranny and oppression. These include mood, sound repetitions, presupposition, implicature, allusion, tone, antithesis, style, epithets, references to the Constitution, rhetorical reference, personification, parallelism, and antithesis. This comprehensive analysis revealed the eloquent and calculated manner in which President Bush advocated the values of freedom and democracy, positioning the United States as a force for positive change in the world while emphasising the importance of historical context in shaping the rhetoric of a nation's leader.

The analysis of President Bush's 2001 and 2005 inaugural speeches within the genre framework sheds light on the dynamic nature of the American inauguration speech genre. As discussed in the Introduction, any individual instance of a genre text, such as an inaugural speech, exists in relation to its antecedents, conventions, and the repetitions of text and context. These two speeches bear a connection to the historical traditions and expectations associated with the American inauguration speech genre, while also introducing variations that mark their continuity and new directions. It is also the same speaker delivering a second instance of the genre in both continuity and contrast with the earlier speech.

The examination of Bush's 2001 inaugural speech exhibits that he strategically aimed to reposition the Republican Party, which had faced negative public perception, particularly in terms of its concern for the welfare of the less fortunate. This highlights an example of how the genre of the American inauguration speech can adapt and evolve in response to the imperatives of the moment, reflecting the political and social climate of the time. In contrast, Bush's 2005 inaugural speech reveals a shift in style and focus. Against the backdrop of the post-9/11 era, characterised by fear and uncertainty and the lived experience of war, Bush evoked a sense of mission akin to that of the Puritans. This reinforces that the genre of the American inauguration speech is not static but rather subject to the imperatives of the moment, taking into account the specific historical context and the need to address pressing issues and national concerns. Therefore, the analysis of Bush's two inaugural speeches not only highlights the genre's capacity for adaptation and continuity but also emphasises how Bush's poetics distinguishes him from other presidents; he embraced innovation within the confines of tradition and addressed the unique demands of his time. They reveal that

the American inauguration speech genre is shaped by tradition and innovation, the influence of historical antecedents, and the demands of the present moment.

President George W. Bush's first and second inaugural speeches provide valuable insights into how public language constructs and communicates meaning. By examining these speeches as akin to poetic texts and drawing upon the inauguration genre theory, I uncover the multifaceted nature of public language and its impact on constructing and conveying meaning. In general, the analysis of President Bush's inaugural speeches suggests that public language constructs and communicates meaning through the deliberate (or otherwise) utilisation of poetic devices, strategic appeals to emotions and shared values, and the skilful crafting of speeches that resonate with the audience. These speeches demonstrate how the genre of the American inaugural speech serves as a platform for American presidents to shape public discourse, establish their vision, and engage with the public on a deeper level.

By employing rhetorical devices that evoke specific moods, tap into cultural references and shape the overall tone of the message, Bush's first inaugural address illustrates how public language constructs meaning. In his second inaugural speech, Bush took on a slightly different approach to utilising the devices. For example, his use of allusions to historical and religious references, coupled with rhetorical techniques such as parallelism and antithesis, served to amplify the significance of the mission and convey a sense of urgency. This reveals how public language communicates meaning by drawing on historical and cultural references, employing rhetorical techniques to enhance the persuasive impact, and constructing a narrative that resonates with the audience's shared values.

Chapter 4: President Barack Obama's First Inaugural Speech: A Rhetoric of Reminiscence

Chapter Overview

As this chapter explores the rhetoric of a very different president, I have attempted to indicate what an analysis of President Obama's first inaugural speech suggests about the genre more widely and how it shapes the construction and communication of meaning through public language. Given the unique context of this speech as being delivered by the first African-American to be elected president, this analysis will provide valuable insights into how this speech might relate to its antecedents and rhetorical conventions and how it might vary to respond to its imperatives.

In this chapter, I investigate how President Barack Obama employed rhetoric that evoked what I will describe as a strategy of reminiscence to highlight the nation's perceived imperfections to inspire its pursuit of progress and improvement. I use the term "reminiscence rhetoric" in this analysis to refer to a rhetorical style that political public speakers may employ to evoke a nostalgic longing for the past. President Obama was evoking reminiscence as a rhetorical strategy by invoking the collective memory of Americans' ancestors to highlight their past sacrifices, unwavering principles, and enduring values. While this analysis primarily focuses on Obama's use of "reminiscence rhetoric," I will also examine how he incorporated the central theme of hope in his speech, as it played a significant role in shaping the overall message and impact. Investigating both aspects provides an understanding of the rhetorical strategies of the speech and their potential effects on the audience.

This chapter contends that although Obama's rhetoric aimed to foster positive feelings by amplifying a longing for the past, it is also important to consider that such rhetorical strategies, which evoke or heighten attachments to a better future, might be damaging by creating unrealistic expectations and desires. In her book *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant explores the concept of optimism and how it can sometimes be cruel or harmful. The author argues that people might hold on to optimistic attachments or fantasies that can be detrimental to their well-being or hinder their ability to confront difficult realities. These attachments notwithstanding their capacity to cause suffering can provide a sense of stability or hope in an uncertain world. Berlant contends that "optimism is cruel when the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving" (2). She explains that if "the cruelty of an attachment is experienced by someone/some group, even in a subtle fashion, the fear is that the loss of the promising object/scene itself will defeat the capacity to have any hope about anything"(24).

Given that the use of emotional attachments in literary works that Berlant theorises can cause harm to the audience, this sense of rhetorical damage can be further discussed in relation to Lim's notion of presidential anti-intellectualism, a defining trait of the contemporary presidency. This anti-intellectualism, according to Lim, "denigrates the intellect and the intellectuals rather than intelligence"(*The Anti-Intellectual* xii). In his book, *The Anti-Intellectual Presidency*, Lim argues that presidential rhetoric has increasingly become anti-intellectual, characterised by a decline in complexity, depth, and substance over time. The author contends that "while presidents talk a lot, they say very little that contributes constructively to public deliberation" (*The Anti-Intellectual* x). He examines how presidents from George

Washington to George W. Bush have simplified their language and appeals to align with populist sentiments, which has implications for public discourse and democratic engagement. Lim's analysis highlights the trend towards more emotionally charged and less intellectually rigorous presidential speeches. He claims that the presidents employ anti-intellectual strategies in the form of rhetoric that is "linguistically simplistic, reliant on platitudes or partisan slogans, short on argument, and long on emotive and human-interest appeals" (*The Anti-Intellectual* xi).

The inauguration speeches investigated in this thesis as an epideictic type of rhetoric can fall under Lim's categories of presidential anti-intellectualism. This is because on the day of their inaugurations presidents propose abstract policies which lack specific details on their implementation. This strategy corresponds with Lim's argument that "a major anti-intellectualist strategy is to fudge and to equivocate by the use of platitudes and abstract concepts" (*The Anti-Intellectual* xii). Moreover, the examination of inaugural addresses in this project emphasises that they tend to be emotionally intense. These two points discussed above exhibit that this research project shares the idea that the contemporary presidential speech can be classified as an anti-intellectual discourse, however, it does not approve of Lim's notion that anti-intellectual discourse reflects a decay in contemporary American presidential rhetoric. It takes this stance because the poetics approach utilised in this study is not only concerned with what the presidents say but how they say them. In this light, my research focuses on the effectiveness and aesthetics of presidential political rhetoric in fulfilling and delivering presidents' messages to the audience even though their speeches may be overly linguistically simplistic discourse that is full of platitudes, political slogans and abstract concepts.

As discussed in previous chapters, the use of memorable and repetitive phrases, such as Kennedy's famous "ask not" or Bush's "America at its best," demonstrated that while these phrases may appear linguistically simple, they were crafted to be rhetorically effective, capturing the audience's attention and resonating with them. This strategic use of language, far from signalling a decay in presidential rhetoric, highlights the rhetorical craft of appealing to a broad audience and reinforcing central messages.

Other critics have explored Obama's utilisation of the rhetoric of reminiscence by focusing on different ideas from the American heritage (Frank "The Prophetic Voice"; Rowland; Rowland and Jones). In "Recasting the American Dream and American Politics: Barack Obama's Keynote Address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention," Robert Rowland and John Jones investigate the ways in which Obama attempted to transform the evocation of the American Dream from being a conservative narrative to a liberal one through the use of "narrative preferences" (428). According to them, the speech literally excited millions because Obama seemed to provide a remarkably new vision of the American Dream (433). The authors argue that although Obama's conception of the American Dream was comparable to that of Ronald Reagan, there were key differences. While Reagan emphasised "personal values" and downplayed "communitarian values," Obama inverted this balance (424).

While Rowland and Jones have explored Obama's redefinition of the American Dream, my analysis focuses on how Obama deploys rhetorical and poetic devices to connect past ideals with present challenges. By strategically invoking nostalgia for American values and sacrifices, Obama bridges historical continuity with a hopeful vision for the future. This approach reveals how the aesthetic and rhythmic qualities of his speech amplify its emotional resonance.

Context: Eloquent Oratory, Historic Milestone, and Political Landscape

President Obama delivered his first inaugural speech on Tuesday, 20 January 2009 (see Appendix 3). The context of this speech was significant for the analysis of this thesis for two reasons. The first was that Obama was already a highly eloquent political speaker. He was considered to have a gift for language and masterful rhetorical strategies. This investigation of Obama's first inaugural speech as akin to poetry conducted in this chapter highlights any artistic and rhetorical nuances he displayed that marked a divergence from his predecessor.

As an exceptionally fluent public speaker, some commentators have considered Obama more eloquent than any American president since Ronald Reagan. In "Obama's Mastery of Rhetoric and Modern Media," Joseph Duggan, a former speechwriter for President George H.W. Bush, argues that Obama's command of rhetoric is the primary reason for his election as president-elect. He claims Obama was "a better rhetorician than any President or any other major presidential candidate since Reagan"(1). Duggan notes that Obama, similarly to Reagan, demonstrated considerable effectiveness in video presentations in that he had "a cool, nonthreatening persona on the video screen" (1). Further, in comparison to Lincoln, Duggan maintains that while Obama was not the reincarnation of Lincoln, he shared more similarities with Lincoln in terms of character than with Reagan. He elucidates that Obama was a "lanky, ambitious, eloquent, personable, intellectually interesting lawyer who after just a few years in the Illinois legislature in Springfield had come to believe he possessed a special calling to heal the Union." Duggan adds that Obama shared with Lincoln the "now-rare capacity to think and speak at the same time, and to speak extemporaneously in full sentences and paragraphs"(1). This likeness in character underscores the similar qualities Obama and

Lincoln held in their ability to connect with the public through their rhetoric and personality.

Duggan's commentary provides valuable context for understanding Obama's communication style. While Duggan's remarks are insightful, they remain somewhat general, focusing on Obama's overall fluency and appeal. My analysis builds on Duggan's observations by offering a more detailed examination of Obama's rhetorical strategies in his inaugural speech. For example, this chapter investigates in depth Duggan's observation about Obama's effectiveness in video presentations by exploring the verbal and non-verbal cues—such as his deliberate use of pauses and gestures—enhanced his connection with the audience, emphasising both his eloquence and his ability to evoke emotional responses.

Furthermore, while Duggan notes Obama's parallels to Lincoln, particularly in terms of rhetorical style, this chapter extends that comparison by examining how Obama strategically incorporated Lincoln's speeches. For example, my analysis highlights Obama's use of reminiscence and historical analogy, showing how he invoked Lincoln's legacy to unite the nation and reinforce themes of hope and renewal. This goes beyond Duggan's commentary by offering a more nuanced exploration of how Obama's longer and more sophisticated sentence structures reflected Obama's rhetorical command. In this way, this chapter not only complements Duggan's work but also provides a focused understanding of Obama's rhetorical mastery.

Marta Degani also comments on Obama's linguistic flexibility of language usage which he displayed as a typical feature of his rhetorical style during his first run for the presidency. She explains his ability to “switch his mode of expression from Standard American English to African American Vernacular English” allowed him to engage diverse audiences effectively, a skill evident throughout his presidential

campaign speeches (2). Degani, in *Framing the Rhetoric of a Leader: An Analysis of Obama's Election Campaign Speeches* investigates Obama's 2008 campaign speeches from a cognitive semantics perspective. This book explores how Obama consistently frames political issues in line with nurturant values and uses metaphorical language and rhetorical strategies to engage diverse audiences (5). Degani's analysis offers a multi-layered examination of Obama's rhetoric, emphasising his ability to frame political discourse through cognitive models like Lakoff's "Strict Father" and "Nurturant Parent" models (4).

While my analysis of Obama's first inaugural speech in this chapter does not extend Degani's examination of whether he adhered to Lakoff's "Nurturant Parent" model, I delve into this aspect more fully in my analysis of his second inaugural speech in Chapter Five. However, this chapter draws upon Degani's observation that Obama was "credited with very skilful use of linguistic devices throughout the 2008 election campaign"(2). Her work not only identifies the values conveyed in Obama's campaign rhetoric but also examines the strategies he used to communicate those values effectively. Thus, her analysis provides details on the "strategies that he employed to give voice to the values in the context of his electoral narrative" (6). Building upon her insights, my analysis shifts the focus from Obama's campaign rhetoric to his inaugural address, investigating the strategies he used to evoke reminiscence during the ceremony of investiture. By extending Degani's framework to a different rhetorical context, this chapter contributes a new dimension to the study of Obama's rhetoric, offering insights into how he framed issues and communicated meaning in his inaugural speech.

Power in Words: The Stories Behind Barack Obama's Speeches, from the State House to the White House is a collection of 18 of Obama's most memorable speeches from 2002 to 2008. Each speech is accompanied by political analysis, historical

context, and behind-the-scenes commentary from the speechwriters. The book provides insights into how these speeches were crafted, highlighting the careful attention paid to rhetoric and message delivery. It emphasises Obama's eloquence and the strategic thinking behind his communication, giving readers a deeper understanding of the rhetorical impact of his words.

In the Forward to this book, Ted Sorensen notes that the careful compilation and analysis of Obama's campaign speeches in this book provided the earliest signs that he "would stand with Jefferson, Lincoln, Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, and Kennedy as a president whose oratory the world would hear and remember"(ii). Ted argues that some of Obama's 2008 campaign speeches "seemed aimed more at members of university faculty or newspaper editorial board than typical American voters" (i). The claim implies that Obama's 2008 campaign speeches were aimed at an audience familiar with academic or journalistic discourse, showcasing his ability to engage diverse audiences.

Ted emphasises the significance of Obama's use of rhetorical themes, commenting that Obama symbolised "change, not only with his skin color, his youth, and his newness to the American national political scene but also with his fresh approach to politics embodied in the themes of his speeches" (ii). With a particular focus on the idea of rhetorical themes, Mary Berry and Josh Gottheimer, the authors, highlight the remarkable consistency with his rhetoric, observing "the language and the themes that had characterized his speeches since his first state senate campaign nearly a decade earlier"(10). They identify the following recurrent themes among his campaign speeches: "Unity, responsibility, and change" (10).

Building on Berry and Gottheimer's identification of recurring themes in Obama's campaign speeches, my analysis extends their observations by examining how

these themes—such as unity, responsibility, and change—are carried over into Obama’s inaugural speech. While Berry and Gottheimer highlight the consistency of Obama’s rhetoric throughout his campaign, my analysis probes how these themes are adapted to the ceremonial context of the inauguration. By investigating this thematic continuity, my work demonstrates the power of political language not only to resonate with various audiences but also to evolve and adapt to different rhetorical situations. This approach deepens the understanding of how Obama’s rhetoric maintains its core values while strategically shifting its tone and emphasis to suit the formality and gravity of an inaugural address.

The second reason that made the context of President Obama’s first inaugural speech significant was that his inauguration as the president of the United States in 2009 was a historic moment in America because he was the first non-white ever to be sworn into the White House. This circumstance had important implications for American society and politics in terms of the racism that emerged against the first African American running for president. For example, Obama’s 2008 candidacy brought up fears, resentments, and racial prejudices in American society, amplified by post-9/11 anxieties. Some hosts on *Fox News* had falsely accused him of being a Muslim, capitalising on those heightened suspicions; see, for example (Michael Giardina 137). Because of his skin colour, there were several targeted attacks on Obama’s patriotism, religious beliefs and citizenship status in the media; he was treated as a suitable representative for the African-American electorates but not suitable for the entire American electorate.

In “A Black Man in the White House? The Role of Racism and Patriotism in the 2008 Presidential Election,” Christopher Parker explores how racism and patriotism influenced the 2008 presidential election and affected Obama’s candidacy. The author

analyses how race and nationalism intersected during Obama's campaign, shedding light on the broader social and political challenges he faced due to his identity as the first African-American candidate with a serious chance at winning the presidency. This article draws on empirical data and provides an in-depth overview of how racial and patriotic sentiments played a role in shaping voters' perceptions of Obama. By examining the ways in which racism and patriotism affected support for Obama among White voters, Parker offers a critical perspective on the racial dynamics at play in American politics during this historic election.

Parker argues that both race and class were recurrent themes during the presidential campaign. He explains that these themes were "a consistent narrative used by Obama's opponents." Hillary Clinton, Obama's rival in the Democratic primaries, and Republicans "in the general election used racial references to attack the Illinois senator, citing him for his perceived inability to connect to real working Americans" (194). Lynn Westmoreland, a Georgia Republican, employed the "term uppity to describe Obama, a clear racial reference" and other Republicans proposed that "his middle name, Hussein, branded him a terrorist" (194).

The analysis of Obama's inaugural speech in this chapter expands upon Parker's concept of "universal rhetoric," which suggests that Black candidates, by avoiding explicit racial appeals, can run a "deracialized" campaign to appeal to White voters (198). While their study focuses on Obama's campaign rhetoric, my analysis shifts the focus to his inaugural speech, highlighting how this unifying rhetoric continues to diminish racial tensions in the ceremonial context of his presidency. By exploring how Obama's inaugural speech sought to unite the nation, my work provides deeper insights into how this type of rhetoric can be deployed to transcend racial divisions and create a sense of national unity.

Additionally, my analysis builds on their discussion of “symbolic racism,” which posits that Whites, rather than overtly claiming Black “inferiority,” argue that “Blacks violate core U.S. values” (196). By comparing how the four presidents, including Obama, attempted to reaffirm shared American values in their inaugural speeches, this thesis amplifies the understanding of the unifying nature of inaugural rhetoric. Through this lens, the inaugural address is not only a reflection of a president’s vision but also a strategic effort to align with widely held national values, thus reinforcing the president’s broader political goals.

In “The Cost of Racial Animus on a Black Candidate: Evidence Using Google Search Data,” Seth Stephens-Davidowitz analysed Google search query data containing racially charged words against Obama. He contends that racial prejudice against Obama negatively affected the percentage of his presidential election votes. Stephens-Davidowitz illustrates that “continuing racial animus in the United States appears to have cost Obama roughly four percentage points of the national popular vote in both 2008 and 2012”(26). These arguments about the continuing racial bias against non-white people in America can provide important insights into how President Obama attempted to recount the nation’s past and his own cultural background as the first non-white president in American history to encourage his people to reject racism.

Mood: Unveiling the Power of Nostalgia for Collective Responsibility

I read the mood, the overall feeling, that Obama’s speech evoked for the audience as one of nostalgia, heightening a sense of longing for a celebrated past. This rhetoric of reminiscence is evident in Obama’s use of historical references and analogies. Scholars such as Zarefsky have analysed Obama’s use of Lincoln and historical analogy to create a connection between his vision and the revered past.

Zarefsky's insights, particularly in *Political Argumentation in the United States: Historical and Contemporary Studies* demonstrate how Obama's rhetorical strategies draw on historical figures to evoke a sense of continuity and shared values. The author examines how political leaders craft their messages, the strategies they use to persuade audiences, and the role of argumentation in shaping public discourse. In terms of Obama's utilisation of the historical analogy, with a particular focus on Lincoln, Zarefsky comments on Obama's Election Night speech, claiming that he employed analogies to "make a fortiori arguments," a form of analogy that, according to Zarefsky, Obama reli[ed] heavily on" (*Political Argumentation* 357, 379). This use of historical analogy indicated that "if Lincoln could surmount greater obstacles, we should be able to surmount lesser ones. This is a message of challenge and hope, not hubris" (*Political Argumentation* 375).

Zarefsky maintains that historical analogies can function as "templates for thinking about the present. They reframe our perspective and shift our focus" (*Political Argumentation* 377). By highlighting these perspectives, this chapter not only aligns with Zarefsky's writing on Obama's uses of Lincoln and historical analogies but also extends the current scholarship on this rhetorical use of reminiscence and its emotional effect in Obama's first inauguration address.

Additionally, Murphy's analysis in "Barack Obama, the Exodus Tradition, and the Joshua Generation" further elucidates how Obama's use of historical narratives fosters a sense of communal identity and purpose across time and place. Murphy explores how Barack Obama employed the Exodus narrative and the concept of the Joshua Generation to frame his political rhetoric, particularly during his 2008 presidential campaign. The author argues that Obama strategically evoked these biblical themes to connect with African American audiences, to situate himself within a

broader historical context, and to inspire a sense of continuity. This use of religious and historical analogy can be useful in crafting a narrative of hope, progress, and collective responsibility. According to the author, Senator Obama endeavoured to teach “his audience how to interpret his campaign and American public life through the performance of Joshua and the renewal of covenant” (“The Exodus” 388). Murphy discusses Obama’s January 20, 2008, King Day address in Atlanta, in which he connected the biblical story of “Jericho” to the Civil Rights movement, emphasising unity (“The Exodus” 394). Obama proclaimed, “God had a plan for his people. He told them to stand together and march together around the city,” highlighting the importance of speaking “with one voice” to overcome obstacles. Obama reiterated this by quoting Martin Luther King: “‘Unity is the great need of the hour’... Unity is how we shall overcome” (“Ebenezer Baptist”).

In this light, the senator, then, Obama expanded the Exodus narrative into the Promised Land, choosing not to assume the role of Moses but instead embody Joshua (“The Exodus” 402). He created a justification for his candidacy using elements from the Exodus tradition. This endeavour, in turn, revealed much about the role of this narrative in American public discourse. Building upon such insights into the use of historical and religious analogies, the analysis in this chapter provides a deeper investigation of the ways in which Obama’s inaugural speech employed nostalgic elements to unite and inspire his audience.

Obama’s deliberate intention to immediately heighten the theme of ancestral connection made it a prominent aspect of his speech right from the customary opening remark. This was a technique Obama used to attract the audience’s attention to the main theme of the speech. Several researchers have examined additional speeches delivered by Obama to investigate his consistent strategy of introducing the main ideas

of his speeches right from the outset. In their article, “Start-up Rhetoric in Eight Speeches of Barack Obama,” the authors investigate the rhetorical strategies Barack Obama employed in the initial five minutes of eight speeches from May to September 2009. Their analysis highlights how Obama navigated different settings, audiences, themes and purposes using both consistent and variable rhetorical techniques. The authors examine specific linguistic elements like articulation rate, pauses, and the use of fillers, demonstrating Obama’s adaptability to different speaking environments while maintaining a sense of orderliness in his language (O’Connell et al. 393). Their research provides a detailed glance at Obama’s rhetorical performance, especially how he adjusted his delivery to suit different contexts, which underscores his effectiveness as a speaker. The authors argue that Obama “has been praised for being aware of the importance of beginning strong” (394). They explain in their study that “the first minute of each speech is crucial” and contend that Obama “uses this first minute, beginning with the first audible utterance on his part, to skilfully establish a deferential, gracious mood by his emphasis of themes across the board”(406). The author of this study found that the most prominent theme in Obama’s speeches is his recurring emphasis on “gratitude” (406).

This chapter builds on the insights from O’Connell’s study by demonstrating Obama’s use of rhetorical strategies to foreground the key theme of ancestral sacrifices in his inaugural speech. While the study by O’Connell primarily focuses on Obama’s start-up rhetoric and adaptability in different settings, my analysis adds depth by exploring how these strategies are employed in the highly formal context of his inauguration. Additionally, this chapter offers a detailed perspective on Obama’s rhetorical excellence by examining how he utilised various aesthetic devices to perform the recurrent functions of the inaugural genre. Furthermore, while O’Connell

emphasises the importance of non-verbal elements in engaging the audience, this chapter extends that discussion by exploring the non-verbal cues (body gestures in the style section) in reinforcing the central themes of the nation's past, unity, responsibility, and change in his first inaugural speech. This analysis highlights the nexus between verbal and non-verbal communication, contributing to a deeper understanding of the overall effectiveness of Obama's inaugural address.

In his inaugural speech, Obama opened with the powerful statement, "My fellow citizens, I stand here today humbled by the task before us, grateful for the trust you have bestowed, mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors." This deliberate mention of the ancestors right at the beginning of the speech, breaking from the customary introductory remark, served to underscore the central theme of the nation's past that Obama would continuously emphasise throughout his speech. By creating an atmosphere of nostalgia, the president endeavoured to prompt the American audience to reflect on the sacrifices made by their forebears.

In this narrative of the inaugural oath encompassing significant historical moments, President Obama refrained from explicitly mentioning himself within this longstanding tradition. Instead, he chose to state that "forty-four Americans have now taken the Presidential oath." This choice reflected a broader rhetorical strategy, often utilised by Obama and other American presidents, to emphasise collective identity over personal achievement. As observed by scholars, presidential speeches frequently avoid individualism, focusing instead on shared national ideals and collective responsibility (Beasley *You, the People* 3). For example, Ian Reifowiz commends Obama's presidential rhetoric of collectivism, contending, "his uniquely American vision, and the evolution of an identity and a personality uniquely suited to bring Americans together"(xi). By omitting a personal statement like "I, the forty-fourth American

president,” Obama subtly redirected attention from his role to the nation’s heritage and the continuity of democratic institutions.

This technique aligns with the epideictic function of inaugural addresses, which often highlight collective responsibility over individual accomplishment. In employing this strategy, Obama employed the poetic device of diversion, rather than the meiosis or litotes of understatement. Abrams explains “meiosis” as a figure of “lessening which deliberately represents something as very much less in magnitude or importance than it really is, or is ordinarily considered to be”(120). While this rhetorical move would seem modest, it also presented a potential tension. By downplaying the president’s personal role, Obama elevated national values but inadvertently lessened the perceived importance of his individual leadership.

Drawing on scholars like Campbell and Jamieson, this strategy can carry the unintended risk of diminishing the symbolic power of the presidency. They argue that presidents must carefully balance demonstrating strong leadership while acknowledging the constitutional limits of the office, to avoid appearing as “inept or enfeebled leaders” (25). Thus, while Obama’s statement advanced unity and emphasised national continuity, it also risked depersonalising the office by shifting too much focus to the collective over the individual.

Tone: Balancing Sorrowful Reflection with Optimistic Resolve

President Obama evoked two different tones in his speech towards the current situation of the country and the forebears. Obama’s speech cast a sombre light on the prevailing state of affairs in the nation, encouraging Americans to embrace their responsibility and come together in collective action. The president professed, “Homes have been lost, jobs shed, businesses shuttered. Our health care is too costly. Our

schools fail too many.” In this context, Obama employed the rhetorical devices of asyndeton, ellipsis, and anaphora to amplify the devastating consequences of irresponsibility and lack of unity. By asyndeton, I mean the intentional omission of conjunctions between a number of connected clauses. Cuddon defines it as “a rhetorical device where conjunctions, articles and even pronouns are omitted” (59). The omission of the subordinate conjunction “and” between the connected clauses in Obama’s remark caused them to gain a hurried rhythm, which would enable the audience to grasp the multitude of losses incurred due to these factors. This remark also employed the literary device of ellipsis, which involved omitting words beyond conjunctions. I will also use Cuddon’s definition of this term because it aptly describes its usage in Obama’s remark. He explains ellipsis as “a rhetorical figure in which one or more words are omitted”(256). In Obama’s sentence about the economic failures, the omission of the verb “have been” in the two last connected clauses created a heightened sense of urgency and a hurried rhythm. Despite the omission, the audience would easily grasp the intended meaning, allowing Obama to succinctly draw attention to the list of economic ills highlighted.

Following Obama’s inaugural speech, there was significant commentary and response to his address. Numerous Americans believed that the speech delivered the necessary hope and promise for a brighter future. For example, *The New York Times* declared that Obama’s speech clearly articulated his perspective on “the nation’s problems and how he [intended] to fix them and, unlike Mr. Bush, the necessary sacrifices he [would] ask of all Americans.” This article asserted that the address “filled [Americans] with hope that with Mr. Obama’s help, this battered nation [would] be able to draw together and mend itself (“Opinion”). Similarly, *The Washington Post* praised Obama’s “sober acknowledgement of the perils that the nation fac[ed],”

alongside his unwavering assurance that the issues would be resolved (*The Washington Post*). Moreover, *The Times* commented on Obama's inaugural, asserting it was "powerful speech, delivered at a moment in American history when every word could be laden with meaning, and every word was" (*The Times*).

In *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, Henry Fowler argues that "shortness is a merit in words" because "short words are not only handier to use, but more powerful in effect; extra syllables reduce, not increase, vigour" (344). Fowler's assertion that brevity enhances power mirrors Obama's use of asyndeton and ellipsis. In 2009, Susan Reynolds, a writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, provided a commentary on how writers responded to Obama's inaugural. For example, she highlighted that Ted Widmer, President Clinton's speechwriter, praised Obama's inaugural, noting his "tight language, short sentences and strong images." Furthermore, Reynolds reported that Peter Robinson, President's Reagan speechwriter, commended the rhetorical style of Obama's inaugural speech, asserting that "this is what writing can do: make the complex sound like plain speaking, contain and channel the emotions, create a kind of bridge from the heart to the mind" (Reynolds). These analyses suggest that Obama's strategic use of ellipsis and asyndeton likely enhanced the speech's clarity and emotional resonance, making his message more accessible to the audience. In this light, the combination of ellipsis and asyndeton likely magnified the effect of Obama's rhetoric, effectively capturing the audience's attention and conveying the gravity of the situation in a manner that encouraged reflection and action.

The president underscored the gravity of America's challenges through the effective use of a powerful rhetorical device known as isocolon or parallel three-part list. Isocolon is defined by Cuddon as "a sequence of clauses or sentences of identical length" (432). In his address, Obama proclaimed, "Today I say to you that the

challenges we face are real, they are serious, and they are many.” This employment of isocolon in the form of a “tricolon” not only created a symmetrical structure but also enhanced the impact of his message by emphasising the profound nature and multitude of the challenges at hand. This president also employed the rhetorical device of epanalepsis to acknowledge the formidable challenges ahead, emphasising the need for time to address them, while highlighting a confident message of the American people’s ability to overcome them. According to Baldick, this device is “a figure of speech that consists of a delayed repetition of the same word or words. It interposes some other words between the two occurrences of the terms emphasized”(195). President Obama declared that the challenges “will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America: They will be met.” Along with the use of opposing ideas to address the challenges, Obama repeated the initial sentence “they will be met” at the end of the remark. However, the recurrent sentence was not fully identical in structure because he shifted its mood from negative to affirmative at the end of the remark. This repetition and shift emphasised the president’s decisiveness that he would do whatever it took to overcome the problems identified.

Through the use of narratives, Obama aimed to evoke a tone of inspiration towards the nation’s ancestors. He utilised the metaphor of a journey to depict the struggles the ancestors endured in order to have “carried us up the long, rugged path toward prosperity and freedom.” James Darsey’s discussion of the journey metaphor in Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign rhetoric is beneficial to shed light on in this analysis because it provides an understanding of how historical references and analogies are integral to Obama’s rhetorical approach. It also deepens the analysis of Obama’s use of reminiscence and nostalgia in his inaugural speech. In “Barack Obama and America’s Journey,” Darsey explores the ways in which Obama utilised the

metaphor of the journey, a narrative that evokes a sense of ongoing progress and collective aspiration. In Darsey's words, this journey "continued to appear as a vehicle inviting the American people to join together to follow Obama along the path out of our present circumstances and toward a new day ever closer to the realization of America's promise"(89). The journey metaphor is significant in political rhetoric because it conjures a direction and a destination for the audience thus "purpose" is the element that distinguishes the journey from mere movement" (90). In this essay, Darsey highlights the role of Obama's personal narrative in the construction of his campaign, claiming that "Obama crafted a campaign in which his personal journey has coincided with America's journey as a nation, especially as that journey involves race"(89). In so doing, he positioned himself within a continuum of American progress and idealism, such as "equality, especially equality of opportunity and equality under the law, or justice" (92). In his rhetoric, President Obama situated "his personal trajectory along the long, hard path that Americans and African Americans have followed en route to the promised land" (93).

I do not argue that in his first inaugural speech, President Obama relied on his individual journey as the first African American to obtain the Oval Office. Instead, I focus on his various attempts to conjure the forbearers' deeds and sacrifices in an attempt to urge his people to continue what they started. This difference is a result of the changing context from campaigning to presidency, where presidents ought to focus on the national narrative rather than their own (an idea touched upon in the discussion of the rhetorical tool of diversion). In their journey of rigid struggles and sacrifices, Obama used many vivid images of the forebears to appeal to the audience's sense of feeling and imagination and to have them picture the struggles and sacrifices of their

ancestors. These images include “pick up,” “few worldly possessions,” “toiled in sweatshops,” “endured the lash of the whip,” and “plowed the hard Earth.”

Style: An Analysis of Oratory and Delivery

President Obama’s 2009 inaugural speech consisted of 2395 words, slightly longer than Bush’s second inaugural speech by 324 words. The speech incorporated longer paragraphs and sentences than his predecessor. The use of longer paragraphs and sentences was a deliberate stylistic choice that served both rhetorical and communicative purposes, allowing Obama to address complex issues, such as the economic crisis, the ongoing military conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and domestic policy. However, Obama’s speech was also simple so that an “average” American could comprehend it. The style of Obama’s delivery during his inaugural speech stood out for its conversational and improvised tone, despite the use of teleprompters. It was evident in his masterful employment of pauses, tone of voice, body gestures, and the skilful use of proverbial language to evoke a sense of connection with the nation’s past forefathers.

In President Obama’s speech, an astute observation can be made regarding his deliberate utilisation of more frequent and prolonged pauses, ranging from two to three seconds. These strategic pauses serve multiple purposes: capturing and maintaining the audience’s attention, allowing them ample time to absorb the content of his statements, and effectively emphasising specific sentences or points. Through his calculated use of pauses, President Obama demonstrated an understanding of effective public speaking techniques. For example, Obama started the customary initial part of the inaugural speech by pausing for three seconds each in three places. The president declared, “My fellow citizens [three seconds pause], I stand here today [three seconds pause] humbled

by the task before us [three seconds pause], grateful for the trust you have bestowed [three seconds pause], mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors [three seconds pause].” These pauses create a sense of anticipation, heightening the impact of his words and fostering a connection with his listeners.

Research in communication and leadership demonstrates the pivotal role of non-verbal communication, particularly gestures, in enhancing both the effectiveness and engagement of a speaker. For example, in her book *The Silent Language of Leaders*, Carol Goman discusses how non-verbal cues such as “personal space, physical gestures, posture, facial expressions, and eye contact” convey messages more powerfully than spoken words (1). Goman highlights that body language plays a fundamental role in “leadership effectiveness.” She explains that it influences key areas such as “change management, trust-building, [project] charisma, and collaboration” (3). She further explains that the non-verbal cues “will most likely be interpreted by others” and their interpretations “will most likely affect the observers’ behavior” (20). According to Goman, non-verbal language influences how an audience interprets the speaker’s “intentions, motivations, and agenda,” often shaping their emotional reactions to the message being conveyed (20).

Goman provides a commentary on the nonverbal communication of presidential candidates during the 2008 debates, particularly highlighting how these behaviours shaped public perception. She notes that Senator Obama, while maintaining a composed demeanour, often “minimized his emotional reactions,” which reinforced a perception of him as “cerebral, remote, and cold” (23). This nonverbal detachment was contrasted by Senator John McCain’s more expressive, but sometimes inappropriate, “forced grins and eye-rolling” during the third debate. According to Goman, McCain’s gestures had an immediate negative impact on his likeability ratings (23). These

observations underscore the importance of nonverbal cues in political communication, where even subtle behaviours can significantly influence public opinion. In contrast to Goman's observations of Obama during the 2008 debates, his 2009 inaugural speech evinced a more dynamic use of body language. As noted, Obama's physical presence and gestures aligned with his verbal delivery, adding emphasis to his message.

Nick Morgan, a speaker, coach, and the president and founder of Public Words, reflected on Obama's body language in his 2009 Cairo speech. Morgan explains that as he began his speech, Obama frequently nodded, recognising the audience and fostering a sense of agreement. Additionally, he "had great stillness in his body; this signals confidence because it's at once poised and yet relaxed enough to show that his nerves haven't got the better of him." Morgan develops that Obama occasionally used a hand gesture effectively, such as when he discussed the commonalities between Muslims and Christians and "overlapped his hands quite naturally." Morgan adds that Obama's hand movements appeared most spontaneous when he declared, "America doesn't presume to know what is best for everyone." His open hand moved outward across his chest. "in a gesture that unequivocally dismissed the presumption" (Morgan).

During his inaugural address, Obama similarly used gestures to emphasise critical points. For instance, when acknowledging the dire state of the American economy, President Obama waved either his right or left hand to the sides, highlighting numerous economic failures and societal ills. He performed this paragraph as the following: "Homes have been lost [hand extended to the left], jobs shed [hand extended to the right], businesses shuttered [hand extended to the right]." This deployment of gestures likely enhanced the conversational quality of his speech, making his arguments clearer and more relatable for the audience.

Building on the stylistic insights from Obama’s delivery, this analysis explores the speech’s rhythm and pauses through intonation units and prosodic patterns, revealing a quasi-poetic quality. Breaking down Obama’s sentence structure into smaller, natural speech segments demonstrates how his phrasing established cadence, much like a poem:

We remain
.. a young nation,
.. but in the words of Scripture,
.. ↑ the time has come
.. .↓to set aside childish things.
↑ The time has come
.. .↓ to reaffirm our enduring spirit,
to choose our better history,
> to carry forward that precious gift,
that noble idea
passed on from generation to generation<:

The segmentation of Obama’s speech into intonation units—bursts of speech divided by natural pauses—reveals not only its meaning but also a rhythm evocative of poetic performance. This rhythm emerges from a blend of pitch shifts, pauses, parallel phrasing, and deliberate variations in tempo. The parallel repetition of “the time has come” introduces a refrain-like quality, lending the speech a musical resonance, and guiding listeners to key moments of thematic significance. Obama’s phrasing reflected what Gerald Davis terms the “narrative formulaic unit” typical of the “performed

African-American sermon.” Key to this style, Davis notes, are “groups of irrhythmic lines shaped around a core idea” (77). By anchoring his message on the phrase ‘the time has come’ as a central motif, Obama attempted to create a building rhythm, akin to a sermonic crescendo, that intensified the sense of urgency and unity.

The strategic repetition of the phrase “the time has come” also reflects the role of pre-constructed phrases or sentence fragments in spoken discourse, emphasising the value of what Andrew Pawley and Frances Syder term “memorised sequences” (205). In *Language and Communication*, Pawley and Syder investigate how native-like fluency is achieved through these ready-made expressions, which allow speakers to quickly access and deliver clauses and sentences with minimal cognitive effort. They note that since such sequences come “ready-made,” they require minimal “encoding work.” This allows speakers, not having to construct these sequences from scratch, to divert their energy to other tasks, such as “matching the timing, tone, and rhythm of [their] utterance to [their] conversational purpose” (208). In presidential rhetoric, this reliance on familiar structures can enhance the effectiveness of the message. For Obama, tying up his message to that familiar phrase likely allowed him to channel his focus into the expressive delivery, adjusting pitch and pauses to heighten the intended emotional effect and rhetorical strength of his speech.

The longer pause preceding “to set aside childish things” functions similarly to a caesura—a deliberate interruption within the speech’s rhythm, akin to “a pause within a line of verse” (Quinn 61). This pause emphasises a moment of thematic reflection which would allow the audience to absorb the gravity of the phrase. The falling pitch of that phrase signals a resolution, underscoring the significance of collective responsibility.

In addition, the excerpt also exhibits a two- to three-beat pattern within several units, reinforcing the rhythmic cadence.

The time has come (2 beats)

to set aside childish things (3 beats).

The time has come (2 beats)

to reaffirm our enduring spirit (3 beats).

These rhythmic bursts, segmented by pauses, create a trochaic pattern, where the stress falls on the first syllable. Although these elements suggest a quasi-poetic cadence, they do not align strictly with a metrical scheme. Davis notes that “the irregularity of the sermonic line is made rhythmic, not uniformly rhythmical” but through techniques such as ‘dramatic pause and emphatic repetition’ (77). Obama’s phrasing achieves a comparable rhythm, balancing between structured beats and the irrhythmic qualities of sermonic oratory.

The variation in pace marked by “> <”—a speed-up in delivery (Sidnell and Stivers 179)—heightens the urgency and rhetorical force of the message, drawing the audience’s attention to the importance of action, much like an oral performance would accelerate to heighten engagement. The alternation between high and low pitch further contributes to the rhythmic ebb and flow. The upward pitch shift in “The time has come” signals a sense of urgency, while the downward shift in “to set aside childish things” provides closure, reinforcing maturity. This deployment of pitch, tempo, and pauses exhibits that rhythm is not confined to strict metrical patterns but emerges organically from speech.

The strategic incorporation of proverb-like expressions in President Obama's speech imbued it with a conversational and colloquial style, enabling him to effortlessly and effectively communicate his messages to both domestic and global audiences. For instance, the president employed the following proverbial expression, "greatness is never a given, it must be earned," to encourage Americans to carry on the hard work journey of their ancestors. Obama claimed that this journey "has been [for] the risk-takers, the doers, the makers of things." In *The Wisdom of Many: Essays on the Proverb*, Ruth Finnegan defines a proverb as a "short," commonly known saying which "contains truth, morals, and traditional views" presented in a "metaphorical, fixed, and memorable form" and which is passed down from generation to generation (24). As mainly conveyed in metaphorical and memorable forms, proverbial expressions in political speeches can enhance relatability and foster deeper connections with diverse audiences. Finnegan's definition of proverbs aligns with Obama's proverb above because it connected historical American values with the contemporary struggles his audience faced.

In *Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor*, Charteris-Black investigates how metaphors in political discourse can simplify complex ideas and connect with everyday experiences, making them accessible to a broad audience. As Obama communicated his metaphorical proverbs in terms of a journey, Charteris-Black argues that this type of metaphor provides "a mental representation that allows the various aspects of political experience to be understood and expressed through [the] embodied experience of movement" (47). Charteris-Black's metaphor of the journey aligns with Obama's invocation of the hard work undertaken by previous generations of Americans, thereby inviting listeners to see their efforts as part of a larger, national journey. It likely aimed to create a mental representation of his vision by drawing on

familiar concepts such as diligence and collective journeying, making his message easier for the audience to grasp. Charteris-Black adds that journey “schema is rhetorically attractive to politicians and leaders because it can be turned into a whole scenario when they represent themselves as guides, their policies as maps and their supporters as fellow travelling companions”(47). Obama’s use of proverbs combined the power of metaphor with the relatable and memorable nature of proverbial expressions.

Employing yet another colloquial expression in the form of a traditional folk phrase, President Obama issued a resolute call to action, urging the nation to embark on its transformative journey by declaring, “We must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America.” By employing proverbial wisdom, the President not only addressed domestic concerns but also utilised a culturally resonant phrase to convey a powerful message to foreign leaders.

The use of familiar and proverb-like expressions enhanced the accessibility and emotional effect of Obama’s speech. Safire, in a 2009 *New York Times* commentary emphasised the effect of familiar language in Obama’s inaugural. Safire explains that President Obama set up a “warning against ‘standing pat,’ adding that Safire himself once “wrote a line for Nixon, ‘America cannot stand pat,’” which Nixon “never used the phrase again.” Safire notes that Obama “topped that passage with a warmly familiar metaphor: ‘Starting today, we must pick ourselves up.’ That worked” (“No Memorable Theme”). Additionally, in 2009, Jeff Shesol, a speechwriter for President Bill Clinton and a writer for the *New York Times*, contended that Obama’s use of his colloquial phrase which, despite its simplicity, became one of the most quoted lines of the address. Shesol reflected that this casual phrase was not “poetry, but it well describe[d] a nation that [had] been knocked to the ground and kicked around for eight years”

(Shesol). The relatable nature of this colloquialism helped Obama communicate plainly, ensuring his message was easily understood and felt by Americans.

Unification: Fostering a Sense of Responsibility through America's Past

By emphasising America's past, President Obama attempted to reconstitute the audience as the people of responsibility by stating that "what is required of us now is a new era of responsibility." This statement highlights that Obama's approach to leadership stemmed from strategies of commitment to a reconciliatory and deliberative style. He avoided depicting contemporary politics as a stark battle between "good and evil"—a narrative in which "white-hatted heroes battle black"—because he believed that such framing only would heighten the tensions he aimed to soothe (Kloppenberg x). According to James Kloppenberg, this was because Obama held "a particular conception of the democratic process rooted in his understanding of American history" (x). In *Reading Obama: Dreams, Hope, and the American Political Tradition*, Kloppenberg investigates Obama's intellectual background, his philosophical influences, and how these shaped his political vision and rhetoric. He argues that Obama's thinking was deeply influenced by the "philosophical pragmatism," that values practical consequences and real-world applications of ideas (xxxiv). As put by Kloppenberg, it is a "philosophy for skeptics, a philosophy for those committed to democratic debate and the critical assessment of the results of political decisions" (xxxv). The influence of pragmatist philosophy was evident in Obama's call for unity and collective responsibility. This call aligned with the pragmatic emphasis on communal effort and "commitment to problem-solving" Kloppenberg discusses (xxxv).

The theme of civic virtue intensified the call for individual and collective responsibility and duties. President Obama employed a narrative about the patriotic

soldiers, “the fallen heroes who lie in Arlington.” He emphasised his call to action for responsibility and service by combining a narrative that highlighted the sacrifices of past soldiers and veterans with strategic rhetorical techniques that would resonate with his audience. In his reconstruction of the audience as a people of responsibility, Obama not only addressed the American people but also approached the people of the world. This was an attempt through which he sought to utilise the American civil religion as a “cosmopolitan” theology. In this view, I am building upon David Frank’s analysis of Obama’s public speeches. In “Obama’s Rhetorical Signature,” Frank argues that the inaugural speech “reflected Obama’s construction of his national and international audience, and assumed the integrity of both religious and scientific methods” emphasising the “role faith plays in global community” (“Obama's Rhetorical” 607). Obama’s view on the nexus between religion and reason is consistent with the idea that “claims should be tested by argument and argumentation” (“Obama's Rhetorical” 611). Frank analyses Obama’s use of “literary, mythic, and rhetorical signatures,” drawing on his personal narrative and American ideals to recast “binary oppositions” and foster a sense of collective identity (“Obama's Rhetorical” 605). The article highlights Obama’s effort to create a new form of civil religion that embraces inclusivity, diversity, and a global perspective.

Building upon this, Obama employed the rhetorical device of antithesis to encourage the audience to comment on the duties they had. He explained that Americans had “duties that we do not grudgingly accept but, rather, seize gladly.” In so doing, he attempted to “reframe binary oppositions and to return to the cosmopolitan expression of American identity” (“Obama's Rhetorical” 608). His strategy of reasoning when he confronted “binary oppositions [was] often to deploy dissociation, to avoid what he believe[d] were false choices and to offer either a compromise or a

new frame that removes or reduces the influence of an incompatibility” (“Obama's Rhetorical” 615). By contrasting the two ideas of “grudgingly accept” and “seize gladly,” he urged his fellow citizens and the broader community to embrace their responsibilities and actively contribute to themselves, their nation, and the world. In this global call for responsibility, Obama attempted to unite a diverse audience around a broader, universal value. It suggested that connecting specific truths of a particular audience with widely recognised principles could be achieved through “convergence and consilience” (“Obama's Rhetorical” 616). In other words, various lines of reasoning can reach the same inference and inductive reasoning could extend to broader generalisation.

President Obama utilised allusions to renowned texts as part of his repertoire of rhetorical and literary devices, strategically amplifying the ideology of responsibility. When he asked his people, “the time has come to set aside childish things,” he was echoing the lines from the first letter to the Corinthians (13:11): “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me” (“1 Corinthians 13:11”). By using the term “Scripture” rather than the Bible, which includes all the religions in the world, Obama attempted to evoke a sense of inclusion. He sought to address all citizens of all different religions, not just Christianity.

In the same paragraph of his speech, President Obama endeavoured to encourage Americans to embrace duties by proclaiming that it was the proper time to act and “choose our better history.” In his remark, Obama echoed the concluding phrase in President Abraham Lincoln’s first inaugural speech, which he delivered in 1861 (“Inaugural Address”). Kloppenberg discusses the ways Obama drew on the “tradition of American political thought,” invoking figures like Lincoln to position

himself within a historical continuum of transformative leadership (153). This strategy highlighted Obama's perception of "democracy as deliberation" (154). Such reference served to legitimise Obama's vision and policies by rooting them in the revered American tradition. During the time of crisis, President Lincoln, like President Obama, reminded Americans of their past heritage and memories. His phrase emphasised the force of the shared past and common heritage by evoking it as a source for all admirable traits within his people. Obama's rhetorical reference was to create a connection with the past, encouraging the audience to see their current challenges as part of a larger, ongoing narrative of American progress.

Shared Values: Uniting Americans in Pursuit of Perfection

President Obama reaffirmed the shared values of "honesty and hard work, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism" to emphasise these essential values for guiding the nation towards its ideals of optimal perfection. The recurring themes of the American mission and civic virtue amplified the urgent call for Americans to rekindle their core values. He attempted to elicit emotions rooted in the past to shape an identity for Americans as responsible citizens who would wholeheartedly embrace individual and shared responsibilities. In this sense, I draw upon the concept of "affective citizenship" as used by Carol Johnson in her article "The Politics of Affective Citizenship: From Blair to Obama." Johnson explores how politicians employ emotion to seek support from voters. She contends that the "Politics of Affect"(495) is also involved in how citizens' identities might be constructed. She emphasises the significance of the concept of "affective citizenship" for examining how citizens can be encouraged to feel about others and themselves (495). According to Johnson, "affective citizenship emphasises that the recognition and encouragement of

emotions has long been part of the very way in which citizenship itself is constructed” (496). In this light, I contend that President Obama attempted to recognise and emphasise certain emotions (the shared values he reaffirmed) to shape citizens’ identity and encourage how they would feel about others, themselves, and their nation.

By recognising and encouraging emotions deeply rooted in the nation’s past, Obama endeavoured to craft a rhetorical identity characterised by sincerity, diligence, bravery, justice, forbearance, tolerance, curiosity, faithfulness, and patriotism for his fellow citizens. This identity encompassed their attitudes towards others, themselves, and their country, portraying them as individuals deeply connected to their values and committed to their roles as responsible citizens. Obama’s recognition and encouragement of these admirable emotions, as well as the enduring values they represent served as a clarion call that highlighted societal deficiencies. By urging his audience to collectively reconnect with their core values, Obama proposed that such an endeavour would propel the country towards its aspirational perfection. Johnson puts it differently, “the good citizen both feels and performs particular emotions” (501).

Proposed Political Principles: Reclaiming Founding Fathers’ Legacy for a New Era of Peace

President Obama utilised rhetoric that appeared critical of the policies implemented during the Bush era. He recounted that the founding forebears, “drafted a charter to assure the rule of law and the rights of man, a charter expanded by the blood of generations.” In his remark, he evoked the profound metaphor of “drafting” to emphasise the deliberate and thoughtful construction of this enduring Constitution. Obama’s decisive departure from the war ideology of the Bush administration became evident as he explicitly delineated how previous generations courageously confronted

and addressed external threats. This president employed the rhetorical technique of “asyndeton” to amplify the significance of America’s security, emphasising that it would be safeguarded through “the justness of our cause, the force of our example, the tempering qualities of humility and restraint.” By deliberately omitting conjunctions between the clauses and delivering the sentence at a faster pace, Obama created a sense of urgency.

Presidential Role: Harnessing the Power of Reminiscence Rhetoric for Transition and Continuity

At the beginning of this speech, President Obama exemplified his comprehension of the demands of the executive office by expressing gratitude and recognition to his predecessor, President Bush, a tradition that faced a departure from the norm during the transition of January 2021. Obama not only inspired progress and improvement but also maintained the continuity of past policies. As Campbell and Jamieson assert, “The past is also preserved by reaffirming the wisdom of the past policies”(20). Consequently, if Obama had failed to demonstrate appreciation for his predecessor’s services, it could have undermined the coherence of his message and potentially raised questions of inconsistency. Thus, President Obama astutely positioned his expression of gratitude towards Bush at the beginning of his speech, immediately following his acknowledgment of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors.

Implications for the Inauguration Speech Genre

This close poetic reading explored how meaning is constructed and communicated in this genre of public presidential speeches. Obama employed the evocation of reminiscences from America’s past to cultivate a collective sense of

imperfection within his audience and a critical examination of the nation's current state at that time. He positively recounted the American forebears' sacrifices, values, ideals, and convictions to encourage the audience to follow the lead of their past in order to complete the unfinished journey their ancestors had begun towards the nation's perfection. By alluding to this past of hard work, sacrifices, and duties, Obama attempted to re-establish the spirit of service and civic responsibility in his audience to re-evaluate their duties to themselves, their nation, and the world.

This close analysis of the poetics of the speech as a written, spoken, and delivered text found the following rhetorical and poetic qualities that aided President Obama's use of "rhetoric of reminiscence" to either convey the need for a "new era of responsibility" or heighten the serious consequences of the lack of responsibility had caused: mood, narrative, diversion, metaphor, tone, imagery, ellipsis, anaphora, isocolon, epanalepsis, style, allusions, asyndeton, and antithesis.

The analysis reveals that public language possesses a transformative power when infused with poetic elements. While public language often contains poetic elements, it is crucial to recognise and examine the specific instances where these elements are intentionally employed for rhetorical effect, emphasising their significance in the analysis. By transformative power, I mean the ability of poetic elements in public language to evoke emotions, shape narratives, and engage audiences at a deeper level, ultimately influencing their perspectives, attitudes, and actions. For instance, the use of metaphor, imagery, and allusions allowed for the creation of vivid mental images and the evocation of shared cultural references, thus fostering a collective understanding and resonance. Furthermore, the strategic use of anaphora and antithesis, for example, enhanced the persuasive impact of public speech. Through repetition and contrasting ideas, public orators can emphasise key messages, establish a

rhythmic cadence, and create memorable moments that resonate with the audience long after the speech concludes. The implementation of the poetic tool of epanalepsis allows for a powerful restatement of important concepts because it involves a delayed repetition of the same word or phrase.

The analysis of President Obama's first inaugural speech, when viewed through the lens of the inaugural speech genre, vividly illustrates the genre's inherent adaptability to the evolving socio-political landscape while maintaining its historical underpinnings. Obama's speech stands as a departure from his predecessor, President Bush's policies and rhetoric; still, it at the same time endorses the core themes and traditions intrinsic to the genre. This highlights how inaugural speeches, as a genre, inherently exhibit variation based on the specific historical context and the unique vision of each president. This interaction between continuity and evolution bridges the close analysis of this singular example with the broader insights gathered from the entirety of this thesis.

Chapter 5: President Barack Obama's Second Inaugural Speech: An Emphasis on America's Founding Principles

Comparison and Contrast

Conducting a close poetic reading of President Barack Obama's 2009 inaugural speech in Chapter Four, followed by the investigation of his 2013 inaugural speech in this chapter, serves the key function of enabling a comparative examination. This approach allows for a consideration of implications not only for the ongoing exploration of meaning-making within public language but also for the evolution of the inauguration speech genre. Like his predecessor, President Obama's two inaugural speeches shared certain contextual factors, such as being delivered by the same speaker, potentially delivered to a similar audience and being held at the same time of the year, in the same city, and for the same ceremonial event. However, Obama's inaugural speeches were not significantly different in their historical contexts; most notably, there was arguably no major trauma such as the 9/11 attacks that impacted distinct rhetorical and leadership styles during both his two inaugural speeches, and indeed, his two presidential terms. Nevertheless, President Obama's two inaugural speeches differed in their overall themes and tones because of the evolving political landscape and the nuanced goals he aimed to address during each inauguration.

In his first inaugural speech, although Obama evoked a sombre feeling about the present, he spoke with a sense of hope and optimism, emphasising the need for unity and collective action to address the challenges facing the nation. "Hope" and "Change" had been a major theme of the first election campaign and figured in the rhetoric of his first inauguration. The speech was inspirational and forward-looking, as Obama attempted to inspire the American people to believe in a brighter future.

On the other hand, Obama acknowledged the realities and disappointments encountered during his first term as president in his second inaugural speech. The speech had a more reflective tone and focused on the challenges that remained and the need for perseverance in the face of setbacks. It emphasised the importance of principles such as equality, life, liberty, and happiness as guiding forces for progress. In this view, I am building upon one of the three different types of burdens that Justin Vaughn and Jennifer Mercieca argue might face every president upon assuming office. Specifically, I am to elaborate on the argument of the burdens associated with holding the presidency because it aligns with the discussion of Obama's recognition of disappointments from his first term. In *Rhetoric of Heroic Expectations: Establishing the Obama Presidency*, Vaughn and Mercieca explore the high expectations placed upon Obama as the first African American president and a figure of hope and change that influenced the ways he approached and executed his new position (ix). They elaborate upon the three types of burdens all American presidents deal with: "institutional, contextual, and personal"(xi). They define these types as specific to the "office of the presidency itself," "historic moment within which the president assumes office," and "the man or woman who becomes president" (xi). Vaughn and Mercieca focus on the high expectations placed on Obama before his first inauguration and how these expectations were shaped by historical precedents, "media portrayals," "political campaigns" "polls of presidential greatness" and "school texts books" (4). They argue that the American public's expectations of presidential leadership are influenced by these elements, which collectively create an image of the president as "the nation's hero rather than the nation's chief executive"(7). Such heroic expectations intensify the president's burden by asking him to seek control over every aspect of the political

community. Thus, the public's heroic expectations for the incoming presidency are classified under what Vaughn and Mercieca proscribe as "institutional burdens" (9).

In terms of the burdens of the presidency, Vaughn and Mercieca expound that "the president's ability to influence the congress is marginal at best" thus presidents are burdened by the expectation that they would "successfully set the public's agenda and move the public opinion" (9-10). These writers have examined the effects of such expectations on the Obama presidency and found that they impeded his ability to govern as he proposed in his 2008 campaign. Obama's commitments and assurances that he made to the electorate during his electoral run contributed to his burdens. For instance, he offered "an almost limitless range of ways in which his presidency would solve policy problems facing the nation and remedy the dysfunctional dimensions of national politics that dismayed so many in the electorate" (11). A multitude of structural obstacles hindered his ability to achieve all of his goals. As put by the authors, the Congress "watered down his health care bill and tabled consideration of immigration and climate change legislation, while the president was quickly forced to either compromise or back away entirely from promises concerning Guantanamo Bay and the Bush tax cuts"(11). By framing his 2008 campaign around the themes of hope and change, Obama set expectations among his supporters for immediate and significant shifts not only in policies but also in the operational dynamics of Washington.

This chapter adds to Vaughn and Mercieca's analysis by investigating the ways in which President Obama attempted to negotiate the expectations and challenges that remained from his first term. More specifically, I scrutinise the ways he attempted to address the new challenges of his second term as a means of meeting the structural and constitutional obstacles standing between his goals. Comparing and contrasting

Obama's two inaugural speeches provides important insights into how his rhetorical strategies evolved over time, how he addressed different challenges and contexts, and how he endeavoured to maintain a connection to fundamental American principles while managing the inevitable challenges that come with high expectations.

Chapter Overview

The close poetic analysis I provide here of President Barack Obama's second inaugural speech argues that he utilised the United States Declaration of Independence to frame his new policy agendas as a continuation of core American principles, such as equality, life, liberty, and happiness. President Obama employed these principles to rally for collective action in addressing the new challenges he aimed to address during his second term. Like his 2009 inaugural speech, President Obama's 2013 inaugural speech centred around the sacrifices and heroic actions of past generations while emphasising the importance of upholding the founding principles of the nation.

This chapter builds upon previous research about Obama's reliance on the American republic's foundational principles (e.g., Coe and Reitzes; Darsey; Terrill) by offering an examination of how he utilised these enduring values to tackle divisive issues in American society at the time. Specifically, it focuses on topics like women's and gay rights, voter suppression, immigration reform, and gun control. It also provides a comparable overview of the changing themes (hope vs. disappointment) among the president's two inaugural speeches which adds to the extant scholarship regarding the nature of the flexibility of this speech genre.

Context: Examining Obama's Stance on Contentious Topics

President Obama delivered his second inaugural speech on Monday, 21 January 2013 (see Appendix 4). The contextual significance of President Obama's speech lies in his unprecedented focus on controversial issues that neither he nor his predecessor approached in his previous inaugural speeches. This speech marks a pivotal moment for the analysis of this thesis as Obama courageously tackled the contentious topics mentioned above.

Mood: Evoking Unwavering Allegiance

In his first inaugural speech, Obama crafted a mood of nostalgia, drawing on a sense of longing for a celebrated past. This atmosphere prompted reflection on the sacrifices of forebears, fostering a collective responsibility to contemplate previous generations' selflessness and duty. Conversely, in his second inaugural speech, Obama shifted the mood to evoke unwavering allegiance and devotion to the nation's founding principles, instilling a strong sense of faithfulness and commitment among the audience. This shift reflects a transition from hope, a major theme of his first inauguration, to acknowledging the realities and challenges encountered during his first term as president, echoing a sense of disappointment and the need for perseverance in his second inaugural speech.

As explored in Chapter Four, Obama demonstrated exceptional skill in his first inauguration speech by strategically emphasising the significance of a powerful opening. In his second inauguration speech, Obama continued this technique by alluding to Americans' unwavering commitment to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Independence. Just after President Obama customarily greeted the audience, he affirmed that what would band Americans together was not "the colors of

our skin or the tenets of our faith or the origins of our names.” Instead, he emphasised that what would make “us exceptional—what makes us American—is our allegiance to an idea articulated in a declaration made more than two centuries ago.” This re-inaugurated president utilised the rhetorical device of antithesis to juxtapose the significance of the founding documents with factors like skin colour, religion, and names, underscoring the vital role of these texts in fostering unity. By linking the concept of American Exceptionalism to the foundational principles outlined in these documents, Obama implicitly integrated the traditions of past inaugural speeches with a fresh perspective, resonating with the themes of continuity and innovation that characterise this genre.

Tone: Navigating Hope Amidst Disappointment

President Obama used a sombre tone in his first term when he addressed the challenges inherited by his administration. This tone resonated with the idea of acknowledging present difficulties and the need for collective action. In his 2013 inaugural speech, however, Obama adopted a tone characterised by optimism and motivation. This shift in tone reflected the evolving themes of his presidencies.

Employing the device of parallelism, Obama presented a concise list of two qualities, emphasising the nation’s remarkable attributes. He explicated that Americans exhibited all the traits required by a world that knows no borders: “youth and drive; diversity and openness; an endless capacity for risk and a gift for reinvention.” This strategic use of parallelism underscored his message of inspiring the audience to recognise their potential and the strength of the nation as a whole.

Style: Crafting Impactful Messages through Repetition and Emphatic Delivery

Obama's second inaugural speech was shorter than his first. It consisted of 2103 words, slightly less than his first inaugural speech by 292 words. This speech featured lengthy paragraphs and sentences, mirroring the style of Obama's first inaugural speech. The rhetorical style of his second inaugural speech differed slightly from his first. Notably, the rhetorical technique of repetition was predominantly used in the entire speech. Obama's use of repetitions came at different levels, i.e., at the level of words, phrases, and ideas. President Obama utilised such repetitions to emphasise the main themes of his speech, which were: unity, equality and immediate action.

To emphasise the urgency of action, the president employed the powerful modal verb of obligation -“must” - with great repetition (seventeen times), emphasising the imperative nature of the tasks at hand. In this manner, Obama aimed to exert a profound impact on the audience, as the repeated use of this modal verb generated a sense of urgency and duty. To further dissect this speech act of obligation Obama utilised, I will use two speech act theories developed by John Austin and Kent Bach and Robert Harnish to explain the persuasive effect of that speech act.

In *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin argues that “by saying or in saying something we are doing something”(12). To explain this claim, Austin contends that “performatives,” a type of utterances, perform a particular action in and of themselves (13). He uses the phrase “I do, (as uttered in the course of a marriage ceremony)” as an example of performatives to illustrate that by saying these words, the action itself is already done (13). Bach and Harnish further extended this argument that “Communicative Illocutionary Acts” perform specific actions by developing a speech act framework. In *Communication and Speech Acts*, they develop a framework that consists of four main categories, namely: “Constatives, Directives, Commissive and

Acknowledgments”(41). I will specifically examine the category of “directives” in analysing Obama’s repetitive use of the modal verb “must” because it interprets how he constructed the compelling sense of obligation conveyed to his audience. To define directives, I will borrow Bach and Harnish’s definition of this term. They explain that directives “express the speaker’s attitude toward some prospective action by the hearer and his intention that his utterance, or the attitude it expresses, be taken as a reason for the hearer’s action”(41). Through the repetitive use of “must,” Obama underscored the immediate need for action, emphasising that it was Americans’ responsibility to uphold the nation’s founding principles and address the challenges at hand.

Bach and Harnish split the four main categories of their framework of Communication and Speech Acts into subcategories that describe the specific action they express more clearly. One of the subcategories under “Directives” that is relevant to my analysis of Obama’s speech act is “Requisitives” (41). According to them, the “Requisitives” subcategory is used to “ask, beg, beseech, implore, insist, invite, petition, plead, pray, request, solicit, summon, supplicate, tell, urge” (47). Within the context of Obama’s directive speech act, I interpret his remark as employing a requestive act aligned with the “Requisitives” subcategory. Through this approach, Obama attempted to request and implore the audience to align with his perspective on the necessity of collective effort. He intensified his intention and desire for shared responsibility, motivating the audience to take action and fulfil their duties for the greater good of themselves, their fellow citizens, and the world.

This re-elected president conveyed a sense of decisiveness and obligation for this second term of his presidential leadership by employing the modal verb “will” twenty times. In this sense, I interpret Obama’s recurrent use of this modal verb as a “commissive” speech act. According to Bach and Harnish, “Commissives are acts of

obligating oneself or of proposing to obligate oneself to do something specified in the propositional content, which may also specify conditions under which the deed is to be done or does not have to be done” (50). For instance, President Obama aimed to instil a sense of unwavering commitment and assurance in his future promises by proclaiming, “America will remain the anchor of strong alliances in every corner of the globe.” The pervasive use of “will” in Obama’s speech not only conveyed his decisiveness but also left no room for doubt or ambiguity, positioning him as a resolute leader determined to fulfil his proposed policies.

As noted in Chapter Four, nonverbal communication holds substantial weight in conveying a speaker’s intended message to the audience. At the beginning of his speeches, President Obama waived his fists vertically to emphasise that every time Americans come together at a presidential inauguration, they “bear witness to the enduring strength [hands movement] of our Constitution [long pause - four seconds].” In the following sentence, Obama was relatively consistent with this technique of long pauses and hand movements, strategically allowing the audience to contemplate and internalise the comparisons he presented regarding the crucial factor underlying the nation’s unity. President Obama stopped at every foundational quality he directly quoted from the Declaration of Independence to deliberately emphasise these key ideas while articulating them slowly. For instance, he stated that “we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal [long pause]; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights [long pause]; that among these are life [long pause], liberty [long pause], and the pursuit of happiness [long pause].” In a deliberate manner of speaking, President Obama evoked a mission for his audience, breaking his speech delivery into short and emphatic sections, as he continued to pause. He declared “today [stopped briefly] we continue [stopped briefly] a never-ending journey [stopped

briefly] to bridge the meaning of those words [stopped briefly] with the realities of our time.”

Unification: Emphasis on Government-People Connection for Advancing Founding Principles

In his first inaugural speech, President Obama emphasised the duty of every American to recognise their responsibilities, drawing upon the sacrifices of past ancestors to elicit a profound sense of honour and admiration. Obama’s second inaugural speech attempted to bridge the nation’s disunity caused by the presidential election by reconstructing the audience members behind “common effort and common purpose” as the guardians of their founding values. The themes of seeking popular support and civic virtue aimed to inspire Americans to respond to the call for diligent effort, echoing the resilience displayed by their ancestors. This president utilised a journey metaphor to establish a task for Americans to “continue a never-ending journey” to “continue the work initiated by those pioneers [forebears]).”

President Obama employed what Adrian Beard refers to as the rhetorical device of logos to reinforce his call to the people and persuade them to embrace the founding creed as a means to confront and overcome emerging challenges. In *The Language of Politics*, Beard defines logos as “persuasion through reasoning” (37). In this sense, Obama attempted to appeal to reason by logically contrasting the nature of the founding values. He proclaimed, “History tells us that while these truths may be self-evident, they’ve never been self-executing.” By using the rhetorical device of antithesis to contrast the juxtaposition of “self-evident” and “self-executing” ideas, President Obama underscored the imperative of individual responsibility and collective action in fulfilling the timeless principles embedded in the founding values.

Building upon the notion of the audience as the custodians of the founding principles, President Obama forged a connection between the people and the government. Through the theme of cooperation with Congress, he evoked principles of the preservation of democracy, equality, life, and happiness as attainable goals through collective action facilitated by the government. By emphasising that it was the government's duty to translate the words of the founding documents to become "real for every American," he underscored the pivotal role of the government in enacting common objectives. In *Studies of Communication in the 2016 Presidential Campaign*, Rober Danton comments on this strategy by Obama. He argues:

The president casts a dichotomy between individual effort and government, or as he terms it collective action. He fallaciously argues that since some things cannot be done by one person they must necessarily be the responsibility of government. Government is, for him, the only source of collective action, a belief squarely at odds with the views of conservative Americans. (211)

Expanding upon Danton's claim, it was notable that President Obama attempted to depart from the Conservative ideology regarding the role of government. To pre-empt potential opposition from conservatives, Obama employed the public as an advocate for his argument, underscoring the urgent necessity for government intervention and immediate action.

Shared Values: Addressing Persistent Challenges through Shared Memories

President Obama's emphasis on shared values was closely tied to the theme of hope in his first inaugural speech. He attempted to inspire Americans by reaffirming

the enduring importance of values like honesty, courage, and patriotism as guiding lights for a more optimistic future. In his second inaugural speech, the tone shifted and became more reflective. Despite this change in tone, Obama continued to stress the significance of shared values, using historical references and shared memories to invoke a sense of continuity and a common commitment to ideals like equality and liberty.

President Obama reaffirmed shared values by reaching back in history to emphasise the imperative of connecting the founding fathers' timeless ideals with the nation's contemporary demands. The employment of common recollections in inauguration speeches allows presidents to develop and strengthen their arguments. Campbell and Jamieson argue that "presidential use of the principles, policies, and presidencies of the past suggest that, in the inaugural address, *memoria* (shared recollection of the past) is a key source of *inventio* (development of lines of argument)"(20). In this way, President Obama utilised allusions to the speeches of President Lincoln, a figure synonymous with the fight against slavery and a key influencer of the principles that have evolved into Democratic ideals. By evoking the memory of Lincoln, a renowned orator, Obama established a profound association with the anti-slavery movement and the core values that have been important throughout American history, even if these values may have evolved differently in terms of party alignment.

President Obama alluded to two speeches delivered by President Lincoln on slavery: Lincoln's 1865 second inaugural speech and his renowned "House Divided Speech," delivered during his campaign for the Senate in 1858. By evoking the blood imagery "blood drawn by lash and blood drawn by sword, Obama echoed a concluding passage in Lincoln's 1865 second inaugural speech, where Lincoln addressed the deep

wounds inflicted by the Civil War and the toll it took on the nation (“Inaugural Address”). President Obama invoked the theme of civic virtue to further underscore the significance of equality and freedom in the nation’s collective consciousness. By referencing Lincoln’s depiction of the savagery endured during the Civil War as a form of divine retribution for the sin of slavery, Obama powerfully appealed to the audience’s sense of shared responsibility and empathy. Obama urged his audience to embrace a renewed commitment to equality, freedom, and solidarity through this connection to Lincoln’s words.

The strategic deployment of what Murphy calls “rhetorical history” in Obama’s speech served as a means to manage political and rhetorical challenges and reframe social change. As Murphy puts it, through his “historical reflexivity,” Obama displayed a “historical consciousness that intertwines with his view of social change” (“Barack Obama” 215). Murphy argues that Obama’s speeches, particularly those addressing significant historical moments, employed historical references to construct a narrative that connected past struggles to contemporary issues, fostering a sense of continuity and progress. In so doing, Obama excelled at making the “past present.” (“Barack Obama” 217). By focusing on specific phrases from Lincoln’s rhetoric, he could “with emphasis make present, by verbal magic alone, what is actually absent” (“Barack Obama” 217). In this sense, President Obama heightened awareness of the deep-rooted issue of racial discrimination in America. Obama’s echoing of Lincoln’s phrase “half-slave, half-free,” from the renowned “House Divided Speech,” emphasised the continued existence of societal divisions and injustices. Obama’s argument from history highlighted his belief in sin and salvation. He depicted the audience as “creatures bound by sin and history, yet able to learn and act” (“Barack Obama” 221).

This invocation suggested that America's internal struggle with its moral failings was central to its journey toward achieving racial equality.

While President Lincoln focused on the liberation of the enslaved by emphasising equality and freedom, President Obama, by contrast, underscored the significance of these shared values from an economic standpoint. He employed the rhetorical device of antithesis to emphasise income equality and the liberation of the middle class. He declared, "for we, the people, understand that our country cannot succeed when a shrinking few do very well and a growing many barely make it." Obama's strategic deployment of antithesis in this remark served as a potent rhetorical device. Antitheses, known for their straightforward structure, can be easily grasped and retained by the audience. Moreover, they evoke a fresh perspective and encourage contemplation. By employing this technique, Obama not only ensured that his message would be easily remembered by his listeners but also prompted them to contemplate the significance of his words. In his book *Artful Persuasion: How to Command Attention, Change Minds, and Influence People*, Harry Mills argues that "antithesis works because it uses simple, easy-to-understand words, and it is short and balanced"(18). The contrast between the prosperous "shrinking few" and the struggling "growing many" intensified Obama's paradoxical depiction of the persistent challenges faced by the middle class and income inequality.

By appealing to the audience's reasoning and emotions, Obama emphasised the need for government and collective action in securing the freedom of middle-class families from the brink of suffering. Through logos, he presented logical arguments to engage the audience's rational thinking, while pathos evoked their deep emotional connection to the plight of working-class families. This strategic use of rhetoric strengthened Obama's message and underscored the critical role of both government

and public involvement in addressing the challenges faced by the middle class. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle argues that “there is persuasion through the hearers when they are led to feel emotion by the speech” (*Rhetoric* II.1378a). President Obama attempted to appeal to the audience’s logic by explicating why the rights of liberty and happiness must be secured for every American. He aimed to stir the audience’s emotions to call for action by asserting that “no matter how responsibly we live our lives,” any American “at any time may face a job loss or a sudden illness or a home swept away in a terrible storm.” He employed the rhetorical tool of polysyndeton by repeating the conjunction “or” two times. Cudden defines this tool as “the opposite of asyndeton and thus the repetition of conjunctions”(485). By so doing, Obama attempted to magnify the seriousness of the circumstances that would face people due to such hardships that would suddenly afflict any American.

Proposed Political Principles: Linking Resounding Domestic Policies to the Nation’s Bedrock Principles

In examining Obama’s policy agendas, a clear shift in emphasis regarding the interplay of hope and disappointment emerged. In his first inaugural speech, the emphasis was on the ideals, resilience, and determination of previous generations as a source of inspiration for addressing challenges. Conversely, Obama’s second inaugural speech embraced a more pragmatic approach. Hope took on a different dimension, framed within the context of specific policy proposals that aimed to advance foundational principles while recognising the complexities of governance. This evolution reflected the transition from aspirational rhetoric to the practical realities of governance, where the optimism of hope must contend with the pragmatism of addressing pressing issues.

Through the themes of general policy principles, cooperation with Congress, and seeking popular support, President Obama proposed the policy agendas that would govern his new administration. He utilised the powerful phrase “we, the people,” from the Constitution in the form of anaphoras to reinforce his political policies and underscore the importance of collective action by both the citizens and the government to achieve them. I interpret this rhetorical strategy of employing repeated uses of the phrase “we, the people,” as a poetic formula reminiscent of the method used by oral bards in composing and performing epic songs. This technique of repetition helped Obama to fluently convey his message and engage his audience, highlighting the collective power and shared responsibility of the people in shaping the nation’s future. As mentioned previously in Chapter Two, Parry defines poetic formula as a specific group of words consistently used within the same metrical framework to convey a particular concept (80). Drawing upon Parry’s concept, the close poetic analysis of Obama’s speech argues that the phrase he recurrently utilised consisted of four syllables and was composed of trochaic tetrameter rhythm because one accented syllable was followed by an unaccented syllable.

Obama employed the poetic device of parallelism to depict his proposed policy of empowering Americans with the needed expertise as preserving the right to life. He proposed that doing so would allow Americans to “work harder, learn more, reach higher.” As noted in Chapter Two, the rhetorical device of parallelism requires a balanced arrangement of structure, the symmetry of grammatical structure in parallel sentences or phrases would enable the audience to effectively process and retain the entirety of Obama’s speech act. In *Writing with Clarity and Style*, Robert Harris notes that this is because sentences with parallelism are “easier to understand than those

without it because a repeated grammatical structure requires less mental processing than a series of new structures” (6).

President Obama highlighted the importance of promoting “the general Welfare.” In his emphasis on the role of government in promoting this proposed policy, he used the rhetorical device of parallelism in the form of a bicolon to emphasise the value of federal programmes. He expounded that Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security “do not sap our initiative, they strengthen us. They do not make us a nation of takers; they free us to take the risks that make this country great.” Obama effectively countered the notion of dependency and highlighted how these programmes enable individuals to take risks that contribute to the greatness of the nation.

By seeking popular support and civic virtue and using four rhetorical devices: star metaphor, oral formula, deixis, and an allusion to King’s speech, Obama endeavoured to encourage the nation to carry on what their forebears had begun in preserving the rights of equality, liberty, justice, and security. He reemphasised to his audience that all of them were created equal was “the star that guides us still.” In this star metaphor, the president employed several historical references to demonstrate to Americans that their ancestors fought to advance the belief that every citizen was created equal. By referencing historical events and social movements such as “Seneca Falls and Selma and Stonewall,” Obama highlighted the ongoing struggle for equality and justice in American society. He was referring to significant social movements in American history, including women’s equality, racial justice, and same-sex rights. In 2013, Rick Ungar, a political contributor at *Forbes*, wrote that the president was referring to “the star of the women’s rights movement in the United States in 1848, The marches in support of the efforts in Selma to gain voting rights for African-American

citizens in 1965, and the gay rights movement in the United States that took place early in the morning of June 28, 1969” (Ungar).

Obama’s use of various deictic references to historical events, social movements, ancestors, and particular geographical locations aimed to create vivid images and convey his vision. In “Obama in Selma: Deixis, Rhetorical Vision, and the True Meaning of America,” Allison Prasch investigates how President Obama employed deixis in his speech on the fiftieth anniversary of Bloody Sunday. Prasch argues that deixis is not confined to a “linguistic pointing to bodies, places, and objects within the audience’s immediate vicinity” (“Obama in Selma” 45). It uncovers the connections between “the material and metaphorical/historical, the physical and the symbolic/discursive, between the things that are physically present before the audience and the mental images and shared histories speakers invoke through language” (“Obama in Selma” 45). This rhetorical technique helped Obama reframe American “patriotism and civic responsibility, and the true meaning of America.” By employing “immediate, imaginary, and discursive deictics,” he invoked “the actions and character of ordinary citizens, specific geographical markers within the landscape of American history and sacred moments,” thereby extending the national narrative to include broader “relational, spatial, and temporal” dimensions (“Obama in Selma” 44-45).

As Prasch contends, by directing his audience’s attention to specific individuals, locations, and events in his Selma speech, Obama “elevated their status, endowed them with a presence, and made them central to the story of the United States” (“Obama in Selma” 48). Similarly, in his inaugural speech, Obama pointed to specific people, places and moments. Building upon the three types of deixis Prasch discusses, I argue that President Obama conveyed the perseverance of America’s core values as fulfilling its true meaning. The use of “immediate deixis” depicts “situations in which deictics

direct the audience to places, people, and temporal dimensions that are materially present within the immediate speech situation” (“Obama in Selma” 46), as seen in Obama’s reference to “this great mall” in his inaugural. Moreover, Obama’s references to historical events such as “Seneca Falls and Selma and Stonewall,” “a preacher” and “King” in his inaugural address were indicative of the “imaginary” deixis which “describes how individuals use speech to direct the audience to and through the imaginary realm” or pointing to something the audience can see with their “mind’s eye” (“Obama in Selma” 46). In so doing, Obama sought to take his audience beyond their immediate environment to a different moment in history: the traumatic events of racial and civil rights deprivation. The narrative about ordinary citizens who faced injustices was done through the use of the “discursive deixis.” This one points “readers or listeners to specific places or moments within the flow of the speech, or the text’s internal context” (“Obama in Selma” 47). This form of deixis is akin to “the act of looking backward or forward in time, that of remembering what happened in the past or anticipating some future event” (“Obama in Selma” 47). Through these indexical references, Obama depicted his audience as witnesses to history who had come together to commemorate and honour the courageous actions of those who fought for civil rights. In so doing, he implied that the audience owed a debt, a moral duty to behave differently in preserving what the ordinary citizens had started.

President Obama echoed Martin Luther King’s 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech to emphasise the principles of equality and justice. Just as King called for the government to fulfil the promises of democracy and eradicate racial injustice, Obama suggested that the government has a role to play in advancing equality. By stating, “It is now our generation’s task to carry on what those pioneers began,” Obama was echoing King’s repeated anaphora, “Now is the time” (King). King grounded his arguments

about the “fierce urgency of now” in the idea that America must collectively act to make the needed positive changes concerning the issues of equality and freedom. For example, he declared, “Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.” President Obama, instead, called on “our generation,” arguing that every American must act individually and collectively toward a collective purpose of making equality and freedom a reality.

President Obama employed another form of poetic formula by repeating the phrase “our journey is not complete until” five times in the form of an anaphora to emphasise his firm determination to preserve the rights of equality and justice the “pioneers” once marched for. In this poetic formula, the president was also alluding to another sentence from King’s renowned speech. This rhetorical strategy highlights that both Obama and King shared a common vision of a more just and equal society, highlighting their commitment to addressing systemic injustices and striving for meaningful progress. Particularly, Obama alluded to King’s repeated refrain, “We can never be satisfied.” By alluding to King’s refrain, Obama not only paid homage to the civil rights leader but also aligned himself with the spirit of perseverance and determination that characterised King’s advocacy. King employed this refrain repetitively with some changes to its verb form by alternating between the verb “cannot,” “are not,” and “will not.” Obama attempted to shift the impact that King’s sentence might have had on the audience. He aimed to change the form of King’s last repetition of the refrain, “No, no we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.” President Obama modified King’s refrain which aimed to urge his audience to focus on achieving

a feeling of satisfaction and used “our journey is not complete until” to encourage this audience to focus on getting to a destination.

Presidential Role: Commitment to the Presidential Oath and Harnessing Faith

The profound manner in which President Obama acknowledged the requirements of the office amplified his recurrent call to Americans, emphasising the imperative of being “true to [their] founding documents.” In the opening moments of his speech, he resolutely proclaimed, “Each time we gather to inaugurate a president, we bear witness to the enduring strength of our Constitution. We affirm the promise of our democracy.” With this powerful declaration, President Obama not only introduced the central theme of his speech but also established himself as a leader who would diligently fulfil the symbolic role of president for all Americans and govern the nation within the constitutionally defined limits of the executive office.

President Obama’s acknowledgment of the limits inherent in the executive office served to alleviate the nation’s fears regarding the potential abuse of power. In his speech, he employed what Ericson terms as a “providential supreme being” theme while deliberately repeating the phrase “my fellow Americans” twice. These rhetorical strategies not only exhibited Obama’s comprehension of his presidential authority but also symbolised his reliance on God and the people’s support in governing the nation. Campbell and Jamieson explain that “by calling upon God, presidents subordinate themselves to a higher power”(26). Obama further expounded to his audience that the presidential oath he had just taken was “an oath to God and country,” thus placing himself and the people under a superior authority. This approach aimed to emphasise the president’s constitutional constraints and increase his humility in the face of the daunting tasks of his second term. As Ericson suggests, this recurrent inaugural theme

of calling upon the supreme being serves as one of the three distinct “rungs” in what Ericson terms the “presidential humility ladder” (734).

Implications for the Inauguration Speech Genre

In the service of exploring how public presidential speech constructs and communicates meaning, the close poetic analysis of President Obama’s 2013 inaugural speech investigated how Obama framed his visionary agenda as an extension of the nation’s enduring principles and values. In contrast to his first inaugural speech, where Obama evoked the sacrifices of past generations to forge a sense of unity, he anchored his vision on the fundamental principles enshrined in the US Declaration of Independence and Constitution in his second inaugural speech. By framing policies such as women’s income equality, same-sex rights, immigration reforms, gun regulations, and poverty eradication as essential components of the unalienable rights and the pursuit of a just and prosperous society, he sought to forge a powerful connection between his policy objectives and the nation’s founding ideals.

In this analysis of President Obama’s second inaugural speech, a nuanced exploration of its poetics as a written, spoken, and delivered text reveals a multitude of rhetorical and poetic devices employed to underscore his call for both individual and collective action in safeguarding and advancing the enduring creed. Examining the speech’s mood, tone, style, directives, requisitives, commissives, metaphors, antithesis, parallelism, logos, pathos, oral poetic formulas, imagery, rhetorical and historical allusions, polysyndeton, and anaphora, these tools uncover the choices that contribute to its overall impact and resonance. These observations illuminate the implications embedded within these devices, allowing a deeper understanding of language, emotion, and persuasion. Using various techniques, President Obama appealed to reason (logos),

tapped into the audience's emotions (pathos), and harnessed the power of symbolism, historical references, and rhythmic patterns to craft a compelling and memorable oratory. The inclusion of these elements encouraged individuals and inspired collective action, fostering a sense of shared purpose and responsibility in working towards a more just and prosperous society.

By drawing out the implications of these poetic and rhetorical choices, I contend that they provide important insights into the overarching themes and objectives of the speech. The strategic use of metaphors and imagery, for instance, helped to evoke vivid mental images and connect abstract concepts to tangible realities, thereby enhancing the audience's understanding and emotional engagement. On the other hand, the employment of parallelism and anaphora reinforced key ideas, established a rhythmic cadence, and underscored the speech's central messages of unity, progress, and civic duty.

Both President Obama's first and second inauguration speeches provide valuable insights into the genre of the inauguration speech, highlighting its adaptability and capacity for evolution. While rooted in a shared foundation, these speeches demonstrated the genre's ability to accommodate different contexts, priorities, and rhetorical strategies. President Obama's first inaugural speech exemplified the traditional expectations of the genre. It emphasised national unity, democratic values, and the responsibilities associated with the presidency. This speech aligned with the historical precedents of the inaugural speeches, focusing on unifying the nation and inspiring hope and change. It affirmed the enduring values of democracy while capturing the significance of Obama's historic election as the first African-American president. In this way, the first inaugural speech reaffirmed the role of the genre in conveying a sense of unity and optimism during times of transition.

In contrast, President Obama's second inaugural speech exhibited a shift in focus and tone, reflecting the specific accomplishments, challenges, and priorities of his first term in office. The speech took a more pragmatic and policy-oriented approach, addressing pressing issues such as income inequality and equal rights. By emphasising specific policy agendas and proposing a more assertive vision for the nation's future, the second inaugural speech expanded the boundaries of the genre. It showcased the capacity of the inauguration speech to address substantive policy matters and advocate for comprehensive action, in addition to its symbolic and unifying functions.

I have argued in Chapter Three that the close reading of President George W. Bush's inaugural speeches suggested that the inauguration speech genre is not static but dynamic. Similarly, these two speeches of President Obama highlighted the genre's adaptability to the changing needs and priorities of the time. They illustrated how the genre can accommodate both the traditional ceremonial aspects and the demands for addressing specific policy concerns. This flexibility within the genre allows presidents to engage with the nation, convey their vision, and inspire collective action in ways that resonate with the prevailing circumstances.

The inauguration speeches of President Obama exemplify the power of public language in constructing and communicating meaning to the nation and the world. They demonstrate the ways in which language can shape public perception, inspire action, and foster a sense of collective identity. In his first inaugural speech, Obama strategically evoked reminiscence to highlight the perceived imperfections of the country, creating a sense of shared experience and a collective desire for positive change. This technique aimed to create a powerful bond by making his audience feel like they were part of a shared historical journey. Using this rhetorical style, Obama

conveyed a powerful narrative of national progress and the possibilities of a brighter future, inspiring the nation to unite in pursuit of a better tomorrow.

In the second inaugural speech, President Obama utilised public language as a tool for rallying support and advocating for specific policy goals. He employed a more direct and assertive approach, employing rhetorical strategies such as repetition, parallelism, and historical references to convey a sense of urgency and inspire action. By articulating his policy agendas within the framework of national ideals and values, Obama aimed to mobilise the nation towards collective action.

Chapter 6: President Donald J. Trump's Inaugural Speech: A Paradigm

Changer

Comparison and Contrast

The purpose of conducting a close poetic reading of President Donald Trump's 2017 inaugural speech is to provide a comparative examination of his speech in relation to his two predecessors and thereby consider the implications for both the ongoing exploration of meaning-making within public language and the evolution of the inauguration speech genre. Examining the similarities and differences offers important insights into how President Trump deviated from the conventional norms and expectations associated with the American inauguration speech genre.

The comparison and contrast will shed light on the following factors: historical context, rhetorical approach, the shift in style and communication, genre reflection and evolution. As for the historical context, while Presidents Bush and Obama delivered their inaugural speeches in the aftermath of significant historical events (pre-and post-9/11, respectively), President Trump, according to a 2017 online article by David Graham in *The Atlantic*, delivered his inaugural speech during a highly divisive political climate and a wave of populist sentiments (Graham). He argues that Trump's inaugural speech marked a departure from the more authoritarian tone of his Republican National Convention speech. At the RNC, Trump declared, "I am your voice" and "Only I can fix it," presenting himself as a singular leader with the power to address the nation's challenges. This highly personalised and authoritarian rhetoric contrasts with his inaugural address, where he shifted toward a populist tone, suggesting that his rise to the presidency represented the empowerment of the people rather than himself (Graham).

In addition, the *Pew Research Center*, a nonpartisan American think tank, reported in 2017 that “public trust in government [was] little different than it was before the 2016 election.” According to the report, trust in the federal government had reached “historically low levels,” with only “19%” of Americans expressing confidence that the government would do “what is right.” This distrust marked the “longest period of low trust in government since the question was first asked in 1958” (Pew Research Center). Thus, it would have created a fertile ground for populist rhetoric, which Trump capitalised on by positioning himself as an outsider vowing to restore power to the people. This context might have influenced the rhetoric, themes, and tone of President Trump’s speech as he attempted to address the concerns and aspirations of a specific segment of the American population that felt economically and ideologically marginalised.

In terms of the rhetorical approach, Trump’s inaugural speech differed notably from his predecessors, who employed allusions to shared memories and a call for unity. Instead, Trump predominantly adopted a direct and assertive tone in his speech. He predominantly adopted this type of tone in his speech to resonate with a broader American population, particularly those associated with characteristics such as being white and working-class. President Trump aimed to distance himself from the perceived elite and establish a connection with the general population. His use of colloquial and demotic language aimed to create a sense of relatability and authenticity to appeal to the everyday concerns and experiences of the American people.

In their article, “Disruption, Demonization, Deliverance, and Norm Destruction: The Rhetorical Signature of Donald J. Trump,” Kathleen Jamieson and Doron Taussigs have studied Trump’s political rhetoric as a presidential candidate, president-elect, and during the first three months of his presidency. They claim that Trump’s rhetoric

deviates from traditional political discourse norms and creates a distinct “rhetorical signature.” This signature involves “seeming spontaneity laced with Manichean, evidence-flouting, accountability-dodging, and institution-disdaining claims”(620). Their study underpins the argument that Trump tended to depart from the content and components of preconstructed presidential speech or as they put it “the sanitized, prepackaged rhetoric of his predecessors” (620). Jamieson and Taussigs investigate the distinct rhetorical style of Trump, highlighting four key features: disruption of political norms, demonisation of opponents, grand promises of deliverance, and the destruction of established norms. In so doing, Trump “represents a change in American presidential rhetoric” (641). Some of these elements are evident in his inaugural address, where he framed his presidency as a departure from the status quo, targeting the establishment and promising to restore power to the ordinary people. The authors argue this rhetorical approach not only distinguishes Trump from his predecessors but also reflects a broader strategy aimed at resonating with his base through emotionally charged and polarising language.

This article explains how these traits helped Trump win the election by portraying him as a change candidate because his rhetoric “aided his cause as a candidate because it signaled a rejection of both the status quo and political convention to a constituency eager to see those things shaken up” (641). Such characteristics also complicated his ability to govern effectively because these “communicative patterns” create challenges for him as president because “the president of the United States exists in a world filled with agents and agencies that embrace traditional forms of evidence and argument and agreed-upon standards for adjudicating challenges to what is known and knowable”(641). The analysis in this chapter adds to Jamieson’s and Taussig’s study by providing new insights into the ways Trump attempted to eschew the

traditional rhetorical mores characterising the American presidential inauguration speech. It also provides new perspectives on the four features Jemieson and Taussig discuss above.

President Trump's inaugural speech exhibited a shift in terms of themes and policy priorities. He focused on themes of nationalism, populism, and America-first protectionist policies. Trump underscored the need to prioritise American interests, both domestically and internationally. In contrast to Bush's emphasis on "compassionate conservatism" and Obama's focus on nostalgia and founding values and principles to transmit a message of hope and unity, Trump's speech emphasised a more nationalistic approach that prioritised the protection of American jobs, securing borders, and promoting a sense of national pride—a sense of identity based on divisiveness and xenophobia.

Importantly for this enquiry, the exploration of Trump's inaugural speech provides significant insights into the evolution of the inauguration speech genre. His departure from the established norms and his unconventional rhetorical strategies challenge the traditional understanding of this type of presidential speech. Trump's speech manifested a paradigm shift in how American presidents approach and communicate their vision during the inauguration. Despite Biden's return to the more conventional use of genre in 2021, it remains to be seen how such a radical shift might reshape the expectations and possibilities for future inaugural speeches.

Trump's communication style, especially concerning the questions of populism, authoritarianism, propriety and transgression has been investigated in the extant scholarship. For example, some scholars have provided systematic empirical data regarding Trump's personality profile and contrasted his profile with other contemporary populist political leaders and candidates in other countries. Their

evidence shows that Trump stood apart even when compared to populist political figures who were consistently described by the press “as having abrasive, narcissistic, provocative, and offensive personalities” (Nai et al. 610). The authors of this empirical study argue that Trump’s perceived personality scores high on one of the “benevolent” traits which is “extraversion” but low on “agreeableness, emotional stability, and openness” (623). On the other hand, he scores high on all three “socially malevolent reputation traits -[narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism]”(623).

In terms of campaigning styles, these writers comment that populist political candidates are considerably more inclined to use “negativity and emotionality” in their campaign strategies (630). This comparative article expounds that Trump’s profile is one of extremes. He ranks fourth highest among populists in “negative campaigning and fear appeals,” and has the highest score for the utilisation of “character attacks.” His use of “enthusiasm appeals” is limited and below the average of other populists (630).

This chapter contributes to the existing literature on Trump’s communication style by investigating how his perceived personality traits are encoded rhetorically and syntactically within his inaugural speech. It adds to such studies that have examined Trump’s personality and rhetorical style, noting his reliance on negativity, emotionality, and character attacks. By providing a detailed analysis of his inaugural speech, this chapter reveals how his populist discourse might appeal to ordinary people through his use of specific rhetorical techniques and highlights his strategic opposition to the established political elite, a common populist tactic.

Other critics of Trump have described his rhetoric and actions as having authoritarian tendencies. This includes his attacks on the media, refusal to accept election results (which will be discussed in the next chapter), and attempts to

concentrate power (Gounari 2009). In *American Nightmare: Donald Trump, Media Spectacle, and Authoritarian Populism*, Douglas Kellner analyses Trump's rise to power, concentrating on his use of media spectacle and populist rhetoric, as well as the authoritarian tendencies in his political style. He proposes that Trump was "an authoritarian leader who has mobilized an authoritarian populist movement that follows his leadership"(20). Situating Trump's populism within a broader context of global authoritarian movements, the author draws parallels to Nazism. Kellner compares Trump to Hitler, arguing that "just as Hitler denounced allegedly corrupt and weak party politicians in the Weimar Republic, Trump decries all politicians as idiots, stupid, or weak – some of the would-be strongman's favorite words." (22).

My analysis extends Kellner's investigation of Trump's populist authoritarianism by examining how Trump's inaugural speech employs constitutive rhetoric to create an exclusionary identity and prioritises a notion of unity based on "oneness" rather than "wholeness." This rhetorical strategy not only reinforces Trump's authoritarian style but also challenges the traditional ceremonial function of the inaugural speech, with implications for the modern American presidency and democratic discourse.

What is more, some critics considered Trump's communication style as transgressing norms of propriety. He frequently employed coarse language, engaged in personal attacks, brought uncertainty to Washington's international relationships, and broke with traditional expectations of presidential decorum. For example, Oliver Turner and Juliet Kaarbo expound that Trump's rhetoric was characterised by "impulsivity, emotion, and provocation," which together generated rhetorical unpredictability (453). Their exploration of the unpredictability of Trump's rhetoric on US foreign policy, particularly towards China, was grounded in his personality. In their analysis of

Trump's leadership characteristics, the authors suggest that he, and other power-motivated political figures, who are "high in distrust and need for power adopt even more aggressive foreign policies in times of crises" (456). Trump's highly provocative rhetoric and approach towards China reflected his political ideology that "the world is conflictual with threats and punishments seen as effective"(462). Brian Ott comments on Trump's "incivility" as a major feature of Trump's discourse on Twitter (63). Michael Cornfield adds that President Trump was often involved in "feuds," "confrontations," and "blunt vernacular"(213).

In *The Rhetorical Presidency*, Tulis argues that the nature of presidential leadership has fundamentally changed over time, with modern presidents relying much more on rhetoric and public appeals than their predecessors, who regarded the presidency primarily as a formal, constitutionally defined position. While Campbell and Jamieson focus chiefly on points of confluence among inaugural speeches that collectively distinguish them, as a genre, from other forms of presidential address, Tulis emphasises points of divergence among inaugural addresses, historically arranged, that collectively distinguish earlier from more recent speeches. In this light, Tulis contrasts the "Old Way" of presidential communication, which was more restrained and institutional (25), with the "New Way," characterised by direct engagement with the public and the use of rhetorical strategies to shape public opinion and policy (117). In the Forward to this book, Russell Muirhead comments on the formality of the nineteenth-century pre-rhetorical US presidency. He claims:

Presidents before Woodrow Wilson saw themselves as bearers of a constitutional office that imposed constraints on what they could say and do. Prior to the twentieth century, presidents were formal—distant, restrained,

dignified— because they thought the Constitution required formality.

Constitutional forms, like the office of the presidency itself, made politics a formal activity where propriety mattered more than passion or authenticity. (xi)

In this type of presidency, presidents, according to Tulis, “regularly go over the heads of Congress to the people at large in support of legislation and other initiatives”(4). In the twentieth century, the concept of the rhetorical presidency enabled presidents to “talk directly and plainly to the people, whether standing at the head of a great public rally or settled comfortably by the fireside for a chat” (xii).

Related to the concept of propriety and transgression discussed above, Muirhead remarks on Trump’s 2016 election and presidency describing Trump as representing the rhetorical presidency taken to its extreme, potentially pushing it to its breaking point. He asserts that “Trump has refined and brought to a new extreme the elements of the rhetorical presidency: he has relaxed and abandoned the formalities and norms of propriety that heretofore constrained presidential talk; and he stands poised to normalize demagoguery in the presidency more fully than any president before”(xiv-xv).

My analysis of President Trump’s inaugural speech deepens the examination of propriety and transgression in presidential rhetoric by demonstrating how Trump’s deliberate eschewing of traditional inaugural norms—both in content and tone—challenges the ceremonial expectations of the speech. This analysis highlights how his rhetoric not only disrupts the epideictic function of unifying the nation but also redefines the modern presidency’s communicative style.

Chapter Overview

In my close poetic analysis of President Trump's inaugural speech, I argue that he challenged and re-envisioned the established rhetorical norms associated with key elements of the American inauguration speech genre as described by Campbell and Jamieson. This divergence from tradition is a central theme in my analysis, highlighting how President Trump's approach marked a departure from the conventional path taken by his predecessors. In other words, while it could be claimed that President Trump's inauguration did demonstrate aspects of the four recurrent genre elements that characterise the American inauguration speech, his approach to these elements diverged significantly from the conventional understanding of this type of presidential speech.

Motivations for President Trump's Genre Norms Deviation

In "Reclaiming White Spaces: Reading Trump's Inaugural Address as a Eulogy for the American Dream," Joshua Guitar investigates how Trump's rhetoric diminished the agency of nonwhite individuals, portrayed nonwhite violations of predominantly white institutions as criminal, and embraced a "messianic" persona to reassert the presidency and the American Dream in line with white ideology (299). Guitar emphasises the sociopolitical context of the 2016 presidential election, claiming that "the racialized milieu of the election was invariably significant as the presidency, a historically white institution, was reclaimed from its first person of color, Barack Obama" (300). The author asserts that "orations" that diverge from traditional norms "may change the trajectory of the genre, or exist as outliers in the historical narrative of the genre." He holds that the "deviations from prescribed genres are manifestations of ideology and that Trump's speech, in particular, was informed by an ideology of whiteness"(300). For example, Guitar alleged that Trump implied that Obama had

unjustly taken something that wasn't rightfully his, stating, "we are transferring power from Washington, D.C. and giving it back to you, the American People." Although this remark seems inclusive at first, it subtly accuses Obama and "alludes to the trope of the nonwhite criminal" (306).

While Guitar argues that Trump's inaugural rhetoric reflected an ideological response to Obama's presidency and institutions of whiteness (299), this analysis builds on his work by demonstrating how Trump's speech further disrupted the inaugural genre. Specifically, this project highlights Trump's rejection of traditional epideictic norms by disparaging the American past, fostering further divisions, and constructing solidarity among his audience through rhetoric grounded in divisive ideological appeals.

In this research, I contend that while all instances of the American inauguration speech genre involve some level of tailoring to the president's goals and audience, Trump's departure from the rhetorical norms and expectations was notable for its distinctiveness and extent. He employed his departure for several purposes: to align his speech with his own political brand, connect with his base of supporters, appeal to anti-establishment sentiments, and employ his distinctive communication style.

Trump's inaugural speech can be considered an intentional effort to establish and reinforce his political brand through the application of rhetorical elements. While establishing a political brand is common among presidents, President Trump stood out with his distinct style and approach. His unconventional communication methods, focus on populism and nationalism, and positioning as an outsider challenged the political establishment and set him apart from his predecessors. His brand relied on his unique persona, unscripted speeches, and direct engagement with supporters through social media, making his political brand distinctive.

President Trump's inauguration speech mirrored the anti-establishment sentiment that drove his campaign. Rich Lowry, an editor for *Politico*, commented in 2015 that during the presidential elections, "Trump [was] something new in Republican politics. He [was] the anti-establishment front-runner" (Lowry). By eschewing the traditional rhetoric associated with inauguration speeches and projecting anti-establishment sentiment, Trump aimed to distance himself from what he represented as the perceived failures of the political elite and highlight his outsider status as a kind of political advantage.

Context: An Iconoclast President from a Celebrity and Real-Estate Background

President Trump delivered his inaugural speech on 20 January 2017 (see Appendix 5). Trump as an individual - and his inaugural speech as a marker of that individuality - is significant for the analysis of public presidential speech in this thesis because both were unconventional. Along with the key factors I have discussed earlier that differentiated Trump and his speech, Trump was the polar opposite of the two previous presidents in terms of his occupational background. As a billionaire businessman and media personality, Trump was the only American president who had never held political office before his presidency. Zachary Crockett, a former Vox staff, commented in 2017 that "from George Washington to Barack Obama — there has never been a president who has entirely lacked both political and military service. Donald Trump has broken this barrier" (Crockett). Thus, he was an inexperienced president, unlike Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, who before their presidencies, had served as the governor of Texas and as an Illinois state senator, respectively.

This unique context of Trump's career background and lack of political experience had two notable implications for his inaugural speech. First, it influenced the tone and content of his speech, which was controversial and divisive. Trump's unconventional approach and outsider status enabled him to communicate his distinct political agenda, which stood apart from the traditional rhetoric of previous presidents. Second, his business background and absence of political ties played a part in shaping his international policy agendas. Particularly, Trump's inaugural speech hinted at a departure from globalism, as he underscored the concept of protectionism and a focus on what he perceived as America's primary national interests, which can be seen as reflecting his ideologies shaped by his experiences and perspectives from his business career.

Mood: Unity Gives Way to a Different Course

In contrast to the customary festive atmosphere of the inauguration ceremony, Trump's inaugural speech set a tone that was divisive, antagonistic, and oppositional. There were moments when President Trump appeared to attempt to evoke a sense of unity among the audience, such as when he expounded that "the Bible tells us, how good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity." These efforts were overshadowed by the pervasive presence of the three aforementioned negative sentiments throughout his speech. In employing this strategy, President Trump aimed to amplify his critique of the previous presidencies and their administrations, attributing the perceived state of decline in the country to them.

This president initially adhered to the formal structure and content of the presidential speech, but he quickly deviated from it. In a customary introductory sentence, Trump employed a lofty language of unification by expressing gratitude to

the audience and the former American presidents present at his inauguration. Through the interconnected inaugural themes of non-partisanship and national unity, which suggested overcoming any divisions that political parties would cause, President Trump followed Obama's rhetorical strategy in which he thanked his predecessor for facilitating the transfer of power. Thus, while Trump's speech began by evoking a powerful message of unity, this initial display of unity was short-lived as the speech took a different course.

By contrasting depictions of prosperity and hardship, he intensified the contentious, conflicting, and sombre moods within his speech. Trump's speech incorporated the device of antithesis to underscore what he represented as previous politicians' unworthiness and mistreatment of the public. He declared, "Their victories have not been your victories; their triumphs have not been your triumphs; and while they celebrated in our Nation's Capital, there was little to celebrate for struggling families all across our land." This contrasting statement would reflect Trump's focus on memorable soundbites, which would resonate with the audience due to the intense sound repetitions, aided by the alliterative repetition of the initial sounds in almost every word. The resulting catchiness of the sentence would ensure its lasting impact on the audience's memory long after Trump delivered it.

Tone: Exaggeration as Optimism and Anti-Establishment Posturing

President Trump's inaugural speech exhibited an optimistic and exaggerated tone. He utilised the rhetorical tool of hyperbole to magnify the significance of his inauguration and the anticipated reforms it would bring to the American public and the world. Trump's hyperbolic claims about his inauguration can be seen as part of his anti-establishment sentiment and his strategic use of populist rhetoric. This strategy aligned

with the approach outlined in his book, *Trump: The Art of the Deal*. In the book, he advocates for the use of exaggeration to tap into “people’s fantasies” and promote ideas effectively. Trump justifies this approach as “an innocent form of exaggeration—and a very effective form of promotion.” He adds that “people want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular,” and he refers to this rhetorical tool as “truthful hyperbole,” an innocent yet powerful form of exaggeration that capitalises on people’s desire to believe in something grandiose and exceptional (Trump and Schwartz 58).

One notable instance of exaggeration in Trump’s speech was his deliberate overstatement regarding the crowd size at his inauguration. By falsely claiming that Americans “came by the tens of millions to become part of a historic movement the likes of which the world has never seen before,” Trump endeavoured to portray his inauguration as the most significant in American history. However, this claim was contradicted by factual evidence. Elle Hunt, a writer for *The Guardian*, commented in 2017 “The New York Times estimated that Trump had drawn a crowd of about one-third the size of Obama’s, which was thought to be a record turnout of 1.8 million” (Hunt). Unlike his predecessors, Bush and Obama, who spoke of their inaugurations as a continuation of the nation’s heritage and service to the country, Trump once again attempted to distance himself from the political establishment and to represent himself as a unique case rather than as part of a tradition. By exaggerating the significance of his inauguration and downplaying previous ceremonies, he aimed to position himself as an outsider who would bring about radical change and challenge the established norms of Washington politics.

Style: Populistic, Divisive, Concise, and Casual

The style of Trump's inaugural rhetoric was inherently populist, reflecting elements of demagoguery. Trump's rhetoric appealed to popular sentiment, tapping into a sense of frustration and disillusionment with the existing political system. Unlike new presidents who would normally attempt to reach out to the audience via the language of unity and positivity, President Trump combined this populist rhetoric with the use of bleak, negative, divisive. This approach also revealed that Trump's presidential speeches would draw directly from his negative campaign speeches. The sombre, divisive, and combative style of Trump's inaugural speech would presage that he would continue to adhere to the kind of "proudly polarising" leader he evoked himself to be in some of his rally speeches. More specifically, Trump would fail to enact the symbolic role of the president as the representative for all the people during his presidency. This would be most evident in the United States Capitol insurrection that took place on January 6, 2021, at the conclusion of his presidency. In this incident, Trump called on a mob of his supporters to overturn the 2020 presidential election following his defeat to Joe Biden. The occurrence highlighted a divisive approach that prioritised his own interests over the collective welfare of the nation. Some commentators on *CNN Politics* wrote in 2022 that Trump also had a "seven-part plan" to overturn the election and stay in office (Bash et al.).

Trump's inauguration speech stood out for its concise, simple, and straightforward structure. It was the shortest speech I have analysed in this thesis, consisting of 1457 words made up of shorter paragraphs, notably shorter than any president's speech investigated in this thesis, and contained numerous one-sentence passages, often connected by coordinating conjunctions or commas. The fragmented flow created by numerous one-sentence passages connected by coordinating

conjunctions or commas could have a detrimental effect on the coherence and continuity of the delivered speech.

While Trump intensively employed tone of voice and body gestures as aspects of a poetics of performativity, his use of them primarily reflected his unique manner of public speaking. He kept moving his hands at every sentence he spoke. He also spoke with a mostly steady tone throughout the speech. However, in some parts of the speech, his hand movements and tone reinforced the meaning he was communicating to his audience. For instance, Trump used body gestures to emphasise the previously discussed notion that his inauguration would mark the “ascension” of the American public over the politicians in Washington. When the president declared to his audience that the nation “was transferring power from Washington, D.C., and giving it back to you, the people,” Trump looked at the camera facing him and pointed at it while raising his voice when he reached “to you, the people.” The president aimed to heighten the inclusiveness of the ordinary people and the exclusiveness of the politicians in his speech by repeatedly pointing his index finger at the front camera and/or directly at the crowd in front of him. This was most evident when the president emphasised to the audience that this moment of his inauguration “was your moment, it belongs to you.”

President Trump strategically employed tone of voice to further amplify the concept of people’s empowerment during his administration. He delivered this message with a distinct rhythm and pace, with frequent pauses and deliberate enunciation. Trump declared that “January 20, 2017, will be remembered as the day the people became the rulers of this Nation again.” In his sentence, Trump paused repeatedly in its second half as follows: “As the day/ the people/ became the rulers/ of this nation/ again.” This use of the word “again” suggests that he believed there was a preceding

period when the people were not in control, and he was aiming to signal a return to their empowerment through his presidency.

Unification: Unconventional Forms of Unity

Despite winning the electoral college while losing the popular vote in a contentious presidential election against Hillary Clinton (“2016 Presidential Election”), Trump not only exhibited a divergence from the traditional approach of unifying the nation as a cohesive whole, a point discussed earlier in this chapter but also introduced a novel concept of unity that focused on a different type of alignment among the American people. Campbell and Jamieson explain that “partisan politicking” is one of the sources that might cause division. They comment, “explicit appeals for unity are most common in addresses that follow divisive campaigns or contested electoral outcomes” (16). As discussed in Chapter Two, Bush faced a deeply divided nation due to the 2000 controversial election between him and Al Gore, in which Bush lost the popular vote but won the Electoral College vote. He attempted to unify the nation by emphasising a shared American story and values, creating unity through the use of a story about the nation’s history that everyone would believe in. President Obama exhibited adherence to this rhetorical tradition of reconstituting the audience as the people in some new manner. In his 2009 inaugural speech, he reconstituted his audience as the people of responsibility.

President Trump adopted a distinct approach to the idea of unity, employing three distinct strategies. First, he employed pronouns in a manner that could be interpreted as creating a division between himself and the public. Second, Trump crafted a narrative that portrayed a historical struggle between the American people and Congress, highlighting a conflict of interests and power dynamics. By framing this

narrative, Trump also aimed to selectively identify and align with a particular group, while isolating others. Third, he attempted to foster a certain kind of ideological unity based on notions of loyalty and allegiance, emphasising the importance of these concepts in his vision of a united America, which, in fact, created exclusions and division.

The Use of “We vs. You” to Establish Divisions

A casual reading of President Trump’s inaugural speech would suggest that he followed what I have described as the rhetorical tradition associated with the ceremony of inauguration. However, the inaugural speech exhibited a departure from the traditional approach observed by the previous two presidents. Trump used pronouns to create divisions, employing a “We vs. You” dichotomy. While President Trump utilised an exclusive voice that seemingly established a division between himself and the people, an alternative interpretation could be that he was encouraging his supporters to prioritise themselves and view him as their advocate. He employed the second-person pronoun “you” exclusively for the American people to emphasise their central role in the power dynamics of the nation. Trump’s speech conveyed the message that the power was being transferred not only between administrations or political parties but specifically from Washington, D.C., back to the people. In this excerpt, he moved from using the collective pronoun “we” to using the exclusive pronoun “you,” which allegedly established a division between the president and the public. Notably, Trump’s use of the pronoun “you” might have indicated a strategic shift in his perceived role. By emphasising the transfer of power from Washington, D.C. back to the people, he positioned himself as a channel or facilitator of the people’s authority and agency, potentially urging their identification with his leadership. This aligned with his populist

rhetoric and the portrayal of himself as a champion of the ordinary American citizen. In contrast to a traditional view of the president as the central figure with significant power and influence, Trump's speech seemed to imply a more decentralised and participatory vision of governance, where the people played a more active role in shaping the nation's direction.

Unlike Presidents Bush and Obama, Trump's use of personal pronouns in his inaugural speech did not aim to reinforce a sense of unity with his audience. Sigelman argues that while the use of "first-person plural pronouns (we, us, and our) connote mutuality and community, the second- and third-person pronouns and first-person singular pronouns (e.g., you, they, and I) erect verbal barriers" (86). Trump intensified this division by pointing at the camera and pronouncing the pronoun "you," when he stated "giving [power] back to you, the people," clearly indicating that he saw himself as separate from the people. He positioned himself as an outsider to the Washington D.C. elites, claiming that he would not seek power for himself but rather act as the voice of the people, fighting for their power to be restored.

A Narrative of Divide

Trump's use of narrative about the past in his speech served to deepen the divisions between Congress and the public, highlighting what he represented as the power imbalances and mistreatment of American citizens by Washington's politicians. He aimed to depict his audience as victims of political injustices. In this view, Trump endeavoured to galvanise his audience through emotional appeals rooted in a narrative of perpetual victimhood and opposition. Trump's rhetoric thus fosters a sense of shared grievance among his audiences, encouraging them to view acts of revenge as morally justified responses to their victimhood. In his article, "Donald J. Trump and the

Rhetoric of Ressentiment,” Casey Kelly examines Trump’s appeals to rage, malice, and revenge by sketching the rhetorical dimensions of an underlying emotional-moral framework in which victimization, resentment, and revenge are civic virtues”(3). The Kelly explores how Trump’s rhetoric is underpinned by “ressentiment,” a term he describes as “self-poisoning of the mind in which a subject is consumed by emotions and affects such as revenge, hatred, malice, envy, the impulse to detract, and spite”(4). This psychological state not only amplifies feelings of anger and resentment but also undermines democratic norms by promoting a self-serving form of civic virtue centred on retribution rather than collective good. Kelly argues that Trump’s rhetoric consistently frames himself and his supporters as victims of various societal and political forces, such as “Democrats, the press, criminals, immigrants, foreign adversaries, welfare recipients, the MeToo movement, globalists, and racial Others” (6). This depiction allows Trump to claim a moral high ground, positioning himself as a martyr and a warrior fighting against these perceived injustices. This deception of “marginalization in the form of reverse discrimination and unfair treatment frees his supporters of any kind of debt or civic obligation to a seemingly cruel and hostile polity”(3). Drawing upon Kelly’s insights, Trump reinforced the divide between those in power and the struggling families across the nation by intensifying their contrasting experiences. He underscored this division through contrasting ideas, stating that “their victories have not been your victories; their triumphs have not been your triumphs.” In this sense, Trump attempted to evoke a particular image for his virtuous ordinary Americans “a very particular cultural figure who might consider themselves aggrieved, grudge-holding, treated unfairly, powerless, and humiliated by economic misfortune” (Kelly 5). He intensified the perception of Congress’s abuses of power, further accentuating the dichotomy between politicians and the public. The strategic use of

narrative and language choices deepened the separation, establishing a narrative of “them” versus “you.”

Segmenting the American People: Defining the Forgotten

The narrative Trump constructed in this first formal speech of his presidency not only heightened the existing conflict between the people and Congress but also shed light on his deliberate efforts to deepen divisions within the population. By selectively identifying and aligning himself with a specific group, he aimed to isolate others and create further discord among the people. He recurrently addressed this group of people, elevating them as “the forgotten men and women” – whom he was bringing into the spotlight. To further widen the divide between the political establishment and this specific faction of the American public, President Trump employed constitutive rhetoric in his speech to underscore the perception of this group as the “forgotten men and women.” This rhetorical strategy aimed to shape and define the identity of his followers, as Maurice Charland elucidates in his analysis of constitutive rhetoric.

The use of “forgotten men and women” was echoed by conservative politicians in other countries, demonstrating a common rhetorical strategy. For example, in Australian politics, conservative leaders employed similar rhetoric, often invoking “the quiet Australians” to represent those whose voices they claim have been marginalised. Scott Morrison, the Prime Minister of Australia, used “the quiet Australians” during his election campaign in 2019 to refer to everyday Australians who he believed were not being heard by the political elite (*ABC News*). It became a central theme in his campaign, emphasising his commitment to representing the concerns of the majority of citizens. This example reveals how such rhetorical appeals transcend borders and are employed by conservative leaders to connect with their constituencies.

Another similar rhetorical strategy was Robert Menzies', an Australian politician who served as the 12th prime minister of Australia from 1939 to 1941 and 1949 to 1966 (Australian Dictionary of Biography). Menzies employed the term "forgotten people" in his 1942 speech to refer to those whom he believed were overlooked by the political establishment. Judith Brett's work *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People* provides insightful analysis into Menzies' use of this term which highlights its significance in shaping Australian political discourse. She expounds that the speech "makes direct address to the Australian middle class, who will return him to power in 1949. It gave non-labour images with which to create and enlarge its constituency (23).

In his article "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the Peuple Quebecois," Charland argues that constitutive rhetoric creates an audience, or as he puts it, "calls an audience into being" through a narrative discourse (134). Through constitutive rhetoric, he demonstrates how "subjects and audience are constituted as subjects through a process of identification with a textual position" (138). According to Charland, one of the ideological impacts of constitutive rhetoric is that it creates the illusion of narrative freedom for the subjects. This sense of freedom is "illusory" because the narrative is already spoken or written and the type of narrative is "a structure of understanding that produces totalizing interpretations, the subjects are constrained to follow through, to act so as to maintain the narrative consistency"(141).

Charland's concept of "interpellation" plays a crucial role in understanding constitutive rhetoric and is equally significant in my investigation of Trump's narrative. This concept sheds light on how Trump endeavoured to construct a distinct subgroup within the larger American audience, highlighting their identification and alignment. I propose that Trump aimed to shape a collective identity and solidify the boundaries of

his chosen group by employing interpellation. Charland argues that “interpellation occurs at the very moment one enters into a rhetorical situation, that is as soon as an individual recognizes and acknowledges being addressed”(138). In this sense, the audience members can be constituted as “always already” subjects of the narrative once they are interpellated. Interpellation can be highly persuasive because audience members become captured by the narrative when they acknowledge themselves as being interpellated. This idea is important because constitutive rhetoric “positions the readers [the audience] towards political, social, and economic action in the material world and it is in this positioning that its ideological character becomes significant”(141).

President Trump used a discursive narrative in which he divided the people in his speech into two groups: namely, “the forgotten men and women” and the rest of the nation. He argued implicitly that this binary of power would be reversed and that a particular group of the people, “the forgotten men and women,” would become the leaders of the country, displacing the “elites.” By addressing this group as “the forgotten” in the narrative, “interpellation” took place, in that the poor “forgotten men and women” recognised themselves as being addressed and accepted themselves in the narrative. Thus, they became subjects in the narrative. In consequence, Trump’s speech can be considered as evoking this idea of the “illusory freedom” that Charland says a constitutive discourse can create. By addressing the “forgotten men and women,” Trump was arguing that he would spare no effort to protect this group of people aggrieved by the past political system so they would regain freedom in the “material world.”

Loyalty and Allegiance as a Source for Unity

The prominence of loyalty and allegiance in Trump's speech overshadowed the formation of a more inclusive unity. He approached the notions in the first half of his speech by saying, "The oath of office I take today is an oath of allegiance to all Americans." He then called on Americans to be loyal to the nation – as implicitly constituted within the metonymy of the president/himself - instead of encouraging them to be unified or harmonious across divisions. Trump explained that "at the bedrock of our politics will be a total allegiance to the United States of America, and through our loyalty to our country, we will rediscover our loyalty to each other. When you open your heart to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice."

This emphasis on loyalty and allegiance would raise important questions about the transition from a rhetoric of unity to a discourse of nationalism and its meaning for the political landscape. In "The Power of the Presidency to Hurt: The Indecorous Rhetoric of Donald J. Trump and the Rhetorical Norms of Democracy," Mary Stuckey analyses how Trump's rhetoric diverges from traditional presidential communication. Stuckey notes Trump's rhetoric is a departure from the educative rhetoric, in which the presidency is perceived as a "deliberative institution" and the unifying role traditionally expected of presidents ("The Power" 370). This president focuses instead on an "overreliance on vituperative rhetoric and a presidential performance that damages democratic norms and values" to mobilise his base and consolidate power ("The Power" 374). She contends that presidents can be described as both "individual agents who make rhetorical and political choices and discursive nodes through which political discourse circulates" ("The Power" 366).

Investigating the significance of President Trump's rhetoric as an intersection of political discourse is what matters for the analysis in this section because it can deepen

the understanding of how establishing unity through loyalty and allegiance disrupts conventional expectations of presidential rhetoric (“The Power” 367). It also highlights the potential harm and divisiveness it fosters within the “entire political system” (“The Power” 368). By understanding the presidency as “a node of discourse” this section explores how Trump’s rhetoric influences the “nature of national political culture” (“The Power” 369) and redefines the boundaries between unity, loyalty, and nationalism.

While Trump did acknowledge the importance of unity and equality, his focus on his focus on loyalty and allegiance shifted the narrative towards a nationalist perspective. This approach positioned dissenters as outsiders, reinforcing a divisive “us versus them” dynamic. Instead of adhering to the democratic practice grounded on principles of respect and equality, the evocation of the American people as either loyal or disloyal implicitly conveys the message that those who disagree with Trump’s vision do not deserve respect, diminishing the legitimacy of opposing viewpoints. In this view, Trump, as an individual agent and a node of political discourse, contributed to a rhetoric that “weakens those tenets” foundational to democratic expectations (“The Power” 378). This raises important questions about how the rhetoric of unity can intertwine with nationalist sentiments, blurring the boundaries between inclusive unity and exclusive assimilation.

Trump’s ideology of unity diverged significantly from the conceptualisation of unity in the theory of the inaugural genre by Campbell and Jamieson. They argue that the audience must be first “unified and reconstituted as the people” before they can “witness and ratify an ascent to power”(16). Trump’s quote reveals that he switched this inauguration tradition, i.e., he concentrated on requesting loyalty from the people instead of attempting to unify them first. His emphasis on loyalty, instead of prioritising

unity in his inauguration, can be seen as evoking a military metaphor. The term “loyalty” often carries connotations of reliance on a leader, suggesting potential consequences for those deemed disloyal. This focus on loyalty may be more pertinent in times of conflict or emergency, where strong allegiance to a leader is expected. Unlike the call for unity, which may not inherently involve consequences for noncompliance, Trump’s request for loyalty conveyed a message of accountability to those who did not align with his vision.

President Trump’s emphasis on loyalty as a means of fostering unity among the people can be further examined by exploring how unity can be established in the realm of politics. This exploration can shed light on the relationship between the political speaker and their audience. I will draw upon the insightful framework presented by political philosopher Danielle Allen in her book *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education*. Allen introduces two metaphorical concepts of unity, namely “oneness” and “wholeness,” which provide valuable perspectives. The concept of “oneness” involves assimilation, where individuals are categorised as either belonging to or excluded from the community. Allen emphasises that this type of unity is “intimately bound together with practices of citizenship that involved making citizens who were not part of the one people politically invisible”(18). In contrast, Allen introduces the notion of “wholeness” in which “citizens must imagine themselves part of a whole they cannot see. The people is the name for that whole”(17). Unlike “oneness,” this concept promotes unity despite individual diversities and disagreements. To put it differently, Allen suggests that “to make the people whole might cultivate an aspiration to the coherence and integrity of a consolidated but complex, intricate, and differentiated body”(17).

Expanding upon this theoretical thinking, I argue that the way Trump tied his call for unity to the concept of loyalty aligned more closely with the metaphorical unity of “oneness.” This notion of unity diverged from the traditional approach of reinforcing a sense of “wholeness” during presidential inaugurations. Previous presidents aimed to foster a unity of “wholeness” by urging their citizens to embrace a collective identity and view their differences as a source of strength. In contrast, Trump’s use of the term loyalty and the underlying concept of “oneness” implied a sense of “assimilation” – and thus a rejection of difference. This type of unity disregarded diversity and dissent, creating an environment where individuals were expected to conform to his ideologies. Consequently, those who did not align with his vision of citizenship would find themselves excluded. Investigating Trump’s rhetoric through the lens of unity shows that his approach challenged the conventional norms of inauguration speeches. Rather than promoting inclusivity and embracing diversity, President Trump’s emphasis on loyalty and “oneness” established a framework where individuals were compelled to assimilate into his prescribed concept of citizenship.

Unpraiseworthy Past: Reaffirmation of Exclusive Values

President Trump eschewed the traditional “rehears[al] of communal values drawn from the past” in two ways (Campbell and Jamieson 15). He refrained from praising the nation’s past and reaffirmed values that would only appeal to himself and the “forgotten” people he constructed. I have discussed in the Introduction that while announcing their particular approaches, newly-inaugurated presidents also normally reaffirm traditional values by “venerating the past and showing that the traditions of the presidency will continue unbroken with them” (Campbell and Jamieson 19). Trump

depicted the past as oppressive and deceptive; he aimed to discredit previous presidents and congress members.

Trump strategically employed sombre imagery, intensifying the impact of what he referred to as the “American carnage” caused by previous establishments. The use of polysyndeton in “and the crime and the gangs and the drugs” heightened the severity of the alleged ruin. These images did not accurately reflect the political and social realities; as Andrew Wood claimed, Trump’s inaugural speech was “widely at odds with the actual state of the nation” (64). He positioned his administration as the solution to the perceived ruin caused by past politicians. President Trump proclaimed his dedication to the audience, “I will fight for you with every breath in my body, and I will never, ever let you down.” By employing rhythmic repetitions in the words “I will,” “fight,” “for,” “breath,” and “body” and emphasising his sacrifice with the use of “I,” “my,” in conjunction with hyperbole, Trump aimed to make his promise captivating to the audience. Markedly, he diverged from the tradition of “venerating the past” and instead positioned himself as a fighter and leader, seeking the firm loyalty of the American people as long as they venerated him.

The second way President Trump deviated significantly from the traditional inauguration speech genre was by challenging a key element, namely the reaffirmation of shared values. Instead of emphasising values that would resonate with a broad spectrum of Americans, Trump selected and reinforced values that appealed primarily to himself and the “forgotten” Americans he previously identified in his speech. In this view, my analysis builds upon Stuckey’s discussion of “Personal Leadership” because it provides a valuable lens for understanding Trump’s divergence from the inauguration tradition of promoting shared values. In her article “The Rhetoric of the Trump Administration,” Stuckey argues that in his presidential rhetoric Trump “personalized

leadership and in doing so undermined expertise as an important element in policy making” and “attacked the norms and values that have long underpinned national politics” (“The Rhetoric” 125). This leadership, Stuckey contends, describes a situation where the institutional role and the personal characteristics of its holder are almost completely intertwined. As Stuckey puts it, Trump was “more interested in using the presidency to demonstrate his personal predilections than as a means of enacting policy or managing the government” (“The Rhetoric” 128). This shift in rhetoric and leadership had substantial implications for the perception and functioning of the presidency and democracy as a whole because “distinctions among the public, the personal and the private have become increasingly obfuscated” in Trump’s leadership (“The Rhetoric” 128). The obscurity of these distinctions under Trump’s leadership is problematic because by “transgressing the norms of the institution, he risked undermining its prestige, and therefore also its power” (“The Rhetoric” 133).

President Trump “failed to obey generic expectations” in his speech (Stuckey “The Rhetoric” 133). Campbell and Jamieson explain that the “traditional values rehearsed by the president need to be selected and framed in ways that unify the audience”(19). President Trump did not rehearse traditional values or what these authors refer to as “communal values” (15). As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, President Bush reaffirmed compassion, courage, and civility as communal and traditional values in his first inaugural speech and emphasised equality, dignity, democracy, and liberty in his second inaugural speech. Bush’s reaffirmations of such values would appeal to all Americans because it reflected the rhetoric of “conservation, preservation, maintenance, and renewal” of what was “sanctified” in the nation’s heritage (20). On the contrary, President Trump referred to values such as strength, wealth, pride, and safety in a closing paragraph. These four values Trump aimed to

reaffirm, which came in the form of an anaphoric poetic formula, that would lead to the nation's greatness, were not inherently communal values. However, he addressed them as so to best resonate with the neglected and marginalised Americans he had constructed as his primary audience and supporters. The two recurrent inaugural themes of a providential supreme being and the American mission gave these values a sense of common heritage. Ericson argues that the repeated inaugural themes are "definitive of the more permanent, cultural features of American Politics" (729). Tammy Vigil contends that the themes "show how the ends outlined by Campbell and Jamieson are actually met" (429).

President Trump utilised the theme of the American mission to reaffirm his values of strength and pride as communal values. The notion of the American mission indeed holds a recurring presence in the American presidential inauguration speech genre, as outlined by Ericson. The nature of the American mission evoked in Trump's speech correlated with the one found in the American presidential speeches delivered post-World War II. Ericson explains that it was presented as "positively promoting democracy around the world" (737). The use of this theme served as a means of providing national strength and pride by spreading American democracy around the world. Trump's speech incorporated the tool of antithesis to expound that Americans would not "seek to impose our way of life on anyone, but rather to let it shine as an example—we will shine—for everyone to follow." He aimed to evoke the American "way of life" as a source of pride for America and other nations if they embraced America's democracy.

Trump strategically aimed to affirm wealth as a shared value by focusing intensely on the topic of the economy. He aimed to heighten the economy as a crucial value for the survival of the "forgotten" people in order to frame his value of wealth as

a traditional value. For President Trump, promoting the value of wealth would make America “start winning again, winning like never before.” This remark reflects a metaphorical framework of winners and losers, which may offer insights into both his presidency and personal disposition. This metaphor of winning and losing resonates with the “America first” rhetoric he utilised earlier in his speech, reinforcing the notion of intense competition where there can only be one winner.

Trump’s delivery of the values demonstrated a quasi-metrical rhythm, achieved through pitch modulation, segmented phrasing, and emphatic repetition. His use of the anaphoric structure—“We will make America [adjective] again”—followed a parallel framework that reinforced his message of restoration and renewal through rhythmic consistency:

We will make America
.. ↑strong again.
.. We will make America
.. ↑wealthy again.
.. We will make America
.. ↑proud again.
.. We will make America
↑safe again.
.. And, yes, together,
... <We WILL MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN>.

This structure draws attention to individual values while maintaining rhythmic continuity. Trump’s decision to pause before each adjective isolates these values—“strong,” “wealthy,” “proud,” and “safe”—emphasising their importance. By placing each adjective with “again” into a distinct intonational unit, he attempted to establish emotional intensity, turning each phrase into a micro-moment of reflection. This segmentation exhibited not just syntactic clarity but also performative rhythm.

In each phrase, the parallel construction maintained the consistency of the message while reinforcing unity across values. The rising pitch at the beginning of each adjective phrase (e.g., “↑strong again”) enhanced the cadence, conveying an optimistic and upward momentum. This ascending pitch evoked a sense of renewal that aligned with the campaign’s broader narrative, building anticipation and inviting the audience to envision a revival of America’s greatness. This repetition with pitch functioned much like incremental repetition in oral poetry, a rhetorical device of the “ballad form” in which a “word or phrase is repeated emphatically to produce a special effect” (Cuddon 283).

Structurally, the rhythm of the segment can be described as tripartite: Subject + Action + Descriptive Adjective + Temporal Refrain. The parallel phrasing, with each sentence beginning with the same subject-action combination, reinforced consistency and drove home the message of renewal and progress. It served as a rhythmic unit, with the repetition of “again” functioning as a refrain that unified the individual promises into a cohesive message. Each phrase followed a rising-falling pitch contour, with emphasis placed on the key values followed by the refrain “again,” which softened slightly. This oscillation between the high pitch and the resolution creates a pattern similar to a metrical foot in poetry, where the stressed syllable is followed by a slightly lighter one. This gave each phrase a forward-driving rhythm, sustaining audience

engagement through repetition and predictability. Though not formal poetry, this pattern fostered auditory engagement similar to oral chants, drawing listeners into the rhythm of the promises.

The brief pauses further intensified the parallelism across lines (indicated by the two dots), which acted as micro-caesuras, providing short reflective breaks without disrupting momentum. The pauses allow for absorbing the individual values one by one, making the promises sound deliberate and attainable.

The delivery culminates with the climactic line: “<We WILL MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN>.” This line shifted in tempo, with Trump slowing down and placing emphatic stress on each word, as marked by the “> <” sign and capitalisation (Sidnell and Stivers 180). This slowing down reflected a coda in poetry, providing a sense of finality that reinforced the speech’s overarching theme. By decelerating at the end, Trump attempted to leave a rhetorical imprint, ensuring that the final message would resonate. This tempo, pitch, and repetition embodied a rhetorical strategy intended to engage and energise listeners, much like the crescendos found in public oratory.

Proposed Political Principles: Unique Approach to Governance

Trump’s policy proposal was more akin to a business plan rather than a government policy that deviated from the expected norms of an inauguration speech. I will discuss this departure in the next section titled “Presidential Role: A President Without Limits.” Suggesting his agendas in a business-oriented manner, Trump exhibited a lack of understanding or acknowledgement of the inherent limitations of the presidential office. Trump’s proposed policies were abstract and lacked specific details on their implementation. As mentioned in the Introduction, American presidents

typically use their inaugural speeches to present “specific policies for contemplation, not for action” (Campbell and Jamieson 22). However, President Trump’s approach went beyond this tradition, as he often made broad statements without providing clear mechanisms or strategies for realising his proposed policies. This characteristic of his inaugural speech may have served as a precursor to his general approach of prioritising rhetoric over detailed action throughout his presidency.

Presidential Role: A President Without Limits?

President Trump’s inaugural speech revealed a restricted grasp of the constitutional boundaries governing his executive authority. This was evident in his governing philosophy, which highlighted his business ideology. By promoting the adherence to “two simple rules: Buy American and Hire American,” President Trump introduced an unconventional policy within the context of the inauguration speech genre. As president, Trump held the authority to enact tax laws that could influence businesses. However, he did not have direct control over consumer behaviour or company practices, which would raise questions about the viability of implementing the two rules he advocated.

Presidents Bush and Obama demonstrated revealed presidential humility by emphasising the recurrent inauguration themes of cooperating with Congress and seeking popular support. By doing so, they emphasised the vital balance between their executive authority and their responsibility as representatives within a democratic framework. As noted, Ericson classifies these two inaugural themes combined with the theme of a providential supreme being under the heading of “presidential humility” (733-735). However, by contrast, President Trump departed from this tradition, thus exhibiting a misunderstanding of his limitations and heightening what could be

described as his arrogance and bias. Regarding the issue of cooperating with Congress, President Trump endeavoured to present himself as having greater power and authority than the legislative branch. He portrayed congress members as feeble and incompetent, further disparaging their moral character, claiming “The time for empty talk is over. Now arrives the hour of action.” Trump’s declaration indicated his refusal to cooperate with past congress members, whom he perceived as whiners. By claiming this, Trump showed that he did not require the assistance of individuals who engaged in “empty talk” and not in responsible action.

Implications for the Inauguration Speech Genre

In this close reading of President Donald Trump’s 2017 inauguration speech, I have demonstrated his significant divergence from the rhetorical norms and expectations associated with the American inauguration speech genre – rhetorical deviations which presaged key differences in his approach to and operations of his presidency. Further, I have identified that while Trump addressed the recurrent elements of the inauguration speech, he did so in highly unconventional ways compared to his predecessors. Instead of adhering to established patterns, Trump challenged and expanded these recurring components to align with his ideology.

By conducting a close analysis of President Trump’s inaugural speech, I examined its poetic qualities to underscore his departure from the traditional American inauguration speech genre. These poetic qualities included mood, tone, style, Trump’s tone of voice, imagery, epithets, personal pronouns, narratives, hyperbole, antithesis, anaphora, metaphors, polysyndeton, religious allusion, and oral poetic formulas. By examining these elements, this reading reveals the distinctiveness of his inaugural speech.

The investigation of President Trump's inaugural speech highlights the dynamic nature of public discourse and the power of language in shaping the genre of the inauguration speech and constructing meaning in the public sphere. What is said and how it's said, especially in the highly public and ceremonial context of a presidential inauguration, is both reflective and constitutive of the development of actions, ideas and allegiances. Concerning the genre of the inauguration speech, this analysis suggests that Trump's speech pushed the boundaries of what is traditionally expected from such speeches, establishing a disruptive and influential precedent. In contrast, as I will discuss in the final case study, President Biden's subsequent inaugural speech reveals a return to a discourse of civility and unity and represents a distinct shift in tone and approach. This contrast between Trump's unconventional style and Biden's emphasis on unity further underscores the evolving nature of the inauguration speech genre and the potential for future presidents to explore new ways of expressing their vision and goals during their inaugurations. Trump's unconventional approach and deviation from established patterns indicate that the genre itself can be subject to reinterpretation and reinvention by future presidents. It raises questions about the role of rhetoric in shaping public discourse and the expectations placed on presidential speeches.

In terms of how public language constructs meaning, Trump's inaugural speech reveals how the strategic use of language and rhetorical devices can shape public perception and understanding. Through his choice of words, tone, and imagery, Trump sought to construct a distinct narrative that positioned him as an outsider president fighting for the rights of the "forgotten" American citizens. His deliberate use of personal pronouns and divisive rhetoric created divisions and established his unique identity as a leader.

Chapter 7: President Joseph Biden's Inaugural Speech: An Appeal to Emotions

Comparison and Contrast

In this final case study of the incumbent American president, I employ a close poetic reading of Joseph Biden's 2021 inaugural speech to provide a comparative examination of his approach to his predecessor, Trump. Remarkably, this chapter investigates the implications of Biden's speech, particularly in the context of the recent insurrection inspired by Trump's rhetoric, which occurred only weeks before Biden's inauguration. I explore the implications of Biden's speech for both the ongoing exploration of meaning-making within public language and the evolution of the inauguration speech genre. Through a comparative lens, I will explore the similarities and differences between President Biden's speech, particularly focusing on the contrast with President Trump's inaugural speech in terms of each president's vision of the institution of the American presidency, tone, themes, and rhetorical approach.

By appealing again to such "better angels," Biden called for a renewed commitment to cooperation, understanding, and the pursuit of a brighter future for all citizens. In this way, Biden's inaugural speech marked a departure from the divisive rhetoric of the immediate past, embodying a vision of national healing and reconciliation that reconnected with earlier presidents and styles.

President Biden employed what I term "emotionally sensitive" rhetoric to evoke emotional responses and convey a sense of unity and collective responsibility. Unlike Trump, who utilised inflammatory, divisive, vituperative language, often employing short and declarative sentences, Biden embraced a more inclusive, casual (less formal), and empathetic approach in his speech. He used rhetoric that emphasised empathy,

compassion, and understanding to reach out to all Americans regardless of their political affiliations.

Whereas Trump's inaugural speech focused on nationalist and inward-looking or protectionist policies, Biden's speech underscored the importance of global cooperation, unity, and shared values. He spoke of the need to restore America's standing in the world and rebuild alliances, signalling a departure from Trump's isolationist stance.

Regarding stylistic differences, Biden's speech exhibited a more traditional and polished delivery style akin to his predecessors, Presidents Bush, and particularly Obama, with whom he shares a close working relationship. Drawing upon his experience in the Obama administration, Biden employed rhetorical devices, such as allusions, metaphors, and historical references, to inspire and uplift the audience, mirroring the eloquent and impactful style often employed by Obama. This shared stylistic approach not only underscores the influence of the Obama-Biden partnership but also reflects Biden's commitment to continuing the legacy of inclusive and thoughtful presidential oratory.

The two presidents showcased opposing perspectives on the nature of the US presidency. While President Trump viewed it as an institution determined by the caprices of the officeholder, President Biden regarded it as an institution defined by and subject to the U.S. Constitution. In this view, I am building upon and contributing to the argument Prasch makes in "A Tale of Two Presidencies: Trump and Biden on the National Mall." In this article, Prasch investigates the contrasting rhetorical approaches of these two presidents, particularly through events in January 2021. Prasch's analysis highlights the sharp distinctions in how Trump and Biden conceptualised and performed the U.S. presidency. Trump's rhetoric, exemplified by the "Save America"

rally and the January 6 insurrection, portrayed the presidency as driven by individual will, often eschewing traditional institutional norms (“A Tale” 472-473). In contrast, Biden’s inaugural address emphasised the presidency as an institution deeply rooted in and “subservient to the U.S. Constitution,” advocating for a return to established norms and the collective “ethos of the institution” and nation (“A Tale” 474).

According to Prasch, when the presidency is defined by the individual rather than by institutional history, the powers of the presidency become subject to the whims of the single occupant. The president can disregard established rhetorical norms and reshape historical precedents to serve personal agendas. Their speeches primarily advance their own interests and those of their most loyal supporters, often distorting political reality to align with their goals. Truth and authenticity are redefined to suit their political gain, undermining democratic principles and the laws that uphold them. Thus, the entire institution and its traditions become subordinate to the individual president’s desires (“A Tale” 475).

This investigation extends Prasch’s analysis by offering a focused examination of the rhetorical strategies in Biden’s inaugural speech, illustrating how they reflect his vision of the presidency. While Prasch explores the broader implications of their rhetoric, my analysis highlights Biden’s use of ‘emotionally sensitive’ language to evoke American values. This contrasts with Trump’s inaugural address, which reinforced a divisive, individualistic view of leadership, while Biden’s speech sought to restore institutional respect and national cohesion. It demonstrates how Biden envisioned the presidency as a role fundamentally rooted in serving the nation’s collective interests.

The use of “emotionally sensitive” rhetoric by political leaders is crucial for connecting with the public and influencing their perceptions and actions, making it a

key feature of political speech. For instance, in “The Rhetorical Presidency and The Myth of the American Dream,” Leroy Dorsey, investigates how presidents use rhetorical strategies, including emotional appeals to craft and promote the American Dream narrative, a key component of their public addresses. Dorsey claims that “as the rhetorical leader of the nation, the president seeks to lead through words” in order to “inspire its citizenry” (132). He examines Obama’s campaign rhetoric during the 2008 election. Obama, according to Dorsey, described two Americas: one marked by “a broken politics in Washington” due to “the failed policies of George W. Bush” and another as a nation of limitless opportunities where every American could pursue a better, richer, and fuller life (130). This juxtaposition utilised emotional appeals to contrast negative and positive visions, aiming to inspire and unite the audience.

This investigation of Biden’s inaugural speech deepens the understanding of how contemporary presidents use emotional appeals to address national challenges. Unlike Trump’s affective rhetoric, which often fostered division, Biden’s speech strategically sought to transform and redirect public emotions toward unity and constructive action. Additionally, by examining the poetic qualities in Biden’s address, this study highlights how these elements enhance emotional resonance, further strengthening the speech’s ability to inspire and unify.

In times of national crisis, the importance of emotional appeals in presidential rhetoric is heightened, as they help guide public sentiment towards specific emotions. Jamie Landau and Bethany Keeley-Jonker explore how President Obama employed emotionally charged rhetoric in his eulogy following the Tucson shooting, effectively acting as a conductor of public emotions. Similar to a musical conductor who leads an orchestra, the authors conceive of presidents as “leaders who employ verbal symbols, sound, and their bodies guide the behaviors of large groups of people” (167) They add

that a president, acting as an “electric conductor,” serves as a channel through which the energy of “other people’s bodies flows, gets redirected, and may transform” (167). Thus, a president who conducts public feelings aims to unite people by channelling and transforming collective emotions. By applying contemporary affect theory, the authors investigate how Obama’s speech aimed to unite the nation, foster a sense of collective mourning, and guide the public through their emotional responses to the tragedy. They found that Obama’s speech in Tucson shifted “affect-emotion from national pain and partisan anger as well as boisterous enthusiasm toward public feelings of love for Americans, this country, and at times civic servants specifically”(181).

This chapter extends existing scholarship on emotional appeals in presidential rhetoric by analysing how President Biden addressed national disunity in the context of post-Trump America and the unique challenges of his presidency. By examining Biden’s strategic efforts to channel and transform public sentiment, this study highlights his rhetorical use of emotional appeals to inspire hope, empathy, unity, reconciliation, and resilience among Americans. Additionally, this analysis contributes to broader discussions on affective leadership by exploring Biden’s integration of verbal and non-verbal communication—specifically his body gestures, vocal tone, and delivery style—as tools for guiding collective emotional responses. This approach deepens our understanding of how presidents combine spoken and performative elements to cultivate national cohesion and emotional solidarity.

In *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation*, Drew Westen, a political psychologist, explores how emotions influence political decision-making and the effectiveness of political communication. His research is based on the concept that the mind is not an impartial mechanism, but that emotions significantly influence our interactions and perceptions of the world. The author

provides an account of how emotional appeals can sway public opinion and voter behaviour. He claims that the Republican party has been more successful than the Democrat party due to a better understanding of how the brain operates. Westen contends that this can be explained by the notion that, unlike Republicans, Democrats fail to grasp the psychology of their voters (ix), (See also Lakoff *The Political Mind* 8). According to Westen, Republicans recognise that voters are primarily emotional and respond to campaigns driven by emotionally resonant narratives (ix).

This chapter builds on Drew Westen's insights into the centrality of emotional resonance in political rhetoric by offering a focused analysis of President Biden's inaugural address. While Westen underscores how emotional appeals shape political campaigns, this study examines Biden's specific use of appeals to emotions within the unique conventions of the inaugural speech genre. By analysing Biden's strategic crafting of a unifying and emotionally resonant narrative, this chapter highlights how his appeals both align with and innovate upon inaugural traditions.

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I argue that President Biden employed "emotionally sensitive" rhetoric as a tool to bridge the deep disunity that arose during the Trump era. By "emotionally sensitive" rhetoric, I mean a persuasive approach that appeals to and expresses emotions and sentiments. Specifically, President Biden chiefly utilised *pathos*, an Aristotelian method of persuasion, to connect with the American people on an emotional level (*Rhetoric*). I defined this rhetorical tool in Chapter Five, highlighting its effectiveness in persuading through emotional appeals. Hanan Amaireh has conducted a corpus-based study of 40 of Biden's political speeches delivered from 2021 to 2022, shedding valuable light on the rhetorical strategies he frequently

employed, including his use of ethos, pathos, and logos to engage and persuade his audience. Her analysis reveals that Biden relied heavily on emotional appeals, particularly advancing feelings of “hope” and “love,” which were the most frequently occurring lexical items related to emotions in the corpus (733). Furthermore, Amaireh points out Biden’s strategic “quoting of authoritative” figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. and the Bible to lend credibility and weight to his arguments, reinforcing his message through ethos and logos (734).

Building upon Amaireh’s observations, this chapter investigates deeper into Biden’s use of emotional appeals in his inaugural speech, particularly focusing on the ways he sought to evoke hope, unity, empathy, and reconciliation. While Amaireh’s study provides a broader overview of Biden’s rhetorical tendencies across multiple speeches, this chapter offers a focused analysis of how these emotional themes are foregrounded in the highly symbolic context of his inaugural address. By applying a poetics-centered approach, this chapter extends Amaireh’s findings by exploring the specific aesthetic devices Biden used to reinforce these emotional appeals.

In addition to Amaireh’s observation of Biden quoting authoritative figures, my analysis investigates how he alluded to previous U.S. presidents’ speeches, renowned figures such as Saint Augustine, and significant texts like the Constitution and the Emancipation Proclamation. Biden aimed to appeal to the audience’s emotions, fostering a sense of shared purpose and moral duty. These historical and cultural allusions were not only meant to build credibility but also to invoke deeply resonant themes that aligned with his overarching message of unity, love, and healing.

Amaireh’s study also highlights Biden’s frequent use of the first-person pronoun “we” as a rhetorical strategy to establish “rapport” and inclusivity with his audience, reinforcing his role as a unifying leader (731). This chapter further

investigates how Biden's consistent use of "we" in his inaugural address played a central role in his call for national unity. By integrating insights from Amaireh's corpus study with detailed, poetics-driven analysis, this chapter reveals how the rhetorical patterns she identifies contribute to the broader aesthetic and emotional dimensions of Biden's inaugural speech.

Orly Kayam highlights that rhetoric that is strategically employed to evoke emotional responses "generally does not raise arguments but rather gives an emotive-stylistic character to the text and provides the listener with pleasure from its manner of linguistic expression" (235). While I agree with Kayam's observation that "emotive rhetoric" enhances the text's emotive-stylistic character and provides pleasure through linguistic expression, I hold a different perspective regarding its argumentative elements. This is because argument and emotion are not mutually exclusive. Contrary to the notion that "emotionally sensitive" rhetoric lacks argumentation, I contend that it can indeed incorporate argumentative elements while still evoking emotional responses in readers and listeners.

To investigate President Biden's inaugural speech and his strategic appeal to the audience's emotions, I will once again explore a range of poetic devices and techniques. These include mood, tone, style, rhetorical questions, metaphors, antithesis, parallelism, rhetorical references, allusions, narratives, epithets, and various poetic oral composition techniques, such as Nicholas Abraham's "Rhythmising Consciousness" effect of poetry's rhythm theory and Eagleton's "Language of Becoming" theory. By scrutinising these elements, I will examine how Biden manipulated emotions of hope, unity, empathy, love, reconciliation, and resilience to convey his persuasive message.

Context: Profound National Schism

President Biden delivered his inaugural speech on Wednesday, 20 January 2021 (see Appendix 6). This speech holds significant context as it highlights Biden's urgent endeavour to unify the nation. As discussed in Chapter Two, context plays a pivotal role in the reception and interpretation of all political speeches, as of all texts, thus shaping the content and delivery style of politicians. In the case of President Biden's inaugural speech, the situational imperatives compelled him to employ "emotive rhetoric" consistently – using emotional appeals - throughout the entire speech because of the deeply divided nation he assumed leadership in, arguably more divided than at any time since the Civil War. Moreover, the divisive leadership and rhetoric of President Trump during the previous four years had fractured the unity of the nation to a remarkable extent. Reporter Michael Toscano in 2021 reflected on the divisive impact of Trump's era and its profound effect on President Biden's inauguration. Toscano remarked "Trump was a very divisive president, a president whose actions over the last four years have left Joe Biden with a deeply fractured nation. It can be argued that America is as divided as it has been since the Civil War" (Toscano).

Former President Trump's repeated false claim of election fraud had planted seeds of distrust in the democratic process, leading his supporters to question the legitimacy of Biden's presidency. According to Larry Buchanan, a reporter for *The New York Times*, this resulted in a violent mob storming the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, in an attempt to disrupt the certification of the Electoral College's results, causing the loss of four lives (Buchanan).

Given the imperative of such extraordinary circumstances, President Biden exhibited new rhetorical leadership that aimed at fostering a revitalised civic spirit in a nation deeply divided by partisan conflicts. In this sense, I am drawing upon Tomas

Salek's analysis of Biden's inaugural speech in which he argues Biden established a new form of rhetorical leadership grounded in empathy and unity. Salek expounds that this president "rhetorically constituted a civic attitude of empathy by speaking of values that could appeal to Americans of divergent political parties, as well as rejecting the resentful and anti-deliberative rhetoric of former President Trump" (139). The author proposes that constructing a public attitude aids "citizens engage in ethical public deliberation through a shared attitude while also respecting the ability for individuals to maintain conflicting values and beliefs" (142). In this public and civic attitude, Salek claims that empathy obliges citizens to acknowledge the humanity and individual identity of others. He asserts that Biden attempted to appeal to an attitude of empathy by fostering a sense of collective "goodwill" and neighborliness," as well as "respect for dissent" and rejection of "resentment and intransigence," which were two major political strategies of President Trump's leadership (143-147).

Building on Salek's insights, this chapter offers an analysis of how Biden's rhetoric sought to foster an attitude of empathy. Specifically, I examine how Biden emphasised kindness, community spirit, and respect for differing opinions while rejecting divisive strategies like bitterness and stubbornness. By closely analysing Biden's rhetorical strategies—including his use of metaphors, tonal shifts, religious and historical references, and evocative imagery—this study uncovers how these elements contributed to promoting civic virtues as a foundation for national unity.

Mood: Shaping Emotional Responses

The context of President Biden's inauguration was that of intense challenges, including the devastating COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions that limited the crowd size at his ceremony. In 2021, reporter James Poniewozik wrote in *The New*

York Times that this cast a melancholic shadow over the event (Poniewozik). This context evoked a sense of cautionary optimism and encouragement in Biden's speech. Using rhetorical questions, Biden asked whether the nation would "step up" and "rise to the occasion," Central to Biden's persuasive strategy was his claim that "we have never, ever, ever, ever failed in America when we have acted together."

Tone: A Message of Reconciliation, Compassion, and Pride

The tone he conveyed towards his audience was one of reconciliation and compassion, which aimed to foster a sense of unity and common purpose. By evoking positive connotations and describing the nation as "a great Nation" with "good people," Biden attempted to instil a sense of pride and optimism in his audience, in direct contrast to Trump's characterisation of "American Carnage." He employed various rhetorical devices such as alliteration, metaphor, antithesis, parallelism and rhetorical allusion to enhance the impact of his message. The use of alliteration, such as "great," "good," "have," "has," "to be," "than," "this," "better," and "believe" created a rhythmic quality to his remarks. Commenting on Biden's inaugural address, Roy Clark from *Poynter* noted in 2021 that the speech offered "America lessons on the relationship between good language and good government," adding that there was "common poetry in the new president's address, in its language, rhythms and delivery." Clark also highlighted Biden's diction, praising the president for rising "to the occasion" with word choices. This writer remarked that Biden used language "to neutralize the political poison of the moment with the language of unity, decency, integrity, hard work, democracy, and hope" (Clark). In this light, Biden's rhetorical strategy not only created an aesthetically pleasing element but also captured the audience's attention and emphasised the key theme of unity.

A Family Metaphor

One notable metaphor he used was to portray America as a family to emphasise the need to treat each other with “respect and dignity.” This metaphor aligns with George Lakoff’s concept of “The Nation as a Family Metaphor,” which explores how political leaders use the ideal model of a family to shape political morality. According to Lakoff, “The nation is seen as a family, the government as a parent and the citizens as children” (“Metaphor, Morality” 11). In analysing Biden’s speech, it was particularly insightful to consider Lakoff’s “The Nurturant Parent Morality” model, which represents a compassionate and inclusive perspective of the family, in contrast to the authoritarian father figure persona associated with the previous administration. According to Lakoff, this model revolves around children learning morality through love, care, and being cared about by parents and the community. Lakoff explains that “the primal experience behind this model is one of being cared for and cared about, having one’s desires for loving interactions met, living as happily as possible, and deriving meaning from one’s community and from caring for and about others” (“Metaphor, Morality” 13). By invoking the metaphor of America as a family, Biden suggested that individuals can achieve a higher moral standard by caring for and supporting one another. However, it is also important to note that families can have diverse dynamics and not all family models are inherently positive. In employing this metaphor, Biden evoked a specific vision of a supportive and compassionate family, which reflected his aspiration for a united and harmonious nation.

President Biden employed the rhetorical device of antithesis to underscore the expected behaviour of individuals within the metaphorical family he evoked in his speech. This strategy of contrasting or opposing ideas presented in a parallel structure played a pivotal role in reinforcing Biden’s message. By urging his audience to view

others not as “adversaries but as neighbors,” he heightened the need to overcome differences and foster a spirit of love and care within the community. In one notable instance, Biden utilised a three-part parallel sentence to rally his people, urging them to “Join forces, stop the shouting, and lower the temperature.” This strategic use of antithesis and parallelism aimed to enhance the clarity, strength, and persuasiveness of Biden’s proposition.

By employing parallel sentences, Biden attempted to leave a lasting emotional effect on his audience. The rhythmic and pleasurable effect created by parallelism not only reflected the speaker’s style but also underlined the key ideas and their relationship. This strategy was likely to enhance the overall power of the message, as the audience would find it easier to absorb and remember the ideas conveyed. Studies have shown that parallelism—by structuring ideas repetitively and rhythmically—reinforces the cognitive and emotional engagement of an audience. In her book *Discourse Analysis*, Barbara Johnstone observes that parallelism enhances memorable through its repetition, aiding retention and recall. She refers to the concept of “presentational persuasion” as one technique of convincing the audience. This strategy, according to Johnstone, can be understood as based on the idea that to persuade is to emotionally move someone, carrying them along with a rhythmic sequence of words and sounds, much like the effect of a song or a poem (91). The objective of this technique is to intensify the audience’s awareness of the argument being made by recurrently “repeating it, paraphrasing it, and calling aesthetic attention to it.” The style of this type of persuasion is “characterized by its rhythmic, paratactic flow.” It seeks to capture the audience, who are “swept along by parallel clauses connected in coordinate series” (91).

Similarly, Tannen expands on this device of parallelism. She suggests that parallelism not only increases memorability but also intensifies emotional response, as the balanced structure of the sentences creates a musicality that resonates emotionally with audiences. She argues that repetitions such as that of “sounds, words, and clauses, surprising juxtapositions and reversals, and parallel constructions” are effective in “both to communicate ideas and to move audiences in oratorical discourse”(90).

By employing parallel sentences in Biden’s speech, this use of repetition and balance likely aimed to make his key ideas more memorable and persuasive. It helped frame Biden’s appeal for collective action and empathy in a manner designed to resonate across diverse segments of the population, though the exact emotional response would vary among individual listeners.

The concept of “The Nurturant Parent Morality,” as proposed by Lakoff, further illuminates President Biden’s approach to fostering a stronger and more cohesive society. According to Lakoff, in this moral model, “people are realized in and through their secure attachments: through their positive relationships to others, through their contribution to their community”(“Metaphor, Morality” 13). It produces adults who actively engage in volunteering and take shared responsibility for communal issues. Biden’s evocation of this model reflects a vision of maturity that depicted the American people as individuals who willingly participate in communal efforts for their own well-being and the betterment of their community.

President Biden’s Epideictic Speech as Poetry

The persuasive effect of President Biden’s “emotionally sensitive” rhetoric can be investigated in relation to two key theories—Abraham’s “Rhythmising Consciousness” and Terry Eagleton’s “Language of Becoming.” As discussed in his

work *Rhythms: On the Work, Translation, and Psychoanalysis*, Abraham's theory emphasises how the temporality of poetry's rhythm influences the audience's interpretation of the text. By exploring Greek tragedies, comedies, and heroic epics, Abraham contends that the rhythmised moment of a poem connects past and future events, enabling audiences to anticipate what lies ahead. He puts it as "the act of rhythmising consciousness [which] occurs at the precise moment when I anticipate a recurrence in the essential mode, that is, at the very moment when consciousness becomes rhythmising" (77). This concept of rhythmised moments was also evident in President Biden's inaugural speech, specifically within the epideictic discourse genre. As I have discussed in the Introduction, the inaugural speech connects the past and future in present contemplation. Using rhetorical devices and rhythmic patterns, Biden repeatedly evoked the past to convey the present and future, creating a rhythmising consciousness within the audience. This effect would allow listeners to enter into poetic appreciation, anticipating the kind of future Biden proposed.

Similarly, Eagleton's "Language of Becoming" theory highlights how the creative potential of language shapes meaning in the present moment. This concept suggests that during a lived experience of a given speech, the poetic present attracts the audience to be aware of the origin and direction of the speech. The audience happens to be conscious of the change that is occurring and the meaning that is becoming.

Eagleton explains:

It is as though poetry grants us the actual experience of seeing meaning take shape as a practice, rather than handling it simply as a finished object. Poetry is an image of the truth that language is not what shuts us off from reality, but what yields us the deepest access to it. So, it is not a choice between being fascinated

with words and being preoccupied with things. It is the very essence of words to point beyond themselves; so that to grasp them as precious in themselves is also to move more deeply into the world they refer to. (*How To* 68-69)

Eagleton employs the concept of “phenomenology of language” to illustrate how a poem embodies its meaning through the lived experience of its audience. He contends that “poetry is something which is done to us, not just said to us. The meaning of its words is closely bound up with the experience of them” (*How To* 21). Drawing upon Eagleton’s idea, I argue that Biden created a rhythm that would engage his audience in the moment of his speech by shifting between past, present, and future tenses. For example, when Biden reflected on past challenges that faced America against which “America has risen to the challenge” (past), the current divisions created by the “attack on democracy and on truth, a raging virus, growing inequity” that the nation must confront (present), and the brighter future in which America “will press forward with speed and urgency” (future), he attempted to connect the nation’s history to its current moment and future aspirations. This shift in tenses evoked Eagleton’s concept where the audience experiences meaning as it would unfold in the present moment. Through these temporal shifts, Biden’s speech attempted to enable his audience to actively participate in the formation of a new national narrative, making them aware of its evolution as it occurred.

Moreover, as Campbell and Jamieson note, the “timelessness” of epideictic discourse is central to the inaugural speech genre, placing it in “time out of time,” where “the event that the ritual commemorates or re-enacts is made present.” This “eternal present” allows the audience to experience the “continuity of the constitutional system” and the “immortality of the presidency” as an institution that transcends any

given historical moment (27). By reconstituting the audience, rehearsing the past, and articulating timeless principles, Biden's speech, like all great inaugurals, embodied this "time out of time" that invited the audience to contemplate both their shared history and future aspirations.

Style: Colloquial and Conversational

President Biden's inaugural speech, spanning 2550 words, stood as the longest among the speeches investigated in this project. This extensive length can be seen as a deliberate choice, embodying the significance and complexity of the nation's fragility and disunity during that time. Notably, Biden's style of his inaugural shifted significantly from the more formal and complex rhetoric observed in his campaign. This shift highlights Biden's capacity to adapt his rhetoric to suit the demands of both political contexts and moments of national significance. In "Trump's and Biden's Styles During the 2020 US Presidential Election," Jacques Savoy and Marylene Wehren conduct a detailed linguistic analysis of the rhetorical and stylistic approaches of both candidates. The authors investigate the candidates' oral rhetoric, including TV debates and radio interviews, written speeches, and tweets (2). They compare the speech patterns, focusing on aspects such as lexical richness, verbosity, sentence structure, and the frequency of rhetorical devices. Savoy and Wheren have observed that Biden's style is described as more formal incorporating more complex words, and being inclusive, emphasising collective language, e.g., using the pronoun "we".

In their measure of the lexical density or what these authors refer to as the "big words composed of six letters or more," Savoy and Wheren note that Trump employed "fewer longer words" than Biden (7). These researchers explain that a large proportion of lengthy words may be perceived as a sign of intricate compositions. Such complex

formulations can impede the effectiveness of the message's understandability. In their book, *The Little Blue Book: The Essential Guide to Thinking and Talking Democratic*, Lakoff and Elisabeth Wehling advocate the use of simple words in political discourse; they argue:

One finding of cognitive science is that words have the most powerful effect on our minds when they are simple. The technical term is basic level. Basic-level words tend to be short. ... Basic-level words are easily remembered; those messages will be best recalled that use basic-level language. (41)

Savoy and Wheren's corpus analysis of Trump and Biden's campaign rhetoric discloses that Trump utilised more simple and direct rhetoric to demonstrate he could "talk like the people, without complex formulations and with the objective to be easily understood by the citizens"(7). Despite the length of his inaugural, Biden refrained from using complex rhetoric that Savoy and Wheren have observed in his campaign which can indicate a formulation harder to be easily understood. Thus, the inaugural utilised simple and concise language to engage directly with his audience. His speech set a less formal tone and incorporated expressions uncommon in previous inaugural addresses.

Biden, in his inaugural, continued to follow a strategy he used during his 2020 campaign rhetoric. Specifically, he deployed a more colloquial tone with a higher frequency of what Savoy and Wheren refer to as "familiarity terms (words used frequently in our daily conversations)" (12). For instance, he frequently addressed the audience using casual terms such as "my friends," "folks," and "look, folks." These colloquial expressions not only resonated with a sense of unity, and aimed to evoke

inclusivity, but also resonated with his campaign persona and reinforced an image of Biden as the healing and nurturant father figure, thus intensifying the emotional and social bonds being evoked. By deviating from the more formal term “fellow,” Biden’s choice of words strengthened his call for unity by establishing a persuasive connection with the people. It also contrasted with the more confrontational language often used by his predecessor, signalling a rhetorical shift toward empathy and collective responsibility. Significantly, the use of the personal pronoun “my” in “my friends” contributed to the overall impact of Biden’s appeal. It underscored the idea that the responsibility of establishing and maintaining solidarity was shared between the president and the people. This linguistic choice, grounded in simple and direct language, exemplified the poetics of Biden’s public speech: through carefully selected words, his address sought to enhance the emotional appeal and create a sense of connection that was central to his message of healing.

President Biden’s inaugural speech employed an uncommon strategy within the context of the inauguration speech by incorporating a personal narrative and familial references to establish a relatable and conversational style. Campbell and Jamieson point to the centrality of the inaugural speeches within the context of the ceremony of inauguration, which encompasses various formal rituals and events associated with the transfer of power. In this sense, they claim that the incoming president “must speak in the public role of president” (23). According to them, the inaugural speech would cease to function as part of the inauguration ceremony if it touched upon the “personality or personal history” of the inaugurated president (23). Thus, when newly-inaugurated presidents incorporate personal information from their past, the information “must reveal something about the presidency or about the people or the nation”(23). President Biden empathetically acknowledged the concerns of Americans by sharing his own

experiences, affirming, “I understand, like my dad, they lay at bed at night staring at the ceiling, wondering: Can I keep my health care?” Furthermore, he encouraged the audience to foster empathy by urging them to “stand in the other person’s shoes, as my mom would say, just for a moment.” This approach of using personal connections and relatable expressions created a sense of informality, which made Biden’s speech resemble a casual conversation

In a 2021 blog, James Lindsay emphasised Biden’s choice of a conversational tone, contrasting it with the more grandiloquent styles of past presidents such as Lincoln and Kennedy. Lindsay remarked that Biden “wisely chose not to try to match the poetic elegance of Lincoln’s two magisterial inaugural addresses or the inspirational vision of Kennedy’s.” Instead, he opted for a more relatable approach, warning Americans of the dangers of division by “talking like a man who has seen a lot—and learned a lot—during his half century in the upper reaches of American political life” (Lindsay). This informal and conversational tone, according to Lindsay, reflected Biden’s pragmatic approach to addressing a polarised nation, fostering a sense of trust and relatability.

Additionally, in 2021, John Harris observed on *Politico* that the most effective parts of Biden’s address were the “most plain-spoken.” Harris noted that this president’s casual references to “Mom,” “Dad,” and phrases like “I get it” were a significant departure from the lofty, iconic rhetoric typically associated with inaugural speeches. Instead, these colloquial expressions offered “a window into a politics of respect,” allowing Biden to connect with the audience on a personal level. Harris contended that Biden’s plainspoken style was an attempt to foster unity, as it conveyed that “there is a shared interest, even among political opponents, in a functional government that can resolve arguments within the guardrails of civility and institutional

integrity” (Harris). Thus, Biden’s conversational style further enhanced the persuasive impact of his message, as it endeavoured to foster a sense of unity and empathy among listeners.

President Biden’s tone of voice served as a powerful tool to underscore the deep divisions within the nation and elicit emotional responses. He set a steady, sombre tone throughout his speech, conveying a sense of sadness and depicting the state of division and schism plaguing the country. In “Division, Discord, and Democracy: A Forum on the 2020 U.S. Presidential Campaign” Stephanie Martin investigates the rhetoric of Trump and Biden and how it reflects broader issues such as racism, sexism, and xenophobia. She focuses on how a variety of factors, including racial reckoning, the COVID-19 pandemic, and ongoing attacks on democratic norms shaped the divisive nature of the campaign (418). On the factor of the pandemic, she argues that the “election took place in a sanitary context where Trump downplayed and, even, ignored the gravity of the coronavirus, leaving Biden to fill the rhetorical lacuna created by the incumbent president’s refusal to act” (421). Building on Martin’s analysis, Biden’s emphasis on shared grief and unity in the face of collective loss starkly contrasted with Trump’s downplaying of the pandemic, positioning Biden as a unifier in a nation fractured by both health and political crises. This was particularly evident in Biden’s inaugural speech when he invited the audience to join him “in a moment of silent prayer to remember all those we lost to the pandemic.”

Unification: A Nation of Resilience

President Biden addressed the audience as a resilient people of resolve, recognising the series of traumatic crises that had diminished America’s standing. He called upon the nation to embrace the “purpose and resolve [with which] we turn to

those tasks of our time.” Through the recurring themes of national unity and popular support, Biden reconstructed the audience as a collective bound by a shared purpose of successfully overcoming the crises. He asserted that the present moment was both a historic crisis and a moment of “significant possibilities,” using the rhetorical device of juxtaposition to contrast the “winter of peril” with the promise of “significant possibilities.” Biden’s repetitive and parallel phrases in the “much to + verb” structure, such as “much to repair, restore, heal, build, and gain,” created a rhythmic cadence that would captivate listeners. This technique not only appeals to the auditory senses but also underscores the urgency of addressing the significant challenges of restoring the nation’s standing in the eyes of the world.

Biden employed the metaphor of personification to depict America as a resilient individual tested by historical challenges. He again aligned with the “Nation as a Family Metaphor” and “Nurturant Parent Morality” model. This metaphor portrayed both the president and America as a caring and protective figure, emphasising the duty to safeguard the community, which can be interpreted in relation to Lakoff’s idea of “protection.” It is remarkable to note that Biden’s emphasis on “protection” in his speech is so distinct from the concept of “protectionism” often connected with Trump’s policies. While Biden’s focus is on safeguarding the well-being and unity of the nation, Trump’s protectionism was related to economic policies aimed at shielding domestic industries from international competition. Lakoff explains:

Protection is a form of caring, and protection from external dangers takes up a significant part of the nurturant parent’s attention. The world is filled with evils that can harm a child, and it is the nurturant parent’s duty to be ward them off.

Protection of innocent and helpless children from such evils is a major part of a

nurturant parent's job. ("Metaphor, Morality" 13)

Drawing upon the above quote, President Biden depicted America as a compassionate and resolute entity that had shielded its community from numerous challenges and crises in the past. The president aimed to emphasise to his audience that the nation operated akin to familial bonds.

Biden's rhetorical style and prosody played an essential role in shaping the emotional and thematic flow of his message. Through rhythmic phrasing and carefully varied intonation, he attempted to construct moments of reflection, empathy, and urgency. His speech sought to transcend divisions, using linguistic strategies that drew on the performative qualities of public oratory. The following analysis of a key segment from his speech demonstrated how prosodic features such as parallelism, strategic pausing, and pitch modulation introduced a quasi-poetic cadence. In his evocative call for unity, Biden declared:

We must end this UNCIVIL war

.. .(2) that pits red against blue,

..rural versus urban,

..conservative versus liberal.

..↑We can do this,

..IF

.. .>we open our souls<

<instead of hardening our hearts,>

.. (2) IF

.. .>we show a little tolerance and humility,<

..and IF,

. . . <we're willing to stand in the other person's shoes>,

This delivery exhibited a quasi-poetic rhythm, marked by deliberate pauses, rising and falling pitch, and parallel phrasing. The rhetorical power of this segment lies in its binary oppositions which Biden used to highlight societal divides. This parallel structure generated a rhythmic cadence that both emphasised these conflicts and underscored the urgency of reconciliation.

The repeated use of “if” as a stand-alone conditional marker intonational unit functioned as a rhetorical pivot, marking conditional moments where the audience was encouraged to reflect on their potential actions. The upward pitch on “IF” emphasised the possibility of change, while the slowing down at each subsequent clause drew attention to the path forward: “if we open our souls,” “if we show a little tolerance.” This repetition mimicked a poetic anaphora, reinforcing the message of unity and reconciliation. Although not a traditional meter, the rhythmic cadence emerged from the repetition and segmentation of clauses. Each “IF” functioned as a rhythmic anchor, much like a metrical foot in poetry, introducing temporal spacing between ideas while building toward a thematic climax.

The rising pitch on the word “uncivil” introduced an emotional peak, creating a moment of tension that the following two-second pause allows to resonate. Again, this pause functioned as a micro-caesura, encouraging reflection. The subsequent softening of tone in the phrase “>we open our souls<” produced a shift in rhythm, mirroring the structure of poetry where the tempo shifts to signal a change in tone or theme. This deceleration reinforces the call for empathy and introspection.

Toward the end of the segment, Biden accelerated his delivery in “we’re willing to stand in the other person’s shoes,” signalling a transition from contemplation to action. This shift in tempo exhibited oratorical techniques where pacing variations emphasise key moments, enhancing rhetorical impact. By accelerating at this point, Biden attempted to direct the audience’s attention toward the practical steps needed to achieve unity. This rhythmic modulation aligned with traditional public speaking strategies that use prosodic variation to sustain engagement and drive home thematic points.

The repetition of soft consonant sounds, such as the /s/ and /h/ in “souls” and “hearts,” created a sense of phonological cohesion. These sounds produced a soothing auditory effect. This interaction between sound, rhythm, and meaning illustrated how Biden’s speech achieved a poetic quality while underscoring the importance of collective action.

Shared Values: Breaking with Trump’s Views for Change

President Biden solidified the importance of democracy, justice, and truth as shared values and emphasised unity as the key to restoring and upholding these values. Through the themes of civic virtue, non-partisanship, and the use of a national narrative, he encouraged active participation in the collective purpose. He presented a national narrative that emphasised Americans’ ability to peacefully transfer power and their collective commitment to strengthening democracy. His language of unity, such as claiming that Americans had “come together as one Nation under God, indivisible” to peacefully transfer power for over two centuries, conveyed a persuasive and appealing message. It is important to recognise that this phrase is drawn from the Pledge of Allegiance, a cornerstone of American cultural identity that is recited daily by

schoolchildren across the nation (Historic Documents). This phrase, deeply embedded in collective memory, carries significant cultural and ideological weight. However, Biden's invocation of the Pledge in the context of his inaugural address went beyond routine familiarity; it aimed to transform this well-worn text into a foregrounded rhetorical device that reinforced themes of unity and continuity.

The poetics approach reveals that Biden's use of this familiar language served two important functions: First, by defamiliarising the Pledge within the elevated context of an inaugural address, he repurposed it to resonate with a divided audience, inviting reflection on shared values and democratic ideals that transcend partisan divides. This aligned with Jakobson's concept of the poetic function, where the language itself—through its form and rhythm—draws attention to its own significance.

Second, the rhythmic quality of the phrase echoes the cadence and symmetry often found in poetic texts. The repetition of consonant sounds (e.g., the n in "Nation" and "under") and the internal rhythm served to provide a sense of formality and resolve, amplifying its emotional appeal. By invoking a text that is both sacred (through "under God") and secular (as part of civic ritual), Biden simultaneously sacralised the mission of democracy and grounded it in the ideological foundations of American identity.

The Uses of References and Narrative-Driven Allusions to Emphasise Justice

To reaffirm the shared value of justice, President Biden utilised historical and rhetorical references and a religious allusion, coupled with narratives highlighting the struggles of others in order to specifically advance the cause of racial and human rights equity. President Biden explicitly alluded to the Emancipation Proclamation signed by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863 (National Archives) to address the challenges

subverting racial and civil rights equality. Specifically, he quoted Lincoln's words: "If my name ever goes down into history it will be for this act, and my whole soul is in it ("Emancipation")." Through the theme of seeking popular support, President Biden followed in the rhetorical footsteps of Lincoln, aligning himself with the former president's moral stance. By employing the phrase "my whole soul is in [this,]" borrowed from Lincoln's statement, Biden attempted to establish a sense of ethical continuity to emphasise the shared commitment to principles and values that have shaped the nation's history. This deliberate reference heightened the moral dimension of his direct call for Americans to join him in the fight for civil rights equality.

In his pursuit of justice, President Biden utilised a religious reference, specifically drawing upon his Catholic background, to convey a message of love as a solution to the societal issues he addressed in his speech. By quoting Saint Augustine, a revered figure in his own church, Biden attempted to promote unity among the American people, defining them by their shared objects of love. He claimed, "Saint Augustine, a saint of my church, wrote that a people was a multitude defined by the common objects of their love." By highlighting the common objects of love that define Americans, President Biden endeavoured to reassert moral values and civic virtues that he believed were declining in American society, largely due to the negative impacts of the previous administration. He presented a list of seven objects that Americans hold dear. He proposed, "opportunity, security, liberty, dignity, respect, honor, and yes, the truth." These values were to serve as unifying forces that would restore the nation's sense of purpose and integrity.

The strategy of alluding to significant public and moral figures such as President Lincoln and Saint Augustine played a crucial role in persuading the audience and reinforcing Biden's message. Kayam explains the fundamental impact of echoing,

quoting or referencing famous public individuals. She argues this strategy is:

Filling many varied roles, such as reinforcing the speaker's position, presenting and promoting information, stylistic ornamentation, etc. It also adds rhetorical value when used as emotive-stylistic means of persuasion, where the aesthetic pleasure, the emotion that they arouse in the listener and the atmosphere created on the text, can contribute an important part to the work of persuasion. (240)

With such metaphorical allusions to highly esteemed individuals, President Biden encouraged the audience to believe that what was once deemed unattainable could be realised with the right leadership at the right time. Through these references, he implicitly positioned himself as the next U.S. president who could bring about the transformative change that had previously seemed unattainable.

In a similar rhetorical fashion, President Biden employed allusions through narratives to underscore the shared value of justice. One such story depicted the struggle of American women for voting rights in the past. As Biden expounded, "Here we stand, where 108 years ago, at another Inaugural, thousands of protesters tried to block brave women marching for the right to vote." By juxtaposing this historical event with the swearing-in of Vice President Kamala Harris, the first woman - and woman of colour - to hold that office, Biden drew attention to the progress made in women's civil rights and the persisting inequities of voter suppression. By highlighting Vice President Harris as the first black and South Asian female Vice president, he not only celebrated progress but also sought to inspire the audience to reject the divisive policies of the immediate past and work towards a more just society. As Martin observes in her analysis of Biden's rhetoric, this strategy aligns with his broader construction of a

diverse administration that would “look like America,” to “correct the Trump administration’s tendency to countenance white resentment and white rage” (419).

Unveiling Truths: Assessing the Legacy of the Former Presidency

President Joseph Biden promoted the value of truth as a unifying tool in response to the prevalence of falsehoods in the period leading up to his inauguration. He aimed to distance the nation from the divisive rhetoric of the previous four years by implicitly attributing negative or derogatory epithets to former President Trump and conservative media outlets. Through allusions and references, Biden aimed to address the national division caused by falsehoods targeting the legitimacy of his presidency. His allusions and statements referenced the lies propagated by President Trump, Republican politicians, and right-wing media outlets regarding the 2020 presidential election. By acknowledging the painful lesson taught in “recent weeks and months,” he highlighted the importance of distinguishing between truth and lies, particularly “lies told for power and profit.” These lies included the false claims that Trump had won the election, alleging election fraud, and ultimately leading to the assault on the Capitol.

Proposed Political Principles: Unity as a Revival Force

Using the theme of general policy principles, he amplified the resonance of his call for unity in tackling challenging issues. President Biden employed additional powerful metaphors by describing unity as “elusive.” The evocative phrase “to restore the soul” heightened the transformative power of unity, comparing it to the revival of life within a lifeless body. Metaphorically, Biden personified America as a deceased individual deprived of its soul. This depiction conveyed the sense that various aspects

of the country were broken, lost, and damaged and required extensive repair, restoration, and reconstruction.

Presidential Role: A President for All Americans

President Biden exemplified a profound understanding of the responsibilities of the presidency by strategically portraying himself as the embodiment of the symbolic role of the president for *all* people, a role that had been undermined by his predecessor. Employing the rhetorical device of repetition, he underscored his commitment to being a leader for every citizen, a principle intrinsic to the democratic process. Addressing those who did not support him during the election, he repeated his promise to fight for them, affirming, “I promise you I will fight as hard for those who did not support me as for those who did.” By prioritising those who did not vote for him, this president aimed to highlight his firm commitment to being the president for all Americans.

Biden’s embrace of this symbolic role of the president signified his acknowledgement of the dual nature of the presidency - one that involves both wielding significant power and exercising humility. By recognising the limitations of presidential power and the potential for its misuse, Biden aimed to alleviate concerns and instil a sense of trust in his leadership, again in contrast to his predecessor. By affirming his noble intentions through a series of contrasting statements and the repetition of the second-person pronoun “you,” he assured the audience that his focus would be on serving the people rather than pursuing personal interests. Through the recurring theme of a providential supreme being, Biden invoked God as a recognition of the presidency’s inherent limitations. By referring to the nation as “one Nation under God” and heightening his inaugural oath “before God,” he positioned himself in subservience to a higher power.

Implications for the Inauguration Speech Genre

In exploring meaning-construction and inauguration speech genre evolution, the close poetic analysis of President Biden's 2021 inaugural speech investigated how he tapped into Americans' emotions and emphasised the powerful forces of hope, unity, and empathy. Through the examination of his use of "emotionally sensitive" rhetoric, I have demonstrated how he strategically employed these emotions to effectively convey his persuasive message and initiate the crucial task of rebuilding national unity, which had been severely compromised by the preceding administration.

Through an exploration of Biden's speech poetics as a written, spoken, and delivered text, I uncovered the rhetorical and poetic devices employed to engage the emotions of his listeners and readers. These devices include the careful manipulation of mood, tone, and style, the employment of thought-provoking rhetorical questions, the artful use of metaphors, the juxtaposition of antithesis, the rhythmic cadence of parallelism, the deliberate evocation of rhetorical references and allusions, the weaving of narratives, the strategic use of epithets, and the application of various oral composition techniques inherent in poetry. Furthermore, my analysis shed light on the significance of the captivating effect of poetry's rhythmic temporality and the relevance of Eagleton's theory of the language of becoming. These elements were vital tools in President Biden's repertoire, which aided him to forge a profound connection with his audience and inspire them towards a collective sense of purpose.

This close reading provides two significant suggestions in terms of the implications concerning the inauguration speech genre. First, it reaffirms that the inaugural speech is a powerful platform for shaping public discourse and national identity. By drawing on historical patterns while addressing contemporary challenges, the speech serves as an adaptable rhetorical tool. Biden's use of "emotionally sensitive"

rhetoric and persuasive language highlights the importance of crafting a narrative that might resonate with the emotions and values of the audience. In this way, the analysis exhibits that the inauguration speech is not merely a political formality but a significant opportunity to shape public opinion and set the tone for the administration's tenure. Campbell and Jamieson point out that while inaugural speeches might appear ceremonial or "merely ritualistic," they serve a deeper function by allowing presidents to "reconstitute the people in new terms" and reaffirm communal values. These speeches do not simply reflect the shared past; instead, they selectively re-energise values aligned with the incoming administration's philosophy, setting the stage for future policy direction. By using strategies of praise and blame, inaugurals can effectively "lay the groundwork for policy initiatives. This underscores the significant ideological role inaugural addresses play in shaping both public opinion and the direction of governance (29).

Moreover, public opinion polls suggested that Biden's speech had a generally positive reception. According to a poll conducted by Ipsos shortly after the ceremony, there was a broad bipartisan agreement with "the themes of unity, democracy, and action that Biden outlined." In terms of believing Biden's statements in his speech, Democrats are in agreement, whereas Republicans are divided. Overall, approximately "two-thirds of Americans" trust Biden's commitment to being a president for all citizens, his dedication to uniting the nation, and his pledge to advocate equally for those who did not back him as well as those who did – "67%" believe each of these assertions. The poll data illustrated the public reception of specific statements, such as "democracy has prevailed" (agreed upon by "73%" of respondents, including 91% of Democrats and 59% of Republicans. (Newall). This poll data highlighted that Biden's

message of unity resonated with a substantial portion of the American public and also supported the idea of the inaugural speech as a tool for shaping public opinion.

Biden's inauguration rhetoric, like Roosevelt's, could influence both public opinion and political frameworks. His call for unity and healing after a divisive election and the Capitol riot carries echoes of Roosevelt's effort to redefine the role of government in the face of the Great Depression. Zarefsky's research on presidential rhetoric supports this claim by demonstrating how presidential speeches can have long-lasting effects on public opinion and national policy. As discussed in Chapter Four, Zarefsky explores how presidents use rhetorical definition and how this power can alter public conceptions of political reality. For example, in his analysis of Franklin Roosevelt's rhetoric, Zarefsky investigates how he redefined liberalism and fundamentally shifted public perceptions of government's role. Roosevelt argued for an active government intervention to protect individual freedom from the power of big business, arguing that "individual freedom was threatened by the consolidated power of big business" ("Presidential Rhetoric" 615). He believed that the government needed to step in to balance this power and protect individual freedom. As a result, big government became seen as a positive force for improving society. He notes that Roosevelt's vision of an activist government gained bipartisan acceptance. In this sense, as Zarefsky states, "even Republican presidents Eisenhower and Nixon felt constrained not to dismantle the major programs of the New Deal and its progeny," which highlights Roosevelt's lasting impact in "transform[ing] the political landscape for nearly half a century" ("Presidential Rhetoric" 615). Biden endeavoured to recast unity and cooperation as essential to restoring democratic stability. By aligning his presidency with these core values, he was similarly working to reframe public

discourse around the idea of collaborative governance, which could impact policy as well as political identity over time.

Furthermore, this close analysis suggests further significant implications regarding the evolution of the inauguration speech genre, particularly when compared to President Trump's inaugural speech. This comparison highlights the shifting dynamics, priorities, stylistics and the role of the president within the genre. Biden's speech sharply contrasts President Trump's inaugural address in four key aspects. First, while Trump's speech utilised a divisive tone that intensified nationalist and protectionist policies, Biden's speech aimed to bridge the deep disunity caused by the Trump era. This contrast highlights a remarkable evolution in the inauguration speech genre, moving away from divisive rhetoric towards a more inclusive and unifying approach.

Second, the inauguration speech genre has evolved to prioritise healing and unity. This highlights the genre's inherent flexibility to adapt and respond to the needs of the historical moment and the style of the incoming president. Biden's emphasis on empathy, compassion, and understanding reflects a departure from President Trump's assertive and confrontational language. This shift signals a recognition of the pressing need to heal the wounds of division and restore a sense of unity within the nation. This suggests that the inauguration speech genre now places greater emphasis on fostering reconciliation and promoting collective responsibility. Moreover, this aspect highlights the shift in priorities from nationalist and isolationist policies towards global cooperation and shared values. While Trump's inaugural speech emphasised America-first policies and an isolationist stance, Biden's speech underscored the importance of rebuilding alliances, restoring America's standing in the world, and promoting unity on a global scale. This suggests that the inauguration speech genre has evolved to embrace

a more outward-looking and collaborative approach that recognises the interconnectedness of global challenges and the need for international cooperation.

Third, the stylistic differences between the two speeches underscore the evolution of the genre. President Biden's speech exhibited a more traditional and polished delivery style, reminiscent of his predecessors, Presidents Bush and Obama. Biden endeavoured to inspire and uplift the audience, mirroring Obama's approach. This indicates a return to a more eloquent and artful expression within the inauguration speech genre, highlighting its potential to engage and captivate the audience through rhetorical and poetic techniques. It is worth noting once again that President Trump presented a distinctive style and tone that set him apart from these three presidents. However, certain elements or themes may be similar to all four presidents, such as addressing the concerns of the American people or highlighting the importance of national interests. However, Trump's approach and delivery were notably different., distinguished him from the more conventional approaches taken by the three presidents in their inaugural speeches.

The fourth aspect is how President Biden portrayed himself as the exemplar of the symbolic role of the president, a role that his predecessor had undermined. This reveals that there has been a significant shift in how the symbolic role of the president is embodied. Unlike Trump, whose rhetoric and actions often advanced division and represented a narrower segment of the population, Biden's inaugural speech and his firm commitment to unity signify a return to a more inclusive and representative presidency. Biden's embodiment of the symbolic role of the president serves as a highlight of a renewed focus on fostering unity and representing the interests of all Americans.

In terms of the implications regarding meaning-making in public language, the analysis of this final case study underlines the power of public language in constructing meaning and eliciting emotional responses. It also highlights how the formal and ceremonial nature of the inauguration speech not only influences the speaker but also shapes the speech itself. The significance of the occasion and the established conventions of the genre impact the speaker's language choices and rhetorical strategies. In turn, the speech reflects and adheres to the expectations and patterns of the formal genre. President Biden's use of "emotionally sensitive" language, reveals the powerful impact of words to evoke hope, unity, empathy, and resilience. It exhibits how public language can go beyond conveying information and instead become a vehicle for mobilising collective emotions such as empathy and unity. The analysis underscores the ability of public language through emotionally charged and unifying discourse to construct a shared national identity. By fostering empathy and mutual respect, the speech sought to shape public sentiment in a divided nation, re-establishing a sense of collective responsibility. Biden engaged the audience on an emotional level, forging a connection that extended beyond the intellectual realm. In a 2021 review of Biden's inaugural address for *BU Today*, Boston University historian Whalen highlighted how Biden delivered "exactly what [the nation] needed to hear—a message of reassurance, honesty, and hope." He noted that Biden's tone conveyed a "spirit of generosity and empathy," a contrast to what had been "sorely lacking" in the previous administration. Whalen further described the emotive tone of the speech as one of "freedom from fear," portraying Biden as if "taking the nation's hand and squeezing it," reassuring the country that "it's going to be all right," which was crucial at such a fraught moment in history (Whalen).

Similarly, Viala-Gaudefroy, writing for *The Conversation*, praised Biden's use of "plain and direct language," noting how his "habitual colloquialisms" such as ("I get it") and folksy charm ("Look, folks"), lent the speech a familiar and approachable charm. Viala-Gaudefroy argued that Biden's empathic tone and faith helped establish a connection with many Americans, making him "a figure with whom "many citizens and voters [could] relate (Viala-Gaudefroy). While the study did not directly assess live audience responses, the incorporation of external evaluations suggests that the speeches transcended mere political formalities and had a tangible impact on public sentiment.

In light of the implications drawn from the analysis of Biden's 2021 inaugural speech, I anticipate potential directions for the inauguration speech genre in 2025 and beyond. Future presidents may follow Biden's lead in employing "emotionally sensitive" rhetoric, recognising its potential to resonate with the American people. However, the specific outlines of these speeches will be moulded by the evolving challenges and aspirations of the nation. Looking ahead to 2025 and beyond, I expect that unity, a theme prominently featured in Biden's speech, will continue to be a central focus, given the enduring need to bridge political divides and heal societal wounds. The gradual shift from divisive and nationalist rhetoric, observed in his speech, might grow further momentum as the world becomes increasingly interconnected. Future inaugural speeches may place greater emphasis on fostering global cooperation and shared values in addressing pressing international issues. Stylistically, presidents may tend toward a more traditional and eloquent delivery, akin to Biden, or adopt distinct approaches influenced by the demands of the era.

Conclusion

Constructing Meaning through Public Language: Insights from 21st-Century American Presidential Inauguration Speeches

At the heart of American political tradition, the presidential inauguration speech marks the beginning of a new government term and provides a formal stage to unite the newly inaugurated president with both the past and the future. As a distinctive piece of speech-making, it thus operates in relation to the web of other examples of its genre, employing patterns of repetition and variation, along with gestures of alliance and repudiation, to construct and convey meaning. In this conclusion, I synthesise and critique the significant findings derived from this thesis' analysis. By comparing these formal speeches of presidential commencement, I uncover recurring patterns and noteworthy variations that illuminate the process of constructing and communicating meaning within this unique genre. This synthesis also reveals its evolution over time, highlighting its responsiveness to the changing political and societal landscape. This chapter also highlights the significance of using the poetic approach in reading presidential speeches, the contributions of this thesis, and suggests further areas of enquiry.

The comparative examination of President Bush's two inaugural speeches revealed differences in historical context, which influenced – and were influenced by – the rhetoric, policy priorities, overall tone, and body gestures of each speech. The first inaugural speech considered here was shaped by a pre-9/11 America, while the second inaugural speech occurred in a post-9/11 and mid-war-on-terror context. That analysis also highlighted the rhetorical shifts between those two inaugural speeches. The first speech reflected optimism and emphasised “compassionate conservatism,” while the second speech exhibited a more resolute tone, constructing a missionary call to focus

on national security, foreign policy, and the promotion of freedom. The thematic priorities of the speeches differed, reflecting the policy agendas of each respective term; this was evidenced in the rhetorical strategies at work in each. This analysis highlights the role of context and the rhetorical situation in shaping presidential discourse. As Bitzer's framework underscores, rhetoric emerges as a response to historical exigencies, with its meaning and effectiveness dictated by the circumstances. Bush's speeches illustrate how inaugural rhetoric evolves to reflect and respond to the distinct demands of its time while adhering to the genre's core functions.

The analysis of Bush's speeches examined how these speeches manifest specific stylistic features, rhetorical devices, and recurrent elements that define and shape this genre. The investigation of President Bush's inaugural speeches within the genre framework provided crucial insights into the idea of tradition and innovation, the influence of historical antecedents, the demands of the present moment, and the impact of the context and the speaker on the evolving nature of the genre. It highlighted that the genre of the inauguration speech is not solely a rigid set of conventions but dynamic where every speech is influenced by what has been said before while also shaping the trajectory of the genre. This two-way influence emphasises how meaning is made in public speech and reflects the responsiveness of the genre to the imperatives of the moment. Thus, the exploration of Bush's speeches demonstrates the genre's capacity for continuity, adaptation, and new directions.

Bush's inauguration speeches exemplified the profound impact of poetic elements in public language, employing cadence and performative rhetorical devices to evoke emotions, shape narratives, and engage audiences at a deeper level. His use of repetition, such as in the phrases "compassionate conservatism" and "America at its best," resonated powerfully, with commentators likening their rhythmic appeal to

symphonic chords and observing their lasting influence on political rhetoric. Bush's tone, pauses, and rhythmic articulation amplified key messages, such as the universal significance of the interconnectedness of liberty and security and, enhancing its emotional and intellectual impact. Critics and analysts highlighted how these rhetorical choices, combined with his body language and optimistic framing, contributed to the memorability and ideological resonance of his speeches.

The investigation of Bush's speeches demonstrates the strategic utilisation of the skilful crafting of speeches to resonate with the audience within a particular socio-historical context. This includes Bush's use of epideictic praise and blame to frame the United States as a nation unified by its commitment to freedom. As Murphy notes, Bush's rhetoric shaped the public's collective identity by amplifying threats to freedom and framing the fight against terrorism as a moral test of the nation's character. Through vivid metaphors and appeals to shared heritage, Bush positioned the spread of freedom as both a national mission and a unifying ideal, drawing upon the nation's ethos to forge unity and purpose in the face of adversity. The analysis explored how public language evokes specific moods, taps into cultural references, shapes tone, employs rhetorical techniques, draws on historical and religious references, and constructs narratives that resonate with shared values.

The comparison of President Obama's first and second inaugural speeches showed that while both speeches shared contextual factors and adhered to the traditions of the inaugural speech genre, they differed in their themes, tones, and rhetorical strategies. The first inaugural speech emphasised unity, hope, and change, aligning with historical precedents and capturing the significance of Obama's historic election. In contrast, the second inaugural speech slightly departed from the traditional ceremonial tone, focusing on policy-oriented approaches and addressing specific challenges and

priorities of his first term. This speech expanded the boundaries of the genre, exhibiting its adaptability to address substantive policy matters and advocate for action. The analysis of President Obama's inaugural speeches reveals the dynamic nature of the inaugural speech genre, its ability to adapt to changing times, and its capacity for evolution. While rooted in a shared foundation, these speeches demonstrate how the genre can accommodate different contexts, priorities, and rhetorical strategies.

The analysis of President Obama's speeches highlights the significant influence of public language infused with poetic elements. The strategic use of rhetorical and poetic devices can have a profound effect on the audience. They play a pivotal role in amplifying the speeches' persuasive power and resonance, enabling political leaders to appeal to reason, sway hearts and minds, inspire collective action, and leave a lasting impression.

While these qualities are often dismissed under Lim's critique of anti-intellectualism in contemporary presidential rhetoric, the analysis of Obama's speeches, including the other inaugurals in this study, challenges the notion that simplicity equates to decay in rhetorical effectiveness. This investigation demonstrates that such strategies are not inherently flawed but can be rhetorically effective. By focusing not only on what presidents say but how they say it, this analysis reveals that rhetorical tools like memorable phrases and repetition can resonate deeply with audiences and reinforce central messages. Far from signalling a decline, these elements underscore the aesthetic and persuasive dimensions of presidential rhetoric, showing how even linguistically simple discourse can construct and communicate profound meaning.

The close poetic reading of President Trump's inaugural speech in Chapter Six provided significant insights into how he deviated from the conventional norms and expectations of the American inauguration speech genre, potentially reshaping its

structures to align with his distinct purposes. It examined the historical context, rhetorical approach, shift in style and communication, and the implications for the evolution of the genre. President Trump's inaugural speech took place during a highly divisive political climate and a wave of populist sentiments. This context influenced the rhetoric, themes, and tone of his speech as he endeavoured to address the concerns and aspirations of a specific segment of the American population that felt marginalised. Unlike his predecessors in this study, who delivered their speeches in the aftermath of significant historical events, President Trump's speech reflected the unique political climate of his time.

Importantly, the analysis of Trump's speech highlights the implications for the evolution of the inauguration speech genre. President Trump's departure from established norms and his unconventional rhetorical strategies challenged the traditional understanding of this type of presidential speech and gave an important example of how individual instances of a genre can have a powerful impact on the evolution and broader reception of that genre. His speech represents a paradigm shift in how American presidents communicate their vision during the inauguration. This analysis emphasises Jamieson and Taussig's observation that Trump's rhetoric created a distinct "rhetorical signature," marked by disruption of norms, demonization of opponents, and emotionally charged language that resonated with his base. His speech framed his presidency as a rejection of the political establishment, positioning himself as the voice of forgotten Americans.

While Trump addressed the recurrent elements of the genre, his radical shift may reshape the expectations and possibilities for future inaugural speeches. Trump's speech diverged significantly from the traditional reaffirmation of shared values expected in inaugural addresses. Instead, as Stuckey notes, Trump's rhetoric

personalized leadership, intertwining the institutional role of the presidency with his personal agenda. This rhetorical shift amplified divisions by constructing a dichotomy between loyal followers and perceived enemies, blurring the boundaries between inclusive unity and exclusive nationalism. While this approach resonated with segments of his audience, it also risked undermining the broader symbolic and unifying functions of the inaugural speech, raising critical questions about its evolving nature and role in political discourse.

Additionally, the investigation of President Trump's inaugural speech underscores the nature of public discourse and the power of language in shaping the inauguration speech genre and constructing meaning in the public sphere. By embracing a narrative of division that positioned his audience as victims of a corrupt establishment, Trump focused on victimhood and grievance which intensified a sense of resentment among his audience. Trump's appeals to victimhood and resentment, as Kelly suggests, fostered an emotional framework in which anger and revenge were recast as civic virtues. This rhetorical strategy deepened divisions by framing Trump's supporters as morally justified in their opposition to various societal and political forces, such as the elite and external adversaries. This suggests that the genre itself can be subject to reinterpretation and reinvention by future presidents and that strategic use of language can shape public perception and understanding.

As the current and closing example of this study of recent inauguration speeches, the analysis of President Biden's inaugural speech in Chapter Seven provided a comparative examination of his approach to his predecessor, President Trump, in terms of tone, themes, and rhetorical approach. The close poetic analysis of Biden's inaugural speech explored how he tapped into emotions and highlighted forces such as hope, unity, empathy, love, reconciliation, and resilience. Confirming Prash's insights,

the analysis revealed Biden's view of the presidency as an institution subservient to the U.S. Constitution, contrasting sharply with Trump's individualistic and divisive approach. This commitment to institutional respect was reflected in Biden's rhetoric, which emphasised collective healing and a return to democratic norms.

Biden's use of "emotionally sensitive" rhetoric, as examined through Dorsey's and Amaireh's frameworks, further demonstrated his ability to connect with the American people. By employing pathos to evoke shared grief and unity, particularly in the context of the pandemic, Biden positioned himself as a unifying figure in a fractured nation. His deliberate use of colloquial expressions such as "my friends" and "folks," combined with solemn moments like the eleven-second silence for pandemic victims, exemplified his strategic modulation of tone and language to foster empathy and collective resolve.

This analysis highlights how Biden's inaugural speech diverged from the confrontational and polarising rhetoric of his predecessor, instead seeking to transform public sentiment and guide the nation toward healing. By blending simplicity, emotional resonance, and symbolic gestures, Biden reaffirmed the ceremonial and unifying potential of the inaugural address while adapting it to the urgent needs of the historical moment.

The observations derived from the analysis of President Biden's inaugural speech analysis suggested implications for the inauguration speech genre as a powerful platform for shaping public discourse and national identity. President Biden's use of "emotionally sensitive" and persuasive language underscores the significance of weaving a narrative that deeply connects with the emotions and values of the audience. As Zarefsky highlights, inaugural speeches can shape public discourse and political identity over time, reinforcing the claim that Biden's rhetoric aimed to redefine unity

and cooperation as essential to restoring democratic stability. Moreover, Whalen emphasised Biden's empathetic tone and plainspoken style, portraying him as a reassuring and approachable leader at a critical moment in history. Similarly, Viala-Gaudefroy noted Biden's use of familiar and conversational language, which established a strong emotional connection with the audience, fostering hope and mutual respect. These rhetorical choices collectively illustrate the enduring power of public language to inspire unity and redefine collective identity in moments of national division.

The analysis also suggests an evolution of the inauguration speech genre, moving from divisive rhetoric to a more inclusive and unifying approach. This shift reflected a broader redefinition of the presidency, as Biden reaffirmed institutional respect and collective purpose, contrasting sharply with his predecessor's individualistic rhetoric. As Salek observes, Biden's rhetoric fostered a civic attitude of empathy and goodwill, rejecting the resentment and divisiveness characteristic of the previous administration. This analysis underlines the shift in priorities from nationalist and isolationist policies to global cooperation and shared values, reinforcing the potential of inaugural speeches to serve as a bridge between historical conventions and contemporary needs.

In terms of meaning-making in public language, this analysis demonstrates how public language can go beyond conveying information and become a vehicle for mobilising collective emotions and aspirations. Reaffirming Westen's argument that effective political communication engages the emotional core of its audience, Biden's speech exemplified the use of "emotionally sensitive" rhetoric to foster hope and unity. His strategic use of solemn moments, such as a reflective silence for pandemic victims, demonstrated the power of language to channel grief into collective resolve, as Martin

notes. By invoking cultural references and shared traditions, Biden's address constructed a narrative of shared responsibility and renewal, uniting his audience around common values.

This study uncovered that presidential inaugural speeches exhibit a quasi-poetic cadence, challenging traditional distinctions between public oratory and poetic performance. By examining the prosodic elements within the speeches, this analysis highlighted the use of rhythmic repetition, pitch modulation, and strategic pauses. The presidents utilised these techniques, evoking the qualities of oral traditions. The integration of Tannen's and Chafe's discourse analysis frameworks illuminated how these speeches adopted a quasi-metric, intonational pattern. By delineating transcripts and isolating intonation units, the speeches revealed how segmented parts imbued each clause with individual rhetorical weight. This method captured the rhythmic ebb and flow that characterises spoken discourse, drawing on Tannen's insights on conversational rhythm and Chafe's concept of speech as bursts or spurts. The analysis of rhythmic units brought out the quasi-poetic structure inherent in political oratory.

Building upon insights from the oral tradition theories of Tedlock, Parry, and Ong, this thesis also situated presidential rhetoric within the broader context of oral poetics. As Ong suggests, elements such as formulaic repetition, rhythmic balance, and the mnemonic function of sound patterns are critical in primarily oral cultures. When applied to the presidents' speeches, these insights revealed how presidents embed recurring phrases within their rhetoric to enhance message retention and create memorable messages. The uses of refrains and reliance on familiar expressions exemplified how such techniques enable politicians to create a narrative that feels both accessible and resonant. This reliance on formulaic phrases, as analysed through Pawley and Syder's concept of "memorized sequences," demonstrated how presidents

employ ready-made expressions to maintain fluency and emphasise core messages effectively, minimising disruptions and enhancing delivery during public addresses.

Ultimately, this research contributed to a growing body of scholarship that treats political speech not merely as a vehicle for information but as a crafted performance that draws on poetic traditions. By situating inaugural addresses within the study of quasi-poetic discourse, this thesis underscored how structured repetition, rhythm, and strategic pauses enhance thematic resonance, supporting a unified national message and grounding the speech in values that evoke collective resilience and purpose. This approach, therefore, solidifies the thesis's argument that political language can exhibit the quality of "literariness" typically associated with literature, demonstrating poetic qualities in political speech contribute to its persuasive and aesthetic power.

The Significance of the Poetic Approach in Reading the 21st-Century American Presidential Inaugural Speeches

The poetic reading techniques employed to read these six inauguration speeches from post-9/11 American presidents served as a valuable tool for comprehending the complications and impact of these speeches, contributing to the understanding of the broader socio-political landscape and the evolving nature of presidential rhetoric in the 21st century. By investigating the rhetorical and poetic elements embedded within the text, the reading techniques allowed for a distinct understanding of the workings of public language in constructing meaning, evoking emotions, revealing symbolism, shaping narratives, engaging the audience, inspiring action, and illuminating the evolution of the inaugural speech genre.

One of the key advantages of employing a poetic reading approach is its ability to uncover the deeper layers of meaning within inaugural speeches, revealing their

aesthetic and performative dimensions. While Campbell and Jamieson's genre theory focuses primarily on the historical and constitutional functions of presidential rhetoric, this thesis extends their framework by demonstrating how poetic elements amplify the emotional and symbolic power of these speeches. By illuminating the values, emotions, and aspirations embedded in presidential language, the poetic reading approach offers an understanding of how inaugural addresses engage and resonate with their audiences.

For instance, Bush's use of rhythmic repetition exemplified by the phrase "Never tiring, never yielding, never finishing," created a quasi-poetic cadence. This triadic structure, combined with deliberate pauses and vocal modulation, reinforced the constitutional values of duty and perseverance, aligning with Campbell and Jamieson's emphasis on presidential rhetoric as "grounded in constitutional provisions" and fulfilling the ceremonial expectations of the presidency while engaging the audience with a rhythmic ebb and flow. Similarly, Trump's anaphoric repetition of 'We will make America + adjective again' employed rhythmic segmentation and a mnemonic rhythm to emphasise his vision of national renewal. Each iteration not only invoked specific values, such as strength or pride but also symbolically framed his rhetoric as a restorative call, operating within the customary expectation for inaugurals to reaffirm the continuity of constitutional governance. These examples illustrate how the poetic reading approach complements existing frameworks by uncovering the nuanced ways presidents use rhetorical techniques to fulfil the institutional and ceremonial functions of the inaugural address.

The application of a poetic reading approach to this consideration of 21st-century American presidential inauguration speeches also sheds light on the evolution of the inaugural speech genre. As noted in Campbell and Jamieson's genre theory, inaugural speeches exhibit a balance between continuity and change, preserving shared

traditions while adapting to contemporary challenges. This thesis extended their framework by uncovering how artistic and stylistic techniques reinforced the rhetorical and ceremonial functions of inaugural addresses. For example, Bush's evocation of a Puritan sense of mission, Obama's ethos of hope and change, Trump's genre-defying transgressive rhetoric, and Biden's emotionally resonant calls for unity exemplified how presidents both upheld and redefined the genre to address shifting political and social contexts.

Building upon critiques of Campbell and Jamieson, such as those by Ryan and Conley, this thesis emphasised the genre's flexibility and adaptability to contextual demands, countering claims that it imposes rigid structures on inaugural rhetoric. While Campbell and Jamieson's analysis identifies recurring elements that anchor the genre, my poetic reading approach revealed how presidents use rhetorical creativity to engage audiences and fulfil the genre's epideictic functions in innovative ways. By linking this epideictic feature to the concepts of "foregrounding" and "defamiliarisation," this study illuminated how this presidential speech accentuates its form and reinvigorates the familiar symbolic components through effective ways that deepen audience engagement and reflection. By examining both continuities and variations, this analysis not only affirms the relevance of Campbell and Jamieson's framework but also addresses its limitations by exploring the artistic and symbolic dimensions of presidential rhetoric.

This thesis thus extended Campbell and Jamieson's insights by demonstrating that the poetic qualities of inaugural speeches functioned not only as aesthetic embellishments but as mechanisms for deeper engagement. This thesis advanced their work by applying the literary concept of "foregrounding," which demonstrated how stylistic variations in inaugural addresses defamiliarise national ideals, prompting

audiences to reflect on them in new ways. In so doing, presidents attempted to amplify the epideictic function of their addresses, transforming them from mere declarations of vision into contemplative experiences that shape public perception of democracy. Therefore, the inaugural rhetoric does not merely persuade but also encourages contemplation by elevating familiar democratic values into heightened, memorable expressions.

For example, Obama's rhetoric of reminiscence, particularly in his references to the sacrifices of past generations, functioned as a contemplative device. His use of parallel sentence structures—such as “For us, they packed up their few worldly possessions and traveled across oceans in search of a new life. For us, they toiled in sweatshops and settled the West; endured the lash of the whip and plowed the hard earth”—created a rhythmic repetition that reinforced the speech's reflective tone. By structuring these historical sacrifices in a patterned cadence, Obama endeavoured to invite the audience to view the present moment as part of an ongoing national journey, drawing them into a contemplative engagement with America's past and future. Trump, by contrast, his stark departure from the genre's expected language and themes served as its own form of defamiliarization and called for contemplation. His bleak portrayal of “American carnage” disrupted the celebratory tone usually characteristic of inaugural addresses, urging audiences to re-evaluate the nation's condition rather than reaffirming its enduring democratic ideals.

Exploring the recurrent elements, stylistic shifts, and thematic priorities across different speeches allowed for an in-depth identification of the changing norms and expectations within this genre. Presidents often depart from tradition and introduce innovative approaches to their speeches, redefining the genre's boundaries and influencing future inaugural speeches. This thesis shed light on how these innovations

can reflect broader shifts in the institution of the presidency itself, as presidential rhetoric increasingly integrates visual and performative elements—such as body gestures, pauses, and tone—enabled by the media landscape of the 21st century. By examining these performative aspects, this project provided new insights into how modern presidents make meaning through both verbal and non-verbal communication, highlighting the interplay between tradition and innovation in the genre.

Further Work

While this thesis enhances the understanding of how public language constructs and communicates meaning through an analysis of the 21st-century American presidential inaugural speeches and an exploration of strategic rhetorical and poetic devices, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. This thesis does not thoroughly investigate the following four perspectives. First, although the scope of the thesis focuses on applying theories, concepts, and terms from poetics to each president's speech, it is primarily a study of language and therefore does not explore deeply the broader socio-political context in which the speeches were delivered. While contextual factors are considered to some extent, future research in political science could incorporate a more extensive analysis of the historical, social, and political circumstances that influenced the speeches, thus further enriching the understanding of their rhetorical impact.

Second, while this project focuses on a significant range of presidents in the 21st century, it specifically centres on the most recent four American presidents up to the present day. Thus, the inclusion of future inaugural speeches from subsequent presidents will undoubtedly fortify the depth and understanding of investigations into the inaugural speeches of this century. As I discussed in the Introduction, I selected this

range of case studies of American presidents because: they are the most recent post-9/11 presidents and, therefore, capture a significant period in American history after such a major event; they encompass diverse perspectives, as refracted through the speeches of four different presidents; they highlight the question of the necessary peaceful transition of power in the United States as a hallmark of American democracy; they reflect individual leadership styles and communication approaches; and offer valuable insights into the evolution of American presidential inaugural speeches in the 21st century as a form of genre communication.

Third, while this approach illuminates the artistic and persuasive elements, it does not extensively explore the practical implications and consequences of the speeches, such as their impact on policy implementation, and legislative outcomes. This is because this thesis is grounded in an analysis of language - it is not a political analysis. Future research could bridge this gap by investigating the relationship between rhetorical strategies and actual policy outcomes.

Fourth, while this project focused specifically on inaugural speeches, investigating how other genres of public language, such as press conferences, political rallies, or State of the Union speeches, may contribute to the overall understanding of presidential rhetoric and deepen the analysis. Examining these additional forms of communication can provide insights into the consistency or divergence in messaging across different contexts and how they shape public perceptions.

Lastly, future research could explore the comparative dimensions of presidential inaugural rhetoric in a global context. While this thesis focuses on American presidential speeches, examining inaugural addresses from leaders in other political systems and cultural contexts could provide valuable insights into the universal and culturally specific functions of inaugural rhetoric. Such comparative studies would

illuminate how rhetorical and poetic strategies adapt to diverse traditions, audiences, and political landscapes, broadening our understanding of the genre's global significance and variation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: President George W. Bush's First Inaugural Address, January 20, 2001.

Thank you, all. Chief Justice Rehnquist, President Carter, President Bush, President Clinton, distinguished guests, and my fellow citizens. The peaceful transfer of authority is rare in history, yet common in our country. With a simple oath, we affirm old traditions and make new beginnings.

As I begin, I thank President Clinton for his service to our Nation, and I thank Vice President Gore for a contest conducted with spirit and ended with grace.

I am honored and humbled to stand here where so many of America's leaders have come before me, and so many will follow. We have a place, all of us, in a long story, a story we continue but whose end we will not see. It is a story of a new world that became a friend and liberator of the old, the story of a slaveholding society that became a servant of freedom, the story of a power that went into the world to protect but not possess, to defend but not to conquer.

It is the American story, a story of flawed and fallible people united across the generations by grand and enduring ideals. The grandest of these ideals is an unfolding American promise that everyone belongs, that everyone deserves a chance, that no insignificant person was ever born.

Americans are called to enact this promise in our lives and in our laws. And though our Nation has sometimes halted and sometimes delayed, we must follow no other course. Through much of the last century, America's faith in freedom and democracy was a rock in a raging sea. Now it is a seed upon the wind, taking root in many nations. Our democratic faith is more than the creed of our country. It is the inborn hope of our

humanity, an ideal we carry but do not own, a trust we bear and pass along. Even after nearly 225 years, we have a long way yet to travel.

While many of our citizens prosper, others doubt the promise, even the justice of our own country. The ambitions of some Americans are limited by failing schools and hidden prejudice and the circumstances of their birth. And sometimes our differences run so deep, it seems we share a continent but not a country. We do not accept this, and we will not allow it.

Our unity, our Union, is a serious work of leaders and citizens and every generation. And this is my solemn pledge: I will work to build a single nation of justice and opportunity. I know this is in our reach because we are guided by a power larger than ourselves, who creates us equal, in His image, and we are confident in principles that unite and lead us onward.

America has never been united by blood or birth or soil. We are bound by ideals that move us beyond our backgrounds, lift us above our interests, and teach us what it means to be citizens. Every child must be taught these principles. Every citizen must uphold them. And every immigrant, by embracing these ideals, makes our country more, not less, American.

Today we affirm a new commitment to live out our Nation's promise through civility, courage, compassion, and character. America at its best matches a commitment to principle with a concern for civility. A civil society demands from each of us good will and respect, fair dealing and forgiveness.

Some seem to believe that our politics can afford to be petty because in a time of peace the stakes of our debates appear small. But the stakes for America are never small. If our country does not lead the cause of freedom, it will not be led. If we do not turn the hearts of children toward knowledge and character, we will lose their gifts and

undermine their idealism. If we permit our economy to drift and decline, the vulnerable will suffer most.

We must live up to the calling we share. Civility is not a tactic or a sentiment; it is the determined choice of trust over cynicism, of community over chaos. And this commitment, if we keep it, is a way to shared accomplishment.

America at its best is also courageous. Our national courage has been clear in times of depression and war, when defeating common dangers defined our common good. Now we must choose if the example of our fathers and mothers will inspire us or condemn us. We must show courage in a time of blessing by confronting problems instead of passing them on to future generations.

Together we will reclaim America's schools before ignorance and apathy claim more young lives. We will reform Social Security and Medicare, sparing our children from struggles we have the power to prevent. And we will reduce taxes to recover the momentum of our economy and reward the effort and enterprise of working Americans.

We will build our defenses beyond challenge, lest weakness invite challenge. We will confront weapons of mass destruction, so that a new century is spared new horrors. The enemies of liberty and our country should make no mistake: America remains engaged in the world, by history and by choice, shaping a balance of power that favors freedom.

We will defend our allies and our interests. We will show purpose without arrogance.

We will meet aggression and bad faith with resolve and strength. And to all nations, we will speak for the values that gave our Nation birth.

America at its best is compassionate. In the quiet of American conscience, we know that deep, persistent poverty is unworthy of our Nation's promise. And whatever our views of its cause, we can agree that children at risk are not at fault.

Abandonment and abuse are not acts of God; they are failures of love. And the proliferation of prisons, however necessary, is no substitute for hope and order in our souls. Where there is suffering, there is duty. Americans in need are not strangers; they are citizens—not problems but priorities. And all of us are diminished when any are hopeless.

Government has great responsibilities for public safety and public health, for civil rights and common schools. Yet, compassion is the work of a nation, not just a government. And some needs and hurts are so deep they will only respond to a mentor's touch or a pastor's prayer. Church and charity, synagogue and mosque lend our communities their humanity, and they will have an honored place in our plans and in our laws.

Many in our country do not know the pain of poverty. But we can listen to those who do. And I can pledge our Nation to a goal: When we see that wounded traveler on the road to Jericho, we will not pass to the other side.

America at its best is a place where personal responsibility is valued and expected. Encouraging responsibility is not a search for scapegoats; it is a call to conscience. And though it requires sacrifice, it brings a deeper fulfillment. We find the fullness of life not only in options but in commitments. And we find that children and community are the commitments that set us free.

Our public interest depends on private character, on civic duty and family bonds and basic fairness, on uncounted, unhonored acts of decency, which give direction to our freedom.

Sometimes in life we're called to do great things. But as a saint of our times has said, "Every day we are called to do small things with great love." The most important tasks of a democracy are done by everyone.

I will live and lead by these principles: to advance my convictions with civility, to serve the public interest with courage, to speak for greater justice and compassion, to call for responsibility and try to live it, as well. In all these ways, I will bring the values of our history to the care of our times.

What you do is as important as anything Government does. I ask you to seek a common good beyond your comfort, to defend needed reforms against easy attacks, to serve your Nation, beginning with your neighbor. I ask you to be citizens: Citizens, not spectators; citizens, not subjects; responsible citizens building communities of service and a nation of character.

Americans are generous and strong and decent, not because we believe in ourselves but because we hold beliefs beyond ourselves. When this spirit of citizenship is missing, no Government program can replace it. When this spirit is present, no wrong can stand against it.

After the Declaration of Independence was signed, Virginia statesman John Page wrote to Thomas Jefferson, "We know the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. Do you not think an angel rides in the whirlwind and directs this storm?"

Much time has passed since Jefferson arrived for his inauguration. The years and changes accumulate, but the themes of this day, he would know: our Nation's grand story of courage and its simple dream of dignity.

We are not this story's author, who fills time and eternity with his purpose. Yet, his purpose is achieved in our duty. And our duty is fulfilled in service to one another. Never tiring, never yielding, never finishing, we renew that purpose today, to make our country more just and generous, to affirm the dignity of our lives and every life. This work continues, the story goes on, and an angel still rides in the whirlwind and directs this storm. God bless you all, and God bless America.

Appendix 2: President George W. Bush's Second Inaugural Address, January 20, 2005.

Vice President Cheney, Mr. Chief Justice, President Carter, President Bush, President Clinton, Members of the United States Congress, reverend clergy, distinguished guests, fellow citizens:

On this day, prescribed by law and marked by ceremony, we celebrate the durable wisdom of our Constitution and recall the deep commitments that unite our country. I am grateful for the honor of this hour, mindful of the consequential times in which we live, and determined to fulfill the oath that I have sworn and you have witnessed.

At this second gathering, our duties are defined not by the words I use but by the history we have seen together. For a half a century, America defended our own freedom by standing watch on distant borders. After the shipwreck of communism came years of relative quiet, years of repose, years of sabbatical, and then there came a day of fire.

We have seen our vulnerability, and we have seen its deepest source. For as long as whole regions of the world simmer in resentment and tyranny, prone to ideologies that feed hatred and excuse murder, violence will gather and multiply in destructive power and cross the most defended borders and raise a mortal threat. There is only one force of history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment and expose the pretensions of tyrants and reward the hopes of the decent and tolerant, and that is the force of human freedom.

We are led, by events and common sense, to one conclusion: The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world.

America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one. From the day of our founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this Earth has rights and

dignity and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of heaven and Earth. Across the generations, we have proclaimed the imperative of self-government, because no one is fit to be a master and no one deserves to be a slave. Advancing these ideals is the mission that created our Nation. It is the honorable achievement of our fathers. Now, it is the urgent requirement of our Nation's security and the calling of our time.

So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world. This is not primarily the task of arms, though we will defend ourselves and our friends by force of arms when necessary. Freedom, by its nature, must be chosen and defended by citizens and sustained by the rule of law and the protection of minorities. And when the soul of a nation finally speaks, the institutions that arise may reflect customs and traditions very different from our own. America will not impose our own style of government on the unwilling. Our goal instead is to help others find their own voice, attain their own freedom, and make their own way.

The great objective of ending tyranny is the concentrated work of generations. The difficulty of the task is no excuse for avoiding it. America's influence is not unlimited, but fortunately for the oppressed, America's influence is considerable and we will use it confidently in freedom's cause.

My most solemn duty is to protect this Nation and its people from further attacks and emerging threats. Some have unwisely chosen to test America's resolve and have found it firm. We will persistently clarify the choice before every ruler and every nation, the moral choice between oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right.

America will not pretend that jailed dissidents prefer their chains or that women welcome humiliation and servitude or that any human being aspires to live at the mercy of bullies. We will encourage reform in other governments by making clear that success in our relations will require the decent treatment of their own people. America's belief in human dignity will guide our policies. Yet rights must be more than the grudging concessions of dictators. They are secured by free dissent and the participation of the governed. In the long run, there is no justice without freedom and there can be no human rights without human liberty.

Some, I know, have questioned the global appeal of liberty, though this time in history, four decades defined by the swiftest advance of freedom ever seen, is an odd time for doubt. Americans, of all people, should never be surprised by the power of our ideals. Eventually, the call of freedom comes to every mind and every soul. We do not accept the existence of permanent tyranny because we do not accept the possibility of permanent slavery. Liberty will come to those who love it.

Today, America speaks anew to the peoples of the world. All who live in tyranny and hopelessness can know: The United States will not ignore your oppression or excuse your oppressors. When you stand for your liberty, we will stand with you.

Democratic reformers facing repression, prison, or exile can know: America sees you for who you are, the future leaders of your free country.

The rulers of outlaw regimes can know that we still believe as Abraham Lincoln did: "Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves and, under the rule of a just God, cannot long retain it."

The leaders of governments with long habits of control need to know: To serve your people, you must learn to trust them. Start on this journey of progress and justice, and America will walk at your side.

And all the allies of the United States can know: We honor your friendship; we rely on your counsel; and we depend on your help. Division among free nations is a primary goal of freedom's enemies. The concerted effort of free nations to promote democracy is a prelude to our enemies' defeat.

Today I also speak anew to my fellow citizens. From all of you I have asked patience in the hard task of securing America, which you have granted in good measure. Our country has accepted obligations that are difficult to fulfill and would be dishonorable to abandon. Yet because we have acted in the great liberating tradition of this Nation, tens of millions have achieved their freedom. And as hope kindles hope, millions more will find it. By our efforts, we have lit a fire as well, a fire in the minds of men. It warms those who feel its power. It burns those who fight its progress. And one day this untamed fire of freedom will reach the darkest corners of our world.

A few Americans have accepted the hardest duties in this cause, in the quiet work of intelligence and diplomacy, the idealistic work of helping raise up free governments, the dangerous and necessary work of fighting our enemies. Some have shown their devotion to our country in deaths that honored their whole lives, and we will always honor their names and their sacrifice.

All Americans have witnessed this idealism and some for the first time. I ask our youngest citizens to believe the evidence of your eyes. You have seen duty and allegiance in the determined faces of our soldiers. You have seen that life is fragile and evil is real and courage triumphs. Make the choice to serve in a cause larger than your wants, larger than yourself, and in your days you will add not just to the wealth of our country but to its character.

America has need of idealism and courage because we have essential work at home, the unfinished work of American freedom. In a world moving toward liberty, we are determined to show the meaning and promise of liberty.

In America's ideal of freedom, citizens find the dignity and security of economic independence instead of laboring on the edge of subsistence. This is the broader definition of liberty that motivated the Homestead Act, the Social Security Act, and the GI bill of rights. And now we will extend this vision by reforming great institutions to serve the needs of our time. To give every American a stake in the promise and future of our country, we will bring the highest standards to our schools and build an ownership society. We will widen the ownership of homes and businesses, retirement savings, and health insurance, preparing our people for the challenges of life in a free society. By making every citizen an agent of his or her own destiny, we will give our fellow Americans greater freedom from want and fear and make our society more prosperous and just and equal.

In America's ideal of freedom, the public interest depends on private character, on integrity and tolerance toward others and the rule of conscience in our own lives. Self-government relies, in the end, on the governing of the self. That edifice of character is built in families, supported by communities with standards, and sustained in our national life by the truths of Sinai, the Sermon on the Mount, the words of the Koran, and the varied faiths of our people. Americans move forward in every generation by reaffirming all that is good and true that came before, ideals of justice and conduct that are the same yesterday, today, and forever.

In America's ideal of freedom, the exercise of rights is ennobled by service and mercy and a heart for the weak. Liberty for all does not mean independence from one another. Our Nation relies on men and women who look after a neighbor and surround the lost

with love. Americans, at our best, value the life we see in one another and must always remember that even the unwanted have worth. And our country must abandon all the habits of racism, because we cannot carry the message of freedom and the baggage of bigotry at the same time.

From the perspective of a single day, including this day of dedication, the issues and questions before our country are many. From the viewpoint of centuries, the questions that come to us are narrowed and few: Did our generation advance the cause of freedom? And did our character bring credit to that cause?

These questions that judge us also unite us, because Americans of every party and background, Americans by choice and by birth are bound to one another in the cause of freedom. We have known divisions, which must be healed to move forward in great purposes, and I will strive in good faith to heal them. Yet those divisions do not define America. We felt the unity and fellowship of our Nation when freedom came under attack, and our response came like a single hand over a single heart. And we can feel that same unity and pride whenever America acts for good and the victims of disaster are given hope and the unjust encounter justice and the captives are set free.

We go forward with complete confidence in the eventual triumph of freedom, not because history runs on the wheels of inevitability—it is human choices that move events; not because we consider ourselves a chosen nation—God moves and chooses as He wills. We have confidence because freedom is the permanent hope of mankind, the hunger in dark places, the longing of the soul. When our Founders declared a new order of the ages, when soldiers died in wave upon wave for a union based on liberty, when citizens marched in peaceful outrage under the banner "Freedom Now," they were acting on an ancient hope that is meant to be fulfilled. History has an ebb and flow of justice, but history also has a visible direction, set by liberty and the Author of Liberty.

When the Declaration of Independence was first read in public and the Liberty Bell was sounded in celebration, a witness said, "It rang as if it meant something." In our time, it means something still. America, in this young century, proclaims liberty throughout all the world and to all the inhabitants thereof. Renewed in our strength, tested but not weary, we are ready for the greatest achievements in the history of freedom. May God bless you, and may He watch over the United States of America.

Appendix 3: President Barack Obama's First Inaugural Address, January 20, 2009.

My fellow citizens, I stand here today humbled by the task before us, grateful for the trust you have bestowed, mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors. I thank President Bush for his service to our Nation, as well as the generosity and cooperation he has shown throughout this transition.

Forty-four Americans have now taken the Presidential oath. The words have been spoken during rising tides of prosperity and the still waters of peace. Yet every so often, the oath is taken amidst gathering clouds and raging storms. At these moments, America has carried on not simply because of the skill or vision of those in high office, but because we the people have remained faithful to the ideals of our forebears and true to our founding documents.

So it has been; so it must be with this generation of Americans.

That we are in the midst of crisis is now well understood. Our Nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the Nation for a new age. Homes have been lost, jobs shed, businesses shuttered. Our health care is too costly. Our schools fail too many. And each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet.

These are the indicators of crisis, subject to data and statistics. Less measurable but no less profound is a sapping of confidence across our land, a nagging fear that America's decline is inevitable, that the next generation must lower its sights. Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious, and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America: They will be met.

On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord. On this day, we come to proclaim an end to the petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations and worn-out dogmas that for far too long have strangled our politics.

We remain a young nation, but in the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit, to choose our better history, to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.

In reaffirming the greatness of our Nation, we understand that greatness is never a given. It must be earned. Our journey has never been one of shortcuts or settling for less. It has not been the path for the fainthearted, for those who prefer leisure over work or seek only the pleasures of riches and fame. Rather, it has been the risk-takers, the doers, the makers of things--some celebrated, but more often men and women obscure in their labor--who have carried us up the long, rugged path toward prosperity and freedom.

For us, they packed up their few worldly possessions and traveled across oceans in search of a new life. For us, they toiled in sweatshops and settled the West, endured the lash of the whip, and plowed the hard Earth. For us, they fought and died in places like Concord and Gettysburg, Normandy and Khe Sanh.

Time and again, these men and women struggled and sacrificed and worked 'til their hands were raw so that we might live a better life. They saw America as bigger than the sum of our individual ambitions, greater than all the differences of birth or wealth or faction.

This is the journey we continue today. We remain the most prosperous, powerful nation on Earth. Our workers are no less productive than when this crisis began. Our minds are no less inventive. Our goods and services no less needed than they were last week or last month or last year. Our capacity remains undiminished. But our time of standing pat, of protecting narrow interests and putting off unpleasant decisions, that time has surely passed. Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America.

For everywhere we look, there is work to be done. The state of the economy calls for action, bold and swift, and we will act not only to create new jobs but to lay a new foundation for growth. We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together. We will restore science to its rightful place and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its cost.

We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories. And we will transform our schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age. All this we can do. All this we will do.

Now, there are some who question the scale of our ambitions, who suggest that our system cannot tolerate too many big plans. Their memories are short, for they have forgotten what this country has already done, what free men and women can achieve when imagination is joined to common purpose and necessity to courage.

What the cynics fail to understand is that the ground has shifted beneath them, that the stale political arguments that have consumed us for so long no longer apply. The question we ask today is not whether our Government is too big or too small, but whether it works; whether it helps families find jobs at a decent wage, care they can afford, a retirement that is dignified. Where the answer is yes, we intend to move forward. Where the answer is no, programs will end. And those of us who manage the

public's dollars will be held to account to spend wisely, reform bad habits, and do our business in the light of day, because only then can we restore the vital trust between a people and their government.

Nor is the question before us whether the market is a force for good or ill. Its power to generate wealth and expand freedom is unmatched. But this crisis has reminded us that without a watchful eye, the market can spin out of control. The Nation cannot prosper long when it favors only the prosperous. The success of our economy has always depended not just on the size of our gross domestic product, but on the reach of our prosperity, on our ability to extend opportunity to every willing heart, not out of charity, but because it is the surest route to our common good.

As for our common defense, we reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals. Our Founding Fathers, faced with perils that we can scarcely imagine, drafted a charter to assure the rule of law and the rights of man, a charter expanded by the blood of generations. Those ideals still light the world, and we will not give them up for expedience's sake. And so to all the other peoples and governments who are watching today, from the grandest capitals to the small village where my father was born, know that America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman, and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and we are ready to lead once more.

Recall that earlier generations faced down fascism and communism not just with missiles and tanks but with sturdy alliances and enduring convictions. They understood that our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we please. Instead, they knew that our power grows through its prudent use. Our security emanates from the justness of our cause, the force of our example, the tempering qualities of humility and restraint.

We are the keepers of this legacy. Guided by these principles once more, we can meet those new threats that demand even greater effort, even greater cooperation and understanding between nations. We will begin to responsibly leave Iraq to its people and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan. With old friends and former foes, we will work tirelessly to lessen the nuclear threat and roll back the specter of a warming planet. We will not apologize for our way of life, nor will we waver in its defense. And for those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken. You cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you.

For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus and nonbelievers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth. And because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass, that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself, and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.

To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward based on mutual interest and mutual respect. To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict or blame their society's ills on the West, know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy. To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history, but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.

To the people of poor nations, we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow, to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds.

And to those nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty, we say we can no longer afford indifference to suffering outside our borders, nor can we consume the world's resources without regard to effect, for the world has changed, and we must change with it.

As we consider the road that unfolds before us, we remember with humble gratitude those brave Americans who, at this very hour, patrol far-off deserts and distant mountains. They have something to tell us today, just as the fallen heroes who lie in Arlington whisper through the ages. We honor them not only because they are guardians of our liberty, but because they embody the spirit of service, a willingness to find meaning in something greater than themselves. And yet at this moment, a moment that will define a generation, it is precisely this spirit that must inhabit us all.

For as much as Government can do and must do, it is ultimately the faith and determination of the American people upon which this Nation relies. It is the kindness to take in a stranger when the levees break, the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job, which sees us through our darkest hours. It is the firefighter's courage to storm a stairway filled with smoke, but also a parent's willingness to nurture a child, that finally decides our fate.

Our challenges may be new. The instruments with which we meet them may be new. But those values upon which our success depends--honesty and hard work, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism--these things are old. These things are true. They have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history. What is demanded then is a return to these truths. What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility, a recognition on the part of every American that we have duties to ourselves, our Nation, and the world. Duties that we do not grudgingly accept but, rather, seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task.

This is the price and the promise of citizenship. This is the source of our confidence, the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny. This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed; why men and women and children of every race and every faith can join in celebration across this magnificent Mall, and why a man whose father less than 60 years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath.

So let us mark this day with remembrance of who we are and how far we have traveled. In the year of America's birth, in the coldest of months, a small band of patriots huddled by dying campfires on the shores of an icy river. The Capital was abandoned. The enemy was advancing. The snow was stained with blood. At a moment when the outcome of our Revolution was most in doubt, the Father of our Nation ordered these words be read to the people:

"Let it be told to the future world . . . that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive . . . that the city and the country, alarmed at one common danger, came forth to meet [it]."

America, in the face of our common dangers, in this winter of our hardship, let us remember these timeless words. With hope and virtue, let us brave once more the icy currents and endure what storms may come. Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested, we refused to let this journey end; that we did not turn back, nor did we falter. And with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations. Thank you. God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

Appendix 4: President Barack Obama's Second Inaugural Address, January 21, 2013.

Thank you. Thank you so much.

Vice President Biden, Mr. Chief Justice, Members of the United States Congress, distinguished guests, and fellow citizens:

Each time we gather to inaugurate a President we bear witness to the enduring strength of our Constitution. We affirm the promise of our democracy. We recall that what binds this Nation together is not the colors of our skin or the tenets of our faith or the origins of our names. What makes us exceptional—what makes us American—is our

allegiance to an idea articulated in a declaration made more than two centuries ago:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Today we continue a never-ending journey to bridge the meaning of those words with the realities of our time. For history tells us that while these truths may be self-evident, they've never been self-executing; that while freedom is a gift from God, it must be secured by His people here on Earth. The patriots of 1776 did not fight to replace the tyranny of a king with the privileges of a few or the rule of a mob. They gave to us a republic, a government of and by and for the people, entrusting each generation to keep safe our founding creed.

And for more than 200 years, we have.

Through blood drawn by lash and blood drawn by sword, we learned that no union founded on the principles of liberty and equality could survive half-slave and half-free.

We made ourselves anew, and vowed to move forward together.

Together, we determined that a modern economy requires railroads and highways to speed travel and commerce, schools and colleges to train our workers.

Together, we discovered that a free market only thrives when there are rules to ensure competition and fair play.

Together, we resolved that a great nation must care for the vulnerable and protect its people from life's worst hazards and misfortune.

Through it all, we have never relinquished our skepticism of central authority nor have we succumbed to the fiction that all society's ills can be cured through government alone. Our celebration of initiative and enterprise, our insistence on hard work and personal responsibility, these are constants in our character.

But we have always understood that when times change, so must we; that fidelity to our founding principles requires new responses to new challenges; that preserving our individual freedoms ultimately requires collective action. For the American people can no more meet the demands of today's world by acting alone than American soldiers could have met the forces of fascism or communism with muskets and militias. No single person can train all the math and science teachers we'll need to equip our children for the future, or build the roads and networks and research labs that will bring new jobs and businesses to our shores. Now more than ever, we must do these things together, as one nation and one people.

This generation of Americans has been tested by crises that steeled our resolve and proved our resilience. A decade of war is now ending. An economic recovery has begun. America's possibilities are limitless, for we possess all the qualities that this world without boundaries demands: youth and drive; diversity and openness; an endless capacity for risk and a gift for reinvention. My fellow Americans, we are made for this moment and we will seize it—so long as we seize it together.

For we, the people, understand that our country cannot succeed when a shrinking few do very well and a growing many barely make it. We believe that America's prosperity must rest upon the broad shoulders of a rising middle class. We know that America thrives when every person can find independence and pride in their work; when the wages of honest labor liberate families from the brink of hardship. We are true to our creed when a little girl born into the bleakest poverty knows that she has the same chance to succeed as anybody else, because she is an American; she is free and she is equal, not just in the eyes of God, but also in our own.

We understand that outworn programs are inadequate to the needs of our time. So we must harness new ideas and technology to remake our government, revamp our Tax Code, reform our schools, and empower our citizens with the skills they need to work harder, learn more, reach higher. But while the means will change, our purpose endures: a nation that rewards the effort and determination of every single American. That is what this moment requires. That is what will give real meaning to our creed.

We, the people, still believe that every citizen deserves a basic measure of security and dignity. We must make the hard choices to reduce the cost of health care and the size of our deficit. But we reject the belief that America must choose between caring for the generation that built this country and investing in the generation that will build its future. For we remember the lessons of our past, when twilight years were spent in poverty and parents of a child with a disability had nowhere to turn.

We do not believe that in this country freedom is reserved for the lucky, or happiness for the few. We recognize that no matter how responsibly we live our lives, any one of us at any time may face a job loss or a sudden illness or a home swept away in a terrible storm. The commitments we make to each other through Medicare and Medicaid and Social Security, these things do not sap our initiative, they strengthen us.

They do not make us a nation of takers; they free us to take the risks that make this country great.

We, the people, still believe that our obligations as Americans are not just to ourselves, but to all posterity. We will respond to the threat of climate change, knowing that the failure to do so would betray our children and future generations. Some may still deny the overwhelming judgment of science, but none can avoid the devastating impact of raging fires and crippling drought and more powerful storms.

The path towards sustainable energy sources will be long and sometimes difficult. But America cannot resist this transition, we must lead it. We cannot cede to other nations the technology that will power new jobs and new industries, we must claim its promise. That's how we will maintain our economic vitality and our national treasure—our forests and waterways, our crop lands and snow-capped peaks. That is how we will preserve our planet, commanded to our care by God. That's what will lend meaning to the creed our fathers once declared.

We, the people, still believe that enduring security and lasting peace do not require perpetual war. Our brave men and women in uniform, tempered by the flames of battle, are unmatched in skill and courage. Our citizens, seared by the memory of those we have lost, know too well the price that is paid for liberty. The knowledge of their sacrifice will keep us forever vigilant against those who would do us harm. But we are also heirs to those who won the peace and not just the war; who turned sworn enemies into the surest of friends—and we must carry those lessons into this time as well.

We will defend our people and uphold our values through strength of arms and rule of law. We will show the courage to try and resolve our differences with other nations peacefully—not because we are naive about the dangers we face, but because engagement can more durably lift suspicion and fear.

America will remain the anchor of strong alliances in every corner of the globe. And we will renew those institutions that extend our capacity to manage crisis abroad, for no one has a greater stake in a peaceful world than its most powerful nation. We will support democracy from Asia to Africa, from the Americas to the Middle East, because our interests and our conscience compel us to act on behalf of those who long for freedom. And we must be a source of hope to the poor, the sick, the marginalized, the victims of prejudice—not out of mere charity, but because peace in our time requires the constant advance of those principles that our common creed describes: tolerance and opportunity, human dignity and justice.

We, the people, declare today that the most evident of truths—that all of us are created equal—is the star that guides us still; just as it guided our forebears through Seneca Falls and Selma and Stonewall; just as it guided all those men and women, sung and unsung, who left footprints along this great Mall, to hear a preacher say that we cannot walk alone; to hear a King proclaim that our individual freedom is inextricably bound to the freedom of every soul on Earth.

It is now our generation's task to carry on what those pioneers began. For our journey is not complete until our wives, our mothers and daughters can earn a living equal to their efforts. Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law—for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well. Our journey is not complete until no citizen is forced to wait for hours to exercise the right to vote. Our journey is not complete until we find a better way to welcome the striving, hopeful immigrants who still see America as a land of opportunity—until bright young students and engineers are enlisted in our workforce rather than expelled from our country. Our journey is not complete until all our children, from the streets of Detroit to the hills of Appalachia, to

the quiet lanes of Newtown, know that they are cared for and cherished and always safe from harm.

That is our generation's task—to make these words, these rights, these values of life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness real for every American. Being true to our founding documents does not require us to agree on every contour of life. It does not mean we all define liberty in exactly the same way or follow the same precise path to happiness. Progress does not compel us to settle centuries-long debates about the role of government for all time, but it does require us to act in our time.

For now decisions are upon us and we cannot afford delay. We cannot mistake absolutism for principle or substitute spectacle for politics or treat name-calling as reasoned debate. We must act, knowing that our work will be imperfect. We must act, we must act knowing that today's victories will be only partial and that it will be up to those who stand here in 4 years and 40 years and 400 years hence to advance the timeless spirit once conferred to us in a spare Philadelphia hall.

My fellow Americans, the oath I have sworn before you today, like the one recited by others who serve in this Capitol, was an oath to God and country, not party or faction. And we must faithfully execute that pledge during the duration of our service. But the words I spoke today are not so different from the oath that is taken each time a soldier signs up for duty or an immigrant realizes her dream. My oath is not so different from the pledge we all make to the flag that waves above and that fills our hearts with pride. They are the words of citizens and they represent our greatest hope. You and I, as citizens, have the power to set this country's course. You and I, as citizens, have the obligation to shape the debates of our time—not only with the votes we cast, but with the voices we lift in defense of our most ancient values and enduring ideals.

Let us, each of us, now embrace with solemn duty and awesome joy what is our lasting birthright. With common effort and common purpose, with passion and dedication, let us answer the call of history and carry into an uncertain future that precious light of freedom.

Thank you. God bless you, and may He forever bless these United States of America.

Appendix 5: President Donald Trump's Inaugural Address, January 20, 2017.

Chief Justice Roberts, President Carter, President Clinton, President Bush, President Obama, fellow Americans, and people of the world: Thank you.

We, the citizens of America, are now joined in a great national effort to rebuild our country and restore its promise for all of our people. Together, we will determine the course of America and the world for many, many years to come. We will face challenges, we will confront hardships, but we will get the job done.

Every 4 years, we gather on these steps to carry out the orderly and peaceful transfer of power, and we are grateful to President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama for their gracious aid throughout this transition. They have been magnificent. Thank you. Today's ceremony, however, has very special meaning. Because today we are not merely transferring power from one administration to another or from one party to another, but we are transferring power from Washington, DC, and giving it back to you, the people.

For too long, a small group in our Nation's Capital has reaped the rewards of Government while the people have borne the cost. Washington flourished, but the people did not share in its wealth. Politicians prospered, but the jobs left, and the factories closed. The establishment protected itself, but not the citizens of our country. Their victories have not been your victories; their triumphs have not been your triumphs; and while they celebrated in our Nation's Capital, there was little to celebrate for struggling families all across our land.

That all changes, starting right here and right now, because this moment is your moment: It belongs to you. It belongs to everyone gathered here today and everyone watching all across America. This is your day. This is your celebration. And this, the United States of America, is your country.

What truly matters is not which party controls our Government, but whether our Government is controlled by the people. January 20, 2017, will be remembered as the day the people became the rulers of this Nation again. The forgotten men and women of our country will be forgotten no longer. Everyone is listening to you now.

You came by the tens of millions to become part of a historic movement the likes of which the world has never seen before. At the center of this movement is a crucial conviction: that a nation exists to serve its citizens. Americans want great schools for their children, safe neighborhoods for their families, and good jobs for themselves.

These are just and reasonable demands of righteous people and a righteous public.

But for too many of our citizens, a different reality exists: Mothers and children trapped in poverty in our inner cities; rusted-out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our Nation; an education system, flush with cash, but which leaves our young and beautiful students deprived of all knowledge; and the crime and the gangs and the drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealized potential.

This American carnage stops right here and stops right now. We are one Nation, and their pain is our pain, their dreams are our dreams, and their success will be our success. We share one heart, one home, and one glorious destiny.

The oath of office I take today is an oath of allegiance to all Americans.

For many decades, we've enriched foreign industry at the expense of American industry, subsidized the armies of other countries while allowing for the very sad depletion of our military. We've defended other nations' borders while refusing to defend our own and spent trillions and trillions of dollars overseas while America's infrastructure has fallen into disrepair and decay. We've made other countries rich while the wealth, strength, and confidence of our country has dissipated over the horizon.

One by one, the factories shuttered and left our shores, with not even a thought about the millions and millions of American workers that were left behind. The wealth of our middle class has been ripped from their homes and then redistributed all across the world.

But that is the past. And now we are looking only to the future.

We, assembled here today, are issuing a new decree to be heard in every city, in every foreign capital, and in every hall of power. From this day forward, a new vision will govern our land. From this day forward, it's going to be only America first. America first.

Every decision on trade, on taxes, on immigration, on foreign affairs, will be made to benefit American workers and American families.

We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs. Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength. I will fight for you with every breath in my body, and I will never, ever let you down.

America will start winning again, winning like never before. We will bring back our jobs. We will bring back our borders. We will bring back our wealth. And we will bring back our dreams.

We will build new roads and highways and bridges and airports and tunnels and railways all across our wonderful Nation.

We will get our people off of welfare and back to work, rebuilding our country with American hands and American labor. We will follow two simple rules: Buy American and hire American.

We will seek friendship and good will with the nations of the world, but we do so with the understanding that it is the right of all nations to put their own interests first. We do

not seek to impose our way of life on anyone, but rather to let it shine as an example—we will shine—for everyone to follow.

We will reinforce old alliances and form new ones and unite the civilized world against radical Islamic terrorism, which we will eradicate completely from the face of the Earth.

At the bedrock of our politics will be a total allegiance to the United States of America, and through our loyalty to our country, we will rediscover our loyalty to each other.

When you open your heart to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice. The Bible tells us, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity." We must speak our minds openly, debate our disagreements honestly, but always pursue solidarity. When America is united, America is totally unstoppable. There should be no fear: We are protected, and we will always be protected. We will be protected by the great men and women of our military and law enforcement, and most importantly, we will be protected by God.

Finally, we must think big and dream even bigger. In America, we understand that a nation is only living as long as it is striving.

We will no longer accept politicians who are all talk and no action, constantly complaining, but never doing anything about it. The time for empty talk is over. Now arrives the hour of action.

Do not allow anyone to tell you that it cannot be done. No challenge can match the heart and fight and spirit of America. We will not fail. Our country will thrive and prosper again.

We stand at the birth of a new millennium, ready to unlock the mysteries of space, to free the Earth from the miseries of disease, and to harness the energies, industries, and

technologies of tomorrow. A new national pride will stir our souls, lift our sights, and heal our divisions.

It's time to remember that old wisdom our soldiers will never forget: that whether we are Black or Brown or White, we all bleed the same red blood of patriots, we all enjoy the same glorious freedoms, and we all salute the same great American flag.

And whether a child is born in the urban sprawl of Detroit or the windswept plains of Nebraska, they look up at the same night sky, they fill their heart with the same dreams, and they are infused with the breath of life by the same almighty Creator.

So to all Americans in every city near and far, small and large, from mountain to mountain, from ocean to ocean, hear these words: You will never be ignored again.

Your voice, your hopes, and your dreams will define our American destiny. And your courage and goodness and love will forever guide us along the way.

Together, we will make America strong again. We will make America wealthy again.

We will make America proud again. We will make America safe again.

And, yes, together, we will make America great again. Thank you. God bless you, and God bless America. Thank you. God bless America.

Appendix 6: President Joe Biden's Inaugural Address, January 20, 2021.

Chief Justice Roberts, Vice President Harris, Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell, Vice President Pence, and my distinguished guests, and my fellow Americans: This is America's day. This is democracy's day, a day of history and hope, of renewal and resolve. Through a crucible for the ages America has been tested anew, and America has risen to the challenge.

Today we celebrate the triumph not of a candidate, but of a cause, the cause of democracy. The people—the will of the people has been heard, and the will of the people has been heeded. We've learned again that democracy is precious, democracy is fragile. And at this hour, my friends, democracy has prevailed.

So now, on this hallowed ground where just a few days ago violence sought to shake the Capitol's very foundation, we come together as one Nation under God, indivisible, to carry out the peaceful transfer of power as we have for more than two centuries. As we look ahead in our uniquely American way—restless, bold, optimistic—and set our sights on the Nation we know we can be and we must be, I thank my predecessors of both parties for their presence here today. I thank them from the bottom of my heart. And I know the resilience of our Constitution and the strength, the strength of our Nation, as does President Carter, who I spoke with last night, who cannot be with us today, but whom we salute for his lifetime of service.

I have just taken the sacred oath each of these patriots have taken, the oath first sworn by George Washington. But the American story depends not on any one of us, not on some of us, but on all of us, on "We the People," who seek a more perfect Union.

This is a great Nation; we are good people. Over the centuries, through storm and strife, in peace and in war, we've come so far. But we still have far to go. We'll press forward with speed and urgency, for we have much to do in this winter of peril and significant

possibilities: much to repair, much to restore, much to heal, much to build, and much to gain.

Few people in our Nation's history have been more challenged or found a time more challenging or difficult than the time we're in now. A once-in-a-century virus that silently stalks the country has taken as many lives in one year as America lost in all of World War II. Millions of jobs have been lost; hundreds of thousands of businesses closed. A cry for racial justice some 400 years in the making moves us. The dream of justice for all will be deferred no longer. A cry for survival comes from the planet itself, a cry that can't be any more desperate or any more clear. And now, a rise of political extremism, White supremacy, domestic terrorism that we must confront and we will defeat.

To overcome these challenges—to restore the soul and secure the future of America—requires so much more than words. It requires the most elusive of all things in a democracy: unity. Unity.

In another January on New Year's Day in 1863, Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. When he put pen to paper, the President said, and I quote, "If my name ever goes down into history it will be for this act, and my whole soul is in it." My whole soul is in it.

Today, on this January day, my whole soul is in this: bringing America together, uniting our people, uniting our Nation. And I ask every American to join me in this cause: uniting to fight the foes we face: anger, resentment, and hatred; extremism, lawlessness, violence; disease, joblessness, and hopelessness.

With unity we can do great things, important things. We can right wrongs. We can put people to work in good jobs. We can teach our children in safe schools. We can overcome the deadly virus. We can reward work and rebuild the middle class and make

health care secure for all. We can deliver racial justice, and we can make America, once again, the leading force for good in the world.

I know speaking of unity can sound to some like a foolish fantasy these days. I know the forces that divide us are deep and they are real. But I also know they are not new. Our history has been a constant struggle between the American ideal that we all are created equal and the harsh, ugly reality that racism, nativism, fear, demonization have long torn us apart. The battle is perennial. And victory is never assured.

Through the Civil War, the Great Depression, World War, 9/11, through struggle, sacrifice, and setbacks, our "better angels" have always prevailed. In each of these moments, enough of us—enough of us—have come together to carry all of us forward. And we can do that now. History, faith, and reason show the way: the way of unity.

We can see each other not as adversaries, but as neighbors. We can treat each other with dignity and respect. We can join forces, stop the shouting, and lower the temperature. For without unity, there is no peace, only bitterness and fury. No progress, only exhausting outrage. No nation, only a state of chaos.

This is our historic moment of crisis and challenge, and unity is the path forward. And we must meet this moment as the United States of America. If we do that, I guarantee you, we will not fail. We have never, ever, ever, ever failed in America when we have acted together.

And so today, at this time, in this place, let's start afresh, all of us. Let's begin to listen to one another, hear one another, see one another, show respect to one another. Politics doesn't have to be a raging fire destroying everything in its path. Every disagreement doesn't have to be a cause for total war. And we must reject the culture in which facts themselves are manipulated and even manufactured.

My fellow Americans, we have to be different than this. America has to be better than this. And I believe America is so much better than this.

Just look around. Here we stand, in the shadow of the Capitol dome, as was mentioned earlier, completed amid the Civil War, when the Union itself was literally hanging in the balance. Yet we endured, we prevailed.

Here we stand looking out on the great Mall where Dr. King spoke of his dream.

Here we stand, where 108 years ago, at another Inaugural, thousands of protesters tried to block brave women marching for the right to vote. And today we mark the swearing-in of the first woman in American history elected to national office: Vice President Kamala Harris. Don't tell me things can't change.

Here we stand across the Potomac from Arlington Cemetery, where heroes who gave the last full measure of devotion rest in eternal peace.

And here we stand, just days after a riotous mob thought they could use violence to silence the will of the people, to stop the work of our democracy, to drive us from this sacred ground. It did not happen. It will never happen, not today, not tomorrow, not ever—not ever.

To all those who supported our campaign, I am humbled by the faith you've placed in us. To all those who did not support us, let me say this: Hear me out as we move forward. Take a measure of me and my heart. And if you still disagree, so be it. That's democracy. That's America. The right to dissent peaceably, within the guardrails of our Republic, is perhaps this Nation's greatest strength. Yet hear me clearly: Disagreement must not lead to disunion. And I pledge this to you: I will be a President for all Americans—all Americans. And I promise you, I will fight as hard for those who did not support me as for those who did.

Many centuries ago, Saint Augustine, a saint of my church, wrote that a people was a multitude defined by the common objects of their love—defined by the common objects of their love. What are the common objects we as Americans love? That define us as Americans? I think we know: opportunity, security, liberty, dignity, respect, honor, and yes, the truth.

Recent weeks and months have taught us a painful lesson. There is truth, and there are lies: lies told for power and for profit. And each of us has a duty and a responsibility, as citizens, as Americans, and especially as leaders—leaders who have pledged to honor our Constitution and protect our Nation—to defend the truth and defeat the lies.

Look, I understand that many of my fellow Americans view the future with fear and trepidation. I understand they worry about their jobs. I understand, like my dad, they lay at bed at night staring at the ceiling, wondering: "Can I keep my health care? Can I pay my mortgage?" Thinking about their families, about what comes next. I promise you, I get it. But the answer is not to turn inward, to retreat into competing factions, distrusting those who don't look like you or worship the way you do or don't get their news from the same sources you do. We must end this uncivil war that pits red against blue, rural versus urban, conservative versus liberal. We can do this if we open our souls instead of hardening our hearts, if we show a little tolerance and humility, and if we're willing to stand in the other person's shoes, as my mom would say, just for a moment. Stand in their shoes.

Because here is the thing about life: There is no accounting for what fate will deal you. Some days when you need a hand. There are other days when we're called to lend a hand. That's how it has to be. That is what we do for one another. And if we are this way, our country will be stronger, more prosperous, more ready for the future. And we can still disagree.

My fellow Americans, in the work ahead of us, we're going to need each other. We need all our strength to persevere through this dark winter. We're entering what may be the toughest and deadliest period of the virus. We must set aside politics and finally face this pandemic as one Nation. One Nation. And I promise you this: As the Bible says, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." We will get through this, together—together.

Look, folks, all my colleagues that I served with in the House and the Senate up here. We all understand the world is watching, watching all of us today. So here is my message to those beyond our borders: America has been tested, and we have come out stronger for it. We will repair our alliances and engage with the world once again, not to meet yesterday's challenges, but today's and tomorrow's challenges. And we'll lead not merely by the example of our power, but by the power of our example. We will be a strong and trusted partner for peace, progress, and security.

Look, you all know, we have been through so much in this Nation. And, in my first act as President, I'd like to ask you to join me in a moment of silent prayer to remember all those we lost this past year to the pandemic, those 400,000 fellow Americans: moms, dads, husbands, wives, sons, daughters, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. We will honor them by becoming the people and Nation we know we can and should be. So I ask you, let's say a silent prayer for those who have lost their lives, for those they left behind, and for our country.

[At this point, a moment of silence was observed.]

Amen.

Folks, this is a time of testing. We face an attack on our democracy and on truth, a raging virus, growing inequity, the sting of systemic racism, a climate in crisis, America's role in the world. Any one of these would be enough to challenge us in

profound ways. But the fact is, we face them all at once, presenting this Nation with one of the gravest of responsibilities we've had.

Now we're going to be tested. Are we going to step up? All of us? It is time for boldness, for there is so much to do. And this is certain, I promise you: We will be judged, you and I, by how we resolve these cascading crises of our era. Will we rise to the occasion, is the question. Will we master this rare and difficult hour? Will we meet our obligations and pass along a new and better world to our children? I believe we must; I'm sure you do as well. I believe we will.

And when we do, we will write the next great chapter in the history of the United States of America: the American story, a story that might sound something like a song that means a lot to me. It's called "American Anthem," and there's one verse that stands out, at least for me, and it goes like this:

"The work and prayers of centuries have brought us to this day

What shall be our legacy? What will our children say? . . .

Let me know in my heart when my days are through

America, America, I gave my best to you."

Let's add—let's us add our own work and prayers to the unfolding story of our great Nation. If we do this, then when our days are through, our children and our children's children will say of us: "They gave their best. They did their duty. They healed a broken land."

My fellow Americans, I close today where I began, with a sacred oath. Before God and all of you I give you my word: I will always level with you. I will defend the Constitution. I will defend our democracy. I will defend America. And I will give all, all of you, keep everything you—I do, in your service, thinking not of power, but of possibilities; not of personal interest, but of the public good. And together, we shall

write an American story of hope, not fear; of unity, not division; of light, not darkness.

A story of decency and dignity, love and healing, greatness and goodness.

May this be the story that guides us, the story that inspires us, and the story that tells ages yet to come that we answered the call of history, we met the moment; democracy and hope, truth and justice, did not die on our watch, but thrived; that America secured liberty at home and stood once again as a beacon to the world. That is what we owe our forebearers, one another, and generations to follow.

So with purpose and resolve we turn to those tasks of our time, sustained by faith, driven by conviction, and devoted to one another and the country we love with all our hearts.

May God bless America, and may God protect our troops. Thank you, America.