



Julius Caesar Hyperbole and Understatement

Hyperbole is a figure of speech that uses extreme exaggeration to illustrate a point, highlight characteristics, or create contrast. Unlike other figures of speech, hyperbole often has a concrete, literal element that is overstated in a figurative manner.

Understatement, also referred to as *litotes*, is presenting something to be less important or relevant than it actually is. Understatement is hyperbole's opposite and is a type of verbal irony that makes a statement about something by presenting its opposite.

Identify the use of hyperbole or understatement in the following excerpts from *Julius Caesar* by underlining the concrete element and circling the abstract/non-literal element. Then explain what is being exaggerated or understated and how Shakespeare or the character in question uses the device to create meaning. You may have to go back to the play to review the context in which these examples appear.

Example:

"And this man is now become a god and Cassius is / A wretched creature and must bend his body / If Caesar carelessly but nod on him" (1.1.118–120)

Device: Hyperbole

Explanation: Caesar is a great man with enormous power and influence in Rome, but Cassius exaggerates this power by comparing Caesar to a god. He then employs a second hyperbole by signifying Caesar's power over Cassius by presenting the fact that Cassius must bow to Caesar because of Caesar's lofty political position and suggesting that if Caesar even nods at him (the exaggerated element), he must bow in terror of this power. Cassius employs hyperbole in order to emphasize the degree to which Caesar's power has grown out of control and highlight how others, such as himself, have grown weaker as a result.

1. CASSIUS

Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus, and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs and peep about
To find ourselves dishonorable graves.
(No Fear: 1.2.136–139)

Device:

Explanation:

2. CASSIUS

Now is it Rome indeed, and room enough,
When there is in it but one only man
(No Fear: 1.2.157–158)

Device:

Explanation:

3. CASSIUS

I am glad that my weak words
Have struck but thus much show of fire from Brutus.
(No Fear: 1.2.177–178)

Device:

Explanation:

4. CASSIUS

What trash is Rome,
What rubbish and what offal, when it serves
For the base matter to illuminate
So vile a thing as Caesar!
(No Fear: 1.3.109–112)

Device:

Explanation:

5. PORTIA

What, is Brutus sick,
And will he steal out of his wholesome bed,
To dare the vile contagion of the night
And tempt the rheumy and unpurgèd air
To add unto his sickness?
(No Fear: 2.1.271–275)

Device:

Explanation:

6. ANTONY

[T]here is no hour so fit
As Caesar's death's hour, nor no instrument
Of half that worth as those your swords, made rich
With the most noble blood of all this world.
I do beseech ye, if you bear me hard,
Now, whilst your purpled hands do reek and smoke,
Fulfill your pleasure.
(No Fear: 3.1.163–169)

Device:

Explanation:

7. ANTONY

But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man
That love my friend. And that they know full well
That gave me public leave to speak of him.
For I have neither wit nor words nor worth,
Action nor utterance nor the power of speech,
To stir men's blood.
(No Fear: 3.2.210–215)

Device:

Explanation: