



An Analysis of Figurative Languages Used in Oscar Wilde's Poem Entitled "A Lament"

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Abstract

This research is conducted to find the figurative language that used in a poem by Oscar Wilde entitled "A Lament". Based on Kreutz and Roberts (1993) there are eight form of figurative language, they are: metaphor, hyperbole, idiom, rhetorical question, simile, irony, understatement, and indirect request. These figurative languages are usually used to express what people thought in novel and proper manner. Throughout the examination, the researcher finds that "A Lament" used metaphor, hyperbole, and simile. But the main figurative language that used was metaphor. These findings come out from the researcher's perspective when reading the poem. In order to get the validation, the next researchers should examine this poem from their perspective.

Keywords: *figurative language, metaphor, hyperbole, simile*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi bentuk-bentuk bahasa kiasan figurative language yang digunakan dalam puisi karya Oscar Wilde berjudul A Lament. Berdasarkan teori Kreutz dan Roberts (1993), terdapat delapan jenis bahasa kiasan, yaitu metafora, hiperbola, idiom, pertanyaan retorik, simile, ironi, peremehan (understatement), dan permintaan tidak langsung (indirect request). Bahasa kiasan umumnya digunakan untuk mengekspresikan gagasan dan perasaan secara estetis serta mendalam. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa puisi A Lament mengandung tiga jenis bahasa kiasan, yaitu metafora, hiperbola, dan simile. Dari ketiganya, metafora merupakan bentuk yang paling dominan digunakan. Temuan ini diperoleh berdasarkan interpretasi peneliti terhadap teks puisi. Untuk memperoleh hasil yang lebih komprehensif dan valid, penelitian selanjutnya disarankan untuk mengkaji puisi ini melalui perspektif dan pendekatan analisis yang berbeda.

Kata kunci: *figurative language, metafora, hiperbola, simile*

Introduction

Language is a culture study that can help people to tell what inside their minds. But sometime people do not speaking with direct language. They intend to use figurative language to make their speaks become more proper and not hurt other people. Even though some figurative language are more meaner than the direct language, but people still intend to use those language. This habit is also used in some language literature such as poems, stories, and novels, in order to make the sentences

become more beautiful and not make the readers become bored while reading those literatures. As we know, the figurative language are divided into eight types, which will explained later within this article. The study of figurative language is an interesting topics. Because figurative language has so many types and it might be different interpretation based on different people. In order to get some interpretation, we need to know more about the eight types of figurative language and how they applied within the literatures. In order to dig more about figurative language, this article will use poems from Oscar Wilde that entitled A Lament.

Kreuz and Roberts (1993) stated that there are some changes that happen in psychology of language. Neisse (1976) in Kreuz and Roberts (1993) wrote that this change are the result of the psychology transformation, where people likely to speaks some words that will not hurting the others. Kreuz and Roberts (1993) also stated that in order to learn the figurative language, people need confirmation from other parts. This mean that the confirmation is need to meet the same interpretation of those figurative language that used in some literary texts. The confirmation also needed to avoid the misleading meaning of the true meaning from the original writers' perspective. Because it will be become a waste if the true meanings of those literary texts are misinterpreted. More over, the misinterpreted can lead into the miss communication. As stated by Hartung *et al.*, (2020) figurative language that are more novel and appropriate can create a creative language. This language is not easy to be understand even for the native speakers. Levorato and Cacciari (1999), Vulchanova *ate al.*, (2011) in Carrol (2017) stated that the ability to understand fugitive language usually arise when people in the age of 10 or 11 years old. Cain *et al.*, (2009) in Carrol (2017) stated that the ability to understand figurative language is arise because they started using language in broader level. Carrol (2017) said that children should learn figurative language from the young age so they can understand the language in broader level. Kreuz *et al.*, find 8 forms of figurative language that are:

Metaphor is usually used when people do not want to directly speak their mind. Metaphor is the form of figurative language that usually used in novel, poems, or even in daily conversation. Kreuz and Roberts (1993) said that a lot of psychologist, philosophers, and literary theorist laid their interest in metaphor. Boyd (1979) said that metaphor not only allow people to express their mind in novel ways, but also have used in formulating scientific theories. Metaphor provide a powerful conceptual to understanding the world by allowing the unfamiliar to be partially understood in the familiar form. Gibbs in Kreuz and Roberts (1993) said that because of the high interest in metaphor, the researchers are having less research for the other figurative language. Kreuz and Roberts (1993) also said that a lot of researchers have linked the metaphor with the other forms of figurative language. This trend cause the blurring effect in the figurative language that can't distinct the metaphor from the other forms. Honeck (1986) and Miller (1979) in Kreuz and Roberts (1993) have linked the metaphor with psychological perspectives. They separated metaphor in three categorize: nominal, predicative, and sentential. Nominal metaphor is refer noun as a noun. Kreuz and Roberts (1993) said that the interpretation of metaphor is not optional, at least this happen on nominal metaphor. Some words are literally refer to it original meanings, for example the word of "cat" can have meaning of "feline cat" and the words of "my

job is a hell” can be interpreted as my job is feels like hell. Which those statement refer to negative form of their current job. Gibbs and Gerrig in Kreuz and Roberts (1993) stated that there are some possibilities that the word is not the original meaning that want to expressed by the users. For example the words of “my job is a hell” can stated the negative meaning of their bosses that behave like the devil. The metaphor can be interpreted subjectively because of the cognitive effort that the readers want to expend and it also depend on the readers’ knowledge. Renan (1987) in Kreuz and Roberts (1993) said that some modern metaphor only can be well interpreted if the readers also want to evolve their point of view and understand about the new words. Steen (1991) in Kreuz and Roberts (1993) stated that the individual differences play big role in understanding the metaphor. Kreuz and Roberts (1993) also said that the authors most create the metaphor first before it understood by the readers. More over, the interpretation of readers about the authors can affected the interpretation of the words.

Hyperbole Kreuz and Roberts (1993) said that hyperbole is a figurative form when people are exaggerated their minds. But, even though this figurative form is used by a lot of people, some researches said that there are no importance in examining the differences of saying “the line for the ticket was a mile long” and “the line for the ticket was ten miles long.” Those statement can be interpreted that the queue for the ticket was very long even though the one is only one mile long and the other is ten miles long. Because of this tendency, Kreuz and Roberts (1993) said there are only few researchers that want to examine about this figurative form. The hyperbole form is happening when people use exaggeration words. Carston and Wearing (2015) also stated the same thing as Kreuz and Roberts (1993), they said that only few researchers want to held a research about hyperbole. The reason are they feel that research about hyperbole is less interesting, the hyperbole also don’t have big impact for the listeners or the readers as the other figurative forms. But some questions arise when people started to think where the origin of the hyperbole. Does it link with the irony or does it link with metaphor. This thing can happen because sometimes people use hyperbole with the other figurative form. For example, the words of “the child is the devil incarnate.” Is the exaggeration form to express that the child is extremely naughty. But, the use of words devil incarnate are also intend the using of metaphor. The other example is, “They go about together like Siamese cat.” These words have the meaning that those two people are usually going everywhere together. But, in those word also used Siamese cat that intended the using of simile. Carston and Wearing (2015) summarize that hyperbole is an exaggerated expression that can be associated with the others figurative forms. Otherwise, some researchers also linking the hyperbole with the metaphor and irony.

Idiom Kreuz and Roberts (1993) said that idiom also usually used by the people to express their thoughts. Nayak and Gibbs (1990) in Kreuz and Roberts (1993) stated that even though idiom may be conventionalized expression, they not consider the idiom so conventionalized so the metaphor is no longer implicit in the idiom. Nayak and Gibbs (1990) in Kreuz and Roberts (1993) also stated that even though some idiom have same meaning, those idioms still can be used differentially, for

examples "blow your stack", flip your lid", and "hit the roof." The meaning of the idioms are tied to the underlying metaphor that represented those concepts. The differential used of idioms are linked to the conceptualization.

Rhetorical question Kertzer (1987) in Kreuz and Roberts (1993) is defined rhetorical question as indirect assertion. This can cause a discourse goal. For example, when people will express some hostility to other people, they tend to speak "what are you doing?" but some people may think that those people really want to mend with their business. Kreuz and Roberts (1993) said that rhetorical question are fairly uncommon in literature. But this rhetorical question are found that usually used in the conversation of the characters in the story. Kreuz and Roberts (1993) also said that the frequency of rhetorical question in the real-world are unknown. So, it can't be examine whether the author used those question as the real question or they are the parts of rhetorical questions.

Simile Kreuz and Roberts (1993) said that the research of simile is drifted by the research of metaphor because those two troupes have similar meaning. Kinstch (1974) and Miller (1979) had seen metaphor as truncated simile. But Glucksberg and Keysar (1990) in Kreuz and Roberts (1993) had argued that the relationship between simile and metaphor is not as simple as that. They said that the simile express extra cognitive demand in their successful interpretation. This is because the relation of the class-inclusion is implicit, in the form of linguistic hedge. Kreuz and Roberts (1993) stated that some authors are have intuition that simile is harder to process than metaphor by the readers, so they intend to use more metaphor in their writings. Some writers also found that the metaphor is more aesthetic than the simile. For example, they found "the love is battlefield" is giving more impact to readers than the choice to use words "the love is like the battlefield."

Irony Knox (1973) in Kreuz and Roberts (1993) stated that irony used by scholars to refer a number of diverse linguistic, existential, and psychological phenomena. Kreuz and Roberts (1993) said that in literary device in text, irony can be used in many ways. A lot of psychological works has been limited to verbal irony and to a more specific form, sarcasm. Study by Ackerman (1981) in Kreuz and Roberts (1993) constructed short story where the context could be systematically manipulated. So the same utterance can be seen as truthful, deceptive, ironic, and erroneous. Winner (1988) in Kreuz and Roberts (1993) concluded that children had more understand in metaphor than in irony. Winner (1988) in Kreuz and Roberts (1993) also said that irony serves more social function, and metaphor is primally cognitive in nature.

Understatement usually known as meiosis, this troupe is not usually used in express people mind. People usually choose to use hyperbole rather than use meiosis. Hubler (1983) in Kreuz and Roberts (1993) stated that meiosis usually used by British speakers. Edelman et al., (1989) in Kreuz and Roberts (1993) stated that across five different European cultures, British tend to understand their embarrassment, and the Greeks tend to overstate it. Kreuz and Roberts (1993) stated that if the readers have some awareness, they will be able to identify texts from their culture perspective by gauging the differential use of these troupe in literary passages.

Indirect request Clark (1979), Gibbs (1979), Francik and Clarks (1985) in Kreuz and Roberts (1993) stated that indirect request already have the attention of the psychological literatures. This question is more appropriate than the direct question. Kreuz and Roberts (1993) said that the indirect request is having faster respond than the direct request. Some indirect requests are so conventionalized so they can have the same function like idioms. Some of the literary texts authors tend to not use this troupe because they find that the indirect requests are cliché.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach, as the data were in the form of words and phrases rather than numbers. The qualitative descriptive method was chosen because it allows the researcher to interpret the meaning of figurative language as it appears naturally in the poem. The main data source of this research was Oscar Wilde's poem "*A Lament*," which was selected due to its rich use of emotional and symbolic expressions typical of Wilde's poetic style.

The data collection technique used in this study was close reading and note-taking. The researcher read the poem several times to understand its overall meaning and emotional tone. During the reading process, all lines containing possible figurative language were noted and listed as data. Each figurative expression was then classified according to the eight categories of figurative language proposed by Kreuz and Roberts (1993): metaphor, hyperbole, idiom, rhetorical question, simile, irony, understatement, and indirect request.

After the classification stage, each figurative expression was analyzed to determine its meaning, function, and contribution to the overall theme of the poem. The researcher used descriptive analysis to interpret the data, focusing on how figurative language enhances the aesthetic and emotional power of the poem. The results were supported by relevant literary theories and previous studies discussing similar stylistic analyses.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the analysis, the researcher compared findings with interpretations from other literary sources and theoretical perspectives. Peer discussions were also conducted to avoid subjective bias in interpreting the figurative meanings found in the poem.

Result and Discussion

This research focuses on the analysis of figurative language used in Oscar Wilde's poem "*A Lament*." The poem reflects deep emotional turmoil, spiritual

reflection, and the poet's philosophical view of human suffering. Through a close reading of the text, the researcher found that Wilde employed three types of figurative language: metaphor, hyperbole, and simile. Among these, metaphor appears as the most dominant device, illustrating Wilde's mastery in transforming emotional experiences into symbolic expressions.

The following table presents the findings from each line of the poem and the type of figurative language identified:

Line from the poem	Type of Figurative	Meaning / Interpretation
O well for him who lives at ease	Metaphor	Describes someone living peacefully and comfortably; a symbol of an easy and privileged life.
With garnered gold in wide domain	Hyperbole	Exaggerates wealth and abundance, symbolizing material prosperity.
Nor heeds the splashing of the rain	Simile	Compares indifference to rain, showing a person's calmness despite life's challenges.
The crashing down of forest trees	Metaphor	Represents the collapse of stability or the destruction caused by hardship.
O, well for him who ne'er hath known	Simile	Compares those who have never suffered with those who have, emphasizing innocence and ignorance of pain.

The travail of the hungry years	Hyperbole	Overstates the hardship of poverty and struggle over long periods.
A father grey with grief and tears	Metaphor	“Grey” symbolizes the toll of sorrow and suffering that ages a person emotionally.
A mother weeping all alone	Metaphor	Depicts deep loneliness and emotional despair, symbolizing loss and isolation.
But well for him whose feet hath trod	Metaphor	The act of “treading” symbolizes the journey through life’s struggles and experiences.
The weary road of toil and strife	Metaphor	“Road” symbolizes life’s journey, filled with hard work and conflict.
Yet from the sorrow of his life	Metaphor	Sorrow symbolizes emotional pain that leads to growth or understanding.

From the table above, it is clear that metaphor is the dominant form of figurative language in the poem. Wilde often uses metaphor to express sorrow, human suffering, and spiritual struggle. For instance, phrases such as “the weary road of toil and strife” and “a father grey with grief and tears” transform emotional pain into visual and tangible images. These metaphors not only depict the hardships of life but also symbolize the moral and spiritual journey of humankind. Through metaphor, Wilde invites readers to experience pain as a transformative process rather than merely understand it as a concept.

Hyperbole appears in lines such as “With garnered gold in wide domain” and “The travail of the hungry years.” Here, exaggeration functions as a contrast between

wealth and suffering, reflecting Wilde's subtle social commentary on inequality and human fate. By magnifying emotional or physical conditions, Wilde enhances the dramatic tone of the poem. Hyperbole thus serves as an emotional amplifier, allowing the intensity of grief, longing, and human endurance to resonate deeply with the reader.

Simile, though used sparingly, adds clarity and vividness to the abstract emotions portrayed. In lines like "Nor heeds the splashing of the rain," the comparison between human detachment and natural indifference highlights the theme of emotional numbness. This simile reveals Wilde's perception of human resilience — that even amidst storms and sorrow, life continues. It also reflects a spiritual message: that detachment from worldly pain might bring one closer to divine peace.

Furthermore, the poem's final line, "Build ladder to be nearer God," carries profound metaphorical meaning. The "ladder" symbolizes human effort and endurance, suggesting that suffering can become a path to spiritual enlightenment. This aligns with Wilde's personal philosophical and religious reflections, especially after his imprisonment, when his later works were filled with themes of repentance, faith, and moral awakening.

Overall, Wilde's dominant use of metaphor throughout the poem indicates his preference for symbolic expression over literal description. This stylistic choice is deeply rooted in the Aesthetic Movement of the late 19th century, which Wilde championed. For him, beauty and emotional subtlety were not merely decorative but essential tools for expressing truth. Through rich figurative language, Wilde constructs an atmosphere that is both sorrowful and sublime — turning human pain into art.

The poem, therefore, is not only a lamentation of personal or universal sorrow but also a reflection of the human soul's journey toward redemption. Figurative language plays a crucial role in bridging emotion, morality, and spirituality, making "A Lament" one of Wilde's most introspective poetic works.

Conclusion

This research concludes that Oscar Wilde's poem "A Lament" makes extensive use of figurative language to convey deep emotions and spiritual reflection. Among the eight types of figurative language identified by Kreutz and Roberts (1993), only three forms—metaphor, hyperbole, and simile—are found in the poem. The dominance of metaphor indicates Wilde's preference for expressing feelings through symbolic and imaginative language rather than through direct description.

Metaphor is used to represent life's sorrow, struggle, and the process of spiritual awakening. Through imagery such as "the weary road of toil and strife" and "build ladder to be nearer God," Wilde transforms grief into a symbol of human

endurance and divine connection. Hyperbole serves to intensify the emotional tone and highlight the contrast between wealth and suffering, while simile helps clarify abstract emotions by linking them to relatable, natural imagery.

Overall, the poem's figurative language reflects Wilde's aesthetic philosophy that beauty and suffering are inseparable in human experience. The figurative expressions do not merely decorate the poem but also embody moral and philosophical meaning. Therefore, "A Lament" stands as a reflection of the human soul's journey—from despair toward spiritual enlightenment—expressed through the beauty of poetic language.

Future researchers are encouraged to analyze the poem from different perspectives, such as structuralism, psychoanalysis, or religious symbolism, to enrich understanding of Wilde's complex emotional and spiritual vision.

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