



Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears

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Marcus Antonius:

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.

Julius Caesar Act 3, scene 2, 74–77

Outside of [Hamlet](#), these are likely the most quoted of all Shakespeare's lines. Almost never quoted, however, are the lines Antony is parodying—the opening words of Brutus's earlier oration: "Romans, countrymen, and lovers, hear me for my cause, and be silent that you may hear" (lines 13–14).

Antony later disingenuously claims that "I am no orator, as Brutus is" (line 217). Yet his modifications of Brutus's formulaic oratory are the first hint that he knows his business. Just compare the deft escalation of rhythm in "Friends, Romans, countrymen" with the metric jangle of "Romans, countrymen, and lovers"; note the arrogance of "be silent" versus the mock humility of "lend me your ears." The contrast is more than literary; Brutus, one of Caesar's assassins, insists he took part in the conspiracy in order to preserve Roman liberties, yet Antony's rhetoric seems much more democratic. Antony skillfully manipulates the crowd where Brutus lectured to it.

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