

Figurative language on visual imagery of Dorothy Parker's selected poems

Amalia Irvana Mangkulla¹, Devian Try Gustary²

Sekolah Tinggi Bahasa Asing Technocrat^{1,2}

¹Email: amaliairvana@gmail.com

Abstract - This research aims to analyse the types of figurative language that can be found on visual imagery of selected poems by Dorothy Parker. The data research method used in this research is a qualitative descriptive method. The research problems are (1) What visual imagery are used in the four selected poems by Dorothy Parker? and (2) What are the types of figurative language that contained on visual imagery of Dorothy Parker's selected poems? The data sources of this research are four selections of poem by Dorothy Parker, *Résumé*, *Penelope*, *The Red Dress*, and *Testament*. The result shows there are fifteen visual imagery that used in the four selected poems and contained five types of figurative language, which are personification, metaphor, hyperbole, simile, and irony.

Keywords: figurative language; visual imagery; Dorothy Parker; poem analyses

I. INTRODUCTION

Dorothy Parker was an American writer, poet, and screenwriter. She wrote a great number of literary works, such as short stories, poetry, and essays during her career. Her writing style typically delves into themes of love, heartbreak, grief, and social critique. Parker was also well known for her sharp wittiness which becoming her as one of the most influential voices of the 20th century. Despite a number of personal and professional difficulties, she continued to produce many masterpieces that remained popular and influential for many people (Britannica, 2024).

To fully comprehend the deeper meanings and complex emotions that poets convey in their poetry, it is necessary to learn and analysis the figurative language. Poems or poetry with figurative language display more appealing visuals, provide readers with vivid imagery, and also could have more deeply interpretations for each line or even each word. Imagery, especially visual imagery, also an essential feature to enhance powerful images in reader's minds and expand their interpretations of the poems. And Dorothy Parker's poetry has a considerable use of figurative language and visual imagery that makes her poetry more impactful and ensuring the readers across generations can relate to her works.

Many previous researches have examined about what figurative language and imagery that can be found in literary works, especially poems. But only a few have analysed the figurative language that contained in visual imagery of the poem. One of them is the research

conducted by Suyudi (2021) who analysed the figurative language on visual imagery of the poem.

One of them is the research conducted by Suyudi (2021) who analysed the figurative language on visual imagery of Henry Wodsworth Longfellow's poems. Meanwhile in Dorothy Parker's poems, no one has done research on that topic, even though her work is very rich in visual imagery. So, that is what makes the researcher interested in analysing what are the figurative language that can be found or contained in visual imagery of Dorothy Parker's selected poems. This research will attempt to answer the following questions:

(1) What visual imagery are used in the four selected poems by Dorothy Parker?

(2) What are the types of figurative language that contained on visual imagery of Dorothy Parker's selected poems?

Figurative language is a form of language that often used in literature and also one of the poetical devices. Miller and Greenberg (1981) say "Figurative language is an indirect statement that says one thing in terms of another". Perrine, in Arp (2000) as cited in Nuraeni and Peron (2017) stated that figurative language is the language that cannot be taken literally or should not to be taken literally only. And according to Oxford Dictionary (2008; Bull, 2008), figurative language is a group of words used not in the ordinary literal sense but in an imaginative way. McKenzie (2016) also stated that figurative language refers to language which conveys ideas or thoughts other than literal meaning of the words. So, based on those definitions, it can conclude that figurative language formed in an imaginative way and does not have a true meaning but another additional meaning that must be analysed first in order to understand it better. Also, with figurative language, literary works can become more vivid or alive because of the clearer imagery, which can be more interesting and grab attention of people or readers.

Imagery also a part of poetical device which plays an important role in literature works. Imagery can be described as a mental image or picture when a reader interpreting the poem. Croft and Cross (2000:56) as cited in Damanhuri (2011) states that an image is a language use that makes it easier for us to see, hear, feel, or comprehend better what is being mentioned or written and the perception that the writer is trying to express. According to Oxford Dictionary (2008), imagery can be defined as the use of figurative language to produce pictures in the mind. So, imagery is a picture or image created by the poet or writer that will help the reader to imagine more widely in their minds about the poem and also more easily understand the accurate meaning and the context of a poem. Imagery is also a descriptive language that use figurative language to reach the reader's senses. Of the several types of imagery, visual imagery is the most commonly found in poetry. Visual imagery is when a poet uses the sense of sight by attempting to explain something so that a reader can see and understand about what the poet sees.

The study of figurative language (Teja et al., 2022) through analysing a selected song lyrics. How the researchers analyse the current research cannot get rid of the previous studies and model and technique of analyses (Wajdi et al., 2024; Amandari et al., 2024; Wajdi & Asrumi, 2024; Wajdi et al., 2024; Mekt et al., 2024; Wajdi et al., 2024; Wajdi et al., 2024; Antari et al., 2022).

II. METHOD

This research is written using a qualitative descriptive method. According to Punch (2005) "Qualitative research is empirical research where the data are not in the form of numbers". Wiersma (1991) as cited in Swarniti (2022) states that narrative or story descriptions play a major role in qualitative research. The researcher will focus on explaining the findings and describing the figurative language on visual imagery that contained in Dorothy Parker's selected poems.

The data sources of this research include a selection poem by Dorothy Parker. The primary data collection in this research involved the form of words and sentences in Dorothy Parker's selected poems that are considered by the researcher use visual imagery and contain figurative language. For the data analysis process, the researcher selecting the poet and their poems first. The next step is reading them thoroughly multiple times, and identifying them to determine what problems that will be analyse. After determining, the researcher will interpret the poems and categorize the words and sentences or primary data in the poems that use visual imagery, and analyse the figurative language that contained in the visual imagery. After all of the procedures, the researcher will make a conclusion of the analysis.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Every poet, including Dorothy Parker, must be used to include visual imagery in their poems. However, there are only a few where figurative languages could be found on that visual imagery. And in the four selected poems by Dorothy Parker, *Résumé*, *Penelope*, *The Red Dress*, and *Testament*, the researcher found fifteen visual imagery and there are five types of figurative language that contained on the visual imagery of Dorothy Parker's selected poems, which will be explained further below.

Poem 1 – *Résumé*

Razors pain you;
Rivers are damp;
Acids stain you;
And drugs cause cramp.

Guns aren't lawful;
Nooses give;
Gas smell awful;
You might as well live.

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The first poem is entitled *Résumé*. This poem is very famous and one of the parts of Parker's first collection of poems with the title "Enough Rope" which was published in 1926. This poem talked about serious topic of suicide with an irony and dark themes. She also uses direct language to be more capture the various ways of person that might want to try to end their own life. The first line until third line are visual imagery, which is create a clear visual image of the physical effects or impacts caused by different ways of suicide.

The figurative language that contained on visual imagery in this poem is **personification**. According to Miller and Greenberg (1981) "Personification is a figure of speech in which an abstract idea, inanimate object, or aspect of nature is described as if it were human." McKenzie (2016) also said that personification is when we put human characteristics to something that is not human. *Razors pain you* (line 1) show personification because *razor* presents an activity or action that is human-like, which are "pain". *Razors pain you* means the razor described as causing a pain directly, not being a passive tool or like an inanimate object.

Poem 2 – *Penelope*

In the pathway of the sun,
In the footsteps of the breeze,
Where the world and sky are one,
He shall ride the silver seas,
He shall cut the glittering wave.
I shall sit at home, and rock;
Rise, to heed a neighbor's knock;
Brew my tea, and snip my thread;

Bleach the linen for my bed.
They will call him brave.

The second poem is entitled *Penelope*. This poem explores the differences and the contrasts of roles between gender, where men are viewed as fearless explorers meanwhile women as obedient housewives. Most of the lines in this poem used visual imagery. But only three of them that contained figurative language on visual imagery, which are:

In the footsteps of the breeze, (Line 2)
He shall ride the silver seas, (Line 4)
He shall cut the glittering wave. (Line 5)

The figurative language that contained on visual imagery in this poem are **personification** and **metaphor**. The line that shows personification is "*In the footsteps of the breeze*" (line 2). The *breeze* is represented as having footsteps which is only possible for humans. In addition, that line can also be referred to as a metaphor. According to McKenzie (2016) and Miller and Greenberg (1981), metaphor is a comparison of two different elements or objects without the use of linking word ("like" or "as"). The *In the footsteps of the breeze* line is metaphors for the journey that is as natural and quick as the movement of a breeze. The breeze also leaves no lasting effects but it touches everything in its way. So, the speaker here compared *the footsteps of breeze* with an unrestricted journey guided by the elements of nature.

Another metaphor is from "*He shall ride the silver seas*," (line 4) and "*He shall cut the glittering wave*." (line 5). *Ride* in line 4 is represent to the action of sailing and implying has a power over the seas. Meanwhile the word *silver seas* creating images of a gorgeous shimmering ocean. For the word *cut* in line 5 is represent the powerful movement of the ship that it seems will cut through the ocean, conveying a strength in the journey. *The glittering wave* also creating the same images as *silver seas*. Those two lines are compared to the journey of the men that look very fascinating and heroic in the eyes of many people.

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Poem 3 – **The Red Dress**

I always saw, I always said
If I were grown and free,
I'd have a gown of reddest red
As fine as you could see,

To wear out walking, sleek and slow,
Upon a Summer day,
And there'd be one to see me so
And flip the world away.

And he would be a gallant one,
With stars behind his eyes,
And hair like metal in the sun,
And lips too warm for lies.

I always saw us, gay and good,
High honored in the town.
Now I am grown to womanhood....
I have the silly gown.

The third poem is entitled *The Red Dress*. This poem explores and depicts the gap between the speaker's youthful dreams and the disappointment truth of adulthood expectation. This poem also talks about her romantic fantasies or imaginations of the future. The visual imagery in this poem includes:

I'd have a gown of reddest red (Stanza 1, Line 3)
And flip the world away (Stanza 2, Line 4)
With stars behind his eyes, And hair like metal in the sun, (Stanza 3, Line 2 & 3)
I have the silly gown (Stanza 4, Line 4)

The first visual imagery contains figurative language **hyperbole**. According to Potter (as cited in Swarniti 2022), "Hyperbole or overstatement is figurative language that contain exaggeration element about something." The phrase *reddest red* is an exaggerated way to highlights how intense the colour red is. The speaker wants to point out or express about her desire for a dress with the brightest and strongest red, indicating that she wishes to wear a dress that very stands out and will grab attention of people, especially to her future admirer.

The second visual imagery also contains hyperbole. The *And flip the world away* line exaggerates someone's ability to flip or turn around the world which is an impossible thing to do. But this line can be considered as **metaphor** too, because the speaker represents it for someone who can make all her troubles or concerns disappear. So, *Flip the world away* that the speaker referring to is the presence and attention from her future admire would have a strong and big influence that it feels like her world is turned upside down, everything else in the world become less important and also will surpass all other her concerns.

The third visual imagery contains the same figurative language as the second visual imagery, which are **metaphor** and **hyperbole**. *Stars behind his eyes* represent the eyes of her future admirer are wonderful and fascinating like the stars. It also implying that staring into his eyes is similar to looking a night sky will full of stars that very captivating. Meanwhile it is called hyperbole because the beautiful eyes of that special person make her exaggerate there are stars behind his eyes.

Next, figurative language that contained on the fourth visual imagery is **simile**. Miller and Greenberg (1981) stated that simile is a figure of speech that uses words such as "like" or "as" to explicitly compare two elements that basically different but united or similar in poet's consideration. The *And hair like metal in the sun* line is comparing hair to metal under the sun that will definitely look shiny. This line creates a clear image of the person's hair is possibly silver or golden that look shiny, glossy and brightly coloured. It is implying her future admirer and even to his hair will looks very attractive and catch all the attention.

For the last visual imagery, *I have the silly gown* is contains figurative language **metaphor** and **irony**. *The silly gown* represents her dreams that seem foolish, and also means the expectations of her dreams when she was young that turned out in the present not to be as she imagined. The term *silly* itself describes her current point of view or perspective about her unrealized dreams and hopes. Back then, she hoped to have *a gown of the reddest red*, the most beautiful gown that anyone would ever see (as described in Stanza 1). But as she grew up and becoming an adult, she realized that what she had was just a *silly gown*.

Those discrepancy shows that this line also contains **irony**. McKenzie, (as cited in Nuraeni & Peron, 2017) said that irony is the opposite or contradiction of what is intended. According to Tanaka, as cited in Millenia et al (2023) stated that irony exists when the person's assumptions or expectation are different from the actual reality. He also added "It is the relationship between the event and the person's point of view that causes irony". So, *I have the silly gown* line is represent the lived reality of the speaker that is different and contrary to what she had expected, as can be seen from *I'd have a gown of reddest red* (Stanza 1, Line 3) and also from the entire content of the previous stanza which states about her expectations and dreams about her adulthood.

Poem 4 – Testament
Oh, let it be a night of lyric rain
And singing breezes, when my bell is tolled.

I have so loved the rain that I would hold
Last in my ears its friendly, dim refrain.
I shall lie cool and quiet, who have lain
Fevered, and **watched the book of day unfold.**
Death will not see me flinch; the heart is bold
That pain has made incapable of pain.

Kinder the busy worms than ever love;
It will be peace to lie there, empty-eyed,
My bed made secret by the leveling showers,
My breast replenishing the weeds above.
And you will say of me, "Then has she died?
Perhaps I should have sent a spray of flowers."

The last poem *Testament*, which is one of the parts of Parker's first collection of poems with the title "Enough Rope" and published in 1926, depicts an easy acceptance of death and the relief or freedom that will offers afterward. The speaker imagines her final hours surrounded by the soothing and comforting sounds of rain and winds, expressing a genuine appreciation for these natural elements. This poem also contains many visual imageries that can be found. The visual imagery in this poem includes:

"Oh, let it be a night of lyric rain And singing breezes, ..." (Stanza 1, Line 1-2)

"... and watched the book of day unfold." (Stanza 2, Line 2)

"It will be peace to lie there, empty-eyed," (Stanza 3, Line 2)

"My bed made secret by the leveling showers, My breast replenishing the weeds above." (Stanza 3, Line 3-4)

The first visual imagery contains figurative language **personification**. The *lyric rain* and *singing breezes* are represented as having characteristics that can only be done by humans. In this case, breeze is described as being able to sing with rain as the lyrics. Also, it has the meaning that it is the one who accompanies the speaker during her final time before passing away.

The second and third visual imagery contains **metaphor**. The *watched the book of day unfold* line is a metaphor for watching or witnessing life and time passing that she already has experienced. That phrase is compared the amount of time with a book that is unfolding or have been opened and read. It is implying that the speaker has lived over each day, watching many changes in the events of her life as if she were reading a story in a book. For the third visual imagery also considered as metaphor because the *It will be peace to lie there* line is implying the freedom that the speaker will find in death combined with the phrase *empty-eyed* that is represent to the speaker's death. So, that line is compared to the death of the speaker when her eyes will not be able to see again or experience the outside world but she thinks she will find peace and comfort afterwards.

Other metaphors are also contained in these last two lines of visual imagery which are from line 3 and 4 in stanza 3, *My bed made secret by the leveling showers, My breast replenishing the weeds above*. The *bed* in line 3 is compared to the funeral, meanwhile *the leveling showers* compared to the rain. This means, the whole line implies that her final resting place or the funeral will be a secret because it is hidden by rain and conveys the process of her returning to the ground or earth to rest for all eternity. Next, the *breast* in line 4 depicts or compared to the speaker's body after death that will providing the weeds or the plants that over her grave. This also points out the relationship or the connection of human and the nature will always be continued even until death.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the research, it could be concluded that the use of visual imagery is very important and influential in making the poem more attractive and appealing. The use of figurative language can also help the reader more understand the poem. Dorothy Parker is one of the poets who uses a lot of imagery, especially visual imagery. The researcher discovered fifteen visual imagery used by Dorothy Parker in the four selected poems *Résumé*, *Penelope*, *The Red Dress*, and *Testament*. There are also five types of figurative languages, which are personification, metaphor, hyperbole, simile, and irony that were contained in the visual imagery. Metaphor is the most frequently found, with its use in nine data.

Through this analysis, the researcher providing new perspective or knowledge in the field of literature about Parker's poetic methods and the impact of visual imagery and figurative language. For further research, the reader or researchers could analyse more deeply about other types of imagery from Dorothy Parker or another poet, and also the figurative language that contained in the imagery.

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