

The Protagonist In Julius Caesar

Peter Angkasa

*Jurusan Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Sastra
Universitas Kristen Maranatha, Bandung*

Abstrak

Artikel ini menganalisis siapa sebenarnya tokoh utama dari drama karya William Shakespeare yang berjudul Julius Caesar. Seperti kolega penulis yang belum membaca atau menonton pertunjukan drama tersebut di atas pentas, penulis dengan begitu saja menerka bahwa Julius Caesar adalah tokoh utamanya. Setelah penulis membaca dan menganalisis karya tersebut, penulis sadar bahwa protagonisnya ternyata bukan Julius Caesar, melainkan Marcus Brutus. Dalam artikel ini penulis mengemukakan alasan-alasan atau bukti-bukti mengapa penulis beranggapan demikian.

Kata kunci: drama Shakespeare, tokoh utama, protagonis, penokohan, alur cerita.

I. Introduction

Ever since Julius Caesar was written, there have been two schools with contrasting opinions concerning the protagonist of the play. One suggests that Julius Caesar is the protagonist, whereas the other considers Brutus to be the protagonist.

The first school points out that since the title of the play is Julius Caesar, Julius Caesar is the hero of the play. This is a very poor argument. Although it is true that the names of the protagonists are also used as the titles of some of Shakespeare's plays, such as in Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, King Lear, to mention but a few, we find that it is not always the case. The Merchant of Venice is a very good example. The Merchant of Venice clearly refers to Antonio, but he does not really possess the qualities of a hero. Antonio is not at all a well-drawn character in this comedy, and we have no reason to regard him as the protagonist of the play. Although Portia is the protagonist, the play does not bear her name. Obviously, therefore, from the title alone, one cannot decide who the protagonist of a Shakespearean play is. The question arises: 'Who is actually the protagonist of William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar?'

II. The Protagonist of Julius Caesar

The protagonist of a Shakespearean tragedy must be a person possessing certain qualities which the audience admires. These qualities must be so marked that in spite of the protagonist's shortcomings, he never loses the audience's sympathy. Macbeth's cruelty, for instance, is balanced with his admirable audacity. Hamlet's habit of self-analysis does not prevent him from being regarded as the protagonist, since this intellectual prince is the most carefully-drawn character and is always the centre of interest.

What qualities does Caesar own? Shakespeare depicts him vividly as an unpleasant dictator who is boastful and fond of flattery. Caesar is also depicted as an unstable person who is incapable of making a decision. On one occasion, he says he is as firm as Mount Olympus. When the conspirators urge him to allow Publius Cimber to return from his banishment, he boasts: 'Hence! Wilt thou lift up Olympus!' (Act III scene i) However, on another occasion, he can change his mind very easily under other people's influence. When his wife Calpurnia asks him to stay at home and not to go to the Capitol, he refuses to do so, but later he says he will take her advice. Soon afterwards, after Cassius has persuaded him, he decides to go. For all Antony's praise of Caesar's greatness in his funeral speech, Shakespeare does not mean to make this unpleasant character the hero of his tragedy. Moreover, the fact that he appears only in one half of the drama clearly indicates that Shakespeare does not intend to develop him fully as a character. Some references to him after his death are made not necessarily to advance the plot but more for their dramatic impact such as the appearance of his spirit.

The play bears his name probably because everything starts with him, as in the case of Antonio in The Merchant of Venice. It is also possible that Julius Caesar, who had done much for the Romans and for Europe, was a more well-known and popular name for Shakespeare's audience than Marcus Brutus. The name 'Julius Caesar' would surely attract a larger audience in those days. From the financial point of view, such a choice for the play's title would be profitable. Our conclusion is that in spite of the fact that Julius Caesar plays a relatively important role in the drama, he is not the protagonist of the play.

In Julius Caesar, Brutus is depicted as a noble politician. Both his friends and enemies speak well of him. He takes part in the conspiracy to assassinate Caesar, thinking that the other conspirators are as honest as himself. He believes that the other conspirators, like himself, really want to free the Roman people from a dictator. Even Mark Antony, who is his enemy, praises him in the funeral by declaring:

This was the noblest Roman of them all.
All the conspirators, save only he,
Did that they did in envy of great Caesar;
He only, in a general honest thought,
And common good to all, made one of them.
His life was gentle, and the elements
So mix'd in him, that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, 'This was a man!'
(Act V scene v)

Portia's uneasiness concerning her husband's security also indicates that Shakespeare wishes to raise the audience's sympathy for Brutus, the hero. That Shakespeare presents Calpurnia's anxiety about her husband simply shows Shakespeare's ability to create a dramatic impact. The audience's sympathy is swayed from Caesar to Brutus and vice versa, in the hope of exciting the audience. Shakespeare apparently succeeds in his effort.

Shakespeare's hero in 'Julius Caesar' is Brutus. In another attempt to present Brutus' humane character, Shakespeare illustrates the episode of Lucius falling asleep while he is playing his musical instrument. Brutus does not wake him up and reprimand him as an officer commonly would with his

subordinates. Instead, he helps him by taking the instrument for fear that he will break it if he falls over it. This fatherly gesture proves to be most fascinating. It is obvious that Shakespeare makes every effort to show that Brutus is the hero of the play.

Notwithstanding the fact that Brutus is the protagonist that has the qualities of being a hero, this main character has 'a tragic flaw, an imperfection that finally leads him to his tragic undoing.' (A.C. Bradley)

Brutus is honest. There is nothing wrong with this. However, since he is too honest, fatality results. In fact, this excessive honesty is his tragic flaw. He is persuaded to participate in the conspiracy because he thinks that the other conspirators are as honest as himself and do not have evil intentions. Unfortunately, he is mistaken because the other conspirators are actually envious of Caesar's increasing power. The futility of assassinating Caesar is soon evident when one of the citizens shouts: 'Let him be Caesar.' He wants to make Brutus an emperor. This desire is tragic because Brutus detests tyrants, and the people misconstrue his real intention in participating in the plot.

Brutus allows Antony to make a funeral speech with a conviction that Antony is as honest as himself. He must face a disaster when later Antony does not keep his promise. The people who at first support the conspirators, suddenly turn against them. Public misunderstanding and loss of popular support are frequently the tragedy of an honest politician.

Brutus' excessive honesty also proves to be disadvantageous in the case of raising money for military purposes. Cassius writes to him to spare Lucius Pella, but Brutus condemns Lucius Pella and makes public his taking of bribes. This action results in a dispute between Brutus and Cassius which, among other factors, weakens their collaboration. Whenever a leader alienates his allies, the enemy will benefit. Brutus' alienating Cassius weakens their struggle against Mark Antony. Cassius has a conception that the end must justify the means. He tolerates the shadiest methods of obtaining money and supplies. He does not care whether the methods are fair or foul, so long as he can meet the military demands. However, Brutus is against such questionable procedures. Because Brutus wants to keep his principles of honesty in all kinds of situation, he furthers his own tragic undoing.

Bibliography

Bradley, A.C. *Shakespearean Tragedy*, Macmillan and Co. Ltd, London and Basingstoke, 1908.

Granville-Barker, Harley. *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, B.T. Batsford Ltd., London, 1947.

Knight, Wilson. *The Wheel of Fire*. Oxford University Press, London, 1930.

Lott, Bernard, *Julius Caesar*, Longman, London and Basingstoke, 1904.

Turner, E (ed). *Julius Caesar*, S. Chand & Co. Ltd., Ram Nagar, New Delhi, 1977.