Julius Caesar Literary and Rhetorical Devices

Use the glossary to find examples of the devices in the text of the play.¹

Part I: Schemes. Schemes are variations in word order or patterns
Schemes of Construction
1. Schemes of Balance
Parallelism—similarity of structure in a pair or series of related words, phrases or clauses. This basic principle of grammar and rhetoric demands that equivalent things be set forth in coordinate grammatical structures: nouns with nouns, infinitives with infinitives, and adverb clauses with adverb clauses. Examples follow.
   a) “...for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.” —The Declaration of Independence
   b) “The love of liberty, jury trial, the writ of habeas corpus, and all the blessings of free government...” —John Randolph of Roanoke “Speech on the Greek Cause"
   c) “It will be long before our larger life interprets itself in such imagination as Hawthorne’s, such wisdom as Emerson’s, such poetry as Longfellow’s, such prophecy as Whittier’s, such grace as Holmes’s, such humor and humanity as Lowell’s.”—William Dean Howells Utterly Friends and Acquaintance

Isocolon is a scheme of parallel structure which occurs when the parallel elements are similar not only in grammatical structure but also in length (the number of words or even the number of syllables.) This is very effective, but a little goes a long way.
   a) “His purpose was to impress the ignorant, to perplex the dubious, and to confound the scrupulous.”
   b) “An envious heart makes a treacherous ear.” Zora Neale Hurston Their Eyes Were Watching God

Antithesis—the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas, often in parallel structure. The contrast may be in words or in ideas or both. When used well, antithesis can be very effective, even witty.
   a) ‘What if I am rich, and another is poor—strong, and he is weak—intelligent, and he is benighted—elevated, and he is depraved? Have we not one Father? Hath not one God created us?” —William Lloyd Garrison, “No Compromise with Slavery”

2. Schemes of Omission
Asyndeton—(a-syn-de-ton) deliberate omission of conjunctions between a series of related clauses. The effect of this device is to produce a hurried rhythm or assertive tone in the sentence.
   a) “I came, I saw, I conquered.” —Julius Caesar
   b) “...that we shall pay any price, bear any burden meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.”—John F. Kennedy

* Polysyndeton—(The opposite of asyndeton—you do not need to find an example of this) deliberate use of many conjunctions. The effect of polysyndeton is to slow down the rhythm of the sentence.
   a) “I said, ‘Who killed him?’ and he said, ‘I don’t know who killed him but he’s dead all right,’ and it was dark and there was water standing in the street and no lights and windows broke and boats all up in the town and trees blown down and everything all blown and I got a skill and went out and found my boat where I had her inside Mango Key and she was all right only she was full of water.”—Ernest Hemingway, “After the Storm”
   b) On and on she went, across Piccadilly, and up Regent Street, ahead of him, her cloak, her gloves, her shoulders combining with the fringes and the laces and the feather boas in the windows to make the spirit of finery and whimsy which dwindled out of the shops onto the pavement, as the light of a lamp goes wavering at night over hedges in the darkness.” —Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway

4. Schemes of Repetition
Alliteration—repetition of initial or medial consonants in two or more adjacent words. Used sparingly, alliteration provides emphasis. Overused, it sounds silly.
   a) “Already American vessels have been searched, seized, and sunk.”—John F. Kennedy, Profiles in Courage
   b) “It was the meaneast moment of eternity.”—Zora Neale Hurston Their Eyes Were Watching God

Anaphora—(an-aph-ora) repetition of the same word or groups of words at the beginnings of successive clauses. This device produces a strong emotional effect, especially in speech. It also establishes a marked change in rhythm.
   a) ‘We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the street, we shall fight in the hills.”—Winston Churchill Speech to the House of Commons, 1940
   b) ‘Why should white people be running all the stores in our community? Why should white people be running the banks of our community? Why should the economy of our community be in the hands of the white man? Why?”—Malcolm X

5. Other Schemes:
Apostrophe—A scheme in which a person or an abstract quality is directly addressed, whether present or not.
Example: “Freedom! You are a beguiling mistress.”
Part II: Tropes. From the Greek word meaning “to turn,” Tropes are rhetorical devices that produce a shift in the meanings of words; figures of speech.

Metaphor—implied comparison between two things of unlike nature.
   a) “The symbol of all our aspirations, one of the student leaders called her, the fruit of our struggle.” —John Simpson, “Tianamen Square”
   b) “A breeze blew though the room, blew curtains in at one end and out the other...twisting them up toward the frosted wedding-cake of a ceiling, and then rippled over the wine-colored rug, making a shadow on it....” —F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby

Simile—explicit comparison between two things of unlike nature.
   a) The night is bleeding like a cut.” —Bono
   b) “Ah, my!” said Eustacia, with a laugh which unclosed her lips so that the sun shone into her mouth as into a tulip and lent it a similar scarlet fire.”—Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native

Synecdoche—a trope in which a part stands for the whole.
   “The great minds of the decade were seated around the conference table.”

Personification—A trope in which human qualities or abilities are assigned to abstractions or inanimate objects. Example: “Integrity thumbs its nose at pomposity.”

Pathetic Fallacy—A phrase coined by Ruskin to denote the tendency to credit nature with human emotions—the carrying over to inanimate objects the moods and passions of a character. The character’s feelings produce a falseness in his or her surroundings.
   a) They rowed her in across the rolling foam—the cruel rolling foam. (Here the foam symbolizes grief)

Pun: A play on words in which a homophone is repeated but used in a different sense. They work best when you hear them out loud. Surely you have used them yourself. What? Your name is not Shirley? Example: “She was always game for any game.”

Hyperbole—the use of exaggeration terms for the purpose of emphasis or heightened effect.
   a) “It rained for four years, eleven months, and two days.”—Gabriel Garcia Marquez One Hundred Years of Solitude
   b) ‘We walked along a road in Cumberland and stooped, because the sky hung so low.”—Thomas Wolfe, Look Homeward, Angel

Rhetorical question—asking a question, not for the purpose of eliciting an answer but for the purpose of asserting or denying something obliquely.
   “Isn’t it interesting that this person to whom you set on your knees in your most private sessions at night and you pray, doesn’t even look like you?”—Malcolm X

Irony—use of a word in such a way as to convey a meaning opposite to the literal meaning of the word.
   a) ‘This plan means that one generation pay for another. Now that’s just dandy.”—Huey P. Long
   b) “By Spring, if God was good, all the proud privileges of trench lice, mustard gas, spattered brains, punctured lungs, ripped guts, asphyxiation, mud, and gangrene might be his.”—Thomas Wolfe, Look Homeward Angel

Paralexia—(A type of irony) Stating and drawing attention to something in the very act of pretending to pass it over.
   Melville’s narrator of Moby Dick, Ishmael, manages to characterize Queequeg in the very act of stating he will pass over such details:
   We will not speak of all Queequeg’s peculiarities here; how he eschewed coffee and hot rolls, and applied his undivided attention to beefsteaks, done rare. —Moby Dick “Breakfast”

Paradox—an apparently contradictory statement that nevertheless contains a measure of truth.
   a) And yet, it was a strangely satisfying experience for an invisible man to hear the silence of sound.” —Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man
   b) “Art is a form of lying in order to tell the truth.”—Pablo Picasso

Other Devices:
Anachronism—Placing an event, person, item, or verbal expression in the wrong historical period.

Mirror Imagery—Sometimes Shakespeare liked to write a scene in which something very dramatic occurs, and then follow it with a scene in which the same sort of thing occurs to another character. He does this in many of his plays.
Part III: Rhetorical Appeals

**Logos:** The Greek word logos is the basis for the English word logic. Logos is a broader idea than formal logic—the highly symbolic and mathematical logic that you might study in a philosophy course. Logos refers to any attempt to appeal to the intellect, the general meaning of "logical argument." Everyday arguments rely heavily on ethos and pathos, but academic arguments rely more on logos. Yes, these arguments will call upon the writers’ credibility and try to touch the audience’s emotions, but there will more often than not be logical chains of reasoning supporting all claims.

**Ethos:** Ethos is related to the English word ethics and refers to the trustworthiness of the speaker/writer. Ethos is an effective persuasive strategy because when we believe that the speaker does not intend to do us harm, we are more willing to listen to what s/he has to say. For example, when a trusted doctor gives you advice, you may not understand all of the medical reasoning behind the advice, but you nonetheless follow the directions because you believe that the doctor knows what s/he is talking about. Likewise, when a judge comments on legal precedent audiences tend to listen because it is the job of a judge to know the nature of past legal cases.

**Pathos:** Pathos is related to the words pathetic, sympathy and empathy. Whenever you accept a claim based on how it makes you feel without fully analyzing the rationale behind the claim, you are acting on pathos. They may be any emotions: love, fear, patriotism, guilt, hate or joy. A majority of arguments in the popular press are heavily dependent on pathetic appeals. The more people react without full consideration for the WHY, the more effective an argument can be. Although the pathetic appeal can be manipulative, it is the cornerstone of moving people to action. Many arguments are able to persuade people logically, but the apathetic audience may not follow through on the call to action. Appeals to pathos touch a nerve and compel people to not only listen, but to also take the next step and act in the world.

Julius Caesar Literary and Rhetorical Device Assignment Due 2 days after we finish the play.

Find an example of each scheme/trope listed below in the play. Copy the example. After each example, provide the act, scene, and line. Some of the acts and scenes are listed to assist you in your search. You should type these or make a photocopy.

1. Parallelism
2. Isocolon (Brutus/Antony’s speeches Act 3)
3. Antithesis 3.2
4. Asyndeton 3.1
5. Alliteration 2.3
6. Anaphora (Antony’s speech)
7. Apostrophe (Antony’s speech)
8. Metaphor
9. Simile
10. Synecdoche 3.2
11. Personification
12. Pathetic Fallacy 1.3
13. Pun
15. Rhetorical question
16. Irony
17. Paralepsis
18. Paradox
19. Anachronism 2.1
20. Mirror Imagery
21. Logos
22. Ethos
23. Pathos

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1 Parts of this device list and samples courtesy of K. Tully's AP materials.
2 Some rhetoricians do not distinguish between paradox and oxymoron.
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