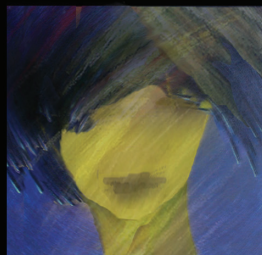


RHETORIC AND ARGUMENTATION IN THE BEGINNING OF THE XXIst CENTURY

EDITED BY

Henrique Jales Ribeiro



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• COIMBRA 2009

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ISBN
978-989-8074-77-5

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OBRA PUBLICADA COM A COLABORAÇÃO DE:

FCT Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia

MINISTÉRIO DA CIÊNCIA, TECNOLOGIA E ENSINO SUPERIOR Portugal



Programa Operacional Ciência e Inovação 2010
MINISTÉRIO DA CIÊNCIA, TECNOLOGIA E ENSINO SUPERIOR

UNIDADE I&D | LINGUAGEM, INTERPRETAÇÃO E FILOSOFIA

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CHAPTER 4

PRAETERITIO AS STRATEGIC MANOEUVRING¹

A. Francisca Snoeck Henkemans*

ABSTRACT: In this paper I investigate what role the figure of thought *praeteritio* can play in arguers' attempts to reconcile their rhetorical with their dialectical aims by manoeuvring strategically. In my discussion of *praeteritio* I will thus be making use of the theoretical framework that van Eemeren and Houtlosser developed in the last ten years, which consists of an integration of rhetorical insight in the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation.—The research I shall report on here, forms part of a larger project in which insights from classical rhetoric, pragmatics and modern stylistics are used to explore the possibilities for strategic manoeuvring with specific presentational means. In the paper, I shall first pay attention to the ways in which *praeteritio* can be realized in discourse. Next, I shall give an analysis of the general effects the use of *praeteritio* may have due to the presentational means that are employed. Then I shall discuss in what way the use of *praeteritio* may contribute to arguers' dialectical and rhetorical aims in the different stages of an argumentative discussion. Finally, I shall pay some attention to the ways in which the use of *praeteritio* may derail and thus become fallacious.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper I investigate what role the stylistic device of *praeteritio* can play in arguers' attempts to reconcile their rhetorical with their dialectical aims by manoeuvring strategically. In my discussion of *praeteritio* I will thus be making use of the theoretical framework that Frans van Eemeren and Peter Houtlosser have developed in the last ten

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¹ This is a more extended version of an earlier paper that is to be published in *Argumentation* in 2009.

years, which consists of an integration of rhetorical insight in the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation. By way of such an integrated approach, van Eemeren and Houtlosser aim to do justice to the fact that there is a rhetorical as well as a dialectical dimension to ordinary argumentative practice (2002: 9). Although there is no reason to assume that the rhetorical norm of persuasion is necessarily in contradiction with the critical ideal of reasonableness, there is nonetheless a potential tension between pursuing at the same time a dialectical as well as a rhetorical aim (Van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002: 135). In order to diminish this tension, arguers make use of what van Eemeren and Houtlosser call “strategic manoeuvring”. Strategic manoeuvring can “derail” and become fallacious if a party allows its dialectical aims to be overruled by its rhetorical aims, and violates one or more rules for critical discussion.

The research I shall report on here, forms part of a larger project in which insights from classical rhetoric, pragmatics and modern stylistics are used to explore the possibilities for strategic manoeuvring with specific presentational means. To this end, for each stage of an argumentative discussion, I examine what role stylistic devices such as *metonymy*, rhetorical questions and *praeteritio* can play in effectively presenting the topical choices that arguers have made (Snoeck Henkemans 2005, 2007).

Since strategic manoeuvring is a way of dealing with the potential tension between dialectical obligations and rhetorical effectiveness, an important aim of the research is to clarify how the stylistic devices in question can contribute to both the dialectical and the rhetorical aims of arguers. With respect to the dialectical aims, it has to be specified which allowable moves in the four dialectical discussion stages can be presented by means of the stylistic device in question. In order to explain why it could be to the advantage of the arguer to present a certain move by means of a particular stylistic device, it also has to be made clear which rhetorical aims could be achieved by making use of that device in the presentation of a particular move. To this end, it also has to be investigated whether there are different forms or manifestations of a specific stylistic device that may influence the suitability of that device for presenting a specific type of move and thus create particular possibilities for strategic manoeuvring.

In this paper, I shall first pay attention to the ways in which *praeteritio* can be realized in discourse. Next, I shall give an analysis of the effects the use of *praeteritio* may have due to the presentational means that are employed. Then I shall discuss what the possibilities for strategic manoeuvring with this device might be in the different stages of an argumentative discussion. Finally, I shall pay some attention to the ways in which the use of *praeteritio* may derail and thus become fallacious.

2. THE PRESENTATION OF *PRAETERITIO*

Praeteritio is a figure of thought by which, according to the *Oxford Dictionary of English* (2005), “attention is drawn to something by professing to omit it”. The figure is also known as *paralipsis*, *antiphrasis*, *occultatio* and *omissio*. The *Ad Herennium* gives the following description of *praeteritio*:

Paralipsis [*praeteritio*] occurs when we say that we are passing by, or do not know, or refuse to say that which precisely now we are saying, as follows: ‘Your boyhood,

indeed, which you dedicated to intemperance of all kinds, I would discuss, if I thought this the right time. But at present I advisedly leave that aside. This too I pass by, that the tribunes have reported you as irregular in military service. [...] Of these things I say nothing, but return to the issue in this trial. (IV, 27.37)

The principle characteristic of *praeteritio* is that the speaker announces that he will omit something, but mentions it nonetheless.² With *praeteritio*, speakers or writers both make clear that they are not going to give certain information and in doing so convey this information all the same. For this reason, this figure is sometimes called “false reticence”. In order to gain more insight into the possible manifestations of *praeteritio*, I shall try to answer the following two questions: 1) By what means can speakers or writers make it clear that they will not convey certain information?; and 2) How do they manage to convey this information all the same?

A first way for speakers or writers to make it clear that they will not speak about something or say something is to explicitly announce this. In example (1) and (2) such a direct approach is chosen:

(1) I will not tell you how my mother made coffee for my father every morning.
(www.stanfordspokenword.com/poems/)

(2) “I am not saying that the pope is ignorant”, says Yumakogullari, “but he has said such ugly things about Islam, that you cannot do otherwise but conclude that he does not know anything about our religion. Islam means peace.” (*NRC Handelsblad*, November 28, 2006)

That one will not say something or talk about something can also be made clear in an indirect way. This is the case if a speaker or writer provides information which amounts to the fact that one of the felicity conditions for performing an assertive speech act are not fulfilled. In doing so, the speaker provides support for the implicit standpoint that performing the speech act in question would not be justified, which in turn can be a way of indirectly making it clear that he is not performing the assertive speech act. In example (3) it is the sincerity condition (S believes that the proposition expressed in the assertive is true or correct) that is claimed to be not fulfilled and in example (4) a preparatory condition (S believes that the information contained by the proposition is in the listener’s interest (new, important, etcetera)):³

² Reticentia (or *aposiopesis* or *praecisio*) is the term used for a genuine omission, that is, where a speaker fulfils his or her stated intention to omit (Usher 1969: 177). According to Usher, reticentia “can create rhetorical effect by suggesting the availability of a great mass of relevant evidence upon which the speaker does not intend to draw” (Usher 1969: 177).

³ Two other preparatory conditions the fulfilment of which can be denied and thus result in a *praeteritio* are: ‘S believes that he can present evidence for the expressed proposition’ (see example 14 in this paper), and ‘S believes he is entitled or in a position to express his commitment to the correctness of the proposition (i.e. there are no moral, legal or practical reasons or social conventions that prevent S from doing so)’ (see example 16 in this paper). My analysis of the felicity conditions for assertives is based on Peter Houtlosser’s (1995: 103-106) analysis of the basic type of assertives, which in turn is based on the felicity conditions formulated by Searle and Vanderveken (1985).

(3) Bush [...] warned Congress against limiting funding for the war [...]: “I do not believe that someone is unpatriotic if they don’t agree with my point of view. On the other hand, I think it’s important for people to understand the consequences of not giving our troops the resources necessary to do the job.” (www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2007-02-26-democrats-iraq)

(4) You’re a smart person, so I don’t have to tell you that the Internet is making a lot of people rich, you already know that. (www.makemoneyonline-now.com/ - 28k)

In example (3), Bush makes it clear that he is not willing to commit himself to the proposition that someone is unpatriotic if they don’t agree with his point of view on limiting funding for the Iraq war by indicating that the sincerity condition – that he believes this proposition to be true – is not fulfilled. Nevertheless, his denial in combination with his follow up gives reason to believe that he thinks this is the case. In example (4), the writer is saying that it would be superfluous to inform the reader about the fact that Internet is making a lot of people rich, thereby implying that giving this information is not what he is doing, which is, of course, not true.

As we have seen, it is characteristic of *praeteritio* that while speakers or writers announce that they will pass something over, they mention it all the same. What sorts of techniques are employed to present the information they claim they will not communicate without drawing too much attention to this inconsistency?

I think that in order to answer this question, first a further distinction needs to be made within the ways of presenting a *praeteritio* that I have discussed until now. On the one hand, there are cases where the speaker denies that he is committing himself to a certain proposition; and on the other hand, there are cases where the speaker denies that he is going to tell something, mention something, or talk about something. The speaker then does not deny that he is prepared to commit himself to a proposition, but only denies that he is prepared (or able) to talk about something. The fact that he is committed to the proposition or propositions he is not prepared to express is then left implicit or is taken for granted. This difference has consequences for the way in which speakers will avoid being overtly inconsistent when they say they will not say or tell something which they communicate nonetheless. If the arguer would not make any attempt at masking the inconsistency that is inherent in a *praeteritio*, he would produce *praeteritio*s of the very unrealistic types (5) and (6):

(5) I do not say that he is ill, but he is ill [not p, but p]

(6) I am not going to tell you what his illness was, which is the flu [I will not perform speech act A, which I am performing now]

Such blatant forms of inconsistency will probably not be of much use in getting the arguer’s standpoint accepted by the other party since they do not help to keep up the appearance of reasonableness. So how do arguers manage to mask these types of inconsistency?

In the first type of cases, where the speaker denies commitment to a proposition, a technique that is often used is to follow up this denial with a clause introduced by *but*, in which the speaker puts forward an alternative assertion, which at first sight

seems to be a different statement, but on closer inspection turns out to be the same thing in the context at hand. This type of technique seems to aim for a comparable effect as the form of hedging that Hyland (1996: 443-445) refers to as *writer-oriented hedges*. By using this type of hedging, according to Hyland, writers attempt “to avoid assuming explicit responsibility for an assertion while seeking to secure ‘uptake’ by moving the reader to the writer’s standpoint” (1996: 444). Hyland gives the following example of this form of hedging:

Although it is premature to answer this question it might be suggested that synthetases present in nuclei could be involved in the regulation of the processing of [...] (1996: 444)

In example (2) a similar technique is employed: when asked for a reaction on Pope Benedict’s comments on Islam, Yumakogullari is not prepared to say that the pope is not ignorant when he talks about Islam, but (only) that he does not know anything about Islam, which amounts to the same thing.

In the second type of case, where the speaker announces that he is not going to convey certain information to the listener, there are various techniques that can be employed to camouflage the inconsistency. One way of achieving this effect is to avoid using an all-or-nothing formulation, such as saying that one will not *speak* of something, but instead use a formulation that allows for more gradation such as: “I will not go into details” or “I will not elaborate”. Since the criteria for considering something as detailed or not are to a large degree a relative and subjective matter, it is hard to accuse someone of being too detailed when he claims he is not. In example (7) this technique has been used:

(7) Well, let me start by pointing out Livingston’s bad side. I will not go into detail but will give you a list. The cops are corrupt! If they don’t like the color of your skin or the clothes you wear, you will be stopped eventually for no reason. The mayor has too much power and he’s loose with it. Helping himself and his friends, paying no attention to the town. There are no family activities. Arts? There is a park right next to a highway and a sewer canal, want to play? As far as tourism and history goes who knows? I was never educated about our past here. No one speaks a word of it and tourism is a bust; who wants to come get pulled over (everyone knows about Livingston police). That’s all I have to say about this small rumor infested town. (*forum.citytowninfo.com/forum/m-1197044039/48k-*)

A second possibility consists in using a construction like ‘I will not tell you how’. (8) is an example:

(8) I will not tell you how the aircraft dipped and plunged through clouds for the good part of an hour while I sat whimpering in my seat, completely sober, wondering what heaven was like. (*www.knotmag.com/?article=532 - 27k*)

This way of introducing the information may be an effective means of camouflaging the fact that one is providing the information one announces not to provide due to

the potential ambiguity of ‘how’ as a subordinating conjunction: it can either refer to the way in which something is done or be used to introduce a statement of fact. To take an example, a sentence like

(9) I will not tell you how Bob lost all his money at the casino.

may be used to make two different statements, (9a) and (9b):

(9a) I will not tell you in what way exactly Bob lost all his money at the casino.

(9b) I will not tell you that Bob lost all his money at the casino.

If the speaker only intended to convey the information *that* Bob lost his money, (9) is a clear case of *praeteritio* of the self-defeating type: the information the speaker claims not to give is exactly the information that he does get across. But this may go unnoticed because of the ambiguity of the ‘how-construction’. It is even likely that the listener will favour interpretation (9a) instead of (9b) since we may take it that he will assume that the speaker is observing Grice’s cooperative principle (1975). The listener will therefore avoid ascribing an infringement of the Quality maxim to the speaker.

A third way of realizing a *praeteritio* without being overtly inconsistent is to use a construction that can also be used in the case of a genuine omission, such as: ‘We will not talk about X today’ where X is a noun or noun phrase, and not a full statement. If this construction is used with a noun or noun phrase that has negative or positive connotations, however, it can be used to convey exactly the information one wants to convey under the pretence of not doing so. If the intended audience of example (10) is not yet aware of there being a budget deficit, (10) could be a means of covertly informing the audience of the fact that there is a budget deficit:⁴

(10) We will not bring up the matter of the budget deficit here. (<http://www.virtualsalt.com/rhetoric.htm>)

An added advantage of this type of construction for the arguer may be that the information (i.e. that there is a budget deficit) is introduced as if it were already an accepted fact, something that belongs to the common ground, and thus does not merit any critical attention.⁵

⁴ As Levene rightly points out, “praeteritio in a narrative will have a different effect depending on whether it is a passing reminder of something already set out in detail, or forms the sole source of knowledge for the hearers” (2004: 135).

⁵ Schmid (2001) discusses comparable constructions with an abstract noun such as ‘The fact is that’ or ‘The trouble is that’ by means of which speakers or writers can manipulate the hearer or reader. Presuppositions are often bluffs, according to Schmid, by means of which speakers “trick their hearers into the unfounded belief that certain pieces of information do not require particular attention or even reflection, since they represent mutually shared, familiar ground anyway” (1548). A similar effect is already achieved by the use of the definite article when speaking of “the budget deficit”.

A fourth example of how speakers or writers can make a statement or accusation while claiming that they will not make this statement without seeming inconsistent is by making use of a past conditional. They thereby make it clear that the non-fulfilment of a specific condition prevents them from making the statement. The statement is made nonetheless, as in example (11), but in this case it no longer seems to be addressed to the person in question, so that the speaker can deny having called his friend a liar:

(11) If you were not my friend, I would say you are a liar.

3. POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF *PRAETERITIO*

According to the *Ad Herennium*, an important reason for using *praeteritio* is to get some information or evidence across without drawing attention to the fact that one is giving this information or presenting this evidence:

This figure is useful if employed in a matter which it is not pertinent to call specifically to the attention of others, because there is advantage in making only an indirect reference to it, or because the direct reference would be tedious or undignified, or cannot be made clear, or can easily be refuted. As a result, it is of greater advantage to create a suspicion by *Paralipsis* [*praeteritio*] than to insist directly on a statement that is refutable. (IV, 27.37)

Usher gives a similar analysis of the function of this figure of thought and claims that it is being used “as a medium for presenting evidence in such a way that it may be accepted by the audience in spite of its doubtful veracity or value.” (1965: 175) He gives the following description of how *praeteritio* might work:

Occultatio [*praeteritio*] is thus used to present material which would, if critically examined by an alert jury, be found false or refutable. It enables a statement to be made and mentally noted by the jury in the speaker’s favour; but because he seems to regard it as unnecessary for his argument or irrelevant, they do not examine it too closely. By this means, weak arguments and false evidence could be introduced with confidence under the pretence of omitting them. (176)

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s description of the use of *praeteritio* also emphasises the usefulness of this figure for speakers who are afraid to use a certain argument:

The specific remedy open to a speaker who is afraid to use a particular argument is to hint at it. Too explicit use of some arguments is contrary to good taste, dangerous or even prohibited. There are arguments that can be referred to only by insinuation or allusion, or by a threat to use them. (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969: 487)

Praeteritio is seen by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca as a type of “semi-renunciation” or “pretended sacrifice” of an argument (1969: 487). According to them, “the sacrifice

of the argument satisfies the proprieties, while it suggests also that the other arguments are sufficiently strong to make this one unnecessary.” (1969: 487)

All the authors discussed until now, believe that *praeteritio* is used to present information and in particular arguments in such a way that they do not receive too much attention, but reach the audience nonetheless. Other authors see *praeteritio* first and foremost as a way of emphasising the allegedly omitted material. Lanham, for instance, defines *praeteritio* as a way of “emphasizing something by pointedly passing it over” (1991: 104). And Dupriez makes a distinction between “semi-preteritions which hardly emphasize an utterance” and “true preterition” which “is a form of pseudo-simulation, concealing the better to display” (1991: 354).

I think that *praeteritio* may be a combination of emphasizing and hiding. Instead of just keeping silent about something or refraining from performing a specific speech act, speakers or writers who use *praeteritio* explicitly deny that they are committed to a certain proposition or explicitly announce that they will not speak of something. By denying their commitment to a proposition, the proposition in question becomes more prominent in the consciousness of the audience. As Clark (1975) observes with respect to Richard Nixon’s famous “I am not a crook” – statement, denials presuppose that the audience does or could believe what is being denied.⁶ And if a speaker announces not to bring up a certain subject, he thereby also draws attention to the speech act he claims not to perform, since this is normally only done in a situation where your audience expects you to perform a certain speech act, or where you yourself would have wanted to do this, but you nonetheless refrain from performing it. For this reason, denying that you are going to perform the speech act focuses the audience’s attention on the fact that you could have done this or would have liked to do this.

So denying a commitment or denying that one is going to perform a certain speech act draws the attention of the audience to the information speakers or writers claim not to provide or the speech act they announce not to perform. If this refusal to commit oneself or to talk about something is a case of *praeteritio* and not just of reticence, the information is given nonetheless, but it is generally presented in such a way that the contradiction between what speakers claim to be doing and what they do in reality is camouflaged. As a result, it may become more difficult to establish what the commitments of speakers exactly are, or to hold them accountable for what they have said. It is in this way that *praeteritio*, when combined with specific presentation techniques, can be seen both as a form of emphasizing and of hiding.

4. PRAETERITIO AND STRATEGIC MANOEUVRING

The question I would now like to address is what role *praeteritio* can play in an arguer’s strategic manoeuvrings. Until now, as we have seen, *praeteritio* has mainly been described as a useful technique for presenting arguments in such a way that they are less likely to raise particular criticisms. *Praeteritio* has thus been considered

⁶ A similar analysis is given by Ducrot (1984: 216-217), who claims that sentences containing a (po-lemic) negation entail a dialogue with a (silent) second “voice” that maintains the opposite viewpoint.

a device that can be used in the argumentation stage. In my opinion, *praeteritio* may be functional in each of the stages of an argumentative discussion. To make this clear, I shall give some examples of how *praeteritio* can be used in the different stages of the ideal model of critical discussion to further both arguers' dialectical and their rhetorical aims.

In the *confrontation* stage, the dialectical aim is to externalize the difference of opinion so that it becomes possible to make an attempt at resolving it. The rhetorical objective of the participants will be to define the difference of opinion in the way that is the most beneficial from their own perspective (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002: 138). If arguers foresee that they will not be able to get the difference of opinion on the table in a way that suits them, they may even try to avoid discussing a certain standpoint or attempt to prevent the other party from advancing a particular standpoint or voicing a certain criticism. In example (12), Chamisa's reaction to the accusation that his faction is on a verbal warpath with the Mutambara camp can be seen as a way of avoiding the discussion of a standpoint by excluding it from the discussion:

Excluding a standpoint from the discussion:

(12) "I do not want to waste my time commenting on such baseless accusations", Chamisa said. "I am tired of accusations from people who want to have relevance by lying." (allafrica.com/stories/200707270571.html)

Chamisa makes it clear that he does not consider the accusation worth discussing, by saying that he does not want to waste his time commenting on such accusations. This is a clear *praeteritio* and not just a case of reticence, since Chamisa does of course comment on the accusation nonetheless, by characterising it as baseless and by disqualifying those who made it by accusing them of lying only to get the attention. The *praeteritio* makes it possible for Chamisa to accuse his opponents of lying without being asked to substantiate his claim. Since Chamisa has indicated not to be prepared to discuss the matter, asking for further support for his own accusations no longer seems appropriate.

An example of an arguer who attempts to prevent his opponents from disagreeing with his position can be found in example (13), a fragment of a speech by the High Commissioner of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA):

Trying to prevent the opponent from casting doubt on the standpoint:

(13) We have a shortfall between what the General Assembly voted in our budget and what we have received so far by way of commitments and pledges of almost seventy million dollars. If this money does not arrive, somehow we will have to reduce activities in our budget by 70 million dollars, and you can imagine what kind of pain that will be. *I do not want to scare anybody*, and I am sure I won't need to scare anybody because I am confident that the international community will live up to its responsibility and cover this deficit. (www.un.org/unrwa/news/fieldevents/almezan-may01.html - 38k -)

The High Commissioner defends the standpoint that the international community should cover the deficit of 70 million dollars in the budget of the UNRWA. By putting pressure on his opponents he tries to prevent them from casting doubt on this standpoint. Making use of the *praeteritio* allows the High Commissioner to protect himself in advance against criticism on his attempt at coercing the international community into covering the budget deficit. This example shows clearly the paradoxical effect of *praeteritio*: on the one hand, the fact that the arguer is threatening his opponent is made manifest by the arguer's explicit denial of any intent to scare anybody. On the other hand, because of this denial, it becomes more difficult if not impossible to accuse the arguer of putting pressure on his opponent.

Instead of attempting to prevent the discussion from getting off the ground, arguers can also use the confrontation stage to arrive at a definition of the difference of opinion that enhances their chances of winning the discussion. Arguers may for instance present their standpoint in such a way that it becomes more difficult to attack, as in example (14):

Putting forward a standpoint:

(14) One of the secret alerts that was leaked was little more than an abstract of a paper published recently by Stanford University researchers. Given CERT's non-profit, public-good mission, it's hard to see why CERT did not release this report to the public, given that the information on which it was based had already been released (and even discussed on Slashdot). It's worth noting that, having set up a system where it is paid to deliver security secrets to the ISA membership, CERT has an economic incentive to manufacture secrets or to increase their perceived value to ISA members by withholding the secrets from the public for longer than necessary. *I have no reason to accuse CERT of doing this systematically, but its handling of the Stanford paper does raise questions. (www.freedom-to-tinker.com)*

The writer first points out that CERT has an economic incentive to manufacture secrets or withhold secrets from the public longer than necessary. Next he denies having reason for accusing CERT of systematically manufacturing secrets. In combination with what he has just suggested about it being in CERT's interest to do exactly that, one can say that he does insinuate this standpoint. The *praeteritio* in this case seems to have the function of an evasion of the burden of proof: the arguer immunizes his standpoint against criticism. It is in particular the type of *praeteritio* where the arguer denies his commitment to a certain proposition, but meanwhile puts forward an alternative standpoint that amounts to more or less the same thing, that is used to make a standpoint more difficult to attack. Since the arguer has denied to be committed to the proposition in question, it seems no longer relevant to criticize this proposition even though it is clearly insinuated. A more extreme case is example (15), where the arguer introduces his standpoint that it would take God to provide a quality public education in America by saying that it would be too easy to say this, but follows up this statement with the claim that it is the truth:

(15) *I suppose it would be too easy to say that it would take God to provide a quality public education in America, but it is the truth. As civilizations turn away from God, crime rates rise. As musicians turn away from God, their music becomes increasingly discordant and painful to listen to. In the same way, when you take God out of a school's education system, it slowly loses all its quality. (invisiblob.blogspot.com/2008/04/what-will-it-take-to-provide-quality.html - 72k -)*

So what is the arguer now committed to? That the claim that it would take God to provide a quality public education is an oversimplification? Or that it is a tenable claim?

Another way for parties of attempting to escape responsibility for their confrontational moves is to criticize the other party's standpoint in such a way that they cannot be called to account for any unreasonableness of their criticisms, as "Joe M." does in example (16) in reaction to "Dan's" negative evaluation of "the Big Bite" sketch show:

Criticizing the opponent's standpoint:

(16) *Dan: Saw 'the Big Bite' sketch show on TV last night. How lame. How Unoriginal. – Joe M.: uh, Dan, it would be too easy to say 'You do better' but a few people around here make their living from helping comedians get their stuff to air. I'd rather watch and support a local comedy for local people than any imported reality series. (phorums.com.au/archive/index.php/t-33805.html - 12k)*

Joe M. is in fact committing an *ad hominem* fallacy of the *tu quoque* type when he reacts critically to Dan's standpoint by remarking 'You do better', but because he introduces this reaction by means of a *praeteritio*, by claiming that reacting is such a way would be too easy, it becomes more difficult for the opponent to hold him accountable for this fallacy.

After the confrontation stage the parties may proceed with the *opening* stage, the dialectical aim of which is to establish an unambiguous point of departure for the discussion by coming to an agreement on the starting points. The rhetorical aim of each of the parties at this stage is to establish those starting points that serve their own interest best. Ways of achieving this are for instance to propose a starting point to the other party or to attribute a starting point to this party.⁷ In example (17) the latter is done by stating that something has already been accepted as a starting point:

⁷ In van Eemeren, Houtlosser & Snoeck Henkemans (2007: 90-92) a dialectical profile for the opening stage is presented in which it is specified which moves a participant in a critical discussion can make as part of proposing a starting point and responding to such a proposal. The types of indicators of the various moves in this stage of a discussion are also specified and discussed.

Indicating that the other party has already accepted something as a starting point:

(17) I recognize that you (the union) have control over the grievance process – if you don't file a grievance for Senior, his claim under the agreement goes nowhere. *I am sure I do not have to remind you* that you have a duty of fair representation to all employees in the bargaining unit, including Bill Jones Sr. See *Chauffeurs, Teamsters, and Helpers Local No. 391 v. Terry*, 494 U.S. 558 (1990). (www.roa.org/site/PageServer?pagename=law_review_0705)

The author is trying to convince the union that it should file a complaint for Bill Jones Sr. by arguing that if the Union does not do so Bill Jones Sr's claim does not stand a chance of being accepted, while it is the Union's duty to represent all employees fairly. The arguer uses an indirect form of *praeteritio* by referring to the superfluity of mentioning this well-established fact to the opponent. The *praeteritio* thus helps in emphasising that this fact is already an agreed-upon starting point (in this case even a legal obligation of U.S. labour unions), meanwhile allowing the arguer to put extra pressure on his opponent to accept the standpoint by explicitly advancing this agreed upon starting point as one of the premises of his argument.

In the *argumentation* stage, the dialectical aim is to advance and criticize argumentation. The rhetorical aim of this stage is “to make the strongest case and to launch the most effective attack” (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002: 139). In order to do so, arguers will, for instance, attempt to present their arguments in such a way that they seem as strong as possible. In example (18) one of the arguments for the standpoint that it is not defensible that there are so few African Americans performing or leading in classical music is presented by means of a *praeteritio*. By presenting the strongest argument for his standpoint in this way, the arguer can give the impression that the arguments he has presented so far are already so convincing, that he doesn't even need the strongest argument. Nonetheless, the argument has been made explicit, and can therefore play a role in convincing the opponent.

Presenting an argument:

(18) It is commonly agreed that music is a universal language that communicates powerfully where words often fail. Why, then, in the year 2005 do major American symphony orchestras persist in performing with no African American conductors and, worse yet, only a handful of African American instrumentalists? [...] *I won't even mention* the world of opera, whose omission of African American talent is quite blatant and even more indefensible, given the available talent. (www.niemanwatchdog.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=ask_this.view&askthisid=00124-34k-)

The dialectical aim of the *concluding* stage is to establish the result of the discussion: can the protagonist maintain his standpoint or can the antagonist maintain his position of doubt? The rhetorical objective of each party is to “claim victory” (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002: 139). In example (19) the antagonist ends the discussion by maintaining his doubt, but does so in the form of a *praeteritio*, possibly to make

it easier to close off the discussion in his own favour without further ado since his 'promise' not to make the persistent disagreement public gives the impression that he is being considerate (or at least it could, if the 'oops' were not added).

Maintaining doubt in the concluding stage:

(19) Thank you very much [t]), and *I promise not to mention* that I disagree (oops). (www.physicsforums.com/showthread.php?t=237&page=13 - 117k -)

I hope these examples will suffice to make it clear that the stylistic device of *praeteritio* can contribute to arguers' strategic manoeuvrings not just in the argumentation stage of an argumentative discussion, but in other stages as well.

6. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, using *praeteritio* when putting forward one of the relevant discussion moves enables speakers or writers to focus the attention on the fact that they are not committed to a certain proposition or are not going to perform a certain speech act and meanwhile smuggle in the information they allegedly are going to omit. Making use of a *praeteritio* does not necessarily result in a fallacy. There is nothing fallacious about example (18) for instance, and example (17) would be an evasion of the burden of proof only if what is presented as a common starting point by means of the *praeteritio* would in fact not be an agreed upon starting point. Since in this case the obligation presented as a common starting point is a legal obligation about which no discussion is possible, no fallacy seems to be committed in example (17). Although making use of a *praeteritio* does not by definition result in a fallacy, there is a real possibility that strategic manoeuvres involving *praeteritio's* may derail. *Praeteritio* is a technique which brings about a distinction between what is said 'on record' and what is said 'off the record' and can therefore, generally speaking, be a means of avoiding the responsibilities that one would have taken upon oneself if one would not have used the *praeteritio*.

For the confrontation stage this means that the device of *praeteritio* can typically result in evasions of the burden of proof, as for instance in examples (14) and (15), where the arguer immunizes the standpoint against criticism by claiming that the position that he is in fact supporting is not the one he wants to defend. Example (12), where the arguer supposedly refuses to discuss a standpoint, but manages by way of the *praeteritio* to make his position clear nonetheless, in effect also amount to an evasion of the burden of proof, since the arguer can now accuse his opponents of lying without being asked to substantiate this claim. And finally, the examples (13) and (16) show that in the confrontation stage *praeteritio* can be a means of committing any type of fallacy associated with the freedom rule of a critical discussion and getting away with it. By denying that one wants to put pressure on the opponent or attack the opponent's person, one can keep up the appearance of innocence and reasonableness, while steering the discussion in the direction one desires.

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