

Andre Orengo
Writ 300
Dr. Ryan
4/10/22

Herb Brooks: The Miracle Speech

By using both Kenneth Burke's theory of identification and an overarching analysis of the audience addressed and audience invoked from Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford's essay, we will see why appealing to an audience while also identifying who and why makes up that audience is one of the most crucial aspects of any good speech. A good speech invokes a reaction from the audience and inspires them to make a difference, take what is being said, and put it to use in their own life. Herb Brooks delivered his famed speech before the Russia-USA hockey game in the 1980 Winter Olympic Games. The entire weight of the country fell on the backs of these young players. Inspiration was needed, and Brooks delivered. By using and intertwining both an audience analysis and a Burkean analysis that focuses on identification, we will be able to identify how Brooks was able to persuade his audience (the players) to unify under the notion of defeating the common enemy.

142 words are all it took to recite one of the most inspirational speeches in the history of sports. The speech itself is not very long, and in fact, no sentence is longer than 15 words. He takes small pauses in between sentences letting each audience member have time to really digest what is being said. The speech is packed rich with grit, resilience, and inspiration that was much needed for that young group of Americans who were about to face the best team in the world. Before we get into the deep analysis of the text, we first need to fully understand what Burke means when it comes to his theory on identification. Burke explains identification in the sense that "A is not identical to with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A

is identified with B. Or he may identify himself with B when their interests are not joined if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so" (Borchers and Hundley 178). Identification and persuasion in rhetoric are oftentimes compared side by side as equals, yet identification goes much more in-depth. While yes it still falls on the rhetorician to bring them together, identification also relies quite heavily on the audience involved and the aspects of self-persuasion as seen in Burke's explanation of identification. This idea of coming together and aligning themselves with their common interests is shown throughout the speech. "you were born to be hockey players-every one of you, and you were meant to be here tonight" (Brooks). While he may be individualizing each person, he is in fact at the same time grouping them together because of their interests as hockey players. This makes each individual player believe that they are all here for the same reason sparking that notion of unification. It takes both the players and their leader to help them realize how similar their interests need to be in order to be successful. In another part of the speech, Brooks says "tonight we are the greatest hockey team in the world" (Brooks). He specifically uses keywords such as "we" and "team" to enforce that point to his audience that to be successful they must come together as a unit rather than as individuals.

There are three main types of broad identification, yet for this speech, it is clear that 2 are used the most in order to inspire and connect the audience. The first one to focus on discusses how the rhetor creates an "us versus them distinction" (Borchers and Hundley 180). By doing so it creates the illusion that we the audience need to stick together and defeat the "enemy". While it may be clear in this situation who the so-called enemy is, Brooks still feels it necessary to address the soviets and increase the audience's drive to take them down. In one of

the final lines of the speech, Brooks says with fierce passion “I’m sick and tired of hearing about what a great hockey team the Soviets have. Screw ‘em” (Brooks). The rhetor in this situation does an excellent job of bringing his team together as they now all have an identifying trait and goal together, which is to bring down the Soviet Union hockey team. “The third type of identification derives from situations in which it goes unnoticed” (Borchers and Hundley 180). The textbook goes further into explaining that “using the word *we* to unite audience members with the rhetor is a powerful, yet subtle type of identification” (Borchers and Hundley 180). It is common practice that sports teams unite under the powerful term “*we*”. When you play team sports it is no longer about the individual, but the collective group. To have success in sports you must be a collective “*we*” and not a singular “*I*”. Brooks reiterates that in his speech when he says “Tonight, we skate with them. Tonight, we stay with them. And we shut them down because we can. Tonight, we are the greatest hockey team in the world” (Brooks). By continuing to reinforce the collective “*we*” he establishes the connection between rhetor and audience, and makes it clear that they are all united to defeat the common goal.

When it comes to the rhetor's ability to influence the audience, it is crucial to identify how Burke's pentad of analysis is used. “The pentad is a method of analysis that focuses the critic's attention on the types of words used to describe what people are doing and why they are doing it” (Borchers and Hundley 181). The five terms of the pentad are act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. Herb Brooks focuses on act-agent and act-agency to unite his audience and inspire them to victory. The act is known as “what happens or takes place” the agent is known as the “person or persons who perform the act” and the agency is “means through which action takes place” (Borchers and Hundley 181). The agent intended in this speech are

the players, and the act is portrayed as the events that lead to getting here. The only way to truly identify these factors is to look directly at the speech. The opening line begins with "Great moments are born from great opportunity, and that is what you have here tonight, boys." (Brooks). He ends his speech with "This is your time. Now go out there and take it!" (Brooks). "The relationship between two pentadic terms is called a ratio" (Borchers and Hundley 182). Ratio's in this sense characterize how one term influences the other as they work together in unison. This particular aspect of the act-agent relates itself with how they got there, the opportunity that is in front of them, and how it is now or never to pounce on that chance. The agent in this scenario can draw motivation and inspiration from these words and now have the chance to act on what was said. As we shift over to act-agency we can draw correlations from what was just learned from act-agent. The only difference is that now we take a look at the speech as to how the act will get done. Brooks gives clear instructions on how this dream is possible by saying "Tonight, we skate with them. Tonight, we stay with them. And we shut them down because we can" (Brooks).

By using a Burkean analysis and introducing aspects of audience analysis as well, it is hard to find a flaw in Herb Brook's famed pre-game speech. You can clearly pinpoint areas in the speech that display key methods related to Burke's Pentad. While Brooks speech has clear aspects of persuasion throughout, you can clearly see Burke's ideas of identification in the speech as well. To me, identification is just persuasion with a deeper sense of connection with the audience. It turns the audience into a more crucial aspect of judging whether or not it was a good speech. A rhetor can say what he wants and feel as if he has persuaded the audience and convinced them that what he said is true, but only once the audience members become

mediators of change can you acknowledge the true power of the rhetorician. That is exactly what happened that night in Lake Placid when a rag-tag group of college kids defeated the best hockey team in the world.

Work Cited

Ede, Lisa, and Andrea Lunsford. "Audience addressed/audience invoked: The role of audience in composition theory and pedagogy." *College composition and communication* 35.2 (1984): 155-171.

Borchers, Timothy, and Heather Hundley. *Rhetorical theory: An introduction*. Waveland Press, 2018.

Brooks, Herb. Winter Olympics, 22 Feb, 1980, Lake Placid, New York.