

Analysis of the
rhetorical strategies
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kingsolvers' "high tide
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“ High Tide in Tucson” by Barbara Kingsolver attempts to enlighten its readers to the harsh reality that results from leaving home and demonstrate how our animal-like qualities keep us going. Kingsolver writes to the people who have already moved away from home and the people who may follow that path someday in hopes of providing some emotional support and guidance — guidance she believes could have helped her with the conflicts she encountered throughout her life. Barbara Kingsolver uses philosophical diction and the emotional connection created between her audience and the hermit crab in order to illustrate the disembodying struggle of leaving home and transitioning to adulthood, and the animalistic adaption that is required to move along with the natural ebb and flow of life. Her use of the emotional connection successfully relates her audience to the ideas present in her essay; however, her use of philosophical diction fails to support her claims, creating an excessive amount of warrants that can conflict with the audience’s opinions.

One of Barbara Kingsolver’s main rhetorical strategies is her use of philosophical diction. While philosophical diction can add profound concepts to one’s writing, the strategy also creates a great deal of warrants that, if the reader or readers have a conflicting opinion, will only succeed in creating frustration and/or a lack of interest in the argument and ideas suggested by the author. In “ High Tide in Tucson,” Kingsolver fails to effectively use philosophical diction thus finding herself in the rhetorical hole created by the warrants she forces her audience to accept. She assertively states philosophy as fact: humans are animals; “ the most shameful tradition of Western Civilization is our need to deny we are animals” (272). She explains

how humans have a tendency to create many wants but have only a few needs. As Kingsolver establishes more and more warrants, her arguments begin to lose meaning. The new concepts created from the establishment of warrants create tangents that force the reader to struggle to comprehend the significance of her claim. Her use of philosophical diction, such as the idea of her child absorbing strength and rhythms from the tree under which her umbilical cord was buried years ago, fails to relate to the logical audience. The warrants created from the use of this strategy disconnect the mindset of many readers and the mindset of the author due to the lack of factual evidence used to establish the warrants themselves.

However, the first half of the essay establishes a strong connection through the introduction of Kingsolver's hermit crab, Buster. Buster was accidentally smuggled from the Bahamas to Arizona in a common tourist mistake: the collection of seashells. Kingsolver describes the peculiar patterns that Buster followed after his illegal international transportation: the hermit crab seemed to follow some sort of mysterious cycle — transitioning through series of absolute restlessness and depression-like stillness — of which its origin was unknown. After some research, Kingsolver discovered that intertidal oysters who have been transplanted from their natural habitat will live according to the high and low tides of a different point on the globe. Since they are unable to feel the highs and lows of their own home, “ the oysters [are] doing there best.” Kingsolver concludes “ when Buster is running around for all he's worth, I can only presume it's high tide in Tucson.” Kingsolver connects Buster's struggle to the common “ North American” act of leaving home. She describes her transition from Kentucky to Tucson and how “[she]

had no earthly notion that [she] was bringing on [her]self a calamity of the magnitude of the one that befell poor Buster.” No matter how attached she becomes to her Kentucky home, no matter how many friends and family she discovers, she “ never cease[s] to long in [her] bones for what [she] left behind.” She still wishes she had never left home; she feels disembodied and wonders if she can ever know who she was and who she could’ve been. This sense of disorienting misplacement has created an environment in which, like Buster, she must do her best to adapt and listen to the secret tides. She learns from the losses she has experienced — a knife to the stomach, a miscarriage, a car accident, an attempt of robbery — in order to create an environment worth living in. While Buster was accidentally transplanted from the Bahamas to Arizona and Kingsolver drove from Kentucky to Tucson, they both have felt the magnitude of this transition and been forced to adapt to their new surroundings. Kingsolver looks back to her ancient animal instincts of survival, family, basic cravings to consume and reproduce with hopes of guidance in times of loss. The connection that we humans have to animals like Buster the hermit crab grants us the ability to adapt to the challenges life throws in our direction.

Overall, Kingsolver’s writing style effectively demonstrates the struggle of leaving home through the establishment of a powerful connection between the audience and the hermit crab, Buster. Readers can easily relate to the difficulties that both Buster and Kingsolver had to face in throughout their lives. However, her use of philosophical diction is unsuccessful in capturing the audience’s attention. In general a rhetorical essay should avoid this type of strategy due to the excessive amount of warrants it forces upon its

readers. “ High Tide in Tucson” fails to properly use philosophical diction in order to illustrate the significance of the difficult transition of independence and adulthood.