The Tragedy Of Julius Caesar: Analysis Of Brutus Character

In the average person's life, there is typically a highly influential person who drives the emotions and thought process of that said person, and often to the point where this influence and authority becomes problematic. In William Shakespeare's The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Brutus is the man responsible for the problems that arise. In the play, Brutus and Cassius along with the other conspirators plan and execute a murder plot against the all-too-powerful leader of Rome, Julius Caesar. In response, a close friend of Caesar, Mark Antony, stirs up civil unrest and wages war against the ill-fated Brutus and Cassius. The driving force behind the plot of this play, contrary to popular belief, is not the murdering of Caesar, it is actually Brutus. The arrogance and unstable persuasive ability of Brutus drives the action and consequences of the play.

To begin with, the audience sees the first sign of Brutus' persuasive demeanour when he convinces the conspirators not to kill Mark Antony. In this moment of the play, Brutus has verbally pledged his commitment to the conspirator's murder plot against Caesar in his house in the middle of the night with the conspirator's company. The majority of the conspirators agree that letting Mark Antony live will cause them future issues, and that he should not be spared. But Brutus presents the side that killing Antony would be too bloody and violent, and that killing Caesar is more of a sacrifice, and that Caesar is the head of his operation and the other parts of his team will not be able to function without him. However, this is not how things play out. Brutus states

"Our course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassius, / To cut the head off and then hack the limbs, / Like wrath in death and envy afterwards; / For Antony is but a limb of Caesar. / Let us be sacrificers, but not butchers, Caius " (2.1.162-166). While the argument Brutus presents appears rational, this thought does not make logistical sense in the grand scheme of things, and this ideology consequently sets the stage for the rest of the play. It appears that everybody but Brutus realizes that Antony is a very close friend to Caesar, and they realize that he would do anything, violent or peaceful, for Caesar. In this situation, the conspirators are murdering the most powerful and beloved person in Rome. Every official and advisor in the empire is below him, so why is Brutus worrying that killing Antony would make himself and the conspirators appear overly anarchist and savage? The repercussion of Brutus' ideology is that Antony still lives, and he goes on to speak at Caesar's funeral and convinces the crowd to turn against Brutus, who they had just agreed with a few minutes prior. This launches the manhunt for the conspirators, specifically Brutus and Cassius, that the audience sees unfold the rest of the play. But before the audience gets to see the downfall of Brutus after the funeral, it is important to analyze the funeral and discover the mistakes Brutus makes before Antony speaks.

Continuing on, the audience gets to see the self-arrogance and influence in Brutus before and during Caesar's funeral. After Caesar had been killed, Antony accidentally walks in on the conspirators talking about what they should do next. Brutus falls for Antony's scheme and allows him to speak at Caesar's funeral despite Cassius' objections, and later assures the conspirators that the crowd will side with him. The text cites

Antony: ...And in the pulpit, as becomes a friend

Speak in the order of his funeral.

Brutus: You shall, Mark Antony.

Cassius: Brutus, a word with you.

[Aside to Brutus]

You know not what you do. Do not Consent.

That Antony speak in his funeral.

Brutus: By your pardon, (3.1.229-236).

This scene is one of the few major scenes that make progress towards the demise of Brutus and Cassius. Antony uses the persuasive method of pathos when speaking to Brutus by saying that he just wants to speak as a friend in the funeral of Caesar, using pity and downplay to hide his agenda, and Brutus falls for it. This causes a fiery reaction in Cassius, and rightfully so. Brutus does not know what Antony will say at the funeral or what he might do, and neither does Cassius. Cassius recognizes the trick Antony is playing and he knows that Antony is scheming to do something. Stubborn Brutus, however, ignores Cassius' warning and sticks with his resolution. Later at the funeral, after Brutus had spoken, Antony does exactly what Cassius had thought Antony was going to do. Instead of giving a goodbye to Caesar and speaking like a friend, he dives into a fiery speech defying everything Brutus had just said. He worked up the crowd and was able to turn them against Brutus, and with the Romans on Antony's side, this marks the beginning of the downfall of Brutus. But where did he go wrong?

In his funeral speech, Brutus never really tries to convince the crowd that he is in the right with his speech, instead it was more of a self-reflection for himself rather than a public address. Brutus thought this was a good type of speech to give because he thought that Antony was going to give a farewell. Additionally, in his speech Brutus emphasized ethos too much for the audience and crowd's liking. Brutus expresses "...Believe me / For mine honor, and have respect to mine honor, / That you may believe me… / ...As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he / was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I / honor him; but--as he was ambitious, I slew him." (3.2.14-16, 25-27). The first part of Brutus' speech is spent trying to get the crowd to listen to him, and while this is a tough problem, Brutus went about it in the wrong way. He had just killed the most loved person in Rome, the crowd is going to be mad at him, and Brutus knows this. But telling them that they should calm down and listen because of his honor only made them skeptical about what Brutus was really trying to do. The next part could have been a great time to connect with the emotions and persuade them to join his side, only if he had not made it all about himself. Brutus, while probably not meaning to, turned his speech into an oration about himself by projecting these emotions like he was the only one in all of Rome experiencing them. This action really distanced him from the people he needed to persuade. Surely Brutus realizes that forcing his plan onto the others did not work out in his favor, and that this conceited and poorly done persuasive speech did not place him in a good situation, so he must change throughout the rest of the play, right? Wrong.

In the last act of the play, Brutus' hubristic decision-making and persuasive ability accelerated him towards his downfall. The audience gets presented with another situation for Brutus to possibly redeem himself: on the battlefield. But this situation just shows Brutus' flaws becoming fatal. Brutus and Cassius are in a tent after resolving an argument between them, and they are discussing what strategy they should engage in with the war against the Triumvirate. Cassius proposes, "'Tis better that the enemy seek us," (4.3.199). He says this because the armies would be at camp, full of rest while the armies of Antony waste their energy trying to find Brutus and Cassius. But Brutus counteracts by saying, "...The enemy, marching along by them, / By then shall make a fuller number up…" (4.3.207-208). While this clause may be true, Cassius tries to counter Brutus' idea, but he gets cut off. Brutus states, "Under your pardon." (4.3.215). This is yet another case where Brutus forces his ideas onto someone until they accept his thinking, except this infringement is the last Brutus will have, as this leads to his death. Brutus and Cassius go to Philippi, which is what Brutus requested. Here, the tension and fierceness of battle between the armies of Brutus and Cassius versus those of Antony and Octavius causes great confusion to both Brutus and Cassius while they each are on their lookouts. Cassius thinks he has seen Brutus slain, so he takes his life, but when Brutus return to the post to see Cassius laying deceased, he takes his own life. Had Brutus listened to Cassius or had he made a compromise, the two would have not ended up dead. Brutus' haughty tendencies and his compelling speech abilities have not only shaped the issues he had to face in his future, but they also brought the demise of himself and his best friend.

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar as the world knows it would not be what it is if Brutus did not have the character traits he has. If Brutus had respected and valued others' opinions, he would not have died at Philippi, Antony would have never spoken at the funeral, and Antony would not have even lived to convince Brutus otherwise. If Brutus had better impacted the audience he would not have had a whole nation of people demanding his blood. Brutus, while fatally flawed, was in some way related to the majority of the events that occured in the play. Brutus is a perfect representation of the common person. Whether they know it or not, people's lives are just them dealing with the decisions they make like choose to take a class and deal with the homework, or buying a car or house and dealing with the following payments. Brutus shows how important it is to recognize and exercise this ability in oneself, lest they have to handle unpleasant situations like Brutus had to. The intent of The Tragedy of Julius Caesar is to get the audience to become aware that they are the ones driving the train of their life and that they have the ability to control where it goes. Hopefully the train does not go to the fields of Philippi.