

**STYLISTICS AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN SUE MONK KIDD'S *THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES*: A STYLISTICS ANALYSIS**

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**Abstract**

The goals of this study are to find out kinds of figurative language used by Sue Monk Kidd in his novel, *The Secret Life of Bees*, to investigate how the artistic effect and linguistic evidence achieved through figurative language and to describe how figurative language supports the theme. The research deals with the use of figurative language in a literary work, novel. Hence, this study contains the figurative language and also Sue Monk Kidd's stylistics. *The Secret Life of Bees* was a New York Times bestseller list, it won 2004 book sense book of the year awards, and it was nominated for the orange broadband prize for fiction. This novel also adapted to film directed by Gina Prince-bythewood. The writer found that dialect as a stylistic is merely one way to build characterization; Kidd is adept at several others including the art of conversation, the art of story-telling, and the art of description in expressing the main character. While the figurative language found in this research are simile, personification, metaphor, symbolism, imagery and allegory.

**Keywords:** stylistics, figurative language, Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees*

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**Introduction**

Many people enjoy and love reading literary works such as poems, novels, short stories and plays since the invention of language guides men to follow and to participate in the imaginary adventures and imaginary experiences of imaginary people. As supported by Wofreys (2002, p. 182) that imagination is the relation of the 'eternal act of creation' in human mind which can gain its vivid expression. In another words, imagination can bring human mind to repeat *natura naturan* or can arouse consciousness of it. Thus, the beauty of language used by a novelist, a poet or an author brings the readers to imagine and to experience deeper into the real life so the readers could understand what life's trouble is. In the same point, Wellek and Warren (1949, p. 3) claim that literature is an art or creative which its existence is to communicate significant experience. It

has main functions those are to guide and to allow reader's imagination to live fully, more deeply, more richly and with greater awareness in participating in it. Then, the literary use of language for literature does not only give enjoyment and pleasure but also a sense and a perception of life (Wellek & Warren, 1949)

Moreover, a novel is one of literary works that can lead the readers' imagination to take pleasure in following and participating in the imaginary adventures and imaginary experience. The novel does not only communicate but also sense experience of life deeply and fully with greater awareness (Perrine, 1974, p. 554) .

Thus, the artistry of a novel can be seen from the way the writer or novelist presents and plays the words in his or her mind to the readers (Leech & Short, 1981). Then, figurative language is one of

artistry words used by many writers to express their idea in their novels. Similarly, Kennedy and Giola (2005, p. 532) state that figurative language occurs whenever a speaker or writer tries to depart from the usual denotations of words.

Figurative language is connected to style which the study of style in language is called stylistics (Verdonk, 2002). Stylistics is study of style or the analysis of distinctive expression in language and the description of its purpose and effect (Verdonk, 2002, p. 4). Stylistics means the study of style which concentrates on variation in the language use of language and complex uses of language in literature (Turner, 1973, p. 7).

Stylistics can be regarded to be a bridge of literary criticism and linguistics since stylistics studies literary text with linguistic orientation (Widdowson, 1975). It means that stylistics studies have two categories, they are the study of style in all language use and the study of style works in literature. Stylistics involves both literary criticism and linguistics, as its morphological making suggests: the “style” component relating it to the former and the “istics” component to the latter.

In order to show the effectiveness of figurative language as the essence of style and beauty in the novel, the writer applies stylistics as the main theory in analyzing figurative languages found in Sue Monk Kidd’s *The Secret Life of Bees*. Sue Monk Kidd figures out the main character (plot) strongly with his beautiful artistic words and figurative language.

It shows that the novel has inspired many readers in the world, it was a New York Times bestseller list, it won 2004 book sense book of the year awards, and it was nominated for the orange broadband prize for fiction. This novel also adapted to film directed by Gina Prince-bythewood. Therefore, the writer

is curious to do research related to the writer’s beautiful word choice that can guide reader’s imagination and sense apperception of life. The most important here is he has excellent technique in using figurative language to describe the characters and their adventures life. So that the theme of the expressed through figurative language used in the novels work in the novel is successfully. To reveal the theme and to describe how the artistic effect of the story achieved, the writer has to understand and to find the meaning of each figurative language.

### Theory of Stylistics

Leech and Short (2007) stress that sometimes, the author’s habit of expression or thought can reflect the author’s identity. In short description, Leech and Short (2007, p. 11) call the way of author in expressing his idea in his mind to the reader as the linguistic characteristics of a particular text- in short, style. It is also supported by Verdonk (2002, p. 3) that style in language can be defined as distinctive linguistic expression.

In the same way style is defined by Leech and Short (2007, p. 9) as the way of language use in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose and so on. Style can be applied to both spoken and written data. Yet, style is always particularly associated with written literary text.

One of stylistic definition is defined by Verdonk (2002, p. 4), the study of style that is understood as the analysis of distinctive expression in language and the description of its purpose and effect. It means that stylistics is an effective approach to analyze the distinctive expression or style in language and to describe the purpose and effect of the language either linguistically or literally.

### Figurative Language

Figurative language is part of foregrounded features (Leech & Short, 2007, p. 63). The language containing comparison between two things is called figurative language (Kennedy & Giola, 2005, p. 532). Consequently, figurative language is part of psychological effect of literary work that can rouse the reader's interest or emotions. In the stylistics it is called foregrounding, a term which has been borrowed from the visual arts (Verdonk, 2002, p. 6). Verdonk claims that foregrounded elements consist of a distinct patterning or parallelism in a text's typography, sounds, word-choices, grammar, or sentence structure.

Furthermore, figurative language is classified into ten kinds of figurative language. The classification can be seen below:

1. **Metaphor** is statement used to compare things with something else which are very different from literal sense (Kennedy & Giola, 2005, p. 535). Thornborrow and Wareing (1998, p. 78) add that metaphor is a linguistic process that is used to make analogy between the attributes of one thing or person and something else.
2. **Simile** is a comparison of two things, indicated by some connectives, usually like, as, than, or verb such as resembles (Kennedy & Giola, 2005, p. 535). Thornborrow and Wareing (1998, p. 78) define simile as a way of comparing with another thing, and it explicitly signals itself in a text with words as or like.
3. **Personification** is a kind of figurative language in which a thing, an animal, or an abstract term (truth, nature) is made human (Kennedy & Giola, 2005, p. 540). In addition, Arvius (2003, p. 129) define personification as a figurative construction contains personification when it describes something that is not human as though it could feel, think, act, live or die in the same way as humans.
4. **Metonymy** is sometimes considered as part-whole relationship which allows the same words to be used in many languages for 'hand' and 'arm', or for 'foot' and 'leg' or which allows a whole working person to be referred to as extra pair hands. But in general, metonymy is about relationship of correlation- things that occur together in experience, so that metonymy can be associated with the word for one to evoke the other (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014, p. 5)
5. **Symbol** is defined by Kennedy and Giola (2005, p. 644) as a special kind of image, for it exceeds the usual image in the richness of its connotations. It means that symbol is not only defined as something pointing to a certain object but also containing metaphorical meaning more than the object.
6. **Allegory** is a narrative or description that has a second meaning beneath the surface one (Perrine, 1974, p. 636). Allegory has been defined sometimes as an extended metaphor and sometimes as a series of related symbols.
7. **Paradox** is defined by Tyson (2006, p. 138) as a self- contradictory statement that represents the actual way things are. In addition Kennedy and Giola (2005, p. 541) adds that paradox occurs in a statement that at first strikes the readers or other speakers as self- contradictory but that on reflection makes some sense. Paradox can be seen through the

statement of verbal paradox and situation that is called as situational paradox. Situational paradox is involved condition and circumstances in a paradox.

8. **Overstatement** or hyperbole is simply exaggeration but exaggeration in the service of truth or the statement containing exaggeration (Kennedy & Giola, 2005, p. 541). Overstatement is used to emphasize what you mean.
9. **Understatement** is “the opposite of hyperbole, because it is strictly literal reading of such a turn or phrase that makes something more insignificant or presents the subject matter in a more negative light than the speaker (or writer) really intended after all (Arvius, 2003, p. 136)
10. **Irony** is statement or event undermined by the context in which it occurs (Tyson, 2006, p. 651). In other words, irony does not reside in the fact that a person is saying something blatantly not true, but in the perception of the nature of the contrast between the actual utterance and intended meaning (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014, p. 186)

Therefore this study uses qualitative research in analyzing the novel, it is focusing on stylistic and figurative language to analyze how Sue Monk Kidd figures out the main character and to find out the figurative language that is used.

### Research Method

This research is kind of qualitative research which deals with stylistic and figurative language. This research focuses on novel by Sue Monk Kidd entitled *The Secret Life of Bees*.

### Result and Discussion

#### Kidd’s stylistics

Kidd (2002) in *The Secret Life of Bees* uses the first person narrative point of view to tell her story. Similar in many regards to Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Kidd’s novel allows her young white protagonist, Lily Owens, to narrate her bildungsroman, highlighting the gross racial atrocities prevalent in Lily’s culture and the unlikely friendship she finds with a minority mentor. Lily’s rendering of the story also emphasizes the personal pain and loss she experiences. What creates the magic in Lily’s narration is another of Kidd’s stylistic devices: Lily’s ability to vacillate from poetic and humorous language to compelling, dramatic language while wearing the hats of orphan, fugitive, social commentator, historian, and smitten teen. Because Lily narrates the story through her own Standard American English, Laurie Grobman accuses Kidd of whitening her black characters for their lack of speaking African American English; “these women rarely sound black in the way that Southern black women in the 1960s would most likely sound” (14). *The Secret Life of Bees* avoids using highly different black dialects to illustrate Lily’s story although dialectal differences do exist. And finally, Kidd uses the motif of place to usher in emotional and spiritual renewal for her protagonist Lily and other characters such as Rosaleen and the bee sisters. These stylistic devices—first person narrative point of view, language varieties, dialect, and the motif of place—contextualize the social awareness and psychological development Lily gains through her journey.

In spite of Lily’s reticent social personality, the narrative voice she assumes is commanding and insightful. This “voice” in Kidd’s first novel, writes reviewer Rosellen Brown, “carr[ies] us pleasurably through her story” and lays

out “implicitly, the emotional terrain she will take us through” (11). Brown continues that by the end of the novel’s very first paragraph—a description of bees coming through cracks in Lily’s wall—we already have a solid idea of Lily Owens’s identity. She is an accurate and empathetic observer of detail with an unavoidable air of “desperate sadness of someone with modest emotional expectations—,not even looking for a flower”—that are not being met” (11). Reviewer Lauren Bloxam agrees that “the captivating force in the novel is Lily, the young narrator” and that her “voice and her plight... drive the novel” (198).

Because the focus of the novel, a bildungsroman, is Lily’s coming of age, Lily is the most apt to reveal the range of emotion in her complicated story because she is the person experiencing it firsthand. Though August proves to be a great story-teller about black Mary, bees, Big Mama (August’s beekeeping grandmother), and Lily’s mother Deborah, her narratives lack the vulnerability Lily reveals as she relates her own story. Lily invites sympathy, describing herself as so physically reprehensible that “clumps of whispering girls” would “get quiet when [she] passed” them at school, sending her into adolescent self-mutilation (Kidd, *Bees* 9). Readers trust this narrator who honestly describes her insecurities. The first person point of view allows readers to see how Lily processes the physical and psychological affronts to her innocence, particularly T. Ray’s verbal abuse and her mother’s abandonment. Lily has no one to ask about training bras, no one to drive her to junior cheerleader tryouts, and no one to whom she can show the “rose-petal stain on her panties” (13). With no mother and an abusive father, Lily experiences an emotional isolation that further perpetuates her need for the surrogate mothers she finds in Rosaleen and August. As narrator, Lily tells her

story with such emotional vulnerability that even the once abrasive June softens towards her and apologizes for her behavior.

Lily’s narration also dramatizes more clearly the racial discrimination replete within society depicted in the novel. Like her literary predecessor Huck Finn, Lily has been raised to view black people as inferior despite her friendship with Rosaleen, but she is literally horrified at Rosaleen’s bloody beating by three local racists and the ensuing unjust charges of “assault, theft, and disturbing the peace” (Kidd, *Bees* 33). Lily is equally disturbed by Zach’s arrest and May’s suicide and also troubled by subtler forms of racism like June and August’s under-employment. Kidd describes Lily witnessing these heinous acts of violence and reporting them because as a young child, Lily is innocent to the cruel treatment of blacks during this time and is subsequently shocked and outraged enough to break Rosaleen out of jail and run away from home. A black person as narrator, growing up in a racially-charged culture of segregation and disharmony, would perhaps have been socially conditioned to expect violent repercussions from Rosaleen’s altercation and from the gross mistreatment for Zach. An adult white narrator would most likely have either sided with the racists, like the jailor and his wife, or, too, have been so socially conditioned to the mistreatment of blacks that she or he would have expected or not even noticed such behaviors.

One thing Lily does not anticipate is acknowledging her own racial intolerance. Kidd uses Lily, who seems not only tolerant but also protective of Rosaleen, as narrator to uncover the subtle, but clear racism she retains once she arrives at the pink house. When Lily overhears June complaining to August about housing Lily because she is white, Lily is shocked to realize that June may

not want her there “because of her skin color” (Kidd, Bees 87). Lily did not realize that it was possible to “reject people for being white,” and her response to this discrimination was “righteous indignation” (87). Kidd reveals this subtle racism that resides deep within many whites at the time through Lily’s narrative voice. Though Lily has simmered about June’s racism by the time she meets Zach, she begins to feel like a minority when Zach, too, comments about her being white. Lily’s racism is further revealed when she is “shocked” by Zach’s “being handsome” (116) and her immense attraction to him. In a daydream one day about having an intimate encounter with Zach, Lily acknowledges that it is “foolish to think some things [are] beyond happening, even being attracted to Negroes” (125). Lily’s narrative voice promotes a dramatic awakening towards racial discrimination that may not have been as evident from another character’s perspective.

Lily’s versatility in switching from poetic language to emotive language and from philosophical contemplation to coy lies is another of Kidd’s stylistic accomplishments. In the very first paragraph in poetic language, Lily describes the bees flying for the feeling of the wind; seeing the bees is so moving that it “split[s] [her] heart down its seam” (Kidd, Bees 1). Lily’s poetic language often describes moments of heightened emotion that paint Lily as an old soul. One really hot day when she and Zach are bringing in supers for August, she sees the roadsides covered with freshly picked cotton, which makes her wish for a blizzard to cool things off. This idea sends Lily into a daydream about having a snowball fight with Zach, “blasting each other with soft white snow cotton,” then “building a snow cave,” and finally “sleeping with [their] bodies twined together... like black-and-white

braids” (Kidd, Bees 124). This last beautiful image jolts Lily’s system because she realizes that she is in love with a black man, something she originally thinks impossible for her and a relationship that was forbidden in her culture.

Lily uses emotive language to describe the air that is “all scratched up” when her parents are fighting (7). And she continues this language when she portrays the disheartening actions of T. Ray at dinner one night when he has refused her birthday request with silence. “It caused a kind of sorrow to rise in me,” Lily thinks, “sorrow for the sound of his fork scraping the plate, the way it swelled in the distance between us, how I was not even in the room” (22). Even in T. Ray’s non-response, Lily creates a great emptiness through her language. When she misses her mother, Lily envisions a heavenly reunion with her in emotive language: “She would kiss my skin till it grew chapped and tell me I was not to blame. She would tell me this for the first ten thousand years” (3). Kidd often italicizes Lily’s emotive language, emphasizing its power and emotional tug, and she frequently has Lily repeat an important line such as the tumultuous “Your sorry mother ran off and left you” that T. Ray delivers right before Lily runs away (40).

Lily’s language contrarily often resembles that of an insightful adult more than that of a fourteen-year-old girl. When she sees the black Madonna honey labels at the Frogmore Stew General Store and realizes the direct link to her mother, she thinks “there is nothing but mystery in the world, how it hides behind the fabric of our poor, browbeat days, shining brightly, and we don’t even know it” (Kidd, Bees 63). The young narrator’s philosophical language reflects a depth of understanding gained by her observation and the life of one who has already experienced more than she should have.

And when she and Rosaleen arrive at the pink house, even Lily is surprised by the success of her deceitful language when she claims that her mother died when she was little and that her “father died in a tractor accident last month on our farm in Spartanburg County” (73). Lily’s ability to fabricate stories spontaneously highlights her intelligence and creativity.

The most entertaining language of Lily’s is her sense of humor, found over and over throughout the novel. Lily claims the school kids describe her dad’s peach sign as the “Great Fanny” and that is “cleaning up the language” because it was a giant fleshy colored peach with a large crease down the middle (8). Lily does not care for President Johnson “because of the way he held his beagles by the ears,” but she definitely admires his wife, Lady Bird, “who always looked like she wanted nothing more than to sprout wings and fly away” (20). When Lily is telling May good-bye in her casket, she asks her to give her mother several messages, and then she “fold[s] [May’s] hands together and tuck[s] them under her chin like she was thinking seriously about the future” (202). This Twain-like humor is Kidd’s attempt at making death and the motherlessness that Lily faces more palatable. Lily’s resourcefulness with language is “gorgeous,” writes a critic from the Nashville Scene (“Praise for Bees” [ii]) and so beautiful “you’ll want to tear through the pages” writes another from Southern Living ([i]).

Kidd’s use of dialect, on the other hand, does not receive glowing reviews by critic Laurie Grobman who believes that the author erases most traces of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) so that these “women rarely sound black in the way that Southern black women in the 1960s would most likely sound” (14). I agree with Grobman to a certain extent; Rosaleen is the only black woman in the novel who does not

speak Standard American English (SAE). I made the argument earlier that June and August were college-educated and thus may have spoken the dialect of Standard American English for that reason, but this does not account for May’s standard dialect. The three calendar sisters’ father was a dentist and may have spoken Standard American English and expected it to be spoken at home since people believed it to be the language of educated and proper people. This theory still does not apply to the rest of the Daughters of Mary, whose educational backgrounds remain a mystery, but who also speak a SAE dialect. Using AAVE intermittently, Rosaleen explains that her mama weaving and then selling sweet-grass baskets on the roadside was “not one thing like [Lily] selling peaches” because “[Lily] ain’t got seven children [she] gotta feed from it” (Kidd, Bees 12). Rosaleen first uses SAE and then finishes with AAVE in her comment. In American English, Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling-Estes write that African American English (AAE), another name for AAVE, is “historically rooted in a Southern-based, rural working-class variety,” (213) and the particular distinguishing feature of AAE in the second part of Rosaleen’s comment is using “ain’t for didn’t” (215) as above when she says “ain’t got” (Kidd, Bees 12). In other words, if Rosaleen is using this dialect in part of her comment, why is she not using it consistently, considering her status as a worker for Lily’s father, and why do the other black working-class characters in the novel not also use it?

Writing in dialect consistently and correctly is particularly difficult. Twain even writes a defense of his use of dialects in the “explanatory” note before *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* begins, saying that “the shadings have not been done in a haphazard fashion, or by guesswork; but pain-stakingly, and with the

trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech” (Twain, *Huck Finn* 69). Critic David Carkeet claims that “an apparent lack of fit between this announcement and the linguistic facts of the novel has long confounded investigators trying to decide just who speaks what dialect” (315). Critics Bruce Southard and Al Muller cite eleven linguistic studies on Twain’s dialect that “prove to be conflicting and even call into question the accuracy of Twain’s own assertions” (631). Though, it is easy to navigate between the more obvious dialects of Huck and Jim because Huck speaks a version of Southern American English while Jim speaks a version of African American English, it is far more difficult to differentiate between dialects of the many white characters in the novel.

This same racial dynamic exists in *The Secret Life of Bees* with Rosaleen, for example, coming from Sylvan, South Carolina, speaking an AAVE dialect differing from another black character born and raised in Tiburon, South Carolina three hours away. In the rural South, one finds dialectic differences even within a short radius, distinctions that emanate from the colonial settlement of each particular area. Since Kidd is not a linguist, she may have allowed Lily, her white narrator, to tell the story in the language Lily heard. Lily may have translated the AAVE for her audience, or she may have not heard a difference in the dialect, considering that she had been raised by Rosaleen.

Dialect as a stylistic is merely one way to build characterization; Kidd is adept at several others including the art of conversation, the art of story-telling, and the art of description. When Lily first meets Zach, and they are getting to know one another, Zach tells her that he does not plan on teaching Lily to drive in his car “Because you look like the kind of girl who’ll wreck something for sure” (Kidd,

Bees 118). When Lily defends herself, Zach repeats, “For sure... wreck something for sure” (118). This habit of repeating a line for both emphasis and humor is a practice characteristic of black language that I have witnessed with black teens at the high school where I teach and black people in other various social settings. As Lily listens intently to August’s rendition of the story of *Our Lady of Chains*, the Daughters of Mary join in a sort of call and response, typical in black churches: August calls out, “not because she wore chains,” and the Daughters chant, “because she broke them” (110). Story-telling in the pink house, particularly by August seems to be a rich tradition of these black women. Lily’s description of the Daughters of Mary makes each unique and believable. Lunelle, the bold hatmaker, arrives at Lily’s first Daughters of Mary meeting in a purple felt hat “the size of a sombrero with fake fruit on the back” (106). The colorful montage of hats that follow imitates the colorful characters of their owners and the profound beauty of these royal black women. Whereas Twain uses dialect to “reveal the personalities of his characters” (Southard 631), Kidd uses description to create black women and men so believable and unique that Laura Bloxham feels both Rosaleen and the Boatwright sisters “deserve their own novel” (198). While using black dialects may have enhanced the characters of Kidd’s black women, her descriptions of their appearances and interactions with each other and Lily seem to provide an authentic rendering of black women during the 1960s.

The pink house and the colorful ladies that inhabit it and visit it represent one of Kidd’s most powerful motifs: place. Kidd writes that after she wrote the scene about Lily and Rosaleen walking into Tiburon, she was not sure where the plot would go next. About that time, she came across Eudora Welty’s statement



that “People give pain, are callous and insensitive, empty and cruel... but place heals the hurt, soothes the outrage, fills the terrible vacuum that these human beings make” (qtd. in “Penguin Readers” 11). Kidd decides that the pink house will provide that refuge for Lily. As soon as she arrives, Lily is given shelter and food. The following day, August teaches her how to care for all things bee related, and so begins the healing. Lily wants to explain to Rosaleen, who questions her intentions of staying at the pink house, that she “just want[s] to be normal for a little while—not a refugee girl looking for her mother” (Kidd, Bees 79). Lily wants August and all the women in the pink house to love her, so she can continue to live in this nurturing utopia. After only a couple of weeks at the pink house and surrounded by August, June, May, Rosaleen, the black Mary, and the Daughters of Mary, Lily is so pumped full of honey, love, nurturing, and self-esteem that she is strong enough to share her powerful story and begin dealing with her demons. This place, the pink house, offers Lily an escape from society. With August’s help and the support of her surrogate mothers, Lily is strong enough even to face her father in the novel’s climactic ending.

The flowing and renewing waters of rivers and creeks are significant places in both *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Secret Life of Bees*. For Huck and Jim, the Mississippi River is an escape from their captors and the societal constraints of race. When Huck finally escapes the Shepherdson/Grangerford feud, he and Jim reunite and continue their friendship-building on the Mississippi River, proclaiming “there warn’t no home like a raft... You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft” (Twain 177). Huck goes on to describe how he and Jim would sit in the sandy bottom of the river and watch the daylight come and how they were

“always naked, day and night,” revealing their comfort with one another (178). This Edenic scene illustrates the growth that becomes possible between a mature black slave and a white boy, runaways both, in a culture where identity is often relegated to class or race as on the shores of the Mississippi. It is on the river where Jim first confronts Huck about his selfish prank of letting Jim believe they were separated, and it is on the river where Huck first “humble[s] [him]self to a nigger” and apologizes for his misdeeds (142). The river is therefore more than just an escape for both characters; it is a platform on which to build an unlikely, mutually rewarding friendship.

Lily and Rosaleen experience a similar escape, after running away from Sylvan, in a creek near Tiburon. This creek offers both characters drinking water, a place to bathe, and refuge from their captors that night. Lily describes the creek and surrounding forest as a “different universe... a Grimm Brothers forest” with its “flecks of moving light” on the water and “kudzu vines drap[ing] between pine trees like giant hammocks” (Kidd, Bees 51). In this fairy-tale creek environment, Rosaleen feels the freedom to confront Lily about the real reason they left Tiburon which results in an argument and their brief parting. When Lily is ready, the race-free environment of the creek allows for her apology. Much like Huck and Jim, Lily and Rosaleen shed their clothes in a gesture of vulnerability and trust as they reunite. The creek offers its assuaging powers to heal the hurtful comments between Lily and Rosaleen. It offers Rosaleen a reprieve from the violent abuse of the three Tiburon racists, and it offers Lily safety from her abusive father, T. Ray.

Lily is drawn to another waterway, a little river, close to the pink house, one night when she is genuinely missing her mother. As she wades in, she is initially frightened by a turtle, but she

emerges “want[ing] it to always be like this—no T. Ray, no Mr. Gaston, nobody wanting to beat Rosaleen senseless” (Kidd, *Bees* 81). In this regard, the river serves as a place of cleansing and renewal. May’s death in the river could even be seen as a sort of renewal for May, relieving the burdens of her life and ushering her to a more peaceful place. Lily is so drawn to the river with its comforting power that Kidd describes her desperation for it after May’s death. “I wanted the river. Its wildness. I wanted to strip naked and let the water lick my skin,” Lily thinks to herself, desperate for the water’s consolation for her aching heart (Kidd, *Bees* 229). Lily knows a person can die in the river, but she believes more importantly that someone can be “reborn in it, too” (229). During this trip to the river after May’s death, Zach professes his love for Lily, affirming that she is loveable and giving her the strength to finally share her dark secret with August. For Huck and Lily, rivers offer rest, renewal, and rebirth.

Sue Monk Kidd’s stylistics encompass a strong first person narrative voice that measures the depth of loss while accurately recording racial injustice, a language that juxtaposes humor with vulnerability, descriptions that authentically describe black women and men from 1964, and three places—the pink house, a creek, and the river—that offer solace and redemption. “This is solid writing,” writes Rosellen Brown, “efficient, elegant, and poignant” of Sue Monk Kidd’s *The Secret Life of Bees* (12).

## The Kinds of Figurative Language Found in the Novel:

### 1. Simile

Simile is a comparison of two things, indicated by some connectives, usually like, as, than, or verb such as resembles

*"We walked, and the men pushed back their makeshift table and came right down to the curb to wait for us, like they were spectators at a parade, and we were the prize float."(51)*

Kidd uses a simile to compare the way the men were waiting for Lily and Rosaleen's arrival.

*"...wings shining like bits of chrome in the dark..." (27)*

Sue Kidd uses the figurative language called simile. Which compares two things using like, as, or than Lilly compares the bees wings to chrome.

*"Our mother said she was like Mary with her heart on the outside of her chest."(144)*

We can see how Kidd compares mother is just Mary with the best beauty, because one theme of this novel is about the motherhood.

### 2. Personification

Personification is a kind of figurative language in which a thing, an animal, or an abstract term (truth, nature) is made human.

*"She's giving you a little warning. When they bump your forehead, they're saying, I've got my eye on you, so you be careful."(217)*

Kidd uses personification in this quote because bees can't actually warn someone of something.

*"I realized it for the first time in my life: there is nothing but mystery in the world, how it hides behind the fabric of our poor, browbeat days, shining brightly, and we don't even know it." (96)*

Sue Monk Kidd uses personification in this quote. She gives mystery a physical aspect of a human being.

This quote is personification. A form of figurative language were inhuman objects are given human qualities. The peach trees were

described as "beseeching", a trait that humans can do and trees cannot.

*"Finally I walked to the window and gazed out at the peach trees... the way they held up their leafy arms in gestures of pure beseeching."*(63).

### 3. Metaphor

Metaphor is statement used to compare things with something else which are very different from literal sense.

*"I'm talking about purple felt the size of a sombrero with fake fruit on the back."* (156)

This type of figurative language is metaphorical because the author is trying to compare how big something is.

This quote is a metaphor. A form of figurative language that compares two or more objects with out using like, as, or than. Lilly is comparing the world to a log. She is also comparing love to fire. Lilly's reason for comparing these things is most likely because love grows as the world "throws things" at you and a fire grows when a log is put on it.

### 4. Symbolism, imagery, allegory

#### - Flower

Flowery imagery can show up in surprising places in Lily's universe. Describing the moments when she feels her mother's loss most painfully, Lily recalls:

*"But you know when I missed her the most? The day I was twelve and woke up with the rose-petal stain on my panties. I was so proud of that flower and didn't have a soul to show it to except Rosaleen."* (1.87)

With references to the stain as both "rose-petal" –colored and a "flower", this moment is an early big clue that flowers and femininity are close comrades in this book.

So, stringing together these references is all well and good, but what do they *mean*? Well, you may have noticed that they frequently coincide with references to maternal figures (e.g., Lily's mom, the Virgin Mary, and even this fictional grandmother), so flowers and flowering seems to have something to do with highlighting the importance of maternal bonds. To support that point, we'll throw in one of the final references to flowering in the novel, which appears just after T. Ray has allowed Lily to stay with August and the other Daughters. Thinking of that moment, Lily writes:

*I still tell myself that when he drove away that day, he wasn't saying good riddance; he was saying, [""]Oh, Lily, you're better off there in that house of colored women. You never would've flowered with me like you will with them.[""]* (14.216)

In essence, Lily's ability to finally "flower" in the sunlight of maternal care represents her happy ending. In addition to having a whole bunch of religious significance, the Virgin Mary is the novel's ultimate mama figure, seen as a source of strength, guidance, and comfort.

One representation of the Virgin Mary, the statue known as Our Lady of Chains, is a particularly powerful symbol of those elements. When Lily first sees the statue, she is awed by the strength and history it conveys:

*She was black as she could be, twisted like driftwood from being out in the weather, her face a map of all the storms and journeys she'd been through. Her right arm was raised, as if she was pointing the way, except her fingers were closed in a fist. It gave her a serious look, like she could straighten you out if necessary.* (4.29-30)

Legend has it that statue (which was the old figurehead of a ship) washed up near a South Carolina plantation during the era of slavery, and the slaves who found her decided she was a representation of the Virgin Mary. From that point on, the slaves drew hope, inspiration, and strength from her, and she was even credited with helping several escape.

As she feels the loss of her own mother acutely, Lily is attracted to Our Lady's potential to serve as a mother figure her and others. Visiting the statue late at night, Lily thinks:

*I live in a hive of darkness, and you are my mother, I told her. You are the mother of thousands. (8.234)*

August, too, thinks that Our Lady could serve as a stand-in mother for Lily, slipping the suggestion subtly (very subtly—so much so that Lily totally misunderstands the moral) into her story about Beatrix the nun, for whom the Virgin Mary stood in when she ran away from home.

In short, the novel's representation of the Virgin Mary is far from traditional, converting her from a purely Christian figure into a kind of earth mother goddess who possesses both historical significance and the power to serve as a "mother" to all who reach out for her.

#### - Bees

When it comes down to it, humans and bees are not all that different. Sure, we don't have the ability to sting whatever is bothering us, and we also don't vomit honey, but this story shows us that bee's life is just a big ole' microcosm of human beings and their relationships. Kidd draws a clear analogy between the bees that Lily traps in her jar and Lily herself early on. When Lily decides to set the bees free, she notes:

*But the bees remained there, like planes on a runway not knowing they'd been cleared for takeoff. They crawled on their stalk legs around the curved perimeters of the glass as if the world had shrunk to that jar. I tapped the glass, even laid the jar on its side, but those crazy bees stayed put. (1.215)*

Not too many pages later, Lily realizes that she herself is sticking around in the "jar" of her unhappy home life, even though she is actually free to fly the coop:

*You could say I'd never had a true religious moment, the kind where you know yourself spoken to by a voice that seems other than yourself, spoken to so genuinely you see the words shining on trees and clouds. But I had such a moment right then, standing in my own ordinary room. I heard a voice say, Lily Melissa Owens, your jar is open. (2.72)*

She never explicitly makes the connection, but it's clear that she already feels a kind of kinship with the bees, and that only strengthens and deepens as the novel goes on.

August broadens the analogy when she's teaching Lily about how to treat the bees, likening her honey-producing friends to the entire human race. As Lily recalls:

*She reminded me that the world was really one big bee yard, and the same rules worked fine in both places. Don't be afraid, as no life-loving bee wants to sting you. Still, don't be an idiot; wear long sleeves and long pants. Don't swat. Don't even think about swatting. If you feel angry, whistle. Anger agitates, while whistling melts a bee's temper. Act like you know what you're doing, even if you don't. Above all, send the bees love. Every little thing wants to be loved. (5.72)*

That *does* seem like fairly solid advice for most human relationships

(and it's not entirely unheard of to think of irritable relatives as bees, no?).

Bee life also mirrors the matriarchal structure of August's own household and spiritual life—or maybe August and the Daughters of Mary modeled these aspects of their life around bees. Whatever the direction of influence, bee life and life in the pink house are two sides of the same coin. A hive contains "no Ozzie, just Harriet and her ten thousand daughters" (5.80), and August's community includes a "mother of thousands" (i.e., Our Lady of Chains) and a multitude of daughters (the Daughters of Mary). And as you already probably figured out, it is the "secret" life of these women that the novel cares about most . . . not bees

Given the novel's overwhelming emphasis on mothers, femininity, and the secret lives of women, it's unsurprising that the moon (whose cycles mirror those of the female body) is a pretty important symbol. The moon is directly tied to August's female-centric brand of spiritualism:

*. . . as long as people have been on this earth, the moon has been a mystery to us. Think about it. She is strong enough to pull the oceans, and when she dies away, she always comes back again. My mama used to tell me Our Lady lived on the moon . . .* (6.111)

We get why August digs it so much—anything that can draw together the ocean tides, the Virgin Mary, and normal everyday women must be pretty darn powerful and important. That's probably why August is put out when she finds out the U.S. is sending a rocket ship there . . . why interfere with a good sisterhood?

Lily draws a link between the moon and maternity when she is in the

middle of a fight with Rosaleen, her surrogate mother, and she has a dream about the moon breaking:

*In my dream I was back on the peach farm, sitting out behind the tractor shed, and even though it was broad daylight, I could see a huge, round moon in the sky. It looked so perfect up there I gazed at it awhile, then leaned against the shed and closed my eyes. Next I heard a sound like ice breaking, and, looking up, I saw the moon crack apart and start to fall. I had to run for my life.* (54.205)

The dream wakes her up—and funny enough, after having seen that mighty symbol of maternity shatter into a million pieces in her dream, she is inspired to go make up with Rosaleen. Coincidence? We think not.

#### - Birds and Flight

Since this novel focuses on bees and beekeeping, you probably won't be surprised to hear that flight is kind of a big deal here. However, even beyond the bees, it's actually pretty amazing how many references to other things that fly (e.g., planes, rocket ships, birds, etc.) the novel crams in.

Some of these references coincide with moments of feeling free. For example, Lily has kind of an out-of-body experience with the bees in which she goes from feeling kind of panicky to having the sense that she's flying with them:

*My breath came faster, and something coiled around my chest and squeezed tighter and tighter, until suddenly, like somebody had snapped off the panic switch, I felt myself go limp. My mind became unnaturally calm, as if part of me had lifted right up out of my body and was sitting on a tree limb watching the spectacle from a safe distance. The other part of me danced with the bees. I wasn't moving a lick, but in my mind I was spinning*

*through the air with them. I had joined the bee conga line.*(8.110)

In this moment, Lily really allows herself to let go, resulting in a feeling of exhilaration/and liberation. The bees are part of that process and, in fact, might be symbolic of it.

However, sometimes the novel's references to flight are a bit muddier, symbolically speaking. Take, for example, a moment soon after Lily and Rosaleen go on the lam, in which Lily is looking for a sign for what to do. She vows to take a few steps, look up, and take whatever she sees as a sign. That "whatever" ends up being a crop dusting plane that's spraying pesticides. She's not sure how to interpret that particular omen, lamenting:

*I couldn't decide what part of this scene I represented: the plants about to be rescued from the bugs or the bugs about to be murdered by the spray. There was an off chance I was really the airplane zipping over the earth creating rescue and doom everywhere I went.* (3.25)

This image of flight is a little "up in the air," as it were—it could have represented liberation or "doom," as far as Lily was concerned.

### Conclusion

The author uses many different ways to express how the main character, Lily, feels. One way is by using figurative language. This builds on her style of writing by adding depth, design, and dimension. Figurative Language impacts this writing by adding elaboration to the characters and surroundings. Dialect as a stylistic is merely one way to build characterization; Kidd is adept at several others including the art of conversation, the art of story-telling, and the art of description.

The figurative language found in this research are: simile, personification,

metaphor, symbolism, imagery and allegory.

In short, this study is not only showing what is figurative language which is found in Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees* or what stylistics that is used by Sue Monk Kidd to create the story of the novel. The suggestion for another researcher is to find other figurative languages and the connections between one figurative language and others which can create a beautiful work.

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