

Antony's rhetorical superiority analysis essay

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Antony's Rhetorical Superiority Analysis Essay In Shakespeare's The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Mark Antony proves himself to be the most effective manipulator. This feat was the product of many factors that Antony both took into account, and employed to a greater effect than his counterparts. Using the illustrative Rhetorical Triangle of Aristotle, Antony was able to convey the three main ingredients of good rhetoric to convince the Roman mob to turn upon the conspirators, mere moments after being told by Brutus that they had acted with "honor". Using Logos, Antony's logical argument that Caesar was not ambitious made the mob begin to doubt their current suppositions that Caesar deserved death for his ambition. With the emotive appeals of Pathos, Antony used a wide variety of props, rhetorical tricks and cleverly worded lies to incense the mob against the conspirators whom had killed the apparently unambitious Caesar. Most importantly, however, Antony's greatest ability was the way that he presented himself almost simultaneously as both a common man and the mighty noble that he was, using Ethos to its utmost effect and connecting to the mob in ways that Brutus and even Cassius could not. When Antony insisted that Brutus tell him why they had killed Caesar, his motive was not to see if their cause was justified or not. Antony's real aims were to decipher their logical argument behind killing Caesar, in order to understand how to combat it in his upcoming monologue. He then paid close attention during Brutus' speech, to reaffirm his knowledge of how to refute the shallow logic that Brutus unknowingly used. From these two sources, Antony was able to construct a counter-argument that was both precise and effective. Brutus had claimed, speaking for all the conspirators, that they had killed Caesar for his ambition

that threatened to enslave all of Rome, leading to destitution and sadness for all. Antony knew the way to respond, however, in his " Friends, Romans, Countrymen..." speech. He stated his refrain early on: "[Caesar] was my friend, faithful and just to me; but Brutus says he was ambitious, and Brutus is an honorable man" (III. ii. 86). He would then proceed by providing factual evidence that Caesar was in fact not ambitious, and then return to his theme by stating that in spite of all the proof to the contrary, Brutus still accused Caesar. Using parallelism, and continuing to juxtapose the incontrovertibility of Caesar's innocence to Brutus' drastic and unnecessary actions, Antony was able to defeat the arguments of the conspirators. Despite this, Brutus had used other reasons why they had killed Caesar in his speech, which Antony did not address within his own. Wherein lies one of his greatest victories: the ability to recognize the essential, underlying argument that was the lifeline of all other logic that the conspirators used, that Caesar's death was warranted by his ambition. Antony reasoned that if he could disprove just this one point, all the other points that the conspirators had made would be immediately invalidated, granting him a complete victory. The mob's sudden loss of confidence in the conspirators and Caesar's guilt would leave the crowd with a void of trust, unsure why " honorable" Brutus, Cassius, and the others would kill Caesar, if not for his ambition. Antony, anticipating this void, planned to fill it with anger and rage against his enemies, by harnessing the subtle and powerful art of Pathos. The turbulent and powerful qualities of emotion have the capacity to control its host entirely. To translate the anger he was creating from the crowd into action, Antony needed to stoke it much as one does a fire. Many times, Antony

played with the emotions of the crowd, and he began by reinforcing his victory of logic. He states in his first speech, " You did all love [Caesar] once, not without cause; what cause withholds you then to mourn for him? " (III. ii. 103) Since he had already convinced his audience of Caesar's innocence, he then makes them feel ashamed for having ever doubting the man's obvious virtue and benevolence. He also used this rhetorical device when he subsequently states, " O judgment, thou art fled to brutish beasts, and men have lost their reason! " (III. ii. 105) Through subtly lamenting that the crowd was acting without judgment, its members became earnest to rectify their mistake in listening to the conspirators. Antony knew that the crowd felt this way, and suggested to them a solution: " O masters! If I were disposed to stir your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage, I should do Brutus wrong and Cassius wrong... I rather choose to wrong the dead, to wrong myself and you" (III. ii. 122). This quotation reveals another concept that Antony places upon the Romans: the concept of two distinct sides. He places himself, the crowd, and the dead Caesar upon one side, and the conspirators upon the other. The crowd then realized that the conspirators, through killing Caesar, had wronged every single one of them. Having the mob come to accept Caesar as on their side might have proven difficult for Antony, but he was able to use exceptional props to accentuate his points. His strongest prop was the body of Caesar himself, which resembled much more a " carcass fit for hounds" than a " dish fit for the gods" as Brutus, hoping for the opposite, had said earlier. Antony placed his mentor's body in plain view of the crowd, in the humble pose that death imposes. He then describes the man in startlingly personal and human terms, bringing the crowd closer to Caesar.

He tells them, " For when the noble Caesar saw [Brutus] stab, ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms, quite vanquished him. Then burst his mighty heart..." (III. ii. 185) Possibly the most brilliant of Antony's portrayals, he described Caesar not as a mighty ruler, but a kind and honest man. Antony brought the moment of the assassination to the Romans, and illustrated for them how it was not the daggers that killed Caesar but the extraordinary pain of seeing his best friend among his killers. He showed them how the great Caesar took their vicious thrusts with the grace and dignity of a hero, and not with regal contempt of a dictator. The crowd could now feel what the great Caesar felt, and welcomed him as one of them as a result. Antony then revealed his final prop: the very " will" of Caesar. At the end of all his speeches, when the populace is at the point of revolt, he reads, " Here is the will, and under Caesar's seal. To every Roman citizen he gives, to every several man, seventy-five drachmas" (III. ii. 241). Despite the fact that the will was only a figment of Antony's boundless imagination, he did not need it to be real in order to cause the mob to riot. When the crowd beheld that the conspirators had killed a man who was their great and just leader, who cared for them all enough to give them each a large sum of money upon his death, their emotions and anger exploded into the desperate and near unstoppable desire to act. Antony knew he had succeeded with making the crowd emotional enough to kill the conspirators, as he says with a grim satisfaction, " Now let it work: Mischief, thou art afoot, take thou what course thou wilt" (III. ii. 262). This undisputed mastery of the Pathos rhetorical technique that Antony wielded gave him the advantages he needed to quickly and efficiently accomplish his ends. The right hand man of Julius Caesar had

another gift as well, one that enabled him to even dare to say most of the things he did to the crowd. The gift was a deep understanding of not just what to convey to an audience, but how to convey it: Ethos. From the very first sentence he spoke to the crowd, he had already received their rapt attention and their unconditional trust. He said, simply and honestly and without condescension, “ Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears...” (III. ii. 74) In only seven-words, Antony's genius for communication can be easily viewed. He began by placing himself and the crowd within three groups that they all belonged to, creating a sense of unity among the gathered Romans. In addition, Antony respectfully requests permission for those assembled to listen to what he had to say, making the crowd truly feel that Antony was a common Roman like them. However, Antony is able to maintain, through both how he identifies himself and the way he speaks, to command respect like a noble or emperor would. This balance that Antony strikes between modesty and arrogance allows him to speak with authority, and not appear to be giving orders even as he does so. A clear demonstration of that ability is when Antony tells the mob, “ I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts; I am no orator, as Brutus is; but (as you know me all) a plain blunt man that love my friend...” (III. ii. 218) Incredibly, Antony is able to mask his immense eloquence behind some of that very eloquence, casting himself and his tremendous words as the honest and simple words of a man whom loves his friend. Through this same passage, Antony distances himself from Brutus, whom he alleges as a practiced orator and politician trying to trick the people. The crowd, when then comparing Brutus to Antony, can connect to and hence trust the word of Antony far

more, allowing him to widen the range of things he could say. Employing all of these tactics and many more, Mark Antony confirms how effective the correct usage of Ethos is as a tool of manipulation. It is unequivocal that the character in William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* whom commanded the most extensive arsenal of manipulative weaponry, and used it to its fullest potential, was Mark Antony. With the Rhetorical Triangle of Aristotle as an evaluator, it is clear that Antony's communicative methods blend together a seamless mix of logical, emotive, and ethical strategies. In only a few minutes, he turned the entire population of Rome against men whom had formerly had their unmitigated support. His efforts and success led to one of the most significant events in Western Civilization's history, the collapse of the Roman Republic and the creation of the monstrous Roman Empire. Antony, in almost five minutes of incomparable excellence, accomplished all of this. His manipulative skills included the ability to, as Caesar put it, "...[look] quite through the deeds of men" (I. ii. 203). Ironically, virtually the only mistake that Antony made was how he trivialized his own success as fate, remarking to Octavian's servant, " Fortune is merry, and in this mood will give us anything" (III. ii. 267). His modesty was most likely false: even fortune could not have done what he was able to.