

Understanding Nature Through Language: Figurative Languages in Thiele's *February Dragon*

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Abstract:- Figurative language is an essential part in literary works used to emphasize the meaning expressed by the author in his or her writing. *February Dragon* sets its setting after the War. It portrays the life of three Australian children and their adventures in the bush. *February Dragon* is an environmental fiction written in hoping to encourage people's awareness to the impact of environmental degradation. The aim of this study is to elaborate figurative languages used by the author focusing on figurative language related to environment. Data were collected from text and analyzed by employing descriptive-qualitative analysis. The result of the research illustrates that there are five figurative languages: simile and metaphor, personification, irony, and allusion.

Keywords:- Figurative Languages; Thiele; *February Dragon*; Nature.

I. INTRODUCTION

The multi-dimensionality of literary works is not only a story about a fragment of aspects of life, or about inspirational life stories that can motivate readers to increase cultural knowledge and experience [1], but literary works can also promote something. Taking the setting of the plot is certainly not without reason. But it has its own purpose which the author is aware of. Thiele realized that he did this for his work, entitled "*February Dragon*".

Literature and ecological studies are a combination of literary studies that are currently in demand by many researchers. Literature contributes to the love of nature in one hand but the beauty of nature on the other hand that can be a good setting for literary works. Such studies include eco-literature or eco-criticism studies. Generally, works like this become multi-disciplinary studies. Concerning for the environment perspective, literature studies have taken an important part for us to understand [2].

The damaging impact of global climate change has encouraged people to take action to prevent its negative externalities. Activists, from artist to ordinary citizens, have shown their concern through different forms of action. In

literary fields, many authors have produced environmental fiction or non-fiction hoping to increase people awareness about the effect of damaged environment.

Environmental studies have been widely used as a framework for the analysis of literature. There are several benefits of studying environmental literature. Mayerson [3] argues that environmental fiction can be a medium to recognize, understand, and feel the catastrophic.

Australian green literature has been flourishing since the early nineteenth. Known for its bush poetry, writer like Henry Lawson, Banjo Peterson, and Dorothea Mackellar were inspired by Romantic Movement in Britain to produce writing admiring the existence of nature [4].

There are various number of Australian environmental fiction have written since then. In 1966, Australian Book Council commended *February Dragon* by Colin Thiele as one of environmental tale that hopefully will increase the awareness of young readers just like what *Storm Boys* had done to protect wildlife in the Murray River [5]. *February Dragon* was actually written at the request of South Australian Bushfires Research Centre [6].

February Dragon is an adventures story of three Australian's children who lived in a rural area at the edge of Australian border after the world war. The story evolves in a fictional town named Gumbowie located in South Australia. Thiele presents an episodic story of Resin, Turps, and Columbine Pine. The plot is light as this novel was written for children. Despite its simple figures, *February Dragon* written in unique way in terms of language. Thiele uses various figurative languages and most of them related to the environment [7].

The author shows different kinds of human and non-human interaction and how different characters treated these non-human objects differently. By the portrayal of how humans treated their non-human counterparts, the reader can justify the position of human beings in the universe.

The aims of this study are to elaborate figurative languages used by Thiele, and the purpose of using it. The researcher investigates through narratives and classified into several categories of figurative languages. The researcher also discusses the relation of the figurative languages with nature.

II. THIELE AND HIS WORKS

Thiele is a writer from Australia whose full name is Colin Milton Thiele. Formed on 16 November 1920, he died on 4 September 2006. Thiele died from heart disease in a hospital in Brisbane, aged 85. He was a writer and educator from Australia. He was known for his award-winning children's fiction, the novels *Storm Boy*, *Blue Fin*, *The Sun on the Stubble* and *February Dragon* in particular.

Thiele was born in Eudunda in South Australia. Only until he went to school at Julia Creek did he speak German. Before studying at the University of Adelaide, he was educated at many state schools, including Eudunda Higher Primary School and Kapunda High School. He got his university certificate in 1941.

In several literature sources, it is found that More than 100 books were written by Thiele, mostly detailing life in rural Australia, especially the Eudunda, Barossa Valley, and Murray River in South Australia's Coorong regions. Several of his books were made into films or television series as an Australian writer on the list, including *Sun on the Stubble*, *The Fire in the Stone*, *Blue Fin*, and *Storm Child*.

One of his quite impressive novels is *February Dragon*, written in 1966, this novel is about the three adventure Australian children in the bush in rural area. Thiele is indeed famous in several works since he often described life in rural Australia. This work then became the object of this research study. In this novel, several expressions are found which are stylistically called figurative language to describe nature [8]. Thiele has a figurative writing style which can then be divided into clusters, for example personification, illusion, simile and so on. All of these are revealed in detail in this study. He was a strong writer for stylistics.

Literary works by Thiele dated from the early 20th century to the very beginning of the 21st century, just before his death in September 2006. The key aspect of his study was literature for children and educational resources for teachers and other authors.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are formulated as follows; 1) to elaborate figurative languages used by the author focusing on figurative languages related to environment, and 2) to reveal the author's nature view through figurative languages used in his work *February Dragon*.

IV. DATA SOURCES AND PROCEDURES

This research is a text research that relies on descriptive discussion. The data of this research are in the form of expressions, statements, and sentences contained in *February Dragon* which were obtained after reading in depth and repeatedly.

This study makes use of primary data from the work. The only data source for this research is a literary work written by Thiele entitled *February Dragon* using interpretation techniques for each data related to figurative language elements that are specifically related to environmental surroundings. All data of this study are in the form of text descriptions, conversations of a character with others, assessments of a character with other characters, and the thoughts of the characters about the natural environment around them.

The data collection procedure is by taking words, specific terms, phrases, sentences, expressions from the work and separating them from the novel text. All of the data in this study are contextualized in nature. From the series of data, then they are categorized according to their characteristics, namely simile and metaphor, personification, irony and allusion.

V. METHODS

This article employed qualitative research. The data were collected from the novel *February Dragon*. The researcher highlighted phrases, words, or narrative, and classified them into the classification of figurative language. Collected data in this research were deeply analyzed by applying descriptive method. After categorizing the highlighted data, they are putting in the table slot.

VI. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings

Since the focus of this study is about figurative language, so only the aspect related it will be explored. Figurative language is a part of figure of speech and generally applied in the study of poetry. However, many studies have applied the study of figurative language in literary works like Novel. According to Perrine [9], figure of speech is using different way of saying something other than usual way. The meaning of figurative language cannot be taken literally.

The purpose of figurative language is to draw the attention of readers, so that the poem is interesting to read. Other than that, it also delivers the idea of the poet in a specific and creative manner [10].

Perrine and Arp [9] further divide figurative language into several categories, however the researcher only elucidates some of them as it is used by Thiele in the novel.

1) *Simile and Metaphor*

Simile and Metaphor is used to illustrate two things that are similar. The comparison using simile is expressed by using words or phrase as similar to, like, resembles or seems [9] [11]. A metaphor is a declaration which compares two things that are not the same. Metaphors do not use the words "like" or "as," unlike similes. Such statements only make sense when the reader understands the connection between the comparisons of the two things.

2) *Personification*

Personification according to Perrine and Arp [9] is the attribution to something nonhuman of a personal nature or human characteristics, or the depiction in human form of an animal, an object, or a concept. The way readers imagine things is affected by using personification.

3) *Irony*

Verbal Irony usually signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect, the expression of one's meaning [9] [12]. Sometimes irony makes the readers compare two different situations.

4) *Allusion*

Allusion is a reference of something in history of previous literature [9]. Some allusion is found in February Dragon

This study divides environmental aspects into two categories: flora and fauna. Flora is a plant. In a broader context, flora means all kinds of plants that exist on earth and fauna is all kinds of animals that live on earth. Flora and fauna have such many and varied types that they are no longer counted. These various animals and plants have various places of residence in the world.

Australia is a region that has a unique biodiversity of flora and fauna compared to several other countries. The uniqueness of flora and fauna in Australia has been implicitly introduced through Thiele's work.

In literary studies, literary works that utilize and highlight nature as a setting are called green literature [13]. Meanwhile, literary works that promote stories about children are categorized as children literature. Thus, Thiele's work is a literary work of green literature of children or children literature of green [14].

Based on the text exploration, it is found the figurative language in *February Dragon* as follows:

Table 1. The Figurative Languages Found in Thiele's February Dragon

No	Figurative Language	Nature (Environment)	
		Flora	Fauna
1	Simile	19	20
2	Metaphor	8	6
3	Personification	6	11
4	Irony	4	3
5	Allusion	3	4

The diversity of flora and fauna in this work which is revealed through literary texts can be stylistically identified as shown in the table above. Several examples of each type of figurative language were presented in the discussion session. The mapping of the figurative types as mentioned in the Table above is done after data reduction is done to avoid repetition and equation forms. It also needs to be clarified here that there are a number of data that have more than one aspect of figurative language.

B. *Discussion*

February Dragon despite its simplistic story contains various figurative languages that make the story more powerful. Besides creating beautiful story, the use of figurative language is also purposed to present vivid image of Australian nature.

The researcher found four types of figurative languages that related to environment or nature. The four figurative languages are discussed below:

1) *Simile*

Simile is used by Thiele to describe the physical appearance of the characters. The portrayal of character using simile can be seen in Thiele's description when "Turps rubbed one bare leg against the other like human grasshopper (3). In this part, Thiele compare the similarity between Turps leg and grasshopper. The second example of simile found in the narrative is the description of old Barnacle, the shop owner in town, when he gets mad because the children playing mischievous trick to him.

Example 1:

Old Barnacle's face blackened like thundercloud. "Out!" he roared, pointing to the door and bringing his six-pound boot down on the wooden floor with such crash that the selves shook and three loses onions bunch out the counter [15].

The expression blackened like thundercloud show that the old Barnacle is mad because of the children. The author portrays madness as thundreclod. Another example of simile also can be identified in this sentence:

Example 2:

"Aunt Hester is enthusiastic as layin hen" [15].

The sentence is categorized as simile. The figures found in the sentence show the similarity of human and layin hen. It is described that when human is enthusiast about something, he or she will probably look like a hen who is laying its eggs.

2) Metaphor

The study of metaphor is increasingly gaining an important position due to the growing awareness that language is not only a reflection of reality, but also a shaper of reality. Metaphor is a linguistic phenomenon that applies at the semantic level. Metaphors are related to the relationship between one word and another in forming a meaning. In expressing something, literary works make use of metaphorical expressions for beauty.

Metaphor is seen as a unique form of language, and it can also be strange because the word relations in the metaphor go beyond the boundaries of literal language relations that have been mutually agreed upon in daily communication. Metaphors are characterized by the substitution of relations, associations, conceptualizations, and analogies in the arrangement of their relationships:

For metaphor, Thiele used the word like "dragon" and "monster" to describe the fire. Both of those word have strong meaning, and it is believed used by the author to describe how dangerous the bushfires in Australia.

3) Personification

Personifications in February Dragon are the author's powerful way to express the condition of his surroundings. The example of personification can be seen in the following Thiele's illustration.

Example 3:

The trees in The Big Scrub tossed in the rising wind. The birds called hastily; the animals fidgeted, ill at ease. Perhaps they sensed something stirring down at Rowett's Reserve [15].

As described in the quotation above, Thiele used human characteristics like "tossed", "called" and "fidgeted" to describe the trees and the animal. Personification is the best way to describe the situation so the reader can really feel the atmosphere of the story.

Another example of personification in the story can be seen in the following quotation:

Example 4:

And so Miss Stravy's bus whopped happily through the trees or ground the teeth of its gears up the ridges [15].

In the above quotation Miss's Stravy bus whopped happily is personified as the bus is having human feeling. Literally, the bus does not seem happy. The word happily is used to describe that the car is in a good condition.

4) Irony

Irony in February Dragon is described in several situation. Thiele illustrated these situations as follows.

Example 5:

There they stayed until the late afternoon when, after another bout of eating that Mr. Pine said was quite rich and unnecessary enough to make them all bilious, they set off home to their waiting farmyard and empty wafer troughs [15].

Example 6:

"It's just as well," Mr. Pine said, slackening the belt on his old working trousers, "that Christmas comes only once a year. Otherwise the people would all be dead from overeating, and the animals from starvation and neglect [15].

After having family lunch at Summertown, Mr. Pine decided to return home earlier because he wants to feed the animals on the farm. From the quotation above. There is some kind of irony presented in Mr. Pine's thought about Christmas as he illustrated the comparison between humans, who get an enormous supply of food when animals starved to death because humans ignore them.

Another example of irony can be seen when the author compares the situation in the city and in the rural as shown below.

Example 7:

It was tremendous Christmas dinner, one of those huge turkey and gravy and seasoning. But when it was all over, Resin, Turps, and Columbine suddenly felt that things had come to dead end. There was nowhere to go- no sheds to play in, no dam to swim in, no big scrub to explore. Outside the asphalt street, shimmering and melting into tackiness, ran straight and wide through the center of the town, past the shop and wide to the center of the town [15].

The situation presented above show how people exploited the environment. Rural slowly turns into city, full of big road and shop. The irony is children no longer has excited place to play, and the atmosphere is also getting hot because there are no more trees in the city.

5) Allusion

The example of allusion can be recognized from the title of the novel. February Dragon is likely inspired by the actual environmental issues that happened in Australia for nineteenth century, the bushfires. The title February Dragon attributes to Australia raging wildfire, which is often happened in February. Some of the worst fire happened for 19 centuries was Black Thursday happened on February 6, 1851, Red Thursday on February 1, 1898, Black Sunday on February 4, 1929, and many more arrival in the following years after.

VII. CONCLUSION

In Stylistics, there are various kinds of figurative language, however in this study the researchers only elaborate five figures of speech. Simile and metaphor, personification, irony, and allusion are used by the author to express her stance about human-nature relationship.

Overall, this study found 88 figurative languages which divided into 39 for simile, 14 for metaphor, 17 for personification, 7 for irony, and 7 for allusion. Those numbers are sufficient to illustrate how language styles are used to describe nature and at the same time they reflect the relationship between humans and their environment.

As elaborated in the findings, Thiele explores the nature as reference, both direct and indirect, Thiele has supported the movement to love and understand the natural environment and show how important relationships are between humans and their natural environment. The figurative language found in the novel mostly used words from animals or plants. How beautiful Australian biodiversity is depicted in this work. Thiele managed to do that.

This work is very well read by children as a movement to love the environment. The adventures of these three children can become character education to love the environment.

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