

Julius Caesar – William Shakespeare

Act III – Scene II

Marc Antony's Speech

ANTONY :

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.

I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.

The evil that men do lives after them;

75The good is oft interrèd with their bones.

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 answered it.

80Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest—

For Brutus is an honorable man;

So are they all, all honorable men—

Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.

He was my friend, faithful and just to me.

85But Brutus says he was ambitious,

And Brutus is an honorable man.

He hath brought many captives home to Rome

Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill.

Explanation

Friends, Romans, countrymen, give me your attention. I have come here to bury Caesar, not to praise him. The evil that men do is remembered after their deaths, but the good is often buried with them. It might as well be the same with Caesar. The noble Brutus told you that Caesar was ambitious. If that's true, it's a serious fault, and Caesar has paid seriously for it. With the permission of Brutus and the others—for Brutus is an honorable man; they are all honorable men—I have come here to speak at Caesar's funeral. He was my friend, He was faithful and just to me. But Brutus says he was ambitious, and Brutus is an honorable man. He brought many captives home to Rome whose ransoms brought wealth to the city.

Analysis

In Mark Antony's funeral oration for Caesar, not only one of Shakespeare's most recognizable opening lines are seen but one of his finest examples of rhetorical irony at work is understood. The speech could serve as a thematic synopsis to *Julius Caesar*. Perhaps more than any other of Shakespeare's works, *Julius Caesar* is a play that hinges upon rhetoric—both as the art of persuasion and an artifice used to veil intent.

Mark Antony's speech at Caesar's funeral is a perfect masterpiece of public oratory. He is pained see the greatest conquerors of his time reduced to that "bleeding piece of earth "because the configured conspirators as "butchers". He forecast death and destruction in Rome. There will be riots and civil war in Rome. Caesar's spirit will wander for revenge. Antony asks the people to make a ring around Caesar's dead body. He shows them the holes in Caesar's cloak and wounds

on his dead body. The most unkindest cut was made by the dagger of Caesar's angel, Brutus step by step,

Antony tries to prove that Caesar was not at all ambitious. He tells them how Caesar refused the Crown every time when it was offered to him thrice. The master orator, Mark Anthony, keeps the mob spell bound with his eloquence and dramatics. He very cleverly mentions that he has Caesar's will with him but will not read it. If he reads it, the people will be incited and he will live under an oath not to speak against the conspirators.

The mob is agitated. They shout that Antony should read the will. This is exactly what he wants. He tells that Caesar has left all his walks, private parks and orchards for the common people. He has made Romans as his 'heirs'. He has left 75 drachmas for every Roman. Antony's speech achieves its aim. He has been able to create sympathy for Caesar. The mob is convinced that Caesar was not ambitious.

The context is not that easy for Antony. He is already a man distrusted by the conspirators for his friendship with Caesar. Brutus lets him speak at Caesar's funeral, but only after Brutus, a great orator in his own right, has spoken first to "show the reason of our Caesar's death." Brutus makes it clear that Antony may speak whatever good he wishes of Caesar so long as he speaks no ill of the conspirators. But Antony has two advantages over Brutus: his subterfuge and his chance to have the last word. It's safe to say that Antony makes the most of his opportunity.

In the speech, Antony merely sets the table for dissent. He progressively hits upon the notes of ambition and honourable in a cadence that soon calls both terms into question. Antony's prime weapons at the beginning are his conspicuous ambiguity regarding Caesar ("If it were so, it was a grievous fault") and Brutus ("Yet Brutus says he was ambitious"), rhetorical questions ("Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?") and feigned intent ("I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke"). More chilling, however, is Antony's cynical epilogue to the funeral speech as the mob departs: "Now let it work: mischief, thou art afoot/ Take thou what course thou wilt!" As Antony exemplifies, the art of persuasion is not far removed in Julius Caesar from the craft of manipulation.