

Metaphor: an Element of Imagery in Gerald Durrell's "My Family and Other Animals"



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It is common knowledge that author–reader relationship is pivotal in a piece of imaginative writing. It is a constant interplay in the process of interpretation and evaluation of literature. All writers have an image of the reader in mind when they construct their narrative. The readers, in their turn, have the writer in their mind when they render the power of his imagination and talent. The concept of implied author and implied reader are of paramount importance as by means of this circle we develop our ability to recognize and evaluate the devices of figurative language used in creating a text. Our understanding of metaphorical language depends not only on our linguistic competence but also our cultural sensitivity and our background knowledge.



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Imagery is a distinctive feature of fiction for the writer conveys his ideas through images. Fiction, which is a form of literature, deals with a large system of verbal images, the creation of which also aims at securing the process of transmission and exchange of creative information. Hence, the most important categories of fiction in general are the categories of imagery (all the events in the text are presented in an imaginative way) and interpretation (Babenko 2000).

Image is a complicated and multidimensional notion. It is a form of reflection of the reality through art, it is concrete and, at the same time, the generalized picture of human life which is transformed due to the artist's aesthetic ideas and creative imagination. It realizes not only cognitive but communicative and aesthetic functions, the latter being first and foremost primarily dependant on metaphor as an element of imagery in verbal art.

Metaphor is pervasive in language and it is important because of its functions, i. e. explaining, clarifying, describing, expressing, evaluating, entertaining. Where we have a choice, we choose metaphors in order to communicate what we think or how we feel about something; to explain what a particular thing is like; to convey a meaning in a more interesting or creative way; or to do all of these (Knowles 2006).

Metaphor is a tool of discovery, providing a way of imposing or discovering structure or unfamiliar situations.

Metaphor is also an important means by which language develops, but again we can provide literal paraphrases of what metaphors convey, at least, in so far as we are concerned with their cognitive content.

Metaphor may be considered an ornament to language but it is not merely an ornament, it need not subvert communication and obfuscate meaning. Language would certainly be much duller, and would more importantly have been unable to develop its complex and powerful resources of generalization and abstraction without the resources of metaphor.

Metaphor which is considered to be one of the powerful means, endows language with evaluative overtones, thus giving birth to new emotions and impressive images in the reader's mind. Hence, metaphor is one of the major elements in creating imagery which not only makes language more vivid and enforces its imaginative features but also reveals certain human characteristics or different circumstances and situations.

The language of verbal art can be understood only in connection with the imaginative system which is at the heart of the work. It defines the motivation and the choice of lexical, syntactic, phonetic means with the help of which this or that image is created.

Obviously, the perception of a literary work is inconceivable without taking into account the lexical, phraseological, grammatical peculiarities of the language.

The research in this paper is carried out along the lines of Gerald Durrell's "My Family And Other Animals".* It is an autobiographical work by Gerald Durrell - a naturalist, telling of his childhood spent in Greece and the island of Corfu between 1935 and 1939. It describes the life of the Durrell Family on the Greek island in a humorous manner, and also richly discusses the fauna of the island.

The analysis showed that metaphor as an element of imagery is always present in nature descriptions. Here is an example:

The villa was small and square, standing in its tiny garden with an air of pink-faced determination. Its shutters had been faded by the sun to a delicate creamy-green, cracked and bubbled in places.

The garden, surrounded by tall fuchsia hedges, had the flower-beds worked in complicated geometrical patterns, marked with smooth white stones. Roses dropped petals that seemed as big and smooth as saucers, flame-red, moon-white, glossy, and unwrinkled; marigolds like broods of shaggy suns stood watching their parent's progress through the sky.

In the low growth the pansies pushed their velvety, innocent face through the leaves, and the violets drooped sorrowfully under their heart-shaped leaves. In the darkness of the fuchsia-hedge a thousand ballerina-like blooms quivered expectantly. The warm air was thick with the scent of a hundred dying flowers, and full of the gentle, smoothing whisper and murmur of insects. (p.30)

The environment is ‘breathing’, the scenery is natural and lively. The plot gains new shades of meaning and is developed with the active help of metaphoric images (... *tiny garden with an air of pink-faced determination; In the darkness of the fuchsia-hedge a thousand ballerina-like blooms quivered expectantly* etc). Another overriding poetic device which has become an important issue in the passage and is closely connected with the use of metaphor, is personification. The author describes nature alive, sensible and full of feeling as humans are. Various images of the text - the garden, the moon, the sun, the flowers - refer to the poet’s own self. Each of these, therefore, gains human features; that is, each is personified. For example, in ...*the villa stands with an air of pink-faced determination, roses are unwrinkled, marigolds stand watching their parent’s progress, pansies with their innocent faces, violets drooped sorrowfully under their heart-shaped leaves*, we enter freely into the processes of nature. The reader feels he is in some harmony with nature, entering into it and allowing it to enter into his soul, crossing the very boundaries between himself and the nature. The whole image of the text may be divided into many pieces which will allow us to examine each as an independent unit, micro images, and each such small image can “live” on its own having its own bearing of aesthetic power. The plot always gains new shades of meaning and is developed with the active help of metaphoric images.

Special attention is also worth to be paid to portrait images through which the plot becomes, somehow moveable. Here is an example:

He had a fairy-tale air about him that was impossible to resist, and I used to look forward eagerly to my infrequent meetings with him.

... He had a sharp, fox-like face, with large, slanting eyes of such a dark brown that they appeared black. ...He was short and light, with a thinness about his wrists and neck that argued a lack of food. His dress was fantastic and on his head was a shapeless hat with a very wide, floppy brim. ...His shirt was worn and frayed, grey with sweat, and round the neck dangled an enormous cravat of the most startling blue satin. (p.46)

This is one of the most weird and fascinating characters, the Rose-beetle Man, whom the author met while travelling. The author describes the man in details and shows his sympathy towards the Rose-beetle Man. The following metaphoric word-combinations (*he had a fairy-tail air about him, he had a sharp, fox-like face; with a thinness about his wrists and neck that argued a lack of food*) not only arise interest in our mind but make us penetrate into the deep image of the man.

The imagery becomes more vivid when the author uses another stylistic means climax (*his shirt was worn and frayed-grey with sweat-round the neck dangled an enormous cravat of the most startling blue satin*) which helps the reader to have a full picture of the hero, once being worn and frayed, grey with sweat, then becoming an enormous cravat made of startling blue satin.

One of the main characteristic features of Gerald Durrell’s novel is the image-bearing nature. Durrell has a unique ability to combine completely diverse emotions, to

create infinitely charming images. His images appear in entirely different shapes from extended ones to more common. For example,

July has been blown out like a candle by a biting wind that ushered in leaden August sky. A sharp, stinging drizzle fell, billowing into opaque sheets when the wind caught in. (p. 1)

Along with the figurative setting of the plot the passage is packed densely with various stylistic means, the use of simile which (*July has been blown out like a candle by a biting wind...*) evokes visual images. It is a good illustration of poetic onomatopoeia. The example is alliterative because it foregrounds a certain type of consonant sounds [b], [s], [t], in order to ascribe a quality of coolness, coldness, and emptiness. It becomes clear that Durrell's aim is to create the stunning image of the English weather in late summer. Then the scene is enforced by the author:

Along the Bournemouth sea-front the beach-huts turned blank wooden faces towards a greeny-grey, froth-chained sea that leapt eagerly at the cement bulwark of the shore. It was the sort of weather calculated to dry anyone's endurance.(p.1)

The metaphoric expression ... *the beach-huts turned blank wooden faces*... catches the reader's attention. *Beach-huts* symbolize those inhabitants who are tired of the change of weather and have blank faces, which means that their *wooden faces* are devoid of emotions. The metaphoric use of the verb *to turn* makes the image more alive. It seems that everything is moveable, even the huts, and that they are turning towards the sea wishing to get rid of the unbearable, unendurable weather.

Thus, we may conclude that the metaphoric passages analyzed above combine the 'imagined' and the 'real'. Neither term has priority, nor complete independence from the other. Imagination without reality would be empty. And we, readers, try to unfold the fertile creativity of figurative means in an ongoing chain. In one way each of the means in the chain represents others through likeness and difference, so that the images themselves stand in metaphorical relationship to each other, involving overt similes, and epithets, climax and personification. And metaphor which does not offer definitive and determinate likenesses, but suggests a much more fluid interrelationship between likenesses and differences makes the figural activity productive, creative and imaginative.

Notes:

- *. The book is presented as autobiographical and hence factual (if not always completely objective). The events described cannot always be taken as literally true. Larry, in particular, who is described as living together with the rest of his

family, was not in fact sharing a house with the Durrells during their journey on Corfu, instead living separately with his wife Nancy, whom Gerald does not mention at all; the chronology of events as they occur in the book is also inaccurate, the reason for the Durrell's departure from Corfu (World War 2) is not given. However, the book does succeed in preserving the impressions of ten to fifteen year old Gerald extremely vividly and with a great deal of light-hearted humour. A special study of simile in G. Durrell's book has been carried out by S. Gasparyan (2008).

References:

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Փոխաբերությունը որպես պատկերաստեղծ հնար Ջերալդ Դարրելի “Իմ ընտանիքը և ուրիշ կենդանիներ” վեպում

Հոդվածում քննության է առնվում փոխաբերությունը, որը բառարվեստի ստեղծագործության ամենահանգուցային արտահայտամիջոցներից մեկն է, իր ուրույն դերն ունի գեղարվեստական պատկերների ստեղծման գործում:

Ջերալդ Դարրելի ստեղծագործություններում պատկերների համակարգը խորն է ու բազմաձև՝ կազմված միկրո/մակրո պատկերներից, որոնցից յուրաքանչյուրի “արտաբերած” գեղագիտական, իմացաբանական և փոխաբերական ներուժը հանգեցնում է մեկ այլ գեղարվեստական պատկերի ստեղծմանը:

Հոդվածի նպատակն է ոչ միայն վերլուծել փոխաբերական կառույցները, այլև մեկնաբանել ու դիտարկել վերջիններս որպես պատկերաստեղծ հնար: