

The Power of Rhetorical Figures as Foregrounding Elements in J. Steinbeck's The Pearl

Trisnowati Tanto, Maranatha Christian University, Indonesia

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Abstract

A writer's style of narrating is worth analysing, especially when this style can serve as a powerful tool to convey the writer's intention in writing the story as well as to attract the readers' attention in keeping on reading and appreciating the story more. In this case, a writer can use certain linguistic features to function as foregrounding elements in the story. This paper focuses on the use of rhetorical figures used by John Steinbeck in his novella, *The Pearl*, in the forms of figures of speech, such as metaphors, similes, and hyperboles, and also lexical repetition. Furthermore, this paper will see how these features become interesting foregrounding elements that can attract the readers' attention and how they are also used to support some literary elements of the novella. The method used in analyzing this is the descriptive method with the referential technique. The grand theory used is Stylistics, which is a study of style in language, or more specifically, the study of distinctive linguistic features. This analysis results in the findings that the figures of speech and the lexical repetition are proved to be powerful features in supporting the characterization, the setting of place, and the plot of the story.

Keywords: style, foregrounding, rhetorical figures, Stylistics

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Introduction

John Ernst Steinbeck III (February 27, 1902 – December 20, 1968) was one of the best-known and most widely read American writers of the 20th century. A winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962, he is best known for his novella *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), both of which examine the lives of the working class and migrant workers during the Great Depression.

Another novella, *The Pearl*, was published in 1947. It is the story of a pearl diver, Kino, and explores man's nature as well as greed and evil. In 1947, it was adapted into a film named *La perla*. In this novella Steinbeck shows how he uses a direct and truthful language in order to denounce what the obsession with wealth causes to his community as well as the identity of the person who experiences that wealth and fame.

It is believed that literature helps better understand human conditions in society. Being a written material, literature through the use of a given language emphasizes the main messages of the writer. Thus, it is logically comprehensible that the writer's style of language is equally important as the writer's message. *The Pearl* reveals the bad effect of wealth. The pearl which symbolizes prosperity is the cause of harsh disagreement between people. The pearl is the cause of wealthy people's selfishness and heartlessness toward poor people. Through the informative language that Steinbeck employs in *The Pearl*, Steinbeck takes the reader along to predict the misfortune that an extreme materialistic behavior is going to cause for Kino's family in *The Pearl*.

In this paper I would like to investigate how the language features used in *The Pearl* successfully create an artistic piece of writing as well as supporting the main messages of the writer. Yet, this research is not going to give a comprehensive picture of John Steinbeck's writing style in general as it is only based on one piece of writing. In the analysis, Stylistics will be applied as the major theory. Stylistic analysis is part of both linguistic and literary studies. It is practised as a way of interpreting the possible meanings in a literary work. It is also generally believed that the process of analysis will reveal the good qualities of the writing.

This literary stylistic analysis is significant so as to make us have a deeper understanding of how a writer achieves the literary and artistic effects through language. By reading this analysis, it is hoped that we appreciate not only the writer's brilliant ideas, but also how the ideas are expressed. It is also hoped that the analysis can help other readers to be able to respond to a literary work in a more appreciative way by observing its language.

There are two problems to analyze in this paper: (1) What are the stylistic categories which John Steinbeck uses in *The Pearl*? And (2) How do these stylistic categories reveal John Steinbeck's messages in *The Pearl*?

Theoretical Framework

Stylistics is a study of interpretation of texts from a linguistic perspective. It is a study of the use of elements of language style, such as figures of speech, in a particular context. Stylistics explores how readers interact with language of texts, which are mainly literary texts, in order to explain how readers understand and are affected by the texts when they read them. (Leech, 1994, p.38)

According to Geoffrey Leech, “Stylistics, simply defined as the (linguistic) study of style, is rarely undertaken for its own sake, simply as an exercise in describing what use is made of language” (p.13). Stylistics shows how authors choose to express themselves in their own particular way. In other words, it shows the relation between language and its artistic function. Literary stylistics has the goal of relating the critic’s concern of aesthetic appreciation with the linguist’s concern of linguistic description. Linguistic description can be used in analyzing the style of a literary text. (Leech, 1994, p. 39)

The categories are placed under four general headings: lexical categories, grammatical categories, figures of speech, and cohesion and context. (Leech, 1994, p. 75) Leech also stated that “there is no harm in mixing categories” (p. 75) since the purpose of the analysis is heuristic.

In this paper, the stylistic categories which will be focused on are the repetition of the conjunction “and” (grammatical category) and the use of figures of speech, namely the use of similes, metaphors, and hyperboles.

A figure of speech is “a change from the ordinary manner of expression, using words in other than their literal sense to enhance the way a thought is expressed.” (“Figures of Speech”) One type of figures of speech is a simile, which is “an explicit comparison between things, events, or actions which are fundamentally unlike.” It typically involves the words "like" or "as". For example, “His arguments withered like grapevines in the fall.” (“Figures of Speech”)

A metaphor is “an implied comparison between things, events, or actions which are fundamentally unlike.” (“Figures of Speech”) For example: The engine stumbles. (Leech 95)

A hyperbole is an exaggeration which is not meant to be taken literally. For example: The world ended the day my father died. (“Figures of Speech”)

As a stylistic analysis shows the relation between language and its artistic function, or in this case, more specifically, the literary effects, in this paper the linguistic features are related to the literary effects they significantly support, namely characterization, setting, and plot structure.

Characterization is how a writer reveals what a character is like and how the character changes throughout the story. Characters play a pivotal role in a novel. Characters can be fictional or based on real, historical entities. It can be human, supernatural, mythical, divine, animal or personifications of an abstraction. (“Elements of Literature”)

Setting is the time, place, physical details, and circumstances in which a situation occurs. Settings include the background, atmosphere or environment in which characters live and move, and usually include physical characteristics of the surroundings. Setting enables the reader to better envision how a story unfolds by relating necessary physical details of a piece of literature. (Endrigo)

Plot is the serial arrangement of incidents, ideas or events. In literature, the plot encompasses all the incidents and provides aesthetic pleasure. The story of the novel progresses through various plots and conflicts. Plots have five essential parts. These are: introduction of the story where the characters and setting are introduced; rising action, which refers to events that occur as result of central conflict; climax, which is the highest point of interest or suspense of story; falling action, which is the action when conflict ends; and denouement: when characters go back to their life before the conflict. (“Elements of Literature”)

Analysis

In this part, we would like to do a stylistic analysis by focusing on the use of foregrounding of some linguistic features in John Steinbeck’s novella, The Pearl. The linguistic features foregrounded in the novella are figures of speech – such as similes, metaphors, and hyperboles – and the use of the conjunction “and”. These foregrounded linguistic features are used to support the literary elements of the novella, namely characterization of the protagonist, Kino, the setting of place, and the plot structure.

Characterization of Kino

In revealing Kino’s character, the first linguistic feature that is foregrounded is the use of similes. There are ten data found in which Steinbeck uses similes when describing Kino. It is interesting to notice that many of the words that are used as a comparison to Kino’s character are related nature, as can be seen below:

- (1) ... he sprang like **an angry cat**, ...
- (2) He hissed at her like **a snake**.
- (3) Kino moved sluggishly, arms and legs stirred like those of **a crushed bug**,
...
- (4) Kino lay as rigid as **the tree limb**.
- (5) Kino edged like **a slow lizard** down the smooth rock shoulder.
- (6) ...he was as dangerous as **a rising storm**.

The objects used in the similes above, a cat, a snake, a bug, a tree limb, a lizard, and a storm, can be easily found in nature, especially in natural places like a forest, a mountain and a beach. This is cleverly chosen considering that The Pearl is set in that kind of surroundings. Thus, when reading the novella, the readers’ imagination will be drawn and focused on a place and all the objects generally found there. I believe the novelist deliberately does this to build the imagination and emotion of the readers as he expects, which is something extraordinary.

Another thing that can be gained from the use of the similes above is the fact that Kino is described as a man who is fierce, dangerous and full of smart tactics. In data

(2) Kino is compared to a snake, which is indeed a ferocious animal. In data (6) Kino is compared to a storm, which is associated with something strong and aggressive. More specifically, it is a rising storm, which means that this is something strong and aggressive and it still has the full energy to cause destructive things. In data (1) he is compared to a cat, which is actually not a wild animal, but here in this part, the cat is an angry one. Therefore, it is consistent with the description that Kino is an aggressive man.

He is further compared to a tree limb (data 4) and a lizard (data 5). In the context of the story, Kino is at that moment trying to make a move in his effort to attack his enemies. He knows when to attack the enemy and when to hide himself. Thus, it can be concluded that Kino is depicted as a man who instinctively is smart at building strategies or tactics when fighting.

Two other similes (data 7 and 8) describing Kino's physical action and emotion are related to objects that are commonly found in the surroundings of a person whose job is a pearl diver, namely wound springs and steel:

- (7) His legs were as tight as wound springs.
- (8) But Kino had become as cold and deadly as steel.

This also shows the novelist's excellent choice of words as this also supports the readers' imagination of the whole story.

Another type of figure of speech used by the novelist to describe Kino is metaphors. There are three metaphors found in the novella:

- (11) Kino was a terrible machine now.
- (12) His strength and his movement and his speed were a machine.
- (13) He was immune and terrible, and his song had become a battle cry.

Data (11) and (12) above compare Kino to a machine; what is more, it is a terrible machine. Therefore, although in data (12) it is illustrated that Kino's strength, movement, and speed are like a machine, which is in fact something good, in data (11) it is obvious that the machine that is meant here is a terrible machine. This fact is emphasized more in the metaphor in data (13), which states that Kino is immune and terrible and he produces a battle cry, which gives the connotation of something violent, mean and cruel.

There is another type of figure of speech used to describe Kino, namely a hyperbole, and there is only one hyperbole found:

- (14) "This pearl has become my soul," said Kino. "If I give it up I shall lose my soul. Go thou also with God."

Through the hyperbole in data (14) above, Kino treats the pearl as something very precious and it is even considered his own soul. This also implies how ambitious and greedy Kino has become when he owns the precious pearl. He does not care about anyone or anything anymore, as what matters the most for him now is the fact that he has the pearl.

Setting of Place

Steinbeck uses similes in describing the setting of place. There are three similes found, and the words used to be compared are also related to nature, as can be seen in the following:

- (9) The wind screamed over the Gulf and turned the water white, and the mangroves plunged like frightened cattle ...
- (10) The wind drove off the clouds and skimmed the sky clean and drifted the sand of the country like snow.
- (11) But the night was not silent; the little tree frogs that lived near the stream twittered like birds, ...

The objects used in the similes above – cattle, snow, and birds – are parts of nature. It is interesting to notice that the novelist uses objects from natural world to describe the condition of the setting of place. The readers will easily get the idea from the comparison of familiar objects to them.

The first two similes are used to describe the wind, as part of the setting of place, as being at rage and thus, harsh. It blows so hard that it makes the mangroves plunge like frightened cattle (data 9), which means they move in uncertain direction. Besides, the wind blows the sand into large piles like the snow (data 10). The harsh wind occurs in accordance with the event when something bad happens to Kino: he is attacked and his house is burnt down, to show that nature is also affected by what happens to the characters. Moreover, in the third simile the novelist compares the little tree frogs' twitter to the birds' to give an emphasis that the night is not at all silent.

Another simile is used to describe the setting of place, namely the town where Kino intends to sell his great pearl:

- (11) A town is a thing like a colonial animal.

The town mentioned is compared to an animal which has nervous system, a head and feet, so that the news of Kino having found the great pearl can soon reach everybody in the town. The animal is not just an ordinary animal; it is a colonial animal, to show that the different kinds of people in the town want to take control over Kino. Once they hear about the news, they want to get benefits from Kino's finding the valuable pearl. This kind of simile is very effective to describe the town as a dangerous place for Kino.

Another interesting type of foregrounding used in describing the setting of place is the dominant use of the conjunction "and" in connecting all the descriptive situation and condition. Steinbeck uses hyper descriptive and detailed way of telling the reader. One location in the story that is given the most highlight is the beach. In data (12), (13), (14) and (15) Steinbeck gives a vivid and detailed description the beach. In data (12), for example, Steinbeck is telling the reader about the colour of sand and the living things that exist on the beach, like shell, algae, crabs, lobsters, eel grass, sea horses, and poison fish. The way Steinbeck describes the beach and its living things is very special, especially with the use of numerous conjunction "and"s, as clear in the following data:

- (12) The beach was yellow sand, but at the water's edge a rubble of shell **and** algae took its place. Fiddler crabs bubbled **and** sputtered in their holes in the sand, **and** in the shallows little lobsters popped in **and** out of their tiny homes in the rubble **and** sand. The sea bottom was rich with crawling **and** swimming **and** growing things. The brown algae waved in the gentle currents **and** the green eel grass swayed **and** little sea horses clung to its stems. Spotted botete, the poison fish, lay on the bottom in the eel-grass beds, **and** the bright-coloured swimming crabs scampered over them.

The use of the many conjunction “and”s in data (12) above gives the impression that Steinbeck is giving the reader a filmic and detailed picture of the setting of place, in this case the beach. It is as if the reader were watching a film which shows the detailed situation, condition and activities in that certain place. In giving the description of the beach in this novella Steinbeck’s detailed and meticulous way of telling is very noticeable. There are four data found in which Steinbeck gives the detailed description of the beach. In data (12) above, he seems to focus on the living things that can be found in that particular beach.

In data (13, 14, 15), still he consistently uses the same style, namely the use of the many conjunction “and”s so as to give the same impression to the reader. In data (13) he focuses on the surroundings of the beach, especially when morning has just broken; in data (14) the details of how the wind blows; and in data (15) the condition or situation of the beach when the pearl is gone. These detailed descriptions can be seen below:

(13) The roosters were crowing **and** the dawn was not far off. Smoke of the first fires seeped out through the walls of the brush houses, **and** the first smell of cooking corncakes was in the air. Already the dawn birds were scampering in the bushes. The weak moon was losing its light **and** the clouds thickened **and** curdled to the southward. The wind blew freshly into the estuary, a nervous, restless wind with the smell of storm on its breath, **and** there was change **and** uneasiness in the air.

(14) The wind screamed over the Gulf **and** turned the water white, **and** the mangroves plunged like frightened cattle, **and** a fine sandy dust rose from the land **and** hung in a stifling cloud over the sea. The wind drove off the clouds **and** skimmed the sky clean **and** drifted the sand of the country like snow.

(15) **And** the pearl settled into the lovely green water **and** dropped towards the bottom. The waving branches of the algae called to it **and** beckoned to it. The lights on its surface were green **and** lovely. It settled down to the sand bottom among the fern-like plants. Above, the surface of the water was a green mirror. **And** the pearl lay on the floor of the sea. A crab scampering over the bottom raised a little cloud of sand, **and** when it settled the pearl was gone.

Again, the impression of some pieces of situation or condition of each place can be vividly imagined.

Plot Structure

In the five plot elements of the plot structure analysis, namely the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution/denouement, the most distinctive

linguistic feature is the use of the conjunction “and”. Steinbeck mostly uses long, complex sentences consisting of many clauses which are coordinated by the conjunction “and”. He uses this style consistently in each of the five elements of plot. In this paper, I would like to show how the conjunction “and” is used in the climax element.

Climax

The climax of the story is reached when the trackers follow Kino, and then Kino succeeds in killing the trackers, but it is followed by a tragic event when Kino hears a “cry of death” from the cave. In depicting these events which become the turning point of the flow of the story, Steinbeck again uses the same style of writing. He makes dominant use of the conjunction “and” in coordinating the many clauses containing the series of events that happen. This is clear in data (16 – 18) below:

1. The trackers follow Kino.

(16) When the trackers came near, Kino could see only their legs **and** only the legs of the horse from under the fallen branch. He saw the dark horny feet of the men **and** their ragged white clothes, **and** he heard the creak of leather of the saddle **and** the clink of spurs. The trackers stopped at the swept place **and** studied it, **and** the horseman stopped. The horse flung his head up against the bit **and** the bit-roller clicked under his tongue **and** the horse snorted. Then the dark trackers turned **and** studied the horse **and** watched his ears.

Kino was not breathing, but his back arched a little **and** the muscles of his arms **and** legs stood out with tension **and** a line of sweat formed on his upper lip. For a long moment the trackers bent over the road, **and** then they moved on slowly, studying the ground ahead of them, **and** the horseman moved after them. The trackers scuttled along, stopping, looking, **and** hurrying on. They would be back, Kino knew. They would be circling **and** searching, peeping, stopping, **and** they would come back sooner or later to his covered track.

He slid backward **and** did not bother to cover his tracks. He could not; too many little signs were there, too many broken twigs **and** scuffed places **and** displaced stones. **And** there was a panic in Kino now, a panic of flight. The trackers would find his trail, he knew it. There was no escape, except in flight. He edged away from the road **and** went quickly **and** silently to the hidden place where Juana was. She looked up at him in question.

The trackers were long in coming, as though they had trouble with the trail Kino had left. It was dusk when they came at last to the little pool. **And** all three were on foot now, for a horse could not climb the last steep slope. From above they were thin figures in the evening. The two trackers scurried about on the little beach, **and** they saw Kino's progress up the cliff before they drank. The man with the rifle sat down **and** rested himself, **and** the trackers squatted near him, **and** in the evening the points of their cigarettes glowed **and** receded. **And** then Kino could see that they were eating, **and** the soft murmur of their voices came to him.

2. Kino succeeds in killing the trackers.

(17) Kino was in mid-leap when the gun crashed **and** the barrel-flash made a picture on his eyes. The great knife swung **and** crunched hollowly. It bit through neck **and** deep into chest, **and** Kino was a terrible machine now. He grasped the rifle even as he wrenched free his knife. His strength **and** his movement **and** his speed were a machine. He whirled **and** struck the head of the seated man like a melon. The third man scabbled away like a crab, slipped into the pool, **and** then he began to climb frantically, to climb up the cliff where the water pencilled down. His hands **and** feet threshed in the tangle of the wild grapevine, **and** he whimpered **and** gibbered as he tried to get up. But Kino had become as cold **and** deadly as steel. Deliberately he threw the lever of the rifle, **and** then he raised the gun **and** aimed deliberately **and** fired. He saw his enemy tumble backward into the pool, **and** Kino strode to the water. In the moonlight he could see the frantic eyes, **and** Kino aimed **and** fired between the eyes.

3. Kino hears a “cry of death” from the cave.

(18) **And** then Kino stood uncertainly. Something was wrong, some signal was trying to get through to his brain. Tree frogs **and** cicadas were silent now. **And** then Kino's brain cleared from its red concentration **and** he knew the sound - the keening, moaning, rising hysterical cry from the little cave in the side of the stone mountain, the cry of death.

Data (16 – 18) above displays Steinbeck's mastery of stringing words into clauses containing very detailed situation. Even a small movement is described in detail so that reading Steinbeck's work is just like watching a film. For example, the tense situation when the trackers get nearer and nearer to Kino is described very meticulously in two paragraphs consisting of thirty-five fragments:

(1)the trackers came near – (2)Kino could see only their legs – (3)only the legs of the horse from under the fallen branch – (4)he saw the dark horny feet of the men – (5)their ragged white clothes – (6)he heard the creak of leather of the saddle – (7)he heard the clink of spurs – (8)the trackers stopped at the swept place – (9)they studied it – (10)the horseman stopped – (11)the horse flung his head up against the bit – (12)the bit-roller clicked under his tongue – (13)the horse snorted – (14)the dark trackers turned – (15)studied the horse – (16)watched his ears – (17)Kino was not breathing – (18)his back arched a little – (19)the muscles of his arms stood out with tension – (20)his legs stood out with tension – (21)a line of sweat formed on his upper lip – (22)for a long moment the trackers bent over the road – (23)they moved on slowly – (24)studying the ground ahead of them – (25)the horseman moved after them – (26)the trackers scuttled along – (27)stopping – (28)looking – (29)hurrying on – (30)Kino knew they would be back – (31)they would be circling – (32)searching – (33)peeping – (34)stopping – (35)they would come back sooner or later to his covered track

Conclusion

In this part I would like to draw some concluding points which are based on the data analysis above, which concerns the stylistic categories used in *The Pearl* and how these stylistic categories reveal John Steinbeck's messages in the novella.

The linguistic features in this novella that stand out are the figures of speech and the repetition of the conjunction "and". The use of the figures of speech shows that Steinbeck is very skillful in using words. What is more admirable is that the similes used are those connected with nature and the things that can be commonly found in the surroundings where the story is set.

The distinctive use of the conjunction "and" is worth analysing as this is something that is rarely found in other novelists' works. This is also Steinbeck's remarkable style of writing. In this novella, the use of the conjunction "and" is very vividly distinctive and meaningful as it supports a lot of messages that Steinbeck wants to convey to the reader.

What is more, Steinbeck is marvelous for he is able to foreground all the special linguistic features and use them to help the reader pay more attention to the important literary elements of the story. In this way, the reader can understand the novelist's messages better. Steinbeck is successful in using the beautiful language not only in telling the story but also in revealing his ideas to the reader. By doing a stylistic analysis of the novella, it is expected that reader can have a better appreciation of the story, both the use of the language and the literary value of the story.

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