

## Shakespeare's King Henry V as a Skillful Rhetor

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Henry V

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### Abstract

Public Speaking is the art of making a speech before an audience, irrespective of the place. There are certain key elements to be followed in the art of speaking as propounded by the Greek philosopher, Aristotle. Such techniques when adopted in one's speech enhance the power and success in one's rhetoric. Shakespeare, the Great English dramatist, has shown his expertise in the use of rhetoric in his writings in all his plays. This paper tries to prove King Henry the Fifth, one of the historical characters of Shakespeare, as a man of rhetoric through the analysis of a heroic speech made by him to his soldiers, cleverly following the nuances of Public Speaking.

**Key Words:** Public speaking, rhetoric, Aristotle, Shakespeare, Henry V.

## Introduction

Public speeches can be informative like lectures, to persuade as sermons and political speeches. They can be delivered during special occasions such as award ceremonies, memorial speeches, introduction of people, commemoration and acceptance of honors (Lucas, 2007). The art of Public Speaking can be traced to the ancient Greek orators and Aristotle was one of the first recorded teachers of Oratory to have set down definitive rules and models. There are five basic elements of Public Speaking according to Lasswell's model of communication (Berg and Carnegie, <http://manybooks.net>) such as the communicator, message, medium, audience and effect. It answers to the questions -- who communicates, what is communicated, through what channel, to whom and with what effect.

## The Art of Rhetoric

Rhetoric was defined by the Greek philosopher Aristotle as the faculty of observing in any given case of persuasion, in his work, *The Art of Rhetoric*. Expression of one's thoughts and information to the audience alone does not matter in a Public Speaking event but how the listeners are moved by the words and their meanings by altering their emotions, and attitudes and actions of the speaker matter a lot. Aristotle has categorized three appeals under three basic parts of Persuasion as Ethos (credibility of the speaker), Logos (logic behind any conclusions drawn by a speaker) and Pathos (emotional appeal or ability to create connection between the speaker and his audience). These make a man a great rhetor or a speaker (Nikitina, 2011).

## Shakespeare, the Master of Rhetoric

Chronicle plays in the Elizabethan period were written as an appeal to the mass of people to promote patriotism. William Shakespeare, belonging to this period, was no less skillful in projecting his characters especially the warriors as masters of rhetoric. Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address in 1863, Sojourner Truth's Identification of racial issues in "Ain't I a woman?", Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech at the Washington Monument in 1963 inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's message of Non-Violence, and Churchill's speech on sinews of Peace prove to be great public speeches. In Shakespeare's plays, speech of his every character stands as a testimony to a complete example of rhetoric. In the array of Shakespeare's

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unparalleled creations of Pericles' Funeral oration on the Peloponnesian war, Mark Antony's Oration on the death of Julius Caesar and the Bishop of Carlisle's Prophetic speech, comes the great speeches of King Henry the Fifth that highlights not only the chivalry of the king but the genius of Shakespeare in the use of rhetoric.

### **Background of King Henry V**

Shakespeare's historical plays *Henry IV Parts I and II* and *Henry V* are grouped under the Trilogy. These three plays deal with the fortunes of the house of Lancaster. The history of Henry IV's reign is taken up and continued in two parts of the play, named after him. As it is not a peaceful reign, he has to abandon his penitential pilgrimage and has to face the rising of Henry Persey, otherwise called Hotspur, aided by the Scots and Welsh rebels. Prince Hal, the son of Henry IV, associates himself with the unrestrained companions, headed by Falstaff who robs the travelers and plays pranks. Hal is called by his father for the amendment of his character and is entrusted with a wing of troops against Hotspur. To everybody's astonishment, Hal emerges victorious in the battle by slaying Hotspur. Henry IV on his death-bed, advises Hal to begin a war abroad to distract the attention of his subjects. It's where Hal incarnates himself as the brave Henry V by casting off his old associates.

### **King Henry V as an Able Rhetor**

The chivalrous and enchanting speech of King Henry V occurs in Act III Scene I of the play *King Henry V* addressing the young English soldiers who are marching towards France with him. England is left in the charge of men, women and children. They siege Harfluer. He declines the French king's offer of his daughter Katherine's hand and some dukedoms. Henry summons his men to the breach made in the walls of Harfluer as,

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;  
Or close the wall up with our English dead.  
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man  
As modest stillness and humility:  
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,  
Then imitate the action of the tiger;

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Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,  
Disguise fair nature with hard-favour'd rage;  
Then lend the eye a terrible aspect;  
Let pry through the portage of the head  
Like the brass cannon; let the brow o'erwhelm it  
As fearfully as doth a galled rock  
O'erhang and jutty his confounded base,  
Swill'd with the wild and wasteful ocean.  
Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide,  
Hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit  
To his full height. On, on, you noblest English.  
Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof!  
Fathers that, like so many Alexanders,  
Have in these parts from morn till even fought  
And sheathed their swords for lack of argument:  
Dishonour not your mothers; now attest  
That those whom you call'd fathers did beget you.  
Be copy now to men of grosser blood,  
And teach them how to war. And you, good yeoman,  
Whose limbs were made in England, show us here  
The mettle of your pasture; let us swear  
That you are worth your breeding; which I doubt not;  
For there is none of you so mean and base,  
That hath not noble lustre in your eyes.  
I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,  
Straining upon the start. The game's afoot:  
Follow your spirit, and upon this charge  
Cry 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George!' (Lines 1-34)

## **Employment of Three Appeals**

Henry V gives the motivational speech with three appeals Ethos, Logos and Pathos when some of the soldiers are ready to abandon war. He inspires them to take charge once more and win the battle. He stirs up their courage with fiery words kindling them to “imitate the action of the tiger”. He wants them to replace kindness with rage and put on the grimmest looks. He reminds them of the heroic tradition and heroic example of their ancestors. He appeals to them to prove as worthy sons of their fathers. He proclaims to the yeomen that they should show them as the worthy sons of England.

### **Ethos**

Ethos forms the possession of certain level of authority and knowledge about the chosen topic by a speaker. In other words, it is the knowledge of the topic or subject by the speaker. Henry V, knowing well the temperament of the soldiers, conducts the siege operations himself. He opens his speech with a demand to either advance to the breach or close it with a heap of dead. He is very clear that as a king, he has to be authoritative to his kinsmen. He instills their ferocity like a tiger when the blow of wars is heard keeping aside humility and modesty that are not befitting that time. Their fair countenance should have rage with which the enemies can be made to flee from the spot. He refers to the brows, eye sockets, nostrils and teeth to be as tempestuous as ocean that makes the rock tremble. He appeals to the active part to be played by each human part of the soldiers, thus serving well the purpose of employing the appeal of Ethos.

### **Logos**

Logos constitutes the logical, informative and clean manner of the speech to bring home correctly the message intended to the audience. It is the knowledge of the audience about the subject. Henry V is very wary in submitting his speech with logical canons so that the message he has intended can be brought home. He brings in the logical evidence of the victory of their ancestors referring them as “Alexanders” and their belonging to such a heroic tradition. It is an indirect instruction to the soldiers that they are the descendants of heroic battle and their defeat in the battle would be the highest disgrace to the heroic tradition. He excellently appeals to the

Logos also through the metaphor of drawing a bow comparing to the drawing up of the spirits of the soldiers.

### **Pathos**

Pathos encompasses the emotional appeal to the listeners by the speaker even at the outset to hold the interest and attention of them throughout the speech. It is the arousal of the emotions of the audience by the speaker. A King is more a kith and a kin to his subjects than a normal comrade. Henry V never falls short of such compassion and benevolence towards his subjects. He touches upon the emotions of the soldiers emphasizing that they should prove themselves to be the worthy sons of his fathers. He insists that they should not bring dishonor to their mothers. He knows well that any reference to the blood relations arouses the emotions of the soldiers. He emphasizes that their victory would assert their heroic blood and earn a great name to his forefathers. He calls forth an emotional patriotism among the soldiers towards England.

### **Conclusion**

Henry V has, thus, emerged as an efficient Rhetor by his exuberant appeal to the Ethos, Logos and Pathos through his upraising speech. He could create a rising tide among the soldiers and bring them triumphant with their martial fight in the battle with the Dauphin of France. He is very stabilized in his disposition of ideas as haste shows lack of control. His mastery over audience vitalizes the speech. Thus, through the oratory skill of Henry V, Shakespeare has endorsed himself as the eminent playwright wielding over the English language for centuries.

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