

"the tragedy of julius caesar" by william shakespeare



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In the play "The Tragedy of Julius Caesar", Antony is viewed as loyal to Caesar and honors his life by giving a speech to all of Rome at his funeral. His task of convincing the Romans that his death is unjustified is complicated by the compelling speech Brutus has just made about why it is justified. Nevertheless, Antony's speech results in success due to his use of antithesis and gruesome diction.

In his funeral speech, Mark Antony uses antithesis to disprove Brutus' justification of murdering Caesar. At the funeral, Antony is speaking to the citizens of Rome and reminding them of the good Caesar had accomplished before his death. He reminds them of how "When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept: Ambition should be made of sterner stuff: Yet Brutus says he was ambitious" (Shakespeare, 90-94). This quote exemplifies how Caesar empathizes with the people of Rome and genuinely wants to improve their lives. Contrasting this against Brutus' claim challenges its credibility by providing evidence against it. Antony also states that he "thrice presented him a kingly crown, which he thrice did refuse... Yet Brutus says he was ambitious" (Shakespeare, 95-99). Here, Antony specifies that Caesar refused to be crowned not once, but three times ("thrice"). Turning it down three times shows he denied it willfully, not to appear humble. Many leaders with selfish intentions are careful to hide them and do or say things to appear like they are ruling "for the good of the people."

A leader like this may say no when first asked to be crowned, in order to maintain their selfless image, but would eventually give in to their craving for power. Having been asked three times and still saying no proves that Caesar genuinely meant it and would do what is in Rome's best interest, <https://assignbuster.com/the-tragedy-of-julius-caesar-by-william-shakespeare/>

even when the Romans themselves wanted him to be king. Antony shows the invalidity of Brutus's claim by demonstrating how even when given the opportunity of greater power, Caesar did not take advantage of it. Though the Romans initially support the assassination of Caesar after hearing Brutus' speech, Antony is successful in refuting his justification of it and thereby convincing the Romans that Caesar's murder was unwarranted and tragic.

Antony also utilizes gruesome diction to evoke emotion from the citizens of Rome. He presents vivid descriptions of Caesar's murder, using phrases such as "ran Cassius' dagger through" (168-169), "the blood of Caesar followed...rushing" (171-173), and "all the while ran blood" (183). By having such vivid, gory words placed in their minds, the citizens of Rome begin to sympathize with Caesar and thereby become angry about his murder. Later into his speech when announcing he is holding Caesar's will, Antony says that if he read it aloud, "the commons...would go and kiss Caesar's dead wounds and dip their napkins in his sacred blood" (128-135). Antony specifically focuses on how the citizens themselves would react if they heard Caesar's will, which makes Caesar's death feel like a personal offence to them. He also uses gruesome word choice, which tends to evoke strong emotions such as disturbance and sadness. By using words that bring out these emotions in the Roman citizens, he makes them feel as if they should be sorrowful about his death, and moreover, that anyone who doesn't feel sorrowful about it is lacking in moral character.

Mark Antony's speech was effective in persuading the Romans that the conspirators should not have killed Caesar because he confuted any reason
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they would have to defend it. His impact on the citizens not only changed their view on Caesar's death, but determined the course of the play and the fate of Rome. If Antony doesn't give his speech after Brutus gives his, the Romans will continue to support Brutus and the other conspirators, giving them power. However, after hearing Antony speak, they declare mutiny against the conspirators and begin a riot, which starts a civil war. The potential for one speech to be so impactful on a whole city exhibits how words alone can change the course of history.