

THE POWER OF WORDS: MARCUS ANTONIUS' FUNERAL ORATION IN SHAKESPEARE'S *JULIUS CAESAR*

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RESUMEN: En este artículo se estudia el discurso fúnebre de Marco Antonio en la obra de Shakespeare *Julio César* como ejemplo del poder de la palabra en la retórica clásica. Se resume la situación socio-cultural y política de la época de César con el fin de contextualizar la tragedia de Shakespeare. Al comparar los discursos de Bruto y Marco Antonio tras el asesinato de César, se evidencia el uso prodigioso de estrategias retóricas en el discurso de Marco Antonio y su argumento persuasivo.

Palabras clave: discurso persuasivo, retórica clásica, estrategias retóricas, Shakespeare Julio César.

ABSTRACT: This paper analyses Marcus Antonius's funeral oration in Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* as an example of the power of words in classical rhetoric. The sociocultural and political situation of Caesar's time is revised in order to contextualise Shakespeare's tragedy. By comparing Brutus and Mark Antony's speeches after the assassination of Caesar, it is proved the prodigious use of rhetorical strategies in Mark Antony's oration and his persuasive argumentation.

Keywords: persuasive discourse, classical rhetoric, rhetorical strategies, Shakespeare's Julius Caesar.



Fig.1. HEINRICH SPIESS, *Mark Antony's Funeral Oration Over the Corpse of Caesar*
(Munich 1832-1875)

«Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him»

I

During the I c. B.C., the Roman Republic became a disputed state among powerful families and occasional leaders, forgetting about the most vulnerable and needed sectors of society. This internal conflict was the cause of a continuous social unrest.

The roman nobility, pursuing the exclusive control of the state, was split up in two political trends: *optimates* and *populares*. The former group defending the senate tradition and the latter one leading the demands of the people, but in any case, respecting the exclusive privileges of the aristocracy.

This political division led to the emergence of leaders in both parts (usually chosen by the fervent people). Obtaining military success was key for the recognition of the Senate, social popularity, and personal enrichment. Military success is needed for the maintenance of a standing army, well equipped and rewarded with lands after dismissal. A professional army, whose components –recruited among the most disadvantaged social groups– replaced the patriotic feelings of their predecessors by loyalty to their generals.

Diverse political actions, the leaders and their personal armies, the greed of Roman rulers and their constant demagoguery, eventually caused the confrontation of Roman society. Tensions in the struggle for power nested in each of the social classes, degenerating into disorders and riots with urban groups causing terror in Rome. The consequence was about to come: a Civil War.

In the first decades of that century, the political situation was tense among the different oligarchies. The most prestigious character was Gnaeus Pompeius, but his absence from Rome due to the war against Mithradates (king of Pontus), gave advantage to Licinius Crassus, his enemy, and he became an outstanding figure of greater influence in Rome. Crassus was an aristocrat, which gave him some support from the senators. But his great strength came from the vast fortune he treasured, a fortune gained thanks to the confiscations of the dictator Sulla, together with his accurate business capacity. His businesses brought him closer to the interests of the great entrepreneurs, who made of him the main ally within the *popular* side, where he showed himself as a young Gaius Julius Caesar.

It was Caesar who acted as intermediary between Pompeius and his traditional enemy Crassus to make a deal among the three most influential politicians at that time (App. BC 2.9, Suet. Caes. 19.2). Crassus brought his vast fortune and economic relations, Pompeius his military prestige, and Caesar, who had just finished his ruling year in Hispania with a brilliant balance of victories and gains, was the political value, the one who defended the interests of the three men, ruling the consulate in 59 B. C. As a consul, Caesar met the demands of Pompeius, making the assembly of the Roman people accept the law which gave lands to veteran soldiers and the reorganization of the eastern

provinces. He also pleased Crassus and his friends, businessmen, by reducing the debt of the state Contractors by a third. Caesar sought for himself the government of Gaul and Illyria during his five-year consulate. The territory of the Gauls offered very convenient expansion possibilities. The military triumphs and the plunder, his military glory and personal enrichment all together placed the ambitious politician at the top of his popularity.

The agreement of these three politicians was ratified in 56 B.C in Lucca (Suet. Caes. 24.1) but two unexpected events caused this agreement to fail: in 54 B.C. Julia, Caesar's daughter and Pompeius' wife, died while she was giving birth (Suet. Caes. 24.1), dissolving the link between these two politicians. The following year, Crassus was killed fighting the Parthians (Plut. Pomp. 53.6). Confrontation was inevitable (Plut. Caes. 28.1). On January 7, 49 B.C., the Senate decreed *senatusconsultum ultimum* by declaring Caesar a public enemy and ordering Pompeius to take action in order protect the state from the cesarean threat. Caesar then decided to march on Rome. On January 10th, he crossed the river Rubicon, border between Gaul and Italy (*alea, iacta est!*), accompanied by his troops (Suet. Caes. 32). This fact meant a coup d'état. The Senate immediately defended its privileges, with Pompeius as the leader. The civil war had just begun.

The fratricidal battles between both parts began in Spain, moving towards Greece, Egypt and the North African provinces, and then back again in Spain, where the conflict would end with the victory of Caesar's troops (Suet. Caes. 34-35). Both parts confronted in Munda (45 B.C.), resulting in a bloody battle (30,000 Pompeian men died). This cruent battle made the civil war come to an end, leaving Caesar as the absolute master of the empire.

Caesar became a dictator, he pursued personal power for life. In the year 49. B. C. he was appointed dictator and from 45 B.C., the civil war was over, by then Caesar received the title indefinitely (Suet. Caes. 76.1).

II

The political agenda of Caesar urged solutions for the problems of the Republic, with severity and without institutional ambushes. But some members of the Senate still did not understand this need and decided to plot against the dictator. Caesar was accused of greed, and a desire to become the king of Romans, a great demagogic accusation that provoked immediate rejection, but an accusation that was not, however, far from the political reality of the moment. Julius Caesar exercised monarchical power, as Sulla previously exercised, but Caesar was convinced that he had exhausted every other possibility of government. The ideal Republic reflected by Cicero in his writings, based on social harmony, stability and longevity, was no more than an unrecognisable wish in the reality of the time (Ferrer-Maestro, 2011: 13).

Julius Caesar was assassinated on the *idus* of March 44. B.C. when he was about to go into the provisional Senate building. The assassination and subsequent events changed the course of the Roman Republic and its form of government. The importance of Caesar and his relevance was reflected in the writings of classical historians and literary and artistic works of modern centuries.

One of the most fascinating stories on this historical event was written by W. Shakespeare, using as a source *The Parallel Lives* by Plutarch of Chaeronea. Along with Coriolanus, Antony and Cleopatra, the plutarchian biography of Julius Caesar reached Shakespeare's hands through the translation, by Sir Thomas North (1579), of Plutarch's French version (Spenvack, 1988). In this Shakespearean tragedy, Caesar is not the real protagonist but the implicit one. Brutus represents the inner fight, with contradictions between honour and friendship. The tension aroused with the assassination of Caesar reaches its highest point with the eulogy delivered by Mark Antony, Caesar's faithful lieutenant.

The allegation addressed to the people of Rome is a magnificent example of the influence of oratory and the power of words. While Caesar's murderers proclaimed this act as a patriotic tyrannicide, as a decision of public spirit and respect for the Republic; Mark Antony persuades the audience (the Roman people) to condemn it and ask for punishment of the assassins.



Fig.2. VICENZO CAMUCCINI, *Caesar's assassination*, 1804-1805
(Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome)

III

Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* (1599) is undoubtedly one of the most popular cultural conceptions of Julius Caesar and his time, at least in the English-speaking world (Royle 2006). However, the character of Julius Caesar, although gaining the highest status, is not the one with greatest impact on the reader or audience. Mark Antony's speech (Act 3, Scene 2) is considered as one of the most powerful and brilliant rhetorical texts which turned the Romans against Brutus after Brutus's group assassination of Caesar. The play was also taken to the cinema as a magnificent film production in the mid 90s by Joseph L. Mankiewicz and has had many other adaptations. The characters of Brutus first, and Mark Antony later take important relevance when we analyse the power of rhetoric in their speeches after Caesar's assassination.

Rhetoric is the art or the discipline that deals with the use of discourse, either spoken or written, to inform or persuade or motivate an audience, whether that audience is made up of one person or a group of people (Corbet & Connors, 1999: 1). Rhetoric has traditionally been concerned with those instances of formal, premeditated, sustained monologue in which a person seeks to exert an effect on an audience.

Having a closer look at the etymology of the word *rhetoric* we can see that its meaning is linked to words and oratory (ῥήτωρ). During the historical period depicted in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, rhetoric was associated with the art of oratory. At this point it is necessary to go back to the origin of the word *persuasion* in Greek πειθώ; persuasion derives from the Greek verb 'to believe': πιστεύω, strongly linked to faith, God and goddesses; that is, being persuaded by the Lord; sharing semantic meaning with verbs such as 'have faith in, trust in'.

However, the art of rhetoric, whether innate or learnt, implies the use of some kind of strategies, that is, linguistic, psychological and social strategies. We could establish a parallelism between the metaphorical concept of war and rhetorical discourse. Mark Antony uses rhetorical strategies in benefit of argumentation in order to persuade the audience, to make the audience (Roman people) trust in him (remember the original meaning of the Greek word persuasion mentioned above) and in his words, to finally convince them. In fact, Mark Antony is fighting a battle against Brutus, but not a usual battle on land with a Roman army, something Mark Antony as Caesar's lieutenant is very much used to; this is a verbal battle, where words play the role of soldiers, it is in fact an example of a verbal, rhetorical battle against Brutus and his speech.

The classical rhetoricians seem to have narrowed the particular effect of rhetorical discourse to persuasion. Aristotle defines rhetoric as the faculty of discovering all the available means of persuasion in any given situation. As Corbet and Connors (1999: 16) quote the end of Rhetoric was:

[...] to convince or persuade and audience to think in certain way or to act in a certain way. Later, the principles of rhetoric were extended to apply to informative or expository modes of discourse, but in the beginning, they were applied almost exclusively to the persuasive modes of discourse.

This is in fact the aim of *Mark Antony's funeral oratio* in *Julius Caesar*. Both, Brutus and Mark Antony use the art of classical rhetoric to persuade the Roman people; first Brutus tries to convince the audience that Caesar's assassination was mostly justified and had to be committed. Later, Mark Antony will persuade and convince the Roman people that what Brutus said and did lacks of justification and the assassination of Caesar has to be punished. Undoubtedly, Mark Antony's funeral oration is more persuasive than Brutus' speech; we can therefore confirm the power of Mark Antony's words and the perfect alignment and use of rhetorical strategies: use of persuasion, irony, metaphors, etc.

In the next section I am going to show the rhetorical strategies used by Mark Antony with excerpts from the play *Julius Caesar*, corresponding to Act II, Scene III.

IV

The communication triangle presented below is an illustration of the components of the rhetorical act in Act II, Scene III of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. The topic under discussion is the assassination of Caesar; this time, we have two different speakers in two different monologues, Brutus first, and Mark Antony later; however, the audience as well as the topic is the same, the Roman people herded in front of the Senate. The most relevant element in this triangle is the power of the text and how this influences and persuades the audience. The social context surrounds all the elements in the communication triangle affecting and/or modifying the final message, this social dimension is the interactive force in communication (Steen, 1999). Both, Brutus and Mark Antony will make references to the social context in Rome and use it for the purposes of their speech.

The Communication Triangle

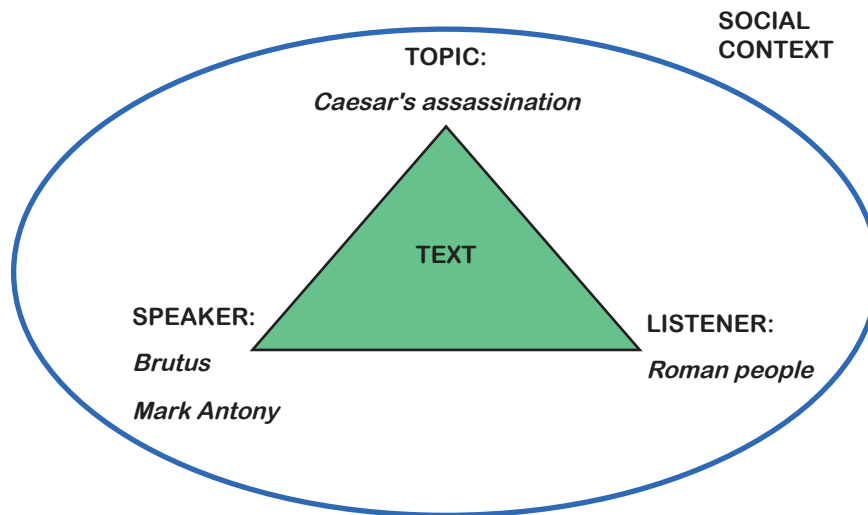


Fig.3. Illustration of the Communication triangle elements in Act II, Scene III in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*

It is essential for the reader of this article to contextualise Mark Antony's funeral oration within the play just after Brutus speech. Scene III begins when Brutus is about to address the Roman people outside the Senate immediately after the assassination of Caesar. There are some words and sentences that have been marked in bold and italics and will serve to analyse the power of Brutus' and Mark Antony's speeches and their rhetorical strategies.

SCENE III. The Forum.

Enter BRUTUS and CASSIUS, and a throng of Citizens

Citizens
We will be satisfied; let us be satisfied.

BRUTUS
Then follow me, and give me audience, friends.
Cassius, go you into the other street,
And part the numbers.
Those that will hear me speak, let 'em stay here;
Those that will follow Cassius, go with him;
And public reasons shall be rendered
Of Caesar's death.

First Citizen
I will hear Brutus speak.

Second Citizen
I will hear Cassius; and compare their reasons,
When severally we hear them rendered.

Exit CASSIUS, with some of the Citizens. BRUTUS goes into the pulpit

Third Citizen
The noble Brutus is ascended: silence!

BRUTUS
Be patient till the last.
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 the better judge. 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**. 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.

All
None, Brutus, none.

BRUTUS
Then none have I offended. I have done no more to Caesar than you shall do to Brutus. The question of his death is enrolled in the Capitol; his glory not extenuated, wherein he was worthy, nor his offences enforced, for which he suffered death.

Enter ANTONY and others, with CAESAR's body

Here comes his body, mourned by Mark Antony: who, though he had no hand in his death, shall receive the benefit of his dying, a place in the commonwealth; as which of you shall not? 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.

All
Live, Brutus! live, live!

First Citizen
Bring him with triumph home unto his house.

Second Citizen
Give him a statue with his ancestors.

Third Citizen
Let him be Caesar.

Fourth Citizen
Caesar's better parts
Shall be crown'd in Brutus.

First Citizen
We'll bring him to his house
With shouts and clamours.

BRUTUS
My countrymen,--

Second Citizen
Peace, silence! Brutus speaks.

First Citizen
Peace, ho!

BRUTUS
Good countrymen, let me depart alone,
And, for my sake, stay here with Antony:
Do grace to Caesar's corpse, and grace his speech
Tending to Caesar's glories; which Mark Antony,
By our permission, is allow'd to make.
I do entreat you, not a man depart,
Save I alone, till Antony have spoke.

Exit

First Citizen
Stay, ho! and let us hear Mark Antony.

Brutus begins his speech with the words: «Romans, countrymen, and lovers!» in order to catch the audience's attention, Mark Antony will use the same syntactical structure when beginning his discourse; he will use different words, though. This appellative exclamation calls the attention with a «Roman» first, to finish with a much friendlier name «lovers». Brutus is well known by Roman people as a wise man and politician, the sentence: «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?», aims at justifying Caesar's assassination, he continues referring to Caesar as: «he was ambitious». Caesar is accused of being ambitious and pretending depriving Roman people from their freedom by becoming king. This is Brutus' main argumentation when justifying Caesar's assassination, the prevalence of Romans' freedom. In fact, what Brutus does is using the social and political situation of the moment where Caesar was nearly exercising dictatorial, monarchical power. One of the most persuasive parts of Brutus' discourse refers to the political idea of love towards one's country rather than love to individuals. Loving his country and defending the status of being Roman justifies Caesar's assassination in benefit of one's own country and citizenship freedom: «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». Brutus leaves the scene widely acclaimed by the audience who sees in him a substitute for Caesar; however, Mark Antony's speech that follows will completely destroy Brutus' rhetoric.

SCENE III (Cont.) The Forum.

MARK 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;
The good is oft interred 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 answer'd it.
Here, 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:
***But 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:
Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?
When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept:
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff:
***Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honorable man.***
You all did see that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse: was this ambition?
***Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And, sure, he is an honorable man.***
I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,
But here I am to speak what I do know.
You all did love him once, not without cause:
What cause withholds you then, to mourn for him?
O judgment! thou art fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason. Bear with me;
My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,
And I must pause till it come back to me.
But yesterday the word of Caesar might
Have stood against the world; now lies he there.
And none so poor to do him reverence.
***O masters, if I were disposed to stir
Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage,
I should do Brutus wrong, and Cassius wrong,
Who, you all know, are honorable men:***
I will not do them wrong; I rather choose
To wrong the dead, to wrong myself and you,
Than I will wrong such honorable men.
***But here's a parchment with the seal of Caesar;
I found it in his closet, 'tis his will:
Let but the commons hear this testament—
Which, pardon me, I do not mean to read—
And they would go and kiss dead Caesar's wounds
And dip their napkins in his sacred blood,
Yea, beg a hair of him for memory,
And, dying, mention it within their wills,
Bequeathing it as a rich legacy
Unto their issue.***
Have patience, gentle friends, I must not read it;
It is not meet you know how Caesar loved you.
You are not wood, you are not stones, but men;
***And, being men, bearing the will of Caesar,
It will inflame you, it will make you mad:***

'Tis good you know not that you are his heirs;
 For, if you should, O, what would come of it!
 Will you be patient? Will you stay awhile?
 I have overshot myself to tell you of it:
 I fear I wrong the honorable men
 Whose daggers have stabbed Caesar; I do fear it.
 You will compel me, then, to read the will?
Then make a ring about the corpse of Caesar,
And let me show you him that made the will.
Shall I descend? And will you give me leave.
If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.
 You all do know this mantle: I remember
 The first time ever Caesar put it on;
 'Twas on a summer's evening, in his tent,
 That day he overcame the Nervii:
Look, in this place ran Cassius' dagger through:
See what a rent the envious Casca made:
 Through this the well-beloved Brutus stabbed;
 And as he plucked his cursed steel away,
 Mark how the blood of Caesar followed it,
 As rushing out of doors, to be resolved
If Brutus so unkindly knocked, or no;
For Brutus, as you know, was Caesar's angel:
Judge, O you gods, how dearly Caesar loved him!
This was the most unkindest cut of all;
 For when the noble Caesar saw him stab,
 Ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms,
 Quite vanquished him: then burst his mighty heart;
 And, in his mantle muffling up his face,
 Even at the base of Pompey's statua,
 Which all the while ran blood, great Caesar fell.
 O, what a fall was there, my countrymen!
 Then I, and you, and all of us fell down,
 Whilst bloody treason flourished over us.
 O, now you weep; and, I perceive, you feel
 The dint of pity: these are gracious drops.
 Kind souls, what, weep you when you but behold
 Our Caesar's vesture wounded? Look you here,
 Here is himself, marred, as you see, with traitors.
Good friends, sweet friends, let me not stir you up
To such a sudden flood of mutiny.
They that have done this deed are honorable:
 What private griefs they have, alas, I know not,
 That made them do it: ***they are wise and honorable,***
 And will, no doubt, with reasons answer you.
I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts:
I am no orator, as Brutus is;
But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man,

*That love my friend; and that they know full well
 That gave me public leave to speak of him:
 For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
 Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech,
 To stir men's blood: I only speak right on;
 I tell you that which you yourselves do know;
 Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor, poor dumb mouths,
 And bid them speak for me: but were I Brutus,
 And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony
 Would ruffle up your spirits and put a tongue
 In every wound of Caesar that should move
 The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny.
 Yet hear me, countrymen; yet hear me speak.
 Why, friends, you go to do you know not what:
 Wherein hath Caesar thus deserved your loves?
 Alas, you know not: I must tell you then:
**Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,
 His private arbors and new-planted orchards,
 On this side Tiber; he hath left them you,
 And to your heirs for ever, common pleasures,
 To walk abroad, and recreate yourselves.
 Here was a Caesar! When comes such another?**
 Now let it work. Mischief, thou art afoot,
 Take thou what course thou wilt!*

The study of rhetoric by Cicero was divided into five main pedagogical parts: «*inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria and pronuntiatio*». *Inventio* was concerned with argumentation or, what is the same, with means of persuasion. Persuasion could be achieved in two different ways or modes according to Aristotle (Garver 1994a), non-artistic and artistic means. The artistic means included the elements of rhetoric: *logos* (rational appeal), *pathos* (emotional appeal), and *ethos* (ethical appeal). Mark Antony's funeral oration is a brilliant example of the use of *logos* in exercising the rational appeal; Mark Antony draws conclusions and shares them with the audience (Roman people) without discrediting Brutus with his words but talking about the good deeds of Caesar at the same time. He plays with affirmative and negative sentences in a very acute and clever way, introducing irony with a pinch of sarcasm. By means of rhetorical strategies such as repetition of the same meaningful statements, Mark Antony appeals to the audience's understanding:

But Brutus says he was ambitious;/ And Brutus is an honorable man.[...] Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;/ And Brutus is an honorable man. [...] Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;/ And, sure, he is an honorable man.[...] O masters, if I were disposed to stir/ Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage,/ I should do Brutus wrong, and Cassius wrong,/ Who, you all know, are honorable men

Following the Aristotelian concept of argumentation as a mode of persuasion (Garver 1994b), the pathos corresponds to the exercise of the emotional appeal. Human beings are rational by nature; however, people are sometimes led by their passions and emotions more than by their reason. A person can usually do, accept or deny something guided by his/her emotions. In this sense, Mark Antony appeals to the audience's emotions twice during his speech. Firstly, he uses Caesar's will as a tool to convince the audience of Caesar's gratitude towards the Roman people as heirs of Caesar's testament, this stuns the audience who begins to believe that Caesar was not as ambitious as Brutus said:

But here's a parchment with the seal of Caesar; I found it in his closet, 'tis his will:/ Let but the commons hear this testament—[...] And, being men, bearing the will of Caesar,/ It will inflame you, it will make you mad:/ 'Tis good you know not that you are his heirs.

There is another action undertaken by Mark Antony that will be decisive to persuade the audience about Caesar's benevolence, Mark Antony knows his audience (the Roman people) and how to appeal upon their more common emotions, he knows that unveiling Caesar's bloody corpse laying on the floor will move the crowd, a very touching vision of Caesar, indeed:

Then make a ring about the corpse of Caesar,/And let me show you him that made the will./ Shall I descend? And will you give me leave./ If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.

The third Aristotelian mode of persuasion, the ethos, is also well known and appropriately used by Mark Antony in his funeral oration, or we should better say that Shakespeare read, studied and practiced the techniques of classical rhetoric in his writings. The ethos, or ethical appeal, is an important mode of persuasion, it consists in making the audience trust, esteem and respect the speaker. Mark Antony wisely presents himself as someone close to the Roman people, he begins his speech with the words: 'Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears'; this is the same syntactical structure used by Brutus and with some repetition of words such as Romans and countrymen; however, Mark Antony uses the word friends in the first place, as a way to shorten distances with the Roman people. He will persist in looking friendly and close to the Roman people nearly at the end of his speech by detaching himself from Brutus and the other conspirators:

I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts:/ I am no orator, as Brutus is;/ But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man,/ That love my friend; and that they know full well/ That gave me public leave to speak of him:/ For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,/ Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech,/ To stir men's blood: I only speak right on.

Mark Antony addresses the Roman people with adjectives such as: good friends, sweet friends in order to persuade the audience with the idea of him and them being equal. He uses verbal irony as a potent rhetorical device for a persuasive argument, this irony borders on sarcasm, he says about himself: But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man. Far from being this the end of his speech, Mark Antony has an ace up on his sleeve, to conclude he reveals the content of Caesar's will and Caesar's benevolence towards the Roman people who are said to be the main benefactors of his testament:

Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,/His private arbors and new-planted orchards, On this side Tiber; he hath left them you,/And to your heirs for ever, common pleasures, To walk abroad, and recreate yourselves./Here was a Caesar! When comes such another?

Mark Antony successfully creates confusion among the Roman people and calls them to take revenge for Caesar's assassination. Mark Antony's funeral oration in *Julius Caesar* is with no doubt one of the most persuasive discourses of all times, it follows the three classical kinds of persuasive discourse: *deliverative* oratory, making the roman people accept that Caesar's death was an assassination; *forensic* oratory, persuading the people to condemn Caesar's assassination; and *epideictic* oratory, inspiring the audience.



Fig.4. GIOVANNI LANFRANCO, *Funeral of a Roman emperor*, 1636
(Museo del Prado, Madrid)

v

The purpose of this article was to analyse Marcus Antonius' funeral oration in Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* as an example of the power of words in classical rhetoric. We have seen how the appropriate use of rhetorical strategies can provoke distinct emotions and reactions when we compare Brutus and Mark Antony's speeches addressed to the Roman people. Mark Anthony's oration is a perfect example of persuasive discourse, appealing to the Roman people's emotions. In his speech, he amalgams a large number of rhetorical strategies: verbal irony, repetition, imagery, and connotations, among others.

The study of classical rhetoric has nearly disappeared from educational institutions as it was conceived by ancient rhetoricians; however, rhetoric has been largely used during long periods of our history, since those people who accurately and wisely handled the art of oratory (spoken or written) had a prominent place in the societies of their times, courts, church, fora, boards, etc. More recently rhetoric seems to have declined due to the emergence of industrialised and technologically equipped societies. Nonetheless, rhetoric will always be a powerful strategy over time, especially during periods of social and political upheaval, as it is the case we are suffering nowadays in our globalised world. In times of crisis and big changes where society participates in crucial debates, the art of rhetoric as a means of persuasive discourse stands out as a powerful strategy, especially in politics.

Taking a closer look at our contemporary society, the art of rhetoric can be seen through forms such as propaganda, demagoguery or a more perverse practice brainwashing. Everyday we come across political messages, news, advertisements, speeches which are full of rhetorical strategies such as irony, sarcasm, double meaning, use of metaphors, etc. These are nothing but basic strategies and principles of the classical art of rhetoric.

If we take into consideration the words of Sluiter and Rosen (2004:2):

[...] linguistics and philosophers have long been convinced that words and deeds are not necessarily essentially different. Words always 'do' things, like ordering or asking (this is their illocutionary force) [...] Other words presuppose that they are capable of having a direct effect in the world out there, e.g. when I have 'persuaded' you, you have undergone a change through my use of language only [...].

If this is so, words should be taken as powerful weapons to rule the crowds, powerful enough to avoid the use of firearms.●

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