
Rhetoric Characteristics In Poems Success Is Counted Sweetest And Second Inaugural Address

Abstract

This paper discusses why Emily Dickinson's poem Success is Counted Sweetest should be considered rhetoric just as much as Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. This paper also discusses the negative connotations and the positive connotations of rhetoric as described by philosophers Plato and Aristotle respectively. The six characteristics of rhetoric, as well as the four resources of language, are used and discussed as a way to determine whether or not these two texts are considered rhetoric.

A Rhetorical Analysis of Rhetoric

Rhetoric has an enormous influence on everyday life. As I am writing this paper, this is a process of me using rhetoric to extort my ideas and opinions about rhetoric. Should I be allowed to use rhetoric? It depends on which Greek philosopher you ask. Plato would argue that rhetoric could be a dangerous and extremely powerful art that should not be practiced. However, philosophers such as Aristotle believed that rhetoric was a beautiful thing that should be taught and shared with the world.

Plato's arguments proved to be true as discussed in the text The Rhetoric of Hitler's "Battle". The text described the evil man that is Adolf Hitler. The text describes how he, with his exceptional oratory skills, convinced millions of people to fight for his cause. His cause was terrible, Hitler is one of the most known names around the globe. He was a fascist dictator who had great hatred towards what he believed was the world's twin evils, namely communism and Judaism. His aim was to eradicate both from Germany and moreover stressed his intention to unite all Germans in the process of destroying them. He was mainly known for how he slaughtered millions of Jews. Or better said, how he convinced people to do this terrible bidding for him. People followed Hitler and his tyranny because he was a very charismatic speaker. In a time of economic crisis, he seemed to have promised all the right things to get people to oblige to his desires. He had all the rhetorical points needed to be a successful orator.

Aristotle's argument reigns true in the many powerful speeches given around the world by politicians, motivational speakers, religious leaders, and others. A perfect example of positive rhetoric is Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address served as a purpose to persuade and strengthen his fellow countrymen into fighting a war within their country. Lincoln provided hope to his fellow countrymen that the war would end and that the nation would heal as one rather than be split as it was at the time. This just proves the power rhetoric has over people. The Union fought bravely against their fellow Confederates and won the civil war, granting freedom to all slaves in the United States of America.

Lincoln wasn't the only one around this time attempting to establish hope. A famous poet by the name of Emily Dickinson was also attempting to establish a sense of happiness and success after the Union bravely fought the war and won. While both are persuading and encouraging

others to fight a war, have hope, and are encouraging the celebration of success, why is Lincoln's speech considered rhetoric while Dickinson's writing is considered poetry?

According to John Harrington, Lucy Series, and Alexander Ruck?Keene (2019), "...rhetoric was long identified with the very substance of law and politics." with that being stated, it makes sense that Lincoln's Second Inaugural Speech, a speech made by a president who was elected for a second term, is considered rhetoric. Lincoln's Second Inaugural Speech contains all six characteristics of rhetorical discourse. We know these things are planned, they are written in context with the world situations and as a thank you for being elected. It was adapted to an audience of mid- Civil War United States, shaped by the motive of ending a Civil War and hope, responded to the situation of the ongoing war, persuasive to make others look forward and fight for a cause, and was concerned with the issue of a war between the north and south of a country.

Do the six characteristics of rhetorical discourse fit within the realm of poetry? It depends on the poem. In a recent study, Torrey Shanks claims that rhetoric should be adopted in a more broad notion to include creative and effective speech. Jonathan Cullen (2013) defined poetry's relationship with rhetoric as:

Poetry is closely allied to rhetoric — the study of the persuasive and expressive resources of language. Poetry is a language that makes abundant use of figures of speech and language. In literary theory, a poem is both a structure made of words (a text) and an event (an act of the poet, an experience of the reader, an event in literary history).

In the case of Emily Dickinson's *Success Is Counted Sweetest*, all the boxes check out. All forms of writing require careful planning on how it will be structured, what it will say, who will it be for and this is especially true for poetry. It was adapted to the citizens of the United States during a war crisis within their own country, shaped by the human motives of joy after winning the war. The poem responded to the post-war United States situation and with the persuasive element of feeling happiness at the ended war. Finally, it was concerned with the contingent issue of the Civil War.

It should be noted that both of the texts have all four of the resources of language – argument, appeal, arrangement, and artistic devices. Dickinson's poem argues that success is better appreciated by those that always fail. She appeals to pathos and the success earned in a romantic form, and it is arranged in a three-stanza lyric poem. The poem uses the literary device known as an aphorism. In Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, he argues that change is coming soon once the Union defeats the Confederates. Lincoln appeals to ethos by mentioning his attempt to end the war, it is arranged in essay format to be given as a speech. Finally, the artistic device used is the call to action.

Should Emily Dickinson's *Success Is Counted Sweetest* be viewed as just poetry? No. Dickinson's poem has the six characteristics of rhetorical discourse as well as four of the resources of language. I believe that Emily Dickinson's poem *Success Is Counted Sweetest* should be considered rhetoric within the genre of poetry. Both of these texts should be considered to have the same level of importance. The importance is relevant to the person receiving the text. Someone might not be a fan of Lincoln at this time and find Lincoln's speech stupid, but that same person might be a lover of poetry and resonates with Dickinson's poem much more deeply.

Discussion

Although rhetoric has been a long-discussed topic, everyone has different interpretations about what rhetoric is and what it includes. Even when rhetoric first became an idea, there were arguments on different aspects of it. The arguments included but were not limited to: whether or not rhetoric should be used, is rhetoric helpful or problematic, and what are the aspects of rhetoric.

It was eventually narrowed down that in order to determine if a text was rhetorical or not it must contain the six characteristics of rhetoric. If the text contains these six characteristics, planned, adapted to an audience, shaped by human motives, responsive to a situation, persuasion-seeking, and concerned with contingent issues, then it is considered rhetorical discourse.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Emily Dickinson's poem *Success is Counted Sweetest* is a work of poetry that checks all the boxes to be known as rhetorical discourse. It is short but that shouldn't matter in the world of rhetoric. Lincoln's *Second Inaugural Address* is a well-known piece of rhetoric and it had a huge influence on the attitudes of citizens of the United States during the Civil War and it is a common example of what rhetoric should look like. The six characteristics of rhetoric are easy to spot and discuss in Lincoln's *Second Inaugural Address* while Dickinson's *Success is Counted Sweetest* is harder to distinguish. The length and structure of a text are not specific requirements to be considered rhetoric, therefore Dickinson's *Success is Counted Sweetest* is a piece of rhetorical discourse that brought happiness to newspaper readers in the post-Civil War timeline.