

Brutus as a tragic hero

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Julius Caesar is regarded as one of William Shakespeare's greatest works of literature. It is mainly based on the assassination of Julius Caesar. Brutus, a servant and close friend to Julius Caesar, was ironically the ringleader for Caesar's assassination. Brutus thinks that if he assassinates Julius Caesar he will be doing what was best for Rome. In this play, Brutus is often referred to as the tragic hero. According to Aristotle, a tragic hero must be noble, demonstrate hubris, demonstrates hamartia, and experiences an epiphany.

Brutus fits Aristotle's definition of a tragic hero since he has all of the characteristics. A tragic hero requires be noble. Shakespeare made Brutus noble in this play by making him always wanting to do what is best for Rome. He incorporates that by making Rome Brutus's top priority. When Brutus was discussing the assassination with the other assassins, he states, " No, not on oath. If not the face of men, the sufferance of our souls, the time's abuse- if these be motives weak, break off betimes, and every man hence to his idle bed.

So let high-sighted tyranny rage on till each man drop by lottery... " (2. 1. 124-9). Brutus explains how the current state of Rome is strong enough to hold themselves together rather than swearing to each others' loyalty. He proves his nobility by saying how the sadness and suffering of the Romans including themselves should not only be their motivation to assassinate Caesar, but should also be creating a brotherhood amongst them. In other words, Brutus believes that a Roman's word should be their loyalty rather than swearing on it.

Shakespeare also shows Brutus's nobility indirectly when Caesar was being assassinated. Before Caesar died, he looked over to Brutus and he said, "Et tu, Brute? – Then fall Caesar!" (3. 1. 85). "Et tu, Brute" means "Even you, Brutus" in Latin, and this shows that Caesar knows that there must be a noble purpose if Brutus was involved. In that manner, this quote also shows Caesar's respect for Brutus as a person. If the dictator of Rome respects his servant, then the servant must be noble to his empire, thus, Brutus is a noble person.

Not only do tragic heroes need to be noble, but they also have to demonstrate hubris. Hubris is excessive pride or self-confidence. Brutus shows his excessive pride and confidence is when he acted on his decisions rather than others. For example, when Brutus assassinated Caesar, Mark Antony wanted to create a speech at his funeral. Cassius tries to tell Brutus what could go wrong, but Brutus stubbornly says, "I will myself into the pulpit first and show the reason of our Caesar's death... It shall advantage more than do us wrong" (2. . 257-63). Brutus doesn't even consider what Cassius has told him. It is as if he already decided not to listen to Cassius's since he thinks his thought is superior. Another example of Brutus's self-confidence was before the battle of Brutus and Cassius against Mark Antony and Octavian. Brutus asks Cassius on the opinion of if they should attack the enemies or wait for them. Cassius thinks it would be better to wait for the enemies, but Brutus says, "Good reasons must of force give place to better..."

The enemy, marching along by them, by them shall make a fuller number up, come on refreshed, new added, and encouraged; from which advantage we cut him off if at Philippi we do face him there, those people at our back"

(4. 3. 233-42). Brutus explains that good reasons give away for better ones. He also explained how the enemies will gain more soldiers for their army on the way to them, but they could nullify that advantage by going towards them. Although Brutus provides a reason to why his claim is better than Cassius's claim, he still gives the impression that he is superior to Cassius.

Brutus's hubris can also give the impression that he thinks better about than himself than he does others. Either way, this causes Brutus problems. Tragic heroes normally suffer hamartia as a result of their hubris. Hamartia is another word for tragic flaw. Brutus demonstrates hamartia in his naivety. One way this was demonstrated was when Brutus was discussing the assassination and they wanted Cicero to get involved. Cassius, Casca, Cinna and Metellus all believed that Cicero should be involved to. Once Brutus made his decision, he stated, " O name him [Cicero] not!

Let us not break with him, for he will never follow anything that other men begin" (2. 1. 161-3). Brutus did not even speak persuasively; he just exclaimed his opinion and everyone agreed with him all of a sudden. This shows that the Cassius, Casca, Cinna and Metellus might be just trying to use Brutus to get rid of Caesar. Another way Brutus demonstrates hamartia is him being manipulated too easily. Cassius flattered Brutus and Brutus let the compliments get to him. One example is when Cassius compared Brutus's and Caesar's names.

Cassius tries to flatter Brutus by saying, " The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings. ' Brutus,' and ' Caesar. ' What should be in that ' Caesar? ' Why should that name be sounded more than yours? " (1. 2. 149-53) Cassius explains to Brutus that they were the ones to

determine their own fate and not the stars. In other words, he is trying to tell Brutus they are inferiors at their own will. This gives an impression that Cassius is trying to make Brutus feel guilty about himself.

Then Cassius attempts to fire up Brutus by saying that his name is equally capable of ruling Rome. The devious Cassius easily manipulates Brutus, and Brutus's self confidence helped him believe all of Cassius's compliments were true. Brutus wouldn't know about his tragic flaw until he lost everything. An epiphany is where someone has a sudden realization of something. Aristotle define epiphany in a tragedy where the tragic hero realizes his/her mistake or mistakes made. In Julius Caesar, Brutus had an epiphany when he was getting ready to fight Octavian and Mark Antony's army.

In the tent discussing his plans with Cassius, he confesses that his wife, Portia, died. Brutus sadly explains: " She [Portia] is dead... Impatient of my absence, and grief that young Octavius with Mark Antony have made themselves so strong- for with her death that tidings came- with this she fell distract, and (her attendants absent) swallowed fire... Speak no more of her... " (4. 3. 171-83). Brutus is upset that his wife is dead and realizes that he dragged her into this mess. He accuses himself for losing the love of his life, and this creates a sensation of pity.

This is the turning point in the play where Brutus starts to believe that killing Caesar was not right. Brutus also experiences an epiphany at the end of the story, after his defeat against Mark Antony and Octavian. Having lost everything, Brutus decides to murder himself. Brutus's final words were, "... Caesar, now be still. I killed not thee with half so good a will" (5. 5. 56-7).

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With these meaningful last words, Brutus creates a sense of pity for himself. Brutus was never sure of whether he should have killed Caesar or not, and he proves it with these words.

To kill himself “ with half so good a will” he gives the impression to where he is curious about what the condition would Rome be like with Caesar still in power. Aristotle's definition of a tragedy seems to fit all the tragedies today. He states that the tragic hero must have the following traits: must be of noble birth, must show excessive pride, must show a tragic flaw, and must learn from his/her mistakes. This universal map of tragedy fits William Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar in a perfect manner. Although one could argue that Brutus is not the tragic hero, he best fits Aristotle’s definition of a tragic hero in Julius Caesar.