

Shakespeare: close reading brutus`s speech assignment

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**ASSIGN
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Close Reading: Shakespeare `Julius Caesar` III. 2 lines 11- 48 (Brutus) Julius Caesar is an historical tragedy, written by Shakespeare in 1599. Set in ancient Rome it depicts the rise and fall of an emperor and a time of vast political change. Presenting a tale of manipulation and a struggle for power Shakespeare uses the art of the orator and rhetoric to describe key moments in Rome`s history. Structurally central to the play is Act III, scene 2, as it is at this pivotal moment, after the conspiracy and assassination of Caesar that the battle for power begins. As the crowd gather they are confused and agitated.

They are aware their ruler has been killed and are looking for answers. Previously reluctant to take power and manipulated into taking part in the conspiracy of killing Caesar, Brutus enters into the pulpit to take charge. `The noble Brutus is ascended. Silence! ` (11) Surrounded by the baying crowd Brutus asserts his authority and urges the crowd to listen to what he has to say: ` Be patient till the last. ` ... (12) He states loudly, pausing to assert himself as someone the crowd can believe in. When the crowd have quietened Brutus resumes his speech, beginning with a brief greeting. Romans, countryman, and lovers, hear me for my cause` ... (13) Signifying his wish to communicate with the people as ordinary folk Brutus uses words that he hopes will endear the public to him. Brutus continues his funeral speech, speaking in slow punctuated, rational tones. Using prose, the language of the common people, he proceeds to implore the expectant crowd to believe in him as an honourable man. He demands the crowd listen to his reasons for Caesars murder: ` Believe me for mine honour, and have respect to mine honour, that you may believe` ... 14-15) Shakespeare`s use

of repetition to focus on honour is particularly significant. Brutus believes his actions are honourable and is determined to make the crowd aware of this. Shakespeare continues his focus on language by employing assonance to focus the crowd on their sense of the situation and believe in what Brutus is saying: `Censure me in your wisdom, and awake your senses, that you may the better judge` ... (16-17). Brutus has previously shown loyalty to Caesar and uses this loyalty and honour to try to appeal to the crowd.

He cleverly uses his language to infer that the crowd would be unwise to disbelieve him. He insists he rose against Caesar for the love of his country. Thus indicating the importance he attaches to his civic duties balanced against that of his personal feelings. `If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of Caesar`s, to him I say that Brutus` love to Caesar was no less than his. If then that friend demand why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer: not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more` ... 17-22) However as the speech carries on we see conflicts of loyalty, honour, and patriotism. Rather than giving reasons to justify why he killed Caesar, Brutus uses rhetorical questions to make it clear that Roman liberty was at stake: `Had you rather Caesar were living, and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all free men?` ... (22-24) Brutus continues by utilising short, repetitive phrases to develop his argument and emphasise how honourable he feels he is. This enables him to focus the crowd on his reasons and dilemma at having taken part in Caesar`s murder.

Brutus proclaims that he loved Caesar. He punctuates this by saying whatever Caesar was he would have stood by him. However he was honour

bound to kill him for Caesar`s ambition was dangerous: ` As Caesar loved me, I weep for him: as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honour him; but, as he was ambitious, I slew him` ... (24-26) It is at this point that Brutus closes this part of his speech; with unanswerable challenges to the crowd, `Who is here so base that would be a bondman? ` ... (29-30).

Implying that if it wasn't for his honourable actions of killing Caesar the Romans would have been made slaves. Brutus goads the crowd and dares them to speak out against him: ` If any, speak; for I have offended. Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman? ` (30-31) This puts the plebeians into an unenviable position of appearing un-patriotic if they dare to answer: ` Who is here so vile that will not love his country? ... He demands. `If any, speak; for him I have offended. I pause for a reply`. (32-34).

Using finely honed phrases Brutus makes clear to the people that they follow him, or offend. He states that he balances the act of Caesar`s glory against that of the good of their country: `The question of his death is enrolled in the Capitol: his glory not extenuated, wherein he was worthy: nor his offences enforced, for which he suffered death` ... (36-40) As Mark Antony enters, carrying Caesar`s body, Brutus leaves himself open to the consequences of the fickle crowd: ` Here comes his body , mourned by Mark Antony, who, though he had no hand in his death, shall receive the benefit of his dying` ... (41-43). Putting Antony in a favourable light he paves the way for the high poetics and what is to come in Antony`s speech that follows. Brutus it appears is now imprisoned by what he perceives as honour. He believes that he is right to have killed Caesar for the good of Rome. He declares he will die

by the same dagger if his countries do not feel this to be so: `I have the same dagger for myself, when it shall please my country to need my death. ` (45-47) Un-wittingly by assuming authority Brutus signs his own death warrant.

It is this assumption that alarms the fickle crowd and what follows are the consequences of actions. The nature of his final appeal has proceeded from the first instance; an honour driven tale, to one of perhaps feigned honour. However allowing Antony to speak shows Brutus to be honourable and fair. He is not a clear cut villain in the piece. He is perhaps the true hero; he truly believes that the act he has committed is in the best interest for Rome.

Bibliography. Shakespeare William, 2005, Julius Caesar, edit Norman Sandirs, London, Penguin books