

Revealing Women's Suffering through Displacing Meaning in William Blake's Poems

Andi Ramadhan

Balikipapan University

andiramadhan0852@gmail.com

Wahyuni

Balikipapan University

wahyuni@uniba-bpn.ac.id

Jepri

Balikipapan University

jeprinainggolan@gmail.com

Abstract:

*This thesis explores the displacing meaning to reveal women's suffering in William Blake's poems such as: "The Sick Rose", "Earth's Answer", "My Pretty Rose Tree", "London" and "Ah Sunflower". There are two objectives of this research, they are to find the types of displacing and to find the displacing meaning reveal women's suffering. The theory used in this research is the semiotic analysis using Riffaterre's theory of displacing meaning caused by metaphor and metonymy in the form of personification, simile, and synecdoche in his book *Semiotics of Poetry*. The methodology employed is qualitative research in which the researcher tried to present the issues descriptively. As for the data, they were collected from the displacing meaning. The poems were taken out as the primary data. The results of the research, the researcher found that the types of displacing meaning in thematic William Blake's poem caused by metaphor, metonymy, personification, synecdoche, and the displacing meaning reveal women's suffering in the form of mental and physical suffering which includes of sadness, disgust, selfishness, restraints, jealousy, fear, abuse, violence, unsound, evil, death, poverty, and disease.*

Keywords: *women's suffering, displacing meaning, William Blake*

INTRODUCTION

According to Peck & Coyle (1984, p.11), “poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling, expression of emotion, and it is concerned with ordinary human concerns with the daily matters of one’s life”. It is meant that poetry has something to reveal for something meaning because of daily matters in human life such as the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling, the expression of emotion, and it is concerned with ordinary human concerns. There are different ways to interpret poems, and one of them is through this research which might be a statement in regarding human experience.

The book *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience* by William Blake is a unique poetical experience and the mystical view of the world influenced by revolutions in France. *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience* are a description of the contrary states of the human soul. Blake illustrated poetry collection contains two poems where ‘innocence’ represents ‘the unfallen world’ and ‘experience’ represents ‘the fallen world’. It appeared in two phases with the full title ‘Songs of Innocence and of Experience’ showing the two contrary states of the human soul published in 1789. It appeared two phases through various stages of innocence and experience. Furthermore, the researcher determined thematic poems as depicted in women suffering. These poems were included in “The Sick Rose”, “Earth’s Answer”, “My Pretty Rose Tree”, “London and “Ah Sunflower”.

In such cases, almost entirely women’s suffering is illustrated in the hidden meaning of William Blake’s poem during the Revolution in France. People know the problem with referring to mostly in a critical situation to women as victim world. It is evident that many women suffer from sexist tyranny as written by William Blake’s poem. As believed by hooks (2000, p.7) says that “women suffering under sexist tyranny is a common bond among all women, transcending the particulars of the different forms that tyranny takes”. Women’s suffering is often outlined as a state of severe distress related to events that threaten the perfection of the person. It would occur with any aspect of the woman within the realm of her social anxiety, her group identification, her relation with self, concerning family, relation with a personal, or transcendental source of that means.

Furthermore, there are two forms of women’s suffering involving physical and mental suffering. Physical suffering consists of illness, disability, hunger, poverty, and death. Mental suffering which includes feelings of distress, fright, anxiety, sadness, loneliness, restrain, anger, heartbreak, disgust. The researcher describes the forms of mental and physical suffering defined by Malpas & Lickiss (2012, p.171) explains that;

“suffering is a universal human experience described as a negative basic feeling or emotion that involves a subjective character of unpleasantness, aversion, harm, or threat of harm to the body or mind consist of physical suffering is pain, illness, disability, hunger, poverty, death. Mental or Emotional Suffering which includes feelings of distress, fright, anxiety, etc.”

In all its forms, the purpose of this research is to detail the life experiences perceived to reveal the forms of women’s suffering while it is evident that many women suffer as

depicted in thematic William Blake's poem. The problems are answered using the semiotic theory.

The displacing meaning of semiotic reveals the figurative language such as metaphor, metonymy, simile, personification, and synecdoche when the signs shifting from one meaning to another. The figurative language revealed by displacing meaning shows two forms of women's suffering represented by mental and physical suffering. According to Riffaterre (1978, p.2) says that "displacing meaning when a sign shifts from one meaning to another, when one word 'stands for' another, as happens with metaphor and metonymy in the form of simile, personification, and synecdoche".

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research applies to the semiotic theory as the process of interpreting every poem for poetic signs. The relevant theory used is Michael Riffaterre's. It is used to completely interpret a poetic text that conveys meaning by analyzing or proposing a coherent and relatively reasonable illustration of the structure of meaning in a poem. There are three apparent ways for indirect expression to occur caused by displacing, distorting, and creating meaning. Among the three ways of indirection methods. As explained by Riffaterre (1978, p.5), "Indirect expression is produced by displacing, distorting, and creating meaning". The displacing meaning intended to mean that figurative language might be used to state something indirectly. Therefore, the researcher limits the displacing meaning of semiotic reveals the figurative language such as metaphor, metonymy, simile, personification, and synecdoche. The figurative language revealed by displacing meaning shows the women's suffering used in this research.

Displacing Meaning

Displacing meaning refers to the shift of one sign from one meaning to another. According to Riffaterre (1978, p.2), "displacing meaning happens when a sign shifts from one meaning to another, when one word 'stands for' another, as happens with metaphor and metonymy in the form of simile, personification, and synecdoche". It means figurative language replaces the meaning of something with something else through displacing meaning revealed in women's suffering in the poems of William Blake. In this section, the researcher gives the explanation related to use in figurative language belongs to other writers, and more examples including metaphor, metonymy, simile, personification, synecdoche. The kinds of figurative language may be classified, as follows.

1. Metaphor

According to Keraf (2007, p.139), "Metaphor is a variety of analogy which compare two things, but in short pattern". It is meant that between subject and object have the same attributes, and the writer uses it to compare it to another. For example: The poem entitled "The Sick Rose" is a short poem written by William Blake. The rose illustrated literally refers to the social crown of life if the rose is a symbol for "passion and love", our views of these emotions may be sick as well. However, the sickness literally refers to something

deeper than flower or destructive love. The rose can also represent a woman's, purity, beauty, perfection. Sick can also represent the heart faint, bad experience, death, strong emotion, filled with disgust, having a strong distaste from surfeit, depression and longing for something.

2. Personification

Personification is a figurative language in which a thing, an animal, or an abstract term is made by human. According to Keraf (2007, p.140), "personification is a kind of figurative language that describe a non-life things or non-human object abstraction or ideas able to act like human being. For example: In the poem "In the Howling Storm" is a short poem that was written by William Blake. Howling illustrated literally refers to a great sorrow and sadness, the word "howl" adds the sense of sorrow because "howl" seems stronger than cry. Howling may refer to cry out loudly in pain, anger, amusement, etc.

3. Simile

A simile is a direct comparison between things which are particularly similar in this sense. According to Keraf (2007, p.138), "simile is comparison that have an explicit character. Explicit here mean that directly comparing thing that similar with other, indicates by the word or phrase such as like, as, than, similar, resemble or seems". In other words, simile is a direct comparison of two things, which are unlike in their sense. For example: Your eyes are like stars". In the example use connective words 'like'. The word her eyes are compared with a star. It describes that her eyes are bright like a star in the sky.

4. Synecdoche

Synecdoche is a figurative of language which is mentioned as a part of something to suggest the whole. As defined by Keraf (2007, p.142), "synecdoche is used apart to signify the whole. Synecdoche into divided into two, those are *pars pro toto* (mention a part of something to suggest the whole), *totum pro parte* (using the whole to mention a part of something). For example: Two heads are better than one and many hands make right now (*pars pro toto*). Heads and hands as a representative of the man or people. Makassar wins the football game (*totum pro parte*). Makassar presents the football team.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses the qualitative method for collecting data obtained in many types of literature, including journals, reference articles, and the same book references supported in this research. According to Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln (2005), "qualitative research is a method of inquiry employed in many different academic disciplines, including in the social sciences, natural sciences, non-academic, market research, business and service demonstration by non-profits". These are called qualitative research that the researcher found in the data from research of library. The main method for collecting data based on the results of qualitative data analysis. Furthermore, this research is a descriptive approach through the qualitative method. The descriptive approach is intended to make a clearer understanding of poetic signs and their meaning in William Blake's poem by using the

displacing meaning to reveal women's suffering that appears in the poems. As stated by Flick (2014), "qualitative research is analyzing a concrete case in the temporal and local particularly and initiating from people expression, perception, and activities in their local context of social phenomena". It means that the phenomena is an interpretation of meanings about the women suffering through displacing meaning in the form of metaphor, metonymy, simile, personification, synecdoche, and all the data are processed by using semiotics of poetry by Riffaterre. The theory is used to analyze the meanings while revealing women's suffering through displacing meaning.

In this research, there are two sources of data that are used by the researcher. They are primary and secondary data. The primary data of this research taken from William Blake's poem in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* which reveal women's suffering. The poems included are "The Sick Rose", "Earth's Answer", "My Pretty Rose Tree", "London" and "Ah Sunflower". The secondary data used in this research is used to support the primary data such as the data supporting that appropriate the research. The data were taken from books, journals, or other relevant information related to the research conducted. Besides, the previous studies the researcher also used the scientific studies of literature to support the research. The analysis and interpretation of data were already analyzed to avoid overly extensive research. Moreover, classifying the data and collecting the cases, in this research only focuses on analyzing the line of words, phrases, sentences, and experience that contains women's suffering. The researcher wanted to find the appropriate theory supported by this research, namely semiotics theory in this research. The researcher uses the displacing meaning used to find the figurative language such as metaphor, metonymy, personification, synecdoche, and simile.

FINDINGS

The researcher presents the results followed by the explanation of the findings that used in Riffaterre's semiotic theory to analyze the types of displacing meaning such as metaphor, metonymy, personification, and synecdoche that found in William Blake's poems in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. As stated by Riffaterre (1978, p.2), "Displacing meaning happens when a sign shifts from one meaning to another, when one word 'stands for' another, as happens with metaphor and metonymy in the form of simile, personification and synecdoche. Therefore, the researcher classifies the displacing meaning of metaphor, metonymy, personification, simile, and synecdoche reveals women's suffering in the form of mental suffering and physical suffering.

The Types of Displacing Meaning

The researcher found the types of displacing meaning caused by metaphor, metonymy in the form of personification, and synecdoche in William Blake's poems in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. The total of findings are 38 data spread differently in the forms of metaphor, personification, metonymy and synecdoche.

Table: 1 The types of displacing meaning

The Displacing Meaning	Amount	Percentage
Metaphor	24	63%
Personification	10	26%
Metonymy	3	8%
Synecdoche	1	3%
Simile	0	0%

Displacing Meaning to Reveal Women’s Suffering

The researcher found the displacing meaning in metaphor, personification and synecdoche to reveal women’s suffering in the form of mental and physical suffering. Total of findings are 35 data from William Blake’s poems in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*.

DISCUSSION

The Types of Displacing Meaning

The researcher explains the types of displacing meaning caused by metaphor and metonymy in the form of personification and synecdoche in thematic William Blake’s poem.

1. Metaphor

The invisible worm

(The Sick Rose, stanza 1, line 2)

In this poem “invisible worm” use a metaphor when the sign “the invisibility of the worm” mirrors statement that worms may refer to disgusting animals. It also mirrors the assertion that the devil lurks unseen such a wicked man. The invisible man emphasizes evil and sin of the worm acting like a devil. The word worm can be interpreted in death, it relates to lowness, vileness, and contempt. It is also a masculine force. In this poem, the worm is also specifically the cankerworm which eats the roots of the rose.

2. Personification

O Rose thou art sick.

(The Sick Rose, stanza 1, line 1)

The Personification of the rose is always seen as feminine, beauty, innocence, love, happiness but the word rose seems more symbolizes love which had ever beautifully blossomed and the word sick symbolizes that the love which had ever blossomed was almost dead. Rose represents the virginity of young woman and innocence popularized as an image of romantic love and passion as a flower it demonstrates the transient nature of human life. However, sick is the adjective of suffering if the focus of this poem! A rose

informs that it's feeling sick, our views of this might hurt too. The word sick can be interpreted in a disordered, weakened, or unsound condition

3. Metonymy

That flies in the **night**
(The Sick Rose, stanza 1, line 3)

The use of the word 'night' to mean the darkness to show that the love was in the secret. The sign of night refers to the horrors and evils.

4. Synecdoche

And her **thorns** were my only delight.
(My Pretty Rose Tree, stanza 2, line 8)

The rose's thorns serve as a synecdoche, or a part for a whole. This poem, the thorns is part of the whole, which is Jesus's crown of thorns. The synecdoche aids the biblical allusion in Blake's poem. Thorns perhaps refer to her hate and harshness towards the speaker. The rose and thorns represent a variety of different figures and situations based on the context in which they appear. This crown of thorns described as death, as it was placed upon Jesus's head before he died.

Displacing Meaning to Reveal Women's Suffering

The researcher explains the form of mental and physical suffering through displacing meaning in thematic William Blake's poem in Songs of Innocence and of Experience.

1. Metaphor to reveal women's suffering

The **invisible worm**
(The Sick Rose, stanza 1, line 2)

The rose and invisible worm are the controlling metaphors that extend over the whole poem. The invasion of an invisible worm that has destroyed the innocence of a rose. The poem mention through the sign of the invisible worm connected with disgust, vileness, and contempt. This shows mental suffering in the form of disgust.

2. Personification to reveal women's suffering

O Rose thou art **sick**.
(The Sick Rose, stanza 1, line 1)

The sign of rose represents virginity which is just only associated with girls who never have sex. Furthermore, "rose" represents love too so there is impossible no sex in love From the title "The Sick Rose" is not a poem full of joyful or romantic feelings but otherwise. Rose gives us a sad and horrible feeling which felt by someone who inspired Blake to make this poem. However, sick is the adjective of suffering if the focus of this poem! Rose is made sick, our views of this might hurt too. It represents other possibilities such as sadness or unsound condition for a young girl who has sex if she has not married yet, but it happened in this poem. This shows mental suffering in the form of sadness.

3. Metonymy to reveal women's suffering

That flies in the **night**
(The Sick Rose, stanza 1, line 3)

In this poem, Blake wrote "that flies in the night" as a sign of night. Normally, people will sleep in the night and traditionally, many people believe night is the best time for demon to come out from the dark sky and try to haunt the people. The night is a sign of darkness, of things secret and hidden. It is also a sign of evil. Satan is referred to as the Prince of Darkness. This shows mental suffering in the form of evil.

4. Synecdoche reveal women's suffering

And her **thorns** were my only delight.
(My Pretty Rose Tree, stanza 2, line 8)

In the second stanza, 'Thorns' may symbolize something else. It relates between rose and thorns. Thorns represent a variety of different figures and situations based on the context in which they appear. This crown of thorns described as death, as it was placed upon Jesus's head before he died. This shows physical suffering in the form of death.

CONCLUSION

Finally, the researcher would conclude how the displacing meaning of semiotic reveals the women's suffering. There is something that can be contained in "The Sick Rose", "Earth's Answer", "My Pretty Rose Tree", "London" and "Ah! Sunflower" in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* by William Blake. The displacing of meaning of semiotic reveals the figurative language such as metaphor, personification, metonymy, synecdoche, and simile. The figurative language revealed by the displacing of meaning shows two forms of women's suffering, they are mental suffering and physical suffering. The figurative language of metaphor shows dominant forms of suffering it is mental suffering represented by 15 data of 34 data equals (44.12%), which physical suffering it is 8 data of 34 equals (23.53%). The second figurative language of displacing meaning of semiotic is personification which is showing only mental suffering represented 6 data of 34 data equals (17.65%). The third figurative language of displacing meaning of metonymy shows dominant forms of suffering it is mental suffering represented by 3 data of 34 data equals (8.83%), which physical suffering it is 1 data of 34 equals (2.95%). The fourth figurative language of displacing meaning of semiotic is synecdoche showing only physical suffering represented by 1 data of 34 data equals (2.95%). The fifth figurative language of a simile that is not showing the types of suffering that could be represented by 34 data equals (0%). It is common revealing the suffering through figurative language to avoid telling directly, and metaphor is the commonest one to express the women's suffering mentally or physically.

References

- Blake, W. (1789). *Songs of Innocence and of Experience (Vol. 5; M. Garcia, ed.)*. Princeton University Press.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*.
- Flick, U. (2018). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications Limited.
- hooks, b. (2000). *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*. London: United Kingdom by Pluto Press.
- Keraf, G. (2007). *Diksi dan Gaya Bahasa (Edisi Terb)*. Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Malpas, J. (2012). *Perspectives on Human Suffering (1st ed.; N. Lickiss, ed.)*. Netherlands: Springer.
- Peck, J., & Coyle, M. (1986). *Literary Terms and Criticism*. London: Red Globe Press.
- Riffaterre, M. (1978). *Semiotics of Poetry*. California: Indiana University Press.