

Conflicting perspectives: shakespeare's julius caesar

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Conflicting Perspectives: Shakespeare's Julius Caesar Ambitious Tyrant or "Noblest Man that Ever Lived in the Tide of Times"? An Intro English Presentation

Conflicting Perspectives: The Theory - All texts are deliberately constructed to convey an agenda and a set of values. - This means that every composer has a purpose, which is based on the issues arising from their context and audience. - To that end, the composer uses conflicting perspectives as a vehicle for successfully conveying their purpose to the audience. - So, through the representation of events, personalities and situations (which utilises form, language and structural devices), the responder is positioned to accept the perspective that the composer has represented as valid/credible. - As a consequence, the composer is able to successfully impart their values to the audience.

Representation - Context - Audience - Conflicting Perspectives — events, personalities & situations - Given composer's agenda, a perspective is privileged Values - Composer successfully conveys their values Purpose Positioning of Responder

What has a play concerning the assassination of Julius Caesar and the subsequent civil war got to do with Elizabethan England? Elizabethan Context & Audience - Julius Caesar was first performed at the Globe theatre in 1599. - Late Elizabethan period — Queen Elizabeth I had been in power for almost 40 years. - At this stage, she was an elderly monarch, with no heirs to the throne. Hence there were concerns regarding who would ascend the throne after her death. This anxiety was increased by the Queen's refusal to name an heir to the throne. - Many feared that her death would plunge England into a civil war akin to that of the Wars of the Roses in the 15th Century. Why Julius Caesar? - Arguably, Shakespeare was using the story of Julius Caesar

to comment on the political situation of his time. - Queen Elizabeth, like Julius Caesar, had progressively enlarged her power at the expense of the aristocracy and the House of Commons. This caused conflict not dissimilar to the tension that existed amongst Roman Senators concerning leadership and political structure in Rome that led to civil war. Therefore, given the trend toward consolidated monarchical power throughout the Elizabethan period and Shakespeare's tendency to depict monarchical power favourably in his plays, it is evident that Shakespeare's representation of the conflict in Roman society between republicanism and imperial rule privileges the case for imperial rule. - Shakespeare's Purpose - - To dramatise the dangers of a disputed succession and the horrors of civil war. To show that it is the actions of leaders that determines the course of history. - - - - Order Stability Unity Loyalty Absolute rule Julius Caesar: Specific Scene Analysis The Case Against Julius Caesar - The play opens with Caesar, victorious having defeated Pompey in civil war, parading through the streets of Rome. - Flavius and Marullus are the characters who initially draw our attention to the republican cause — this is furthered by Cassius. Shakespeare's Representation of the Conspirators FLAVIUS Hence! Home, you idle creatures, get you home! MARULLUS You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things! O you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome, Knew you not Pompey? - Shakespeare encourages us to question the republican cause from the beginning. - Flavius and Marullus are shown to disrespect the Roman people: - Insulting language — pejorative - Use of imperative - Exclamation - Rhetorical questioning - Whilst Flavius and Marullus' make an important point regarding Caesar's triumph over Pompey and the fickle

nature of the plebians, they appear cruel and dictatorial — making it difficult for the audience to accept their perspective. Shakespeare's Representation of the Conspirators COBBLER A trade... I hope I may use with a safe conscience, which is... a mender of bad soles. - This representation is set against the carpenter and cobbler who are cast in a comparatively more sympathetic light. - Shakespeare uses them as the first voice against the conspiracy - consider the cobbler's pun on the term "soles" — perhaps Shakespeare is suggesting Flavius and Marullus' 'souls' require 'mending'; and hence their perspective also needs 'mending'? COBBLER If thou be out, sir, I can mend you. Shakespeare's Representation of the Conspirators - Moreover, the disrobing of Caesar's statues by Flavius and Marullus is represented as a distasteful, petty and envious act: - Shakespeare stages it on the feast of Lupercal — a pastoral festival observed to avert evil spirits, ensure fertility and purify the city. - Flavius justifies the act, saying it will make Caesar "fly at an ordinary pitch" — the metaphor betrays a tone of envy — allowing Shakespeare to establish from the very beginning that the conspiracy against Caesar was founded largely on jealousy of him. FLAVIUS Let no images be hung with Caesar's trophies. I'll about and drive away the vulgar from the streets. So do you too where you perceive them thick. These growing feathers, plucked from Caesar's wing will make him fly an ordinary pitch... Shakespeare's Representation of the Conspirators CASSIUS For once, upon a raw and gusty day, The troubled Tiber chafing with her shores, Caesar said to me 'Darest thou, Cassius, now Leap in with me into this angry flood, And swim to yonder point?' Upon the word, Accoutred as I was, I plunged in And bade him follow; so indeed he did. The torrent roar'd, and we

did buffet it With lusty sinews, throwing it aside And stemming it with hearts of controversy; But ere we could arrive the point proposed, Caesar cried 'Help me, Cassius, or I sink!' I, as Aeneas, our great ancestor, Did from the flames of Troy upon his shoulder The old Anchises bear, so from the waves of Tiber Did I the tired Caesar. And this man Is now become a god, and Cassius is A wretched creature and must bend his body, If Caesar carelessly but nod on him. - The representation of the conspirators as envious is furthered by Cassius' speech to Brutus. - Cassius claims that the "subject" of his story is "honour", however any message of "honour" is undermined through Shakespeare's representation of Cassius as a jealous manipulator.

Shakespeare's Representation of the Conspirators - Staging: - Language devices: - Duologue — Cassius and Brutus - Bitter, envious tone are alone together on stage — - Childhood anecdote casting heightens the secretive and Caesar as weak conspiratorial nature of their - Analogy comparing himself with exchange — Cassius appears to be Aeneas 'getting into' Brutus' ear. - These techniques convey the plot to - Offstage — their conversation is assassinate Caesar as a personal plot; interrupted by several shouts a case of tearing down a fellow Roman from the crowd — this who "might" be changed by power emphasises Caesar's popularity and "may do danger" to Rome if given and contrasts with Cassius' the crown. depiction of Caesar as a "sick girl" — intensifies Cassius' envy. Shakespeare's Representation of the Conspirators CASCA I saw Mark Antony offer him a crown... and, as I told you, he put it by once; but for all that, to my thinking, he would fain have had it. Then he offered it to him again; then he put it by again; but to my thinking, he was very loath to lay his fingers off it. And then he offered it the

third time. He put it the third time by; and still as he refused it, the rabblement hooted, and clapped their chopt hands, and threw tip their sweaty nightcaps, and uttered such a deal of stinking breath because Caesar refused the crown that it had almost choked Caesar; for he swounded and fell down at it. And for mine own part, I durst no laugh, for fear of opening my lips and receiving the bad air. - To further undermine the conspirator's cause, Shakespeare presents Casca as a relentless gossip; all too eager to cast Caesar as ambitious in desiring the crown, but politically savvy enough to refuse it publicly. - Consider the effect of staging at this point — the audience hears the crowd shouting in support of Caesar, but we do not see the manner in which he refuses the crown. - We have only Casca's recount of the event: - Theatrical rendition - The eagerness and relish with which he passes his opinion of Caesar - His contempt for the plebeians - His scorn at Caesar's epileptic fit - This effectively positions us to question the reliability of his recount. Shakespeare's Representation of the Conspirators CASSIUS (Soliloquy end of Act 1, scene ii) Well, Brutus, thou art noble; yet I see thy honourable mettle may be wrought from that it is disposed. Therefore it is meet that noble minds keep ever with their likes; for who so firm that cannot be seduced?... I will this night, in several hands, in at his windows throw, as if they came from several citizens, writings, all tending to the great opinion that Rome holds of his *Brutus'+ name; wherein obscurely Caesar's ambition will be glanced at. - The representation of the conspiracy as dishonest and underhanded is rendered clear by Cassius final soliloquy in Act 1. - Represented here as the grand manipulator, Cassius admits to using Brutus' honour to further his own cause. - His line " it is meet that noble minds keep

ever with their likes" is ironic as Cassius has already proven to be envious of Caesar and can hardly be said to possess a " noble mind". - He reveals his plan to distribute flattering letters about Brutus to make him think the common people admire him and also believe Caesar to be ambitious — this manipulative and dishonest act throws the conspirator's cause into disrepute. Shakespeare's Representation of Brutus BRUTUS It must be by his death: and for my part, I know no personal cause to spurn at him, But for the general. He would be crown'd: How that might change his nature, there's the question. It is the bright day that brings forth the adder; And that craves wary walking. Crown him that And then, I grant, we put a sting in him, That at his will he may do danger with. The abuse of greatness is, when it disjoins Remorse from power: and, to speak truth of Caesar, I have not known when his affections sway'd more than his reason. But 'tis a common proof, That lowliness is young ambition's ladder, Whereto the climber-upward turns his face; But when he once attains the upmost round. He then unto the ladder turns his back, Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees By which he did ascend. So Caesar may. Then, lest he may, prevent. And, since the quarrel Will bear no colour for the thing he is, Fashion it thus; that what he is, augmented, Would run to these and these extremities: And therefore think him as a serpent's egg Which, hatch'd, would, as his kind, grow mischievous, and kill him in the shell. - Soliloquy — reveals Brutus' idealism — he is a patriot. This quality is presented as a redeeming one and distinguishes him from the other conspirators, thus impacting on our final assessment of his character. - Shakespeare , from this soliloquy onwards, positions us to accept Mark Antony's evaluation of Brutus in Act V — " This

was the noblest Roman of them all... he only, in a general honest thought and common good to all, made one of them. " Shakespeare's Representation of Brutus - Despite Brutus' idealism, Shakespeare encourages us to question the validity of the assassination plot. - Consider Brutus' admissions: - " I know no personal cause to sprun at him" - Power " might change his nature" - " To speak truth of Caesar, I have not known when his affections sway'd more than his reason" - Brutus' low modality language betrays his uncertainty concerning whether Caesar would become a tyrant once crowned. - In Brutus' experience, Caesar has not been one to let his own wilfulness outweigh his capacity for reason Shakespeare's Representation of Brutus - Shakespeare clearly renders the assassination plot pre-emptive — Caesar, who may become the " serpent" must be killed " in the shell". So, according to the play so far: - Caesar has not been crowned and only " might" become a tyrant. - Shakespeare's manipulation of the historical chronology and the rapid acceleration of events strongly suggests the assassination of Caesar was unjust. Shakespeare's Representation of Brutus BRUTUS (funeral oration) Be patient till the last. Romans, countrymen, and lovers! hear me for my cause, and be silent, that you may hear: believe me for mine honour, and have respect to mine honour, that you may believe: censure me in your wisdom, and awake your senses, that you may the better judge. 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. Had you rather Caesar were living and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all free men? 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. There is tears for his love; joy for his fortune; honour for his valour; and death for his ambition. Who is here so base that would be a bondman? If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman? If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so vile that will not love his country? If any, speak; for him have I offended. I pause for a reply. -

Ironically, Brutus appears before the crowd sounding like the tyrant he feared Caesar would become: - Imperative language - Intimidating rhetorical questions - Use of logos - Judicious use of dramatic pause Staging: -

Remember the conspirators have “washed” in Caesar’s blood — Brutus appears before the crowd basked in blood — heightens how intimidating he is. - Brutus is positioned in the pulpit, above the crowd, bearing down on them. - Shakespeare’s Representation of the Conspiracy — Further Considerations - When considering the representation of conspiracy and the assassination plot, think about the following: - The conspiracy experiences divided leadership between Brutus and Cassius: - Envy vs. the “general” good of Rome - Having an oath vs. not having one - Including Cicero vs. excluding him - Assassinating Mark Antony vs. letting him live - Brutus’ leadership is weakened by Cassius’ continual foreshadowing regarding the threat posed by Mark Antony. He judges Antony’s character correctly and this undermines Brutus’ credibility as a leader. - The way in which the assassination is staged — Shakespeare’s representation of the conspirators as “butchers”. - The argument between Brutus and Cassius in front of their armies in Act 4, scene ii, which continues into Act 4, scene iii. Shakespeare’s

Representation of the Conspiracy — Further Considerations - This contrasts with Mark Antony, Octavius and Lepidus who display a united front and common desire to avenge the conspirator's "foul deed": - Lepidus readily agrees to Antony's suggestion that his brother must die - Antony readily agrees that his nephew, Publius "shall not live" - There is no doubt (especially given Antony's funeral oration) that Antony is the leader of this triumvirate. Even though he speaks disparagingly about Lepidus to Octavius, calling him an "unmeritable man" and Octavius voices disagreement; Antony maintains credibility and strength of leadership by calling on his age and experience in battle, which silences Octavius. He also shows considerable political and military prowess in suggesting that their "alliance be combined" for the purpose of winning the war against Brutus. - Hence, Shakespeare emphasises the triumvirate's ability to put aside personal differences and unite under Antony's command. Shakespeare's Representation of Julius Caesar - The representation of Caesar is complex: - Proud in the way he relishes his popularity - Arrogant in his dismissal of the Soothsayer's warning "beware the Ides of March" - Wise in his assessment of Cassius' "mean and hungry look" - Fallible — he is deaf in one ear and suffers from epilepsy - Naïve in his astonishment at Brutus' involvement in the conspiracy — "Et tu Brute" - This representation of Caesar conveys the perspective that he is decidedly human and, despite a few very real failings, he is very much a great man. - This is proven in the play by the loyalty shown to Caesar by Mark Antony and the respect Caesar is given by the Roman citizens. - This contrasts with the conspirators who claim that Caesar is ambitious and believes himself to be a god-like tyrant — none of which are

conclusively proven by Shakespeare's representation of Caesar.

Shakespeare's Representation of Antony & his Defence of Caesar ANTONY

(soliloquy Act 3, scene i) O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth, That I am meek and gentle with these butchers! Thou art the ruins of the noblest man That ever lived in the tide of times. Woe to the hand that shed this costly blood! Over thy wounds now do I prophesy (Which, like dumb mouths, do ope their ruby lips To beg the voice and utterance of my tongue). A curse shall light upon the limbs of men; Domestic fury and fierce civil strife Shall cumber all the parts of Italy; Blood and destruction shall be so in use And dreadful objects so familiar That mothers shall but smile when they behold Their infants choked with custom of fell deeds And Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge, With Ate by his side come hot from hell, Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice Cry ' Havoc!' and let slip the dogs of war, That this foul deed shall smell above the earth With carrion men, groaning for burial. -

Soliloquy — effectively reveals Antony's thoughts and feelings to the audience: - His seemingly dishonourable pact with the conspirators is successfully rendered a political tactic — making Antony appear clever, honourable and loyal. - Emotive language emphasises his personal loyalty to Caesar — he emerges as an admirable figure, motivated by loyalty — this contrasts with the conspirators who appear motivated by envy.

Shakespeare's Representation of Antony & his Defence of Caesar - Dramatic verse — the structure of the soliloquy allows for the gradual escalation of Antony's emotions: - He begins subdued and sorrowful - This escalates into the heraldic fury of the final metaphor " let slip the dogs of war". - As his feelings run higher, his words become more intense and the images he uses

become more powerful - The prophecy of chaos Antony proclaims serves as a poignant reminder of the horror of a disrupted world; a world disrupted by the actions of envious "butchers". It is precisely this horror that Shakespeare is warning against. Shakespeare's Representation of Antony & his Defence of Caesar

ANTONY (funeral oration) Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears; I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. The evil that men do lives after them; The good is oft interréd with their bones; So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus Hath told you Caesar was ambitious: If it were so, it was a grievous fault, And grievously hath Caesar answer'd it. Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest- For Brutus is an honourable man; So are they all, all honourable men- Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral. He was my friend, faithful and just to me: But Brutus says he was ambitious; And Brutus is an honourable man. He hath brought many captives home to Rome Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill: - - Did this in Caesar seem ambitious? When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept: Ambition should be made of sterner stuff: Yet Brutus says he was ambitious; And Brutus is an honourable man. You all did see that on the Lupercal I thrice presented him a kingly crown, Which he did thrice refuse: was this ambition? Yet Brutus says he was ambitious; And, sure, he is an honourable man. I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke, But here I am to speak what I do know. You all did love him once, not without cause: What cause withholds you then, to mourn for him? O judgment! Thou art fled to brutish beasts, And men have lost their reason. Bear with me; My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar, And I must pause till it come back to me.

Antony progressively hits upon the notes of 'honour' and 'ambition' with a

cadence that calls them both into question. He uses conspicuous ambiguity regarding Caesar — “ If it were so, it was a grievous fault” and Brutus - “ Yet Brutus says he was ambitious”, rhetorical questions — “ Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?” and feigned intent -“ I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke”. Shakespeare’s Representation of Antony & his Defence of Caesar - There is a carefully balanced combination of logos (reason) and pathos (emotion). - The rhetorical questions show the employment of reasoned thought, whilst metaphor — “ My heart in is the coffin there with Caesar” and dramatic pause — “ I must pause till it come back to me” convey Antony’s emotional state — evoking responder sympathy as he is successfully represented as a loyal man who is grieving over the loss of his friend.

Shakespeare’s Representation of Antony & his Defence of Caesar - Funeral orations — staging considerations: - Brutus exits after his speech, but not before he has encouraged the citizens to “ stay” and “ grace” both Caesar’s corpse and Mark Antony’s speech. - Antony has several advantages over Brutus: his duplicity, the opportunity afforded him to expend 137 lines of blank verse unimpeded by the conspirators and his position as the final speaker, thus giving him the final word. - Use of props — Antony has two important props at his disposal: Caesar’s body and Caesar’s final will and testament. This, in particular is used for great dramatic effect as Antony delays his reading of it to the crowd, successfully building anticipation. - Antony, unlike Brutus, descends from the pulpit and places himself amongst the citizens. This helps him to foster a sense of shared grief and portrays Antony as respectful and compassionate toward the citizens; qualities that contrast with the conspirator’s treatment of the citizens. Conflicting

Perspectives: Concluding Points - Given his representation of the situation in Rome, the event of Caesar's assassination and the subsequent civil war and the presentation of key personalities: - Julius Caesar - Brutus - Antony - Cassius Shakespeare positions us to accept the following: - The plot to assassinate Caesar was fundamentally dishonourable - The assassination of Caesar was unjust - That Caesar, despite his fallibility, was a great man - Brutus, although acting out of a sense of honour, was ultimately misguided - That Mark Antony, through his loyalty and commitment to Caesar, proved far more honourable than Brutus with his patriotic ideals. - As a result, Shakespeare successfully conveys his values of unified power, loyalty, order and stability.