

# How does Cassius attempt to persuade Brutus to turn against Caesar?

**Full title:** *Paying close attention to the effects of Shakespeare's choices of language, form and structure, analyse the ways in which Cassius attempts to persuade Brutus to turn against Caesar.*

In Act 1 Scene 2 of William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Cassius uses various persuasive devices to try and obtain Brutus' trust and loyalty in order to implement his plot to kill Caesar. Initially, Brutus is afraid that after having become a king, Caesar will soon turn into a tyrant who will drive Rome into corruption, and Cassius employs this idea as an excellent starting point. Cassius attempts to persuade Brutus on the day of Caesar's victorious return from his battle against Pompey.

In lines 79 to 89, Brutus talks about his virtues that he holds in high regard, and later on, Cassius repeats and emphasises these values to create a more compelling speech. Brutus hears the "Flourish and shout" of the crowd, which is excited about Caesar's triumph, but he has his reservations and uses a periphrastic 'do' to emphasise this: "I do fear the people / Choose Caesar for their king." Brutus admits this fear despite his love for Caesar, and Cassius spots these conflicting emotions as a perfect opportunity to begin his persuasive speech. Brutus' words "If it be aught toward the general good, set honour in one eye and death i' th' other / And I will look on both indifferently" indicate that he will risk his life for a good cause. This character trait gives an idea to Cassius that Brutus could be a suitable person to conspire against Caesar. At the end of his speech, Brutus says, "I love / The name of honour more than I fear death" which shows his greatest value. These few lines provide Cassius with a perfect base to build his speech upon: "Well, honour is the subject of my story."

Cassius uses illustrative anecdotes and hyperbole to portray Julius Caesar as a fragile but overambitious man and hence to help turn Brutus against him. He uses powerful and striking words such as "raw", "gusty", "chafing", "angry" and "cried" to juxtapose a cruel nature and the feeble and helpless Caesar. Having painted this mental image, Cassius describes himself as a hero, an embodiment of Roman virtue, superior to Caesar – an old man with less influence. These contrasts are predominantly expressed in Caesar's words "Help me, Cassius, or I sink", obliging him to save "the tired Caesar", just like Aeneas, who was a great hero of Rome, and this reinforces Cassius' image as an embodiment of Roman virtues. Now, Cassius' help is all but forgotten, and he must worship the man he once saved: "And this man / Is now become a god", emphasising the contrast between Caesar's supposed immortality and his weakness. Cassius also reminisces about Julius Caesar's trip to Spain, where Julius suffered from epilepsy, hereby presenting Caesar as ungodly and implying that it happened due to Caesar's ineptitude and cowardice instead of an actual sickness. Cassius also compares Caesar to a "sick girl", characterising him as unmanly and unfit to rule, immediately invoking associations with the fact that women were not considered to be able to govern at the time. Also, Cassius repeats the verb 'to cry' for emphasis: "'Alas', ... [he] cried, 'give me some drink, Titinius', / As a sick girl". This has a connotation to Caesar's childish vulnerability, dependency on others and helplessness. Overall, Cassius' skilful use of illustrative anecdotes and hyperbole creates an impression of his superiority and undermines Julius Caesar's status, authority and reputation. In this way, Cassius convincingly explains why Brutus should side with him, and plot against Caesar.

Next, Cassius focuses on names and compares 'Brutus' and 'Caesar' to present Brutus as having an equally

good and fair name as Caesar's, implying that Brutus should not be a subordinate to Caesar: "Write them together, yours is as fair a name; ... Weigh them, it is as heavy". Then, he asks rhetorical questions to motivate Brutus to join the conspiracy: "Why should that name be sounded more than yours?" Also, he likens Caesar to the Colossus statue in Rhodes, and through this comparison, he subtly forebodes the fall of Caesar, presenting him as a frail giant: omnipotent but with a fatal flaw – his hamartia. Cassius suggests that this flaw of being overambitious will eventually lead to Caesar's downfall. Cassius addresses Brutus as 'dear' to be inclusive and to show that they will work together, and then mentions that Cassius does not believe in fate but that it is the person's decisions that govern their life instead. He uses this to stress that it is only their own fault that they have let themselves become Caesar's inferior servants and therefore can do something about it. Cassius asks another rhetorical question "what meat doth this our Caesar feed", alluding to him as a carnivore which feeds on other animals or people to build his greatness. In lines 134-149, Cassius attempts to make Brutus believe that he is just as great as Caesar and should not be forced to serve him, but instead, they should unite against him.

Finally, Cassius appeals to the history of Rome and Roman virtues – he apostrophises and personifies the concept of time to increase sympathy and combines this with a caesura to create a contrasting and memorable effect: "Age, thou art sham'd". He also mentions 'the great flood', perhaps insinuating that Caesar is one of the worst men since the beginning of all humanity. Cassius also says that Brutus' ancestor Lucius Junius Brutus, the alleged founder of the Roman Republic, would've rather let the devil rule than a king: "There was a Brutus once that would have brook'd / Th'eternal devil to keep his state in Rome / As easily as the king." Thus, he appeals to honour and to Rome's glorified past, finishing his speech with this dramatic ending.

To conclude, Cassius' speech in lines 90 to 161 includes many persuasive techniques, such as repetition for emphasis, hyperbole and rhetorical questions. By building on Brutus' values and beliefs and by carefully re-structuring and re-emphasising them, he creates a compelling speech that persuades Brutus to turn against Caesar in an attempt to prevent him from becoming a tyrant. After this speech, Brutus says that he "shall recount hereafter" and has "some aim", confirming that he understands Cassius' motivations and will consider joining the conspiracy as well, which proves a complete success of Cassius' potent and eloquent rhetoric.