

## METAPHOR FUNCTIONS AS A MODE OF REPRESENTING REALITY IN LITERARY TEXTS

Ahmadzada Parvin Elchin

Teacher

Azerbaijan University of Architecture and Construction

*Metaphor occupies a central position in the study of literary language, functioning not simply as a decorative device but as a dynamic mechanism for constructing meaning and shaping the representation of reality. From classical poetics to modern cognitive linguistics, scholars have consistently emphasized that metaphor allows writers to reorganize human experience into new conceptual forms. When Aristotle described metaphor as the ability to perceive “likeness in unlikeness,” he implicitly pointed to its epistemic power: metaphor helps the mind see the world differently by placing disparate concepts in meaningful relation. In contemporary literary theory metaphor is increasingly understood as a mode of world-making. Within the fictional world, metaphor functions as a representational strategy through which the author encodes emotional states, cultural meanings, ideological tensions and philosophical reflections.*

**Keywords:** *metaphor, literary reality, representation, cognitive poetics, conceptual mapping, figurative language, world-building, narrative semantics.*

## МЕТАФОРА ЯК СПОСІБ ВІДОБРАЖЕННЯ РЕАЛЬНОСТІ В ХУДОЖНІХ ТЕКСТАХ

Ахмадзада Парвін Елчін

викладач

Азербайджанський університет архітектури та будівництва

*Метафора посідає центральне місце у вивченні літературної мови, функціонує не просто як декоративний засіб, а як динамічний механізм конструювання смислу та формування способів репрезентації реальності. Від класичної поетики до сучасної когнітивної лінгвістики дослідники послідовно підкреслювали, що метафора дозволяє письменникам переорганізовувати людський досвід у нові концептуальні форми. Коли Аристотель описував метафору як здатність бачити «подібність у неподібному», він фактично вказував на її епістемологічну силу: метафора допомагає розуму інакше побачити світ, поєднуючи різномірні поняття в осмислену взаємодію. У сучасній літературознавчій теорії метафору дедалі більше розглядають як спосіб творення світу. У межах художнього всесвіту вона виконує функцію репрезентаційної стратегії, за допомогою якої автор кодує емоційні стани, культурні значення, ідеологічні напруження та філософські роздуми.*

**Ключові слова:** метафора, літературна реальність, репрезентація, когнітивна поетика, концептуальне картування, образна мова, моделювання світу, нарративна семантика.

**Introduction.** The representation of reality in literature is never a direct, it is filtered through language, narrative perspective and semiotic choices. Among these, metaphor is one of the most productive tools for transforming lived experience into aesthetic form. Through metaphor, pain becomes a “dark room,” memory becomes a “mirror,” time becomes a “river” and human relationships turn into “bridges,” “storms” or “labyrinths”. Each metaphorical mapping shapes how the reader perceives the narrative world, inviting them to inhabit a particular conceptual and emotional landscape.

Metaphor has been at the centre of literary and linguistic inquiry for centuries, evolving from a purely rhetorical ornament into a foundational cognitive and semiotic mechanism. Classical thinkers such as Aristotle viewed metaphor as an act of naming based on perceived similarity an aesthetic transfer that enabled stylistic beauty. For much of literary history this ornamental perspective dominated: metaphors were seen as embellishments designed to elevate the expressive quality of texts.

**Methodological Framework.** This study employs a qualitative, text-centered approach based on the principles of cognitive poetics and conceptual metaphor theory. Metaphors are examined through close reading to identify their conceptual mappings and interpretive functions within literary discourse. Semiotic and narrative-semantic tools support the analysis by revealing how metaphor operates as a mechanism of meaning-making and world-construction. Through this integrated framework, metaphor is treated not only as a linguistic device but as a cognitive and representational strategy that reshapes reality in literary texts.

The emergence of modern linguistics in the 20th century, however, shifted the focus from stylistic decoration to structural and conceptual function. The decisive transformation occurred with Lakoff and Johnson’s seminal work *Metaphors we live by*, which asserted that metaphor is not merely a linguistic device but a fundamental mechanism of thought. According to their theory, human cognition is structured through conceptual mappings such as “time is money, life is a journey or emotions are forces”. Within this framework, literary metaphor represents an intensified and artistically reshaped version of the metaphors that structure everyday thinking (Lakoff, Johnson, 1981).

Building on this cognitive foundation, scholars such as Mark Turner, Gilles Fauconnier, Raymond Gibbs and Elena Semino have argued that literature does not simply employ metaphors it constructs entire narrative worlds through them. Turner's notion of "*blended spaces*" and Fauconnier's "*conceptual integration networks*" demonstrate how literary texts generate imaginative universes by merging disparate conceptual domains. Semino's corpus-based research, especially in *Metaphor in Discourse*, highlights how metaphor organizes narrative perspective, emotional framing and ideological positioning (Fauconnier, Turner, 2002; Gibbs, 1994; Semino 2008).

More recent studies in cognitive poetics (Stockwell, Freeman, Hogan) emphasize the experiential dimension of reading: metaphors evoke sensory simulation, emotional participation, and imaginative immersion. In this view, metaphor functions as a representational mode that enables literature to reconstruct reality, not by imitating its surface, but by reorganizing human experience into symbolic, perceptual and narrative structures (Stockwell, 2002).

Semiotic and phenomenological approaches (Ricoeur, Eco, Merleau-Ponty) add an interpretive layer: for Ricoeur, metaphor creates a "*surplus of meaning*" by redescribing reality, while Eco frames metaphor as an open-ended signifying process that destabilizes fixed interpretations. These perspectives underline metaphor's transformative power: it is not only a way of seeing the world but a way of altering the world as it is perceived (Ricoeur, 1977; Eco, 1984; Merleau, 1962).

Across world literary traditions from Oscar Wilde's aestheticism to the satirical realism of Mark Twain the psychological symbolism of Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray* the Azerbaijani modernist sensibility of Anar and the moral-philosophical narratives of Mir Jalal metaphor consistently functions as a mediating device between the empirical world and its artistic reimagination.

In each of these traditions metaphor constructs emotional landscapes, encodes cultural values, and reframes human experience into conceptual patterns that enable readers to access deeper truths about identity, society and existence. This broad scholarly foundation allows the present study to situate literary metaphor not only as a linguistic or stylistic phenomenon but as a mode of representing and reconstructing reality within fictional worlds.

"*These painful minutes seemed to Dorian like endless hours of torment...*" (Wilde, 2010). Wilde transforms subjective time into a metaphorical torture chamber. This mapping reveals psychological reality: time stretches under emotional stress. The metaphor constructs an inner temporal world where

emotion, not chronology, governs duration. Reality becomes elastic, bending to Dorian's dread. Dorian spoke *"like a man carrying a heavy load"*. The metaphor of guilt as bodily weight turns a moral condition into a tangible burden. Wilde uses somatic imagery to materialize inner corruption, giving readers a physical sense of Dorian's moral collapse.

*"The morning air seemed to sweep away the dark thoughts from his mind"* (Wilde, 2010). By presenting the wind as a metaphoric janitor, Wilde uses the symbolic purity of nature to contrast Dorian's decayed soul. The metaphor creates a moral topography, where nature's light cleanses sin's darkness.

*"The ticking of the clock seemed to divide time into separate atoms of pain"* (Wilde, 2010). Wilde materializes time into particles of suffering, suggesting that reality itself breaks into microscopic torment under guilt. The metaphor establishes a universe where time — pain, a structural reframing of existence.

*"The fog grew denser and denser and nothing could be seen"* (Twain, 1998: 41). Twain uses literal fog metaphorically as perceptual confusion. Reality becomes visually and morally blurred.

*"Monday began a new week of torture at school"* (Twain, 1998: 41). The metaphor of school as a prison reveals children's perspective: adult institutions appear as oppressive worlds.

*"Let us cross out a few things from the list; the rest won't be a sin"* (Twain, 1998: 171). Moral decisions are reduced to inventory management an ironic metaphor exposing the childish logic of ethical reasoning.

*"Every word about the murder froze Tom's heart"* (Twain, 1998: 173). Emotional terror becomes a climatic event. Twain blends physical coldness with psychological dread to build a symbolic internal climate.

Similar examples can also be found in Azerbaijani literature, particularly in Anar's and Mir Jalal's works. Through metaphor Anar creates such vivid and compelling images that the reader feels as if they are inside the very scene being described. Ex. *"Fikirlərim quma batmış maşının çarxları kimi fırlanırdı"* — (*My thoughts revolved like the wheels of a car stuck in sand*) (Anar, 2003: 37). Anar metaphorizes mental stagnation with a mechanical image. Thought becomes an engine trapped in inertia, forming a reality of psychological paralysis.

*"Biz böyüklər dünyasına uşaqlıq ölkəsindən gəlmiş mühacirlik"* — (*We are migrants refugees from the land of childhood to the world of adults*) (Anar, 2003: 129). Childhood is reimagined as a lost homeland. This metaphor cre-

ates a biographical mythology, where life becomes migration and adulthood a foreign land.

*“Qavalın səsi qələbə himni, igidlik simfoniyası kimi idi”*. — (*The flute sounded like a triumphal hymn, a symphony of valor*) (Anar, 2003: 320). Sound becomes heroism. Landscape is anthropomorphized into an orchestra. Anar builds a reality in which environment mirrors human courage.

*“Bəzi dəqiqələr qalın və ağır, bəziləri isə boş butulka kimi idi”* — (*Some minutes were thick and heavy, others empty like a drained bottle*) (Anar, 2003: 382) Time is reframed as a series of vessels some overfilled with emotion, others barren. Anar constructs a material ontology of time, grounding psychological experience in everyday objects.

*“Kəsilmiş badam ağacları onun qarşısında dayanıb səssiz suallar verirdi”* — (*The felled almond trees stood before him, asking their silent questions*) (Mir Jalal, 2005: 231). Nature becomes moral witness. Cut trees transform into accusing voices, forming a reality where nature judges human wrongdoing.

*“O, kəsilmiş şam ağacının “quru kötüyü”nün üstündə oturmuşdu”* — (*He sat on “the dry stump” of the cut pine*) (Mir Jalal, 2005: 239). The stump symbolizes personal devastation identity cut off from its roots.

*“Meşə, külək, göy — hamısı susurdu”* — (*The forest, the winds, the sky — all were silent*) (Mir Jalal, 2005: 302). Silence becomes cosmic judgment. Mir Jalal constructs a metaphysical courtroom where everything living and non-living testifies.

*“Evində xoşbəxtlik günəşi doğmuşdu — (A sun of happiness had risen in her home)* (Mir Jalal, 2005: 317) Joy becomes meteorology. Emotional states transform into celestial bodies, creating a symbolic cosmology of human experience.

Wilde transforms subjective time into an elastic psychological dimension. Under fear and guilt, minutes dilate into hours. This metaphor constructs a reality governed by emotion rather than chronology, where time itself becomes a persecutor.

Across the works of all examined authors, metaphor emerges as a foundational world-building mechanism that restructures human experience into symbolic, spatial and sensory forms. Psychological interiority is consistently externalized through spatial and mechanical imagery, allowing emotions such as guilt, fear or cognitive stagnation to acquire physical shape and locational depth. Likewise, the temporal dimension ordinarily abstract and linear is transformed into a tangible and measurable entity, rendered heavy,

hollow, dense or fragmented into microscopic particles of pain. Nature, far from functioning as a passive backdrop, assumes an active moral and emotional agency: mountains bear witness, trees interrogate human guilt and the wind cleanses inner darkness, thereby positioning the natural world as a participant in ethical judgment. Identity and life stages are reimagined through metaphors of geography and movement childhood becomes a lost homeland, adulthood a form of exile suggesting that selfhood is not merely chronological but mapped onto symbolic terrains. Emotional states, in turn, are reframed through climatic and luminous metaphors, converting fear into freezing cold or happiness into radiant sunlight, thus granting affective experience a meteorological or cosmological dimension. Taken together, these tendencies reveal that metaphor reshapes literary reality by translating invisible psychological and existential states into visible, sensory and materially grounded forms, enabling readers to engage with the complexities of human experience through richly constructed symbolic worlds.

**Results and discussion.** The analysis of metaphors extracted from Wilde, Anar, Twain and Mir Jalal demonstrates that metaphor functions as a multilevel representational system through which literary texts construct psychological, temporal, moral and cultural realities. The main findings can be summarized as follows:

1. **Metaphors materialize abstract psychological states.** Metaphors frequently convert inner experiences into concrete physical forms, enabling readers to access the characters' emotional realities: Fear becomes *coldness* (Twain: “froze Tom’s heart”); Guilt becomes *weight* (Wilde: “like a man carrying a heavy load”); Mental stagnation becomes *mechanical failure* (Anar: “wheels stuck in sand”). As a result literature constructs somatic worlds, where emotions physically shape the environment.

2. **Time is reframed through sensory and material metaphors.** Across the analyzed works, time appears as weight, density, fragmentation or emptiness: Wilde’s “atoms of agony” transform time into microscopic particles (Wilde, 2010); Anar’s “heavy minutes” and “empty bottles” make time tactile and visual (Anar, 2003); Tension lengthens minutes into “endless hours”. As a result metaphor serves as a cognitive mechanism that recalibrates temporal reality, reflecting psychological pressure.

3. **Nature functions as a moral and emotional agent.** The natural world is anthropomorphized and symbolically activated: Trees “ask silent questions” (Mir Jalal, 2005); Mountains act as witnesses to human sorrow (Anar, 2003); Morning wind “sweeps away dark thoughts” (Wilde, 2010). As a result

literature constructs moral ecologies, where landscape participates in human experience.

**4. Identity and life stages are conceptualized through spatial and geographical metaphors.** Authors use migration, exile, and vegetative growth to frame personal development: Childhood becomes a “*lost homeland*” (Anar, 2003); A cut tree becomes a metaphor for a life severed from its roots; Happiness rises “*as a sun*” in the household (Mir Jalal, 2005). As a result human identity is represented as movement through symbolic spaces rather than linear biography.

**5. Social and ethical realities are modeled through structural metaphors.** Metaphors operate as critique and commentary on social dynamics: Ethics appears as “crossing out items from a list” (Twain, 1998); Ideological influence becomes “poison” (Wilde, 2010); Relationships appear as “a tangled ball of string” (Anar, 2003). As a result metaphor exposes the hidden logic of social systems, revealing moral contradictions and cultural anxieties.

**6. Metaphor operates as narrative architecture.** Beyond individual expressions, clusters of metaphors shape entire fictional worlds: Wilde builds an aesthetic-moral universe of corruption and beauty; Anar constructs existential landscapes rooted in memory and time (Anar, 2003); Twain organizes satire through playful yet revealing metaphors (Twain, 1998); Mir Jalal frames moral conflict through natural symbolism (Mir Jalal, 2015). As a result metaphor functions as a structural principle, not merely stylistic decoration.

**7. Cross-textual patterns reveal universal literary tendencies.** Across all works, metaphors consistently: Transform abstraction into sensory experience; personify non-human agents; spatialize emotions; moralize natural settings; build symbolic cosmologies

Metaphor operates as a universal mode of world-building, enabling literature to represent reality not by mirroring it, but by reimagining and reconstructing it through symbolic logic.

**Conclusion.** The analysis demonstrates that metaphor in literary texts functions as a central mechanism for reconstructing reality rather than merely embellishing it. By materializing psychological states, reconfiguring temporal perception, animating elements of nature, spatializing identity and revealing underlying social dynamics, metaphor creates symbolic worlds that invite readers to inhabit emotional, moral and cognitive dimensions of human experience. It emerges as a universal tool of literary world-building one that transforms abstract inner life into tangible imagery, reshapes or-

dinary perception through aesthetic logic and uncovers deeper existential truths. Ultimately, metaphor proves to be not a peripheral stylistic device but a fundamental mode of representing, organizing and understanding the complexity of lived reality.

### Literature

- Anar. *Collected Works*. Baku : Nurlan, 2003. Vol. 1. 578 p.
- Eco U. *Semiotics and the philosophy of language*. Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1986. 254 p.
- Fauconnier G., Turner M. *The way we think: conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. New York : Basic Books, 2003. 464 p.
- Gibbs R. W. *The poetics of mind: figurative thought, language, and understanding*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1999. 19 p.
- Kövecses Z. *Metaphor: A practical introduction*. 2nd ed. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2022. 342 p.
- Lakoff G., Johnson M. *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1981. 256 p.
- Lotman Y. M. *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 2014. 416 p.
- Merleau-Ponty M. *Phenomenology of Perception*. London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2010. 696 p.
- Mir Jalal. *Selected Works*. Baku : Sharq-Qarb, 2005. 384 p.
- Ricoeur P. *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*. Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1995. 464 p.
- Semino E. *Metaphor in discourse*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2008. 10 p.
- Stockwell P. *Cognitive poetics: an introduction*. London : Routledge, 2020. 256 p.
- Twain M. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer & Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York : Barnes & Noble Classics, 1998. 192 p.
- Wilde O. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. London : Penguin Classics, 2010. 304 p.

### References

- Anar. (2003). *Collected works* (Vol. 1). Nurlan.
- Eco, U. (1986). *Semiotics and the philosophy of language*. Indiana University Press.
- Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (2003). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. Basic Books.
- Gibbs, R. W. (1999). *The poetics of mind: Figurative thought, language, and understanding*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kövecses, Z. (2022). *Metaphor: A practical introduction* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1981). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.

- Lotman, Y. M. (2014). *Universe of the mind: A semiotic theory of culture*. Indiana University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2010). *Phenomenology of perception*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Mir Jalal. (2005). *Selected works*. Sharq-Qarb.
- Ricoeur, P. (1995). *The rule of metaphor: Multi-disciplinary studies of the creation of meaning in language*. University of Toronto Press.
- Semino, E. (2008). *Metaphor in discourse*. Cambridge University Press.
- Stockwell, P. (2020). *Cognitive poetics: An introduction*. Routledge.
- Twain, M. (1998). *The adventures of Tom Sawyer & adventures of huckleberry finn*. Barnes & Noble Classics.
- Wilde, O. (2010). *The picture of Dorian Gray*. Penguin Classics.

Стаття надійшла до редакції 20.10. 2025 року