

Figurative Language of Milk and Honey Poetry Collections

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Abstract: *This study aimed to identify the types of figurative language and the use of figurative language to deliver the stages of grief applied in the Milk and Honey poetry collections due to its powerful deliverance by using figurative language inside the poetry which made the exploration of the pain of experiencing unpleasant events in an individual's life more sophisticated. The data were collected by using documentation methods and note-taking techniques. This undergraduate thesis is aimed to discover the types of figurative language and stages of grief found inside the Milk and Honey poetry collections. The data were analyzed by using descriptive and qualitative method. In addition, the theory of Kennedy (1979) was applied in this study. The analysis of this study shows that seven out of eight types of figurative language are found in the poetry collections. They are metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, metonymy, symbol and irony. Furthermore, to identify the use of figurative language to deliver the stages of grief, the theory of Ross (1969) was used to enhance the study. There are five stages of grief proposed by the theory, and all of the stages of grief are found in this study. There are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.*

INTRODUCTION

Poetry is one of the forms of literary works for individuals to express their feelings. Today, poetry gains its popularity among a variety of ages from teenagers to adults. People who enjoyed reading poetry tended to have their satisfaction due to the relation of the points of the poetry with their experiences or journeys which made them feel supported and received encouragement from the poetry itself. According to Wordsworth, poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling, expression of emotion and it is always concerned with ordinary human concerns, with the daily matters of one's life (Robinson, 2010). It conveys that poetry is the media of someone to express their feelings into written works. In poetry, figurative language is used as the media to deliver phrases that have to be interpreted based on the reader's perspective.

Figurative language is the use of words or phrases beyond its literal meaning where it alters writings into more interesting and entertaining works. It also delivers something beyond what it

intended to mean or also known as implicit. One of the literary works that used figurative language in poetry collection is entitled Milk and Honey.

Milk and Honey is one of the New York Times best-selling works that is written and published by a Indian-Canadian poet named Rupi Kaur. There are four chapters inside the book which are the hurting, the loving, the breaking, and the healing. Based on the title of each chapter, Milk and Honey consists of the journeys of survival that are faced by someone delivered using figurative languages. Throughout the poetry collections, she described how she managed to find herself and put herself back up again by embracing her unpleasant past experiences as well as her flaws. The process is called stages of grief.

Grief is an emotion of sadness and anguish that is felt by someone who just lost something or someone or being left behind by her loved ones. The process of grieving has been divided into stages which is founded by Ross. Ross proposed five stages of grief which are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The following stages are discovered in Milk and Honey poetry collections by using figurative language.

Rupi Kaur's literary work entitled Milk and Honey is chosen in this study due to the powerful deliverance by using figurative language inside the poetry which made the exploration of the pain of experiencing unpleasant events in an individual's life more sophisticated.

In the Milk and Honey poetry collections, there are types of figurative language that are found by using Kennedy's theory (1979). Furthermore, how the figurative language used to deliver the stages of grief faced by the author was also discovered in the following poetry collection book using the theory of Ross (1969).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are two theories that will be elaborated which are figurative language by Kennedy (1979), and Stages of Grief by Ross (1969).

1. Theory of Kennedy (1979)

There are various types in figurative language existed in literary devices, this undergraduate thesis is using the theory of Kennedy (1979), there are eight types of figurative language which are:

a. Metaphor

According to Kennedy (1979), metaphor is a statement that one thing is something else, which in a literal sense, it is not. It does not use connective words such as like or as. However, the phrase will make sense if the readers understand the connection between the two things. For example, in the phrase 'He has a heart of stone.' (Margolis, 1957), the writer uses the word heart as a metaphor where it is similar to stone whereas it means that he won't change his will easily just because someone says so where he ought to hold onto what he believes is right. In the following phrase, a heart of stone does not actually mean that the heart is made of stone.

b. Simile

For instance, simile is a comparison between two things using like or as. According to Kennedy (1979), simile is defined as comparison of two things, indicated by some connective, usually as, like, the, or a verb such as resembles. The example can be found in the phrase 'Light as a feather.' (Wikberg, 2008). A feather is an object that is not heavy or light. Thus, the phrase compares the weight of the feather which is light.

c. Personification

According to Kennedy (1979), personification is a figure of speech in which an object, an animal, or an abstract phrase (truth, nature) is turned human. The use of personification usually describes non-living things as alive objects, and living things as inanimate objects, and animals. The example of personification is ‘My alarm clock yells at me to get out of bed every morning.’ (Mukti & Nugraha, 2022). The act of yelling is something that only human beings can do, while in the following sentence, the alarm clock as inanimate object is doing the human being activity. Thus, the following characteristic indicates personification.

d. **Hyperbole**

Kennedy (1983:687) stated that the word hyperbole is derived from the Greek language, that is ‘hyper’ which means ‘over’ and ‘ballien’ means to ‘throw’. In the phrase ‘I’m so hungry that I could eat a horse.’ (Tinsman, 2021), it is impossible to actually eat a horse in a whole. The phrase suggests that the person is starving so that they can eat a big amount of an object where it uses a horse as the object. It could be concluded that this type of figurative language includes exaggeration when it is being used.

e. **Allusion**

According to X.J Kennedy (1979), Allusion is figurative language that show indirectly forwards a person or even that people have known together. For example, ‘I was surprised his nose was not growing like Pinocchio’s.’ (Grofman, 1989). The phrase suggests the story of Pinocchio where his nose will grow longer if he lies.

f. **Metonymy**

According to Kennedy (1978:57), metonymy is the use of something closely related for the thing actually meant. It is figurative language where the name of an object is replaced by another which is closely associated with it. For example, the famous phrase ‘The pen is mightier than the sword.’ (Barcelona, 2019) which means that ‘pen’ stands for ‘the written word’ and ‘sword’ stands for ‘military aggression’.

g. **Symbol**

According to Kennedy (1983), symbol in literature could also be a thing meaning quite its literal meaning. Symbol is an object or action which plays a role as something else beyond its literal meaning. The example of symbolism is the term ‘feeling blue’. (BBC, 2023). The use of color blue is not actually talking about the color; on the contrary, blue represents sadness. So, when someone says they are feeling blue, it actually means that they are feeling sad.

h. **Irony**

Irony is characterized by a figure of speech that compares, exaggerates, or shows the other sense of the first appearance meaning. Kennedy (1979) explains that irony usually results from a contrast or disparity between what occurs and what was predicted to occur. For example, the phrase ‘Your house is beautiful because there are so many things on the floor.’ (Situmeang, 2022) is implying irony where it describes the contrast of complimenting the house is beautiful and the actual condition on how the house is very dirty because there are many things on the floor. Thus, the existing contract in the sentence indicates that the sentence is a form of irony.

2. Theory of Ross (1969)

In human beings’ series of life, they experienced circumstances and situations, grief is one of them. For example, a daughter who is grieving over the divorce of her

parents, an adolescent who is grieving over his break up with her girlfriend, or receiving news of death of relatives. As people face their grief, they tend to go through various processes which alter them into someone they are not used to be. In 1969, Ross published as book called *On The Death of Dying* which explains about five stages of grief or also known as Kubler-Ross Model which are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

a. Denial

The first step of grief is denial. Denial is the first stage and is a common defense mechanism used to protect oneself from the hardship of considering an upsetting reality. Ross stated that the victim would often reject the reality of the new information which affects them significantly such as the loss of a loved one by death. (Tyrell, 2021). The characteristics usually involve feeling detachment, overwhelmed, apathy, confusion, disbelief, and numbness, clinging to false hope. It occurred due to the fact that the person just experienced loss and their brain refuses to believe what happened. According to Ross and Kessler (2005:28), we may respond at first by being paralyzed with shock or being blanketed with insensibility. Over time, the denial process will start to fade and the start of the healing process begins.

b. Anger

As the person comes back to reality, the feeling of anger will set inside their emotions. It occurs due to the feedback they will engage and they will start blaming themselves for not stopping bad things from happening (Ross and Kessler, 2005: 32). The characteristics of anger stage of grief are frustration, impatience, irritability, rage, resentment, and loss of control including a desire to assign blame or responsibility for the loss, and a sense of powerlessness or helplessness in the face of the situation. Mental health professionals claimed that it is a natural response for someone to feel anger towards what they have experienced, in fact in order to receive acceptance they have to feel the anger as the beginning of the process. Afterwards, the anger decreases and is replaced with the next stage which is bargaining.

c. Bargaining

In the bargaining stage, an individual tends to think the possibilities of ‘what if’s’ and ‘what could’ve been’. Guilt starts to wash over the individuals and they can’t help but imagine how things will turn out different if they did another way around. In this stage, the individuals may bargain with the pain they felt, such as hoping for the reward to what we had sacrificed which made us feel more terrible and suffer than previously. Not only that, the individual is more likely to be isolated by the guilt of the things they did not do. (Wiandri, 2022). Thus, the process of depression arises.

d. Depression

Most individuals consider depression as something unnatural when in fact it is a normal mechanism for someone to feel depressed after suffering the loss of their loved ones. When an individual is used to having someone they love around them and all of the sudden the person is not present anymore might be the most depressing thing. Ross and Kessler (2002:37) also explained how we would want to have our loved one to be back and prevent them from leaving us behind. The characteristics that individuals may experience are intense feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and despair. They may withdraw from social activities, lose interest in things they once enjoyed, and struggle with feelings

of guilt, regret, or self-blame. The response towards the ache is normal and it is one of the stages to go through in order to reach healing and acceptance.

e. **Acceptance**

After going through several processes of grieving, the individual learned to find peace within themselves and began to accept the fact that the person they loved will not ever come back and that is the reality that they are obliged to accept whether they like it or not (Ross and Kessler, 2005: 45). In this stage, usually the individual will finally be able to look at the bright side towards the incident that invited their grief. They are willing to widen their heart, and open their eyes that at last, things happen for a reason. Thus, the acceptance allows the individuals to move forward and proceed with life.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research method consists of techniques used to collect, analyze, and present the data to support this undergraduate thesis. There are four types of research method in this study which are:

1. Data Source

A poetry collection book entitled *Milk and Honey* written by Rupi Kaur was originally published in 2014. It is a survival journey of the author herself to reach the process of her healing phase. The following poetry collections book is chosen due to its breakout literary phenomenon and one of the top New York Times Bestselling Authors. Also the poetry collections book contains the related materials for this undergraduate thesis which are figurative language and how it is used to deliver the stages of grief.

2. Method and Technique of Collecting Data

The data were collected by documentation method and note taking technique inside the *Milk and Honey* poetry collections book. These are the steps applied to conduct the data collecting:

- a. Read the *Milk and Honey* poetry collections book thoroughly.
- b. Taking notes in every discovered types of figurative language and the usage of figurative language to deliver the stages of grief found in the *Milk and Honey* poetry collections.

3. Method and Technique of Analyzing Data

In analyzing the data, descriptive technique and qualitative method was applied. These are the steps applied to conduct the analysis:

- a. Determine the type of figurative language using Kennedy's theory (1979) and stage of grief by using the theory of Ross (1969).
- b. Analyzing the poetry collections in order to discover how the figurative language was used to deliver the stages of grief.

4. Method and Technique of Presenting Analysis

The analysis is presented by using formal and informal methods and descriptive techniques. Formal method is used in order to acknowledge the information found in this undergraduate thesis. While Informal method is used to elaborate well about the information found that has been acknowledged previously. The technique used in order to present the data was a descriptive technique. Thus, these are the order of presenting the analysis:

- a. The data found in the *Milk and Honey* poetry collections is acknowledged by listing the findings.
- b. The analysis of figurative language and how it is used to deliver the stages of grief

from the data are elaborated in formal and informal methods.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Types of Figurative Language

The analysis of types of figurative language in the Milk and Honey poetry collections is proposed by Kennedy's (1979) theory. Figurative language is divided into eight types which are Metaphor, Irony, Simile, Personification, Hyperbole, Allusion, Metonymy, and Symbol.

a. Metaphor

Metaphor was found inside the poetry collection where it is a statement that one thing is something else, which in a literal sense, it is not. The sample of the data is elaborated below:

[1] "I am a museum full of art/you had your eyes shut."
(Milk and Honey, Page 100)

The following verse 'I am a museum full of art but you had your eyes shut' is a metaphor. A metaphor is a figure of speech that describes an object or action in a way that isn't literally true, but helps explain an idea or make a comparison. Data 1 is comparing an individual to a museum full of art, suggesting that they are full of interesting and valuable things to discover. The second part of the metaphor, 'but you had your eyes shut' suggests that the other person is missing out on all of the interesting things that the writer has to offer because they are not paying attention. The metaphor is effective because it creates a vivid image in the reader's mind and helps to convey the writer's message in a memorable way.

b. Simile

Simile is a phrase that implies a comparison, such as 'in the same way that or similar to' by using connecting word 'as' or 'like'. By using similes, writers can help readers to connect with the emotions and experiences of the speaker on a deeper level, and to better understand the meaning and significance of the text. The sample of the data is elaborated below:

[2] "I am losing parts of you like I lose eyelashes/unknowingly and everywhere."
(Milk and Honey, Page 135)

The following verse is simile where Data 2 is comparing the process of losing parts of someone to the process of losing eyelashes, emphasizing the gradual and unconscious nature of the loss by using the connecting word of like.

c. Personification

The use of personification usually describes inanimate things as living objects, and animate things as non-living objects, and animals. The following data has proven the existence of personification in the poetry collections. The sample of the data is elaborated below:

[3] "he isn't coming back/whispered my head/he has to/sobbed my heart"
(Milk and Honey, Page 133)

In the following verse, inanimate things are found attributing animate objects which are head and heart. In this case, the writer is personifying their head and heart, attributing the actions of whispering and sobbing to them, respectively. As inanimate objects, it is impossible for the head and heart to have the ability of human beings' actions which are to whisper and to sob. The writer uses personification to emphasize that her heart and head are contemplating to each other as the response of her messed up feelings after the other person left her, where the head which acknowledges as her mind already knows that he will not come back yet the heart is still hoping for him to come back.

d. Hyperbole

The following data consisted of hyperbole which is the expression of exaggerating things beyond what they actually are. The sample of the data is elaborated below:

[4] "you were so distant/i forgot you were there at all" (Milk and Honey, Page 83)

The following verse is hyperbole where Data 3 used hyperbole to convey the extreme emotional distance between the speaker and the subject of the poem. The hyperbolic statement suggests that the person's absence or emotional detachment was so profound that the speaker completely forgot their presence. Thus, the hyperbole characteristic in the verse is that the distance of both the writer and the other person was so far that she forgot he even existed.

e. Metonymy

Metonymy is the substitution of an attribute for that of the thing meant which is usually based on a material, and casual. The sample of the data is elaborated below:

[5] "my **tongue** is sour /from the **hunger** of /missing you"
(Milk and Honey, Page 116)

The following verse is metonymy. In Data 5, the word 'tongue' is used to refer to the writer's desire to taste or kiss the person they are missing, while 'hunger' is used to refer to their intense longing for that person and crave to be fulfilled. Kennedy's theory of metonymy which is a phrase or word that represents something else that is associated with it. In the verse, the words tongue and hunger represents another meaning which is a taste of the person, and a longing of something (an individual) to be fulfilled so the writer will feel content.

f. Symbol

Symbol is the use of a concrete image to represent abstract ideas. The following data is the explanation of the existence of symbolism. The sample of the data is elaborated below:

[6] "the good thing about feeling extremes is/when i love i give them wings"
(Milk and Honey, Page 109)

The following verse used wings as symbol. In this context, wings represent the idea of freedom and transformation. According to Kennedy's theory, symbolism substitutes an object as another concept just like the use of wings as the word to

emphasize the ability of flying and developed just like the metamorphosis process of a butterfly. The writer is saying that when they love someone, they give them the freedom to be their own self and to grow and change. The symbol of wings emphasizes the idea that love can be transformative and can help people to reach new heights. Thus, symbolism gives a layer of interpretation to the reader in order to create a vivid elaboration of acknowledging the meaning.

g. Irony

Irony is a figure of speech that compares, exaggerates, or shows the other sense of the first appearance meaning. Usually, it can be indicated in a phrase which states something that actually means the other way around in reality. The sample of the data is elaborated below:

[7] “it must hurt to know/ I am your most/beautiful/regret”
(Milk and Honey, Page 91)

The following verse indicates irony in the line “beautiful regret”. The writer emphasizes irony because regret is typically associated with negative emotions and experiences, while beauty is associated with positive or desirable qualities. Thus, the contradiction used in the verse is the characteristic of irony.

2. **Figurative Language Usage to Deliver Stages of Grief**

There are five stages of grief found in Milk and Honey’s Rupi Kaur by using figurative language to deliver each characteristic which portray the stages of grief itself. The following section elaborates the exploration of the pain and the struggle to find meaning in a loss with the usage of figurative language. The analysis in this section reflects on the stages of grief which are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance delivered by using figurative language.

a. Denial

Denial stage is the first stage where a common defense mechanism is used to protect oneself from the hardship of considering an upsetting reality. During the denial stage, the individual may experience a range of emotions, including detachment, shock, confusion, disbelief, and numbness. The sample of the data is elaborated below:

[8] “you were so distant/**i forgot you were there at all**”
(Milk and Honey, page 83)

In the following verse, the writer is expressing a sense of detachment and denial by using metaphor. The line ‘you were so distant/I forgot you were there at all’ is suggesting that they have forgotten the presence of someone who was once significant in their life. This sentiment reflects the emotional weight and internal conflict often experienced during the denial stage of grief.

The act of forgetting or minimizing the presence of the person can be interpreted as a form of denial, where the speaker is attempting to shield themselves from the full weight of the pain associated with the loss. This denial may serve as a coping mechanism to preserve a sense of normalcy or to avoid the pain of facing the reality of the situation.

Thus, the verse can be seen as a representation of the denial stage of grief, where the individual grapples with feelings of disbelief, detachment, and a struggle to accept the

reality of the loss or trauma experienced. It highlights the human tendency to protect oneself from the full weight of the pain by denying or minimizing the significance of the loss.

b. Anger

Anger is the second stage of grief where an individual comes back to reality and sets their emotions. During the anger stage, the individuals may experience a range of emotions such as frustration, impatience, irritability, rage, resentment, and loss of control including a desire to assign blame or responsibility for the loss, and a sense of powerlessness or helplessness in the face of the situation. The sample of the data is elaborated below:

[9] “you were not wrong for leaving/you were wrong for coming back/and thinking/you could have me/when it was convenient/and leave when it was not”

(Milk and Honey, page 120)

In the following verse, the writer is expressing their anger and frustration towards a person who left and then returned, only to leave again when it was convenient for them which delivered by using metaphor. The verse begins with the lines ‘you were not wrong for leaving’ which suggest a sense of acceptance and understanding of the initial departure. However, the speaker goes on to say ‘you were wrong for coming back’ indicating a sense of betrayal and anger towards the person who left and then returned.

The writer is lashing out against the idea of being used and discarded, and is expressing their desire for justice and fairness. The verse is a powerful depiction of the anger stage of grief, as the writer is expressing their emotions and refusing to accept the situation.

c. Bargaining

Bargaining is the third stage of grief. Individuals usually face certain characteristics such as the tendency to think of ‘what if’s’ and ‘what could’ve been’. In other words, the individual is creating scenarios if things turned out differently. The sample of the data is elaborated below:

[10] “if i knew what/safety looked like/i would have spent/less time falling into/arms that were not”

(Milk and Honey, Page 21)

The following verse indicates the bargaining stage of grief where the writer/the individual is having thoughts of ‘If only I had done something differently, this loss could have been prevented’. In this context, the writer stated ‘/i would have spent/less time falling into/arms that were not’ by using metaphor which implies if only she acknowledges how safety actually is, she will not have to spend her time with the arms of people who are not good for her. Thus, the bargaining process inside of her is a part of her grief of the loss she felt throughout the failed relationship she has with her past lover.

d. Depression

Depression is the fourth stage of grief where it is characterized with mourning, guilt, and a sense of despair. Individuals may withdraw from social activities and feel a sense of emptiness or loss of purpose. The sample of the data is elaborated below:

[11] “perhaps/i don’t deserve/nice things/cause i am paying/for sins i don’t/remember”
(Milk and Honey, Page 147)

The following verse is using metaphor (paying/for sins i don’t/remember) and irony (perhaps/i don’t deserve/nice things) emphasizes the depression stage of grief faced by the writer. In the second and third line which said ‘i don’t deserve/nice things’, the writer is surrounded with the feelings of unworthiness and self-blame that come with grief itself. The writer makes believe with the fact that she has done so many terrible things in the past that she could not remember all of them and now she is paying for the things she did that are most likely considered as her own karma. Thus, as the self-blame and the feeling of unworthiness gnawing her mind, her depression stage begins to haunt her.

e. Acceptance

The last stage of grief is acceptance where it is the final stage involves coming to terms throughout the loss and finding ways to move forward. This also means that the individual is not ‘over’ the loss, but rather that they have found a way to live with it and embrace it into their life. The sample of the data is elaborated below:

[12] “accept that you deserve more/than painful love/life is moving/the healthiest things/for your heart is/to move with it”
(Milk and Honey, Page 151)

The line ‘the healthiest things/for your heart is/to move with it’ is implying the acceptance of the writer by using metaphor where she is ready to come to terms that she deserves better than to feel the pain of past experiences and to embrace her personal growth as she is trying to heal. The relevancy of the characteristics of acceptance which are coming to terms throughout the loss and finding ways to move forward has proven that the writer is facing the last stage of grief.

CONCLUSION

After conducting the analysis, the main problem of the study is that based on Kennedy’s theory (1979) there are seven out of eight types of figurative language found in Rupi Kaur’s Milk and Honey which are hyperbole, personification, metaphor, simile, symbolism, metonymy, and irony. While Allusion, the eighth type of figurative language, is not found within the poetry collections after conducting the analysis thoroughly. Throughout the chapter, Rupi Kaur used the following figurative language to deliver her survival journeys to the readers.

The five stages of grief also found based on Ross’ theory (1969) which are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The usage of figurative language to deliver the journey of grieving is one of the forms applied by the author to emphasize her emotions to the readers. Thus, the following exploration made the Milk and Honey poetry collections book a unique literary work to be studied.

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