

ENGLISH ADVANCED: *SPEECHES*

Great speeches have no ‘use by’ date; those that utilise the power of persuasive rhetoric will retain the ability to resonate with audiences over time. Spotty Handed Villainesses and Faith Hope and Reconciliation are prime examples of speeches that transcend time, due to each speaker’s effective manipulation of rhetorical devices to create textual integrity, meaning an overall unity or coherence, or in the words of Aristotle, “the ability, in each particular case, to see the available means of persuasion.”

Margaret Atwood’s status as a renowned, internationally successful writer gives her instant ethos among literary groups, which was evidently her intended audience as her topic is the writing of fiction, and she alludes to many specific literary examples that would be familiar to an educated audience. However, the orator’s ingenious use of humour illustrates the key difference between Spotty Handed Villainesses as compared to Bandler or Keating’s speeches; Atwood’s purpose was not solely to inform or persuade, but to entertain. She establishes rapport in the first moments of her speech through the familiar children’s rhyme: “There was a little girl/Who had a little curl...” The incongruence of the rhyme, coming from such a highly literate subject, raises the audience’s curiosity, humorously introducing the main idea of her speech: the dichotomy of the “Angel/Whore split”. The speaker analyses her own response to this rhyme as a five year old: “it brought home to me the deeply Jungian possibilities of a Dr Jekyll-Mr Hyde double life for women”, again using incongruent humour to create a warm relationship with her audience, due to the unlikelihood of a child understanding the concepts of psychiatrist Carl Jung and having such a highly educated response. In this way Atwood sets up the main argument of her feminist speech: the inequality that exists regarding the depiction of good and evil women in literature – an inequality that, as she explains in a topical aside, transcends literature: “the average jail sentence in the U.S. for men who kill their wives is four years, but for women who kill their husbands... it’s twenty.”

Atwood artfully weaves humour throughout her speech through use of personal anecdote and cheeky tone, creating textual integrity that allows any audience to identify with the message conveyed. She introduces the notion of “breakfast”, a term that becomes a recurring motif and in-joke with her audience, very early in the speech through a deeply personal anecdote. Using simple sentences and a didactic, colloquial tone she explains that in real life, it is alright for nothing to happen however in a novel, “we certainly expect something more than breakfast.” The orator repeats this motif numerous times throughout the text, creating a coherence that strengthens her connection with the audience. Other examples of the strong coherence in ‘Spotty Handed Villainesses’ include the repetition of the high modality, definite imperative, “Novels are not...” which employs the rhetorical device of anaphora, as well as the recurrence of the image of language and the writing process as indefinite and undefinable: “a medium which is notoriously slippery”, “like wrestling a greased pig in the dark.” Atwood skilfully alludes to countless pieces of literature, which exemplifies her personal context and allows her audience to connect with the underlying message of the speech through familiar references. The most obvious allusion is the one featured in the title itself; Atwood refers to, “that most famous of spots, the invisible but indelible one on the hand of the wicked Lady Macbeth.” She maintains a flippant tone through colloquial understatements: “Shakespeare is not big on breakfast openings” and the irreverent treatment of God and religious beliefs: “God – who is among other things, an author – is just as enamoured of character flaws and dire plots as we human writers are.” The speaker refrains from becoming too sophisticated for her audience, ensuring she maintains a connection and continues to engage her listeners by constantly making humorous asides: “It happens to be my favourite meal”, hypophora: “What is a novel anyway? Only a very foolish person would attempt to give a definitive answer...” and complimenting her listeners: “let me go over some essentials which may be insulting to your intelligence...” While we can only hope that the underlying issue of Spotty Handed Villainesses, that of gender equality and justice for all, will one day be a non-issue, Atwood’s speech has no ‘use by’ date due to her effective use of rhetorical devices to create a speech that demonstrates brilliant textual integrity.

Faith Bandler speaks from a vastly different cultural background and context to Atwood in *Faith Hope and Reconciliation*, however she addresses similar values of equality and justice through various rhetorical techniques. Faith is an Australian civil rights activist of South Sea Islander heritage, best known for her leadership in the Indigenous rights campaign for the 1967 referendum. Bandler's personal context informs the speech and her personal voice is strong throughout, which creates empathy: "There was a little sadness because I felt the reconciliation program had slowed since 1967..." The title of the speech is a pun on the speaker's name and alludes to the biblical, "Faith, hope and charity", serving to create immediate intrigue. The informal and polite opening with the repetition of "thank you" to the Indigenous custodians also adds to the appeal, creating ethos; it is a testament to her genuine passion for the topic on which she speaks. Bandler's colloquial style and use of collective pronouns: "At this conference we might ask ourselves if our efforts are enough to make this country a better place for those who come after us", allow her personal warmth to permeate the speech, inspiring listeners to take her point of view. The orator uses high modality language and a figurative idea in the line, "None is without fault, none is without blemish, but they greatly outnumber the objectionable and the crude" to divide her audience into two groups: those sided with the speaker, the "fair-minded", and those opposed: "the objectionable and the crude." Bandler very cleverly makes her argument seem the only logical option – an excellent use of the rhetoric to persuade her audience.

Bandler skilfully employs many of the same rhetorical techniques as Atwood, although she manipulates them to suit a very different argument, appealing to a very different audience. The notion of a physical struggle to represent the hardship faced by the Indigenous people is a resonant motif throughout, which creates appeal through textual integrity. The language soars through cumulative expression and pejorative verbs: "lived, breathed, struggled and climbed those ramparts of the rugged past." The alliteration emphasises the struggle imagery that represents the Aboriginal fight for justice and equality, which recurs later in the speech: "rights are not handed on a platter by governments, they have to be won." Another resonant motif in the text is a visual image, describing those against racial equality as "willingly blind" and "deliberately blinkered". She argues the ridiculous nature of the opposing argument by combining this visual imagery a statement of hyperbolic impossibility: "those who close their eyes to the past... those who long for a homogenous society where all think alike."

The appeal in *Faith, Hope and Reconciliation* stems from Bandler's ability to engage with a tone that does not antagonise or offend, but rather, acknowledges the dark past and looks toward a hopeful future. She is self-effacing: "My learning was rather hard and slow" and calls on the Marxist ideal: "if praise must be given it ought not to be given to the powerful but rather to the powerless", to appeal to the value of ordinary people. Bandler paraphrases JFK to draw on his ethos as well as to give her speech contextual weight, by referencing the speech made at the height of the American civil rights movement: "this movement should be one wherein we should ask not what is in it for me, but what is in it for us." The anaphora in the repetition of the imperative "It is about" has a cumulative, didactic effect, clearly conveying Bandler's underlying values of equality and justice and relaying her hopes for the future. The speech is characterised by bold statements and emotive language, which evoke an emotional response from immediate and contemporary audiences alike: "a genuine people's movement can move more than governments. It can move mountains"