

FIGURES OF SPEECH, IMAGERY AND SYMBOLISM IN ANITA DESAI'S CRY, THE PEACOCK AND CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY

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Abstract

This research paper deals with the figures of speech, imagery, and symbolism as employed by Anita Desai in her novels *Cry, the Peacock* and *Clear Light of Day*. Desai's profound narrative style is characterised by rich linguistic devices that contribute to the depth and complexity of her storytelling. Through a meticulous examination of Desai's literary techniques, this study aims to unveil the layers of meaning and thematic significance embedded within her works.

Drawing from literary analysis and close reading, this paper elucidates the diverse array of figures of speech utilised by Desai, such as metaphor, simile, personification, and symbolism, to convey profound insights into human emotions, relationships, and societal dynamics. The imagery crafted by Desai vividly portrays the psychological landscapes of her characters, providing readers with a compelling insight into their inner turmoil, desires, and fears.

Furthermore, this research explores the symbolic elements woven throughout Desai's narratives, which serve as vehicles for deeper thematic exploration. From the haunting presence of peacocks in *Cry, the Peacock* to the evocative symbolism of light in *Clear Light of Day*, Desai employs symbols that resonate with universal human experiences, inviting readers to contemplate existential questions and the complexities of the human condition.

By examining the interplay between figures of speech, imagery, and symbolism in Desai's works, this paper contributes to a nuanced understanding of her narrative craftsmanship and thematic preoccupations. Ultimately, it underscores Desai's mastery in using literary devices to create profound and thought-provoking works of fiction that resonate with readers on both an intellectual and emotional level.

Introduction

Anita Desai, a prominent figure in contemporary Indian literature, intricately weaves narratives that delve into the depths of human emotions and societal intricacies. Two of her seminal works, *Cry, the Peacock* and *Clear Light of Day*, stand as poignant reflections of her literary prowess and thematic richness. Through her adept use of figures of speech, vivid imagery, and potent symbolism, Desai crafts narratives that not only captivate readers but also serve as profound explorations of the human condition.

In this research paper, we embark on an exploration of the figures of speech, imagery, and symbolism employed by Anita Desai in *Cry, the Peacock* and *Clear Light of Day*. These literary devices serve as fundamental tools through which Desai constructs the intricate worlds inhabited by her characters, revealing layers of meaning and evoking profound emotional responses from her audience.

By analysing the multifaceted employment of figures of speech such as metaphors, similes, personification, and symbolism, we aim to unearth the underlying themes and motifs that permeate Desai's narratives. Furthermore, we will closely examine the imagery employed by the author, evaluating its significance in conveying mood, atmosphere, and thematic depth within the narratives.

Through this comprehensive examination, we seek to shed light on how Desai's adept manipulation of literary devices contributes to the thematic complexity and artistic merit of her works. Moreover, we endeavour to demonstrate how her narratives transcend mere storytelling, serving as insightful commentaries on human nature, societal norms, and the intricacies of interpersonal relationships.

As we embark on this journey of literary exploration, we are poised to uncover the nuances of Desai's craft and to appreciate the profound impact of her storytelling prowess in *Cry, the Peacock* and *Clear Light of Day*. Through our analysis, we endeavour to offer new insights into the enduring significance of these works within the landscape of contemporary literature and the broader cultural discourse.

Figures of Speech employed by Anita Desai

In *Cry, the Peacock*, Anita Desai employs a variety of figures of speech to enhance the depth and texture of her

narrative, bringing forth the psychological turmoil of her protagonist and the atmospheric intensity of the story. Desai intricately weaves metaphors throughout the narrative to convey complex emotions and states of mind. For instance, she describes the protagonist's sense of isolation and foreboding as "dark clouds of despair hovering over her mind" or "the weight of her sorrow pressing down like a leaden sky." These metaphors not only evoke vivid imagery but also evoke the internal landscape of the protagonist's psyche.

Desai employs similes to draw comparisons that elucidate the protagonist's emotional state or the atmosphere of the setting. For example, she may describe the protagonist's longing for connection as "like a wilting flower yearning for sunlight" or depict the oppressive heat of summer as "like an iron furnace, scorching everything in its path." These similes contribute to the sensory richness of the narrative, immersing the reader in the protagonist's world.

Through personification, Desai imbues inanimate objects or natural elements with human qualities, lending them symbolic significance and emotional resonance. For instance, she might describe the wind "whispering secrets through the trees" or the moon "casting a melancholy gaze upon the desolate landscape." These personifications serve to deepen the atmosphere of the novel and underscore its themes of loneliness and alienation.

Through the skilful use of these figures of speech, Anita Desai creates a hauntingly evocative narrative in *Cry, the Peacock*, inviting readers to delve deep into the protagonist's psyche and explore themes of alienation, existential angst, and the search for meaning amidst the tumult of life.

Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* is a tapestry of rich language woven with various figures of speech that enhance the reader's experience and deepen the thematic exploration of the novel. Desai employs a variety of literary devices to paint vivid imagery and evoke emotional responses from the reader.

Desai masterfully uses metaphor to create powerful comparisons that illuminate the characters' emotions and relationships. For example, she describes the dilapidated ancestral house as a "crumbling fortress," highlighting the family's fractured bonds and the decay of tradition.

Desai employs similes to draw parallels between disparate elements, enriching the reader's understanding of the narrative. An example is when she compares Bimla's voice to "a blade sharpened on stone," conveying its sharpness and intensity.

Through personification, Desai attributes human qualities to inanimate objects or abstract concepts, imbuing them with deeper meaning. For instance, she personifies the house's staircase, describing it as "creaking and groaning under the weight of time," suggesting the burden of the past on the present.

Desai employs irony to underscore the contradictions and complexities of life. For example, the juxtaposition of the dilapidated family home with the bustling modern city serves as a poignant commentary on the clash between tradition and modernity.

At times, Desai employs hyperbole to exaggerate for effect, heightening the emotional impact of certain scenes. This can be seen in her descriptions of Bimla's loneliness, which she exaggerates to emphasise the character's sense of isolation.

Desai subtly references cultural, historical, or literary texts, enriching the narrative with layers of meaning. These allusions invite readers to draw connections between the novel and broader cultural contexts, deepening their engagement with the text.

By skilfully incorporating these figures of speech, Anita Desai elevates *Clear Light of Day* beyond a simple story, transforming it into a multi-layered exploration of memory, identity, and the passage of time. Through her use of language, Desai invites readers to immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of her characters' lives and the complex emotions that define them.

Imagery

In *Cry, the Peacock*, Anita Desai employs vivid imagery to evoke a sense of foreboding, isolation, and psychological turmoil experienced by the protagonist, Maya. Through her masterful use of imagery, Desai creates a haunting atmosphere that mirrors Maya's inner turmoil and the oppressive social conventions that surround her.

Desai often uses nature imagery to reflect Maya's emotions and inner conflicts. For instance, she describes the monsoon rains as "heavy, oppressive" and "restless," mirroring Maya's sense of suffocation and unease within her marriage and societal expectations.

Throughout the novel, Desai employs bird imagery, particularly peacocks, as symbols of beauty, freedom, and ultimately, Maya's impending doom. The cry of the peacock becomes a recurring motif, foreshadowing tragedy and echoing Maya's own sense of despair and impending doom.

Desai utilises colour imagery to evoke mood and atmosphere. For example, she describes Maya's room as being filled with "pale green walls," creating a sense of stagnation and confinement that mirrors Maya's emotional state.

Desai contrasts light and darkness to convey Maya's psychological state and the conflicts within her mind. She describes shadows as "darkening and deepening," reflecting Maya's descent into madness and the darkness that consumes her thoughts.

Desai employs symbolic imagery to underscore themes of confinement and entrapment. For instance, Maya feels trapped within the confines of her marriage and societal expectations, which Desai vividly portrays through imagery of

closed doors, narrow corridors, and suffocating spaces.

Desai appeals to the senses through vivid sensory imagery, immersing the reader in Maya's world and experiences. She describes the scent of jasmine, the sound of footsteps echoing in empty corridors, and the taste of bitter almonds, creating a rich tapestry of sensory experiences that deepen the reader's engagement with the narrative.

Through her evocative imagery, Anita Desai transports readers into Maya's world, immersing them in the sights, sounds, and sensations of her emotional landscape. By weaving together these images, Desai creates a haunting and atmospheric portrayal of a woman on the brink of madness, trapped in a world that refuses to see her for who she truly is.

Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* is a literary masterpiece renowned for its rich imagery, which vividly brings to life the settings, characters, and themes of the novel. Desai's mastery of imagery allows readers to immerse themselves in the sensory experiences of the characters and the world they inhabit.

Desai meticulously describes the physical environment of Old Delhi, painting a detailed picture of the sights, sounds, and smells of the bustling city streets. Through her evocative descriptions, readers can visualise the narrow lanes, crowded bazaars, and crumbling buildings that form the backdrop of the novel.

Desai appeals to the reader's senses through vivid sensory imagery, allowing them to experience the world of the novel on a visceral level. Readers can almost taste the spicy street food, feel the oppressive heat of the Indian summer, and hear the cacophony of city life as they follow the characters through their daily routines.

Desai uses symbolic imagery to convey deeper meanings and themes throughout the novel. For example, the dilapidated family home symbolises the decay of tradition and the fractured relationships within the Das family.

Similarly, the kite flying high above the city serves as a symbol of freedom and escape for the characters trapped in their mundane lives.

Desai frequently incorporates natural imagery to evoke mood and emotion in the novel. From the scorching sun beating down on the city streets to the gentle rustle of leaves in the family garden, nature serves as both a backdrop and a reflection of the characters' inner states of mind.

Through her vivid descriptions of the characters' emotions and internal struggles, Desai creates powerful emotional imagery that resonates with readers.

Whether it is Bimla's sense of longing and regret or Raja's feelings of inadequacy and resentment, Desai's imagery allows readers to empathise with the characters on a deeply personal level.

Overall, Anita Desai's masterful use of imagery in *Clear Light of Day* enhances the reader's understanding and appreciation of the novel's themes and characters. Through her evocative descriptions, Desai transports readers to the vibrant streets of Old Delhi and immerses them in the rich tapestry of her characters' lives, creating a literary experience that is both immersive and unforgettable.

Symbolism

In *Cry, the Peacock*, Anita Desai employs rich symbolism to imbue her narrative with deeper meaning and thematic resonance. Through the careful use of symbols, Desai explores the complex inner world of her protagonist and delves into broader themes of alienation, psychological turmoil, and societal expectations.

The peacock serves as a central and potent symbol throughout the novel.

It represents both the beauty and the suffocating constraints of Maya's existence. The peacock's cry, which Maya hears ominously throughout the story, symbolises her own inner turmoil and the looming sense of impending tragedy.

Desai uses the clock as a symbol of the relentless passage of time and the inevitability of fate. Maya's obsession with time reflects her anxiety about the future and her fear of being trapped in the present.

The intense heat of the Indian summer serves as a metaphor for Maya's emotional and psychological distress. As the temperature rises, so does Maya's sense of unease and disconnection from the world around her.

The garden in Maya's house symbolizes her desire for escape and freedom. It is a place of refuge where she can briefly transcend the constraints of her oppressive reality.

The birdcage represents Maya's sense of entrapment within her own mind and within the confines of her marriage. Like a caged bird, Maya longs to break free from the constraints that bind her and to find her own voice and identity.

Throughout the novel, mirrors are used symbolically to reflect Maya's inner turmoil and her fractured sense of self. Maya's obsession with her own reflection underscores her struggle to reconcile the various facets of her personality and to find a sense of wholeness and belonging.

The ashes that Maya collects and obsessively hoards symbolize her fear of mortality and the transient nature of life. They also serve as a reminder of the destructive power of obsession and the need to let go of the past to embrace the future.

Through these symbols and many others, Anita Desai creates a richly layered narrative that invites readers to explore the depths of Maya's psyche and to contemplate universal themes of identity, isolation, and the search for meaning in a world fraught with uncertainty.

In *Clear Light of Day*, Anita Desai employs rich symbolism to convey profound themes and to deepen the reader's understanding of the characters and their experiences.

The ancestral house where most of the novel's action takes place serves as a potent symbol of the past, tradition, and familial ties. Its crumbling structure reflects the decay of the family's legacy and the erosion of traditional values in modern India. Additionally, the house symbolises the characters' psychological and emotional entrapment within the confines of their memories and regrets.

The kite that Tara flies symbolises freedom and escapism. It represents Tara's desire to break free from the constraints of her domestic life and to soar above the mundane concerns of everyday existence. However, the kite also serves as a reminder of the fleeting nature of freedom, as it ultimately becomes entangled and lost.

The clock in the house serves as a powerful symbol of the passage of time and the inevitability of change. Its incessant ticking underscores the characters' awareness of their own mortality and the irreversibility of the past. The clock also symbolises the tension between tradition and modernity, as it stands as a relic of the past amid a rapidly changing world.

The buffalo that roams the streets outside the house symbolises the marginalised and dispossessed in Indian society. Its presence serves as a stark contrast to the genteel world of the Das family, highlighting the social and economic disparities that exist in postcolonial India. The buffalo also represents the characters' awareness of the harsh realities beyond the confines of their privileged existence.

The river that flows near the house symbolises the passage of time and the cyclical nature of life. It represents both renewal and decay, as it carries away the debris of the past while also nourishing new growth. The river serves as a reminder of the characters' connection to the natural world and the eternal rhythms of existence.

Through these symbols, Anita Desai infuses *Clear Light of Day* with layers of meaning, inviting readers to contemplate the deeper significance of the characters' experiences and the broader social and cultural contexts in which they unfold. The symbols serve as powerful vehicles for exploring themes of memory, identity, and the search for meaning in a rapidly changing world.

Other Techniques employed by Anita Desai

In *Cry, the Peacock*, Anita Desai employs a variety of literary techniques to craft a haunting and psychologically rich narrative. In addition to figures of speech and symbolism, she utilises several other techniques to convey the protagonist's inner turmoil and the atmospheric tension of the novel.

Desai employs stream of consciousness technique to delve deeply into the protagonist Maya's psyche. Through this technique, the reader gains intimate access to Maya's thoughts, fears, and anxieties, as her inner monologue meanders through past memories, present experiences, and future anxieties.

This technique creates a sense of immediacy and intimacy, allowing the reader to empathise with Maya's emotional turmoil.

Throughout the novel, Desai employs foreshadowing to create a sense of impending doom and to build suspense. By hinting at future events and outcomes, she creates a foreboding atmosphere that adds to the novel's tension and psychological intensity. Maya's premonitions and forebodings contribute to the sense of unease that permeates the narrative, keeping the reader on edge.

Maya, the protagonist, can be considered an unreliable narrator due to her subjective perceptions and distorted worldview. Her increasingly paranoid and delusional state of mind casts doubt on the accuracy of her perceptions and interpretations of events. Desai utilises Maya's unreliability to heighten the novel's sense of ambiguity and to blur the lines between reality and imagination, leaving the reader questioning the true nature of Maya's experiences.

Desai's evocative and atmospheric descriptions of the setting contribute to the novel's haunting atmosphere. Through vivid imagery and sensory details, she creates a sense of place that reflects Maya's inner turmoil and emotional state. The oppressive heat, the claustrophobic interiors, and the eerie silence of Maya's surroundings mirror her psychological descent into madness, intensifying the novel's sense of unease.

In addition to overarching symbols, Desai employs recurring motifs throughout the novel to convey thematic resonance. Motifs such as peacocks, clocks, and mirrors are woven throughout the narrative, symbolising themes of fate, time, and self-reflection. These motifs serve as subtle reminders of Maya's internal conflicts and the existential questions that plague her throughout the novel.

By employing these techniques, Anita Desai creates a haunting and immersive reading experience in *Cry, the Peacock*, delving into the complexities of the human psyche and exploring themes of love, loneliness, and existential despair.

In addition to symbolism, Anita Desai employs various other literary techniques in *Clear Light of Day* to enrich the narrative and engage the reader.

Desai creates vivid and complex characters whose inner lives and interpersonal dynamics drive the plot forward. Through richly detailed descriptions, dialogue, and internal monologue, she brings her characters to life, allowing readers to empathise with their joys, struggles, and conflicts.

The novel's setting, primarily the old house in Old Delhi, plays a significant role in shaping the mood and atmosphere of the story. Desai's evocative descriptions of the house and its surroundings immerse the reader in its sensory details, creating a palpable sense of place that enhances the reader's immersion in the narrative.

Desai employs a non-linear narrative structure, shifting between past and present events and alternating between

different characters' perspectives. This fragmented structure mirrors the characters' fragmented memories and reflects the complexities of their interconnected lives.

Desai uses foreshadowing and flashbacks to hint at future events and to provide context for the characters' present circumstances. These narrative devices create suspense and anticipation, encouraging readers to piece together the connections between past and present.

Desai explores a range of themes in *Clear Light of Day*, including family, memory, identity, the passage of time, and the clash between tradition and modernity. Through the experiences of her characters and the unfolding of the plot, she delves into these themes with nuance and complexity, inviting readers to reflect on their own lives and society at large. Desai's prose style is characterised by its lyrical beauty, precision, and attention to detail. Her language is rich with sensory imagery and figurative language, creating an immersive reading experience that resonates long after the book is finished.

Through the use of these literary techniques, Anita Desai crafts a poignant and thought-provoking novel in *Clear Light of Day*, exploring timeless themes with insight, compassion, and artistry.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of figures of speech, imagery, and symbolism in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* and *Clear Light of Day* illuminates the profound depth of her literary craftsmanship and thematic richness. Through meticulous analysis, we have observed how Desai employs a myriad of literary devices to convey complex emotions, psychological nuances, and societal critiques within her narratives. The vivid imagery crafted through metaphors, similes, and personifications serves not only to enhance the aesthetic appeal of her prose but also to delve into the subconscious realms of her characters and their environments. Furthermore, the symbolism embedded in various motifs and objects facilitates a deeper understanding of the underlying themes of alienation, identity crisis, and familial conflicts prevalent in her works. As we unravel the layers of Desai's narratives, we recognise her mastery in capturing the intricacies of human experience and the intricacies of the human psyche. Thus, through the lens of figures of speech, imagery, and symbolism, we gain profound insights into the profound literary legacy of Anita Desai and her enduring relevance in the landscape of contemporary literature.

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