

# On Antony's Speech

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One of the features of *Julius Caesar* that deserves special attention is that it is full of arguments throughout. Conspirators talk over their secret intrigue, Brutus argues with them and tries to convince himself into the plot by debate; Antony moves the mob through his argument. Here Shakespeare seems to have grown to admit the power of thought as well as that of action.

Now I want to examine the contents of Antony's speech found in Act III, Sc. ii from the point of view of the art of persuasion by Antony, who moves the people at large through the means of argument only.

It is plainly seen by the last words in his discourse, "Now let it work," that Antony's speech is not a casual result of "the gift of the gab", but based on a plan made scrupulously beforehand. At the back of his talk is hidden a wholly conscientious plot hatched with an ardent passion and intense intellectual efforts. Through his speech he tries to move the masses, change the situation in Rome and gain an advantage over his enemy. And in fact this object of his attains success.

To succeed in anything there must be some reasons for it. If we examine why Antony had such success in instigating the masses only

through his speech, we may suggest as follows :

1 ) When he makes his speech, the time and the circumstances combine to favour him greatly. Then the people are in the great commotion owing to a big event — the assassination of great Caesar. And it may be said that the death of Caesar is an incident to which the mind clings, and from which it will not be torn away to share in other sorrows.

2 ) Brutus' speech made before Antony serves as a foil to the latter. That of the former in defence of the assassination of Caesar is a debate too systematic to appeal to the audience' imagination. And the prose used in his speech only adds to the impression that Brutus is cool. Such a speech of Brutus' might have made the people understand "This Caesar was a tyrant" (III, ii, 73), but could not move the audience. When Brutus says "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" (III, ii, 26 ff.), the people, I believe, cannot follow the stoic rigour of Brutus who dared to kill his friend whom once he so loved, though it was from the far deeper love for his country, because they are not sensible enough to know the difference between reason and passion distinctly.

3 ) When he has finished his speech, Brutus says, before leaving,

... for my sake, stay here with Antony :

...

I do entreat you, not a man depart,

Save I alone, till Antony have spoke. (III, ii, 61 – 66)

This is advantageous to Antony. It is not only useful for detaining the audience on the spot but also gives Antony an excuse to make a speech by "duty". It is never unintentional that Shakespeare makes

Antony say twice in lines 70 and 72 "For Brutus' sake, I am beholding to you."

4) The above three items are about the causes that lie outside. Now the causes that arise within — Antony himself. He may be said to have a sharp insight into the psychology of the masses. His speech based on his insight quite fits the tastes and demands of the audience. In the association with men we must know the character, trait, demand, attainment, age, circumstances and so on of the others. In this respect Antony is perfect.

Such are the advantages Antony has over his opponent. Now how about Brutus? Brutus, on the other hand, is intellectual, honest, and being a stoic philosopher, tries to behave according to a particular principle, insisting on his particular opinion. He does not in the least care about whether he is regarded as cool and cruel on that account. Accordingly he gives little consideration to the citizens as his audience in the way that Antony does. It is certain that he is far inferior in the art of the speech to his opponent.

Then what traits of the citizens does Antony grasp through his insight and make use of?

a) He knows that people are fond of clear, bold, and ardent expressions. It is shown by the fact that he uses repetition, antithesis etc. in his speech.

b) It is not that the masses do not understand abstract expression, but they rather like it. How to use it is the question. The key is to use the abstract with the concrete properly. In convincing people, it used to be a common way to tell a story in the concrete and conclude with a moral, as seen in fables. Fully aware of this, Antony also makes a clever use of it. For Example, "O, what a fall was there, my

countrymen! " (III, ii, 194) is a conclusion of the preceding six lines and may be compared with a biblical exclamation.

c) The masses are likely to act according to passion rather than to reason. So the exclamatory expression is more attractive to them. The apparent honesty and candour (modesty) of the speaker appeal to them far more greatly than the contents of the speech itself. Antony declares that he is obliged to speak by duty and tries his hardest to win their favour lest his hidden plot should be suspected. This is one of the greatest characteristics of his speech. For example, "So let it be..." (III, ii, 82) is useful in showing how impartial he is. "Under leave of Brutus..." (III, ii, 86) tells how he is modest in his behaviour. He uses euphemism as the way of the expression.

d) In his speech we find many facts stated in the form of supposition. This is done to make use of the psychology of the audience, who, in their excitement, are easily apt to take up a supposition as a fact, being unable to distinguish between the world of the present and that of the supposition. It is useful in hiding his otherwise disadvantageous plot and appealing to the audience' imagination, thus having a greater psychological effect than the plain statement of a fact. For instance: "... but were I Brutus,/And Brutus Antony..." (III, ii, 230).

At any rate, Antony's speech which is done with complete knowledge of their tastes is quite a success. But here we must consider the matter more in detail. It is true that he behaves and speaks so as to please the audience, which gives his speech a great success, but the greatest reason for his triumph is his psychological tact in handling the people. His discourse is full of paradoxes. His speech as a whole may be said to be a great and complete deception. His speech for the repose of Brutus' soul at the end of this play (V, v, 68) seems to me

almost an eloquent vacancy even though there is such an opinion as follows, that is, it is a eulogy, quite different from a piece of persuasive demagoguery. Coming from Antony who has used every trick in the book, it is very moving and true. And no one notices it. The upshot of the matter is that the personal elements of Antony as a speaker of rather a demagogue are superior. After all, he is among those who would accomplish their purpose by fair means or foul. Brutus in contrast to him is fair and just, having no selfish motive. He seems to be little concerned as to the way of the delivery of his speech and his rhetorical flashes are rather tame. Now let us come back again to Antony. Antony is conscious of the effects of his speech; he gives fire to each word and tries to give it the force to lead the masses into mutiny. It might be said that in his speech there is no "sincere word" in the true sense of the word. Antony says, "He was my friend, faithful and just to me" (III, ii, 90). This confession of his might be true, but considering it is included in his speech, I am disinclined to take it literally. (Here is my judgment of his morality.) In his speech you will find parts which reveal his plot, but then his intended meaning is contrary to that of the words used. Antony repeats too often, "he (Caesar) was ambitious; /And Brutus is an honourable man" (III, ii, 91-92). This is not what he wants to say. He never means it. Repetition of the same words however drives his intention into the mind of the masses who are, as it were, under his mesmerism. In the end the citizens are deluded to say, "Therefore 'tis certain he was not ambitious" (III, ii, 118). In the fortieth line after it we find the cry of the citizens, "They were traitors; honourable men." There is some time before they say so, because the impression of Brutus is still fresh on the citizens. Antony makes clever use of an-

tiphrasis, one of the figures of speech.

In order to attain his aim Antony adopts every means of psychological stratagem to incite the sense of pity for Caesar in the audience's minds: exclamations, tears, comparing him to martyr, taking advantage of the feeling of hero-worship of the mob, suggestion of Caesar's will, and so on. It seems to me that the death of Caesar is too overwhelming an incident for any stage of the drama but the last. "... and, I perceive, you feel/ The dint of pity" (III, ii, 197 – 198) shows how well he has succeeded in inciting the sense of pity in the audience's minds. Thus Antony drives the sympathy of the people for Caesar to fury and from fury to a climax the more effectively reached by the temporary suppression of the excitement, all in order to move passion into action. He is, indeed, excellent in his psychological stratagem.

Now I have said that his speech is full of deception. His speech beginning with "I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts" (III, ii, 220) to the line 235 is a remarkable example of this. All the citizens are under his spell. Thus all the negations turn into strong affirmations, all the suppositions change into real facts. His speech is done to attain his object, it is true, but the fact that his intention is carried out solely by means of that speech proves how great he is.

At last he does not mind crying "... to rise and mutiny" (III, ii, 234), though it reveals his intention hidden till then. This shows that he is quite aware that his audience is in his hand and his speech has been a great success. Antony is a clever demagogue, full of stratagem, tactful and politic, yet a man of feeling who completely understands the crowd, since he is, as he himself says, one of them. Yet by his detachment and cool stratagem, at the same time, he is able to

control them like a man dangling puppets.

In this play we find that stratagem wins in the end and that tactics beat simplicity. This play leads me to think if Shakespeare might have made an experiment as to the power of words in persuading men through the character of Antony. Indeed his deep thought and sharp insight into the human soul are astonishing.

Here again I cannot help admiring Shakespeare's greatness in his attitude to watch the foolishness, the weakness, and the frailty of men with his eyes full of tears of that sympathy, in which his greatness is said to lie.