

## The Art of Persuasion in *Julius Caesar*: A Psychological Study

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### Abstract

*Julius Caesar* is the greatest of Shakespeare's historical drama that it is the most popular and the most which have been acted on the theatre and published since its production more than 400 years ago. There are many reasons that stand behind this popularity of the play other than the representation of the historical figure of "Julius Caesar" and his reign era. The events of the play from its opening scene till its end are socially and politically connected not to a specific time, but happens repeatedly throughout the ages and everywhere. The main problem which lead the characters of the play to their tragic flaw is not the conspiracies nor the conflicted political viewpoints, but it is the art of persuasion. Most of the leading characters of the play had been fallen because the psychological pressure of the persuasion. In *Julius Caesar*, it is the art of persuasion of those who make others lend their ears and then get things done as they desired. Julius Caesar, Brutus, Mark Antony and Cassius have tried the art of persuasion to affect others' activity for their own benefit, neglecting the friendly advices or the results of their decisions. Shakespeare psychologically treated this subject by exposing the personality of each character with his psychological disorder and used the role of the mob in changing the direction of the political events of Rome.

**Key words:** persuasion, psychology, Rome, Julius Caesar, Brutus, Cassius.

### Introduction:

Shakespeare's most majestic and powerful historical play *Julius Caesar* is in fact an excellent example of the art of persuasion. The central issue of the play is pure political, Rome is politically mature state with a sophisticated culture and glorious history and for this reason

the political service and power should not been kidnapped by Julius Caesar. The play opens with Caesar's last victory celebration when he has triumphed over another Romans and not foreigners. The first dialogue of the play between Flavius and Marullus explains immediately the political tensions and the conflicted viewpoints of this time. They reflect the opposite viewpoint side that Caesar is feared and hated, but simple people who formerly praised Pompey, the sane now celebrating Caesar's victory over his sons. Cassius, the close friend to Brutus believes that Caesar is a dictator who want to steel the mature republic of Rome for his personal glory and decided to put an end his life with the participation of many of other men. But Cassius believes that Brutus, the nearest of Caesar's followers should be with them to cover their deed with reasonability to be accepted by the public of Rome.

### **Cassius persuades Brutus:**

Cassius is the second prominent figure in the play despite his being an obscure figure and the play put in motion with his first activity of persuasion. He was standing behind when he observed that Brutus, his close friend and the second man of the republic is not satisfied about what happening in the celebration saying that he is not in the right spirit to celebrate the victory. According to his art of persuasion, Cassius started his speech with accusing Brutus of keeping distance and being not in his usual. Brutus assures Cassius that his unstable behaviour comes from his self-dissatisfaction and said when he hear the people's shouting saying that he fears that Caesar will accept being crowned as the king of Rome. Cassius meditates deeply into what fears Brutus rather than cheers him of Caesar's being crowned as the king of Rome. He then begins his next step by speaking about Caesar as unworthy of being the head of Rome focusing in his plan on reducing Brutus' devotion to Caesar and increasing his sense of responsibility towards Rome. He said that he is ready to be his mirror which reflect him to make him understand his greatness. Cassius made a comparing between Brutus and Caesar to reach the conclusion that Caesar's name is not more great than the name of 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.

Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well.

Weigh them, it is as heavy. Conjure with 'em,

“Brutus” will start a spirit as soon as “Caesar”. (1.2.144-146)

Cassius' idea to give the leadership of the action to Brutus because being with them will bring the respect and support to their action. Cassius then succeeded to persuade Brutus, the loyal man to Caesar to rebel against him. Cassius used various persuasion and rhetorical devices to gain Brutus' acceptance to join his rebel against Julius Caesar. The tone of Cassius' speech was introduced with a kind of appealing to Brutus' sensitive personality to have its responsibility towards the mature republic of Rome. He said:

I heard where many of the best respect in Rome

Except immoral Caesar

Speaking of Brutus and groaning underneath this age's yoke

Have wished that noble Brutus had his eyes (i. ii 64-68)

Cassius, experience about Brutus' idealistic personality makes him know how to speak with him and appealing to him to put Rome ahead himself. Cassius insists that for the future of Rome Caesar should be killed. Telling Brutus that "Honour is the subject of my story" (I. ii. 99). Cassius then succeeded to persuade the loyal man to Caesar against him.

### **Brutus, Antony; The Challenge of Persuasion**

The climax of the persuasion art exposed clearly in Caesar's funeral when the Roman public crowd gathered with overwhelming feeling of rage about his murder. It is Brutus' ability of persuasion to ensure credibility for the action and restore the peace. He asks the crowd to hear him out and begins to remind them that he is honourable and he has his reasons for his deed asking them to be the judges he said:

Not that I loved Caesar, but I loved Rome more (3. 2. 23)

Brutus asked the crowd a rhetorical contradicted question which has only one logic answer in which he defines his ability to get their attention as well as their passion. He asks them if they rather have Caesar alive and accept to be his own slaves or dead with their own freedom. Antonio Reyes argues in his book "*Voice in Political Discourse*" that this kind of question implies the audience's participation, he said;

They lower the formality of the speech event, establishing a fake distance where the politician seeks confirmation from the audience. (p-192)

Brutus speaks to the crowd according to his idealism, thinking that they have the same of his vision about Caesar as an ambitious man who had to be killed. Temporarily, he succeeds to convince the crowd to be with his side.

Antony arrived to Caesar's brutally stabbed body by the conspirators before Brutus' speech to the crowd. When he gives his speech after Brutus, he successfully makes use of the brutality

of the conspirators when they killed Caesar. He begins his speech with calm confidence telling the crowd that he is present for the funeral of Caesar only. The next step is an agreement with what Brutus have said about ambition as a great crime with praising to Brutus personality as he allowed him to speak to the crowd. When Antony start to speak about Caesar, he begins with personal relationship between him them as they were a close friends defining him as the man who present himself as "faithful and just", a point from which he begins to turn the viewpoints of the crowd. Pamela Loos explain these two words as they presented by Antony in her book "*Harold Bloom's Shakespeare through the Ages*":

A "faithful person is loyal ; such a person would not turn on others, as Brutus suggested Caesar would do if he had the crowd. A "just" person, as Antony describes Caesar, would never turn citizen into slaves, as Brutus had led the crowd to believe Caesar would do (p-28).

The great art of persuasion clarified by Antony's choice of the word that makes the crowd believe that the truth is contradicts what Brutus had said and moreover they begin asking the honesty of the conspirators. Antony then begins to ask Brutus judgement of Caesar "But Brutus says he was ambitious, And Brutus is honourable man". He make the crowd suspect Brutus honesty as well as his opinions. Antony explain that his speech is not to "disprove what Brutus spoke" but to "speak what I do know". Just as Antony wishes, the crowd turned against Brutus and the conspirators.

### **Psychological reading of persuasion**

The art of persuasion could be seen nearly everywhere and for different reasons, plays the basic role in the political debates, the religious attitudes and the social interactions. Psychologically, it is the individual who is the main target and specially his attitudes which is the essential object of the influence which affect the individual choice and his action and as a result, attitude formulates the personal evaluation. The personal persuasion that chanes the people's evaluation towards the choice of the favoured product and the best branch of study and even the choice of the political leaders.

A close psychological reading of *Julius Caesar* implies that it is Brutus' attitudes that make Cassius' attempts of persuasion successful. Essentially, Cassius have the complete knowledge about Brutus ethical and political attitudes. Thus, Cassius concentration is about the value-expressive arguments to affect Brutus' nobility, honour and virtues. Cassius succeeds to persuade Brutus, the loyal man to Caesar to rebel against him and Brutus had been changed from the follower of Caesar to leader of the "Republicans".

There are many psychological questions and answers regarding and their quick reaction to Brutus' and Antony's words as they altered their attitudes towards the conspirators and Caesar quickly. How could this number of people change their opinion and what this psychological force which is able to quickly change their opinion?

According to the French social psychologist *Gustav Le Bon*, the founder of the crowd theory in his book *The Crowd: A Study of Popular Mind*, he explains why people do things in groups arguing that individual will behave in more primal fashion as he forms a part of an organized crowd.

The emotional tone of the crowd is heightened with the leaders suggestion and their verbal symbols and excited gestures and heavily influences by the feeling of confidence and responsibility. Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar's* crowd was influenced by the words of Brutus and Antony when they first heard Brutus reasons of slaying Caesar they cheer him and even suggest that he should be the Caesar "let him be Caesar". However when they listened to Antony with his emotional and rhetoric words, they easily changed their opinion and begin to doubt Brutus and other conspirators.

### **Conclusion:**

In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, the art of persuasion is the backbone of the play in which all the active and main characters exploited their ability of persuasion to change or direct others' viewpoint for personal, social and political purposes depending on their rhetorical and philosophical speeches to alter the opinion of their target. Julius Caesar indirectly persuaded the public to accept him as being their king by his studied actions and behaviours that he is not interested with their demand. Cassius knowledge of Brutus idealism gives him the path to persuade him to be Caesar's slayer rather than loyal. Brutus confidence to speak with the crowd encourages him to persuade them that Julius Caesar is a dictator and deserves his fate. Antony and his calm personality with his rhetorical words and gestures gives him the ability to alter the crowds support to Brutus and the conspiratorsto doubt for their "crime". *Julius Caesaris* a lesson about the art of persuasion more than being mere a historical tragedy.

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