Metaphors in Classic Literature


T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock":
Extended metaphor comparing the fog to either a dog or cat:

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,…

Of course, Shakespeare's plays and poems are full of excellent examples. Here's one from from Hamlet, comparing the world to an unkempt garden. Garden metaphors are pretty common in Shakespeare's work, in fact. You'll find many of them, if you look:

How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed;

And here, from Macbeth, is one of the darkest descriptions of life, using an actor and his lines as a metaphor:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

The General Prologue - The Merchant (Canterbury Tales)

There was a merchant with forked beard, and girt
In motley gown, and high on horse he sat,
Upon his head a Flemish beaver hat;
His boots were fastened rather elegantly.
His spoke his notions out right pompously,(5)
Stressing the times when he had won, not lost.
He would the sea were held at any cost
Across from Middleburgh to Orwell town.
At money-changing he could make a crown.
This worthy man kept all his wits well set;(10)
There was no one could say he was in debt,
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So well he governed all his trade affairs
With bargains and with borrowings and with shares.
Indeed, he was a worthy man withal,
But, sooth to say, his name I can’t recall.(15)

https://www.owleyes.org/text/canterbury-tales/read/the-merchant#root-218782-1
Follow the link to see the explanations of each.

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Several metaphors here beginning with the stairs in line 2. (Almost every line)

Mother to Son
BY LANGSTON HUGHES

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It’s had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.
But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin’ in the dark
Where there ain’t been no light.
So boy, don’t you turn back.
Don’t you set down on the steps
’Cause you finds it’s kinder hard.
Don’t you fall now—
Metaphors in Classic Literature

For I’se still goin’, honey,
I’se still climbin’,
And life for me ain’t been no crystal stair.


https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/africa-poems-eagle-metaphor/

Thou mighty troubadour of Heaven!
Thou proud citizen of the lascivious sky!
Invite me to thy fabulous palace of
Thy unconstrained tax free haven where thou
Dost soar free in the wild summer rain!

Pheko Motaung

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Various examples at Elementary Level.

He is my knight in shining armor.

He is the class clown.

He is a pig.

She is a cutie pie.

My classroom is a shoe box.

My classroom is an oven.

You are my guardian angel.

You are my shining star.

My child is the apple of my eye.

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