**A Cautionary Eulogy**

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**Introduction**

When a diplomat delivers a public message to their country, particularly one in remembrance of those whose lives were lost, it is done with particular care. Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, delivered “Remarks on the Deaths of American Personnel in Benghazi, Libya” on September 12, 2012. With carefully placed emphasis, her speech was not only meant for her mourning nation but was carefully coded to send a greater message abroad. Her firm and subtly aggressive tone that accompanied her speech paid tribute to those whose lives were lost while hinting at the rhetoric hidden in her message – that the United States condemned the actions in “the strongest terms (Clinton, 2012).” Clinton’s remarks are significant in that they can be characterized as a eulogy because it typifies the category, in that it shows both a recurrent problem, purpose and societal limitations – death, by nature, is a recurrent problem we face; the purpose that the eulogy was meant to fulfill; and the societal limitations which include that the address was given with careful consideration of those who had passed and whose lives were honored. Though the textbook refers to a genre analysis of a eulogy as one of the most limited and all-too-common category of rhetoric, this particular eulogy is more weighted and structured by its purpose and agenda – to pull a community back together so that healing can occur while justice is pursued. By looking at this specific category of rhetoric, it will be easier to both describe and evaluate Clinton’s remarks to define it explicitly as a eulogy despite any other underlying purpose. This paper will look at whether the artifact can first off be characterized as a eulogy and then will apply the seven defining characteristics of a eulogy – including typical form, content, substance and style – to further expand and prove its effectiveness.

**Background & Literature Review**

Late on September 11, 2012 an attack on the American consulate in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi resulted in the injury of four Americans, seven Libyans, and the death of four Americans including the U.S. Ambassador to Libya, Christopher Stevens. Heavily armed Islamist militants coordinated the attack on the U.S. consulate, setting fire to the compound and vehicles contained within. The attack was purported to be in response to an amateur American-made Internet video that mocked Islam, subsequently outraging Islamists (CBS, 2012). The instability in Benghazi first warranted an increased U.S. intelligence agency presence to monitor known terrorist operations in the region; particularly after Libya suffered through a Civil War which left the country struggling under a new leadership after the fallen regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi (CBS, 2012). The CIA deployed some of its elite counter-terrorist operators, targeting Libyan militias with known connections to terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda. At the time of attack, it was reported that U.S. operations were underway to secure Libyan chemical weapon stockpiles, shoulder-fired missiles and were helping to train a new Libyan intelligence service – overall, working to police a region suffering from great instability and divide under the new leadership (Murder, 2012). Stevens, whom had been appointed to the ambassador post only 6 months prior by Hilary Clinton, was visiting the Benghazi compound to review plans to establish a new cultural center and modernize a hospital (Obama, 2012). President Barack Obama paints Stevens as a martyr, stating, “He helped the Libyan people as they coped with violent conflict, cared for the wounded, and crafted a vision for the future in which the rights of all Libyans would be respected (Obama, 2012).”

“For many Americans the killing of Christopher Stevens, their ambassador to Libya, this week crystallized everything they have come to expect from the Arab world,” reported an article written by anonymous in *The Economist*. The loss of Stevens and three other Foreign Service agents was a powerful blow given the pervasive Arab stereotype that still permeates and captivates the American mind. They saw Stevens as a father, son and brother, someone they had lost in the 9/11 attacks; someone who had given their life to serve their country overseas in an ongoing ideological battle between the Democratic United States and the Autocratic Arab world. Particularly in reference to the 9/11 attack, Clinton recognizes the compounding difficulty faced in the knowledge that the crime was perpetrated on an anniversary, “that means a great deal to all Americans (Clinton, 2012).”

The societal context that this artifact reflects and is impacted by is that of the continuing conflict that pervades U.S. and Arab world relations. This background detail on the conflict and way in which Stevens was symbolically memorialized as a hero fighting the war on peace speaks to the effective language and unifying theme of Clinton’s speech (The Eloquent Woman, 2012). It offers better insight and analysis of her remarks in that, not only did the president publically eulogize Stevens and his comrades, but Clinton too addressed the nation from a more personal standpoint because she knew the deceased and had personally hired Stevens. The event was overall declared an “act of terror” by Obama and because the controversy over the embassy attack was played out for weeks in the American media, it warranted the attention that it got from both President Obama and Secretary Clinton (Gutteridge, 2012).

**Method of Analysis**

When someone dies, grief is created that needs to be addressed and acknowledged within American society; and if that particular person’s life was taken unjustly, justice will be sought and expected because the practice is a commonly accepted American value. In the 19th century, more religious references would have been a typical norm contained within a eulogy; wherein, today that is not the case. Longer and more flowery prose and addresses characterized eulogies of even a couple of decades ago, but today within the American society those eulogies are more subdued as they are not as constrained by societal factors as the once were. Genre analysis allows one to identify the norms within a category and compare an artifact to those norms to see if they meet the qualifications and standards of the particular rhetoric and ultimately determine whether it was a good speech. By knowing the specific category, it allows for a focused description and evaluation of the rhetoric because common terminology, methods and patterns thereof can be identified and developed. First and foremost, the aforementioned recurrent problem, purpose(s) and societal limitations need to first be identified in the work to characterize it as a eulogy and in turn proceed in a step-by-step genre analysis. The second step can be defined as furthering the first in that those purposes previously mentioned need to be specifically met, including – the direct confrontation of death; the purpose of bringing closure to the relationship with the deceased; the purpose of helping the audience confront the inevitability of their own mortality; and finally, the effort to pull the community back together so as to be able to confront the death, find closure and move on. Finally in the final step, a eulogy is a specific genre that can be analyzed based on the seven typical characteristics that make up the distinctive form, content, substance and style of the eulogy – the eulogy must confront the death of the person; the tone should be somber, particularly in the beginning; the content of the eulogy should be personal; the eulogist should tell the meaning of the life of the person who has died, not a resume of their life; a good eulogy is a rhetorical journey from pain to catharsis; also, a good eulogy recognizes that the deceased lives on in some way; and finally, the eulogy must be adapted to the specifics of the person’s life. In this particular analysis, Clinton’s speech can be appropriately categorized as such because it can be identified as containing a recurrent problem, purpose, societal limitations and the seven typical characteristics which make up an effective eulogy.

**Report of Findings**

Clinton’s remarks address the first component of a typical eulogy in that death as a recurrent problem is faced within the introductory paragraphs of her eulogy. The fact that death is a reality and recognized as a problem is best identified when Clinton said, “All over the world, every day, America’s diplomats and development experts risk their lives in the service of our country and our values (Clinton, 2012).” She indirectly alludes to the inevitability of death, particularly for those individuals who are at a higher risk because Clinton recognizes that they are making greater sacrifices in striving to be a force for peace and progress in the world (Clinton, 2012). Clinton also specifically notes her individual connection with Stevens, acknowledging the personal nature of his loss when she said, “I asked Chris to be our envoy to the rebel opposition.” Clinton’s eulogy recognizes the recurrent problem of death which also lends a hand to identifying the four purposes fulfilled by an effective eulogy that Clinton follows. First, she confronts the death of Stevens and the other U.S. agents directly by acknowledging the loss. Second, Clinton works to bring closure to the relationship she had personally established when she mentions how she spoke with Stevens’ sister to offer her personal condolences. Her eulogy recognizes the very personal meaning and nature of her relationship specifically developed with Stevens; as opposed to the broad generalities often expected of leaders of state when they are asked to present a eulogy acknowledging and honoring a person they might never have met. Third, as was expanded upon in the identification of the recurrent problem, Clinton acknowledges the audience’s own mortality – with particular emphasis to the increased risk of those serving their country – when she said, “In the lobby of this building, the State Department, the names of those who have fallen in the line of duty are inscribed in marble.” She acknowledges that Stevens and the other Americans were not the first and nor will they be the last to lose their life in the line of duty. Finally, Clinton addresses the fourth and final purpose when she said mid-speech, “There will be more time later to reflect, but today, we have work to do.” She recognizes the unity and oneness experienced as a nation when grief is created, confronts their deaths and then encourages the community to reestablish itself in order to focus on those who are still alive and serving. “There is no higher priority than protecting our men and women wherever they serve (Clinton, 2012).” The third and final component of a eulogy – the societal limitations – is best represented in Clinton’s speech when she follows what is appropriate given the context of her speech. While there is a notable edge of warning and severity in her voice, she is largely subdued and monotone when presenting her speech. Clinton does reference God throughout her speech, not typical in today’s diverse American society. This is likely the case because the cause of the stressor which led to the crisis was that the militants felt that they were acting on behalf of their God who they felt had been so severely offended; so by acknowledging a higher power on the most subliminal level, Clinton attempts to find a common ground across any and all denominations to deny them any power to declare their actions as divine and just. She is also relatively brief and concise in her delivery; and most importantly out of all of the societal limitations in effect, she does not speak ill of the dead.

Now that Clinton’s speech can be appropriately categorized as a eulogy based on those identified factors, it is important to analyze whether it was an effective speech by delving deeper to see whether she applied the seven characteristics of form, content, substance and style. First, the death of Christopher Stevens, Foreign Service information management officer, Sean Smith, and two other Americans is acknowledged. Clinton applies this characteristic best in her second to final paragraph when she acknowledges the anniversary of 9/11 and the concurrent tragedy in 2012 – a date which will now remember not only those lost in the terrorist attack on 9/11/01, but those whose lives were lost in another subsequent terrorist attack on 9/11/12. The pain of the past and present is confronted and overall Clinton openly recognizes this pain when she said, “we have new heroes to honor and more friends to mourn.” Second, Clinton’s tone is somber when presenting her speech; with particular emphasis and pause when introducing the first paragraph and grave context of her speech. Third, the eulogy is personal because of her established connection with Stevens in particular. Fourth, Clinton elaborates on the specifics, without too much detail, of those whose lives were lost. She first introduces Chris Stevens as a man who, “fell in love with the Middle East as a young Peace Corps volunteer teaching English in Morocco. He joined the Foreign Service, learned languages, won friends for American in distant places, and made other people’s hopes his own (Clinton, 2012).” She defines the meaning in Stevens life as his effort to build relationships with Libya’s revolutionaries in an attempt to build a better Libya. In less than two minutes of a ten minute speech she gives us the meat and potatoes of who Stevens was and a description of the essence of who he was. The same applies to Sean Smith whom she acknowledges as a father who spent his life in service of his country. This was particularly effective in Clinton’s case because the audience can walk away not overwhelmed and inundated with facts about these two individuals lives; but rather, have a broad and purposeful overview of that which was most important and defined their individual character. Fifth, in some ways Clinton develops a journey from pain to catharsis in her eulogy, and in some ways she falls short. Knowing the context of the conflict and that it is not one that is going to resolve itself in the near, perceivable future, it is hard to stimulate a cathartic release because there is still the foreboding presence of a tangible future conflict. This is probably the biggest challenge Clinton faced in writing her eulogy - How do I encourage resilience while recognizing the attack(s) as being a recurrent theme? She does her best to depict this rhetorical journey in her speech when she alludes to being knocked down, but getting right back up to brush off the dust and keep working in every corner of the world to make American the greatest force for peace in order to avoid any future conflict (Clinton, 2012). Sixth, Clinton comforts the living audience when she acknowledges in her eulogy that the names of those who have fallen in the line of duty will be inscribed in marble and they will be honored and mourned on the 9/11 anniversary. Their memorialization is also created when Clinton acknowledges that the deceased and their work lives on in the work of their comrades’ world-wide. Finally, this particular eulogy is appropriately adapted to the specifics of the character of those who died. They served their country and Clinton serves them in her speech by acknowledging that as a nation, they will continue to support and honor the, “thousands of Americans working in every corner of the world who make this country the greatest force for peace, prosperity, and progress, and a force that has always stood for human dignity – the greatest force the world has ever known (Clinton, 2012).”

**Conclusion**

This particular eulogy must also be recognized as not fully or entirely serving the purpose of memorializing these said individuals. In one defining and overwhelming way, Hilary Clinton’s speech was meant as much for a mourning nation as it was meant to send a message that acts of terror and violence would not be tolerated. Her message was one with a dual purpose – to respectfully remember and eulogize the dead, but also caution and warn those who had perpetrated the crime. This warning is probably more effectively interwoven into a eulogy because of the innate emotional response that any eulogy elicits. Hilary Clinton’s speech can be appropriately characterized as an effective eulogy because it considers the societal and cultural contexts while recognizing a recurrent problem, purpose and societal limitations, while adhering to most if not all of the seven characteristics of an effective eulogy.

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