**An Analysis of Political Rhetoric Devices in William Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar***

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**ABSTRACT**

The present paper is an attempt to describe the use of rhetorical devices by pointing out its pedagogical value with an analysis of political discourse in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. Through this paper, my aim is to present the use of rhetorical devices as a multilayered accumulation of rhetorical motives by looking at the political confrontation that unfolds in this literary work. The fundamental communicative act in this segment happens to be the two speeches made by Brutus and Marc Antony. Therefore, my attempt will be to outline those points from their speeches that include the language elements of ‘exhortative discourse’ that form the main perspective of the rhetorical process. The paper also seeks to demonstrate the power of rhetoric strategies to influence individuals and sway crowds to action and also how the lacking of rhetoric quality brings the tragic consequences. It also scrutinizes the relevance of ‘logos,’ ‘pathos,’ and ‘ethos’ in analyzing the use of rhetorical elements.

**Keywords:** **Rhetoric, Political discourse, Pathos, Republicanism, Ethical Appeal, Reason.**

William Shakespeare’s fascination with republicanism allows him to assert himself as a playwright who focused on contemporary political discourse with a perfect and balanced use of rhetorical devices in his writings. Shakespeare is not an author traditionally linked with seventeenth-century political discourse, but it can be strongly argued that he wrote his plays with as much attention to politics as attention to the rhetoric of his characters. He spent the greater part of his life under the rule of Elizabeth, and, therefore, knew about the varying degrees of civil unrest, and allowed Shakespeare to explore political disintegration. A clear indication of Shakespeare’s interest in the issue of politics can be noticed in his setting of the opening scenes in public places in so many of his plays. Robin Headlam Wells argues that “Shakespeare is not a political propagandist; he is interested above all in human beings caught up in the drama of power” (Wells 89).

Shakespeare perfectly used of classic rhetoric devices in his historical and political plays, particularly in *Julius Caesar*. Person/characters in Shakespeare frequently engage in the rhetorical process during their speeches or conversation, which is why this study targets the unravelling of the basic intentionally and motives underlying such speeches. Cronick also points out that the study of rhetoric is used to explore people employ language to achieve certain things, that is, to convince others, establish power structures and make people do what they want. This means that the speech should be presented in a clear manner in order to reach out to the audience.

Shakespeare brings the fears of Renaissance England to the stage in 1599 when *Julius Caesar* was first performed. Andrew Hadfield suggests that Shakespeare wrote *Julius Caesar* recognizing that the significance of the play was the death of the republic and the rise of imperial Rome (Hadfield 167). As a commentary on republicanism, Shakespeare highlights the fall of Brutus and the small resemblance that his Rome bears to established republican ideals. Brutus and Cassius represent the need for a change over oppressive rule and Mark Antony represents the voice of reason against political chaos. Thus, *Julius Caesar* is an offhand way for Shakespeare to posit himself as a political analyst. It is a different breed of political analysis for Shakespeare because the play focuses on a republican form of government (Hadfield 469).

The men who conspired to kill Caesar were hoping to restore a republican government to Rome. Even though the assassination was successful, the conspirators could not gain the support of the public. Without this support, they could not gain the political edge that they desired because they could not manipulate the situation to their advantage. Perhaps what Shakespeare is suggesting with *Julius Caesar* is that the government, including the English Monarchy, cannot survive, or at least cannot prosper, without the will of the people to support the leader. The conspirators are quickly sentenced to violent revenge by the gentle persuasion of Mark Antony when a few lines before they were hanging on the words of Brutus. He convinces the crowd that Caesar’s death was by no means a justifiable act and that the conspirators were just struggling for power. Shakespeare explores the struggle for supremacy faced by the conspirators and the triumvirate of Caesar’s friends. The play ends with a new group of leaders Mark Antony, Octavius Caesar, and Lepidus who will now fight for control of Rome. This continues the circle of strife that is maintained by multiple leaders. But Shakespeare proposes that a singular leader is necessary for a political system to work .

As it is clear that along with political discourse in Elizabethan England, rhetoric also became as much a set of tools for reading and literary analysis as an art of composition, and that writers in that age used metaphor and other rhetorical resources functionally, for the purposes of argument, praise and blame ( Keller 399). As Sigmund Freud also wrote that “words have a magical power . . . words are capable of arousing the strongest emotions and prompting all men’s actions” (qtd. In Coenn 1). The study of *Julius Caesar* clearly discloses that this work constitutes and portrays the comprehensive and effective use of rhetorical devices in the communicative actions of Cassius, Brutus and Mark Antony. Hadfield writes that , “The central feature of the republic at its height was rhetoric, the public art of persuasion, enabling listeners to weight up the evidence on either side of the argument and choose the right was forward (Hadfield 178). This shows how by the power of rhetoric the society can switch from one political side to another and how the majority opinion sways the course of political action. This observation agrees with that of Kangira and Mungenga who point out that “the use of rhetoric is to influence other people to follow their good or bad intentions” (Kangira 110). In view of this, the main objective of rhetoric is persuasion of one’s audience.

To regard this, Hussey emphasises that “the word must be the cousin to the deed, meaning that different styles are suitable for different subject-matters” (Hussey 66). Smit accepts that in relation to discourse, metaphor is important because of its functions of explaining, clarifying, describing, expressing, evaluating and entertaining and that people choose metaphor in order to communicate what they think or feel about something (Smit 95). This point clears that the objective of this is to achieve the desired persuasive goals. Meanwhile, another scholar, Rong-gen identifies several lexical and rhetoric features that speakers and writers alike normally employ to create vivid and emphatic effects and evoke profound persuasion. These are simile, metonymy, synecdoche, personification, paradox, allusion, hyperbole, understatement and irony (qtd. in Kemwi 11).

Hussey points out that during the Middle Ages, memoria (memorising) and pronuntiatio (delivery) were very important, where oral delivery was more common than silent reading (Hussey 67). And as time went on, rhetoric became more concerned with elocution, the ornaments of style. These devices are particularly used for elaboration, illustration and amplification. Hussey lists some of the more common devices which can be used in speeches: Adnominatio (repetition of the same word in a different form), Anaphora (repetition of the same word(s) at the beginning of successively clauses or lines of poetry), Apostrophe (highly-charged emotional comment frequently shown in successive lines beginning with ‘O’ or Alas! ), Epistrophe (the same word ending successive clause –the opposite of anaphora—), Isocolon (balance of two clauses of equal length), Parison (balance of two clauses of corresponding syntactic structure), Litotes (understatement frequently by negatives e.g. ‘He is no fool’), Ploce (repetition of the same word or phrase, sometimes after the intervention), and Sychomythia, a form of dialogue in which single lines are uttered by alternative speakers. (Hussey 68)

According to Hussey, these rhetorical figures provide speakers with a means to organise their speeches, especially utterance of some persuasion which needs to be distinguished from an ordinary talk. He further points out “talking and eloquence are not the same, to speak and to speak well are two things” (68). Cronick also considers that the speaker not only tries to convince his or her listener, but is also “thinking” out loud, so to speak” (Cronick 4). He adds that the speaker is elaborating his/ her own political, philosophical and existential posture in a continuous and changing negotiation with his/ her social environment (5). He also observes that “the use of rhetorical figures, interpretative distance and historical allusions in texts reveals a great deal about the intentions of the speaker” (Cronick 5). In this regard, for the speakers to be able to reach out to their audience their speeches should be organised through the use of the mentioned rhetorical devices.

In *Julius Caesar*, the story is put in motion as Cassius pulls Brutus aside to discuss this perception of Caesar and the dangers of Caesar’s growing power, in an attempt to persuade a man loyal to Caesar to rebel against him. With this objective of convincing a man to turn his back on his friend, Cassius focuses on two specific strategies: to weaken Brutus’ devotion to Caesar and to prompt Brutus’ sense of civic responsibility. First, Cassius uses devices such as “contradiction” and juxtaposition” (Chou 2). He points out Caesar’s shortcomings and juxtaposes him to fellow men, showing no difference between Caesar and ordinary men in comparison. This implies Caesar is just likely to become corrupted with power, despite him being treated as a god. As case of juxtaposition would be his constant comparing Caesar with Brutus:

Brutus and Caesar— what should be in that “Caesar”?

Why should that name be sounded more than yours?

Write them together, yours is as fair a name. (1.2 144-146)

He forces Brutus to question whether such ordinary and weak men deserve to hold such power, while continually flattering Brutus. Next, Cassius is aware that “knowing the audience” is essential to successfully persuading. Twice in eight lines Brutus uses the word “honor,” reflecting the weight he places on honour. Cassius quickly takes advantage of this:

I know that virtue to be in you, Brutus

As well as I do know your outward favour.

Well, honor is the subject of my story. (1.2 90-92)

One will discover in the ensuing speeches delivered by Cassius and Antony, respectively in Act Scene II and Act III Scene II, the chosen wording of “honor” repeatedly appears. In Act III, Brutus finally falls victims to Cassius’ tricks and joins the conspirators after receiving Cassius feigned letters, in which fake citizens urged Brutus to lead Rome.

Persuading by the speech of Cassius, Brutus makes no attempt to hide his involvement in the assassination of Caesar, and he takes the platform to justify Caesar’s death to the public of Rome. He presents his speech in plain prose and aims to appeal to the people’s reason, he addresses them as “friends,” empathizing with their alarm. He addresses the crowd of Plebeians as follow: Romans, countrymen, and lovers, hear me for my cause, and be silent, that you may hear” (3.2). These lines are enunciated with the intention of fortifying the highly valued identification between the orator and his audience. We shall notice afterwards that the first three signifiers are not only a chain of formal and clichéd lexemes used for oratorical delivery, but a significant principle that crystallizes the political project that Brutus himself adopts with prudence. Further, he addresses, “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” (3.2 23). With the conditional he predicates the “answer-vindication” as ethically normal with regards to his viewpoint where the forensic development of his speech will focus on. Through these lines, with steadfast decisiveness he discloses to the audience the issue under the bush (Newman 9). He simultaneously presents the vivid antithesis (conjoing contrasting ideas) by the use of antithetic lexemes “less/more” which is a political dividing line between tyranny and republicanism (Newman 9). Through this technique, one idea could be heightened to importance, while the other diminishes to oblivion. The people will consider Brutus Valorous for placing his personal affections beneath his patriotism. He would appear as a man of true honour.

Moreover, Brutus eloquently uses “rhetorical questions” or reverse psychology to augment his argument: “Had you rather Caesar were living and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all free men?” (3.2 24) and it is understood that men would refuse to become slaves and feed disposed to freedom. Linguist Antonio Reyes believes questions imply connections with the audience, since they are formulated in the here—and—more moments of discourse. These questions constitute confirmatory questions, used often as solidarity devices” (Reyes 192). Brutus continues step by step to stack up Caesar’s virtues by the words, “There is tears, for his love; joy for his fortune; honour for his ambition” (3.2). Ending the sentence with the word “ambition,” Brutus claims that this is the real cause that motivated him and his friends to carry out the assassination. By using his rhetorical technique, he proposes question after question to the people:

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 love his country?

If any, speak-for him have I offended. (3.2 31-33)

Here, Brutus uses another rhetoric technique “epimome,” the frequent repetition of a phrase of question to manifest one point. Nearing the end of his speech, he swears to take his own life if the people spiritually shouted in response, “Live Brutus! Live! Live!” (3.2 45). By using isocolon and anaphora, he becomes success to gain the confidence and emotional bondation of the people, which he sought to secure by means of his justification. Thus Brutus demonstrates consistency with his taking the life of his friend, for killing himself would prove his commitment in placing the good of Rome above all personal affections. Brutus delivers his oratory in a potent and brief style basing his arguments largely on appealing to the audience’s logos and their patriotic love of Rome (Chou 4). Further, Brutus’s impending strategy is coming to a head in which he “permits” Antony to deliver what he thinks is a normally expected speech as funeral oration. Brutus simply believes that Antony will pay tribute to the deceased; he requests the citizen to listen to Antony’s speech, “Plebeians say, “stay, ho! And let us hear Marc Antony” (3.2). Thus, Brutus gives a pass way to Antony.

Antony begins his speech by the words, “For Brutus’ sake, I am beholding to you” (3.2). As the audience are still under the influence of Brutus’s apparently well aimed argumentation, which in the end seems to have appeased them. There is, at least, the indication that they, “identify” with the rhetorical vision that Brutus has promoted. Moreover, there is the apprehension that Antony might speak with impertinence against Brutus. Antony’s speech is a classic example of powerful rhetoric. Its widely believed that Shakespeare composed Antony’s speech following the rhetorical guide of Thomas Wilson’s 1560 book *Arte of Rhetorique* (Chou 4). This is concerned to the theories of rhetoric and includes the example of how to fit an argument to different circumstances. There are three different rhetorical/ artistic proofs are : ethos or ethical appeal based on the character, credibility or reliability of the speaker, addresser or writer, Pathos or emotional appeal and logos or use of inductive or deductive reasoning (Shipale 36). Antony uses the device “ethos” with an address that clearly flatters the audience , “Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears; I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him” (3.2). He starts at a moment when the listener were impressed by the speech of Brutus, and were in his side, Wilson heeds that “nothing should be spoken at the first, but that which might please the judge” (Chou 4). In carefully choosing the wording of “lend me your ears,” Antony applies the device “metonymy,” where he associates two concepts –the ear and the act of listening; with metonymy, Antony effectively grasps the audiences’ attention. Now, the crowd has calmed down and has become less reluctant to hear Antony’s words:

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. (3.2 83-86)

Antony carries out his speech referring to Brutus an “honourable man,” which he would repeat several times throughout the text. The people were pleased to hear Brutus praised. However, this is in Antony’s favour, for he will use the same repeated phrase to spark the audience into doubt. Antony cunningly combines the use of “juxtaposition” and “repetition” (Chou 5). Furthermore, he addresses:

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. (3.2 83-86)

Through these lines, Brutus connected two facts with each other as one: Brutus says Caesar was ambitious , and Brutus is an honourable man. When two facts are juxtaposed as such, if one of them has proven questionable both the facts will become doubtful. Antony aims to prove Caesar was not ambitious, and by doing so, Brutus’ honour and honesty will become shaken. Chou notes that for justifying his point strongly, Antony appeals to Aristotle’s “logos,” in giving three evidences of Caesar’s moderate ambition- Caesar paid ransom, implying his generosity. He also added that Caesar wept for the poor, implying his compassion for the people. Caesar refused the crown three times, inferring his lack of ambition. Antony creates a logical chain connecting Julius Caesar’s behaviour to his lack of excessive ambition. Chou writes, “This technique is called, ‘exdoxa’ by the Sophist, which is the manipulation of commonly held beliefs. Through recalling certain events, citizens have witnessed, he supports his position” (Chou 5).

Afterwards, Antony appeals to the emotion of the audience, also known as Aristotle’s “Pathos,” thoughtfully conveying his grief for Caesar: “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”. Thus through the use of ‘pathos,’ sentiment that is here presented from a personal account which aims for the audience to respond by accepting the idealized image of Caesar and to gradually identify with the ethos of his projection. This emotional response contrasts heavily with Brutus’ stern demeanour. While Brutus firmly states his emotions, Antony conveys it through his actions. “If you have tears prepare to shed them now,” he says as he shows the people Caesar’s gashed and bloody cloak. He even walks down into the crowd, combined with his emotions, Antony seems more of a man of the people than Brutus, who spoke form a heightened platform in an elevate manner

Finally, he appeals to the self-interest of the crowd, who under the terms of Caesar’s will should all inherit money and the enjoyment of his private gardens. Here, Antony again uses rhetorical devices to emphasize his point (the will) through seemingly passing over it- “paralepsis” (Chou 6).

Have patience, gentle friends. I must not read it.

It is not meet you know how Caesar loved you.

You are not wood, you are not stones, but men.

And, being men, bearing the will of Caesar, (3.2 139-142)

Thus, he states as given fact that “everyone” loved Caesar, regardless of deviously playing with the word “cause” which emerges here in an ambiguous way. Antony has also selected the depiction of sentimental incidents that focus on ‘pathos’. Moreover, we have here an aptly formed enthymeme:

1. “We should mourn those who once had cause of love.” (Major Premise)
2. “We once had a cause to love Caesar” (Minor Premises)
3. “Therefore, we should mourn Caesar” (Conclusion)

In this way, and with the dramatized diffusion of the sentimental incident, Antony is in a position to manipulate the audience with an affected discourse that he fervently executes without restraint. Behold the following interjection: “O judgement thou art fled to brutish beasts, and men have lost their reason” (3.2). By using the three devices: hyperbole, apostrophe and Pun, especially his paying on the word ‘brutish’ as a subtle reference to Brutus captures the way Antony can denigrate his opponent. He portrays the situation as a departure from rational thought and the disintegration of the social fabric.

Consequently, it’s becoming noticeable that the Plebeians are on the verge of completely submitting to the imposition of Antony’s highly charged and scheming rhetoric. To be sure, the obvious inconstancy fickleness and shallowness of the crowd show how the audience in this particular instance, can radically change its beliefs in a flash! The statement made by the first Plebeians, “Me thinks there is much reason in his sayings” proves that Antony’s speech is persuaded and totally based on Brutus’s fundamental argument. Moreover, the act of persuasion by the use of rhetoric devices tends to assist the listener in taking the decision so as to behave or to act as the speaker wishes. Kamwi writes that persuasion in effect demands a commitment from the listener in the form of changing his/her mind or behaviour. (17). The Plebeians elevate Antony as the “noblest” man in Rome; and so he now manages to gain supremacy in the arena of current political confrontation.

To conclude William Shakespeare in *Julius Caesar* presents the multifaceted variety of rhetorical schemes which turned out to be effective. Antony’s victorious influence was attained by using a highly expressive logos as rhetoric, as a rule, is made up of a logos in which the orator seeks to instil his or her worldview in an audience so that they will identify with it (Chou 6). They are all used for a political purpose to sway the minds of the Roman people as well as leaders in power. Moreover, through *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare also presents that the public must perceive the forthcoming consequences of the expediency and the basic motives of the orators who use their rhetoric tongue for their own purposes. As in the end, Antony charmed the Plebeians with his rhetoric. With an effective use of his brain and tongue, he was in a position to lead this uncivil audience down a pathway that he himself had chosen.

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