



Writing About Imagery

The Literary Work's Link to the Senses

In literature, **imagery** refers to words that trigger your imagination to recall and recombine **images**—memories or mental pictures of sights, sounds, tastes, smells, sensations of touch, and motions. The process is active and even vigorous, for when words or descriptions produce images, you are using your personal experiences with life and language to help you understand the works you are reading. In effect, you are recreating the work *in your own way* through the controlled stimulation produced by the writer's words. Imagery is therefore one of the strongest modes of literary expression because it provides a channel to your active imagination, and along this channel, writers bring their works directly to you and into your consciousness.

For example, reading the word *lake* may bring to your mind your literal memory of a particular lake. Your mental picture—or image—may be a distant view of calm waters reflecting blue sky, a nearby view of gentle waves rippling in the wind, a close-up view of the sandy lake bottom from a boat, or an overhead view of a sun-drenched shoreline. Similarly, the words *rose*, *apple*, *hot dog*, *malted milk*, and *pizza* all cause you to recollect these objects, and, in addition, may cause you to recall their smells and tastes. Active and graphic words like *row*, *swim*, and *dive* stimulate you to picture moving images of someone performing these actions.

Responses and the Writer's Use of Detail

In studying imagery, we try to comprehend and explain our imaginative reconstruction of the pictures and impressions evoked by the work's images. We let the poet's words simmer and percolate in our minds. To get our imaginations stirring, we might follow Coleridge in this description from his poem "Kubla Khan" (lines 37–41):

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid,

And on her dulcimer she played
Singing of Mount Abora.

We do not read about the color of the young woman's clothing, or anything else about her appearance except that she is playing a dulcimer—an old-fashioned stringed instrument—and that she is singing a song about a mountain in a foreign, remote country. But Coleridge's image is enough. From it we can imagine a vivid, exotic picture of a young woman from a distant land singing, together with the loveliness of her song (even though we never hear it or understand it). The image lives.

The Relationship of Imagery to Ideas and Attitudes

Images do more than elicit impressions. By the *authenticating* effects of the vision and perceptions underlying them, they give you new ways of seeing the world and of strengthening your old ways of seeing it. Shakespeare's speaker in "Sonnet 73: That Time of Year Thou Mayst in Me Behold" (pages 102–103), for example, emphasizes that he is getting older and therefore closer to the time of his death. Rather than stating this idea so uninterestingly, however, Shakespeare dramatizes it through the introduction of images of autumn, evening, and a dying fire. In the second quatrain, for example, the speaker describes the approaching evening of life:

In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the West,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self that seals up all in rest.

This expanded image, like those in the two other quatrains, forms an easily recognized and affirmable link with the experiences of readers. Such uses of imagery comprise one of the strongest means by which literature reinforces ideas.

Types of Imagery

Visual Imagery Is the Language of Sight

Human beings are visual. Sight is the most significant of our senses, for it is the key to our remembrance of other sense impressions. Therefore, the most frequently occurring literary imagery is to things we can visualize either exactly or approximately—**visual images**. In "Cargoes," Masfield asks us to recreate mental pictures or images of ocean-going merchant vessels from three periods of human history. He refers to a large ancient sailing vessel, a quinquereme, which he associates with the Biblical King Solomon. Then he turns to a "stately Spanish galleon," and finally refers to a modern British ship caked with salt, carrying grubby and cheap freight over the English

Channel. His images are vivid as they stand and need no further amplification. For us to reconstruct them imaginatively, we do not need ever to have seen the ancient biblical lands or waters, or ever to have seen or handled the cheap commodities on a modern merchant ship. We have seen enough in our lives both in reality and in pictures to *imagine* places and objects like these, and hence Masfield is successful in fixing his visual images in our minds.

Auditory Imagery Is the Language of Sound

Auditory images trigger our experiences with sound. For such images, let us consider Wilfred Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth," which is about the death of soldiers in warfare and the sorrow of their loved ones. The poem begins with the question of "what passing-bells" may be tolled for "those who die as cattle." Owen's speaker is referring to the traditional tolling of a parish church bell to announce the burial of a parishioner. Reference to the sounds of such a ceremony suggests a period of peace and order, when there is time to pay respect to the dead. But the poem then points out that the only sound for those who have fallen in battle is the "rapid rattle" of "stuttering" rifles—in other words, not the solemn, dignified sounds of peace, but the horrifying noises of war. Owen's auditory images evoke corresponding sounds in our imaginations, and they help us to experience the poem and to hate the uncivilized depravity of war.

Olfactory, Gustatory, and Tactile Imagery Refer to Smell, Taste, and Touch

In addition to sight and sound, you will also find images from the other senses. An **olfactory image** refers to smell, a **gustatory image** to taste, and a **tactile image** to touch. A great deal of love poetry, for example, includes *olfactory images* about the fragrances of flowers.

Images derived from and referring to taste—*gustatory images*—are also common, though less frequent than those referring to sight and sound. Lines 5 and 10 of Masfield's "Cargoes," for example, includes references to "sweet white wine" and "cinnamon." Although the poem refers to these commodities as cargoes, the words themselves also register in our minds as gustatory images because they evoke our sense of taste.

Tactile images of touch and texture are not as common because touch is difficult to render except in terms of effects. The speaker of Lowell's "Patterns" (pages 375–377), for example, uses tactile imagery when imagining a never-to-happen embrace with her fiancé, who we learn has been killed on a wartime battlefield. Her imagery records the effect of the embrace ("bruised"), whereas her internalized feelings are expressed in metaphors ("aching, melting") (lines 51–52):

And the buttons of his waistcoat bruised my body as he clasped me
Aching, melting, unafraid.

Tactile images are not uncommon in love poetry, where references to touch and feeling are natural. Usually, however, love poetry deals with yearning and hope rather than sexual fulfillment (as in Keats's "Bright Star").

Kinetic and Kinesthetic Imagery Refers to Motion

References to movement are also images. Images of general motion are **kinetic** (remember that *motion pictures* are called "cinema"; note the closeness of *kine* and *cine*), whereas the term **kinesthetic** is applied to human or animal movement. Imagery of motion is closely related to visual images, for motion is most often seen. Masfield's "British coaster," for example, is a visual image, but when it goes "Butting through the channel," the motion makes it also kinetic. When Hardy's skeletons sit upright at the beginning of "Channel Firing," the image is kinesthetic, as is the action of Amy Lowell's speaker walking in the garden after hearing about her fiancé's death.

The areas from which kinetic and kinesthetic imagery can be derived are too varied and unpredictable to describe. Occupations, trades, professions, businesses, recreational activities—all these might furnish images. One poet introduces references from gardening, another from money and banking, another from modern real estate developments, another from the falling of leaves in autumn, another from life in the jungle. The freshness, newness, and surprise of much poetry result from the many and varied areas from which writers draw their images.

Writing About Imagery

Raise Questions to Discover Ideas

In preparing to write, you should develop a set of thoughtful notes dealing with issues such as the following:

- What type or types of images prevail in the work? Visual (shapes, colors)? Auditory (sounds)? Olfactory (smells)? Tactile (touch and texture)? Gustatory (taste)? Kinetic or kinesthetic (motion)? Or is the imagery a combination of these?
- To what degree do the images reflect the writer's actual observation or the writer's reading and knowledge of fields such as science or history?
- How well do the images stand out? How vivid are they? How is this vividness achieved?
- Within a group of images, say visual or auditory, do the images pertain to one location or area rather than another (e.g., natural scenes rather than interiors, snowy scenes rather than grassy ones, loud and harsh sounds rather than quiet and civilized ones)?
- What explanation is needed for the images? (Images might be derived from the classics or the Bible, the Revolutionary War or World War II, the behaviors of four-footed creatures or birds, and so on.)

- What effect do the circumstances described in the work (e.g., conditions of brightness or darkness, warmth or cold, etc.) have upon your responses to the images? What poetic purpose do you think the poet achieves by controlling these responses?
- How well are the images integrated within the poem's argument or development?

Answering questions like these should provide you with a sizable body of ready-made material that you can convert directly to the body of your essay.

Organize Your Essay About Imagery

Introduction Connect a brief overview of the work to your plan of development, such as that the writer uses images to strengthen ideas about war, character, or love, or that the writer relies predominantly on images of sight, sound, and action.

Body You might deal exclusively with one of the following aspects, or, equally likely, you may combine your approaches, as you wish.

1. **Images suggesting ideas and/or moods.** Such an essay should emphasize the effects of the imagery. What ideas or moods are evoked by the images? (The auditory images beginning Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth," for example, all point toward a condemnation of war's brutal cruelty.) Do the images promote approval or disapproval? Cheerfulness? Melancholy? Are the images drab, exciting, vivid? How? Why? Are they conducive to humor or surprise? How does the writer achieve these effects? Are the images consistent, or are they ambiguous? (For example, the images in Masfield's "Cargoes" first indicate approval and then disapproval, with no ambiguity.)
2. **The types of images.** Here the emphasis is on the categories of images themselves. Is there a predominance of a particular type of image (e.g., visual or auditory images), or is there a blending? Is there a bunching of types at particular points in the poem or story? If so, why? Is there any shifting as the work develops, as, for example, in Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth" (page 378), in which the auditory images first describe loudness and harshness, but later images describe quietness and sorrow? Are the images appropriate, granting the nature and apparent intent of the work? Do they assist in making the ideas seem convincing? If there seems to be any inappropriateness, what is its effect?
3. **Systems of images.** Here the emphasis should be on the areas from which the images are drawn. This is another way of considering the appropriateness of the imagery. Is there a pattern of similar or consistent images, such as brightness changing to darkness (Masfield's "Miss Brill")? Do all the images adhere consistently to a particular frame of reference, such as a sunlit garden (Lowell's "Patterns"), an extensive recreational forest and garden (Coleridge's "Kubla Khan"), a church graveyard (Hardy's "Channel Firing"), the sea in various stages of light (Masfield's "Cargoes"), or

a darkened forest (Blake's "The Tyger")? What is unusual or unique about the set of images? What unexpected or new responses do they produce?

Conclusion Your conclusion, in addition to recapitulating your major points, is the place for additional insights. It would not be proper to go too far in new directions here, but you might briefly take up one or more of the ideas that you have not developed in the body. In short, what have you learned from your study of imagery in the work?

Illustrative Essay

The Images of Masfield's "Cargoes"^o

- [1] In the three-stanza poem "Cargoes," John Masfield uses imagery skillfully to create a negative impression of modern commercial life.^{*} There is a contrast between the first two stanzas and the third, with the first two idealizing the romantic, distant past and the third demeaning the modern, gritty, grimy present. Masfield's images are thus both positive and lush, on the one hand, and negative and stark, on the other.[†]
- [2] The most evocative and pleasant images in the poem are in the first stanza. The speaker asks that we imagine a "Quinquereme of Nineveh from distant Ophir" (line 1), one of the ocean-going, many-oared vessels in use in the ancient times of the biblical King Solomon. As Masfield identifies the cargo, the visual images are rich and romantic (lines 3 to 5):

With a cargo of ivory,
And apes and peacocks,
Sandalwood, cedarwood, and sweet white wine.

Ivory suggests richness, which is augmented by the exotic "apes and peacocks" in all their spectacular strangeness. The "sandalwood, cedarwood, and sweet white wine" evoke pungent smells and tastes. The "sunny" light of ancient Palestine (line 2) not only illuminates the imaginative scene (visual), but invites readers to imagine the sun's warming touch (tactile). The references to animals and birds also suggest the sounds that these creatures would make (auditory). Thus, in this lush first stanza, images derived from all the senses are introduced to create impressions of a glorious past.

- [3] Almost equally lush are the images of the second stanza, which completes the poem's first part. Here the visual imagery evokes the royal splendor of a tall-masted, full-sailed galleon (line 6) at the height of Spain's commercial power in the sixteenth century. The galleon's cargo suggests wealth, with sparkling diamonds and amethysts, and Portuguese "gold moldores"

gleaming in open chests (line 10). With cinnamon in the second stanza's bill of lading (line 10), Masfield includes the image of a pleasant-tasting spice.

- [4] The negative imagery of the third stanza is in stark contrast to the first two stanzas. The visual image is a modern "Dirty British coaster" (line 11), which draws attention to the griminess and suffocation of modern civilization. This spray-swept ship, caked in sea-salt, is loaded with materials that pollute the earth with noise and smoke. The smoke-stack of the coaster (line 11) and the firewood it is carrying suggest choking smog. The Tyne Coal (line 13) and road rails (line 14) suggest the noise and smoke of puffing railroad engines. As if this were not enough, the "pig-lead" (line 14) to be used in various industrial processes indicates not just more unpleasantness, but also something poisonous and deadly. In contrast to the lush and stately imagery of the first two stanzas, the images in the third stanza invite the conclusion that people now, when the "Dirty British coaster" butts through the English Channel, are surrounded and threatened by visual, olfactory, and auditory pollution.
- [5] The poem thus establishes a romantic past and ugly present through images of sight, smell, and sound. The images of motion also emphasize this view: In the first two stanzas, the quinquereme is "rowing" and the galleon is "dipping." These kinetic images suggest dignity and lightness. The British coaster, however, is "butting," an image indicating bull-like hostility and stupid force. These, together with all the other images, focus the poem's negative views of modern life. The facts that existence for both the ancient Palestinians and the Renaissance Spaniards included slavery (of those men rowing the quinquereme) and piracy (by those Spanish "explorers" who robbed and killed the natives of the Isthmus) should probably not be emphasized as a protest against Masfield's otherwise valid contrasts in images. His final commentary may hence be thought of as the banging of his "cheap tin trays" (line 15), which makes a percussive climax of the oppressive images filling too large a portion of modern lives.

Work Cited

Masfield, John. "Cargoes." Edgar V. Roberts. *Writing About Literature*. 11th ed. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2006. 377.

Commentary on the Essay

This essay illustrates the first strategy for writing about imagery, using images to develop ideas and moods. All the examples—derived directly from the poem—emphasize the qualities of Masfield's images. This method permits the introduction of imagery drawn from all the senses in order to demonstrate Masfield's ideas about the past and the present. Other approaches might have concentrated exclusively on Masfield's visual images, or upon his im-

^oSee page 377 for this poem.

^{*}Central idea

[†]Central idea. Masfield uses auditory and

Writing About Metaphor and Simile

A Source of Depth and Range in Literature

Figures of speech, metaphorical language, figurative language, figurative devices, and rhetorical figures are terms describing organized patterns of comparison that deepen, broaden, extend, illuminate, and emphasize meaning. First and foremost, the use of figures of speech is a major characteristic by which great literature provides us with fresh and original ways of thinking, feeling, and understanding. Although metaphorical language is sometimes called “ornate,” as though it were unnecessarily decorative, it is not uncommon in conversational speech, and it is essential in literary thought and expression.

Unlike the writing of the social and “hard” sciences, imaginative literature does not purport to be direct and absolute, offering a direct correspondence of words and things. Yes, literature often presents specific and accurate descriptions and explanations, but it also moves in areas of implication and suggestiveness through the use of metaphorical language, which enables writers to amplify their ideas while still employing a relatively small number of words. Such language is therefore a *sine qua non* in imaginative literature, particularly poetry, where it compresses thought, deepens understanding, and shapes response.

There are many metaphorical figures, some of which are *paradox*, *anaphora*, *apostrophe*, *personification*, *synecdoche* and *metonymy*, *pun* (or *paronomasia*), *synesthesia*, *overstatement*, and *understatement*. All these figures are modes of comparison, and they may be expressed in single words, phrases, clauses, or entire structures. The two most important and easily recognized figures of speech, with which we will be concerned here, are *metaphors* and *similes*.

Metaphors and Similes: The Major Figures of Speech

A Metaphor Shows That Something Unknown Can Be Understood Because It Is Identical to Something Known

A **metaphor** (a “carrying out [*phor*] a change [*meta*]”) equates known objects or actions with something that is unknown or to be explained (e.g., “Your words are *music* to my ears,” “You are the *sunshine* of my life,” “My life is a *squirrel*

in a cage”). The equation of the metaphor not only explains and illuminates the thing—let us choose Keats’s star in the poem “Bright Star”—but also offers distinctive and original ways of seeing it, applying it, and thinking about it. Thus Keats draws his metaphor of the star because of its constancy in the heavens, for the star has kept its identical location from year to year and age to age. Keats applies this quality to his speaker’s wish for love that is unchanging and permanent—both a natural and an appropriate equation of celestial star and human desire.

Metaphors are inseparable from language. In a heavy storm, for example, trees may be said to *bow* constantly as the wind blows against them. *Bow* is a metaphor because the word usually refers to performers’ bending forward to acknowledge the applause of an audience and to indicate their gratitude for the audience’s approval. The metaphor therefore asks us to equate our knowledge of theater life (something known) to a weather occurrence (something to be explained). A comparable reference to theater life creates one of the best-known metaphors to appear in Shakespeare’s plays: “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players.” Here, Shakespeare’s character Jacques (JAY-queez) from Act 2, scene 7 of *As You Like It*, equates human life directly with stage life. In other words, the things said and done by stage actors are also said and done by living people in real life. It is important to recognize that Shakespeare’s metaphor does not state that the world is *like* a stage but that it literally *is* a stage.

A Simile Shows That Something Unknown Can Be Understood Because It Is Similar to Something Known

A **simile** (a “showing of likeness or resemblance”) illustrates the *similarity* or *comparability* of the known to something unknown or to be explained. Whereas a metaphor merges identities, a simile focuses on resemblances (e.g., “Your words are *like music* to me,” “You are *like sunshine* in my life,” “I feel *like a squirrel in a cage*”). Similes are distinguishable from metaphors because they are introduced by *like* with nouns and *as* (also *as if* and *as though*) with clauses. If Keats had written that his speaker’s desire for steadfastness is *like* the bright star, his comparison would have been a simile.

Let us consider one of the best-known similes in poetry, from “A Valadiction: Forbidding Mourning” by the seventeenth-century poet John Donne. This is a dramatic poem spoken by a lover about to go on a trip. His loved one is sorrowful, and he attempts to console her by claiming that even when he is gone, he will remain with her in spirit. The following stanza contains a famous simile embodying this idea.

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not yet

A breach,³ but an expansion
Like gold to airy thinness beat.

The simile compares the souls of the speaker and his loved one to gold, a metal both valuable and malleable. By the simile, the speaker asserts that the impending departure will not be a separation but rather a thinning out, so that the relationship of the lovers will remain constant and rich even as the distance between them increases. Because the comparison is introduced by “Like,” the emphasis of the figurative language is on the *similarity* of the lovers’ love to gold (which is always gold even when it is thinned out by the goldsmith’s hammer), not on the *identification* of the two.

Characteristics of Metaphors and Similes

Metaphors and similes are based in imagery, which is the means by which literature is made graphic and vivid (see Chapter 8). That is, by using words that convey images the writer prompts us to recall memories (images) of sights, sounds, tastes, smells, sensations, and visualization of motion. Metaphors and similes go beyond literal imagery to introduce perceptions and comparisons that can be unusual, unpredictable, and surprising, as in Donne’s simile comparing the lovers’ relationship to gold. The comparison emphasizes the bond between the two lovers; the reference to gold shows how valuable the bond is; the unusual and original comparison is one of the elements that make the poem striking and memorable.

To see metaphorical language in further operation, let us take a commonly described condition—happiness. In everyday speech, we might use the sentence “She was happy,” to state that a particular character was experiencing joy and excitement. The sentence is of course accurate, but it is not interesting. A more vivid way of saying the same thing is to use an image of action, such as “She jumped for joy.” But another and better way of communicating joy is the following simile: “She felt as if she had just won the lottery.” Because readers easily understand the disbelief, excitement, exhilaration, and delight that such an event would bring, they also understand—and feel—the character’s happiness. It is the *simile* that evokes this perception and enables each reader to personalize the experience, for no simple description could help a reader comprehend the same degree of emotion.

As a parallel poetic example, let us look at Keats’s famous sonnet “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer,” which Keats wrote soon after reading the translation of Homer’s great epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* by the Renaissance poet George Chapman. Keats, one of the greatest of all poets himself, describes his enthusiasm about Chapman’s successful and exciting work.

John Keats (1795–1821)

On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer^o (1816)

Much have I travell’d in the realms of gold,^o
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen:
Round many western islands^o have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo^o hold.
Of one wide expanse^o had I been told
That deep-brow’d Homer ruled as his demesne;^o
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene^o
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;^o
Or like stout Cortez^o when with eagle eyes
He star’d at the Pacific—and all his men
Look’d at each other with a wild surmise^o—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

As a first step in understanding the power of metaphorical language, we can briefly paraphrase the sonnet’s content.

I have enjoyed much art and read much poetry, and I have been told that Homer is the best writer of all. However, I did not appreciate his works until I first read them in Chapman’s clear and forceful translation. This discovery was exciting and awe-inspiring.

If all Keats had written had been a paragraph like this one, we would pay little attention to it, for it conveys no excitement or wonder. But the last six lines of the sonnet contain two memorable similes (“like some watcher of the skies” and “like stout Cortez”) that stand out and demand a special effort of imagination. To appreciate these similes fully, we need to imagine what it would be like to be an astronomer as he or she discovers a previously unknown planet, and what it would have been like to be one of the first European explorers to see the Pacific Ocean. As we imagine ourselves in these

On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer: George Chapman (c. 1560–1634) published his translations of Homer’s *Iliad* in 1612 and *Odyssey* in 1614–1615.

1 *realms of gold*: the world of great art. 3 *islands*: ancient literature. 4 *bards . . . Apollo*: writers who are sworn subjects of Apollo, the Greek god of light, music, poetry, prophecy, and the sun. 5 *expanse*: epic poetry. 6 *demesne*: realm, estate. 7 *serene*: a clear expanse of air; also grandeur, clarity; rulers were also sometimes called “serene majesty.” 10 *ken*: range of vision. 11 *Cortez*: Hernando Cortés (1485–1547), a Spanish general and the conqueror of Mexico. Keats confuses him with Vasco de Balboa (c. 1475–1519), the first European to see the Pacific Ocean (in 1510) from Darien, an early name for the Isthmus of Panama. 13 *surmise*: conjecture, supposition.

3 *breach*: break, separation.

VEHICLE AND TENOR

To describe the relationship between a writer's ideas and the metaphors and similes chosen to objectify them, two useful terms have been coined by I. A. Richards (in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 1929). First is the **vehicle**, or the specific words of the metaphor or simile. Second is the **tenor**, which is the totality of ideas and attitudes not only of the literary speaker but also of the author. For example, the tenor of Donne's simile in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" is the inseparable love and unbreakable connection of the two lovers; the vehicle is the hammering of gold "to airy thinness." Similarly, the tenor of the similes in the sestet of Keats's sonnet is awe and wonder; the vehicle is the description of astronomical and geographical discovery.

roles, we get a sense of the amazement, excitement, exhilaration, and joy that would accompany such discoveries. With that experience comes the realization that the world—the universe—is far bigger and more astonishing than we had ever dreamed.

Metaphorical language therefore makes strong demands on our creative imaginations. It bears repeating that as we develop our own mental pictures under the stimulation of metaphors and similes, we also develop appropriately associated attitudes and feelings. Let us consider once more Keats's metaphor "realms of gold," which invites us both to imagine brilliant and shining kingdoms and also to join Keats in valuing and loving not just poetry but all literature. The metaphorical "realms of gold" act upon our minds, liberating our imaginations, directing our understanding, and evoking our feelings. In such a way, reading and responding to the works of writers like Keats produces both mental and emotional experiences that were previously hidden to us. Writers constantly give us something new, widening our comprehension, increasing our knowledge, and deepening our imagination.

Writing About Metaphors and Similes

Begin by determining the use, line by line, of metaphors or similes. Obviously, similes are the easiest figures to recognize because they introduce comparisons with *like* or *as*. Metaphors can be recognized because the topics are discussed not as themselves but as other topics. If the poems speak of falling leaves or law courts but the subjects are memory or increasing age, you are looking at metaphors.

Raise Questions to Discover Ideas

- What metaphors and/or similes does the work contain? Where do they occur? Under what circumstances? How extensive are they?
- How do you recognize them? Are they signaled by a single word or phrase, such as "desert places" in Frost's "Desert Places" (page 369), or are they more extensively detailed, as in Shakespeare's "Sonnet 30: When to the Sessions of Sweet Silent Thought" (page 380)?
- How vivid are the metaphors and similes? How obvious? How unusual? What kind of effort is needed to understand them in context?
- Structurally, how are the metaphors and similes developed? How do they rise out of the situation envisioned in the work? To what degree are they integrated into the work's development of ideas? How do they relate to other aspects of the work?
- Is one type of figure used in a particular section while another type predominates in another section? Why?
- If you have discovered a number of metaphors, what relationships can you find among them, such as the judicial and financial connections in Shakespeare's "When to the Sessions of Sweet Silent Thought" (page 380)?
- How do the metaphors or similes broaden, deepen, or otherwise assist in making the ideas in the poem forceful?
- In general, how appropriate and meaningful is the metaphorical language in the poem? What effect does this language have on the poem's tone, and on your understanding and appreciation of the poem?

Organize Your Essay About Metaphors and Similes

Introduction In the introduction, relate the quality of the figures of speech to the general nature of the work. Thus, metaphors and similes of suffering might be appropriate to a religious, redemptive work, while those of sunshine and cheer might be right for a romantic one. If there is any discrepancy between the metaphorical language and the topic, you could consider that contrast as a possible central idea, for it would clearly indicate the writer's ironic perspective. Suppose that the topic of the poem is love, but the figures put you in mind of darkness and cold. What would the writer be saying about the quality of love? You should also try to justify any claims that you make about the figures. For example, the major metaphor of Lowell's "Patterns" is that people are virtually compelled to live their lives controlled by many habits, restrictions, customs, expectations, duties, roles, and services—"patterns." How is this metaphor to be taken? As an outcry for personal freedom? As an expression of rage against restrictions? As a suggestion that customs that restrict may also be customs that provide solace? How do you explain your answer or answers? Your introduction is the place to establish ideas and justifications of this sort.

Body The following approaches for discussing rhetorical figures are not mutually exclusive, and you may combine them as you wish. Most likely, your essay will bring in most of the following classifications.

1. **Interpret the meaning and effect of the metaphorical language.** Here you explain how the metaphors and/or similes enable you to make an interpretation. In lines 17 to 19 of "Kubla Khan" (page 367), for example, Coleridge introduces the following simile:

And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced.

Coleridge's simile of "fast thick pants" almost literally animates the earth as a moving, working power, panting as it forces the fountain out of the chasm. The idea is that the phenomena of Nature are not dead, but vigorously alive. A directly explanatory approach, such as this, requires that metaphors and similes be expanded and interpreted, including the explanation of necessary references and allusions.

2. **Analyze the frames of reference and their appropriateness to the subject matter.** Here you classify and locate the sources and types of references and determine the appropriateness of these to the poem's subject matter. Ask questions similar to these: Does the writer refer extensively to nature, science, warfare, politics, business, reading (e.g., Shakespeare's metaphor equating personal reverie with courtroom proceedings in Sonnet 30)? Does the metaphor seem appropriate? How? Why?
3. **Focus on the interests and sensibilities of the poet.** In a way this approach is like strategy 2, but the emphasis here is on what the selectivity of the writer might show about his or her vision and interests. You might begin by listing the figures in the work and then determining the sources. But then you should raise questions like the following: Does the writer use figures derived from one sense rather than another (i.e., sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch)? Does he or she record color, brightness, shadow, shape, depth, height, number, size, slowness, speed, emptiness, fullness, richness, drabness? Has the writer relied on the associations of figures of sense? Do metaphors and similes referring to green plants and trees, to red roses, or to rich fabrics, for example, suggest that life is full and beautiful, or do references to touch suggest amorous warmth? This approach is designed to help you draw conclusions about the author's taste or sensibility.
4. **Examine the effect of one figure on the other figures and ideas of the work.** The assumption of this approach is that each literary work is unified and organically whole, so that each part is closely related and inseparable from everything else. Usually it is best to pick a figure that occurs at the beginning of the work and then determine how this figure influences your perception of the remainder. Your aim is to consider the relationship of part to parts and part to whole. The beginning of Frost's poem "Desert Places," for example, describes "snow falling and night

falling." What is the effect of this opening on the poem's metaphor of human "desert places"? To help you with questions like this, you might substitute a totally different detail, such as, for this poem, the rising sun on a beautiful day, or playing with a kitten, rather than the onset of cold and night. Such suppositions, which would clearly be out of place, may help you understand and then explain the poet's figures of speech.

Conclusion In your conclusion, summarize your main points, describe your general impressions, try to describe the impact of the figures, indicate your personal responses, or show what might further be done along the lines you have been developing. If you know other works by the same writer, or other works by other writers who use comparable or contrasting figures, you might explain the relationship of the other work or works to your present analysis.

Illustrative Essay

Shakespeare's Metaphors in "Sonnet 30: When to the Sessions of Sweet Silent Thought"

- [1] In this sonnet Shakespeare stresses the sadness of remembering past regrets and misfortunes, but he states that a person with such heavyheartedness may be cheered by present thoughts about a good friend. His metaphors present new and fresh ways of seeing personal life in this perspective.* He creates metaphors drawn from the public and business world of law courts, money, and banking or money-handling.[†]
- [2] In the first four lines, Shakespeare presents a metaphor of law and the courtroom to show that memories of past experience are constantly present and influential. Like a judge commanding defendants to appear in court, Shakespeare's speaker "summon[s]" his memory of "things past" to appear on trial before him. This metaphor suggests that people are their own judges and that their ideals and morals are actual laws by which they measure themselves. The speaker finds himself guilty of wasting his time in the past. Removing himself, however, from the strict punishment that a real judge might require, he does not condemn himself for his "dear time's waste" but instead laments it (line 4). The metaphor is thus used to indicate that a person's consciousness is made up just as much of self-doubt and reproach as of more positive qualities.

^{*}See page 380 for this poem.

^{*}Central idea.

[†]Thesis sentence.