

Julius Caesar by Shakespeare

Mark Antony's speech, a masterpiece of oratory

"Julius Caesar" is one of the most important creations of William Shakespeare, the king of English dramatists. The play was made in a moment of England's history when the events were similar to the year 44 BC in Rome, when Caesar returned from his successful campaign in Spain and started to become a dictator. The play is a contrast of republican and imperial ideas, exposed by Brutus and Caesar respectively.

After Caesar is murdered, Brutus explains to the people, why was this act a necessity, and he succeeds in convincing them.

Mark Antony's speech is the most important part of the play, because here he uses a variety of phrase constructions to change people's concept about Caesar and his interests.

It is clearly from the beginning of the fragment that people's ideas were against Antony's speech. "This Caesar was a tyrant", says *the first citizen*; "We are blest that Rome is rid of him", is the opinion of *the third citizen*. *The second citizen* has a doubtful idea about what Antony will speak ("Peace! Let us hear what Antony **can** say").

From the first lines of Antony's words, we can see what his intentions are: using a "Captatio benevolentiae" structure, he is trying to determine people to start listening carefully what he has to speak. He calls the crowd "gentle Romans, ... friends". He uses a metaphor, too, ("lend me your ears"), for the same purpose.

To change somebody's opinion about something you must start from the same point as your interlocutor. This is why Antony's next phrase is: "I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him".

With this introduction, the speaker can afford to tell the crowd an aphorism, and to be sure that they will not doubt about its truth: "The evil that men do lives after them; / The good is oft interred with their bones".

This means that even if a person has done many good things in his life, it is sure that he provoked some bad things to happen, too; but the good things are regarded as the results of a normal behavior, and the portrait of someone who have died is suggested by the bad things he had done. This is life experience and it is exactly what happened with Caesar's memory. In the wars leading by him, had probably died many Romans. But the cause was greater: to create a large and powerful country for his people.

We can see that Antony calls Brutus noble, because this was idea of the majority of the people, at the beginning.

Starting from this point, the speaker tries to change people's thought about Caesar's ambition. He first makes a connection between Brutus's name and this ambition. "The noble Brutus / Hath told you Caesar was ambitious". Next he declares his opinion about ambition at a leader ("a grievous fault"), and the question he will answer is whether or not Caesar was ambitious.

Then he uses again the same method, starting from a point where his thoughts seem to be the same with the people: "... Brutus is an honorable man; / So are they all, all honorable men".

The acting starts here, unclear at the start, when Antony begins to demolish the estate of Caesar as an ambitious man. The speaker says that Caesar was "faithful and just", and that he was his friend; he does not forget to remember the link between "ambition" and Brutus (an honorable man). Then he uses another counterexample, more convincing: "I thrice presented him a kingly crown, / Which he did thrice refuse: was this ambition?", and by using an adversative conjunction and the reiteration of the blame, the image of Brutus as honorable man seems now like a mock. Acting is now more relevant, for the one who analyses the text.

The methods used by Antony are now expanding: he uses emphatic "do" to suggest that he is not trying to "disprove what Brutus spoke", but to say the truth.

The next step is to use modal verbs, and to start controlling the people's emotions. ("You loved him once [...] / What cause withholds you then to mourn for him?". By using rhetorical invocations, the acting is now a certainty: "O judgment! thou art fled to brutish beasts [...] / My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar."

During Antony's pause, the change in people's thinking is suggested by the words of the three citizens. The first one who considered Caesar a tyrant, says now: "Methinks there is much reason in his [Antony's] sayings."; and the others are clearly moved by the speech, too ("There in no nobler man in Rome than Antony").

With this stage of confidence, Antony prepares the last piece of evidence in his support: the will of Caesar, and especially to raise its importance, he pretend he does not mean to read it, in a way that is completely opposite to his intentions: "It is not meat you know how Caesar lov'd you". He remembers the crowd, using a little piece of irony, that they are "not wood, not stones, but man" and he is afraid the will "it will inflame you, it will make you mad [...] O! What would come of it!". It is probably the best phrase in this play where we can see Mark Antony's ability to manipulate the masses. This is because, what he said he is afraid of, it is exactly what will happen, after he will read the will. Now, when Antony pronounces "honorable men", the crowd understands "traitors", and after hearing the will, the fact that the one who was murdered has left them his entire fortune, they are completely turned against Brutus and his "honorable men".

Using a variety of methods, Mark Anthony succeeds in changing people's concept about a brave and good intentioned man, who's name is now associated with the roman people. By reviewing the entire construction of his speech, we can say it is a masterpiece of oratory.