

應外二 許宛伶

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Brutus' and Antony's Critical Speeches in *Julius Caesar*

In Act 3 Scene 2 of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*,¹ the successive speeches of Brutus and Antony not only irreversibly direct the story line and mark the fatal end, these speeches also reflect some features of the two characters. "Both Brutus and Antony," according to Ruth Morse, "play on their 'ethos' in their speeches, that is, the morality of speaker" (1991, 59). In addition, Brutus and Antony approach to the audience with different goals in mind, which turns out that Brutus' "force of his argument" is pale in comparison to Antony's "appeal to the emotions of the crowd" (60). In this paper I would like to investigate the strategies Brutus and Antony adopt with regard to the form and the context.

Brutus and Antony's significant difference lies in the style of their discourse. Brutus addresses to the Roman citizen in prose, while Antony in verse (Martindale 1994, 155). The convention in the drama is that a play is mostly engaged in verse and prose is used for comic purposes. But it is Shakespeare's craftsmanship to alternatively use prose and verse in a play to spawn impressive effects. In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare makes Brutus' prose precede Antony's verse. The rhetorical

¹ Mowat, Barbara A. and Paul Werstine eds. *Julius Caesar By William Shakespeare*. New Folger Shakespeare Library ed. New York: Washington Square Press, 1992. All the text of the play cited in this paper is from the edition.

techniques the characters approach not only reveal their personalities but also their underlying targets. Brutus' choice of prosaic style signifies his "commitment to undecorated truth" (Smith 2004, 108). In this way, Brutus expects those citizens to judge the assassination with reason rather than with passion. He announces that, "Censure me in your wisdom, and awake your senses that you may the better judge" (17-19). Nevertheless, one cannot overlook the fact that in most Shakespearian plays, prose often comes in to play when the character is in the state of madness, like the fragmented lines uttered by Hamlet or King Lear. The use of prose here can be said to betray Brutus' fallibility that he is a sinner and his false belief that he has advantages over Antony. Despite his confidence in his justification, Brutus' speech is far from aridity. Although Brutus speaks not in an elevated and poetic tone as Antony does, his public oration integrates "schemes of equivalence and repetition" (Smith 2004, 108), so that it appears well-organized and intricately designed.

Regardless of Brutus success in arousing consensus so much so that the public anticipates Brutus replacement of Caesar, Antony comes to the front at a more reserved stand and ironically wins the hearts of Roman citizens. He challenges Brutus and talks in verse, which, compared to Brutus's prose, is more elaborated. Unlike Brutus, Antony aims at the emotions of the mob. His first denial that he comes "to bury Caesar, not to praise him" (83), caters to the feelings of the crowd and earns

himself the attention. The poetic style of Antony has the advantages of sincerity and spontaneity. The repetition of “honorable man” seems natural without harmful intention at first. But with Antony’s timely pauses and rhetorical rhythm, the phrase resonates in the minds of the citizens and the suspicion grows into revelation:

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. (3. 2. 114-17)

And therefore Antony ensues doubts and whispers in the crowd who says:

Methinks there is much reason in his sayings.
If thou consider rightly of the matter,
Caesar has had great wrong.
Has he, masters?
I fear there will a worse come in his place.
Marked you his words? He would not take the
crown;
Therefore ‘tis certain he was not ambitious. (3.2. 118-25)

Both Brutus and Antony are conscious of the citizens’ impressions about them.

Brutus regards himself as a patriot; however Antony talks of himself as a “plain blunt man,” not an “orator” as Brutus is. It is true that Brutus is energetic and prompt in order to achieve his goal, while Antony is deficient in force. Antony’s winding and comparatively prolonged speech, in effect, creates the irony that in turn gives a blow to Brutus.

In fact, both their speeches and the triggered responses share the elements of irony. Brutus begins his speech with apostrophe—“Romans, countrymen, and lovers!”

In contrast, Antony cries for the attention of “[f]riends, Romans, countrymen.” Their intention and emphasis is therefore transparent. Brutus makes his effort to convince Romans by specifying his passionate love for Caesar but even more so for Rome. His killing of Caesar is a token of his opposition of monarchy as Nicholas Brooke illustrates in *Shakespeare’s Early Tragedies*, but ironically the crowd responds by exalting him as a successor of Caesar (157):

Live, Brutus, live, live!
Bring him with triumph home unto his house.
Give him a statue with his ancestors.
Let him be Caesar.
Caesar’s better parts
Shall be crown’d in Brutus. (3. 2. 50-55)

Where Brutus advances Romans in his oration and takes notice of patriotism, Antony strengthens his companionship with the citizens. Antony calls for the patience of “friends,” as he acknowledges Caesar’s flaws.

I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones.
So let it be with Caesar. (3. 2. 83-86)

He then could conjure up an “honorable” Brutus at will. His speech, as Brooke points out, serves as an “exhibition of destruction of reason” (1968, 157). To put it another way, Antony is more concerned with the psychology of the crowd. He implicitly guides the citizens into questioning the authenticity and plausibility of Brutus’ personality and his motive of assassination. He repeatedly refers to Brutus as an

“honorable man,” and stresses Brutus’s declaration of Caesar being “ambitious.” After he stimulates a sense of uncertainty, Antony embarks on “[wheedling] the crowd into hearing Caesar’s will” (158). Before delivering Caesar’s will, Antony suspends the curiosity and edgy, eager emotions of the public:

Will you be patient? Will you stay awhile?
I have o’ershot myself to tell you of it.
I fear I wrong the honorable men
Whose daggers have stabbed Caesar. I do fear it. (3. 2. 161-64)

Antony, at last, evokes from the citizens the words behind his well-calculated verse—“traitors,” “villains,” and “murderers.”

Although the outcome of the successive speeches proves Antony’s superiority over Brutus’, it is nevertheless the instability of the audience’s emotions that decisively marks the tragic end of the arguments at the funeral. “[B]oth end in farcical bestiality,” states Brook, “for both are rooted in the mindless instability of the mob” (158). However, their personalities play a part in leading themselves to the delivery of speeches that put Brutus in jeopardy and provide Antony with advantages. Brutus is too confident in his judgment that Antony’s address to the citizens will make no harm. Brutus is in fact lacking in foresight, which results in an opportunity for Antony to make use of it. Before his departure, Brutus makes his statement:

. . . as I slew my best lover for
the good of Rome, I have the same dagger for myself
when it shall please my country to need my death. (3. 2. 47-49)

Brutus invites Antony to give the speech, but before Antony makes known his

purpose, Brutus actually plants a seed of his own failure and ironically invites the “dagger” that makes himself a traitor of Caesar and Rome.

The intricate arrangement of the speeches reflects the inner parts of the characters and foreshadows the tragic end of Brutus. The irony embedded in Brutus’ and Antony’s speeches evokes pathos in readers and audience. So their utterances at Caesar’s funeral mark Brutus’ hamartia and prove Shakespeare’s artistry of rhetoric.

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