Figurative Language

**Simile** - direct comparison between two usually unrelated things using “like” or “as”

A Red, Red Rose
Robert Burns

O, my luve is like a red, red rose,
That’s newly sprung in June.
O, my luve is like the melodie,
That’s sweetly played in tune.

**Metaphor** - a comparison between two usually unrelated things not using “like” or “as”

**Personification** - giving human characteristics to non-human things

The Mountains Are a Lonely Folk
Hamlin Garland

The mountains they are silent folk,
They stand afar-alone;
And the clouds that kiss their brows at night
Hear neither sigh nor groan.
Each bears him in his ordered place
As soldiers do, and bold and high
They fold their forests round their feet
And bolster up the sky.

Fog
Lizette Woodworth Reese

What grave has cracked and let this frail thing out,
To press its poor face to the window-pane;
Or, head hid in frayed cloak, to drift about
The mallow bush, then out to the wet lane?
Long-closeted scents across the drippings break,
Of violet petunias blowing there,
A shred of mint, mixed with whatever ache
Old springs have left behind wedged tight in air.
Small, aged things peer in, ready to slip
Into the chairs, and watch and stare apace;
The house has loosened from its grasp of yore
Dark-horded tales. Were I, finger on lip,
To climb the stair, might I not find the place
Turned all to huddled shape, white on the floor?

Sea Lullaby
Elinor Wylie

The old moon is tarnished
With smoke of the flood,
The dead leaves are varnished
With color like blood,
A treacherous smiler
With teeth white as milk,
A savage beguiler
In sheathings of silk,
The sea creeps to pillage,
She leaps on her prey;
A child of the village
Was murdered today.

She came up to meet him
In a smooth golden cloak,
She choked him and beat him
to death, for a joke.

Her bright locks were tangled,
She shouted for joy,
With one hand she strangled
A strong little boy.

Now in silence she lingers
Beside him all night
To wash her long fingers
In silvery light.
**Hyperbole** - exaggeration for the sake of emphasis

**Nightmare**
W.S. Gilbert

When you’re lying awake with a dismal headache, and repose is taboo’d by anxiety,
I conceive you may use any language you choose to indulge in, without impropriety;
For your brain is on fire-the bedclothes conspire of usual slumber to plunder you:
First your counterpane goes, and uncovers your toes, and your sheet slips demurely from under you;
Then the blanketing tickles- you feel like mixed pickles, so terribly sharp is the pricking,
And you’re hot, and you’re cross, and you tumble and toss till there’s nothing ‘twixt you and the ticking.
Then the bedclothes all creep to the ground in a heap, and you pick ‘em all up in a tangle;
Next your pillow resigns and politely declines to remain at its usual angle!
Well, you get some repose in the form of a doze, with hot eyeballs and head ever aching.
But your slumbering teems with such horrible dreams that you’d very much better be waking...
You’re a regular wreck, with a crick in your neck, and no wonder you snore, for your head’s on the floor, and you’ve needles and pins from your soles to your shins, and your flesh is a-creep; for left legs’s asleep, and you’ve cramp in your toes, and a fly on your nose, and some fluff in your lung, and a feverish tongue, and a thirst that’s intense, and a general sense that you haven’t been sleeping in clover;
But the darkness has passed, and it’s daylight at last, and the night has been long--ditto ditto my song-and thank goodness they’re both of them over!

**Litote(s)** - understatement for the sake of emphasis

He had a delicate snack of three burgers, fries, a shake, and a turnover.
**Apostrophe** – addressing someone or something not present or who cannot answer

**A Father’s Heart Is Touched**  
Samuel Hoffenstein

When I think of all you’ve got  
Coming to you, little tot:  
The disappointments and diseases,  
The rosebud hopes that blow to cheeses,  
The pains, the aches, the blows, the kicks,  
The jobs, the women, and the bricks,  
I’m almost glad to see you such  
An idiot, they won’t hurt you much.

**To Night**  
Percy Bysshe Shelley

Swiftly walk o’er the western wave,  
Spirit of the misty eastern cave,  
Where, all the long and lone daylight,  
Thou wovest dreams of joy and fear,  
Which make thee terrible and dear-  
Swift be thy flight!

Wrap thy form in a mantle gray,  
Star-in-wrought!  
Blind with thine hair the eyes of Day;  
Kiss her until she be wearried out;  
Then wander o’er city and sea, and land,  
Touching all with thine opiate wand-  
Come, long-sought!

When I arose and saw the dawn,  
I sighed for thee;  
When light rode high, and the dew was gone,  
And noon lay heavy on flower and tree,  
And the weary Day turned to his rest,  
Lingering like an unloved guest,  
I sighed for thee.

Thy brother Death came, and cried,  
“Wouldst thou me?”

Thy sweet child Sleep, the filmy-eyed,  
Murmured like a noontide bee,  
“Shall I nestle near thy side?  
Wouldst thou me?”-And I replied,  
“No, not thee!”

Death will come when thou art dead,  
Soon, too soon-  
Sleep will come when thou art fled;  
Of neither would I ask the boon  
I ask of thee, beloved Night-  
Swift be thine approaching flight,  
Come soon, soon!

**Synecdoche** - using a part of something to represent the whole, or the whole to represent a part

All hands on deck.  
His wheels are out in the parking lot.  
He asked for her hand in marriage.
**Metonymy** – calling a thing not by its own name but by a name associated with it.

The pen is mightier than the sword.
The white House issued a statement today.

**How Do I Love Thee**  
Elizabeth Barrett Browning

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.  
I love thee to the level of everyday’s  
Most quiet need, **by sun and candlelight**.  
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;  
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.  
I love thee with the passion put to use  
In my old griefs, and with my childhood’s faith.  
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints-I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears, of all my life!-and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.

**Symbol** - a word or image which signifies something other than what it literally represents

**Allusion** – an indirect reference to some historical event or person

**Plato Told**  
E. E. Cummings

(plato told  
him: he couldn’t believe it (jesus  
told him; he wouldn’t believe it) lao  
tsze  
certainly told him, and general (yes ma’am) sherman; and even

(believe it or not) you  
told him: i told him; we told him  
(he didn’t believe it, no sir) it took  
a nipponized bit of

the old sixth avenue  
el; in the top of his head: to tell  
him