

Rhetorical Analysis of *Come September* by Arundhati Roy

The modern life does not stop striking one with injustice and cruelty that happens in the world. Some are silently observing what is going on around them; others take some stand and become outrageous supporters of their views. As writer's role in most general sense presupposes a firmness of one's position concerning this or that event crucial for the development of the country he or she lives in, Arundhati Roy has her own views on the actions of the United States government and shares them with the readers and listeners afterwards.

The main point that the author makes is that the US government does not succeed in establishment of good relationship between power and powerlessness. Reading her speech I interpreted this idea in a slightly different way: it is in the United States' interest to divide the world for those who are with them, and those who are against them.

The readers/listener's attention to the problem discussed is attracted with the first sentences. The author admits that she is going to read her speech out loud and stresses on the two reasons for reading: first, she is a writer and she feels more comfortable when she writes and not tells and, second, the complexity of the problem under consideration increases the responsibility of the one who deals with it: "I think we have to be very, very precise about what we're saying and how we say them and the language that we use" (Roy 1).

Once the readers'/listeners' attention is drawn to the problem, the author aims at finding the necessary words that will not scare the audience off. Due to the seriousness and the acuteness of the subject under analysis the author seems to run risks because of being misunderstood. She warns the audience that she is not "an ideologue who wants to pit one absolutist ideology against another, but as a story-

teller who wants to share her way of seeing.” She goes on: “Though it might appear otherwise, my writing is not really about nations and histories; it’s about power. About the paranoia and ruthlessness of power. About the physics of power” (Roy 1).

I like the way the author presents her views on power: she states that she believes the accumulation of vast unfettered power regardless the institution, the authority or the person that accumulates it inevitably leads to excesses of power. The speaker makes the problem understandable for everyone, thus she helps the audience realize that no one can stay aside, everybody has to take some position.

The reality of life is that those who are this or that way concerned with American problems are either “Americans” or “Anti-Americans”. Those who blindly follow the demagogical principles of the US government are treated as “Americans” by it; those who criticize the actions of the US government are considered “Anti-Americans”. The author ruthlessly attacks those who pin labels of the types. She asks a lot of rhetorical questions that cannot but touch the readers’/listeners’ hearts and make them find adequate answers:

But what does the term “anti-American” mean? Does it mean you are anti-jazz? Or that you’re opposed to freedom of speech? That you don’t delight in Toni Morrison or John Updike? That you have a quarrel with giant sequoias? Does it mean that you don’t admire the hundreds of thousands of American citizens who marched against nuclear weapons, or the thousands of war resisters who forced their government to withdraw from Vietnam? Does it mean that you hate all Americans? (Roy 2)

As far as this problem is concerned, the speaker concludes that to call someone “Anti-American” does not simply mean to be a racist but to suffer from lack of imagination as well, as this implies “an inability to see the world in terms other than

those the establishment has set out for you” (Roy 2). Though it sounds rather categorical, it is indeed a characteristic feature of the contemporary policy that USA dictates to the rest of the world: “If you’re not a Bushie you’re a Taliban. If you don’t love us, you hate us. If you’re not Good, you’re Evil. If you’re not with us, you’re with the terrorists” (Roy 2). I wonder why the author did not use all capital letters in these utterances? To my mind, this might have contributed to the author’s persuasiveness.

To support her point, the speaker suggests a lot of examples of inadequate actions of the American government. Different actions of the government on the world arena get the speaker’s bright description; she constantly reminds the audience that drastic consequences might have been avoided if the US government could think of other nations but for the American one. The author’s point is that every problem can be resolved without resorting to acts of war:

Should Delhi, Islamabad and Dhaka be destroyed? Is it possible to bomb bigotry out of India? Can we bomb our way to a feminist paradise? [Laughter] Is that how women won the vote in the U.S? Or how slavery was abolished? Can we win redress for the genocide of the millions of Native Americans upon whose corpses the United States was founded by bombing Santa Fe?
(Roy 2)

The terrorist attack 9/11 warned the American administration that every evil caused by it to other nations is penal. Nearly three thousand inhabitants were lost in that fatal terrorist strike. The author chooses laconic and, I would say, sharp sentences to render the horror of the situation: “The grief is still deep. The rage still sharp. The tears have not dried. And a strange, deadly war is raging around the world” (Roy 2). The last sentence emphasizes the fact that the whole world faces the disaster that can only be stopped by the United States. What worsens the situation is the US

government's unwillingness to stop the war that was once started by them. The idea that America is interested in this war runs through the whole Roy's speech.

War inevitably brings deaths. "Grief, failure, brokenness, numbness, uncertainty, fear, the death of feeling, the death of dreaming" (Roy 3) are eternal companions of war. The author speaks of the meaning that loss has for people who got used to live with these feelings and states that measures should be assumed immediately to change the current situation.

Constant applause throughout the author's speech signifies the audience's support of her ideas. When the author sounds witty speaking about the actions of the US government the listeners' laugh can be heard. This means that the author managed to touch the listeners' hearts and make them think of the problem of the American politics on the international scene. The author encouraged everyone to understand that the problem is not so distant as it might seem, unfortunately, the disaster knocks already at the doors of each and every. No one knows what aspect the US policy of "moral equivalence" can get at a new stage of its development. Will it be some new sanctions against the peoples like Iraqi or some new tendencies will appear in the American policy?

The speaker quotes the words of the former US ambassador to the United Nations, Madeleine Albright, concerning the drastic results of the American sanctions in Iraq: "It's a very hard choice, but we think the price is worth it" (Roy 5). I cannot get how a woman can talk of some mathematical calculations when it comes to a death of at least one innocent child. I suppose that on the statements like this the policy of the United States in its complexity and atrocity is based. Governors like Albright make the world more cruel and indifferent to others' grief.

Another quotation that the author provides her audience with is Donald Rumsfeld's one. He once said that the mission of the Americans in the War against Terror was to persuade the world that the Americans must be allowed to continue their way of life (Roy 8). Though it is hard for the speaker to admit, but she does state that "The American Way of Life" is simply not acceptable. Because it doesn't acknowledge that there is a world beyond America. I suppose, a storm of applause that comes after these words speaks for the listeners' acceptance of this cruel but objective truth.

As long as the world is run by the three of the most secretive institutions which all are dominated by the US, the net of the War against Terror will become wider and wider. If adequate measures are not taken, the system of American war policy will fail by itself, not only because too few people usurp too much power but because it is flawed. To paraphrase Roy, this system is "constructed by the human intelligence" but "undone by human nature" (Roy 8). Isn't it high time to use intelligence and neglect the drawbacks of our nature?

I suppose that at last America has to understand that the world is not divided into Americans and non-Americans, and it does not revolve on the American axis. As there is no pure black and pure white color in nature, there is no sharp division of the world into those who are for and those who are against Americans. The US government needs to understand that those who do not support its actions will not necessarily take some actions against it. The preventing policy appears to be a rather beneficial one in a number of cases, but how cannot the US government see that the price of it is too high? I do realize that it is much more convenient to close one's eyes to the drastic results that the governmental policy has and enjoy the

benefits that it has for one's country, but one day the policy of the type will definitely ruin the whole world. So, is the price worth it?

Works Cited

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