

How do Antony's speeches in Act 3 Scene 1 and Scene 2 undermine the conspirators' attempts to assert control over Rome?

At the beginning of Act 3 of William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, after Caesar's murder, Antony gives a powerful speech to manipulate and change the public's opinion of the conspirators and their actions that were supposedly for a good cause. Brutus underestimated Antony and let him speak last, but instead, Antony made good use of such an opportunity.

Antony prepares for his speech by performing a monologue in private, in which he begins by using ecphrasis and exclaiming "O" to show the overwhelming emotions in him due to Caesar's death. Alone on stage with the body, he addresses it as "thou bleeding piece of earth," implying that Caesar, when still alive, was a fundamental part of the world. Next, Antony describes himself as "meek and gentle" – to which he has a feeling of self-disgust, and then juxtaposes the connotations of kindness and the word 'butchers'. He calls them the exact opposite of how they wished not to be seen, as Brutus said in Act 2 Scene 1: "Let us be sacrificers but not butchers". By naming Caesar as "the noblest man," Antony directly contradicts the line "Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods!" which Cassius said to persuade Brutus in Act 1 Scene 2. In lines 262 to 266, Antony employs a semantic field with war-like and violent connotations, using words such as "curse", "fury", "fierce", and "strife", with the repetition of the "f" sound in many of them emphasising their meaning even further. Also, by using alliteration between words such as "light" and "limb", "ranging" and "revenge", "hot" and "hell", Antony speeds up his speech, increases suspense and makes himself seem angrier and more moved by the murder, motivating his want for vengeance. He says "That mothers shall but smile when they behold / Their infants quarter'd with the hands of war" – this horrible imagery is even more powerful than a similar idea deployed by Casca, where he says that "If Caesar had stabbed their mothers they would have done no less." Antony mentions "Caesar's spirit" – foreshadowing the ghost's appearance in Act 4. As his speech increases in brutality as it moves on, he foresees and explains his desire for violence in "all the parts of Italy", with Ate, the goddess of revenge, by his side.

In the next scene, after Brutus gives his speech, Mark Antony has the last word to himself, and so he uses rhetoric to manipulate and influence the public's opinion of the conspirators and the murder. He starts by creating a sense of belonging with the phrase "Friends, Romans, countrymen" and then further heightens it by using personal pronouns. Antony says that "Brutus says he was ambitious / And Brutus is an honourable man" and then repeats that phrase multiple times since he is questioning the meaning of "honour" and "ambition", as seen when he says that "Ambition should be made of sterner stuff". He uses these terms sarcastically and ironically to lower Brutus' status. Antony claims to speak plainly: "I am to speak what I do know", yet he words his speech very carefully – in this sentence he emphasises that fact with his use of the periphrastic 'do'. Antony says he speaks "not to disprove what Brutus spoke", yet that is precisely what he intends to do – alter the people's minds and turn them against the conspirators. Not only does Antony lower Brutus' status in society, but he undermines Brutus' speech, for example, with his rhetorical question "Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?" He illustrates it by saying that "When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept", showing that Caesar was a man of great empathy, that he shared emotion with the people, continuing with the theme of belonging and that fact that Caesar was part of the people too. Antony goes on to compare men to "brutish beasts", the alliteration captures the audience's attention, and the adjective

“brutish” is a pun on Brutus’ name. To bring the attention of his speech back to Caesar’s death and show Antony’s love for his dead friend, Antony says that his “heart is in the coffin there with Caesar / And I must pause till it come back to me.” He pauses and weeps – this use of physical language and aposiopesis shows his extreme emotion, swaying the crowd to his side having undermined Brutus’ speech beforehand.

After the pause, Antony first puts the audience in control by addressing it as “O masters”, then he continues: “if I were dispos’d to stir / Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage”. By saying this, he presents an idea, yet he asks the audience not to do it, even though that is what he wants from them. Next, he mentions the will, and slowly builds tension and excitement, but to the disappointment of the crowd, he uses praeteritio and apophasis, stating that he “must not read it.” However, by doing so, Antony entices the crowd even further, and one can see the audience’s excitement when everyone shouts “The will, the will, we will hear Caesar’s will”, with the repetition of the word “will” creating a sense of the audience’s control over Antony. However, he replies that “You are not wood, you are not stones, but men” - in a positive manner, but in structure similar to the way Murellus insulted the commoners in Act 1 Scene 1 by calling them “You blocks, you stones, you less than senseless things”. Antony says that Caesar’s testament “will inflame you”, but this use of tantalising language instead livens the audience, heightens their interest and creates a sense of unity, especially after having called them Caesar’s “heirs”. Having repeated the phrase “honourable men” so many times, Antony goes on to create a direct connotation between the conspirators and the expression. The audience starts to use it too - a clear sign of success for Antony in his subtle exercise of manipulation.

Antony begins the next part of his speech quite emotionally: “If you have tears, prepare to shed them now”, and once again shows unity by saying “You all do know this mantle.” In lines 169 to 172, Antony deploys an anecdote with a positive meaning, unlike in Cassius’ speech to engage the audience. Suddenly, he switches from telling a story in which he portrays Caesar as glorious and victorious to recounting the brutal murder of Caesar, naming and picking out the conspirators. However, Antony purposely gives the names of only three conspirators, making use of the tricolon for effect. He sarcastically describes Brutus as “well-beloved” and “Caesar’s angel”, lowering Brutus’ status, depicting Caesar as a god and creating an idea of false friendship. Furthermore, Antony specifically calls upon the gods and this concept of divine justice: “Judge, O you gods”. He continues to show his emotion while describing Caesar’s murder, repeating and reemphasising his key ideas and statements, artfully swaying the fickle crowd.

His hugely rhetoric speech proves to be a success as the crowd shout: “Revenge! About! Seek! Burn! Fire! Kill! / Slay! Let not a traitor live!” – the exclamations directly show the effect Antony’s speech has had on the public, and the audience ignoring Antony asking them not riot, but doing the complete opposite. Antony has direct control of the public – when he says “Stay, countrymen”, they listen, and call him “noble Antony”. Also, they show their devotion to him: “We’ll hear him, we’ll follow him, we’ll die with him.” Antony, on the other hand, continues with false modesty, lowering his status in comparison to Brutus’: “I am no orator, as Brutus is” – indirectly altering the public’s opinion. He repeats the fact that he does not wish to “stir you up”, but at the end, he lets go and states his honest desire: “move / The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny.” The audience echoes him: “We’ll mutiny” – he has them in his hands.

Just as the crowd wishes to disperse and “burn the house of Brutus”, Antony pulls them back with the “will I told you of”, further engaging the public. He reads the will, despite his previous statement that he “must not read it”, revealing that Caesar has given “To every several man, seventy-five drachmaes”, with such a

large sum of money creating a direct cause for revenge. Having presented Caesar as such a kind leader, and having angered the people to their highest, the crowd chaotically shouting to one another, everyone exits.

To conclude, Antony's speech, which is the central part of Scene 2, includes many manipulative techniques and rhetoric, such as repetition and apophasis. By using his rhetorical skill and Brutus' mistakes to his advantage, he gives a compelling speech that favourably alters the public's opinion of the murderers and their actions. Alone on stage once again, Antony refers to "Mischief", apostrophising and personifying it, victorious in his task of persuading the crowd and undermining the conspirators' attempts to assert control over Rome.