

The Expressive Function Of Figurative Language In The Novel *Katarsis* By Anastasia Aemilia: A Stylistic Study

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ABSTRACT

Figurative language is not merely an aesthetic ornament, but a means of expressing psychological meaning in literary works. This study aims to examine the form and function of figurative language in Anastasia Aemilia's novel Katarsis through a stylistic approach. By connecting linguistic and aesthetic aspects, this study focuses on understanding the relationship between language, context, and emotional effects on readers. Using a qualitative descriptive method with the Simak and Catat techniques, as well as data in the form of quotations containing elements of metaphor, personification, simile, synesthesia, anatomia, and metonymy, the data was analyzed based on the stylistic theories of Henry Guntur Tarigan and Gorys Keraf. Data in the form of quotations from the novel containing figurative language elements, such as metaphors, personification, similes, synesthesia, anatomia, and metonymy, were analyzed based on the stylistic theories of Henry Guntur Tarigan and Gorys Keraf. This study used a qualitative descriptive method with observation and note-taking techniques. The results show that the use of figurative language in the novel Katarsis is very dominant and plays an important role in shaping the characters, building the atmosphere, and describing the inner conflicts and past traumas of the main characters. Metaphors and similes are the most frequently used figures of speech to express extreme emotions, inner turmoil, and tension in the storyline, both explicitly and implicitly. These findings confirm that figurative language in this novel is a medium for conveying complex psychological messages to readers, while also contributing to the development of modern literary stylistics studies in understanding the aesthetic and expressive functions of narrative prose.

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1. Introduction

Figurative language in literary works is used to express meaning indirectly through figures of speech, such as metaphors and similes, which enrich the emotional and imaginative impact of the text (Rahman & Weda, 2019; Asha et al., 2025; Nursaadah et al., 2025). Abrams (1999) emphasizes that this style of language is a way of expressing ideas that cannot be conveyed directly. Meanwhile, Richards (1936) views metaphors as a means to expand our understanding of an object or idea by linking two conceptually different things. Burke (1966) also asserts that in addition to beautifying language, metaphors help humans understand and organize life experiences more deeply.

In the novel *Katarsis* (2013) by Anastasia Aemilia, the use of figurative language is very effective in describing the inner conflict and emotional journey of the main character who is facing difficult times. This style of language deepens the meaning of the story and strengthens the emotional experience for readers. In line with Ricoeur's (1976) view, the metaphors in this novel are able to expand the meaning and present new concepts that enrich the understanding of the main character's condition. Furthermore, the use of personification in traumatic narratives has also proven to be a powerful tool for reflecting sadness and mental burdens, as shown in research by Fairuz (2025).

Catharsis is Anastasia Aemilia's debut novel in the psychological thriller genre, telling the story of Tara Johandi, a character who experiences trauma after witnessing a tragic robbery at her uncle's house at the age of eighteen. This work is rich in psychological content and emphasizes the process of catharsis as an emotional release from the inner wounds experienced by the main character, becoming the focus of analysis of the negative speech acts in the story. The author chose the psychological thriller genre because there are still very few local works that take up this theme, with the hope of

enriching Indonesian literature. In reader reviews, Anasta (2023) describes the main character as delusional due to mental disorders, while Estiningtyas (2023) highlights the lack of explanation regarding the causes of these disorders. Lamase (2024) appreciates the author's ability to create tension and direct the reader's opinion through Tara's point of view, who turns out to be the main perpetrator of the murder in the story.

Although the author successfully created a main character with a mental disorder that affects her perception, the background of the disorder is not explicitly explained, which is a shortcoming in character development. Tara's point of view also successfully arouses the reader's curiosity about the perpetrator of the tragedy, who is actually herself. However, some of the mysteries that appear at the beginning of the story are not resolved, causing dissatisfaction for readers who expect a clearer ending.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the use of figurative language in the novel *Katarsis* through a stylistic approach, which is an interdisciplinary study that connects linguistic structure with literary aesthetics to reveal the use of language and style in creating certain effects (Verdonk in Fairuz, 2023; Muslimat et al., 2025; Panggabean et al., 2025). Leech and Short (2007) emphasize the importance of analyzing language patterns to convey meaning and emotion, while Teeuw (in Fananie, 2000) adds that stylistics reflects the author's thoughts, soul, and personality.

Specifically, this study aims to reveal how the use of figures of speech, particularly metaphors and personification, functions as an expressive means to describe the emotions, inner conflicts, and depictions of the main character's past trauma. Ultimately, this study will reveal how figurative language becomes a communication tool to convey deep psychological messages in the psychological thriller genre.

2. Methodology

This type of research is descriptive qualitative. Descriptive qualitative research aims to describe, depict, and deeply understand the forms of figurative language used in Anastasia Aemilia's novel *Katarsis*. The data collected consists of quotations or narratives in the novel that contain elements of figurative language, which are then analyzed using stylistic or linguistic theories.

In qualitative research, the focus is not on quantity but on depth of meaning. Therefore, the population in this study is the entire text of the novel *Katarsis* by Anastasia Aemilia. This population includes all chapters, paragraphs, and sentences in the novel. The sample in this study was taken using purposive sampling, which involved selecting parts of the text that contained figurative language, such as metaphors, personification, similes, and so on.

The selection of samples was based on the relevance and connection of the quotations to the focus of the study, namely the analysis of style or figurative language. With this technique, only quotations or parts of the novel that contain elements of figurative language were analyzed in depth. Data collection was carried out by examining books, literature, notes, and various reports relevant to the issues to be resolved. Meanwhile, the data analysis technique in this study used descriptive qualitative content analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

Figurative language or figurative language plays an important role in writing a work. In addition to beautifying, the use of figurative language has a significant role in deepening meaning and conveying the emotions and internal conflicts of the main character. In Anastasia Aemilia's novel *Katarsis*, there is the use of metaphors, personification, similes, synesthesia, anatomicia, and metonymy, which enrich the style of language and serve to deepen the meaning of the story.

Table 1. Figures of Speech Found in the Novel *Katarsis*

Figure of Speech	Number
Metaphor	6
Personification	4
Simile	7
Synesthesia	1
Antonomasia	1
Metonymy	1

The meaning of the six (6) metaphorical expressions found in this study is to convey the characters' emotions. The four (4) instances of personification depict objects as if they were alive and give the impression that the objects seen or felt by the characters play a role in creating their inner atmosphere. The seven (7) similes express comparisons between human life and nature that are inconsistent with destiny or reality. The one (1) instance of synesthesia functions to show the characters' feelings through the exchange of responses between two different senses or the transfer of sensory impressions. The one (1) instance of antonomasia refers to something not by its original name but by a special name based on its characteristics, and finally, there is one (1) instance of metonymy.

Below are six metaphors found in the novel *Katarsis*, along with their figurative meanings and analyses.

Data 1

"Dasar bocah tengik!" (p.38)

You rotten kid!

The figurative meaning of this sentence is to express that a child's nature or behavior is very annoying, irritating, or disturbing, like a foul smell that makes others feel uncomfortable.

The word *bocah* refers to Moses and the word *tengik* is an adjective commonly used to describe a foul or unpleasant smell. This expression reflects Tara Johandi's annoyance with Moses, Tara's five-year-old cousin, for letting go of the handlebars of his bicycle and crashing into a tree, causing Tara to fall.

Data 2

"Aku seperti bisa melihat kuman-kuman berjatuhan dari kertas koran itu ke atas piringnya." (p. 45)

I felt as if I could see germs falling from the newspaper onto his plate.

The figurative meaning of this sentence is to portray Tara's feeling of disgust toward something she considers dirty or unhygienic when she sees Arif—her uncle—opening a newspaper folded in half over a plate.

The phrase *kuman-kuman berjatuhan* is a strong depiction of the spread of contamination, poisoning, or negative influence that spreads widely because it cannot be seen with the naked eye. Newspapers are often associated with news or information. The *kuman-kuman berjatuhan* from the newspaper can be interpreted as a metaphor for misleading information, false news, or harmful ideas that damage a person's mind or perspective (the plate).

Data 3

"Aku berusaha merasakan saraf di ujung-ujung jariku, serasa menggerakkan tangan yang membatu." (p.52)

I tried to feel the nerves at the tips of my fingers, as if I were moving a hand that had turned to stone.

The figurative meaning of this sentence implies an inability to feel or respond emotionally or physically, even though she consciously wants to feel something, yet her efforts are futile.

The phrase *menggerakkan tangan yang membatu* illustrates a struggle against helplessness or the inability to respond. This is experienced by Tara after returning from the psychiatrist, as she imagines herself wrapped in white clothing with extremely long sleeves, her forehead aching, and her ears seemingly able to hear her heart pounding loudly as if it were about to explode.

Data 4

"Rasanya seperti ada deram konser band yang membuat seluruh saraf di tubuhku berdenyut-denyut sampai telingaku berdenging." (p. 35)

It felt like the roar of a band concert was making every nerve in my body throb until my ears were ringing.

The figurative meaning of this sentence reveals an extremely intense and unforgettable experience that triggers strong physical and emotional reactions, leaving a deep impression that is difficult to describe.

The phrase *deram konser band* is a figurative expression for an experience that is highly intense, powerful, and extraordinary. The phrase *seluruh saraf di tubuhku berdenyut-denyut* depicts a very strong physical and emotional reaction. The phrase *telingaku berdenging* is a figurative expression for an overwhelming sensation that is difficult to forget. This is experienced by Tara when she hears the scream of her mother, Tari, who is in pain because her foot is pierced by shards of broken glass, causing the throbbing in her gums to intensify.

Data 5

“Debar jantungku seperti menggedor-gedor tulang rusuk, mendesakku melangkah keluar.” (p. 49)

My heartbeat felt like it was pounding against my ribs, urging me to step outside.

The figurative meaning of this sentence reveals a very strong restlessness, such as fear, anxiety, or excitement that ultimately drives someone to take action.

The phrase *debar jantungku seperti menggedor-gedor tulang rusuk* is a visual metaphor that compares the heartbeat to a pounding or knocking sound. Meanwhile, the phrase *mendesakku melangkah keluar* is an action metaphor—a symbolic act that a person feels compelled to perform. This is experienced by Tara when she witnesses, from her bedroom window, a large dog clamping onto the thin stomach of a cat until it dies.

Data 6

“Hatinya benar-benar sudah membatu.” (p. 106)

His heart had truly turned to stone.

The figurative meaning of this sentence serves as a comparison for a person’s character or emotional state that is hard, insensitive, or lacking in feeling.

The word *hati* refers to a person’s emotions, feelings, or inner nature. Meanwhile, the word *membatu* functions as a metaphor describing a rigid, frozen emotional condition that is unable to respond and is indifferent. This expression is uttered by Ello when he realizes that his father has truly cast him aside. Next, four (4) instances of personification found in the novel *Katarsis*, along with their figurative meanings and analyses, are presented below.

Data 7

“Pepohonan di sekitar taman mulai berdesir. Embusan angin sepoi menyentuh kulitku seperti sentuhan tangan yang membelai lembut.” (p. 31-32)

The trees around the park began to rustle. A gentle breeze brushed against my skin like the soft touch of a caressing hand.

The figurative meaning of this sentence depicts a calm natural atmosphere, as if the environment is responding to the presence of the character.

The phrase *pepohonan mulai berdesir* is an example of personification because trees, which are inanimate objects, are given actions as if they are “whispering or speaking” through the rustling of their leaves. This creates the impression that nature is alive and communicating with humans, forming a more intimate and vivid atmosphere. Personification is also found in the phrase *embusan angin sepoi menyentuh kulitku seperti sentuhan tangan yang membelai lembut*; the gentle breeze is described as having human qualities, able to “touch” and “caress” like a human being. Overall, the sentence creates a personal, intimate natural atmosphere that feels close to Tara’s inner world. This is experienced by Tara as a child after she drops a shovel she managed to seize from another child and after she pushed that child until they lost consciousness.

Data 8

“Bulan beriak di balik jendela.” (p. 51)

The moon rippled beyond the window.

The figurative meaning of this sentence is that the moonlight appears to move or tremble as if it were rippling or undulating, creating a dynamic visual effect.

The word *bulan* is an inanimate object combined with the word *beriak*, which describes a quality usually attributed to living beings or natural phenomena, thus forming personification. Literally, the moon cannot “ripple.” However, in this sentence, the author gives the impression that the moon is alive and moving dynamically from behind the window. This atmosphere is seen or felt by Tara after returning from the psychiatrist who has passed judgment on her sanity.

Data 9

“Itu yang kusuka dari air putih. Kesegarannya akan membersihkan pikiranmu dari semua kebingungan.” (p. 125)

That’s what I like about plain water. Its freshness clears your mind of all confusion.

The figurative meaning of this sentence is that drinking plain water provides a refreshing effect that is felt not only physically but also mentally, as if the water itself has the power to clear one’s thoughts.

The phrase *air putih* functions as the subject (an inanimate object) that is given a human trait, namely the ability to *clean your mind of all confusion*. This action is a human action, because clearing one’s mind is something that can be done by living beings, such as humans. This expression of the doctor’s fondness is said by Dr. Alfons to Tara, who does not like cold water reaching the bottom of her stomach.

Data 10

“Di luar sana, hujan kembali mengamuk, seperti janjiku pada Tara.” (p. 177)

Outside, the rain was raging again, like my promise to Tara.

The figurative meaning of this sentence refers to a promise that has not yet been fulfilled or is still left hanging.

The word *mengamuk* here is a form of personification attached to the subject *hujan*. Rain is a natural phenomenon that does not possess emotions or intentions, yet it is described with human-like traits, specifically the act of *mengamuk*. *Mengamuk* is a verb that reflects anger, violence, or force—actions that can only be performed by humans. This expression comes from Ello’s inner thoughts. Ello’s commitment to Tara feels very deep because it has not yet been carried out, creating an impression similar to a storm.

Next, seven (7) instances of simile found in the novel *Katarsis*, along with their figurative meanings and analyses, are presented below.

Data 11

“Kotak harta karun berisi satu nyawa, itu bagaikan angin segar bagi kepolisian.” (p. 15)

The treasure chest containing a single life was like a breath of fresh air for the police.

The figurative meaning of this sentence is to describe the discovery of a crucial clue or piece of evidence that determines a person’s fate and provides new hope or renewed motivation for the police in handling the case.

The phrase *kotak harta karun diumpamakan dengan angin segar* shows a simile, as it conveys a pleasant effect or a sense of renewed enthusiasm for the police. This occurs when the police receive new information regarding a brutal robbery case committed by police fugitives, namely Martin Silado and Andita Pramani.

Data 12

“... seorang wanita muda yang kosong ke arah taman dan menatap aku seolah aku jangkrik yang siap melompat ke pangkuannya.” (p. 16)

...a young woman who stared blankly toward the park and looked at me as if I were a cricket ready to leap into her lap.

The figurative meaning of this sentence is to depict a gaze filled with curiosity, anticipation, or even a sense of desire or possession. It may also suggest that the woman is waiting for a movement or action from the subject.

In this sentence, there is an explicit comparison between the subject *aku* and a cricket ready to jump into her lap. The use of the connector *seolah* functions as a key word indicating an indirect comparison. This is expressed by Tara

when Dr. Alfons places her on a wheeled bed with her hands tightly bound at the sides next to the young woman. She likens herself to a cricket ready to jump toward its target—the woman—creating a dramatic impression.

Data 13

“Kepalanya menggeleng-geleng kuat seperti singa mengaum dalam film bisu....”
(p. 22)

He shook his head vigorously like a lion roaring in a silent film....

The figurative meaning in this sentence is to convey a powerful movement filled with resistance or deeply felt anger that cannot be verbally expressed. The phrase *a strong shaking of the head* is compared to *the roar of a lion*; both symbolize immense strength, anger, and extreme rejection. This figurative expression becomes particularly compelling because it is reinforced by the phrase *in a silent film*, which suggests that the roar is soundless. The author employs imaginative power through the character Tara by using emotional effects generated through simile, creating a dramatic and suspenseful atmosphere for the reader.

This experience is felt by Tara when the lights in the hospital where she is staying go out due to a collapsed electric pole. She then sees the silhouette of a man's face that remains motionless in front of the door for a long time until near midnight. The figure has a head with thick, flowing hair like a lion's mane, a large and protruding body like a gorilla's, and other body parts that are winged and clawed like an eagle. The silhouette then moves and hovers.

Data 14

“Bunyi hantaman yang meremukan tengkoraknya seperti timpani dalam orkestra besar yang membawa simfoni di telingaku.” (p. 57)

The sound of the blow crushing his skull was like a timpani in a grand orchestra, carrying a symphony into my ears.

The figurative meaning of this sentence is that a painful or traumatic event appears highly dramatic and monumental, as if it were an inseparable part of a grand composition in life.

The phrase *bunyi hantaman* here, which should feel painful, is instead described as *timpani*, a musical instrument that creates a dramatic and significant effect. This emphasizes that the impact of the event is extremely significant, not merely an ordinary blow. The event then brings a *simfoni*, suggesting that the pain or trauma continues to echo in the mind. Here, the intensity of the simile increases as Tara's inner conflict reaches its peak, to the point where she no longer cares and continues her actions even after the sound of Moses's skull being crushed is heard due to repeated blows from a Harley-Davidson iron belt buckle to his head. She does this because of her hatred toward Moses, who intended to rape her.

Data 15

“Tak ada yang dilahirkan bak malaikat suci.” (p. 75)

No one is born like a holy angel.

The figurative meaning of this sentence is that no human being is perfect from birth.

The word *manusia* is compared to the phrase *malaikat suci*, which symbolizes perfection, flawless goodness, and absolute purity. This comparison is used to emphasize that every individual is born with weaknesses, shortcomings, and the potential to make mistakes. This is expressed by Tara when she is confined in a toolbox, which makes her introspective or turns her into an observer of her own thoughts, upon learning that her uncle, aunt, and father did not feed her for two days because she refused to explain what she had done to Moses, which resulted in so much blood on her bed and bedroom floor.

Data 16

“Ibuku selalu bilang, rasa sakit itu seperti kebahagiaan yang getir.” (p. 94)

My mother always said that pain is like a bittersweet kind of happiness.

The figurative meaning of this sentence is to show that pain can contain positive value, just as happiness may come with the shadows of the past or sacrifice.

The comparison between the phrase *pain* and *bittersweet happiness* in this sentence indicates that a change has taken place. Pain is something that helps shape a person's character to become stronger, wiser, or more empathetic. It is similar to bittersweet happiness that returns after difficult times, as if a process of purification or a reversal of perception has occurred. Here, Ello's emotional effect is evident as he expresses feelings of happiness and satisfaction after doing something that makes him feel fulfilled—namely, tying a sack containing severed hands along with the body of the woman who had touched him and sinking it to the bottom of the Kalimalang river—while brushing his teeth until they bleed, making the atmosphere even more dramatic.

Data 17

"Seperti cahaya membara yang menerangi hatiku, aku menatapnya tanpa melepaskan pandangan sedetik pun." (p. 212)

Like a blazing light illuminating my heart, I looked at him without taking my eyes off him for even a second.

The figurative meaning of this sentence is to describe a feeling of love or admiration that is so deep that it becomes the center of attention.

The phrase *cahaya membara yang menerangi hatiku* is a simile that compares a person to a blazing light. The word *cahaya* symbolizes intense and powerful emotions, such as love or passion. The word *membara* indicates that this is not an ordinary feeling. Meanwhile, *menerangi hatiku* refers to joy within the character's inner life. The emotional effect of this simile is both dramatic and tense, because Tara's feelings when she sees the color of blood seeping into Ello's bandage awaken her past memories.

Next, one (1) instance of synesthesia found in the novel *Katarsis*, along with its figurative meaning and analysis, is presented below.

Data 18

"Aku bisa merasakan tajamnya tatapan mereka di kulitku." (p. 97)

I could feel the sharpness of their stares on my skin.

The figurative meaning of this sentence is to show that the character experiences extremely intense social pressure from their surroundings.

The linguistic analysis reveals an exchange of sensory impressions between the sense of sight (gazes) and the sense of touch (a sharp sensation on the skin). This is experienced by Ello when he responds to a nurse's call informing him about his appointment with Dr. Alfons. He feels deeply intimidated, judged, or intensely observed by others, to the point that the discomfort caused by those stares feels like a painful physical sensation on his skin.

Next, one (1) instance of antonomasia found in the novel *Katarsis*, along with its figurative meaning and analysis, is presented below.

Data 19

"Bagi wanita penggemar opera sabun, aku tahu pasti berharap mengetahui perasaanku melalui buku harianku." (p. 44)

As a woman who loves soap operas, I knew she must have hoped to find out my feelings through my diary.

The figurative meaning of this sentence implies a desire for one's feelings to be understood in a dramatic and emotional way, without needing to be expressed directly.

The phrase *penggemar opera sabun* functions as an instance of antonomasia referring to Sasi, pointing to conflict and deep emotion. A soap opera itself is a drama series that usually has plots full of intrigue and is known for its melodramatic nature. The author replaces the character's name with a description of the character's traits or preferences in order to build a particular imagery for the reader.

Lastly, one (1) instance of metonymy found in the novel *Katarsis*, along with its figurative meaning and analysis, is presented below.

Data 20

“Bagi wanita penggemar opera sabun, aku tahu pasti berharap mengetahui perasaanku melalui buku harianku.” (p. 44)

For a woman who is a fan of soap operas, I knew she must have been hoping to learn about my feelings through my diary.

The figurative meaning of this sentence implies a desire for someone's feelings to be understood in a dramatic and emotional way, without needing to be expressed directly.

The phrase *buku harian* serves as a label for the object being used, namely a book that is often used to write personal daily notes. A person's feelings can be automatically understood after reading the contents of such a book. As experienced by Sasi, she strongly wants to know Tara's inner feelings through the diary she finds in Tara's room; however, all she gains is disappointment because its contents do not match her expectations.

4. Conclusion

The researcher concludes that the use of figurative language in the novel *Katarsis* is not merely an aesthetic ornament, but a crucial narrative instrument for examining the psychological complexity of the characters. The dominance of six (6) types of figures of speech—metaphor, personification, simile, synesthesia, antonomasia, and metonymy—has proven effective in concretizing abstract emotions, past trauma, and the inner tension experienced by the main character. In particular, metaphor and simile serve as primary media for expressing extreme inner turmoil. Meanwhile, antonomasia and metonymy function strategically to strengthen characterization through distinctive identity labeling. These findings affirm that figurative language acts as a communicative bridge for conveying profound psychological messages, while also making a significant contribution to the development of modern stylistic literary studies in understanding the expressive function of narrative prose.

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