Fred to Evelyn: A love story gone wrong?

Nathan Benya

University of Iowa
Rhetorical Analysis:

In the midst of March 1943, a letter was written to John N. Calhoun while he was on leave from his home in Burlington, Iowa. This letter was written by his wife [Dorothee] and daughter who is referred to as Kiddie. It is evident that [Dorothee] and Kiddie love and miss John dearly. Throughout the old, worn out letter, the author focuses on setting the mood to connect with John to assure him that he is missed by his family at home, but is also fulfilling a great service by being away. In his novel, *Thank You for Arguing*, Jay Heinrichs explains how it is important to set goals for the audience. When arguing or attempting to sway someone’s opinion in a certain direction, it is important to set the mood to make a point clear.

In this letter, a calm mood is set from the very first sentence “just a few lines before I turn in for the night.” Dorothee continues by recapping business events from the week, how the housework has been coming along, and how the days have been going by. After setting a mood of boring, routine life, she jumps into her next thought and brings up a mutual friend, Raymond Wright. Raymond was transferred to a new location in New Orleans with decent living facilities.
[Dorothee] uses Heinrichs’ technique “appearing to take the middle course” (73) by giving John her opinion on his future plans, as well as asking for his opinion. When reflecting on Raymond’s move to New Orleans, she writes, “that wouldn’t be a bad place to go, would it?” Clearly she likes the idea of John moving to a similar area, but she does not want to force him into doing anything he is not comfortable with.

After this more serious topic, [Dorothee] changes the mood to a happier topic by using Heinrichs “three traits of ethos; cause, craft, and caring” (68). To catch John up on life at home, she informs him of where their friend John is going for spring break, how Marian is doing, and what the weather is like. Then, she uses her rhetorical craft to change to a more personal mood by telling a short story (Heinrichs 95). She explains, “I asked Carol today whose girl she was and she said I’m yours when daddy isn’t here and when he’s here I’m his.” Bringing this up shows how much he means to Carol and clearly proves that they both miss his presence. The letter comes to a close by letting John know they are counting the days until he gets home and finally ends with “hugs and kisses,” which further express how much [Dorothee] and Kiddie miss him.

**Historical Analysis:**

As of March 23, 1943, John N Calhoun was known as a beloved family member gone to war, but before that, his life was very different life. According to the information donated to the Iowa Libraries by Mrs. John N Calhoun, John N Calhoun began practicing law in Keosauqua, Iowa after graduating with a law degree from the University of Iowa. In 1933 to 1937, before the
leaving his family during World War II, Calhoun served as a senator in the Iowa state legislature as an active Republican. In 1936, he campaigned for Congress. Because he was unsuccessful, he left and moved to Burlington to begin another law firm.

In addition to his legal practices, Calhoun was a member of the National Guard. His service in the military began when he was released from the National Guard during World War II. According to the information provided by Mrs. Calhoun, John was stationed in the Middle East for the majority of the war “as part of the Judge Advocate General’s Office”. Unfortunately, more specific information on his role in the Judge Advocate General’s Office was not accessible.

March 1st, 1943 was the beginning of processed food rationing in the United States. Because winning the war was the country’s main focus, Americans had to ration, grow their own foods, and use what little materials they had available to their full potential. For [Dorothee] and Kiddie, this change would have required them to make a conscious effort to save food and other materials. Overseas, between March 20th and 28th, Montgomery’s Eighth Army broke through the Mareth Line in Tunisia. According to Mrs. John C Calhoun, John was in the Middle East during this time. It is possible that he was involved with the attacks on Tunisia, although there is no hard evidence to verify.

The letter [Dorothee] and Kiddie wrote is interesting because there is no mention of John Calhoun being in another country. [Dorothee] mentions how she hopes John will be sent to New Orleans or somewhere with good living facilities. She also wrote about friends
of theirs, the weather, and a part she ordered to fix the furnace. After researching more about what was going on at this time, the letter almost sounds too casual. John faced endless amount of danger in the Middle East and [Dorothee] and Kiddie were definitely struggling to go on with their lives as normal without John there to help them.

Written by: Jessie Stein

Works Cited


