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# Which world is your simile from? Relations between simile vehicles and fictional worlds

## Abstract

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The aim of the study is to reveal the richness of literary similes and comparisons in selected novels in English. The author discusses the linguistic phenomenon of similes/comparisons and then looks at how they are employed in both Joseph Boyden's *The Orenda* and Mohammed Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*. He demonstrates different analytical angles from which to examine the construal of novel comparisons and similes in literary contexts. The focus of the study is on the source domains used by the authors in their selection of vehicles in the construction of fictitious literary worlds.

## Keywords

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Literature, Language, English, Literary Comparisons, Literary Similes, Boyden, Hanif

As we immerse ourselves into novelistic fictional worlds, we are encouraged to believe in the verity of the construed reality. Our belief in the veracity of the alternative world depends on many factors, all of which must form a comprehensive whole to be convincing. The coherence of the presented worlds is conditioned upon a plethora of elements, amongst which the most conspicuous are the linguistic and logical makers of cohesion

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and coherence which tie a narrative together. The selection, combination and transformation of these elements is related to and contingent upon the kind of genre and narrative, the type of narrator, and the audience, amongst others. I would like to address the question of enhancing the coherence of fictional worlds by means of figurative language through the example of similes and comparisons. This paper combines two major elements: figurative language and a literary text in which the former is embedded. However, rather than focusing on figuration as such, I would like to focus my attention on its role in the construal of fictional worlds and its contribution to the coherence of a narrative. Therefore, I will not examine in detail the theoretical aspects of similes, only inasmuch as my examination of their presence in the text analyzed requires. I will not discuss such aspects as the categorization of similes amongst figurative language, their formal characteristics and distinctions within a class of similes, the relations between topics and vehicles, the target and source domains, the concrete and abstract targets and vehicles, the psycholinguistic aspects of simile comprehension and the differences between metaphor and similes. For the sake of simplicity and taking into account the focus of this paper I will treat similes as a separate class of figurative language, different from metaphor though similar on a very general level as a means of comparison, and understood as assertions of similitude, not assertions of categorization. The similes collected for my analysis use the connectors *like* and *as*, as well as clausal vehicles signalled by *as if*. These are the most conspicuous types in a corpus representing comparisons in a more general sense. In what follows I would like to examine briefly the selected narratives and the linguistic means used therein with respect to similes. My observations will be based on two novels, namely *The Orenda* by Joseph Boyden (*Orenda* henceforth) and *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* by Mohammed Hanif (*Our Lady* henceforth) and I hope to show how the explicitly or implicitly defined fictional worlds of the characters are reflected in their choice of simile vehicles and in doing so prove that the figurative language used by the characters is restrained by the confines imposed on them by their cognitive interactions with the worlds they inhabit. In more general terms I would like to highlight the coherence of the narrative worlds, warranted also by the character of the figurative language used in their creation<sup>1</sup>.

Similes are almost always mentioned when one discusses figurative language, more specifically metaphorical language. However, it is also true that little research has been undertaken with regard to similes<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nor will I elaborate on theories of possible worlds here, which are discussed successfully in, for example, E. Lahey, *Stylistics and text world theory*, [in:] *The Routledge handbook of stylistics*, ed. M. Burke, Routledge 2014, pp.284–296.

<sup>2</sup> R.J. Harris, B.M. Friel, N.R. Mickelson, *Attribution of discourse goals for using concrete- and abstract-tenor metaphors and similes with or without discourse context*, “Journal of

and if they are discussed they are described not in isolation but in conjunction with (comparative) metaphors or other types of figuration<sup>3</sup>. Similes are more often than not regarded as being “like metaphors”<sup>4</sup> as they are “structurally and lexically identical” (but for an explicit marker) and semantically often similar<sup>5</sup>. This metalinguistic comparison — “like a metaphor” — is itself a bone of contention as specialists disagree as to the degree of similarity between figurative comparisons and metaphor (what kind and to what extent), with some claiming that there is considerable evidence that these two forms of figuration should be kept apart as the two are used in different contexts, for different purposes, and that the presence of an explicit comparison is of vital significance. The differences in the linguistic and cognitive treatment of metaphors and similes is reflected in the comparison theory of metaphor, whereby a metaphor is viewed as “an elliptical version of a simile or comparison”.<sup>6</sup> According to the exponents of the Categorization Theory, the distinction between the two lies in the fact that a metaphor is “a categorization assertion”, whereas a simile is “an assertion of similitude”<sup>7</sup>, but either is paraphrasable in essence into the form of the other. Glucksberg and Haught<sup>8</sup> and Glucksberg<sup>9</sup> claim that they are so different that the differences between them could be explained by the quality-of-metaphor hypothesis that accounts better for the dichotomy than the comparison, categorization theories as well as the career-of-metaphor hypothesis suggested by Bowdle and Gentner<sup>10</sup>. In some approaches similes and comparisons can be seen as exponents of scalar metaphoricity, for example, in terms of Goatly’s “clines of metaphoricity”<sup>11</sup>. The two approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive as metaphors and similes are basically involved in comparing two domains<sup>12</sup>.

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Pragmatics” 2005, vol. 38, no. 6, p. 864.

<sup>3</sup> C. Addison, *From literal to figurative: an introduction to similes*, “College English” 1993, vol. 55, no. 4, p. 402; R. Moon, *Conventionalized as-similes in English. A case problem*, “International Journal of Corpus Linguistics” 2008, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 3–37.

<sup>4</sup> M. Knowles, R. Moon, *Introducing metaphor*, London and New York 2006, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> R.J. Harris, B.M. Friel, N.R. Mickelson, *Attribution of discourse goals...*, op. cit. p. 864.

<sup>6</sup> A. Goatly, *The language of metaphors*, London 1997, p. 118. For a discussion of the process of comparison itself see Bredin (1998).

<sup>7</sup> S. Glucksberg, C. Haught, *On the relationship between metaphor and simile: when comparisons fail*, “Mind & Language” 2006, vol. 21, no. 3, p. 361.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, p. 360–378.

<sup>9</sup> S. Glucksberg, *How metaphors create categories — quickly*, [in:] *The Cambridge handbook of metaphor and thought*, ed. R.W. Gibbs, Cambridge 2008, pp. 67–83.

<sup>10</sup> B.F. Bowdle, D. Gentner, *The career of metaphor*, “Psychological Review” 2005, vol. 112, pp. 193–216.

<sup>11</sup> A. Goatly, *The language of metaphors*, op. cit., p. 38ff.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 118.

Simile has generally been defined as a figure of speech whereby “two concepts are imaginatively and descriptively compared”<sup>13</sup> with the help of connectives or “similarity markers”<sup>14</sup>, such as *as*, *like* and *as if*<sup>15</sup>. The presence of these markers is to distinguish similes from metaphors<sup>16</sup>. Similes compare “unlike objects or ideas”<sup>17</sup>; the topic and the vehicle are not expected to be considered comparable in contrast to literal comparisons<sup>18</sup>. In this paper I will focus on similes which are recognizable by means of the markers *as*, *like*, *as if* acting as markers of “clauses of similarity and comparison”<sup>19</sup>. In such similes four elements can be typically found, following Fishelov’s terminology<sup>20</sup>: target, vehicle, marker of similarity and ground of similarity.<sup>21</sup> Thus in “But this thing is like a brick, refusing to move” (*Our Lady*, 164) *this thing* (unborn child) functions as the target, the vehicle is *a brick*, the marker is *like* and the ground is an incapacity of movement, refusal to move, immobility, obstinacy, for example.

Secondary markers<sup>22</sup> also appear in figurative comparisons employed in the novels under scrutiny. They are, however, excluded from the present analysis, and so are other types of sentences which could also be categorized as similes in the broadest sense of the term as they imply a comparison between a topic and the vehicle<sup>23</sup>. Having excluded them from this study of simile vehicles, I am fully aware that their examination can significantly enrich any consideration of comparisons aimed at comparing two unlike things. Let us look at some examples of such sentences:

- A strange croak comes out of her mouth, a voice that surprises her, the voice of a baby frog complaining about being too small for this world. (*Our Lady*, 6)
- There is something drone-like but pacifying about their gibberish. (*Our Lady*, 34)

<sup>13</sup> K. Wales, *A Dictionary of stylistics*, 2nd ed., Harlow 2001, p. 358.

<sup>14</sup> Z. Ben-Porat, *Poetics of the Homeric simile and the theory of (poetic) simile*, “Poetics Today” 1992, vol. 13, no. 4, p. 738.

<sup>15</sup> N. Nørgaard et al., *Key terms in stylistics*, London and New York 2010, p. 107.

<sup>16</sup> Z. Ben-Porat, *Poetics of the Homeric simile and the theory of (poetic) simile*, op. cit., p. 738.

<sup>17</sup> E. Sommer, D. Weiss, *Metaphors dictionary*, Canton, MI 1996, p. ix.

<sup>18</sup> M. Israel, J.R. Harding, V. Tobin, *On Simile*, [in:] *Language, culture, and mind*, eds. M. Achard, S. Kremmer, Chicago 2004, p. 125.

<sup>19</sup> R. Quirk, *A Comprehensive grammar of the English language*, London 1985, p. 1110.

<sup>20</sup> D. Fishelov, *Poetic and non-poetic similes: structure, semantics, rhetoric*, “Poetics Today” 1993, vol. 14, no. 1, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> It has to be remembered that Fishlov’s (1993) elements and their arrangement are criterial in assessing the “non-poeticalness” and “poeticalness” of similes, the latter of which is assessed on a scale of deviation from the former.

<sup>22</sup> R. Moon, *Simile and dissimilarity*, “Journal of Literary Semantics”, vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 139–140.

<sup>23</sup> H. Bredin, *Comparisons and similes*, “Lingua” 1998, vol. 105, no. 1-2, p. 69; Fishelov D., *Poetic and non-poetic similes: structure, semantics, rhetoric*, “Poetics Today” 1993, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 1–23; M. Israel, J.R. Harding, V. Tobin, *On Simile*, op. cit., p. 125.

- She does it with such studied concentration that it seems the health of the nation depends on getting this count right. (*Our Lady*, 63)
- When he exhales, his stomach contracts and then disappears under his ribcage, leaving behind a steep concave that reminds Alice of the starving Buddha. (*Our Lady*, 144)
- He rummages through the cupboard with such desperation, it seems his life depends on finding the right shirt. (*Our Lady*, 182)
- She feels a cold shiver in her nape, the kind you feel when someone is following you secretly, when someone is staring at your back and doesn't want you to know. (*Our Lady*, 217)
- And then above the roof people saw a silver throne hovering, held aloft by a flock of peacocks on which sat a likeness of our Holy Mother. (*Our Lady*, 223)

In some cases it is really a matter of the presence or absence of a marker of comparison that renders sentences non-similes in the technical sense.

Research into literary simile vehicles in contemporary literature pales in comparison with the linguistic, psycholinguistic, or cognitive examinations of this trope. Simile and comparison vehicles have normally been discussed in the absence of any context: in so-called conventional or phraseological expressions, whereby the sources of the vehicles have been specified relying on the corpus of existing fixed expressions in a particular language, or by analyzing examples concocted or specifically selected for the sake of an analysis. At the same time such contextless studies of similes have been criticized<sup>24</sup> and it has been postulated that similes be studied in poetic and literary contexts to account for their multifaceted nature and the possible relationships which obtain between similes and their context<sup>25</sup>.

## The Orenda by Joseph Boyden: different worlds, different vehicles

This analysis is inspired by the reading of two novels, one of which is Joseph Boyden's highly-acclaimed book *The Orenda* published in 2013. This historical novel portrays the bellicose relations between the indigenous peoples of Canada at the beginning of the 17th century in a context that encompasses the arrival of Europeans (represented by Jesuits) in their land. The book has received remarkably good reviews for capturing "a heart-

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<sup>24</sup> T. Bridgeman, *On the likeness of similes and metaphors (with special reference to Alfred Jarry's Les Jours Et Les Nuits)*, "The Modern Language Review" 1996, vol. 91, no. 1, p. 65.

<sup>25</sup> D.L. Chiappe, J.M. Kennedy, P. Chiappe, *Aptness is more important than comprehensibility in preference for metaphors and similes*, "Poetics" 2003, vol. 31, p. 65; R.J. Harris, B.M. Friel, N.R. Mickelson, *Attribution of discourse goals...*, op. cit., p. 867.

breaking historical moment [...] brilliantly”,<sup>26</sup> for chronicling “a period of catastrophic change”, as well as for immersing the reader “in an ancient culture”.<sup>27</sup>

The story is told by three narrators, namely Bird, a Harun warrior, Snow Falls, an Iroquois girl, and Christopher, a Jesuit missionary. As one of the reviewers said: “these three voices interweave in the present tense, the reader’s only clue to their identity being the tone and perspective on the story”.<sup>28</sup> The three protagonists present three individual and to a large extent different views of the same events, with the three living in and experiencing the same world as the narrative develops. The very important difference between them is the voice of Christopher who arrives from a different world (his “old world”, *Orenda*, 6) to what will become Canada in due course. Therefore, he brings into his narrative two clashing worlds: the Old World represented by his European heritage, education, experience, and knowledge, in contrast with the new world which he is in the process of conceptualizing as he speaks. To some extent the other two characters also face a new world, represented by the new arrivals and the advent of a new civilization, a world which they face using their already formed patterns of conceptualization.

The narratives of Bird and Christopher each have well-defined addressees. Bird talks to his deceased wife and Christopher’s narration is in the form of a book, diary, journal (*Orenda*, 28) about his life amongst the indigenous peoples that is addressed to his Superior in Kebec and ultimately any readers in France (*Orenda*, 79). Snow Fall’s narrative, on the other hand, is aimed at no one in particular but it seems that for the most part she as if speaks to her old family (cf. Mother, Father, *Orenda*, 170, and her extended family), as well as the tribe killed by the Huron. The alleged addressees may have more impact on their stories and the way the latter are told than on the potential idealized reader, because the characters each arguably share with their intended readers, listeners, audiences the same kind of experience, world views, beliefs, etc. in the form of reference domains from which to draw elements to construe a comprehensive and potent figurative language.

<sup>26</sup> D. Annand, *The Orenda by Joseph Boyden, review*, “The Telegraph”, 13.12.2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/10509080/The-Orenda-by-Joseph-Boyden-review.html>, [access: 20.03.2014].

<sup>27</sup> W. Smith, ‘*The Orenda*’ by Joseph Boyden, “The Washington Post”, 22.05.2013, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/the-orenda-by-joseph-boyden/2014/05/22/f8118f72-d976-11e3-bda1-9b46b2066796\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/the-orenda-by-joseph-boyden/2014/05/22/f8118f72-d976-11e3-bda1-9b46b2066796_story.html), [access: 20.03.2014].

<sup>28</sup> K. Bruce, *Joseph Boyden: The Orenda (One World)*, “The Herald” (Scotland), 8.12.2013, <http://www.heraldscotland.com/books-poetry/reviews/joseph-boyden-the-orenda-one-world.22795107>, [access: 20.02.2014].

Taking into consideration the fictional addressee is also a marker of maintaining the coherence of their narratives.

Their stories provide the only access to their worlds, the way they conceptualize the narrated events, the way they describe their feelings, their attitudes, their evaluations and attitudes as well the physical elements of the observable world. They do this in a variety of ways and an integral element of their narratives is similes. The main function of the similes can be characterized as descriptive, that is to say, by evoking source domains they provide descriptions of novel elements of their narratives. Amongst other pragmatic functions identified are, for example, irony, evaluation, appreciation and disparagement. For me, however, from all the specific roles one panfunction emerges, a metafunction if you will, which is an indexing marker of the characters' belonging to the worlds they describe and refer to in the similes (both in the targets and vehicles).

For this analysis I have selected over 182 similes (42 used by Bird, 81 by Snow Falls and 59 by Christopher). Numerically speaking, the number of similes in *The Orenda* is not high. Taking into consideration all the similes extracted from the book the average is 3 similes per page, and yet despite the fact *The Orenda* is not suffused with figurative language, similes seem to be the dominant type. The privileged position of similes among the figurative types demonstrates their importance in the construal of the narrators' language, exposes their ways of conceptualizing and representing the new, in addition to the characters' figurative thinking and ways of expression in general.

Although the *Orenda* corpus in this study consists of similes used by the three protagonists, there are also similes which are used by other less important figures in the novel, such as other Jesuit missionaries or other Harun warriors or tribe members, for instance, Gosling, in which we can observe the same type of coherent relationships between the source domains chosen and the fictional worlds of the characters. The examples below illustrate my point.

- "It's maddening," Gabriel says, leaning over me, "how even after all this time they still frighten like deer." (Gabriel, 159)
- "Well," Fox says, "he certainly makes it all sound like summer evenings." (Fox, 185)
- Are you not like Nero fiddling as your savage empire around you burns? (Gabriel, 210)
- They look like the drawing of rapids in a river. (A young woman, 246)
- They're like cow moose in rut. (A warrior, 336)
- The crows have slid themselves like snakes between us and our allies. (Carries an Axe, 390)
- You know the crows guard their food cache as carefully as squirrels. (Gosling, 406)

Before discussing the vehicles of the similes in *The Orenda*, let us first look at the targets and target domains. It has to be said that the majority are concrete domains, with abstract targets very infrequent, and these include similes used by Christopher, for example:

- It is up to us whether or not we allow our okis to grow strong and straight like a beautiful oak, or bent and gnarled like a thorn bush. The Great Voice wants us to be as the oak tree. (*Orenda*, 160)
- Is it vanity, then, dear Lord, that consumes me like a fever as I stay up writing late into the night, the words pouring from me in an endless stream. (*Orenda*, 210)

The dominant and most heterogeneous target domain is that of actions, which involves a variety of common activities, such as walking, sitting, crying, feeding, screaming, for example:

- My mouth moves like a pike's that's been tossed onto shore. (*Orenda*, 45)
- I watch her, and she acts like a dreaming animal [...]. (*Orenda*, 58)
- It's as if these people act more like animals than humans. (*Orenda*, 90)
- Our pursuers have slowed and, like a swarm of bees, attack those in our group who weren't speedy enough. (*Orenda*, 150)
- He moves gracefully, like a hawk drifting in slow spirals above me. (*Orenda*, 271)

with less frequent or more subtly defined target domains, such as bristling, wilting, hovering, curling and others, for instance:

- The canoes, one by one, slow like great birds coming in to land. (*Orenda*, 90)
- All of my people stretch out before me, their voices roaring like big rapids pulling me to them. (*Orenda*, 262)
- I can see how the skin opens like a smiling mouth and the blood spurts out. (*Orenda*, 264)
- He takes my shoulders in his hands, as if he cups a bird's egg in each one. (*Orenda*, 391)
- All around us, men yell and arrows slice through the air, burning the colour of the summer sky until they hit the ground or a longhouse before they explode like a small sun. (*Orenda*, 431)

Other target domains found in the similes are appearance, weather conditions, character traits, physical features, as well as senses. For example:

- [...] his voice droning in a tongue that sounds like a fast spring creek. (*Orenda*, 21)
- Who sneaked up behind me quick as a lynx [...]. (*Orenda*, 14)
- These longhouses are truly a wonder, like giant beehives woven together with saplings and covered in sheets of bark. (*Orenda*, 29)
- Her form as thin as a snake's. (*Orenda*, 44)
- Their teeth as sharp and pointed as flint knives [...]. (*Orenda*, 49)
- The captives look more like skinned bears than men when I decide it's time to carry them outside ... (*Orenda*, 276)



To sum up, we can say that the narrators most frequently describe observable facts: that is the actions performed by themselves and others, the attributes of character, the physical features of human beings and inanimate objects. The targets do not tell us much about the narrators, certainly less than the vehicles. The choice of targets does not necessarily entail the choice of particular vehicles. Nevertheless, the targets unite the characters, they are elements of the same schemas, with scripts and frames being formed or, more precisely, being described and defined as they speak. They unambiguously show what is being narrated, which in *The Orenda* is very much limited to the “here and now” of New France and indeed a specific location on its map. It cannot be ruled out that the choice of the targets may also have some influence on the characteristics of the protagonists, an analysis of which however cannot be undertaken here.

If we look at the source domains the prevailing groups are those of flora and fauna, inanimate objects, as well as what I call here schema domains, used primarily in clausal comparisons. Other source domains include human beings, parts of the body, topographic features, beliefs, including religious beliefs, and weather conditions. These types of domains are used without preference by all three protagonists/narrators. This is not surprising at all as all of the domains include tangible and observable phenomena, phenomena which are accessible to the narrators, by default present in the real world as well as the world represented in the novel. In most cases it is difficult to decide on the basis of the vehicles used in whose narrative the similes appear. That is to say, the vehicles are mostly fairly general, as they use relatively generic terms, such as *animal, bird, river, sun, moon*, although this is true also of more specialized names such as *dogs, ravens, bears, creeks, rapids, trunks, mussels, frost, snakes* and others. Nonetheless, none of these vehicles seem to trespass on domains of experience that would be inaccessible to the fictional characters. The influences drawn from the narrative allow us to accept them as part and parcel of their worlds.

It is only in the case of Christopher that we can notice that similes draw on different source domains. While this character is not dissimilar from the other two protagonists as far as their targets are concerned, his selection of vehicles evince his broader range of references, which sets him apart quite dramatically from the other narrators. The following examples illustrate the point:

- Where they trade those furs for staples such as iron axes and copper kettles and all form of glass beads, which to the Huron are as valuable as gold. (*Orenda*, 29)

- But these ones have a musculature that's impressive, taut stomachs and strong arms, their brown, hairless skin in the winter firelight like oil paintings that have come alive. (*Orenda*, 30)
- [...] the sauvages [...] lay their parcels of souls upon the ground, essentially once again putting them on display for curious visitors to stroll by and admire as if they are perusing wares at a village fair. (*Orenda*, 82)
- He's a very handsome young man, high cheekboned and with a frame like Michelangelo's David. (*Orenda*, 88)
- I cannot comprehend how they live like this, an existence that to me is like hell. (*Orenda*, 89)
- A clear view of the water and land on all sides, a cliff steep enough to prevent frontal attacks, the palisades thick and well maintained, with stone buildings like anchors behind them. (*Orenda*, 117)
- [...] healthy as a donkey when I left this place, now crooked and dying. (*Orenda*, 118)
- It's another one, the one that comes when a man doesn't want to admit he'll soon die yet knows this is what pursues him, baying like a hound. (*Orenda*, 122)
- Gabriel kneels to force Isaac to show him, then scuttles back like a crab. (*Orenda*, 208)
- Beyond that corn paste, ottet, which tastes like glue and is their staple on long trips [...]. (*Orenda*, 240)
- I assume this unhappiness is born from suffering a long winter cooped up like livestock in a barn. (*Orenda*, 297)
- Spring seems as far away as sweet France [...]. (*Orenda*, 302)
- The burning flesh smells like a cow's liver left too long on the fire. (*Orenda*, 473)
- They've built up the fires in my chapel so hot the air undulates as if I crawl through the desert. (*Orenda*, 475)

It stands to reason that the similes, and in particular the vehicles, cannot be analysed in dissociation from other linguistic elements of the narratives. They are not the only means with which the characters present their own worlds and with which they wish to cross to the other worlds. That is to say, the characters understandably refer not infrequently to culture-bound items and language specific phenomena in relating their respective stories, which contributes to the characterization of their separate universes. At this point it is worth mentioning the connection between the vehicles and the separate universes. For instance, Christopher's vehicles tie up with other frequent references to the world he has left behind. He refers in his narrative to such elements as: Dante (*Orenda*, 28), bankers (*Orenda*, 29), Versailles (*Orenda*, 82), a Mediterranean archipelago (*Orenda*, 87), Satan (*Orenda*, 88), Egypt's Pharaoh (*Orenda*, 155), Moses, Aaron, Delilah (*Orenda*, 156), that is historical figures, art, architecture, the Bible and religious beliefs. Christopher is probably more aware of the dichotomy he is experiencing than the other characters, as he thinks in "European terms" (*Orenda*, 83), which are so often evoked in his similes as well as in those of others. On the other hand, the natives form the names

of their cotribals and the French Jesuits by using vehicles implicitly or explicitly expressed. For example, Crows and Charcoal, used to refer to Christopher and the other missionaries, are based on the comparisons drawn between the latter and elements of the natural world of New France as perceived by the indigenous Indians.

The similes, and in particular the author's choice of vehicles, in *The Orenda* illustrate a conscious technique of rendering the created worlds coherent and believable. The author selects those vehicles which would have been used by real, non-fictional inhabitants of the worlds described, inhabitants who would be constrained by their cognitive capacities to draw analogies within the scope of their knowledge, experience, education and others. The examples show the close relationships between figurative language and the availability of cognitively accessible source domains. The examination of similes in the novel demonstrates how cognitive mechanisms behind the production of figurative language are used to create fictional worlds, and establish consistent fictional personas. They demonstrate that the author is fully aware of the limitations of cognition imposed upon the characters, a fact which is taken advantage of in the process of construing the coherent and consequently convincing narrative in *The Orenda*. The book highlights that similes are figurative tools frequently used with the aim of capturing the new and redefining the old. And of course the novel shows on a certain level the clash of the two worlds whose differences are also eloquently underlined in the characters' similes.

### **Our Lady of Alice Bhatti by Mohammed Hanif: endo- and exocentric vehicles**

On reading Mohammed Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* the reader is struck by the large number of figurative similes in the same way as Reese (1953: 373) was struck when reading Malraux's novels. I was further impressed by the fact that Hanif seemed to have used statistically more similes per page than Malraux in his novels, thus positioning himself far above those writers in whose novels the average seems to be two similes per eleven pages as Reese (*ibid.*) estimated 60 years ago. In Hanif's novel I have counted 354, which means there is one and a half figurative elements of this type per page and that number includes three types of comparative construction. Calculations similar to Reese's and my own may be found in the analyses of other literary works. For example, in Burger's estimation in *Komm wieder, Pepino*, a novel by Eveline Haller, there is one simile on each page of the text. Similes are like no other figurative feature of Mohammed Hanif's *Our Lady*, in that numerically they are exceptionally foregrounded. Furthermore, the book does not evince the author's liking for

phraseological units (except for some idioms, as well as fixed similes and comparisons), nor does it counterbalance the use of similes and comparisons with a frequent deployment of metaphors, or indeed other figures for that matter. The statistical data do not themselves account for the richness of the forms and functions the similes in Hanif's book demonstrate, however, they show the author's preference for this kind of expression, expressions highlighting differences and similarities, when presenting topics. It is the dominant method in functionalizing the figurative language, conceptualizing the similarities between the presented tenors and vehicles, choosing the best vehicles from amongst a multitude of available sources with an eye to characterizing elements of the created world.

Now I would like to address the employment of similes and comparisons in *Our Lady*. Since it is impossible to include all aspects of Hanif's similes in my analysis I would like to focus on selected features of the figurative trope and its employment in the novel. Firstly, I would like to address the issue of the vehicle as a component of the similes and secondly, I would like to analyse Hanif's vehicles in terms of the relations that hold between them and both the reality of the novel and the realness of the outside world.

One basic way of looking at vehicles is to classify them in such categories as human beings, tools, animals, nature, plants, substances and objects<sup>29</sup>. Such categories can naturally also be applied in the classification of vehicles in novel figurative comparisons, however, they remain undefined with reference to the context of their use. If similes are analysed in a literary context, such as the context of Malraux's novels, for example, it is obviously an attempt to see them against the background of their contextual embedding. My analysis of similes in Hanif's novel is based primarily on the context, although an examination of the primary sources of the similes is illuminating in itself as they point to Hanif's preferred types of vehicle with reference to the principal motifs of the book (animals, slavery, disease, hospital, sport, religion). In their entirety these tie up with the main themes: treatment of women, religion, hospital conditions, plight of the ill), as well as link them as entities with the Pakistani way of life (for example, animals – dogs, sport – cricket). Thus the use of particular source domains can be both conditioned by the textual world as well as influence its reading.

The occurrence of the animal source domain in *Our Lady* is a case in point. Although it is represented by many different animals (bees, sparrows, lion, fish, snake, animal, pet), the one that is repeated is the

<sup>29</sup> P. Grzybek, *Comparison*, [in:] *Simple forms. An encyclopedia of simple text-types in lore and literature*, ed. W.A. Koch, Bochum 1994, pp. 70–71.

dog hyponymic domain and the presence of references to this domain in the vehicles is linked to the strong presence of dogs in the world of Alice Bhatti.

- Teddy doesn't look back to thank him, doesn't even remember to take the rifle back from him, but runs, cradling the remains of his thumb like a hunting dog dashing back to his master, carrying back the catch in triumph with the hope of a reward for a job well done. (*Our Lady*, 18)
- The vehicle occupies a space and then makes it its own, like a ferocious dog marking its territory. (*Our Lady*, 54)
- She has dressed his mangled thumb, which initially looked like a dog had chewed it and spat it out. (*Our Lady*, 86)
- But after dressing up properly, he disappears in a Hilux that turns up to pick him up and returns him in the morning covered in dust, his hands bruised, as if he has been fighting wild dogs all night. (*Our Lady*, 219)

In other cases the vehicles from the same general animal domain are divorced from the textual world, for example:

- Inspector Malangi gestures towards the back of the van, and the man there moans like a dying animal. (*Our Lady*, 12)
- The plates are moved aside, the bread rolled, and eight pairs of eyes follow Sister Alice's feet like those of caged animals who have just learnt to respect their new captor. (*Our Lady*, 57)
- It looked like a dead eel from the outside and inside smelled of sailors' farts,' she would say. (*Our Lady*, 89)
- He whimpers like an animal that has been half slaughtered with a blunt knife and is now waiting for its soul to leave its body. (*Our Lady*, 110)
- He is going through his drawer when Teddy shows up looking lost like a pet whose owner has suddenly decided to move house and has no plans to take him along. (*Our Lady*, 207)

The choice of two other categories of source domain, that is religion and sport, is highly motivated by the context. Although they can be employed in contexts other than that of *Our Lady*, we cannot fail to notice the relations that obtain between them and the textual world.

- Then he changes his mind and puts his left hand around the pole, thumb pointing towards Noor, who is holding the gun by its barrel, wielding it like a cricket bat. (*Our Lady*, 17)
- Noor tests the rifle in the air like a batsman getting the measure of the swing he should expect. (*Our Lady*, 17)
- Alice feels she is airborne for a long time, and then she lands in the waiting arms of two men, who shout 'Howzat!' like deranged cricketers. (*Our Lady*, 34)
- An old nun quipped that she looked like a cross with tits. (*Our Lady*, 93)
- 'Yes. The world needs this one. You know that our Lord Yassoo's faith didn't spread beyond Egypt until they learned to mass-produce wooden crosses,' he says, emphasising every word, as if trying to explain the Old Testament to high school students. (*Our Lady*, 121)

- There is always a cloud shaped like Muhammad. (*Our Lady*, 188)
- She already knows that her miracles are turning out to be her curse, like a prophet who brings the dead back to life, and then those brought back complain that they've come back to the same life again. (*Our Lady*, 189)
- He drifted into sleep and saw a rain-soaked street, its drains bubbling, and a man who looked like Jesus Christ riding a bike through the knee-deep water, trailing a twenty-foot-long bamboo pole on the carrier. (*Our Lady*, 193)

In this section I would like to view the simile vehicles in terms of their endo- and exocentricity. Exocentric similes are those similes whose vehicles derive from domains which are positioned outside the fictitious world of a novel (but may to a certain extent overlap with the presented reality) and whose interpretation is conditioned by re-ality (objectively existing), also presented as reinterpreted reality. They require the activation of accumulated knowledge from sources other than the text itself. Endocentric similes, on the other hand, are those similes whose vehicles are part and parcel of the fictional world and exist there by virtue of being invented or explicitly evoked verbally by the author of the world. They activate the information retrieved from the text itself and contained within the fictitious world. This distinction is of course not new. The fact that establishing the grounds, and in consequence the comprehension of similes, is conditioned on general knowledge (extratextual references), or textually established knowledge (intratextual), or both at the same time in some cases, has been noticed before<sup>30</sup>.

These categories are not clear-cut classes of vehicles. They are internally diversified, displaying various degrees of vehicle endo- and exocentricity and such classes are valid only with reference to a particular text. The following examples illustrate to my mind the most uncontentious examples of endo- and exocentric similes:

- Through the dusty leaves of the Old Doctor, the afternoon sun comes to Alice in dribs, like the rusting shower in Teddy's Al.-Aman apartment. (*Our Lady*, 168)
- Ortho Sir said this as if slutville was a Toronto suburb he had been denied entry into. (*Our Lady*, 148)
- A helicopter hovers over the beach as if defending the Arabian Sea against the burning rubber smell that is spreading through the city. (*Our Lady*, 71)
- Here, surrounded by six dogs with not-Abu Zar nowhere in sight, Teddy feels as if he is back under that tree, a mad drummer punishing a pair of bricks as someone else walks away with the prize. (*Our Lady*, 139)

<sup>30</sup> Cf. T. Bridgeman, *On the likeness of similes and metaphors (with special reference to Alfred Jarry's Les Jours et Les Nuits)*, "The Modern Language Review" 1996, vol. 91, no. 1, p. 70; G.A. Miller, *Images and models, similes and metaphors*, [in:] *Metaphor and thought*, ed. A. Ortony, Cambridge 1979, p. 220; D. Fishelov, *Shall I compare thee? Simile understanding and semantic categories*, "Journal of Literary Semantics" 2007, vol. 36, p. 75.

- They had seen the owner step out of the vehicle: Rolex, Ray-Bans, Bally, Montblanc; he walked like someone wearing a million rupees' worth of accessories in a place where half a pint of O-positive costs two hundred rupees. (*Our Lady*, 54)

All of these vehicles refer to elements of the story, that is elements of the created worlds of Karachi and Toronto, as well as descriptions of characters and fictional places, etc. The full potential of the similes can be exploited by analyzing the reference of the vehicles to the context of their employment.

In the examples below the vehicles use familiar images, scripts, symbols, etc. in the description of the tenors and can be therefore treated as exocentric:

- They look like a ragtag army that has lost its way and is running low on supplies, the kind of army that can't make up its mind whether it has besieged a castle and is waiting for reinforcements to launch the final assault or just waiting for an ambush to relieve the men of their misery. (*Our Lady*, 26)
- It looked like a dead eel from the outside and inside smelled of sailors' farts,' she would say. (*Our Lady*, 89)
- Sister Alice, spurred by her Lord's approval, squeezed with the power of her faith till the vein couldn't stand the flow of blood any more and burst in at least seventeen places simultaneously, swivelling like a lawn sprinkler going crazy. (*Our Lady*, 176)

This category contains vehicles which present imaginary alternative realnesses, in what Goatly calls quasi-similes<sup>31</sup> (238).

- He had repeated the words like a password that would grant him access to a world where people constantly excused each other. (*Our Lady*, 20)
- He looks like a freak with two cocks. (*Our Lady*, 62)
- Noor knows the old saying about opposites attracting each other, but these two belong to different species. It's like a cheetah falling for a squirrel or bats trying to chat up butterflies. (*Our Lady*, 80)

This category is controversial to say the least. The vehicles created by the author are fictional, so they come into being as textual creations but at the same time they do not belong to the textual world, nor do they belong to the actual realness. They are provided as a contrast to the clearly defined world of the novel.

A specific type of vehicle classified as exocentric can refer to a well-defined universe of realness. In the case of *Our Lady*, it is the world directly implied by the positioning (geographic, cultural, linguistic, religious, political) of the fictional world of Karachi and more generally Pakistan. Such vehicles can be illustrated by the following

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<sup>31</sup> A. Goatly, *The language of metaphors*, London 1997, p. 238.

similes, as together with those similes discussed earlier that derive from the domains of sport, religion and animals, both stand in an inclusive relationship with the novels' reality:

- He was only fourteen years old, pale and skinny as a stick, and nobody thought that he would be allowed into the building, especially as he had one arm around an old woman who wore cheap sunglasses and looked like someone who had just embarked on a career in panhandling. (*Our Lady*, 19)
- Alice Bhatti carries her handcuffs lightly, as if she is wearing glass bangles. (*Our Lady*, 47)
- His bodybuilder's weekly regime of waxing his body hair has left certain parts of him looking like abstract kilim designs. (*Our Lady*, 61)
- This whole business of love, he concludes, is a protection racket, like paying your weekly bhata to your local hoodlum so that you are not mugged on your own street. (*Our Lady*, 82)
- He puts them into the sweaty hand of PT teacher, who places them in front of him like a Hindu priest making an offering. (*Our Lady*, 137)
- Alice Bhatti is holding her hand, ignoring her screams, which alternate between yelling and chanting slogans of Ya Ali as if she was a new convert at a Shia procession. (*Our Lady*, 163)

Comparing the two groups of vehicles in Hanif's novel, I noticed the overwhelming prevalence of exocentric vehicles (87%). Why do we come across more exocentric than endocentric vehicles? I can offer a few possible explanations: firstly, vehicles have a greater power of attribute extraction and attribute assignation when they derive from familiar concepts, which is true in the case of exocentric concepts — they are universally accessible. Familiar domains enhance the appreciation of the similes in their entirety through their reference to the tangibility of the images involving sight, smell, touch. Thus they ease the comprehension of the similes to a large extent, as well as allowing access to the author's/narrator's perception of the non-fictional world, with their perception of its more or less salient features being used in figurative comparisons. Secondly, and more specifically, universal concepts offer a range of attributes much wider than a set of attributes generated by the context. Exocentric vehicles come from an unlimited number of available domains. Thirdly, evoking scripts, images, etc., of objectively established evaluative connotations can serve as ready-made means of creating evaluative similes. Fourthly, exocentric vehicles provide more fertile ground for allusions. Scripts evoked by universal vehicles provide rich descriptions, enrich the description, and widen the perspective. And of course we should not forget the functionalization of similes, which influences the choice of vehicles. It may be said that at least in *Our Lady* exocentric references



are established more frequently because exocentric vehicles can functionalize a simile more efficiently.

I am unable to explore more extensively the functions of the similes in Hanif's book and will not in consequence refer to the relations between the narrator's vehicles and the roles they perform in the constitution of the meanings of the similes. It suffices to say that they are multifarious, of which the most frequent are description (of physical conditions, mental states), intensification, evaluation, criticism, and irony. Further examinations of Hanif's use of this trope, as well as that of other writers', should explore simile vehicles in more detail, taking advantage of the distinctions I have enumerated to establish if and to what extent they can inform our interpretation of the novel. I believe that such analyses of similes can contribute to the overall understanding of Hanif's novels, amongst others, and his authorial style including the deployment of figuration in the construal of fictitious worlds.

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