

# [Shakespeare’s presentation of the speeches of brutus and antony in act 3 scene 2 ...](https://assignbuster.com/shakespeares-presentation-of-the-speeches-of-brutus-and-antony-in-act-3-scene-2-of-julius-caesar-essay-sample/)

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Julius Caesar is a tragedy written in 1599 by the most important playwright in the English Renaissance, William Shakespeare. It is believed that Shakespeare wrote this play to reflect England’s monarchy and its political situation during the period when Queen Elizabeth I was on the throne. Historical plays like Julius Caesar were very popular during that time and people were interested and eager to learn about other countries other than their own, in this case, Julius Caesar taught them Roman history. As a result, Julius Caesar would have been performed immediately after its completion in late 1599 or early 1600.

This was also the first play to be performed at the Globe Theatre. Julius Caesar is also a play about ceremony and superstition. The ceremony of the Feast of Lupercal in Act 1 Scene 2 is in honour of the God of fertility. It is a superstition that during this time, women who cannot bear children would be cured of their infertility. Ceremony and superstition are important to the play as they help shape the way the play is performed and also give both the characters and the audience ideas of what is to come.

Other scenes depict how soothsayers roam the streets, warning people about their prediction of the future. “ Beware the ides of March” is one of the many occasions when Caesar’s death is foreseen. Although the soothsayers’ predictions are always correct, they predict these without charge since they lack any formal office or shop, so they are often looked down upon by higher class people. The citizens’ distrust of these predictions leads to more predictions being made, having a significant effect in the play, which will determine upcoming events and the outcome of Caesar.

As his source in writing Julius Caesar, Shakespeare uses Sir Thomas North’s translation of Plutarch’s Lives of the Greeks and Romans, which was written in Latin during the first century after the birth of Christ. Shakespeare borrows Plutarch’s reference of Caesar’s dislike of thin men, “ Let me have men about me that are fat,” this becoming the line in Act 1 Scene 2. Although Shakespeare is inspired by Plutarch’s book, some differences between the actual history and the play are apparent, this helps the audience to understand the characters as Shakespeare intends them to be understood.

For example, on the journey to the Senate House in Act 3 Scene 1, Artemidorus approaches Caesar with a letter, urging him to read it since it “ touches Caesar nearer”. Plutarch writes that Caesar took the letter and tried to read it but was prevented from doing so by the crowd that kept saluting him. In the play, however, Caesar rejects the letter, “ what touches ourself shall be last serv’d. ” Shakespeare’s intention is to portray Caesar as a selfless individual who puts others needs and interests first, dealing with matters that concern the public before dealing with his own.

It is his unselfishness rather than what the crowd of citizens believe in that puts his life at great risk. In the Life of Caesar, Plutarch depicts Caesar as an arrogant man who had so much pride that he acted as though he were a god. In the play, on the other hand, it is only Cassius who refers to Caesar’s god-like behaviour, “ this man is now become a god,” and the audience knows that this man is not to be trusted. They also observe that Caesar is liked by many, as seen at the beginning of the play when the crowd rejoices in the return of Caesar.

This illustrates that Shakespeare wants the audience to realise that Caesar is not a tyrant who desires absolute power over the country but just an ordinary man who is respected by almost everyone and is suited to become the ruler of Rome. Act 3 Scene 2 revolves around the funeral orations made by Brutus and Antony. It explores the effects the speeches have on the citizens’ reactions. This scene is very important to the whole play, as the effects of the speeches will determine whether the citizens will support Brutus or Antony and which of the two they wish to see becoming the leader of Rome.

The outcome of this scene will give an idea of what is likely to occur in the many scenes to come. Until now, the play has been aimed at the murder of Caesar, now it goes through a sudden change of direction; that is to secure revenge for Caesar. As a result, this scene marks the beginning of the end of the play: it is the end of the conspiracy against Caesar, leading to his assassination and prompting the start of an expected civil war. Near the end of Act 3 Scene 1, when all the conspirators have left, it is only then that Antony reveals his true feelings in his soliloquy.

He apologises to Caesar for being so “ meek” and “ gentle” with his murderers. This shows that although Caesar is now dead, Antony is still loyal to him. But he has his reasons for siding up with Brutus – he wants revenge. Shakespeare has prepared us for the next scene by confirming in Antony’s oration that he will show the citizens the “ cruel issue” of these murderers, demonstrating that Antony will do whatever it takes to get revenge without making enemies with Brutus. Shakespeare’s staging of the scene in the marketplace corresponds to Plutarch’s account.

However, there are some evident differences between the scene and Plutarch’s historical account. In the play, Shakespeare writes about Caesar’s will, which leaves the citizens with “ seventy five drachmas” each, his “ walks,” “ private arbours” and the “ new-planted orchards,” whereas Plutarch’s account shows no indication of Caesar leaving a will. When shown the number of holes on Caesar’s gown, there is uproar among the citizens, but Antony quickly calms them down. On the other hand, Plutarch’s account tells us that the citizens fell into such a rage and mutiny that there was “ no more order” kept amongst them.

They then all ran to the murderers’ houses to set them on fire, but in the play, it does not show the citizens actually doing this. The crowd of citizens have a substantial effect on both the characters in the play and the audience because of their boundless eagerness to express their emotions. This is demonstrated at the very beginning of the play when Caesar has defeated Pompey. The citizens’ positive response influences the idea that Caesar is gaining power and securing a place in the Romans’ hearts.

Therefore the citizens of Rome play a great role in the fate of Caesar, as we will later find out. Another example of their role later in Act 3 Scene 2 shows them embracing Brutus’s words with cheers and understanding. However, their opinions alter after Antony’s speech. They are overwhelmed with anger and grief for Caesar’s death, agreeing with everything Antony says. If the role of the citizens did not exist, Cassius would not have noticed Caesar’s continual popularity and growing ambition. Hence there would not be a conspiracy to murder Caesar.

Furthermore, if they did murder Caesar, the speeches would not be as powerful and persuasive since there was no one for them to win over. Aristotle argues that plot is the single most important component in a play; an awful story with well-developed characters will not work, whereas a good story with poorly-drawn characters will work. Aristotle also states that a good tragedy must have a unity of action, a unity of place and a unity of time. This unity of three means that a tragedy should have one single plot line, which ought to take place in one single location within twenty four hours.

As the play is based on Plutarch’s account, Shakespeare found that he had to change the structure of time in the history in order to make Plutarch’s story performable – he condenses the time span of the play. For example, he places Caesar’s triumph over Pompey’s defeat in February, whereas his victory was in October according Plutarch’s account. Moreover, in the play, Brutus and Cassius flee from Rome immediately after Antony has made his speech but in Plutarch’s version, they fled from the city over the period of a year after Caesar’s funeral.

The murderer of Caesar, Brutus, makes his speech first, identifying his authority and status to the general public. Shakespeare writes Brutus’s speech in prose rather than in verse, attempting to make his speech appear plain and to keep him to the same level as the plebeians so that they would regard him as one of their own. Brutus’s speech appeals to reasons, presenting an honest and factual argument to justify the murder. Shakespeare begins Brutus’s oration using a list of three, “ Romans, countrymen, and lovers” to address the crowd. Just these three words at the beginning of the speech set the tone for the rest of it.

He puts “ Romans” first, which appeals to the crowd’s conscience that Brutus regards them as proper Roman citizens. This paints a picture that his speech will be based on facts and matters concerning Roman politics. Brutus continues by declaring that he is an honourable man and they should “ have respect” to his honour. He then urges them to “ censure” him in their “ wisdom”. This illustrates that he is interested in their opinions and wants them to judge the accuracy of his reasoning, encouraging the crowd to believe him as an honourable man.

Brutus admits that the reason he turned against Caesar was not because he “ loved Caesar less” but that he “ loved Rome more”. This displays him as patriotic; he loves and supports his country and its people more than he does for a human being. The people may now think that Rome is so privileged to have Brutus’s utmost love. There are many instances in which a rhetorical question is used. The first example is when Brutus asks the crowd if they preferred that “ Caesar were living, and die all slaves, than…? The answer to this is obvious; they will most certainly prefer Caesar to die to save many lives rather than many lives lost just to save one.

By asking a rhetorical question, Shakespeare intends both the crowd and the audience to think more deeply about the situation and to persuade them that it was right to kill Caesar. Shakespeare also uses antonyms, “ live” and “ die” for which their contrast makes an impact on the listeners. Brutus goes on to say that “ as Caesar loved me, I weep for him,” demonstrating that he is moved by Caesar’s love and cannot wish for anything more. As he was fortunate, I rejoice at it,” showing that he is happy for Caesar and not jealous of him.

“ As he was valiant, I honour him,” which displays his admiration for Caesar, who he seems to look up to. But “ as he was ambitious, I slew him. ” Once again, Brutus shows the love for his country as he thinks that Caesar’s great ambition is not in Rome’s best interest, so the only solution is to kill him. This type of phrases is called a parallelism. Shakespeare uses parallelisms because the similarity in the syntactical structure of these phrases has a powerful effect on the citizens, making them stay on their minds.

There are three more examples of rhetorical questions, which in this case, can also be identified as anaphora, “ who is here so… ” each of them followed by a repetition of “ if any, speak, for him have I offended”. Shakespeare’s aim is to show the citizens that their opinions really matter to Brutus, but the stress upon the line gets greater and greater at each repetition so the crowd dares not to admit if Brutus has insulted them. The use of assonance, “ base” and “ bondman”, “ rude” and “ Roman” and, “ vile” and “ love” gives a more dramatic effect on the questions as these words stand out very clearly.

Shakespeare finishes the speech with a “ pause for a reply,” this allows the citizens to respond to the rhetorical questions, making them believe that Brutus really does care about them and their opinions. The crowd could only reply “ none, Brutus, none” because they are satisfied with what Brutus has said and moreover, they agree with him. Shakespeare portrays Brutus as an honest man, who is loyal to his own country and truly believes that by killing Caesar, along with his ambition, will benefit Rome.

His speech reflects his naivety as he genuinely believes that the people around him, especially those that he trusts, are also sincere in their love for Rome so as to kill Caesar for it. As we can see, this is a major flaw in his character. Shakespeare wants the audience to see that Brutus is not like the other conspirators, his motives for joining the conspiracy are entirely pure. This is shown when Brutus disagrees that Antony should be killed along with Caesar, as he wants them to be seen as “ sacrificers, but not butchers.

His biggest error is to permit Antony to give a speech at the funeral, and adding to his mistake, he leaves the scene after making his own speech, giving Antony the opportunity to speak his true thoughts subtly. Antony enters the scene carrying Caesar’s corpse, which he will later use as a prop to intensify his oration. Unlike Brutus’s, Antony’s speech is in verse and Shakespeare concentrates the speech on winning the citizens over by emotions, there is no attempt to produce a logical argument. His aim is to touch the listeners with Antony’s emotion of Caesar’s death, hoping to influence them to feel the same way.

The speech begins by addressing the crowd with a list of three, “ Friends, Romans, countrymen”. This mirrors the first line of Brutus’s speech, only Shakespeare has rearranged the order of it so that “ friends” is placed at the front. This is intended to show Antony as a friend in the citizens’ heads and not as an ambitious man who wants to gain power of Rome. Antony immediately convinces the crowd, who is firmly on Brutus’s side, that he is here to “ bury Caesar, not to praise him”. This is the first irony in his speech as the audience all know that he is here to undoubtedly, praise Caesar.

Shakespeare makes a subtle innuendo when Antony says “ the evil that men do lives after them, the good is … bones”. From the crowd’s point of view, these two lines are clearly referring to Caesar, but to some of the audience, they may have guessed that it is implying about the conspirators, their murder of Caesar will never be forgotten while their good doings will not be remembered. When reminding the crowd that “ Brutus hath told you Caesar was ambitious,” Shakespeare places a slight hint that Antony does not agree with this, or else he would have just said “ Caesar was ambitious”.

This also throws in a question of doubt and furthermore, it is the starting point of a series of queries of whether Caesar was actually ambitious. Shakespeare then develops Antony’s previous thought, saying, “ if it were so, it was a grievous fault”. The word “ if” is unstressed in rhythm, it is subtle and drops further hints of doubt. “ Grievous” is followed by “ grievously” in the next line, this repetition of the same root word creates a stronger image on the citizens’ minds that Caesar has received a harsh punishment for his terrible fault, making them wonder if he has paid for something he hasn’t done.

Since Antony does not want to disobey the conditions imposed on him by Brutus, and since the citizens have responded positively to Brutus’s speech, he cannot disrespect Brutus’s explanations directly. So he uses irony to describe Brutus as an “ honourable man”. Antony then starts to praise Caesar by recalling their friendship, that he was “ faithful” and “ just” to him. This contradicts what Brutus has said about the reasons behind Caesar’s murder. Despite the fact that both men claim to be Caesar’s friend, they both have different views regarding his character.

Shakespeare’s aim is to make the citizens think that either Brutus or Antony has made a mistake in his judgement of Caesar, so one of them is not to be trusted fully. Antony gives examples of Caesar not being ambitious: the first is that “ he brought many captives home… ” this shows that Caesar, like Brutus, also acts for the good of Rome. Similar Brutus’s speech, rhetorical questions are also used here, one of them is “ Did this in Caesar seem ambitious? ” This is a direct attack on what Brutus has said, leading the plebeians to conclude that Brutus has perhaps been lying.

The second example is that “ when the poor hath cried, Caesar hath wept,” this illustrates that Caesar is compassionate and he sympathizes with the less fortunate. The citizens are now beginning to regard him in a new light. The phrase “ Yest Brutus says he was ambitious, and Brutus is an honourable man” is now at its second repetition, each time the level of sarcasm is increasing all the more. Shakespeare provides the best evidence to disprove Brutus’s speech and the crowd will certainly take note of it: Caesar was offered kingship three times but he “ thrice refused”.

The third time when Antony repeats the phrase “… ambitious… honourable man”, its actual meaning cannot be more clear. But it is only when the phrase is repeated some more times later in the speech that one of the citizens works out what Antony truly means for he shouts, “ they were traitors, honourable men! ” Antony points out that the citizens “ did love him once, not without cause,” this is an example of litotes. Shakespeare has used it to emphatically affirm the opposite, in this case, what Antony really means is that they once loved him with good reasons and not because they were told to love him.

Anadiplosis is also shown with the word “ cause” at the end of that line and at the beginning of the next. Shakespeare’s intention is to sharpen Antony’s eloquence, making it more memorable to the listeners. A metaphor is then used, “ my heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,” this is to put across the idea that Antony loves Caesar so much and cannot believe that he is now dead. The citizens will also pity him for he and Caesar were such good friends and now he is gone. Shakespeare then makes time for a pause for tears before the crowd.

This is dramatically effective, making the citizens pity him even more and also allowing them some time to let his words sink in. Shakespeare also provides another prop for Antony: Caesar’s will. This is an important piece of evidence to show Caesar’s kindness and the extent of his love for Rome. Shakespeare then makes use of apophasis, which allows Antony to manipulate the crowd of citizens into begging him to read the will, which in turn, enables Antony to disprove, with proof, the claim made by Brutus that Caesar is too ambitious without having to volunteer to read it.

Further demonstrating his ability to influence ideas and persuade the crowd, Antony descends from the pulpit to make himself one with the citizens. By placing Antony among the crowd, Shakespeare wants the commoners to feel closer to him and feel that they are united as one. Antony first reveals Caesar’s body, which is covered in blood and stab wounds, being fully aware that image speaks much better than words, so this image will remain in the citizens’ minds as long as it will take. He uses powerful adjectives to show how Brutus “ pluck’d his cursed steel away”.

The purpose of using the word “ pluck’d” illustrates the sheer force by which the knife is pulled away swiftly from the body and it also associates with anger and violence, which makes the force seem even greater. “ Cursed” has a sense of evil about it, meaning the knife that is used to kill Caesar will have dreadful consequences. Shakespeare uses a double superlative, “ most unkindest,” to describe the cut made by Brutus. The intention of this is for emphasis on the word “ unkind” to portray how cruel and heartless Brutus is for stabbing Caesar when he is “ Caesar’s angel” and “ how dearly Caesar lov’d him”.

Antony claims that he is “ no orator, as Brutus is,” he has “ neither wit, nor words, nor worth” and does not want to stir the crowd up to a “ sudden flood of mutiny”. Yet his speech shows the exact opposite of his claims, he has proved himself to be a great orator by just one look at the crowd’s acceptance of him. Shakespeare’s use of alliteration, “ wit”, “ words” and “ worth” are for emphasis on Antony’s ability in making a good oration, through the repetition of initial consonant letters.

This further demonstrates his claims of not being good enough for anything, especially in making the speech and he also knows that at this point, the mere mention of the word “ mutiny” will incite rebellion. The citizens’ raging reactions to the speech show its success, leaving Antony to marvel at his deft oration, relishing at the sight of the crowd securing revenge for Caesar. By this, Shakespeare wants the audience to realise that the crowd’s reactions are not totally unprovoked, he wants the audience to show sympathy for Brutus and maybe, consider him as the true hero of the play, who we will later see die the noblest death.

Shakespeare has created Antony’s speech in a way so as to allow the audience to come to the conclusion that he is attempting to make, without being as direct as Brutus, who is too honest and nai?? ve. Antony immediately gains the crowd’s attention by entering the scene carrying Caesar’s corpse while Brutus has to struggle to get their attention. Although Brutus has failed in winning over the citizens, Shakespeare has provided Antony with props such as Caesar’s wounded body and his will throughout his oration in order to emphasize certain points.

Therefore, I don’t think the crowd would have acted they way they have if he didn’t use any props to kindle their emotions. Overall, I think Act 3 Scene 2 is the most important part of the play. The citizens are fickle; they can be led in any direction and their minds and opinions altered in a split-second. They just follow what appears right at the moment and Shakespeare has illustrated that the plebeians have a powerful influence on the play as a whole, the civil war could not have started without the support of these people.

In my opinion, I think Brutus is very noble but deluded, he should not have left the scene after his own speech, letting Antony gain control over the whole situation. I sympathize with Brutus for he truly believes that by killing Caesar, Rome would be a better place. On the other hand, Antony should have realised Brutus’s weaknesses that he is easily deceived, for example, by Cassius, and should have believed him that he genuinely felt that what he did is for the good of Rome.