A CRITICAL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF JULIUS CAESAR’S FUNERAL SPEECHES
AND THE ART OF RHETORIC

ABSTRACT

*Julius Caesar* is one of the most enthralling tragic plays of Shakespeare. It is a play that gives one some sense of critical reasoning about power, death and life in its full sense. Though, tragedy is a genre of literature which makes one feel—there is always an emotional involvement while reading or seeing a tragic play in the theatre. Unlike comedy that gives one a sense of intellectuality—it makes one think rather than feel. Therefore, this study is meant to examine the funeral rhetoric made by the two characters, Brutus and Mark Antony and how they are able to use the power of words to convince and gain people’s attention to themselves. Looking critically into the rhetorical art engagement by the two powerful orators, Brutus and Mark Antony at Caesar’s funeral rite, one will discover that the two individuals make use of different rhetorical approaches and techniques in communicating their feelings to their audience. In their speeches, the art of rhetoric plays a very significant role in the way they delivered their vagary. As the study progresses, the technique that each of the speakers uses to prove their points and gain people’s support to themselves is brought under fulcrum.

Key Words: Funeral rite, Speech and Rhetorical Art, Persuasion, Julius Caesar, Roman Audience.

Introduction

Rhetorical art is a useful and acquired skill which is principally used to convince or persuade people. During Elizabethan England, rhetoric was an important activity due to the number of books that were published on the subject. Though, little is known about personal life of
Shakespeare but it seems that he must have been schooled in King Edward VI School. It is therefore assumed that in his teenage period he must have learned more about rhetorical art as it must have been included in their normal curricula. In all his dramatic texts, one can actually see how skillful Shakespeare applies rhetorical devices to convey his whim. He has not only made use of linguistic craft and mechanisms in the creation of his characters and their dialogues but the characters were made to express interesting speeches and rhetorical art of conversation. In *Julius Caesar* rhetorical devices are significantly applied to make the play absorbing. In fact, *Julius Caesar* is a play that really reflects the art of rhetoric in its real magnitude. For Shakespeare to demonstrate a high knowledge about rhetorical art in his plays, he must have acclimatized himself with classical writings and ancient characters. As it is understood that rhetorical art was an important communication tool in governance, law, public hearing, and philosophical argument in ancient Greece and Rome. Therefore, this paper intends to make a comparative analysis of how Shakespeare applies rhetoric in *Julius Caesar* using the characters of Mark Antony and Brutus.

The Pedigree and the Power of Rhetoric in Caesar’s Funeral

Looking critically into the rhetorical art engagement by the two powerful orators, Brutus and Mark Antony at the Caesar’s funeral rite, one will discover that the two individuals make use of different approaches and techniques in communicating their feelings to their audience. In their speeches, the art of rhetoric plays a very significant role in the way they delivered their vagary. As it is known that the fountainhead of rhetoric could be traced to the ancient Greece and Rome—it is a powerful tool in which they used in persuading people to accept their ideas especially in government. Rhetorical art is an exigent contrivance of governance particularly during the time that Roman Empire existed. Virtually all the emperors were usually an orator. In particular, during the period of Cicero, a great politician—he was a competent orator whose speech can make the most skeptical person believe anything. Hence, it is this rhetorical art that Shakespeare puts in his characters, especially Brutus and Antony during the Caesar’s funeral. Ballard, (2016) opines that, “throughout his plays, we can see how Shakespeare was steeped in
rhetoric – not just through the linguistic ‘tricks’ and techniques he uses to compose his characters’ speeches, but through the comments the characters themselves make about the art of communication” (Ballard, 2016). Therefore, if one should considerably look into the manner through which Brutus and Antony deliver their oratory, it is obvious that there are significant linguistic devices that Shakespeare makes them use.

Thus, Ballard, (2016) explains that, “early on then, Shakespeare establishes rhetoric as the possession of the powerful, and as a means of controlling and influencing the behaviour of the commoners. It’s also the vehicle by which he explores issues relating to the good of the Roman people and the democratic values of the state”. As Senator Brutus begins his speech, trying to justify and elucidate his participation in the killing of his friend, Caesar, he makes use of effective rhetorical devices such as antithesis parallelism to defend his crime. This is reflected thus, “Had you rather Caesar were living and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all free men?”. Brutus main reason for rising against Caesar is well stated here and it appeals to the senses of the audience—they never question him, instead he is hailed and received their praises. Hence, “Brutus convinces the public about the fact that Caesar was ambitious by using again the arguments of the confirmatio …and some rhetorical questions... He has just exposed his arguments making clear that he killed Caesar because he was a tyrant” (Sara, 2015:99).

Hence, he goes further and states that:

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.

Although Brutus extenuates his crime against his good friend, Caesar—his act of amiciocide is not rationally justifiable. In fact, “Brutus makes no attempt to hide his involvement in the
assassination of Caesar, and takes the platform to justify Caesar’s death to the people of Rome. He presents his speech in plain prose and aims to appeal to people’s reason.” (Chou) Listening critically to what Mark Antony utters at Caesar's funeral, it becomes clear that Brutus' act of perfidy is basically a product of conspiratorial persuasion from Cassius who has succeeded in inveigling other quislings to join him in the assassination of their emperor. In fact, it is not the death of Caesar that now matters but the speeches—the rhetoric that was made by Brutus and Mark Antony accentuates the pick of the entire play and it is the basis of the rest of the play. Hence, Brutus is a great betrayer of a great friend. Although, according to Aristotle's concept of tragedy: a tragic hero one way or the other personally contributes to his own doom. His Achilles' heel is always the main point of his woe.

Therefore, Caesar has a weak point which is hubris. Even when he is warned by the seer at the marketplace to beware of "Ides of March", yet he ignores the warning. His wife also has a terrible and petrifying nightmare a day prior to the day of his destruction--she warns him of going to the senate that there is a danger awaiting him. But he refuses to obey; instead, he becomes less sensitive to danger and claims to be more dangerous than danger itself. This is where his doom begins--his doom begins when his pride arises. Thus, “Caesar prepares to go to the Senate. His wife, Calpurnia, begs him not to go, describing recent nightmares she has had in which a statue of Caesar streamed with blood and smiling men bathed their hands in the blood. Caesar refuses to yield to fear and insists on going about his daily business” (A Shakespeare in the Ruins Study Guide). In Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, he postulates the circumstances of certain engagement in which if those circumstances are not carefully engaged it will always lead to doom—unwanted doom indeed.

Hence, in Aristotle’s opinion, he explicates that there have been people of great wealth who were destroyed by their own wealth and the brave were devoured by their bravery. In this scenario, when one is not meticulous about what he has most, be it bravery, wealth, power, fame, influence or whatever, it is possible for the destruction of one to be imminent through those possessions. This is the muddle Caesar has. He is never aware of his private or public excessive pride which is the main architect of his doom. If Caesar had listened to warning he
would have escaped the doom. But in the other hand, because he is a hero who has been fated to perish without any reversal of doom, “what will be, will be—whatever will be will be”. In juxtaposition to what happened to King Oedipus in Sophocles’ The Oedipus Rex, King Oedipus is also vehemently warned against finding out the truth about who is responsible for the plague in the land, but he insists on searching for the truth until the last point. At the end, his discovery of the truth indicts and incriminates him of being the main culprit—it is a discovery of bitter candour that leads to his desertion of his noble thrown, gushing out of his two eyes, identifying that his children are also his siblings, and his self-banishment. Knowing the truth will always end somewhere; and as a tragic hero it will always end somewhere unfavourable.

To some certain extent, Caesar is becoming more powerful, magnificent and indispensable than Rome itself—critically speaking he needs to die for Rome and its dignity to survive as Brutus claims. This is more crystallized in his being deified when people say "hail Caesar". But, Caesar could have been guiltier if his death did not come from his close friends. Really, it is very pathetic. He is a great man with a godlike character, but his inability and insouciance to be wary of his frailty and get rid of it devours him.

The Comparative Survey of Brutus’ and Antony’s Funeral Rhetoric

In the speeches made by the two speakers at the Caesar’s funeral—comparing rhetorical speeches made by Brutus and Antony, one will realize that both of them applied different rhetorical styles to gain Roman audience to themselves. In the art of public speaking, there are different appeals that can be applied in order to arrest, gain, and retain the attention of one’s audience. Thus, there are different types of speeches which are:

1. Intellectual speech (academic appeal)
2. Forensic speech (logical appeal)
3. Political speech (emotional appeal)
4. Religious speech (emotional appeal)
All these mentioned above have different approaches and appealing in which they are applied to achieve a goal. Looking critically into the approach used by Brutus, he applies logical appeal—he is able to prove his rationale with logic by drawing attention of Roman audience to the dignity of Rome—that Rome is more cardinal than anyone irrespective of his achievement and dignity, including Caesar. He justifies killing Caesar for the good of Rome and Romans. To him, no one is more indispensable than Rome even the emperor. Thence, if anyone or emperor is over rising or raising himself above the dignity of Rome, he poses a great threat to the entire Rome and her descents. Therefore, Caesar must die for Rome to live. Here is what Brutus postulates in his apologia of killing his best friend under the auspices of conspiracy:

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 be the better Judge.

At the beginning of his speech, he tries to instruct the audience to maintain absolute decorum so that he will be able to instill his words, points and logic in their psyche. Though, logical approaches and points he maintains make the audience see reasons to why Caesar must die and they hail him for killing their emperor who has brought great cachet to Rome than what Brutus should have brought them. In this sense, sophistry is appropriately applied in his speeches. In the ancient Greece, the Sophists usually applied sophistry to convince their audience, but most times, sophistry was always a potent mobility to deception. They manipulated people through their fair and logical speeches. Critically, some speeches may be very logical but not true. Ryan (2014) points that "Brutus' appeal to "any dear friend of Caesar's" and his rhetoric of love, friendship, and civic loyalties outline the familiar discourse of
friendship so prevalent in late-sixteenth and early seventeenth century England”. This is exactly what Brutus applies; he uses logical words that are not necessarily true. He tells them to awake their senses, but definitely Brutus is the one who tries to manipulate their senses through fair speeches that are not really fair. Thus, he explicates further in which he reveals his hypocrisy to rationalize his crime—he tries to make the people of Rome accept the fact that he is right for killing Caesar and killing him is for the good of Rome. He accuses Caesar of being ambitious, here, ambition as it is accentuated by Brutus has a negative connotation. Thus, he opines that:

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.

To Brutus, according to what he has tried to prove, by logic he is absolutely right, but looking at it from the verisimilitude point of view, Brutus himself has a personal ambition attached to the assassination of his best friend—that is, to eliminate him so as not to attain the godlike level which Caesar is almost or has already achieved. There is a great seed of envy planted within the line of his heart that prompts the tragic connivance against Caesar. He really does not want Caesar to attain the level he presumes he might attain, and which he feels could be more egregious to the entire Rome—Rome must be first, not Caesar; that is his perception. But unfortunately he claims he is doing everything for Rome’s sake and good. Here he points out at the end of his speech when Antony comes in with the Caesar’s body:

With this I depart,—that, 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.

Brutus identifies the fact that he is mostly loved by Caesar, but he betrays him. Nonetheless, as he claims that he has the dagger for himself, when it shall please Rome to need his death. The
question is: is he really true about his statement or he says that to gain people’s trust? He actually gives his speech rhetorically even as he is ending his speech at the entrance of Antony and Caesar body, he maintains that:

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.

Here, logical approach that Brutus applies to his audience is appealing to them and, they hail him without questioning. But as he rounds off his speech, Mark Antony dispels his claim and gets into people’s emotion. In an occasion like this, knowing the fact that Caesar untimely passage into the great beyond is too tragic—too, too tragic. Assassinating the emperor of Rome is tantamount to crumbling the whole Rome itself—when the captain of a troupe is defeated the troupe is conquered. Symbolically and sincerely, Caesar is not just an emperor, but a warrior emperor who has fought and brought conquests to Rome in his adventure of war. The Caesar of Rome is an embodiment and symbol of Rome, so, if the Caesar of Rome is conquered, it shows Rome has gone down.

The people of Rome have never reasoned to this extent before they hail Brutus for his speech of crime. But Antony’s elocution is more emotional because he becomes emotive when he renders his speech. He opens the eyes and senses of the people, and draws attention of the citizens of Rome to all good works of Caesar to Rome and her people. He tells them how he has fought most terrible wars in which, through that, he brought honour to Rome and her people—it is therefore tragically uncalled for to pay him back with death—tragic death. He makes them realize that even if Brutus has justified his crime they should know that his crime is not just against Caesar but against Rome in particular. If truly Brutus loves Rome more as he claims, he wouldn’t have destroyed the man who stands as the symbol of the entire Roman Empire.

Hence, the rectitude Brutus avows to have for Rome is never a true integrity but a forged and barmy one. One cannot claim to love Rome and destroy her Head. In attempt to persuade the Romans, Antony uses an act of persuasion in an emotive manner and he is able to resuscitate
the mind of the people towards the evil that Brutus has done. In his first few lines he maintains thus:

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;

I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.

The evil that men do lives after them; 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.

In this speech stated above, Antony also makes use of dramatic irony in which he taunts Brutus as an “honourable man” as Brutus himself claims. And all his partners in crime are also honourable men because they all conspire to commit “an honourable crime”. In this sense, Antony uses pathos and makes people to have an emotional identification with him to mourn the fallen Caesar because he really does not deserve how he is treated by his best friends. Thence, he keeps on explicating all what Caesar has done that should accord him honour even in death than Brutus who claims to be an honourable man. He points out and proves to the audience that Caesar is not ambitious—he has even three times presented him the opportunity of becoming the emperor of which he has rejected three times. If he is truly ambitious as Brutus has accused him he would have accepted the kingly offer when he is given. He opines that “I thrice presented him a kingly crown, which he did thrice refuse: Was this ambition? Yet Brutus says he was ambitious”
Antony is very intelligent and he points out the good works of Caesar through which he is able to stare up people’s emotion against Brutus and his cohorts. Thence, the significant difference between the two speakers is that Brutus appeals to the logical mind of the Roman audience while Antony cleverly appeals to the emotions of the people and it yields him a very good result. Brutus is honourable while Antony is emotionally persuasive. “However, Mark Antony’s speech is not as clearly divided as Brutus’ is, as this one is longer and includes several pauses and interactions with the public which is in some way indicating that it will be a more pathetic and less rational speech” (Sara, 2015:99). Hence, pathos is effectively felt in Antony’s speech when he establishes an emotional nexus and identification with the crowd, he makes them view the injuries of the stabs executed by Brutus on Caesar his friend. This he postulates that “this was the unkindest cut of them all”. This really creates an emotional identification between the audience and the speech. Therefore, catharsis is greatly accentuated—there is a great sense of pity and fear. With his rhetoric and gestures, Antony is able to establish a great sense of sympathy, trauma and loss of trust in the citizen of Rome. However, “as much as listening to his words, Antony wants to encourage the plebeians of Rome to look once more upon the piteous sight of the slain Caesar’s corpse. The assumption that underpins Antony’s observation is that the blood of Caesar can “speak” more to the citizens than any words the orators might use” (Geddes, 2010:45).

Talking about Ethos reflected in Mark Antony’s speech, he tries to give the justification of his good relationship with Caesar, this is shown in his comments “he was my friend, faithful and just to me”. This manifests the tragic feeling and the speech is used to persuade and convince the listeners about the level of credibility of their friendship.

The last but not the least, logos is palpably manifested in Mark Antony’s speech: this is a situation where there is an appeal to logic and reason and this is how he is able to persuade the Roman audience to get outraged at the atrocity committed by Brutus and his partners in crime. Antony points out when he tries to persuade his audience to reason with the good works of Caesar that “He hath brought many captives home to Rome, whose ransoms did the general coffers fill”. From the debut till the end of his speech, Antony gives many instances of the good
deeds and a great sense of humanity of Caesar to prove that he is unjustly murdered by his "friendly enemies". This is culminated in the will Caesar wrote in which he reads to the audience and it is discovered that Caesar gives every citizen of Rome 75 drachmas and half of his orchards. Antony makes use of those proofs to let the Roman citizens realize that Caesar is never a dictator as Brutus and others make them believe. Therefore, Antony uses the rhetorical devices judiciously to the extent that he is able to evoke tragic feelings from the audience; and this makes him win their support at the end.

Conclusion

Shakespeare’s characters have always been unique that even the most absurd character of his plays makes a very sensible speech while conversing. The two characters analyzed in this study and the peculiarities of their speeches have shown what the power of rhetorical art can achieve. Using the persuasive speeches to gain the support of the listeners has played a significant role in the funeral scene of Julius Caesar, and this really gives the play an indispensable credibility and prestige it has gained so far. This analysis has revealed not just logically but chronologically the use and the power of effective rhetoric in an attempt to persuade others and gain their acquiescence. However, there are critical questions about the nature of Caesar’s death: why has Mark Antony kept the secret away from Caesar? If truly he loves Caesar as he claims, does that mean he is not aware of the conspiracy that leads to the death of his friend? Why has Caesar not listened to the warning from both the soothsayer and his wife about the pending danger? Relating Caesar’ case to fate, do we think even if Caesar had listened to the warnings he could have as well died in his sleep? These questions are very relevant for further research.
REFERENCES

http://web.ntpu.edu.tw/~shueng/Christine-Shakespeare-Caesar.pdf

http://web.ntpu.edu.tw/~shueng/Christine-Shakespeare-Caesar.pdf
