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A Point in Time Filled with Significance: The Application of Kairos in Contemporary Rhetoric and Civic Pedagogy

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A Point in Time Filled with Significance: The Application of *Kairos* in Contemporary Rhetoric and Civic Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines how *kairos* continues to operate in contemporary discourses and disciplines despite its inadequate treatment as a normative principle in modern studies. Notwithstanding James Kinneavy's revival of *kairos* encouraging many scholars to revisit the term in search of a complete definition, there is still an absence of conclusive application of the concept in contemporary pedagogy. I argue that, over time, the two versions of *kairos* have become entangled, contradictory, and thought of as too flexible to be taught in a modern setting because they have resisted concrete methodology. While the idea that *kairos* possesses two dimensions has already been observed, modern attempts to explain *kairos* have focused on only one version and there has been no thorough attempt to expand on their interdependence. Recent overviews of kairos*'s* employment in classical Greek pedagogies alongside the theories and arguments put forward by Kinneavy aid in developing a new understanding of the interdependence between these two versions of *kairos*. This renewed attention provides a space where it is possible to bring together these seemingly opposing concepts to not only highlight the role it plays within modern discourse but also identify the application of *kairos* within a contemporary example of civic pedagogy.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Kairos is a concept that previously dominated ancient Greek rhetoric and literature yet has long remained a confusing and elusive principle in contemporary discipline studies. Typically thought of as a term denoting a "sense of due measure or proper proportion," *kairos* can be said to operate in a similar way as other master terms such as *pathos, logos, and ethos,* all of which "generated many significant definitions…and carried strategic implications for historical interpretation" (Sipiora and Baumlin 1). As Carolyn Miller suggests, the concept of *kairos* is "central to at least some versions of the rhetorical tradition and arguably necessary to all" (xi). The term is crucial to a diverse array of Greek educations: the philosophy and rhetoric of Plato and Aristotle, the rhetoric of Protagoras, Gorgias, Isocrates and even Renaissance Humanist Rhetoric. More recently, the concept has been identified in other discourses and disciplines such as Hippocratic medicine, Pythagorean philosophy, New Testament theology, Western literature, and psychological ethics (Miller xi). *Kairos*, then, has consistently influenced classical Greek thought and performed a crucial role in establishing pedagogies beyond rhetoric. Philip Sipiora emphasizes that *kairos* should be considered "in dynamic relation" with "theology, philosophy, ethics…literary theory, and composition pedagogy" because its history can be charted across such a wide range of cultures and disciplines (Sipiora and Baumlin 17).

While recent scholarship has revived *kairos* and emphasized its seminal role throughout multiple discourses and disciplines, its overarching function in contemporary discourse and pedagogy remains highly complex and difficult to discern. Although scholars have rightly noted that *kairos* "remains a master concept cutting across ages, cultures, and disciplines," the term has primarily been shown to operate as a means by which philosophers, educators, and rhetors migrated from aesthetics and style as foundational principles of rhetoric to non-foundational principles which employed language and rhetoric situationally and dependent on the needs of a discourse community (Sipiora and Baumlin 17).

Consequently, two views on *kairos* have emerged. The first view, which can be attributed to the ideas generated by the early Sophists, Isocrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, treats *kairos* as it initially operated in ancient Greek and early Roman rhetoric: as a method for emphasizing the need to treat rhetoric and oratory in such a dynamic and fluid way that the individual would be prepared for the multitude of discourse communities they would come across. This notion of *kairos* continues to focus on attention toward "propriety and decorum, underscoring its attention towards the principle of adaptation and accommodation to convention, expectation, [and] predictability" (Miller xii). Rather than providing the rhetor or educator the perfect equation for addressing all exigencies, *kairos,* in its classical rhetorical conception, provided a way of thinking which permitted individuals to absorb all the known elements of a situation and then act through an argument directly suited for the occasion. In this view, as Miller points out, *kairos* is treated as a means for understanding an order that guides and shapes rhetorical action, whether that order is given and absolute or socially constructed (xii).

The second view treats *kairos* as a tool of invention. It acts as a heuristic that transforms *kairos's* original argumentative role into a tool for handling events situationally and depends on the multitude of discourses and discourse communities in which an individual could find themselves. Miller emphasizes that this view of rhetoric is "uniquely timely…spontaneous, [and] radically particular" (xiii). This notion of *kairos* does not encourage the accommodation of convention but rather emphasizes the need of the educator or scholar to be creative in their response to an event. Because most rhetorical exigencies remain invisible until a specific moment, and there is an overall lack of order to the modes of human life, *kairos* in this form challenges the individual to invent "within a set of unfolding and unprecedented circumstances" (xiii). It is "an action (rhetorical or otherwise) that will be understood as uniquely meaningful within those circumstances" (xiii).

Because *kairos* is such a "multi-dimensional and flexible" term, the concept has been considered a dominating aspect of classical Greek and Roman discourse and disciplines (Crowley and Hawhee 31). However, it remains elusive in contemporary studies. The numerous definitions and ideas attached to *kairos* emphasize its sheer complexity and contradictory nature, creating a notion that *kairos* "resists method," and the term's adaptiveness to specific circumstances makes it challenging to discover tangible applications of the idea (Miller xiii). As James Kinneavy underscores, *kairos* plays a foundational role in sophistic, Isocratean, Platonic, Aristotelian, and Ciceronian rhetoric (58). Despite the crucial role it has played in the pedagogical methods and theories of these monumental individuals, the employment of *kairos* remains difficult to discern in a modern setting, and the lack of a concrete

application poses the dual question: is *kairos* performing the same crucial role in contemporary education, and if it is indeed playing a fundamental role in modern discourse, why has there not been a detailed and direct application of *kairos*?

The scholarship and research I have completed up to this point have been situated around the natural link between rhetoric and civic education. As a result, I have been interested in how revisiting the many resonances of *kairos* would potentially enrich contemporary civic pedagogy and produce a greater understanding of how *kairos* operates in modern discourse. Therefore, the research I have completed on the role *kairos* plays in certain rhetorical teachings, particularly those of Isocrates, Aristotle, and Cicero, has focused on how classical rhetors sought to provide students and future educators with a form of rhetoric that would prepare individuals in becoming meaningful contributors to society.

These educators were concerned with developing an understanding that *kairos* could be used to better position their students to quickly accommodate for the social order constructed by their respective communities, then decisively act through argumentation to influence a particular audience. I discovered that these three rhetors, alongside other educators, commonly employed *kairos* to enhance civic engagement and prepare members of the polis to become its future leaders. However, this view displays how rhetoric employing *kairos* was tailored to engage with the civic exigencies of classical Greek and Roman times. The pedagogies put forward by Greek educators emphasized identifying proper order and decorum and then relying on many rhetorical traditions to present a decisive argument to an audience. Subsequently, dealing with this notion of rhetoric shows how *kairos* was employed in classical civic discourse but leaves

unanswered how and if *kairos* is being applied in contemporary civic discourse. Despite *kairos's* pivotal role in several classical pedagogies, its complete meaning has remained evasive, and *kairos* still does not hold a prominent position in contemporary education. The overarching question I pose, then, is why *kairos* was held in such high regard in classical pedagogies, whereas in modern education, it has remained largely unexplored?

This thesis examines how *kairos* continues to operate in contemporary discourses and disciplines in spite of its scarce treatment as a normative principle in modern studies. Despite James Kinneavy's seminal revival of *kairos* encouraging many scholars to revisit the term in search of a complete definition, there is still an absence of conclusive application of the concept in contemporary pedagogy. I argue that, over time, the two versions of *kairos* have become entangled, contradictory, and thought of as too flexible to be taught in a modern setting because it has resisted concrete methodology. While the idea that *kairos* possesses two dimensions has already been observed, modern attempts to explain *kairos* have focused on one version or the other and there has been no thorough attempt to expand on their interdependence in modern discourse. I argue that recent overviews of kairos*'s origins* and its employment in classical Greek civic pedagogies alongside the theories and arguments put forward by Kinneavy and other scholars aid in developing a new understanding of the interdependence between these two versions of *kairos*. This renewed attention to *kairos* has provided a space where it is possible to bring together these seemingly opposing concepts to not only highlight the role it plays within modern discourse but also identify the application of *kairos* within a contemporary example of civic pedagogy that considers all the "ethical, epistemological, aesthetic, and

rhetorical aspects" that have made *kairos* such a foundational principle of contemporary civic discourse (Harker 78).

Because the goal of this thesis is to clearly show how both dimensions of *kairos* are operating interdependently in modern civic education and discourse, chapter three offers a brief overview of the origins of *kairos* and how the concept originally played a pivotal role in the education of civic discourse in the classical Greek context. Because *kairos* is attributed to a wide range of educational paideia, I will focus specifically on reviewing the use of *kairos* in Isocratean and Aristotelian rhetoric. This approach establishes a firm understanding of the ways in which *kairos* was utilized in the Greek setting and establishes a lens for viewing the two dimensions of *kairos* that James Kinneavy will identify as part of his revival of the concept. With this accomplished, chapter four introduces Professor Kinneavy and other scholars into the project as a way to advance the understanding that *kairos* has not simply disappeared from contemporary discourse but has become difficult to discern because of its two wide-ranging dimensions. The theories and arguments put forward by Kinneavy and other scholars will aid in developing a concise understanding of the interdependence between these two versions of *kairos* and provide a space where I can bring together these seemingly different dimensions to highlight the role *kairos* plays within an example of modern civic pedagogy. This chapter explores the revival of *kairos* as an important subject area and analyzes the theories and discussions initiated by James Kinneavy. In addition to the modern depiction of *kairos* established by Kinneavy, I will pull in authors such as Michael Harker, Michael Carter, Carolyn Miller, Roger Thompson, and others who have returned to *kairos* as a crucial pedagogical tool and provided a modern lens on the

concept. This section aims to firmly establish contemporary views on how *kairos* functions today and to create a space for the aspects of *kairos* that will be applied to Michael Harker's proposed composition curriculum in *The Lure of Literacy: A Critical Reception of the Compulsory Composition Debate*. Alongside these contributions, I provide my own research on how *kairos* can be thought about and how the concept is not only maintaining its original purpose in today's discourses and disciplines but also establishing newer forms of engagement.

The fifth chapter focuses on a direct application of both Kinneavy's research and my research to a modern text. Namely, Michael Harker's *The Lure of Literacy: A Critical Reception of the Compulsory Composition Debate*, and rather than attempting to apply *kairos* to the entirety of the book, it will focus on certain chapters from the text, specifically chapter five and the five learning objectives he proposes for teaching a unique form of discourse in college composition courses. The conclusion will perform two functions for this thesis. First, it will gesture towards the overall importance of continuing to study *kairos* in both its classical and modern depictions. Secondly, it will focus on establishing why the enactment of *kairos* in Harker's book is crucial for understanding the importance of *kairos* in a modern setting and how, overall, the presence of *kairos* in this text underscores *kairos's* continued role as a cornerstone of several contemporary discourses and disciplines.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

When defining *kairos* and discussing its role within contemporary civic education, I engage with a wide range of scholarship dealing with the depiction of *kairos* in both its classical and contemporary forms. There are two components of the literature review for this thesis. The first will discuss the origin and depiction of *kairos* in classical Greek rhetoric and literature. In contrast, the second will analyze modern understandings of *kairos* and its role in contemporary theory and interpretation.

Foundational to the overall goal of this thesis are the essays included in Philip Sipiora's and James Baumlin's book *Rhetoric and Kairos: Essays in History, Theory, and Praxis*. These editors provide a modern comprehensive discussion of the history and origin of *kairos* as an educational tool alongside the term's rhetorical, theoretical, and pedagogical implications. In the essays provided by this text, *kairos* is shown to be both a "dominant issue in classical Greek rhetoric and literature" and still occupying an important space in contemporary discourse despite the lack of formal terminology around the term (Kinneavy 58). Even though recent scholarship has revived *kairos* and revised the pivotal role it played in classical rhetoric, as Michael Harker points out, the term is still "often summarized with the cliché… Right timing and proper measure" (78). While this distinction underscores the concept's attention to argumentation and the need to rhetorically accommodate for time, place, speaker, and audience, it does little for explaining *kairos's* crucial role as a tool of invention and adapting to unpredictable

events in meaningful ways. In order to fully explain *kairos's* modern depiction, I utilize the theories and research put forward by James Kinneavy on *kairos* and engage with several scholars who have taken up Kinneavy's call for renewed attention to the concept and sought to either rediscover its core purpose or discover new ways for employing *kairos*.

When considering the depiction of *kairos* in classical Greek rhetoric and literature, this essay primarily focuses on the first version of *kairos* mentioned in the introduction. Essays and books such as Phillip Sipiora's "The Ancient Concept of *Kairos*," Joseph Hughes' "*Kairos* and Decorum," Richard Enos' *Greek Rhetoric Before Aristotle* and *Roman Rhetoric: Revolution and the Greek Influence*, and Takis Poulakos *Isocrates and Civic Education* aid in laying out the origin of *kairos* and its role in civic education as a way of thinking that maintains decorum, encouraging individuals to deal with contingencies through proper argumentation, and becoming comfortable with adapting to improvisations. These essays will be supplemented with specific passages and quotes from texts such as Isocrates *Against the Sophists* and Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* so that *kairos* can be shown clearly operating as a classical educational tool.

Crucial to this thesis's goal of discovering a contemporary application of *kairos* is the work of James Kinneavy. He readily acknowledges *kairos's* encouragement of being creative in responding to the lack of order in human life (Miller xiii). Kinneavy's essays: "Kairos in Classical and Modern Rhetorical Theory," "Kairos in Aristotle's Rhetoric," and the interviews "Speaking of Rhetoric: A Conversation with James Kinneavy" and "Kairos Revisited: An Interview with James Kinneavy" emphasize not only the importance of the second version of *kairos*, which is the inventing of a creative response

tailored specifically towards an unforeseen circumstance, but how, in modern times especially, *kairos* is operating in tandem with both of its versions. As Carolyn Miller explains, the primary reason for the difficulty in discovering contemporary applications of *kairos* and teaching a direct *kairos methodology* is that both remain in "productive tension…avoiding what each view by itself can yield" (Miller xiii). Consequentially, Kinneavy hints at how these two versions of *kairos* could exist in contemporary disciplines and discourses through multiple combinations of their ideas. Research conducted by Kinneavy suggests that *kairos* currently exists in this state in a modern setting because the concept cannot be prescribed to a concrete terminology; therefore, it cannot be "limited to its literal appearance" and is instead deeply tethered to the "main themes" of whatever work it finds itself in and "often bound up" with the core concepts being expressed by the author (Kinneavy 66).

In addition to considering Kinneavy's theories and research of *kairos*, I bring into conversation scholars who have supported Kinneavy's argument and utilized his renewed attention to the concept to develop their understanding of *kairos* through a contemporary lens. Michael Carter's "Stasis and Kairos: Principles of Social Construction in Classical Rhetoric," Michael Harker's "The Ethics of Argument: Rereading Kairos and Making Sense in a Timely Fashion," Cynthia Sheard's "*Kairos* and Kenneth Burke's Psychology of Political and Social Communication," and Kelly Pender's "*Kairos* and the Subject of Expressive Discourse" all contribute modern research that helps to further support Kinneavy's argument while also directly addressing how *kairos* in a contemporary setting operates as a situational context and uses that principle to emphasize the contextual nature of all discourses and their roles in social construction.

In order to show how *kairos* continues to operate in contemporary civic education, I utilize Michael Harker's most recent book, *The Lure of Literacy: A Critical Reception of the Compulsory Composition Debate*, as a space that accurately shows how *kairos* has been updated to address modern exigencies born out of rhetoric. The primary reason for choosing this text is because Harker has already focused a great deal on the benefits of *kairos's* ability to "respond to unique cultural movements…conditions…[and] special moments" where rhetorical ideas can be fully enacted (Thompson 73). In his essay "The Ethics of Argument: Rereading Kairos and Making Sense in a Timely Fashion," Harker clearly lays out how *kairos*'*s* consideration of ethical rather than solely argumentative concerns allow the concept to inform and update the theoretical underpinnings of research and argument in the teaching of writing (78). In short, Harker is already deeply concerned with exploring *kairos's* multi-dimensional functions in search of a tangible understanding of how the concept is operating today.

Crucially, Harker has noted how scholarship searching for a complete understanding of *kairos* has still yet to appear outside of its original classical context and emphasizes the need for texts to be examined in search of a complete definition of *kairos* in the present. While it would not be feasible to analyze the entirety of Harker's book in search of a functioning *kairos*, there are specific chapters and passages which reinforce Kinneavy's understanding of *kairos* and advance my own research as to how the concept is now operating. Specifically, chapter five of Harker's book, "What Should Colleges Teach? A Proposal for a Compulsory Curriculum in First-Year Literacy Studies," details his proposed composition program through five lessons and provides a pivotal space for

concretely applying the two versions of *kairos*, which I argue are operating in dynamic tension with one another.

CHAPTER III

ORIGINS OF *KAIROS*

In the rhetorical tradition, *kairos* is a term that is "multi-dimensional and flexible" (Crowley and Hawhee 31). The numerous definitions attached to the concept emphasize its sheer complexity and contradictory nature in a way that makes it difficult for any student of rhetoric to understand why it was so intertwined with the rhetorical process itself. Over the centuries, *kairos* has come to represent symmetry, propriety, occasion, due measures, fitness, tact, decorum, profit, and wise moderation, just to name a handful of definitions that accompany this idea (Sipiora and Baumlin 1). Before the term became wedded to rhetorical concepts, *kairos* was one of the gods within Grecian culture. Known by the name Opportunity, the god was the youngest child of Zeus and was generally associated with the ideas of timing and recognizing the strategic moment (1). While related to *chronos*, which dealt with time as something that could be directly measured, *kairos* instead dealt with a specific window of time.

Rather than being about "the duration of time," *kairos* was concerned with what use was made of a singular advantageous moment (Crowley and Hawhee 31). In short, *kairos* refers to a strategic point in time that necessitated proper care. As time progressed, Greek poets and writers continued expanding on the concept to the point that a clear split was seen with the linear *chronos*. Works by Hesiod, Euripides, Pericles, Pythagoras, and others gradually underscored that *kairos* was "a point in time filled with significance"

instead of simply occupying a physical space (Sipiora and Baumlin 2). *Kairos* in the classical Greek period was only utilized by these individuals as a literary principle that expressed great profoundness in several poems and plays. It would not be long, however, until several educators began to realize the importance of *kairos* in Greek culture and the potential it had for influencing and unifying the classical rhetorical traditions that were emerging on the scene.

The golden age of rhetoric in Greece can be said to have begun after the Battle of Marathon, an event which "direct[ed] attention to the importance of rhetoric from individual human capacity to the benefits of rhetorical deliberation for a city and her culture" (Enos 92). This fusion of rhetoric with society would become the foundation on which several educators and philosophers would cultivate a discipline centered on *kairos*. As Richard Enos suggests, certain Greek social and political forces provided the environment and exigence needed for the development of techniques that would coalesce into the rhetorical discipline (95). Specifically, it was the interactions between the democratic cities of Syracuse and Athens which opened the minds of several Greek political leaders to the value of using rhetoric as a tool for giving decisive arguments in front of their assembly colleagues. They began to see it as a way to increase their own political power within a democratic institution. Long before Isocrates, Aristotle, or Cicero made powerful use of *kairos* in their pedagogies, Sophists such as Gorgias and Protagoras realized that the term had the potential to unify several concepts into one comprehensive work because of the way it tethered disciplinary principles to gaining political power. This is particularly seen in rhetoric's transition from being merely an artistic element in Hellenic society to it becoming a civic tool used in the creation and operation of

democracy (104). Marked by the arrival of Gorgias in Athens during a major war raging on in Sicily, the methods he utilized when addressing the Greek assembly not only introduced the Sophistic concept of rhetoric as an amplifier of political arguments to Athens, but also "elevated rhetoric as an effective source of power within a democratic context" (Enos 108).

While educators such as Plato sought a more philosophical approach to rhetoric that underscored the need for morality and aesthetic elements to be present in the discipline as a counter to the Sophistic idea of rhetoric acting solely as a machine meant for advancing one's political standing, *kairos* unifies the political rhetoric embodied in the Sophist with the social responsibility insisted upon by Plato's philosophical rhetoric (Sipiora and Baumlin 5). *Kairos* became a way for balancing the best elements of rhetorical education with one another in an attempt to develop a realistic approach for knowing which *logos* ideally fits the situation. Although several educators recognized the value *kairos* had in teaching the "grasping of concepts" or thinking in a particular way at a particular time, a true civic virtue *paideia* based upon a full understanding of rhetoric and the role *kairos* plays in the discipline would not emerge until Isocrates presented his *Antidosis* into Athenian society (4).

In short, "*Kairos* is clearly a complex, multidimensional concept… [where] there is much to learn from the ancients' treatment of [it]" (Sipiora and Baumlin 6). *Kairos* is an idea that is highly complicated and contradictory in its very nature. Its definition has changed so rapidly since its inception in the classical Greek period that it has become inherently difficult to identify a set definition for examining how *kairos* works specifically in civic education. Therefore, it is vital to first recognize that *kairos*, as it was

used by classical Greek rhetors, was meant to unify several rhetorical concepts into one strategic concept for handling any situation. This supports the idea of *kairos* "account[ing] for the past, present, and future, its meaning derived from its relation to a particular end" (79). Because each rhetorical situation demands that a unique argument be crafted for dealing with that issue, it is nearly impossible for a rhetor to know how to plan for every situation they will come across. Rhetorical theories can provide "models of right and wrong strategies [but] cannot cast nets over the unforeseen, unpredictable, and uncontrollable moments" (Sipiora and Baumlin 6). *Kairos*, then, was meant to be used as an extemporaneous mindset by a rhetor. Its goal in classical rhetoric was to provide a method of improvisation which allows certain individuals to navigate an unanticipated argument in search of its most vital components, then present their own argument that is decisive in persuading their audience. *Kairos* in classical rhetorical discourse does not provide the rhetor with the perfect equation for addressing all exigencies; it instead provides a way of thinking which permits individuals to quickly absorb all the known elements of a situation and give them the ability to act through a wholesome argument designed to heavily influence their listeners.

Kairos is a key element in a broad section of education; therefore, it is important to identify a definition that best represents what classical educators were seeking to achieve in their application of the idea to their civic pedagogies. Although a complete definition of *kairos* would explore the ethical, epistemological, aesthetic, and rhetorical aspects within the term, such a definition does not thoroughly explain the role the concept originally played in Greek pedagogies (Harker 78). When analyzing the civic teachings of Isocrates and Aristotle, it is possible to see one theme that descends from the Sophists

into the works of these rhetors and provides a way for understanding *kairos's* original conception as a tool for absorbing all the elements of an exigency then acting with an argument which suits the occasion. Because *kairos* tethers the opposing ideas of conflict and resolution to one another, it is understood that its main purpose is to provide the rhetor with the capacity to seek the truth in all unpredictable and uncontrollable circumstances and then present that truth to a community in a way they can clearly understand. *Kairos* provides a way for individuals dealing with civic questions to find a proper footing within the exigence and then navigate towards a truth they wish to consider.

When explaining the purpose of *kairos* within the pedagogical works of Isocrates and Aristotle, their overall goal, as Michael Carter explains, was centered upon using the concept as a way for "finding truth in a relativistic world" (Carter 103). Understanding this idea that *kairos* must be looked at outside of it merely being the opportune moment in a rhetorical situation allows for a definition to be identified that ideally represents how *kairos* was utilized in classical civic pedagogy. Consequently, the concept can act as the comprehensive backbone that intertwines ethical, epistemological, aesthetic, and rhetorical forms of argument into a method for always being capable of navigating an argument, regardless of its complexity (Harker 79). This definition can be broken down even more when we specifically look at the rhetorical strategies employed by Isocrates and Aristotle. These two rhetors saw *kairos* as the underlying instrument used to swiftly understand all the interconnected components of an exigency then use those forms to deliver the crucial act through a powerful and ethical argument meant to deeply influence the audience. *Kairos* possesses a level of depth and intricacy that hides its true purpose in

civic education. The *paideia* of Isocrates is the first to begin the cultivation of a rhetorical discipline where *kairos* forms the heart of a discipline meant to create socially responsible citizens.

3.1 Isocrates' Use of *Kairos*

Isocrates explains that his main goal in rhetorical pedagogy is to produce individuals who will be able to effectively lead Athens and the rest of the Hellenistic world. In *Against The Sophists*, he writes that he aimed to furnish educators who would "expound the principles of the art with the utmost possible exactness as to leave out nothing that can be taught" (175) and for these teachers to educate certain men in becoming "able orators and statesmen [through] much study and [the application] of a vigorous and imaginative mind" (173). For Isocrates, the core of this form of civic education is *kairos*. He sought a pragmatic course of action through understanding when the opportune time was to deliver the decisive moment in an argument. As noted above, *kairos* is ultimately pragmatic in Isocrates' rhetoric. Seeing that democratic institutions instilled with rhetorical elements would demand that its individuals take part in ensuring the welfare of the entire community, Isocrates believed that rhetoric should be utilized in a way that emphasized pragmatism and thoughtful activity within the polis—both of which depended on *kairos*. Instead of being citizens who simply gave thoughtless responses on a whim, as Poulakos explains, they were meant to show reflection and deliberative response before putting their case before their fellow Athenians (9). The value of *kairos* in civic education for Isocrates then was its ability to instill improvisation and flexibility into the minds of all individuals facing a rhetorical situation. To create a pedagogy that would fully prepare future leaders of the Greek state, this flexibility

needed to be applied to his education in a way that opened the boundaries between all the scholarly forms of argument and politics itself.

To understand the methods by which Isocrates utilized *kairos* in civic education, it is necessary to note that, especially in *Against the Sophists*, he deemphasized the best way to give a speech and placed priority in teaching the cultivation of political ideas through men who could "speak in a manner worthy of his subject yet able to discover in its topics which are nowise the same as those used by others" (171). Isocrates did not want rhetors to "[apply] the analogy of an art with hard and fast rules to a creative process" (171) but wanted them to rely on a pragmatic grasp of how rhetorical situations differed and to realize that what was "said by one speaker is not equally useful for the speaker who comes after him" (171). In order to accomplish this, Isocrates lists a series of elements that each rhetor must be able to pull from and apply when composing any type of discourse. The elements a rhetor employs for each situation are: "to join them [thoughts] together, to arrange them properly…[understanding] what the occasion demands…[and] to adorn the whole speech with striking thoughts and melodious phrases" (173). Upon breaking down this list, it is possible to see *kairos* forming the backbone that fully connects the speaker to the exigence. He provides a method for allowing individuals to immediately react to an unforeseen situation by drawing connections between all the critical pieces of information, recognizing how to treat this occasion, then delivering a response that is simultaneously eloquent and pivotal in influencing the audience. Isocrates fully believed in the notion that, in order to become great leaders for the Greek nation, men had to fully understand the lessons of his civic education and develop a moral quality alongside pragmatic decision-making abilities in

political rhetoric in order to look out for the good of the entire group, not just that of individual interest. Aristotle, although he criticized many of Isocrates' methods, would adopt several of these elements in the hopes of developing a form of civic education that fully used *kairos* as a binding component between rhetorical methodology and rhetorical practicality.

3.2 Aristotle's Use of *Kairos*

Kinneavy notes that "Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is grounded in *kairos"* (64). Aristotle sought a usage for *kairos* in rhetoric that, alongside supporting the ability for civic leaders to quickly make pragmatic decisions in sudden civic situations, provided a way for leaders to grasp all the forms of arguments that govern a society. As illustrated by George Kennedy, Aristotle realizes that an audience is made up of a variety of souls with differing patience levels and grasp of detailed argument, which means that the speaker must be able to identify the proper mode of persuasion for each occasion and for each audience member (15), including the "demand for clarity in understanding [all] the different kinds of language" (*On Rhetoric* 21). *Kairos* for Aristotle provides the rhetorical map for discovering what can be commonly used in all situations and equips the leading citizens with the ability to address the public as effectively and eloquently as they would their fellow senators (Bizzell and Herzberg 29). Another key element of Aristotle's treatment of *kairos* is his desire to fold in Platonic ethics as seen in Plato's *Phaedrus.* In *On Rhetoric*, according to Kennedy, Aristotle explains that his intention for rhetoric in civic pedagogy is to allow the rhetor to identify the proper form of persuasion that could be applied to many different subject matters (14). However, tempering Isocratean opportunism with platonic ethical charge was intended to convey truth to all kinds of

audiences, not just senatorial. In a sense, Aristotle combined Isocrates' focus on using *kairos* to identify the realistic path within a rhetorical situation with the ethical dimensions of Platonic rhetoric.

In terms of pedagogical method, Isocrates generally believed that "practical wisdom is all that we humans have" (Poulakos 14). While he agreed with Isocrates' desire to apply practical wisdom, Aristotle thought that some individuals could ascend to true theoretical science on human affairs through rhetoric (Poulakos 14). In other words, he asserted the equal importance of rhetoric as an art that could be mastered and recognized that it is *kairos* that illustrates rhetoric's role as an "art" (Sipiora and Baumlin 73). Aristotle expresses his concern for men "who have composed arts of speech [but] have worked [only] on a small part of the subject" of rhetoric and "give most of their attention to matters external to the [true] subject" (*On Rhetoric* 31). Aristotle recognizes that rhetoric is the only art that is bent upon knowing how to persuade a specific audience: "The rhetor had to understand that rhetoric "does not belong to a single defined genus of subject but, is like dialectic… [and] sees the available means of persuasion in each case, as is true in all other arts" (36). He uses the term as a way to expound on the generalized rules of the art of public speaking and most importantly, "emphasize the individuality of the situation" (Kinneavy 67). For Aristotle, rhetoric is situationally determined: Aristotle's method "applies the rules of the art of rhetoric to the particular situation at issue (67). *Kairos,* as concerned with timing, is "the starting point for grasping the whole of an argument" (Harker 80); it is a sign or map for the rhetor that points to all the forms of argument and rhetoric a member of Greek society would come across as well as the strategies of delivery, style, and arrangement to use for these

arguments (Kennedy 16). Thus, Aristotle's identification of the three artistic proofs—*ethos, pathos,* and *logos*—can be said to derive from his thinking about *kairos* as a universal way of thinking about how to approach a specific issue when addressing a public assembly. He tethers *kairos's* methods of persuasion with the Platonic desire to tell the truth directly to multiple audiences, whom a leader of a community will approach to get them involved in decision-making; the key is the leader's ability to present the argument to them in a way they can understand and thus can contribute to the good of the community. As pointed out by Michael Harker, "the Aristotelian tradition holds that *kairos* is absorbed in part of a comprehensive system of rhetoric and emerges through moderation, the appropriate, and the good" (Harker 80). Aristotle's rhetoric emphasizes *kairos's* place as the starting point for understanding an argument. It is "a place of inquiry, approximations of logic, character, and empathy" as he truly intended it to be (80).

3.3 Classical Application of *Kairos*: A Summary

Isocrates and Aristotle sought to cultivate a civic pedagogy that was extremely flexible and capable of addressing many of the political debates within their respective societies. The two rhetors collectively thought they needed to teach their students to practice rhetorical discourse in such a dynamic and expansive way that they would be prepared for any exigency once they became the main political actors within their communities. Because rhetoric had become the primary method for many prominent figures to build up their own political power in the Greek state, these two educators felt it was necessary to employ a tool that would allow skilled rhetoricians to freely operate as long as they did so for the betterment of the entire group. *Kairos*, they believed, provided

this crucial tool to civic education because it acts as a tool for swiftly gaining an insightful understanding of all the interconnected components of a situation then using those forms to deliver the crucial act through a powerful and wholesome argument meant to deeply influence the audience. The key characteristic for them, however, is the fact that *kairos* actively searches for the truth within a conflict. As Kinneavy points out, "*kairos* has a close relation to justice… Justice was defined as giving to each *according to merit*… Justice, therefore, was determined by circumstances: justice was *kairos*" (61). The works of both rhetors concerning civic education through the use of *kairos* emphasized the need for a moral quality, an ethical charge, and crucially, a *decorum* from which methods of persuasion could be centered on winning debates that were concerned with ways to advance their societies and cultures as a whole.

When analyzing why each rhetor thought *kairos* was so vital to their civic pedagogies and the methods by which they utilized the term in their paideia, two ideas are repeatedly built upon and successively amplified by Isocrates and Aristotle: the "principle of right timing (timeliness) and the principle of proper measure (propriety)" (Poulakos 60). Beginning with Isocrates and his central desire to give his students the "ability to apply rhetorical principles to political situations," he needed his students to understand that they must be able to quickly ascertain the situation within a discourse, recognize the proper way to address the occasion, then deliver an argument that was as influential as it was elegant (Poulakos 44). Timing is of course critical in *kairos*, and Isocrates taught kairotic principles to his students by "conjoining *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and pragmatic ethics within the situation and time" (Sipiora and Baumlin 8). Isocrates also sought an application of proper measure in his teachings by repeatedly

emphasizing a process of the rhetor "seeking social justice… [within their] personal ethics" (8). Because many individuals were actively seeking to advance their own agendas in the polis selfishly, it was necessary for the Isocratean rhetor to know the ideal time to exercise their practical intelligence and experience while additionally "observ[ing] good measure and proportion" when putting a case before their fellow Athenians (Kinneavy 60). *Kairos,* for Isocrates, was so effective in civic education because it requires the individual to have pragmatic wisdom if they wish to give practical answers in a rhetorical circumstance alongside understanding your own value system so discourse can translate into social action.

Aristotle would build upon and magnify Isocrates' use of *phronesis* by crafting a civic pedagogy that combined his desire to find a pragmatic path inside a rhetorical situation with the ethical elements of Platonic rhetoric. Aristotle saw the two principles inside of *kairos* as capable of not only assisting in the construction of a speech but also capable of analyzing and evaluating other forms of discourse (*On Rhetoric* 20). When dealing with seeking the proper moment, Aristotle desired a form of *phronesis* that encouraged individuals to expand rhetoric from just being a way to persuade to an art of persuading. Knowing when the proper time to address any audience came from knowing how to masterfully "apply the rules of the art of rhetoric to the particular situation at issue" (Kinneavy 67). *Kairos's* situationally determined attitude was expanded from Isocrates' desire to bring more practical intelligence into political deliberation by Aristotle to include the wisdom to know the opportune time to apply the proper mode of persuasion when addressing a variety of audiences. Proper measure in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, while it largely remained the same in applying *kairos's* desire to actively seek

the truth when persuading an audience, adopted Platonic ethics in a way that demanded a stronger sense of clarity on the speaker's part. The rhetor needed to listen to his own inner ethics that derive from personal skills and experiences, very similar to Isocrates' belief, and understand that an argument that was meant to persuade had to be "recognizable and meaningful to the audience" if they needed to take an active role in discourse (Bizzell and Herzberg 29).

CHAPTER IV

KINNEAVEY AND THE REVIVAL OF *KAIROS*

Like other recent scholars, I take up the view that two distinct versions of *kairos* have emerged over time. In the first view, *kairos* is still closely associated with identifying the proper time to deliver an argument based on fully understanding the orders and institutions already established by society. It is a view closely resembling the classical Greek and Roman attention to "propriety [and] decorum" that encourages individuals to seek to understand "an order that guides and shapes rhetorical action, whether that order is given and absolute or socially constructed" (Miller xii). In the second view, *kairos* is treated as a heuristic. It challenges the individual to creatively invent in the face of unforeseen and unpredictable challenges and to produce a response to "an action…that will be understood as uniquely meaningful within those circumstances" (xiii). Over time, these two versions of *kairos* became intermingled, confused, and considered too flexible to be treated as a cornerstone of the rhetorical tradition. They have, in many ways, been kept in dynamic tension with one another and, as Carolyn Miller explains, avoided what each version by itself can yield (xiii). The sheer amount of territory that *kairos* covers have led to a modern depiction of the concept being immensely complex and contradictory in nature; therefore, it has been thought to be

unteachable because it resists concrete methodology and has been generally avoided in contemporary classrooms.

James Kinneavy's revival of *kairos*, however, has brought to light the concept's continued existence because of "certain cultural movements and conditions [uniting] with special moments to create ripe times for the rhetorical act," leading to several modern attempts to completely define *kairos* (Thompson 73). There is still an overall lack of concrete application of the concept in contemporary pedagogy. Although the idea that *kairos* possesses two dimensions that are operating in productive tension with one another has been observed, to my knowledge, no scholar has concretely attempted to expand on the symbiotic relationship of these two dimensions in modern discourse. In this chapter, I suggest that Kinneavy— supported by contemporary scholars inspired by his work— Michael Harker, Roger Thompson, Michael Carter, and Kelly Pender, provide a way for recognizing and understanding this interdependence, help establish where *kairos* is operating in the contemporary civic discourse, and make it possible to directly apply new theories around the concept to a modern text on civic education.

In the forward to "*Kairos* Revisited: An Interview with James Kinneavy," Roger Thompson quickly underscores the crucial role James Kinneavy played in not only reviving *kairos's* role in literary and rhetorical studies but also his role in inspiring many contemporary scholars to treat *kairos* as an idea which "worked across culture lines…offer[ing] a subtle way of addressing the situations in which rhetoric is born (Thompson 73). While Kinneavy is well known for his theory of discourse and his contributions to the modern development of composition pedagogy, as Fredric Gale and Michael Kleine point out in an interview with him, *kairos* is "another term frequently

associated with Kinneavy because of his lucid explanation of the term in his work…[and] is credited with demonstrating the moral aspects of *kairos*" which have become so crucial in the ethical teaching of composition in recent times (31). For Kinneavy, *kairos* represented far more than the cliché definition of right time and proper measure. While this definition plays a foundational role in both classical and contemporary pedagogies, Kinneavy sought to expand on this definition and to clarify that the broadness and complexities embodied by *kairos's* two dimensions are one of its greatest strengths as it produced a term that was "transcendent… [and] expressed how certain cultural movements and conditions united with special moments to create ripe times for the rhetorical act" (Thompson 73). According to Kinneavy, an understanding of *kairos* was crucial for contemporary educators because the idea was central to understanding language's persuasive force, and as he asserted, actually explained how rhetorical situations are born in modern societies and how they could be treated in an ethical and realistic manner that would lead to meaningful action (73-74).

Kinneavy notes early on in his seminal essay "*Kairos* in Classical and Modern Rhetorical Theory" that, while the term was "a dominant issue in classical Greek rhetoric and literature, [it] does not appear in many reference books" (58). Although contemporary references allocate greater attention to the concept, Kinneavy noted that *kairos* was still often summarized as the "right or opportune time to do something, or right measure in doing something" and was usually presented as a maxim embedded solely in the work of the educators of antiquity (58). Rather than addressing the fact that *kairos* exists in "varying proportions and combinations," Kinneavy noticed that many modern references to the term consider this flexibility as an indictment of how thin *kairos*

is as an educational tool and generally avoid teaching the concept, citing its resistance to a concrete theory or methodology as a core reason (58). In response to this lack of education on *kairos*, Kinneavy argued that the concept possessed a "double dimension that runs all through [its] history," and crucially, that both dimensions must be acknowledged and emphasized to fully understand *kairos's* foundational role in rhetoric (Thompson 75). It is important to reiterate Kinneavy's perspective on these opposing versions to understand why Kinneavy thought their interdependence was crucial to recognizing *kairos* potential in contemporary education and where he believed the concept could be identified in a modern educational curriculum.

Through a historical review of the concept, Kinneavy identified the first dimension of *kairos* as a method for maintaining propriety and decorum in language so that rhetorical actions could be guided and shaped by a prescribed social order. This view requires the individual to clearly understand the expectations and order of society if they wish to act rhetorically. As Kinneavy points out, this view emerged from early rhetorical theorists such as Isocrates and Aristotle as a means to distinguish the general rules of the art of rhetoric from their situational application (Thompson 74). A failure to allow rhetorical actions to be guided by propriety and decorum, as Miller underscores, would result in a failure to understand this *kairos* and observe its propriety, resulting in rhetorical, aesthetic, and even moral failure (xiii). The second dimension of *kairos* was identified by Kinneavy as a means for accounting "for certain elements of the rhetorical act that are ultimately beyond the rhetor's control" (Thompson 74). Rather than being focused solely on maintaining propriety and decorum, this dimension encourages spontaneity and timeliness as an individual creatively uses language to invent in response

to an unforeseen circumstance. Because the purpose of this dimension is to invent as a result of an unfolding circumstance, the action would be recognized as timely and "uniquely meaningful within those circumstances" (Miller xiii).

When asked in an interview if he could prescribe a modern definition to *kairos*, Kinneavy reiterates the understanding that the intermingling of these two dimensions makes it "rather complicated" to provide a concrete definition, stating that he would firstly define *kairos* as a "term that has no single translation in any modern language" because most translations of the term are unable to account for both dimensions (Thompson 76). For Kinneavy, *kairos* remained difficult to discern in a modern context as a consequence of these two dimensions constantly experiencing moments of "intermingling, unification, and interdependence" through the shared use of the "distinct aspects of timing and propriety" (Thompson 74). In other words, Kinneavy believed that the concept remained largely neglected in contemporary rhetoric because it required educators and students to take into account both the first dimension, propriety, and the second dimension, timing, when considering what makes language such a persuasive force in particular instances of modern discourse. For Kinneavy, understanding the usefulness of *kairos* in the modern classroom meant using both the propriety of a rhetorical action embodied within the concept's first dimension and understanding the timeliness of the second dimension to invent a uniquely meaningful rhetorical response. Thompson points out in his interview with Kinneavy that *kairos's* full potential has not been fully realized because of the problems that emerge from having to account for all the dimensions of the concept in a course curriculum without a concrete theory or methodology already in place (80). He states that *kairos* is usually misunderstood

because it is "difficult in many discussions to carry along all…the dimensions," and as Kinneavy emphasizes, "many people will adopt the word *kairos* [but] won't drag along a lot of the aesthetic and political and ethical implications" utilized by both dimensions (80).

Recognizing that *kairos* had been generally avoided in modern education as a consequence of only one dimension being considered at a given time, Kinneavy worked to revive *kairos* by focusing on why the two dimensions should be considered interdependent and how the concept should be reconsidered a central mechanism to understanding language's persuasive force in modern discourse. Thompson reinforces this notion by stating that Kinneavy heavily believed awareness of *kairos* was crucial for understanding the power of language in contemporary discourse (74). With this in mind, Kinneavy suggested that *kairos* should be treated as a modern rhetorical tool "that recognizes the contingent nature of reality and the way man constitutes his world through language" (Carter 98). That is, *kairos* should be treated as a "classically-based epistemology for modern rhetoric" (98). *Kairos's* two dimensions operate together to establish a method for understanding the social construction of discourse. Rather than being a weakness, Kinneavy recognizes *kairos's* broad applicability as a tool that aids individuals in recognizing "the contextual nature of all discourses" (Carter 98). This interaction between *kairos's* first dimension (propriety) and its second dimension (timeliness), as Kinneavy emphasizes, positioned the concept as a powerful tool for recognizing "what makes language persuasive at a particular time" (Thompson 74). For *kairos* to be used and understood to its utmost potential in contemporary education, an educator or student had to consider the specific timing of an occurring exigence, take into

account the situational context informing the rhetorical act, then utilize propriety *and* timeliness to present a decisive argument. Rather than being an inherent weakness for the concept, Kinneavy emphasized that the interdependence between propriety and timeliness in *kairos* called for greater attention towards recognizing the "appropriateness of the discourse to the particular circumstances of the time, place, speaker, and audience involved (Kinneavy 74). He saw this attention to the situational context of a given discourse as an ideal tool for modern students responding to their societies' unique and immediate situations that would aid in identifying a realistic audience so that meaningful change could be enacted through a rhetorical act.

Kinneavy's views on how he believed *kairos* was operating in our contemporary setting naturally led him to consider where exactly the concept could be found today. The interdependence between the two dimensions of *kairos* and his focus on composition pedagogy encouraged Kinneavy to return to a personal question on how an "ethical education could be made to work in the university today" and where an ethical education would initially take place (Thompson 74). Accordingly, he believed that an ethical education would likely take place in the composition classroom first, and crucially, "it would have at its center a concept of *kairos*" (74). As Michael Harker points out in his response to Kinneavy's call for greater attention to *kairos*, he noted that several research proposals concerning the link between ethics and composition programs already exhibited a "working sense of *kairos*" that had grown out of its intertwined dimensions and were ultimately taking into account the "ethical considerations that orbit *kairos*…[revealing] the importance of the concept (*kairos*) to the theoretical underpinnings of…teaching writing (Harker 78). The reason for a nascent application of

kairos emerging in composition courses comes from the way in which Kinneavy viewed the intermingling between the two dimensions of *kairos* in modern discourse.

As already mentioned, Kinneavy saw both versions operating in a way that offered a broader perspective for writers or speakers to consider when attempting to persuade a realistic audience. By considering the timing of a rhetorical exigence, accounting for the situational context informing the rhetorical act, then utilizing propriety and timeliness to persuade the audience in a meaningful way, the "focus [on] personal writing from the writer's experiences and emotions [shifts] to a broader perspective that explicitly concentrates on the rhetorical situation (Pender 96). Kinneavy and additional scholars identified elements of *kairos* within composition programs as a result of students and teachers steadily facing more discourses that were immediate, unique to the occasion, and unpredictable. Consequently, previous rhetorical theories could not be applied directly to the present occasion because, as Philip Sipiora accurately notes, "rhetorical theory cannot cast its net over the unforeseen, unpredictable, and uncontrollable moments…every rhetorical act becomes a reinvention of theory as well as of the discourse itself" (6). Therefore, a shift in focus began to take place in composition programs that treated "kairic discourse" as a "mode of improvisation" capable of developing a timely response to a present situation (7). Kelly Pender reinforces Kinneavy's belief by acknowledging a trend in composition programs encouraging a "shift in focus from the text to the situational context… the need to frame the social context of the writer and reader, increased emphasis on disciplinary modes of inquiry, and increased emphasis on enabling students to find a realistic audience" (91).

Professor Kinneavy's revival of *kairos* reestablished the term as a crucial subject area in rhetoric and contemporary discourse. He has brought a unique and crucial perspective to how the concept's two interdependent dimensions should be understood and firmly established where *kairos*-like principles could be identified in modern civic pedagogy. As Carolyn Miller correctly points out, Professor Kinneavy "did more than anyone to revive *kairos* as a term of rhetorical art and inspired, either directly or indirectly," many of the contemporary scholars who now look to *kairos's* as a tool for handling the "profound contingencies of our [current] existence" (xiii). Through an analysis of Kinneavy's perceptions on the interdependence of the concept's two dimensions, it is possible to see that Kinneavy viewed both propriety and timeliness as crucial to the modern scholar wishing to fully comprehend what makes language such a persuasive force at a particular time. He identified *kairos* as a cornerstone of rhetoric that allowed individuals to respond to their immediate and unforeseen cultural situations in a way that would be unique and capable of reaching a realistic audience.

More importantly, Kinneavy's work on *kairos* established an initial starting point for additional scholars wishing to explore a greater understanding of *kairos* and its utility when facing modern-day exigencies. Noticing a shift in composition programs as they sought to teach students how to develop an immediate response to unique and unpredictable occasions, Kinneavy believed *kairos*-like elements were emerging in composition classrooms as a way for "students to examine their cultural situations and understand how their times might affect other times" (Thompson 74). In other words, Kinneavy saw composition programs as a new proving ground for *kairos* through a modern lens, as Thompson suggests, because it would allow students to unify their times

with their situations, providing a space where they might begin to see how they could create meaningful change through a timely rhetorical act (74). Kinneavy's revival and subsequent call for greater attention to *kairos* have since encouraged "rhetoricians, composition teachers, and students to explore the ethical epistemological, aesthetic, and rhetorical aspects of a complete definition of *kairos*" (Harker 78). Although many contemporary scholars have responded to Kinneavy's challenge by searching for a more nuanced understanding of how the concept could be directly applied to a composition curriculum, the term remains highly elusive and difficult to discern as a clear instructive practice. Despite the complications in attempting to provide a complete definition of *kairos*, this review of Kinneavy's understanding of *kairos* has created an opportune moment for identifying a nuanced understanding of how *kairos* could be applied to a contemporary composition curriculum in a way that accounts for all the dimensions that have made *kairos* such a foundational principle for contemporary discourse.

CHAPTER V

APPLICATION OF *KAIROS*

Michael Harker's *The Lure of Literacy: A Critical Reception of the Compulsory Composition Debate* takes a unique approach towards understanding how *kairos* can be utilized in contemporary composition curriculums to address the modern exigencies born out of rhetoric. Harker, one of many scholars who have been inspired by Kinneavy's call for educators to develop a greater appreciation for *kairos's* value in the modern classroom, utilizes an approach within his book that focuses primarily on how *kairos* can be enacted within a composition program without attempting to prescribe a concrete kairic theory or methodology. As Kinneavy suggested in his elaboration on *kairos*, the concept's central strength is derived from its capacity to bring "timeless ideas down into the human situations of historical time…it imposes value on ideas and forces humans to make free decisions about these values" (62). Since modern discourse especially must be shaped by an "immediate response to the present occasion," the rhetor attempting to control a discourse by molding it to a rhetorical theory, such as a theory of *kairos*, misses the point of utilizing *kairos* to respond to an unforeseen and unpredictable situation (Sipiora and Baumlin 6). The richness of the concept's two dimensions, propriety on the one hand and timeliness on the other, makes *kairos* a tool of invention when responding to an exigence. With this in mind, Harker reiterates the view given by Kinneavy and other scholars that "instruction in *kairos* becomes virtually impossible" (6). That is not to

say that it is impossible to teach the principles of *kairos*; rather, the focus should not be on prescribing a kairic methodology, but, as Jane Sutton notes, on understanding the principles of knowing the right time to call for decisive action, recognizing the right moment to speak, and expressing only what is appropriate for that particular discourse (413).

In short, Harker firmly recognizes Kinneavy's point that *kairos* is deeply grounded in "ethical concerns and relativism; it remains both situational and contextual and represents…a moment at which one must finally act" (Harker 84). Rather than attempting to apply *kairos* as a rhetorical theory in his book, Harker chooses to not make any direct references to *kairos*, opting to instead focus on the curious ways in which *kairos* interacts with the social and value-laden components of intellectual arguments aiming at producing action in the world (84). Although *kairos* is not directly mentioned in *The Lure of Literacy*, Harker builds upon his previous work regarding *kairos* in composition pedagogy: "The Ethics of Argument: Rereading *Kairos* and Making Sense in a Timely Fashion" to make a case for how a pedagogical approach concerning composition and literacy could be built around the idea of "teaching kairotically" (Harker 94). Rather than attempting to analyze the entirety of *The Lure of Literacy* in search of a functioning pedagogy of *kairos*, this chapter will focus primarily on part five of Harker's book, "What Should Colleges Teach? A Proposal for a Compulsory Curriculum in First-Year Literacy Studies," as a space which explains how composition educators may adopt kairotic principles as a crucial element of their pedagogies. By utilizing Harker's principle for teaching kairotically as it is seen within his essay "The Ethics of Argument: Rereading *Kairos* and Making Sense in a Timely Fashion" and Kinneavy's contemporary

understanding of *kairos*, it is possible to recognize a detailed application of the concept in this modern-day text.

Harker's *The Lure of Literacy* functions as a work that sheds greater light on the "persistent complaints about the aims and effectiveness of composition…[underscoring] how the relationship of freshman composition to literacy, language acquisition, formal schooling, and higher education is a fundamentally complex one" (Harker, *Lure of Literacy* 2). Harker utilizes the history of the debate surrounding continuing or abolishing compulsory first-year composition studies as a "sort of laboratory to examine, test, and explore how definitions of literacy emerge from, overlap with, and contest" our understanding of composition instruction today (7). While the majority of the book focuses on the assumptions which are made about literacy from the perspective of compulsory composition, Harker's final chapter, "What Should Colleges Teach? A Proposal for a Compulsory Curriculum in First-Year Literacy Studies," details his proposed composition program through five lessons which "may be used to inform a new model for first-year writing, one based on interrogating the very idea of literacy itself" (7). Crucially, Harker's work can already be recognized as an enactment of *kairos* through his concern for making a "timely perspective on the relationships between rhetoric, ethics, and action" within the field of literacy and composition as a whole (Harker 94). In a vein similar to Kinneavy's call for renewed and sharpened attention towards the benefits of *kairos* in modern discourse, Harker's final chapter detailing his proposed composition program via five unique lessons and objectives acts as a call for opening up "new lines of thinking" on how we teach composition curriculums, and also "reminds us to sharpen our understanding, attitude…and definitions of literacy that we

rely on to face the challenges of composition instruction today" (Harker, *Lure of Literacy* 7).

In the chapter "What Should Colleges Teach? A Proposal for a Compulsory Curriculum in First-Year Literacy Studies," Harker lays out his proposal by defining five instructor objectives that are similarly paired with five student lessons to inform an appropriate and timely model for contemporary first-year composition programs. These outcomes and lessons are tailored to address both the instructor and the student of a composition course in a way that would encourage them to be "mindful of the pedagogical opportunities" that are presented by the "ethical, epistemological, aesthetic, and rhetorical aspects" already contributed to the study of literacy in the composition classroom and established a situational context that readers may respond to (Harker 91). Learning objective one is defined as "Recognizing literacy in specific historical, social, cultural, political, and economic contexts," and is paired with two student lessons: "Literacy is historical and history teaches us there are many paths to literacy" and "Literacy is not simple" (Harker, *Lure of Literacy* 118-120). Learning objective two is defined as "Recognizing that literacy cannot be reduced to one definition, nor to one effect on people or societies" and is paired with the lesson "Literacy is not neutral or invariably good" (121). Learning objective three is given as "Investigate the uses, abuses, complexity, and contradictions of literacy as a social practice" and is paired with the lesson "The consequences of literacy are curious" (123). The fourth objective is defined as "Study the acquisition, uses, practices, and consequences of literacy and literacies across age, gender, race, class, ethnicity, geography, and media" and accompanied by the lesson "The literacy myth does not express a falsehood" (125). While Harker offers a

fifth learning objective in this chapter: "Develop critical approaches to common assumptions about the importance, power, and centrality of literacy," the objective functions more as a summary of the previous four instructor objectives and student lessons (129). Additionally, his final learning objective primarily operates as a conclusion for the work as a whole; therefore, it will not be considered in this review of the application of *kairos* to a contemporary text.

When reviewing the enactment of *kairos* in these five objectives and lessons, it is important to keep in mind what exactly Harker means by teaching kairotically. As previously mentioned, Kinneavy believed that one of the core reasons for individuals not fully understanding the intertwined dimensions of propriety and timeliness comes from believing *kairos* was a broad term "expressing a formal aspect of argument or strictly temporal concerns" (Harker 78). Although the concept does possess some formal aspects of argumentation as part of its concern with appropriateness and decorum, what made *kairos* a foundational tool in the past and a relevant tool now is its attention to the way in which individuals constitute their world through language and its attention to the contextual nature of all discourses. With this in mind, Harker embodies Kinneavy's interpretation of *kairos* by referring to teaching kairotically as passing time [which] becomes critical moments…for writing instruction, opportune moments that signal to our students that both they and their readers know precisely what is at stake in their writing…action in the world, ethical action" (Harker 94). Like Kinneavy, Harker's five learning objectives and lessons focus on utilizing the principles of *kairos* as a way to offer both teachers and students a starting point for grasping a greater understanding of

how they can use their unique cultural situations and times to respond with a meaningful rhetorical act.

5.1 Learning Objective One

Beginning with Instructor Learning Objective One and Student Lessons One and Two, "Recognizing literacy in specific historical, social, cultural, political, and economic contexts," and "Literacy is historical and history teaches us there are many paths to literacy," and "Literacy is not simple," Harker is primarily concerned with establishing a general orientation towards literacy and composition that both instructors and students can follow when attempting to understand literacy and its role in composition pedagogy. This section states that successfully teaching literacy studies in composition means situating literacy studies in their historical and specific contexts (Harker, *Lure of Literacy* 119). Exploring literacy through their specific contexts allows literacy and composition to be taught through multiple paths and expresses a "heightened sensitivity" towards the fact that there are indeed "multiple paths of learning literacy" available for students concerned or anxious about taking a first-year composition course (120). In order to avoid narrowing the paths available for learning literacy, Harker suggests that any definitions of literacy that students or instructors may provide "must be qualified and tied to historical particulars" (Harker, *Lure of Literacy* 121). This is because of the fundamental complexities that emerge from any definition of literacy and provides a space where teachers can encourage students to think firstly of literature as fundamentally complex, then recognize this distinction as an "opportunity for understanding the fundamental nature of literacy as it is a chance to talk about the limits of literacy" (121).

Kairos-like principles can be identified in this section through Harker's attention to the opportune occasion teaching a first-year composition program provides both the instructor and the student. By focusing on the need to teach literacy through the lens of a specific historical context as a way to highlight the multiple paths of literacy, alongside iterating the need to treat any definition of literacy as a fundamentally complex one, Harker establishes this first objective as an "act of discovery…a repeated process of beginning again and starting out new" for both the instructor and the student (Harker 91). In other words, this approach highlights *kairos's* role in establishing the situational context that the instructor and student must take into consideration: that there are multiple paths to learning literacy and defining literacy is fundamentally complex, and then establishes the reason for responding to this discourse: because literacy is fundamentally complex, there is a unique opportunity to discuss the nature of literacy and its limits. As Michael Carter notes, *kairos* performs a double role in any rhetorical situation: "the need for rhetoric to take into consideration and be guided by the situation; and second, the reason or impetus for the discourse" (104). By centering this objective as a chance for instructors to focus on their pedagogical approach to literacy as a "reflection in practice," Harker also opens up an opportune occasion for students to take note of the instructor's "commitment to treating each writer as unique" so that they may "communicate [their] particular interests and construct an identity in the writing classroom" (Harker 91). Such an approach "imposes value on ideas (of literacy) and forces humans (i.e., the instructor and the student) to make free decisions on these values," then decide if their response is appropriate to the current rhetorical situation and consider whether or not their decision is timely and meaningful to the conversation (Kinneavy 62).

5.2 Learning Objective Two

In Instructor Learning Objective Two and Student Lesson Three, "recognizing that literacy cannot be reduced to one definition, nor to one effect on people or societies" and "Literacy is not neutral or invariably good," Harker challenges the "commonsensical view of many composition students and instructors who assume that the stakes of the composition course are rooted in the innate goodness or neutrality of literacy" (Harker, *Lure of Literacy* 121). He elaborates further on this statement by suggesting that the importance of this objective is not to provide evidence of literacy being bad; rather, it is to tap into, draw out, and make more visible the language students use to define literacy and focus on the tendency to oversimplify conceptions of literacy through language (121-122). Harker suggests that this impulse to oversimplify literacy comes from "characterizations of literacy as neutral [that] are often rooted in figurative expressions of literacy, specifically skills-based views of literacy" (122). Consequently, a skills-based view of literacy in the composition classroom makes it easy to "forget that the way we talk about literacy affects how we view illiteracy" (122). It becomes easier for instructors to use skills-based views to determine pedagogical approaches and establishes a frame for students to recognize these "neutral" views as the appropriate way to discuss literacy in the classroom. Such practices entrench "literate biases" into the minds of instructors and students alike and prevent "investigations of literacy in specific social practices and contexts" (123). For Harker, these views are intrinsically linked to the ways in which we talk about literacy. He suggests that investigating literacy as it is seen in its specific social practices and contexts would make a space for "more useful, relevant, and specific understandings of literacy" that would grow from a clearer understanding of how we use

language to discuss literacy rather than relying on "legacies of received wisdom" which may establish attitudes or characterizations harmful to the teaching of literacy (Harker, *Lure of Literacy* 123).

Harker's emphasis on how instructors and students use language to discuss and define literacy calls to mind Kinneavy's perception that *kairos* is central to understanding language's persuasive force because it accounts for certain elements of the rhetorical act that are ultimately beyond the writer's control (Thompson 74). As Harker emphasizes in this objective, developing a greater understanding of literacy does not mean asking students to re-imagine literacy or to abandon their personal understandings once they enter the classroom; rather, the way they use language to establish their personal understandings is pivotal to the kairic process of teaching them how to examine the situational context that literacy may be found in and how to relate that context to their own specific times (Harker, *Lure of Literacy* 122). In an effort to elaborate on how *kairos* would operate in a composition classroom, Harker takes up Cynthia Sheard's explanation that *kairos* can be viewed as a term where the "sum total of contexts, both spatial and temporal… influence the translation of thought into language and meaning in any rhetorical situation" (291). Utilizing this definition, he suggests that if we consider the "classroom a rhetorical situation in which any activity is both a temporal and spatial influence, it is possible" to consider behaviors such as the language students use to personally define literacy as "generative and constructive" (Harker 86). With this statement in mind, one can look at objective two's critique of composition courses which render views that are considered neutral or 'skills-based' as a choice to "ignore a

pedagogical opportunity and disrupt the generative and constructive potential of that moment" (86).

In a way, Harker makes use of what Kelly Pender refers to as *kairos's* ability to disentangle a particular discourse from unfavorable characterizations or stereotypes to position a student's personal understanding of literacy as a useful tool for working through their rational and non-rational decisions when using language to explain literacy in a particular way (Pender 99-100). More importantly, when Harker refers to the need for more useful, relevant, and specific understandings of literacy that would come from investigating literacy in social practices and contexts, he is alluding to *kairos's* ability to turn the student's personal description of literacy into an opportune moment for teaching the student to think critically about why they would describe literacy in that specific way, to give them an opportunity to consider the "appropriateness of [their] answer over another" and to consider if their response is "situation-dependent" (100). In sum, Harker's second objective makes use of Kinneavy's understanding of the interdependence between the dimensions of propriety and timeliness to use a student's personal understanding of literacy to "respond to a more specific rhetorical task within a concrete situation," causing a shift in the student's perspective from presenting their definition of literacy to attempting to persuade the audience to accept their understanding of literacy (100).

5.3 Learning Objective Three

Learning Objective Three and Student Lesson Four, "Investigate the uses, abuses, complexity, and contradictions of literacy as a social practice" and "The consequences of literacy are curious," focuses on the need to encourage students to become more curious

about how literacy operates within composition by teaching them about its historical underpinnings (Harker, *Lure of Literacy* 123). Much in the same way that students are encouraged to become more curious about rhetoric by exploring its "ancient and historical underpinnings," for a more "complex frame of reference [for] the term" Harker suggests that literacy should be taught in a way that encourages students to appropriate literacy precepts from a literary tradition as one would "appropriate the rhetorical precepts from the rhetorical tradition and employ relevant aspects…in their everyday lives" (122). Recognizing that the majority of students taking a first-year literacy course come to the class prepared to talk about literacy even if they struggle with articulating their stance on literacy, Harker believes many students come into the course with the perspective that "literacy is merely synonymous with power and status" (123). Consequently, a student's intellectual curiosity extends only as far as needed to achieve such an elevation in intellectual status.

According to Harker, such characterizations in literacy establish "generalizations based on strong theories of literacy [leading] to conceptions of students…as lacking the ability to think analytically or abstractly about the world" (124). To rectify such an issue, he believes that both instructors and students must be willing to be intellectually curious about literacy in composition and "resist the tendency to only think of literacy in terms of the…consequences that come from possessing it" (Harker 124). Doing so requires instructors and students alike to question and inquire into "reductive and commonsensical theories of literacy" so they can "accurately evaluate and describe the consequences of being literate" (124). The purpose of taking this approach in a composition course is to encourage greater curiosity about literacy and create a pedagogical environment that

encourages students to do the "difficult work of expanding *and* critiquing the centrality of literacy in our current cultural moment" (125).

Ironically, Harker's third learning objective similarly shares *kairos's* situation in gaining greater attention and curiosity from a contemporary audience. Like Harker's sense that a greater curiosity in literacy needs to be promoted in writing courses to "encourage, complicate, and cultivate students' about literacy and literacy studies," Kinneavy's call for contemporary scholars to produce a more profound and comprehensive understanding of *kairos* can be taken as a similar challenge to complicate our understanding of how *kairos* is operating in a contemporary setting (124). As previously mentioned, Kinneavy believed that *kairos* as an educational principle remained largely elusive in contemporary rhetorical pedagogy because it required scholars to account for both of its dimensions. Rather than "keeping them in productive tension [and] avoiding what each view by itself could yield," research before Kinneavy's revival of the concept usually focused on the generalized aspects of argumentation embedded within *kairos* (Miller xiii).

In a similar vein, Harker believes that some first-year literacy courses only experience "strong theories of literacy in action," thereby missing the point that literacy courses should question and complicate our understanding of literacy studies so that a stronger intellectual curiosity could be encouraged (Harker, *Lure of Literacy* 124). Harker enacts *kairos* in his third learning objective by making a timely call for instructors and students to revisit their past experiences in literacy writing for a more complete definition of literacy itself. Exploring the various ethical, epistemological, aesthetic, and rhetorical aspects which have informed literacy studies throughout history not only complicates

some of the entrenched and generalized theories which dominate the curriculum in modern times but also generates questions on the social contexts in which literacy theories may find themselves in, how individuals can "identify and articulate the significance of moments in time that are crucial to [a] position, and what more can be done to convey "the urgency with which [an] audience should adopt or consider [this particular] position (Harker 91-93).

5.4 Learning Objective Four

Harker's Learning Objective Four and Student Lesson Five, "Study the acquisition, uses, practices, and consequences of literacy and literacies across age, gender, race, class, ethnicity, geography, and media" and "The literacy myth does not express a falsehood" is centered around the question of how instructors are supposed to handle the literacy myth in first-year composition programs. Harker defines the literacy myth as "the belief, articulated in educational, civic, religious, and other settings, contemporary or historical, that acquisition of literacy is a necessary precursor to and invariably results in economic development, democratic practice, cognitive enhancement, and upward social mobility" (Harker, *Lure of Literacy* 125-126). Rather than avoiding this debate, Harker suggests that composition courses should not ignore the literacy myth but put forward the distinction that the idea is "not so much an expression of falsehood as a representation of the ideology of people who gain from others investing in it" (126).

Similar to how Harker views a student's personal use of language to define literacy, thereby creating a unique occasion to think critically on why we choose to express our views on literacy in meaningful ways, he treats the debate surrounding the literacy myth as an opportune moment to "teach students important lessons about how

definitions of literacy sustain and perpetuate the myth" (126). Like the generalized and 'strong' theories that tend to dominate literacy's discourse, the literacy myth does not "accurately describe or account for the effects of possessing literacy," rather, it offers a space for educators to provide students with "more critical frameworks for talking about literacy" (127). In short, objective four focuses on how "vague and commonsensical attitudes about literacy" can be utilized by students as a way to situate the debate within a timely response to a cultural situation (Harker, *The Lure of Literacy* 127). Because the literacy myth is persistent throughout discourses we face every day, reviewing the various circumstances which perpetuate the myth open up the opportunity for instructors and students to inquire into the situation by presenting ways to ground concrete "definitions of literacy in specific, qualified, and historical particulars" and discover truths that challenge the myth overall (128).

Michael Harker's enactment of *kairos* in learning objective four specifically comes from his attention to Kinneavy's belief that an ethical education in the contemporary university would firstly emerge in the composition classroom and would have at its center a working concept of *kairos*. Because the goal of this learning objective is to "go beyond commonsensical notions" which perpetuate the existence of the literacy myth, Harker uses *kairos's* intrinsic relationship with ethical responsibility to lay out a framework for how teaching the literacy myth establishes a reason for students to utilize their own unique cultural situations and times as a means for "evaluating [historical and social] context before decisions are made in the writing classroom" (Harker 94). As Kelly Pender points out, "*kairos* illuminates the role of social, cultural, and ideological forces in the rhetor's generative decisions" (105). With this in mind, Harker relies on *kairos* in this

objective as a way for instructors and students to examine the literacy myth as a pedagogical opportunity to understand and respond to the reasons for societies' "collective investment in the literacy myth" (Harker, *Lure of Literacy* 127). Treating the literacy myth as a representation of a specific ideology within literacy studies rather than an inherent falsehood opens up avenues for composition programs to consider the "timing, appropriateness, and ethical underpinnings" which are present in the rhetorical situation of defining literacy and directs individuals towards making a unique, timely, and appropriate deliberations on what makes literacy such a fundamentally complex field of study (Harker 92).

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This broad review of the elusive concept known as *kairos* has sought to shed greater light on the pivotal and foundational work conducted by scholars who have been deeply concerned with how *kairos* has been utilized in antiquity and subsequently revived in contemporary rhetorical discourse. These scholars and their thought-provoking research have been brought together to achieve one specific goal within this text: encouraging students and teachers alike to reflect on why *kairos* has remained such a "persistent if somewhat confusing term," not only in "the history of rhetoric and composition studies" but also in the history of discourses and disciplines as wide-ranging as Hippocratic medicine, Pythagorean philosophy, New Testament theology, American literature, the foundational genres of Western literature, and psychoanalysis and psychological ethics to name a handful (Harker 78). This thesis has sought to examine how *kairos* continues to function in contemporary discourses and disciplines despite the general lack of its treatment as a foundational principle within contemporary studies. Furthermore, this essay takes up James Kinneavy's request that modern-day scholars should take another look in the past to see if they could learn something from the handling of *kairos* in antiquity and suggests that recent overviews of kairos*'s origins* and its employment in classical Greek civic pedagogies, alongside the theories and arguments put forward by Kinneavy and other scholars', has created an opportune moment to

develop a new understanding of the symbiotic relationship between *kairos's* duel dimensions of propriety and timeliness.

Thirty-six years after the publication of Professor Kinneavy's "*Kairos*: A Neglected Concept in Classical Rhetoric," scholars have since recognized the "importance of the concept itself to the theoretical underpinnings" of an abundance of academic disciplines and brought renewed attention to *kairos* (Harker 78). Such scholarship has made it possible to not only elaborate on the interdependence of its two dimensions in a modern setting but created an occasion for highlighting the role *kairos* plays within contemporary composition pedagogy and made it possible to identify the application of *kairos* within a contemporary example of civic pedagogy that accurately considers all the aspects that have made *kairos* such a foundational principle across the ages. By examining the origins of *kairos* within the context of Greece's classical history and its application throughout Isocratean and Aristotelian rhetoric, it is possible to view the ways *kairos's* two dimensions were originally conceived and identified by Kinneavy as part of his revival of the concept as a crucial subject area for any scholar wishing to understand "the persuasive force of language" on modern-day exigencies (Thompson 74). This permits an understanding to be made on how Kinneavy recognized the relationship between these two dimensions, establishes a working understanding of where *kairos* may be operating in contemporary civic discourse, and creates a space where kairic principles could be directly applied to a modern pedagogical work. This work, Michael Harker's *The Lure of Literacy:* acts as a unique space for recognizing the application of *kairos* within a modern text through its reliance on the idea of teaching *kairotically* rather than attempting to prescribe the concept as a concrete methodology. By focusing on the five-

learning objectives and student lessons situated within the final chapter: "What Should Colleges Teach? A Proposal for a Compulsory Curriculum in First-Year Literacy Studies," Harker provides a space that explains how composition educators may adopt the kairotic principles emphasized by Professor Kinneavy as a crucial element which would allow instructors and students to examine their "unique cultural situations and understand how their times might affect other times" as a way to produce meaningful change through appropriate and timely rhetorical action (Thompson 74).

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