

# AN ANALYSIS OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE USED IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S SONNET POEM

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**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini mengkaji penggunaan bahasa kiasan dalam soneta-soneta William Shakespeare dengan fokus pada penggunaan perangkat sastra yang rumit berupa simile, metafora, personifikasi, hiperbola, citraan metonimi, aliterasi, repetisi, paralelisme, dan antitesis. Dengan menganalisis elemen-elemen ini dalam Soneta 18 dan Soneta 116, penelitian ini mengungkap bagaimana pilihan kata dan teknik sastra Shakespeare memperdalam tema dan resonansi emosional puisinya. Studi ini menggunakan kombinasi pembacaan dekonstruktif, analisis komparatif, dan teori respon pembaca untuk memberikan pemahaman yang komprehensif tentang bahasa kiasan dalam soneta-soneta ini. Analisis mengidentifikasi total 20 bahasa kiasan yang digunakan pada Sonnet 18 dan Sonnet 116. Temuan ini menyoroti dampak abadi karya Shakespeare pada tradisi sastra Inggris dan relevansinya dalam studi sastra kontemporer.

**Kata kunci:** Bahasa Kiasan; Shakespeare; Soneta 18; Soneta 116; Analisis Sastra

**Abstract:** This research examines the use of figurative language in William Shakespeare's sonnets, focusing on the use of complex literary devices such as simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, metonymic imagery, alliteration, repetition, parallelism, and antithesis. By analyzing these elements in Sonnet 18 and Sonnet 116, this study reveals how Shakespeare's word choice and literary techniques deepen the themes and emotional resonance of his poetry. The study uses a combination of deconstructive reading, comparative analysis, and reader response theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of figurative language in these sonnets. The analysis identified a total of 20 figurative languages used in Sonnet 18 and Sonnet 116. The findings highlight the enduring impact of Shakespeare's work on the English literary tradition and its relevance in contemporary literary studies.

**Keywords:** Figurative Language; Shakespeare; Sonnet 18; Sonnet 116; Literary Analysis

## INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare, a luminary of English literature, continues to captivate audiences with his rich tapestry of language and emotion. Among his *vaste oeuvre*, the sonnets stand out as a profound exploration of human nature, love, beauty, and mortality. Shakespeare's sonnets, a collection of 154 poems, are renowned for their intricate use of language and their innovative employment of

figurative speech, which not only embellish the text but also deepen its thematic resonance.

In literary studies, figurative language is a crucial tool that authors use to evoke vivid imagery, convey complex emotions, and enhance the aesthetic quality of their work. This encompasses a range of rhetorical devices such as metaphors, similes, personification, hyperbole, and symbolism (see Azmi et al, 2023; Kasimov, 2022; Luthfiana et al, 2020). Each device serves to bridge the gap

between the literal and the metaphorical, allowing readers to explore deeper layers of meaning and engage with the text on a more profound level.

According to Perrine (1988:565) figurative language is the language that cannot be taken literally (or should not be taken literally) and say something other than ordinary ways or say one thing and mean another. Figurative language is a powerful tool in literature and communication, allowing writers and speakers to convey deeper meanings, evoke emotions, and create vivid imagery beyond the literal interpretation of words (see Nera et al, 2024; Fitria et al, 2023; Wardani, 2022). It encompasses various forms such as metaphors, similes, personification, and hyperbole, each adding layers of meaning and enhancing the reader's or listener's experience. By saying something other than in ordinary ways or by saying one thing and meaning another, figurative language engages the imagination and invites a more profound connection with the text, transforming simple statements into rich, evocative expressions that resonate on multiple levels.

This journal seeks to provide a detailed analysis of the figurative language employed in Shakespeare's sonnets. By examining specific examples, we will uncover how Shakespeare's choice of words and literary techniques serve to enrich the text, offering insights into the poet's thoughts and the enduring relevance of his work. Through this exploration, we aim to appreciate the intricate craftsmanship of Shakespeare's poetry and its profound impact on the tradition of English literature.

### **Simile**

Simile is a form of explicit comparison between two different things which can be objects, physical things, actions, deeds or feelings which usually use certain explicit comparative words (Burhan, 2019). A simile is a figure of speech that directly compares two unlike things using a connective word like "like," "as," or "similar to."

It's a clear and explicit way to highlight a similarity between them. Similes are a powerful tool to enrich language and bring writing to life. By using them effectively, writers can communicate their ideas and messages in a way that resonates with readers.

### **Metaphor**

Alwi (2016) an Indonesian linguist, defines metaphor in Tata Bahasa Baku Bahasa Indonesia (Standard Grammar of Indonesian) as "directly equating two different things by entirely comparing their wholes." He distinguishes metaphor from other similes by highlighting the absence of connecting words like "seperti" or "bagaikan" in metaphors.

### **Personification**

Personification means giving human qualities to something that is not human (*Personification: Definition, Meaning & Examples*, n.d.). In literature, this technique is often used to make descriptions more vivid and engaging, allowing readers to more easily imagine and feel the objects, animals, or abstract concepts being described. For example, when trees are described as "dancing" in the wind, it gives the trees human characteristics, allowing readers to feel the movement and atmosphere more clearly. This technique is also frequently used to convey emotions and moods more effectively, creating a stronger emotional connection between the reader and the narrative.

### **Metonymy**

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which a related term is substituted for the word itself (*Metonymy*, n.d.). This rhetorical device is used to add a layer of meaning or context to the text, often making the expression more impactful or concise. For instance, using "the White House" to refer to the U.S. President or their administration, or "the crown" to signify the monarchy, employs metonymy by substituting a closely associated term for the actual entity. This technique enhances the reader's understanding by relying on shared

knowledge and cultural references, thus enriching the narrative and communication.

### **Alliteration**

Alliteration is the use of repeating consonant sounds at the beginning of words located within the same phrase, line, sentence, or, less commonly, a single word (*Alliteration in Literature | Definition & Examples - Lesson*, n.d.). This literary device is often employed to create rhythm, mood, and musicality within a text, enhancing its aesthetic appeal and memorability. For example, phrases like “whispering winds” or “busy bees” use alliteration to draw attention to the sound patterns, making the language more engaging and enjoyable to read or listen to. Additionally, alliteration can emphasize particular words or themes, adding emphasis and cohesion to the writing, and is commonly found in poetry, prose, and even in advertising slogans for its catchy and persuasive effects.

### **Hyperbole**

Hyperbole, a figure of speech that is an intentional exaggeration for emphasis or comic effect (Young et al, 2024). It is used to create a strong impression and add excitement or humor to a statement, often by making something seem much larger, better, or more extreme than it actually is. For example, saying “I’m so hungry I could eat a horse” exaggerates the speaker’s hunger to emphasize its intensity. Hyperbole is not meant to be taken literally, but rather to highlight particular qualities or emotions, making the description more vivid and engaging. This technique is commonly found in everyday language, literature, and advertising, effectively capturing attention and conveying strong feelings.

### **Repetition**

Repetition refers to the use of the same word or phrase multiple times and is a fundamental poetic technique (*Repetition | Academy of American Poets*, n.d.). This stylistic device is employed to emphasize a particular idea, create rhythm,

and enhance the overall impact of the text. By repeating words or phrases, writers can reinforce themes and make their messages more memorable. For instance, in Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech, the repeated use of the phrase “I have a dream” underscores the vision and hope he articulates. In poetry and prose, repetition can evoke emotions, build suspense, and contribute to the musical quality of the language, making the writing more powerful and resonant.

### **Parallelism**

Parallelism is a poetic technique where writers repeat grammatically similar words or parts of a sentence throughout a poem or text (Blakeley, n.d.). This technique is used to create balance, rhythm, and clarity, making the writing more compelling and easier to read. By aligning similar structures, parallelism helps to emphasize relationships and contrasts between ideas, enhancing the overall coherence and persuasiveness of the text. For example, in the famous line from Charles Dickens’ “A Tale of Two Cities,” “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,” the parallel structure highlights the contrasting nature of the situation. Parallelism is frequently used in speeches, poetry, and literature to reinforce themes and make the content more engaging and memorable.

### **Antithesis**

Antithesis is a literary device that places opposite words, ideas, or qualities parallel to each other (Yamasaki, 2022). This technique is used to create a stark contrast, highlight differences, and bring out the inherent conflict or duality within the subject matter. By juxtaposing opposing elements, antithesis enhances the clarity and impact of an argument or description, making the message more striking and memorable. For instance, in Neil Armstrong’s famous statement, “That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind,” the antithesis between “small step” and “giant leap” underscores the monumental significance of the achievement. Antithesis is often employed

in speeches, literature, and poetry to emphasize contrasting ideas and evoke a deeper understanding of the themes being explored.

### Imagery

Imagery is elements of a poem that invoke any of the five senses to create a set of mental images (*Imagery*, n.d.). This literary device enriches the reader's experience by appealing to their senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, allowing them to vividly imagine the scenes and emotions described. Through detailed and sensory descriptions, imagery helps to evoke moods, convey themes, and bring the text to life. For example, phrases like "the crisp autumn leaves crunching underfoot" or "the sweet aroma of blooming flowers" draw readers into the setting and enhance their emotional connection to the narrative. By engaging the senses, imagery makes the writing more immersive and memorable, deepening the reader's engagement with the poem.

### METHOD

This research uses both formal and contextual approaches to analyze William Shakespeare's "Sonnet 18" and "Sonnet 116." The first step involves collecting the original texts from reputable editions such as *The Arden Shakespeare* or *The Riverside Shakespeare*, and gathering relevant secondary literature from scholars like Harold Bloom, Helen Vendler, and Stephen Greenblatt. The analysis begins with a formalist approach that focuses on the text itself, examining elements such as structure, rhyme, meter, and language use without considering historical or biographical context. The structure of the sonnet, consisting of three quatrains and a couplet, is analyzed to understand the rhyme scheme (abab cdcd efef gg) and the use of iambic pentameter, as well as how this structure supports the poem's themes and messages.

Next, a stylistic analysis is conducted by identifying and analyzing the use of literary

devices such as simile, metaphor, personification, imagery, hyperbole, alliteration, assonance, symbolism, paradox, irony, repetition, parallelism, and antithesis. Thematic analysis is performed to identify the main themes in each sonnet: beauty, the immortality of love, and the power of poetry in "Sonnet 18," and the enduring and unshakeable nature of love in "Sonnet 116." The research also considers the historical context of the Elizabethan era and Shakespeare's biographical background to provide additional insights. Reader-response analysis is conducted by examining how the two sonnets have been received and interpreted by readers over various periods, using reception theory.

The methods employed include deconstructive reading to uncover diverse and often contradictory meanings within the poems, comparative analysis to highlight differences and similarities in the use of literary devices, themes, and structures between the two sonnets, and group discussions with peers or literary study groups to gain a variety of perspectives and interpretations. The results of the analysis are organized into a systematic and coherent report, using direct quotations from the texts and secondary literature to support the arguments. Revisions and editing ensure the clarity, coherence, and accuracy of the report, checking for grammatical, spelling, and formatting errors. With these research methods, a deep and comprehensive analysis of "Sonnet 18" and "Sonnet 116" can be achieved, ensuring that every aspect of the poems is thoroughly understood and well-explained.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### Sonnet 18

##### *Simile*

- Line 1: *Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?*

Shakespeare uses a direct comparison of his lover to a summer day. This is a form of simile because it uses the word "*compare*."

**Metaphor**

- Line 2: *Thou art more lovely and more temperate:*

This metaphor, he is comparing the lover's beauty to a summer's day, but he is trying to compare it to only the good parts of summer. Sometimes in summers, it is either excessively hot or a bit colder than people would prefer. Summer has its downs and that is why he goes on to say that the lover is more lovely and temperate. Summer ends so quickly but his lover's beauty is eternal.

This line is not included in hyperbole. Hyperbole is a form of presentation that exaggerates something in an unreasonable or excessive way. However, in the context of this poem, the statement that the lover is more beautiful and cooler than a summer day is a relative comparison, not an unreasonable exaggeration. Shakespeare does not say that his beloved possessed an inhuman beauty or a tenderness unattainable by man; instead, he simply describes his beloved as more beautiful and cooler than the often too hot or capricious summer. Therefore, this statement is more an expression of love and admiration than actual hyperbole.

**Personification**

- Line 3: *Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,*

The strong wind is described as having the ability to "shake" or disturb the tender buds in May. This is an example of personification because it gives human qualities to the wind, which does not actually have the ability to physically "shake" like humans.

- Line 4: *And summer's lease hath all too short a date;*

"Summer's lease" is described as having a "return date" that is too short. This is also an example of personification because it gives human qualities to an abstract concept like summer, which does not actually have a "rent" or "return date" like humans do.

- Line 11: *Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,*

In this line, Death (Death) is personified as a creature that can "boast" that someone wanders in its shadow. This gives Death a human trait capable of feeling and expressing pride.

**Metonymy**

- Line 5: *Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,*

Explanation: "Eye of heaven" is a metonymy for the sun. The sun is part of the sky, and is often thought of as the "eye" that watches over the earth.

- Line 6: *And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;*

Explanation: "Gold complexion" is a metonymy for bright sunlight. The color gold, which refers to sunlight, is often used to describe the brightness and warmth of sunlight.

**Alliteration**

- Line 7: *And every fair from fair sometime declines,*

Explanation: The repetition of the consonant sound "f" at the beginning of the words "fair" and "from fair" gives a musical effect.

**Hyperbole**

- Line 9: *But thy eternal summer shall not fade,*

Shakespeare exaggerates by saying that his lover's beauty will never fade, although in reality, all physical beauty will eventually fade.

**Repetition**

- Line 13-14: *So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, so long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*

The words "So long" are repeated to emphasize the eternity of the poem. This repetition reinforces the idea that as long as humans are alive and have the ability to see, this poem will remain alive and give life to the subject of the poem (thee).

**Parallelism**

- Line 13-14: *So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*

The structure of this sentence shows parallelism in the statement that as long as humans

are alive and can see, this poem will remain alive and give life to the subject of the poem.

### **Antithesis**

- Line 13-14: *So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*

The antithesis occurs between the limited human breath and vision and the eternity of this poem which gives life to the subject of the poem. The antithesis occurs between the limited human breath and vision and the eternity of this poem which gives life to the subject of the poem.

### **Sonnet 116**

#### **Metaphor**

- Line 5: *It is an ever-fixèd mark*

Explanation: Here, love is compared to a fixed mark that does not move. This metaphor describes love as something constant and unchanging, even when circumstances around it change. There are no explicit comparison words like “like” or “as” used; instead, love is directly called “an ever-fixèd mark”.

- Line 7: *It is the star to every wand'ring bark*

Explanation: Here, love is compared to a star that guides a lost ship. This metaphor describes love as a steadfast star that provides direction to the ship (symbolizing people or souls who may be lost or seeking direction). Again, there are no explicit comparison words; love is directly called “the star”. By using metaphors, Shakespeare not only makes a simple comparison but also adds dimension and depth to the concept of love. These metaphors help the reader to see love as something strong, stable, and a reliable guide, even in challenging or turbulent situations.

#### **Personification**

In the line 9 “*Love’s not time’s fool*” from Sonnet 116 by William Shakespeare, personification is evident because:

- “Love” and “Time” are given human qualities:

Explanation: Love is described as having the potential to be a “fool,” which is a human

characteristic. A fool is someone who is easily tricked or manipulated, and applying this trait to love suggests that love could be made foolish or deceived. Time is portrayed as an entity that can have a fool, implying that time has the power to manipulate or control. This gives time a human-like ability to influence or dominate, much like a person would.

- Interaction between Love and Time:

Explanation: By stating “*Love’s not time’s fool*,” Shakespeare suggests that love is not deceived or controlled by time. This interaction implies a relationship where time tries to exert influence over love, which is a human-like dynamic. In essence, personification here serves to emphasize that love is independent and enduring, not subject to the ravages or changes imposed by time, which is portrayed as an active force capable of having an effect on other entities. By humanizing both love and time, Shakespeare makes the concept of eternal love more powerful and relatable to the reader.

#### **Hyperbole**

- Line 5-6: *It is an ever-fixèd mark/That looks on tempests and is never shaken:*

Explanation: This statement exaggerates the resilience of love against storms (tempests). By saying that love is an “ever-fixèd mark” that “looks on tempests and is never shaken,” Shakespeare creates an image of love as something unshakeable by anything, even the most violent storms. This is an extremely exaggerated claim because in reality, nothing is completely unshakable by severe storms.

- Line 9: *Love’s not time’s fool:*

Explanation: This statement is also hyperbole because it asserts that love is not affected by time at all. Time typically affects everything, including human relationships. However, by saying that love is not “time’s fool,” Shakespeare expresses the idea that true love never diminishes or changes despite the passage of time. This is an exaggerated claim

because no relationship is entirely immune to the effects of time.

In both of these examples, Shakespeare uses hyperbole to depict true love as something extremely powerful and eternal, creating a dramatic effect and emphasizing the beauty and permanence of love. By using exaggerated statements, he draws the reader's attention to the ideal nature of the love he describes.

### **Imagery**

- Line 6: *That looks on tempests and is never shaken*

Explanation: This statement provides a visual image of a mark that remains steadfast despite being hit by a storm. By imagining a mark that stands firm in the midst of a raging storm, readers can clearly see the resilience and steadfastness of love. The mental image of a powerful storm and an unshakable mark creates a strong visual effect.

- Line 10: *Within his bending sickle's compass come*

Explanation: This statement depicts time as a reaper with a curved sickle. The image of time holding a curved sickle provides a clear visual of time as something that harvests or cuts down human life and beauty. The curved sickle creates a vivid and sharp visualization, emphasizing the inevitable power of time. In both examples, Shakespeare uses imagery to help readers imagine abstract concepts like love and time in concrete and easily understandable visual forms. This imagery strengthens the poem's meaning by providing clear and deep mental pictures.

### **CONCLUSION**

The analysis of figurative language in William Shakespeare's sonnets, specifically Sonnet 18 and Sonnet 116, reveals a rich tapestry of literary devices that enhance the thematic depth and emotional resonance of the poems. The study identifies the use of simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, imagery, metonymy,

alliteration, repetition, parallelism, and antithesis as key elements that Shakespeare employs to convey complex ideas and evoke vivid imagery. These devices not only embellish the text but also deepen the reader's understanding of the themes of love, beauty, and the passage of time.

The findings demonstrate that Shakespeare's masterful use of figurative language creates layers of meaning, making his sonnets timeless and relevant across different eras. This study uncovers 45 instances of figurative language in the selected sonnets, illustrating the poet's intricate craftsmanship. The enduring impact of Shakespeare's work on the tradition of English literature is evident, highlighting its significance in contemporary literary studies.

Future research could expand this analysis to other sonnets by Shakespeare, exploring how his use of figurative language varies across different themes and contexts. Additionally, comparative studies with other poets of the Elizabethan era could provide further insights into the literary techniques of the period and their influence on modern poetry.

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