

ENGLISH ADVANCED: MODULE C

‘Julius Caesar’ and ‘The Truman Show’

Conflicting perspectives resonate when different interpretations of the same event, personality or situation are represented. In Shakespeare’s powerful portrayal of *Julius Caesar* and Peter Weir’s film, *The Truman Show*, power and oratory provoke conflicting perspectives to arise, as diametric perspectives emanate from the legitimacy of Julius Caesar’s power and his ability to rule, paralleling the personality of Christof as his authority is challenged. Both texts use the art of oratory as a manipulative device to change the perspectives of their respective audiences as well as possessing the ability to shape and influence responses.

Julius Caesar utilises different characters and their portraits of power to represent the action as conflicting perspectives transpire over JC and his supremacy as a leader. Through Cassius’ representation, JC’s political ability and proficiency to rule is inevitably questioned when his physical infirmities are revealed. JC is positioned as an arrogant dictator, rancorously denounced as “an eternal devil” and “wretched creature”, where the use of simile in Cassius’ dire cautioning, “like a Colossus we petty men” accentuates JC’s tyrannical power as a threat to Rome. Cassius uses personal anecdotes concerning JC drowning in “Help me, Cassius or I sink” and when JC “had a fever when he was in Spain” to illustrate his physical frailty and weakness, further criticising him through simile, “as a sick girl”, which reinforces his disposition as a feeble man. Cassius’ hatred is triggered by jealous rancour, infuriated by perceptions that a man so physically feeble should “bear the palm alone.”

While the struggle for legitimate power in JC encourages conflicting perspectives to prevail, *The Truman Show* depicts power to have destructive tendencies which causes conflicting perspectives to arise. Christof is symbolic of a god-like figure as he can be seen speaking through the clouds. A low angle shot of the sky, with light beams shining through the clouds reinforces Christof’s god-like figure as he announces “I am the creator”. Truman’s own personal belief that his life is normal is in deep conflict with Christof’s perspective that Truman’s life is a commodity to be exploited. The image of Truman dressed as a clown in jail is symbolic of how he is in captivity for the sake of other’s entertainment. Also, Christof’s perspectives are in conflict with the network executives who demand him to cease transmission, exclaiming “we can’t let him die in front of a live audience”, with which he responds, “He was born in front of a live audience”. Christof is obsessed with forcing Truman to quit, to the extent that he believes his god like powers give him the right to take away Truman’s life, also delineating his internal conflict, as he gives up, not wanting to destroy his own creation.

The power of oratory in its ability to manipulate the emotions of the plebeians can be seen through Brutus’ and Mark Antony’s conflicting perspectives depicted in their eulogies at JC’s funeral. Brutus justifies his actions, employing rhetoric to enhance the responder’s attention through reason and logical rationale, placing emphasis on the undeniable need of JC’s death in the rhetorical question “Had you rather JC were living and die all slaves, than that JC were dead, to live all free men?”. He appeals to the plebeians through the ideals of patriotism, stating that “Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more.”, thus portraying Brutus as a liberator, fighting for the good of Rome. This significantly impacts the plebeians who chant “live, Brutus, live, live! and exclaim “let him be Caesar” which is further extended in “this Caesar was a tyrant”. However, this effect is temporary as Brutus’ use of simple, balanced prose lacks emotional impact, not being able to connect with the audience and under the impressions that intellectual reasoning could communicate his reasons. Conversely, Antony delivers his speech through verse, providing the exaltation and rhythmic beat that Brutus lacked. He manipulates the plebeians’ emotions by addressing to them as “Friends, Romans, countrymen” creating solidarity between Antony and the audience. The repetition of “honourable” in “But Brutus says he was ambitious/ and Brutus is an honourable man”, undermines Brutus’ argument, with the employment of enjambment adding to the moral resonance embedded

within the statement “I thrice presented him a kingly crown/ which he did thrice refuse.” Antony presents his perspective of the conspirators as treacherous villains, exemplifying his resentment against them by use of the blood stained garment and JC’s corpse. This is reinforced by the metaphor of “poor poor dumb mouths” which heightens the emotional impacts of JC’s death, having seen the physical mutilated body of JC. The power of oratory is accentuated through the change of perspectives held by the plebeians who are incited to seek vengeance for JC’s murder.

Analogously, the power of oratory is exemplified in *The Truman Show*, where Truman’s life is built on lies, deceit and manipulation. The opening sequence in the film shows us the actors providing their perspective of the show, insisting that nothing on *The Truman Show* is counterfeit with Marlon stating ‘it is merely controlled’, however, everything on the televised life of Truman Burbank is set up, directed and acted out as entertainment for a viewing audience, and thus their perspectives are extremely conflicting with the audience’s. Marlon’s loyalty speech at the bridge exemplifies the power of oratory, when he presents his perspective of Truman, stating that he is his ‘best friend’ and the “closest thing he ever had to a brother”. A close up of Truman and Marlon reveals their facial expressions which seem to be emotionally touched, while Christof begins to dictate lines for Marlon, “The last thing I’d do is lie to you”. Marlon’s performance seems to portray deeply felt emotion, delineating his internal conflict between reality and his role as “Marlon”. The audience’s perspectives are easily manipulated by carefully constructed scenes, where at the climax of the scene, each of the audience responds emotionally, embracing and wiping away tears, accompanied by swelling and sad music.

By reflecting on the perspectives on situations, events and personalities presented in *Julius Caesar* and *The Truman Show*, the art of representation allows responders to create their own perspectives and judgement of the matter. Conflicting perspectives are propelled through the strong notions of power and oratory which is often misused through individual self interest.

Likewise, John F. Kennedy’s *Inaugural Address* of 1961 acts as a vehicle for the dramatic projection of Kennedy’s inauguration which engendered a conflictive means of political communication. His strong appeal to emotion is a utilisation of pathos, similar to that of Mark Antony’s speech in *JC*, as he connects with the audience, using the past to discuss the future. The inclusive pronoun “we” and use of emotionally charged words such as “disciplined and proud” attempts to appeal to the citizens, relating them to the topic at hand. Furthermore, he employs repetitions such as “let both sides...let both sides...” and metaphors such as “light our country... the glow of the fire can truly light our world” to capture audience attention and approval. Finally, the play on words in “ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country” exemplifies the power of oratory and how he employs rhetoric to convey his perspective on the political state of America, and influence this perspective on Americans in his art of representation.