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Brutus V. Antony: Caesar's Funeral

In his play "Julius Caesar," Shakespeare explores how different tones, rhetoric, and emotions can sway an audience towards or against justice. During Julius Caesar's funeral, after he was killed by a group of senators including Brutus, both Brutus and Antony speak of Caesar and his character. Both characters touch on the leader's life and death, but the ways in which they present their words produce drastically different outcomes and emotions from the Romans. Antony succeeds in his effort to win over the Roman people by appealing to the masses, alienating Brutus, showing real emotion, and using effective rhetoric. Brutus fails due to his dismissal of the commoners, tendency to talk only of his own honor and esteem, lack of emotion, and his irrational attempt to justify his actions.

To understand one aspect of the superiority in Antony's speech, we have to look at Rome's class system. The plebeians play a role in deciding how they want Rome to mourn and remember Julius Caesar. Although Antony is a politician, in his speech he appeals towards the commoners by marketing himself as an equal to them. He regards them as his, "friends, Romans, countrymen," and asks them to "lend me your ears" (Act 3.2 ln. 73). He markets Caesar as a populist, on the side of the people and the uneducated. In fact, Antony appeals to those without proper education. He persuades the uneducated audience by stating:

I am no orator as Brutus is, but as you know me all, a plain blunt man that love my friend; and that they know full well that gave me public leave to speak of him. For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth (Act 3.2 lines 211-215).

By stating that he is allowed by Brutus to speak of Caesar in this time, he not only alienates Brutus by naming him an orator and marking him off as a politician, but he also assigns himself as one of the commoners, identifying with their struggles and taking on their position of class. Although he speech is well thought out, and has clear intentions to sway the audience's perspective of Caesar's murder, Antony wistfully states that he cannot make a speech as properly as Brutus has, for he has "no wit, nor words".

The start of Brutus' speech is vastly different from Antony's. Instead of asking the Romans to lend their ears, he demands that they "hear me for my cause, and be silent that you may hear. Believe me for mine honor, and have respect to mine honor" (Act 3.2 lines 13-15). Almost instantly in a speech supposedly dedicated to Rome's fallen leader, Brutus talks about himself and his honor. He sets up his character, refusing to stoop down to the commoner's level, opposite of Antony. Brutus used ethos in his speech, using his credibility as a politician to label himself as an honorable man. He is confident in himself, and refuses to acknowledge the relationship that Caesar had with the Plebians. He does not connect with the people as Anthony has.

Brutus spends the majority of the speech trying to defend himself and his reasons for killing Caesar, portraying himself as Rome's savior. In his attempt to justify his actions (to the crowd and arguably to himself, considering his guilt later in the play) he creates hypothetical instances in which he asks the crowd: "had you rather Caesar were living, and die all slaves, than that Caesar wer dead, to live all free men? ... As he was ambitious, I slew him" (Act 3.2 lines

22-24, 26). In his attempt to rid himself of guilt, he generalizes how Caesar could have become a Tyrant, and how the commoners could have been enslaved by him. Brutus does not acknowledge the seemingly good relationship that Caesar had with the Romans, and decides that he would have become a Tyrant if not killed. Antony challenges Brutus' hypotheticals, by sharing Caesar's will with the crowd. Before Antony's speech, the crowd is swayed by Brutus' speech and they approve of him.

One major step that tips the scales in Antony's favor in the heated debate about Caesar's death, is the introduction of Caesar's will to the crowd: "Here is the will, and under Caesar's seal. To every Roman citizen he gives – to every several man – seventy-five drachmas" (Act 3.2 lines 234-236). To deny Brutus' claims about Caesar's disregard for the Romans and his potential enslavement of them, Antony reveals the shocking will that grants each Roman a piece of Caesar's wealth. The will proves Caesar's care for the Romans, and dismisses Brutus' justifications for murder. Not only does this set Brutus back, but it proves Antony's regard for Caesar's care and respect towards the Romans.

Looking back to earlier in Anthony's speech, we see Irony in Antony's talk of Brutus. Although both men are politicians, Brutus takes on the role of the honorable hero, who saves Rome from Caesar's inevitable tyranny. He tries to convince the crowds that killing Caesar was an entirely altruistic act, a sacrifice he was willing to make for the good of Rome. In his speech, he argues that he had to kill Caesar, stating the reason: "not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more" (Act 3.2 lines 21-22). Antony, after taking in Brutus' speech, mentions the "nobility" and "honor" that is Brutus, as opposed to himself, a marketed commoner. In multiple parts of the speech, Antony refers to Brutus as "an honorable man" (Act 3.2 lines 82, 94, 99, and 208).

The repetition of this ironic statement works in Antony's favor to convince the plebeians of his seemingly unbiased and supposedly innocent speech. There is effectiveness in this repetition, as it reads like poetry, as opposed to Brutus's prosaic language. Antony lies about his feelings towards Brutus as a leader, in order to come off as neutral, coercing the crowd to decide for themselves the character of Brutus and the murderers.

In addition to the many ways in which Antony took hold of the Roman's perspective on Caesar, he includes real emotion in his speech. He weeps, and states, "bear with me. My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar, and I must pause till it come back to me" (Act 3.2 lines 106-107). Antony was loyal to Caesar, and truly cared for him. Antony displays his love for Caesar whereas Brutus lacks emotion in his speech. Brutus focuses on Caesar's love of him, stating "as Caesar loved me, I weep for him" (Act 3.2 ln. 25). Each statement falls back on Brutus' image of himself rather than Caesar's legacy or any respect for the Romans.

The juxtaposing speeches of Antony and Brutus display different uses of rhetoric, and work to define how tone can reveal a character's true intentions. By the end of the play, we see internal conflict and guilt in Brutus, by which he dies from. By the end of the play, Antony calls Brutus a good and noble Roman, and an honest man. To say that Antony was tricking the Romans with his speech, would not be correct. Rather, he opened their eyes to the wrongdoings of the senators and of Brutus in his moment of weakness. Shakespeare uses prose and poetry to display two different mindsets about the same person. Both speeches were effective in different ways, yet one shows Romans the truth. In conclusion, Antony's speech succeeds in its effort to win over the Romans and to avenge Julius Caesar.