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English 400

Rhetorical Analysis of Winston Churchill’s

Their Finest Hour Speech

Parallel approaches have been integrated into some of the most influential speeches given throughout history that have made them successful. Techniques such as introducing philosophy, logos, pathos, keeping your speech short, using anecdotes and desirable audiences are just a few of the key features of great dialogue. The speech I have chosen to analyze is Winston Churchill’s “Their Finest Hour.” This speech was given at a time when Europe was experiencing the atrocities of the second world war. The historical value in this speech is unfathomable, less than a month after the rise spirits, England engaged the Nazi’s head on which is now known as the Battle of Britain. However, Britain continued to encounter intense bombings from the Nazi’s from their Blitzkrieg strategy. Churchill concentrated on what he needed from his people, such as patriotism and determination. These ideas, along with others, are examples of a repetitive element, which are seen throughout this speech and are common ineffective rhetoric. He justified his requests by explaining that the history of their people and the world was in jeopardy. By appealing in a reason-based manner, he transcended the scenario to inspire action and determination. The Kairo’s that are provided throughout this speech was assisted by two key factors; Churchill announced that the allies would be joining them, and explained the possibility of their extermination. The emotion in the delivery of the speech showed that he truly believed and wanted his people to believe that they could overcome the terrifying odds they had of winning this war. Churchill’s audience was categorized as being in a state of fear, but by disseminating his words of courage, he provided his people with the emotional relief that aided with the defeat of Hitler.

For the most part, the basic message that he was trying to convey was that Hitler’s attempt at world domination was growing closer and closer every day. The Nazis were winning almost every battle in Europe and the British army needed to fully administer their entire country’s concentration on defeating them. He began by discussing the status of British and France. He stated some of the battles that had occurred and included their locations. He discussed the statistics of relative information as well to keep his people informed. He then moved on to discuss how the naval sector was going to be pivotal in the tough roads ahead. He emphasized that the situation had grown farther and farther in the Nazi’s favor. They had expanded through most of the middle and western parts of Europe. This meant that the Nazi’s had reached the coastline and were now in danger of being invaded. This situation is almost impossible to express without diminishing morale. However, Churchill’s rhetorical dissemination inspired his people. He did so by his conviction in that there was no losing this war, or surrendering, even if they wanted to. This was because losing this war didn’t mean that the battles would be over, it meant that society and the world would be over. This ties back ties to the Kairos previously stated in the essay. The emotional expressiveness was a major contributor to the successfulness of their finest hour.

“This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.” Statements such as these are what awoken the spirits of Britain’s damaged charisma. However, on June 18, 1940, Churchill’s audience went beyond just the citizens of England. Churchill’s message spread like wildfire, inquiring all of those fighting against the Nazi’s to understand the state that England was in and to fight alongside each other, nation by nation. “But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all we have known and care for, will sing into the abyss of a new dark age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science” Churchill blatantly targets the United States along with the rest of the world to fight against the tyrannous Nazi party. The audience was the world, and Churchill made that clear in his speech. The various global audiences that Churchill had to appeal to was a very important aspect of this speech. The nation’s that he was targeting in his speech were the United States, Russia, France and all of the European countries that were annexed by the Nazi army. Churchill’s address intended to unite all of the nations being threatened by Hitler, which is how the creation of the allies formed in World War II.

Churchill has been regarded for the level of emotion he delivers in his speech. This admirable attribute was very relevant and seen throughout this speech. However, this speech was unique in that showing too much emotion may cause the listeners to feel over-emotional swell which wouldn’t be a good scenario. The situation was very sensitive and he knew that overemphasizing or embellishing his tone of voice might have a fearful response from his audience. Churchill counteracted this by maintaining a level of formality throughout this speech. He spoke with urgency, and conviction, but did not show fear or any signs of resignation. The threat of invasion loomed on all of England’s shoulders but Churchill continued to brighten spirits through truth and determination.

Something that is not commonly known about this speech was that Churchill had just recently been elected to the audience. Only 6 weeks into his term, the prime minister might have been faced with one of the toughest tasks possible, defending his nation from being invaded. However, he did not let the fact that he was new to the position get in his way. He set out to convocated the countrymen of Britain during the 36 minutes of dialogue along with rallying the global alliance of World War 2. The final statement said in the speech “Let us, therefore, brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, ‘This was their finest hour’ ” is possibly one of the most impactful rhetoric ever disseminated. The reason for its significance is not only recognized by the word for word content but the results it produced. His oratory propelled throughout Europe and across the Atlantic, inspiring all enemies of the axis power to rise and fight back. The address allied with Russian and United States military powers, along with creating the resolve British people needed to fight back knowing that right across the water from them France had just fallen.

“Their Finest Hour” is the unofficial title of a speech delivered in 1940 by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, shortly after the beginning of World War II. Churchill composed the speech to boost the British people’s morale as they faced off against the Nazi regime as its blitzkrieg spread throughout Western Europe. With the Nazi occupation of Paris, the United Kingdom became the only surviving sovereign state and resorted to desperate action to preserve its national border. Churchill’s speech is seen as an important rallying cry in response to the efforts taken in Operation Dynamo and the famous evacuation at Dunkirk. “Their Finest Hour” is an example of masterful oration, blending logos and pathos to galvanize its audience into retaliatory action.

Churchill begins with a logical appeal for the likelihood of British victory over Hitler’s armies. Knowing that his forces are quickly losing morale, he reminds his audience that several British military cohorts have led successful attacks alongside the French. The prime minister argues that the recent French failures were the fault of their commanders and, therefore, have no bearing on the outcome of the British war effort. He also reminds his listeners that the successful evacuation at Dunkirk has bolstered the ranks of available officers seasoned in Nazi warfare to face off against Hitler, whose armies are smaller than Britain’s. He suggests that for this reason alone, Britain is effectively impenetrable. He also dismisses the idea of a successful air assault, claiming that the British air force is used to inflicting several times more losses than it suffers. He points to the example of Dunkirk, where the German air force lost three or four officers for each British loss. He speculates that when the air force is defending its homeland, the ratio will be even higher. He then assures his audience that Britain is not alone in the fight against Nazi oppression. Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, each a former British colony, had all pledged support. Britain’s supplies were also bolstered by aid from the United States.

Churchill complements these logistical figures and speculations with an emotional appeal. He compares the plight of Britain and the formerly free states of Europe to the events of World War I. At the beginning of that war, the Allies took incredible losses and despaired for their individual and collective futures. This constant fear cast a specter over Europe until the tides of battle suddenly turned and they emerged victoriously. This historical example gives Churchill the hope and emotional resilience he wishes to impart to the British people. He demonstrates a masterful use of imagery, especially the classic binary opposition between light and dark, describing Britain as a place of beauty and light that will vigorously oppose Germany’s fascism and despotism. Churchill laments that the British people would give up and let the losses of so many Poles, Czechs, French, and other Europeans be in vain. He states, moreover, the British people are responsible for the salvation of people suffering throughout Europe, especially the ones that they have promised to protect. To Churchill, it is completely insensible to accept a self-defeating prophecy; the only way to gain a fighting chance against Hitler is to conceive of it as possible in the first place.

In his speech’s climax, Churchill emphasizes the inherent Christian goodness of Britain, asserting that its religious foundation must be protected at all costs. He warns against the creation of a “Dark Age” in which the world is controlled by Hitler. Finally, he rallies for a future in which the British Empire and Commonwealth have endured for a thousand years, and whose men look back on the Second World War and recall it being “their finest hour.” From this section, the speech obtains its name, symbolizes national pride, nobility, and virtue.

The impact of Their Finest Hour immediately resonated through Britain and the rest of the world. It was said that it motivated the French general Charles de Gaulle to urge the remaining French forces to fight harder. It also foreshadowed the Battle of Britain, which began mere weeks after Churchill’s official address. When the war ended five years later, Churchill’s address was recognized as prophetic and empowering, leading to its canonization as one of the greatest oral addresses ever made.