

## RHETORICAL DEVICES AND PERSUASIVE TECHNIQUES

Act III, Scene ii of *Julius Caesar* contains two of the most famous orations ever written for the stage. "Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears..." declares Antony, and then he goes on with a powerfully persuasive speech to the Roman people. In order to understand why his words (indeed, Shakespeare's words) have remained in the human collective memory for so long, one must understand the use of **rhetoric** and **persuasive techniques** in the speech.

**Rhetoric is defined** as, "The art or study of using language effectively and persuasively; skill in using language effectively and persuasively" (Microsoft Bookshelf 98). Below is a list of common rhetorical devices.

- \* ALLITERATION – repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words; this catches the audience's ear and is audibly appealing.
- \* ANTITHESIS - opposition, or contrast of ideas or words in a balanced or parallel construction. Many times these statements almost seem contradictory. *Example: Brutus: Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more.*
- \* APORIA - expression of doubt (often feigned) by which a speaker appears uncertain as to what he should think, say, or do. This can oftentimes gain sympathy from the audience as if the speaker is torn on what to do.
- \* APOSTROPHE - a sudden turn from the general audience to address a specific group or person or personified abstraction absent or present.  
*Example:*  
*For Brutus, as you know, was Caesar's angel.*  
*Judge, O you gods, how dearly Caesar loved him (III.ii. 178-179).*
- \* ETHOS – building the speaker's credibility
- \* HYPERBOLE - exaggeration for emphasis or for rhetorical effect
- \* IRONY - expression of something that is contrary to the intended meaning; the words say one thing but mean another.
- \* LOGOS – a logical approach to the argument
- \* METAPHOR – a comparison not using like or as
- \* PARADOX - an assertion seemingly opposed to common sense, but that may yet have some truth in it
- \* PATHOS – appealing to the audience's emotions
- \* PERSONIFICATION – giving human characteristics to nonhuman things.
- \* REPETITION – repeating a word or idea throughout a speech for emphasis  
*Example:*  
*We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender. Churchill.*
- \* RHETORICAL QUESTION - A rhetorical question is asked just for effect or to lay emphasis on some point discussed when no real answer is expected. A rhetorical question may have an obvious answer but the questioner asks rhetorical questions to lay emphasis to the point. In literature, a rhetorical question is self-evident and used for style as an impressive persuasive device.
- \* SIMILE – a comparison using like or as
- \* UNDERSTATEMENT - for intensification, by denying the contrary of the thing being affirmed.

## *Julius Caesar Writing Assignment: "Friends, Romans, countrymen...."*



In Mark Antony and Brutus' funeral oration for Caesar, we have not only one of Shakespeare's most recognizable opening lines but one of his finest examples of rhetorical irony at work. 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. To be sure, Antony does not have it easy. 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 plan of deception and his chance to have the last word. It's safe to say that Antony makes the most of his opportunity.

Assignment:

1. Annotate Antony's speech for rhetorical devices (as many as you can find)
2. Write a 3 paragraph essay identifying at least 3 examples of rhetoric and/or persuasion in Antony's speech and the specific effect of each piece of rhetoric/persuasion (ie: Was it effective and what did it do for the speech? Why was it used?)
3. Follow MLA format and submit to turnitin.com on: \_\_\_\_\_. Bring a hard copy to class on: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Assignment is 50 points: 10 for intro, 10 for conclusion and 10 for each example of thoroughly explained rhetoric/persuasion in body paragraph.

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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 interréd 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 honourable man;

So are they all, all honourable 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 honourable 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 honourable 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 honourable 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.

—*Act III, sc. ii*