

# 'As Shakespeare so Memorably Said...': Quotation, Rhetoric, and the Performance of Politics

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**Original citation & hyperlink:**

Atkins, J. and Finlayson, A. (2015) 'As Shakespeare so Memorably Said...': Quotation, Rhetoric, and the Performance of Politics. *Political Studies*, volume 64 (1): 164-181  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12156>

DOI 10.1111/1467-9248.12156

ISSN 0032-3217

ESSN 1467-9248

Publisher: Sage

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## **“As Shakespeare so memorably said...”: Quotation, Rhetoric and the Performance of Politics**

Research into rhetoric and argumentation is a growing sub-field within political studies (e.g. Atkins, 2010, 2011; Atkins and Finlayson, 2013; Crines, 2013; Finlayson, 2004, 2007, 2012; Finlayson and Martin, 2008; Gaffney and Lahel, 2013; Grube, 2012; Ilie, 2013; Martin, 2013; Moon, 2013; Morrell and Hewison, 2013; Toye, 2013; Turnbull, 2005). In this article, we contribute to the further development of ‘rhetorical political analysis’ by exploring the workings of one particular class of rhetorical acts – those involving quotation – and through this highlighting the performance dimension of public rhetoric. Rhetorical analysis, we show, exposes the symbolic, ritualised aspect of contemporary political and ideological practices, the understanding of which requires the integration of rhetorical with performance theories.

The article begins with a discussion of rhetorical and political theories of quotation. We argue that quotations are an exemplary instance of rhetoric in that they work out of (and feed back into) common references and opinions - what Aristotle called *doxa*. Drawing on contemporary cultural-sociological theories of ‘social performance’ (Alexander 2010, 2011; Alexander, Giesen & Mast, 2006) we argue that, in contemporary societies where culture is complex and multifaceted, and where *doxa* is not uniform, rhetoricians must draw on a variety of common sources at the same time as they engage in dispute as to which aspects of a culture should be regarded as ‘authoritative’.

The second section provides a rhetorical analysis of quotations used by British party leaders in their speeches to their annual conferences. We find that quotation contributes to *logos*, or rational proofs, by providing evidence for claims, and that it may also intensify *pathos* (the emotional or affective aspects of argument) by generating sentimentality or enabling humour, or through the appropriation of ‘elevated’ language. Above all, we show, quotation contributes to *ethos*, to the character of a speaker, including their identification with a particular community or cultural milieu. It does so not only by affirming or creating shared cultural references, but also by enabling a speech performance to be recognisably ‘the sort of thing’ that political leaders say. In a third section we further develop this point by looking at the use of unattributed or allusive quotations, arguing that political speeches are instances of what critical theorists call performative citationality (e.g. Derrida, 1988; Butler, 1993). The total performance of a speech (the words, the delivery, the timing and the setting) may, we suggest, be understood as a kind of quotation.

### **Quotations, Rhetoric and Argument**

Quotations and citations are a deeply rooted, even unavoidable, component of the apparatus of explanation and proof in persuasive and argumentative speech and writing. Academics - surely - know this better than any other profession. Citing others is a way of pointing to evidence we believe supports our case; it can be a form of direct proof, showing that our findings or claims belong squarely within an already established series of larger claims; and it can enable us to demonstrate that our acquaintance with a field of study is sufficient for us to say something about it with authority. Academics’ elaborate and formal apparatus for referencing enables the

incorporation within writing of extensive and varied citations, while ensuring clarity as to who has said what - which words are 'ours' and which derive from somebody else – and thus maintains authority and protecting intellectual private property (Connors, 1998, 1999). Although speech and writing outside the academy rarely employ citations within such an ordered framework, quotations nonetheless may serve as authorities of various kinds, as short-cuts to authorisation, and - importantly - as a way of connecting speech-acts. In this public context the boundaries between authors are often blurred, such that quotation is a way of affirming not the originality of thought but, on the contrary, its belonging to an ideological, moral or cultural community.

Thus, in Renaissance rhetoric, the trope of *testimonia* was linked with other tropes such as *conformatio* or *prosopopoeia* (bringing before the audience the voice or words of someone absent), *apodixis* (the attempt to prove by reference to general knowledge, common sayings and proverbs) and *sententiae* - the use of aphorisms or maxims to sum up part of an argument (Serjeantson, 2007, pp. 181-94). Quotation exemplifies the 'communitarian' dimension of rhetoric – its adaptation to what Aristotle called 'notions possessed by everybody' in a community (*Rhetoric* 1355a). This is why Thomas Farrell argues that rhetoric is part of an activity of reasoning in which 'the norms and conventions of a culture find themselves employed as premises of both recognition and inference', put to the test and collectively practised (1993, p. 76). Rhetoric is always both a particular argument about some issue and a general argument about what should be considered a good argument. Quotation is a special case of this. If it is to be effective the source has to be one recognised by audiences as authoritative or appropriate, while its use is also an argument for that very aptness and authority.

For Aristotle, quotations provided ‘evidence’ in the form of ‘witnesses’ who might be ‘ancient’ (‘the poets and all those other famous men whose judgements are well known’) or recent (‘notables who have given some judgement’). They are not only people with direct and material insight into the matter at hand, but anyone whose thoughts might aid us (and whom we think our audience will take seriously). This was clearly understood by modern political theorists such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, who attacked the rhetorical uses of quotation as part of their more general assault on the claims of traditional authority, and argued for an individualised conception of political reasoning. For instance, Hobbes, at the close of *Leviathan*, justified (in polemical fashion) his own failure (‘contrary to the custom of late time’) to quote ancient poets, orators and philosophers. Taking an unambiguous stance in the 17th century battle between the ancients and the moderns, Hobbes insisted that because his concerns were with right – not fact – there was no place in his work for witnesses; as an outcome of rigorous logical deduction, his truths needed nobody to report on them. Finding ancient writers unreliable and contradictory, Hobbes objected that ‘such opinions as are taken only upon credit of antiquity, are not intrinsically the judgment of those that cite them, but words that pass (like gaping) from mouth to mouth’ (1985, pp. 726-7).

Locke was similarly critical of arguments that relied simply on reference to others, challenging what he called the *argumentum ad verecundiam*, or the argument that relies on our respect for an authority. Its use is a kind of force, cowing interlocutors by daring them to risk the appearance of immodesty in challenging that which is commonly thought to be unchallengeable. ‘When men are established in any kind of dignity,’ Locke wrote, ‘it is thought a breach of modesty for others to derogate any

way from it, and question the authority of men, who are in possession of it ... and it is looked upon as insolence, for a man to set up, and adhere to his own opinion, against the current stream of antiquity' (1838, p. 524). Similarly, Jeremy Bentham was scathing about appeals to authority, although he recognised its indispensability and tried to specify instances when in dealing with matters of fact it may be legitimate to refer to others, distinguishing these from the deployment of authority 'in place of such relevant argument as ought to be furnished' (1952, p. 25).

These criticisms of quotation are instances of a more general argument about whom or what should be thought authoritative when it comes to political matters. Yet - the claims of some modern theorists notwithstanding - contemporary politics is not governed by a universally accepted rationality; rhetoric persists and authority remains contested. Institutions of sovereign power retain from pre-modern societies symbolic and ritual forms (Manow, 2010; Santer, 2011) that contribute to the 'contrived character' of political occasions - their 'departure from men's daily routine, a special or heroic quality in the proceedings' (Edelman, 1985, p. 96), allocating and legitimating identities (Barker, 2001; Crewe, 2007). In the UK, a number of such ritualised moments feature in the political calendar: the speech from the throne, set-piece parliamentary encounters (such as Prime Minister's Questions) and the Mansion House speech. Such occasions are replicated at the sub-national, regional and local levels. Each requires a political actor to deliver a speech as part of a performance that belongs 'as much to the symbolic ritual dimension of politics [as to] the strategic-realist dimension of short-term gains' (Finlayson and Martin, 2008, p. 448). To these one might add the irregular but nevertheless stylised performances of politicians on television, on the radio and at public meetings, or various spectacles of political

protest. At all these occasions participants do not simply state claims, attitudes and beliefs, but also represent them through their ways of talking, acting and appearing.

Such ritualisation is not merely a remnant of an earlier era. In traditional societies, ritual is bound up with the cultural unity that is characteristic of what Émile Durkheim called 'mechanical solidarity'. The complexity and fragmentation of social modernity make symbolic communication more complex, demanding a greater and more varied repertoire. 'When society becomes more complex, culture more critical, and authority less ascriptive', argues cultural sociologist Jeffrey Alexander, 'rather than responding to authoritative commands and prescriptions, social processes become more contingent, more subject to conflict and argumentation'. At the level of politics, he shows, this has given rise not to a wholly rationalised public sphere of deliberation but to 'a public stage, a symbolic forum in which actors have increasing freedom to create and to project performances of their reasons, dramas tailored to audiences whose voices have become more legitimate references in political conflicts' (2006, p. 51). In democracies, political actors, unconfined by a single traditional culture, are free to innovate ways of 'doing' politics but still have to adapt to the *doxa* of multiple audiences, finding ways to emphasise some things while de-emphasising others. As Michael Saward has shown, political figures represent interests both formally and symbolically. Their 'representative claim' is thus 'a double claim: about an attitude or capacity of a would-be representative, and also about relevant characteristics of a would-be audience' (2006, p. 303).

How such performances take place, and the forms and genres of rhetoric that they enable, is an important topic for cultural and political sociology, as well as for

theoretical reflections on the nature of contemporary politics (for examples of the application of performance theories to British politics, see Brasset and Clarke, 2012; Coleman and Ross, 2010; Faucher-King, 2005; Rai, 2011). Because quotations both invoke authorities and are part of a dispute about what is and is not an authority, the rhetoric of quotation is one way of getting at this. Indeed, Hobbes and Locke resisted the established position of ancient sources in favour of new kinds of reasoning in an argument that was as much about political as intellectual authority.

From the rhetorical perspective, quotation works only to the extent that it, or its source, is recognised and approved of by the audience that is to be persuaded by it. It is a way of deferring to an audience and of demonstrating such deference, while trying to convince that audience of which of its extant values and references are the most relevant. Success in this can establish ‘identification’ between speaker and audience (Burke, 1969). It can therefore be employed as evidence of the matters to which it explicitly refers and of the presence of common cultural resources; it is a proof of *ethos*, a prop in the performance of a particular sort of character and in the making of a ‘representative claim’. Quotation provides the words to a script, so that a rhetorician may speak with the voices of others. For these reasons it is always ‘ideological’. Its success derives from, and contributes to, a broader culture that has assigned authority to some sources and not others. It is also ‘political’ insofar as its use may affirm some of these ‘foundational’ sources, add to them, or challenge them; it may weave different cultural references into a larger argumentative fabric, or unpick and isolate them.



To explore further these ideological/political uses of quotation (and to open up the performance dimensions of political practices), we now examine its appearance in the speeches of British party leaders. As we will see, the surface uses (as well as the sources) of quotation in party conference speeches are varied, but they have in common this capacity to put the words of one speaker into a relationship with the words of others in ways that enable ideological and political public performances.

### **Quotation in British Party Leaders' Speeches to Annual Conference**

Politicians give a lot of speeches. To establish a manageable corpus, we concentrate on speeches given by the leaders of the three main parties to their annual conferences since 1945. We restrict our attention to this genre to enable comparison across time and between parties; because there is a good record of leaders' speeches (see [www.britishpoliticalspeech.org](http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org)); and above all because of the exemplary nature of the conference speech. Writing about international conferences and summits, Carl Death has shown how 'the rituals of diplomacy, the speeches, media statements, rolling news coverage and routine confrontations between protestors and police are used to communicate particular norms, expectations, and standards of conduct to watching audiences' (2011, p. 7). Similarly, the party conference, with the leader's speech at its core, is a point of convergence for attempts to influence news media and elite opinions, to present party and leader to various publics, and for affirmations of internal party values, culture and identity (Faucher-King, 2005).

The table below shows the frequency of different types of direct quotation found in the speeches of leaders for the Labour, Conservative and Liberal/Liberal Democrat Parties since 1945.<sup>1</sup>

Year	Evidential	Cultural	Party Political	Anecdotal	Total
1945-49	5	0	24	0	29
1950-54	5	1	13	0	19
1955-59	2	2	5	0	9
1960-64	4	3	4	0	11
1965-69	6	5	24	1	36
1970-74	13	4	35	0	52
1975-79	25	11	38	5	79
1980-84	38	14	65	5	122
1985-89	11	14	21	10	56
1990-94	4	9	18	6	37
1995-99	9	6	35	11	61
2000-04	4	1	21	9	35
2005-09	3	1	21	14	39
2010-13	1	0	12	19	32
Total	130	71	336	80	617

Two things immediately stand out. Firstly, the use of quotation is greater at times of ideological contest and change, and as such is perhaps indicative of a need to affirm tradition as part of the process of adapting it. Secondly, the use of anecdotal quotation increases over time. At the earlier party conferences, the leader's speech was

addressed to a limited audience likely to share common reference points. As the conferences became more public and mediated, the range of reference expanded not only as part of an attempt to include more audiences, but also because of uncertainty as to what might be recognised as ‘an authority’ and as a basis for identification. That quotations from ‘ordinary’ people have become predominant suggests that politicians feel a strong need to establish identification with the public.

We will explore these issues further by looking more closely at the types of quotation found in the leaders’ speeches. There is not space to analyse each quotation in detail, and we therefore concentrate on some representative examples.

### *Quotations as Evidence*

As we have seen, a central and important use of quotation is as a kind of ‘witness’. It introduces into a speech someone or something that can provide authoritative factual evidence to support a claim. On this basis, we might expect that the primary form of citation in leaders’ conference speeches would be of evidential authorities, providing incontrovertible facts and figures. Yet such citations are relatively rare; facts and figures are often given but not sourced. This indicates that the leaders’ speeches are primarily ‘epideictic’ in nature. That is, they are not ‘forensic’ speeches, marshalling evidence for prosecution or defence, and nor are they truly ‘deliberative’ speeches, addressing a specific question or proposing a particular course of action. They are more like the kinds of speech given at weddings and birthdays, in that they are about amplifying and articulating the feelings of an audience, and affirming a sense of

occasion or community. Accordingly, the rhetorical use of ‘witnesses’ is primarily about proof that a cultural and political ‘identity’ is shared.

For instance, in his 1971 conference speech, Harold Wilson wanted to argue that the Conservatives’ free market philosophy had led to land profiteering, which was pricing young people out of the housing market. Referring to an article published in the *Financial Times* he quoted: ‘In some areas land prices for private housing have risen 15 per cent in the last four months alone, compared with a national average of only two per cent in 1970’. The force of such a citation lies not in the objectivity of the authority, but quite the opposite - on the fact that the source will be understood by the audience as partisan. If ‘even’ the FT is saying it, it must be bad. Similarly, Wilson referred to ‘their own *Daily Telegraph*’ in 1969, and in 1981 Michael Foot cited *The Times*’ critique of US disarmament policy. Significantly, Foot did not at first attribute the quotation, drawing out his point:

Now I have said that, I have no doubt I would be accused of being a Soviet spy, or something of the sort, but those are the words that were printed in *The Times* on the day that Denis [Healey] and I returned from Moscow.

Although there are some instances of Liberal leaders using quotation in this way (e.g. Steel, 1982), more often they appeal to evidential sources imagined to be objective - and go to some lengths to make this clear. Thus we find David Steel stressing the professorial status of Michael Dummett when citing his expressions of alarm about Conservative attitudes (1979), and naming as well as quoting the ‘Chairman and Managing Director of Fords’ in calling for greater moderation in party politics -

emphasising that the man ‘to the best of my knowledge is not a member of our party’ (1977). Such quotations introduce evidence of the general reasonableness of Liberal thinking. In fact, the party seems especially keen to reassure itself of the correctness of its opinions by reference to external sources. Thus, in the opening section of his 1981 speech, Steel declared:

This has been an outstandingly good Assembly. Don’t take my word for it, take George Gale in yesterday’s *Daily Express*: “This is not only the best Liberal Party Assembly I have ever attended; it is the best Liberal Party I have encountered”.

In contrast to their Liberal and Labour counterparts, the Conservative leaders – strikingly - almost never use quotations as sources of evidential authority (Churchill’s 1954 speech is the exception that proves the rule). However, they do make use of ‘famous men whose judgements are well known’. For example, Margaret Thatcher, in 1976 referred to ‘that wise French philosopher de Tocqueville’, using a quote from his *Journeys to England and Ireland* as evidence of the virtues of free markets. A year later she drew on Lao Tzu, whom she identified only as ‘a Chinese philosopher centuries ago’ (1977). The words she used here – ‘Govern a great nation as you would cook a small fish. Don’t overdo it’ – would subsequently find their way into Ronald Reagan’s State of the Union Address of 25 January 1988. The line might be better thought of as a proverb, a form of quotation of which there are numerous examples in the party conference speeches, many deriving from the Bible (e.g. Sinclair, 1945; Churchill, 1950; Wilson, 1964; Thatcher, 1985; Brown, 2007).

It seems, then, that for much of the post-war period, the use of evidential citation in party leaders' speeches maps onto ideological orientation. Labour leaders use quotations as evidence of their holding opinions that are congruent with the establishment, even as they affirm their community's distance from it; the Liberal Party uses quotation as a means of demonstrating the breadth of objective and professional opinion that shares its perspective; and Conservatives employ quotations that situate their party within the lineage of what Matthew Arnold called 'the best that has been thought and said in the world', and so speak to the shared cultural tastes of their party audience.

However, since the mid-1980s, there has been a steep decline in the citation as evidence of noted authorities of any kind, and an increase in the citation of 'ordinary' people. This substitution of laity for experts is indicative of a form of populism, which treats individuals' anecdotal experience as evidence and requires that political leaders prove they are in touch with such experience. This they seek to achieve by literally incorporating the voices of ordinary people into their own speech (Atkins and Finlayson, 2013, p. 171). In the contest over authorities, the abstraction "the British people" has risen to dominance.

### *Citing Culture*

Hobbes was critical not only of the use of citations as pretend authorities, but also of what he described as the 'fraudulent design' with which 'men stick their corrupt doctrine with the cloves of other men's wit' (1985, p. 727) – that is to say, the use of fine words from others to dress up our own dull and dubious thoughts. We have

already seen some instances of this, and in everyday life it is probably the most common reason for using quotations in a speech: they provide a form of words more fitting and elegant than any we can come up with ourselves. Such adornment can carry further connotations. In citing particular forms of culture we assume that our audience will be moved and affected in the way we hope, and demonstrate general erudition while indicating our familiarity with a specific canon of reference points; literary, philosophical and other ‘cultural’ quotations establish the extent to which a speaker is part of, and able to show fidelity to, a larger cultural tradition (including the tradition of speech-making itself).

For example, in her 1989 conference speech, Thatcher drew attention to shifts in Labour policy by remarking that:

Mr President, politicians come in many colours, but if you aspire to lead this nation: “This, above all, to thine own self be true.” You don’t reach Downing Street by pretending you’ve travelled the road to Damascus when you haven’t even left home.

The quotation is from *Hamlet* (Act 1, Scene 3), but is in effect proverbial - as well-known as the reference to the story of St Paul’s conversion. Its immediate purpose is, of course, to reinforce the claim that Labour’s policy changes are motivated by opportunism, and to contrast this with Thatcher’s own *ethos* of conviction. It is ironic that the line is from a comical speech by Polonius consisting of nothing but bland clichéd phrases (and expressive of the bureaucratic pomposity of his character). Yet, perhaps for this very reason, it carries connotative force: the archaism of ‘thine’

sounds like the sort of thing said in a formal speech (as opposed to the sort of thing said in casual conversation), and like the kind of thing a religious minister or head-teacher might say. In this respect, the words are woven out of and then back into the generic expectations of the audience before whom they were uttered.

Similarly, here is Harold Macmillan opening his 1958 speech:

Autumn – “season of mists and mellow fruitfulness.” It is also the season of political conferences. We have recently enjoyed reading about the first two – the Liberal and the Socialist Conferences. Those, of course, were the mists. Here we have had the fruitfulness.

Macmillan’s aim is to divide rhetorically the parties into those that lack clarity of vision and contrast them with his own, which is productive and fruitful – a point he subsequently reinforced by observing that the Young Conservatives had played a prominent role at conference, and that the Party’s debates had focused on the present and future rather than on the past. In addition to the joke, the effects of the citation derive from the poetic rather than prosaic nature of the words (and perhaps also from the audience enjoying recognition of the opening to Keats’ justly famous *Ode to Autumn*).

Three years later, Macmillan sought to render his imminent departure more poetic by saying: ‘For, like one of Shakespeare’s characters, I do not intend “To live after my flame lacks oil, to be the snuff of younger spirits.”’ (1961). The line is from *All’s Well That Ends Well* (Act 1 Scene 2), where it is said by the King of France. Yet again the



words make little sense if their original context is borne in mind. But they are quite apt as an expression of Macmillan's intention to make way for a younger generation. They also gesture at familiarity with literary heritage, but in a very careful way. To 'get' the reference, one does not need to know the play it is from – one needs only to know that there was someone called Shakespeare, that he is great and British, and that he is appropriately quoted (at least in 1961) by learned, leading men.

Labour leaders, interestingly, are more direct than Conservatives in their acknowledgement of the source of their words. They also tend to use them less as general colour and more as a way to rouse - combining optimism with a call to arms in a gesture so well rooted in the British social democratic rhetorical tradition as to be nearly synonymous with it. A typical example is the peroration to Neil Kinnock's 1989 speech:

It is not an empty claim to say that this Conference is one of progress, is one indeed of celebration, not one of relaxation or of complacency. In Robert Frost's words, we have "miles to go" and "promises to keep." That should always be a guide for socialism.

If one understands Frost's *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* to be a presentiment of mortality, then the quotation seems rather inapt (if less so with hindsight). A moment later, Kinnock continued:

I would like to put my feelings into words greater than anything I could ever produce, the words of Percy Bysshe Shelley:

‘A brighter dawn awaits the human day.  
When poverty and privilege,  
The fear of infamy Disease and woe,  
War with its million horrors and fierce hell shall live,  
But only in the memory of time’.

These lines are from *Queen Mab* - a poem with an important place in the canon of radical and revolutionary writing (although Kinnock’s rendition is not accurate, with some lines excluded and some words altered). Shelley’s poem was much quoted by Chartists; the section Kinnock uses also served as an epigraph to Moses Hess’s 1845 essay *The Essence of Money*.

Kinnock closed the speech by merging his own message with the words of Shelley, in order to inspire his audience with the prospect of a return to office and a better future for Britain:

Let us seek power. Let us earn power. Let us be elected to power. Let us use power to ensure that all of those evils are put into the memory of time and we shall greet the brighter dawn of that day (1989).

Shelley’s words carry the speech to its end not through their content so much as through their affective, elevated form, which brings it to the kind of crescendo everyone expects.

Labour leaders are more prone to literary citations than others, tending to draw on recognised parts of the radical tradition as constituted by the 20th century Left. In 1997, Tony Blair urged the embrace of technological and social change, declaring it perfectly natural since ‘change is in the blood and bones of the British, we are by our nature and tradition innovators, adventurers, pioneers’. As proof of this, he cited John Milton - whom he called ‘our great poet of renewal and recovery’ - describing ‘A nation not slow or dull, but of quick, ingenious and piercing spirit, acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discourse, not beneath the reach of any point that human capacity can soar to’. These are famous words from *Areopagitica*. In their original context they are part of an argument against censorship, but Blair glossed: ‘Even today, we lead the world, in design, pharmaceuticals, financial services, telecommunications’ (1997). Perhaps this use of Milton more properly belongs to the category of citation from authority: Blair employs the poet as a witness for the case that Britain is naturally a technologically adept nation. Yet Milton’s words also enabled Blair to speak in the language of his party’s ideological tradition, giving his modernising technological project a place within it.<sup>2</sup>

Such ‘cultural’ references peak during the long period of ideological division that runs from the mid-1970s to the start of the Blair era. This is because their use lies in affirming party identity, both for the purposes of going into battle and as a way of managing transition by articulating it to continuity; leaders take up an old script and begin to rewrite it. This is even more the case, as we will now see, with citations of others within the party.

### *Party Political Citations*

A common use of citation in leaders' speeches is as part of a forensic exposition of inconsistency or mendacity on the part of opponents. For example, in 1969 Wilson made reference to a recent attack on his government's 1967 application for entry to the EEC, delivered by Enoch Powell. 'But does he think this decision was wrong? Did he think it then?' asked Wilson, before citing Powell in 1967 expressing his support for the government's position. Usually, such comparisons are less specific. In 2000 William Hague, aware that anybody listening would know that it had been an almost total failure, reminded his audience of Blair's prediction that the Millennium Dome would be a 'startling and exhilarating success ... it will be the most famous new building in the world in the year 2000', and 'the first paragraph of Labour's next Election Manifesto'. For Hague, the Dome typified everything that was wrong with New Labour – excessive state interference, the precedence of style over substance.

Here, quotations connect a single speech act with others in a way that clarifies and affirms the differences between parties. This can also be achieved by using the words of figures from a tradition against those who have inherited it. In 1975, for instance, Wilson - as a way of attacking Conservative demands for spending cuts - cited Disraeli from 1862 denouncing 'mere abstract and declaratory opinions in favour of reduction and retrenchment'. Steel did the same in 1983, insisting that 'the Prime Minister listen to the words of her great predecessor Disraeli instead of the false prophets she has been following', before quoting him on the two nations and 'community of purpose'. Ed Miliband followed suit in 2012 with a conference

address built around the Disraelian phrase ‘One Nation Labour’ (see Gaffney and Lahel, 2013).

Particularly common is the citation of figures from the party’s past, who may also belong to an intellectual tradition. Thus, Steel made use of J. S. Mill in 1980 and 1985; Thatcher drew on Edmund Burke in 1982; R.H. Tawney was cited by Callaghan in 1978 and Kinnock in 1989; John Maynard Keynes by Wilson in 1974 and by Thatcher in 1975 and 1982. More common, however, is the citation of political predecessors. Wilson referred to Bevan in 1965 and 1968, and, in 1974, he gave his ‘favourite quotation ... from the last ever speech that Aneurin Bevan made in the House of Commons before he was taken ill’. Foot also cited Bevan in 1981 and 1982, and in 1983 he described Kinnock (about to take over as leader) as like a young Bevan. Kinnock himself went on to cite Bevan in 1985 and 1987.

In all these cases, citation contributes to the identification of personal *ethos* with that of the movement, connecting a current speech with others from the tradition. Indeed, Kinnock’s citation of Bevan was part of his famous 1985 speech attacking the hard Left of the Labour Party, and as such it is worth noting that these kinds of citation are particularly common at moments of internal conflict, where they form part of an attempt to heal divisions and reunite the party.<sup>3</sup> They are also part of a general tendency simply to name-check such figures. Blair was typical when, in 1997, he said ‘I’ll tell you: my heroes aren’t just Ernie Bevin, Nye Bevan and Attlee. They are also Keynes, Beveridge, Lloyd George’, thus uniting in himself the Labour and Liberal traditions. Similarly, Conservative leaders make regular mentions of Thatcher (e.g. Hague, 1998; Howard, 2005; Cameron, 2008), as she did of Winston Churchill. The

names of these figures are emblems of parts of the party tradition with which a leader wishes to be allied. The use of quotations from (and of general reference to) historical party figures enables party leaders to emphasise particular moments, inviting evaluation and reevaluation, and to align themselves with the tradition, seeking approval as its present embodiment. They present their credentials to be a curator of the past and, having shown due deference, seek to reinvent that tradition so that their leadership becomes its self-evident culmination.

### **Leadership as quotation**

Across the party leaders' speeches, we find quotation is primarily related to *ethos* – to the demonstration of the ideological credentials of the leader to their party followers and fellow-travellers and, latterly, to the attempt to prove familiarity with citizens' daily lives. Quotation weaves together elements of past and contemporary ideological traditions with the voices of that tradition and of exemplars of 'the public'. It forms part of complex affirmations of communal reference points, of the identity of the speaker, and of their fitness to be a representative and advocate not only for their political tradition, but for the nation as a whole.

Yet the authority or authorisation 'effect' of quotation is ambiguous. Rhetorical citation identifies a possible authority in the original author and claims this for the person citing it. However, citations are effective only if recognised and verified by the community of auditors; authority is dispersed, circulating between source, speaker and audience, in search of its own authorisation. This is especially true of citations that make limited sense in terms of their formal content, but which may work as

invocations of a mood or style; they are attempts to ‘strike the right note’, to resonate with audiences by proving what that right note is. For this reason, our investigation into the uses of quotation leads us to conceive of the conference speech itself as a rhetorical *performance*.

To conceptualise occasions such as a leader’s speech as ‘performances’ is to see them as total occasions; rather than thinking of speaker, topic and audience as isolated elements, we approach them as things that exist in relation to each other and as part of an overall activity. They are ‘rhetorical situations’ (Bitzer, 1999) – combinations of people, events and problems brought together by and for a particular occasion, which also shapes them through implicit and explicit ‘rules’ and expectations. Prior relations between speaker, audience and the topic, dispute or issue, as well as prior understandings of the situation at hand (knowledge of previous speeches, conventions as to what a good speech is like) comprise a history that bequeaths a potential vocabulary, ‘genres’ of speech, and a contained range of expectations. These are reinforced by the general staging of the situation, which organises the subjects and objects of a rhetorical performance in a familiar and conventional way, providing props (literal and figural) for the participants and cues that clarify the meaning or value of what is occurring.

In the case of party leadership speeches, one of the goals is a convincing performance as leader. But what is a convincing performance? In any such situation a speaker, as Erving Goffman puts it with reference to all kinds of social performance, ‘implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them’ (1990, p. 28). That role is one that ‘tends to become institutionalized in terms of the

abstract stereotyped expectation to which it gives rise, and tends to take on meaning and stability ... [it] becomes a “collective representation” and a fact in its own right’. (1990, p. 37). In many such situations, the required roles are well-defined. When it comes to weddings and funerals, for instance, we have a very clear idea of what the officiator should and should not do, and at least some of the words are sufficiently well-established as to be effectively invariant: “We are gathered here today”, “I now pronounce you...”, “ashes to ashes...”.

The role of leader is not quite so tightly specified; a performer is in a position to, in Goffman’s terms, ‘project’ a ‘definition of the situation’ and to ‘make an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of particular kind’. He or she informs the audiences ‘as to what is and as to what they *ought* to see as the “is”’ (1990, p. 24, emphasis in original). A leader cannot be all things at all times. They have to choose elements from party, ideological and national traditions, and decide which of several potential roles to emphasise: conciliator, traditionalist, innovator, warrior, and so on. As the anthropologist Victor Turner has put it, in social performances the successful adoption of a part requires ‘taking for granted the culturally defined roles supposedly played by that character: father, businessman, friend, lover, fiancé, trade union leader, farmer, poet’ (cited in Alexander 2006, p. 58).

A successful performance, then, is one that is recognisable as such; it is one that looks like what we expected or hoped for. And part of what a speech tries to do is convince us which of our many potential expectations and hopes is most important to us. Orators are helped in this by the elaborate setting of the speech, which works towards a successful performance (the arrangement of the venue, the timing and build-up to



the ‘show’ and, in latter days, the warm-up video and accompanying music). They are helped also by the repetition of the generic structure of the party conference speech. Such addresses begin with a ritualistic marking of time (the period which has elapsed since the party last met, the previous occasions when they have met in that venue, the evocation of anniversaries); commemorations of recently deceased party icons are very common; there is always thanks expressed to others in the party hierarchy; the peroration always commits the party to victory. These are established parts of the performance. A political actor seeks to repeat and to adapt this established ‘script’ so as to embed themselves in an imagined tradition, even as they add to or amend it. In this way, authority comes from the tradition itself, fidelity to which is merely verified by the recognition of the audience as they experience it manifested, renewed and transformed through the delivery of the leader. Quotation is a part of this since, as we have shown, it connects speech acts together in a new weave. In a more general sense, the leaders’ speech ‘quotes’ all the other speeches of the kind that it invokes and imitates. This is a point we can develop further by reflecting on another category of citations: those which are inexplicit or allusive.

In 1999, Blair wanted to explain his understanding of the new global forces to which the country had to respond. ‘All around us the challenge of change’, he said, ‘a spectre haunts the world: technological revolution’. No explicit citation was given, but this is of course a not-so-covert reference to the preface to *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Blair did not stop there. In the face of technological revolution, the 21st century would, he said, be centred on the knowledge economy, where success depended on people fulfilling their potential. But, he warned, ‘People are born with talent and everywhere it is in chains’. This is Blair’s unstated ‘version’ of Rousseau.

These references may be an in-joke on the part of speechwriters or a deliberate attempt to show subtle reverence to historical giants of radical political theory. Either way, they are citations of ‘the sort of thing’ a serious yet radical person says when telling the world that what it thinks is its comfort is its slavery, and that it must rouse itself for the work of transformation. The formality of citation is not necessary, only the familiar nature of the phrase and a sense of its aptness in the context.

Here is a more obscure example. On 13 October 1978, Margaret Thatcher delivered the last speech to the Conservative Party conference that she would give as a mere party leader. This address ranged widely, touching on the failings she identified in her Labour opponents and in trade unions, and upon what were already her characteristic themes of race, nation and the Cold War. Her peroration, naturally, sought to rouse the party to victory. Speaking of the ‘Conservative Faith’, the prime minister-in-waiting declared in her final three sentences: ‘It is my personal faith and vision. As we move towards Government and service may it be our strength and inspiration. Then not only will victory be ours, but we shall be worthy of it’. With these words, which brought her audience to their feet, Thatcher sought to fuse her personal faith with that of the party, inviting the latter to take strength not only from its commitment to itself but also directly from her.

That last sentence is a partial and adapted citation of these words from Act 1, Scene 2, of Joseph Addison’s 1712 play *Cato: A Tragedy*: ‘’Tis not in mortals to command success; but we’ll do more, Sempronius, we’ll deserve it’ (1811, p. 221). A tragic, and to modern sensibilities perhaps also overwrought, drama, *Cato* is not tremendously well-known today. But its depiction of a Stoic’s refusal to give way on

his commitment to liberty and to the idea of the Roman republic, even as the mighty armies of Caesar approach, was, in its day, a wild success and for many an inspiration (Miller, 1999). When Trenchard and Gordon, from 1720-3, wrote their Whig tracts, they chose to present them under the name of Cato, inspired by Addison. *Cato's Letters* in turn became hugely influential in the American colonies, where Addison's play was George Washington's favourite: he thought the title character an excellent role model, and had the tragedy performed for his soldiers during the War of Independence. The lines that would later be a reference in Thatcher's speech were used by Washington in a letter to Benedict Arnold: 'It is not in the power of any man to command success; but you have done more — you have deserved it'.<sup>4</sup> Today the play is, in effect, part of the canon of North American free-market liberal culture — a canon that Thatcher did not cite directly but which she nevertheless invoked — sounding like a particular kind of leader from a particular sort of ideological and performance context.

All party leaders' speeches are multiply allusive, as they echo phrases, maxims and gestures of other speeches in ways that may enable audiences to see (and to experience in a particular way) the nature of the performance in which they are participating. This is how we might interpret Miliband's 2012 'Disraelian' address. Here, the citation enabled Miliband to lay claim to a national political tradition, asserting the right to make use of a particular authority (implying that his political opponents might have lost that right), and thus formed part of an attempt to rework the range of sources available to a Labour leader.

In a sense, the entirety of a leaders' speech to conference is a quotation: one does not only say the sorts of things said in such a speech because one is a leader; one is a leader because one says these things. That is to say, such set-piece rhetoric is both a performance and *performative*. It is a 'performance' that is 'felicitous' (Austin, 1975) 'not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech but only because that action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices*' (Butler, 1997, p. 51, emphasis in original).

## **Conclusion**

We begin our own peroration with (naturally) a quotation:

Just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionising themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before ... they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honoured disguise and borrowed language ... the heroes as well as the parties and the masses of the old French Revolution, performed the task of their time – that of unchaining and establishing modern bourgeois society – in Roman costumes and with Roman phrases.

This – as many in our intended audience will know – is taken from Marx's famous essay *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in which, as James Martin perceptively notes, Marx recognises in events 'the symbolic dimension in which they unfolded' and the fact that – for all the claims for the priority of the base over the

superstructure – ‘the symbolic is not simply some secondary “level” perched upon the hard rock of property relations but is itself integral to the materialisation of class power’ (2002, p. 129). Institutional and resource-based forms of social or political power have historical effectiveness only insofar as they can be materialised in and through the extant symbolic forms that a people uses to communicate: political power must take a detour through the worldview of those over whom it is to be exercised and play the role allotted to it. In Alexander’s words, ‘To struggle for power in a democratic society one must become a collective representation - a symbolic vessel filled with what citizens hold most dear ... a broad expression of the moods and meanings of the nation’s democratic life’ (2010, p. 18); political actors present themselves as grand protagonists and ‘exemplifications of sacred religious and secular texts’ (2006, p. 52).

Identifying, describing and comprehending these symbolic dimensions of political action is, we believe, an important task for political science and political theory. This task involves identifying the domains and genres (both formal and informal) of rhetorical performance in British political life, and examining how their use varies between ideologies and changes over time. That in turn leads to questions about the limits to such performances, the players and parts that are encouraged and those which are systematically written out of the script because their words are rendered structurally ‘unintelligible’ (Butler, 2004; Carver and Chambers, 2008, pp. 126-8).

Equally important is the study of how speech performances fail. We have tended to write as if rhetorical performances are always effective. This, of course, is not the case. Public mistrust or disinterest in politics may be evidence of the extent to which

they do not. The shift in reference from party and ideological culture to ‘ordinary’ people may be a sign of desperate rewrites by rhetoricians who know their speeches are failing to connect with their audiences. They are also experiencing ever more intense competition, as the contemporary public sphere contains a variety of stages for broadly political performances. Alongside traditional legislative arenas, there are media platforms for celebrities, cyberspace for all, and temporary settings such as Zucotti Park. As these stages proliferate, so too do the genres, styles and sources of political communication, and the performances of politicians risk seeming hopelessly out of place. In this context, the question of the authority of authority takes centre-stage as the political issue of our time (and is played out in dramatised contests over Britain’s role in the world, the science of climate change, and in domestic scandals around probity and corruption). This is a problem commanding the attention of many subfields of political studies, and one about which the theory of political rhetorical performance has much of value to say.

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<sup>1</sup> The corpus is incomplete. No formal Labour leader’s speech was delivered between 1952 and 1963 (inclusive), and Liberal Party/Liberal Democrat speeches are unavailable for 1946-62 (inclusive), 1964-76 (inclusive), 1990, 1991, 1995, 1997 and 1998. The unusually high number of citations in 1979-84 is largely attributable to the fact that we have the full complement of speeches delivered by David Steel – a prolific user of quotations – for this period.

<sup>2</sup> There are also instances of citations from popular culture, primarily to mock political opponents and always intended as humorous. For example, Macmillan (1962) used Jerome Kern’s and Otto Harbach’s *She Didn’t Say Yes* to make fun of ambivalence over entry into Europe; in 1980 Thatcher humorously praised Lord Carrington thus: ‘When I think of our much-travelled Foreign Secretary I am reminded of the advert, you know the one I mean, about “The peer that reaches those foreign parts that other peers cannot reach”’; in 1993 Paddy Ashdown made fun of John Major with reference to the folk-proverbial *Antigonish* ‘As I was going up the stair, I met a man who wasn’t there. He wasn’t there again today, I wish, I wish he’d go away’.

<sup>3</sup> Thus, in 1980 James Callaghan remarked: ‘Mr Attlee is coming back into favour. He is being quoted by all and sundry. Every time I read an article or hear a speech I hear a quotation from Clem. I must say it only goes to show what happens to us after we are dead’. He then cited Attlee’s warning that ‘Self-criticism is a healthy thing as long as it does not lead to a paralysis of the will ... [a party] may discuss its own internal conditions to such an extent that it disgusts all those with whom it comes in contact’ (quoted in Callaghan, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> Of numerous other examples, see Rosebery (1896) and Rees-Mogg (2006).