

Embodying Emotion: Ontological Metaphors in Frances Hodgson Burnett's Novel: The Secret Garden

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Abstract

This research examined how to analyze metaphors in the novel *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. Using Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory, the study examined 50 metaphors to explain how nature-based imagery converts abstract emotional notions into real sensations. The findings showed that ontological metaphors, which account for 60% of the investigated data, successfully represent emotions like hope, despair, and joy. Structural and orientational metaphors help to depict personal growth and cognitive-emotional interaction. This study emphasized the instructional usefulness of metaphors in children's reading, indicating their ability to improve emotional literacy and cognitive understanding. By bridging the gap between natural imagery and abstract emotional states, *The Secret Garden* is an effective narrative tool for readers to develop emotional resilience and personal growth.

INTRODUCTION

Metaphors are frequently used in children's literature to tie abstract concepts to physical visuals, making complicated ideas more accessible to young readers. This research examines Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, looking at how ontological, structural, and orientational metaphors relate to themes of emotional healing and personal development. Burnett's use of natural metaphors, particularly the garden as a symbol of healing and regeneration, links the characters' inner emotional states to the outside world (Hodgson Burnett, 2007). For example, the metaphor "hope was a seed buried deep in the soil" (Chapter 5, Page 39) not only depicts human development but also appeals to young readers by linking hope with a concrete, natural process. (Zhang et al., 2020) and (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) found that such metaphors improve emotional understanding in children's reading

The use of metaphors such as "seed of hope" and "hidden garden" transforms abstract concepts into visuals that young readers can easily understand. This research fills a gap in the study of metaphors in children's literature, especially in conveying emotional themes and supporting cognitive development. It highlights how metaphors in *The Secret Garden* can enrich narrative understanding and support young readers' emotional literacy.

Previous academics conducted comprehensive investigations on metaphors in a variety of genres, including music and literature. Studies on metaphors in songs (Yasmina Frida & Zuraida, 2022; Nursolihat & Kareviati, 2020; Lestari, 2020; Ndraha, 2018; Rahmadhanti et al., 2022; Yusuf & Reski Amelia, 2018; Maoula et al., 2022; Lukmana et al., 2019; Saragih, 2021; Jati, 2020; Naura & Juanda, 2020; Sawettanun & Keawduangsang, 2018; Jama'an & Firza, 2021) primarily focus on the metaphorical language unique to each text. (Yamina, 2016) examined the semantic components of songs and found 34 examples of lexical and contextual meanings. Other studies Lestari, 2020; Aulia et al., 2023; Gayatri Manuaba et al., 2019; Fatikha & Masykuroh, 2022; Nursolihat & Kareviati, 2020 focus on figurative language in songs, such as alliteration, simile, personification, metaphor, and exaggeration, but these are limited to single songs or song genres.

While metaphor studies frequently focus on adult literature or non-natural environments, little study has been conducted to investigate nature-based metaphors in children's literature and their relevance in themes such as emotional healing and growth. This study addresses that gap by examining how natural metaphors in *The Secret Garden* make complicated emotions accessible and engage young readers in cognitive and emotional comprehension, such as (Wibowo & Handayani, 2023; Monika, 2020) analysis of Kate Chopin's work, which detects nine metaphoric elements. (Birello & Pujolà, 2023; Chaerunnisah, 2020; Molek-Kozakowska, 2014; Boeynaems et al., 2017; Kitis & Milapides, 1997; Sperandio, 2020) study on news texts explores metonymy and conceptual metaphors in political news, comparable to conversational English (Nuzulia & Firmonasari, 2023; Al-Badawi & Al Najjar, 2021; Shie, 2011). This variation in metaphor studies reflects the larger function of metaphor across settings, but it also highlights a lack of study on how metaphors impact cognitive and emotional experiences in children's literature.

This study addresses that need by looking at how metaphors in *The Secret Garden* promote emotional resonance and cognitive comprehension in young readers. Using (Lakoff & Johnsen, 2003), this study investigates how metaphors function as cognitive frames, turning abstract concepts into relevant and physical images. It delves into the novel's deeper symbolic connotations and its capacity to captivate readers intellectually and emotionally.

The Secret Garden is an unusual instance for investigating metaphor's dual significance as a literary and cognitive tool. Burnett's metaphorical use of the garden emphasizes emotional healing, human progress, and nature's transformational power. For example, the garden becomes a symbolic location where characters may recover and refresh themselves, reflecting the balance between their internal emotional oscillations and the natural world outside. This study stresses the role of metaphorical language in changing young readers' comprehension of complicated emotions and supporting their emotional maturation by focusing on certain areas of the text (Zhang et al., 2020; Semino & Steen, 2008; Semino & Demjén, 2017; Dong & Duan, 2020).

The present study contributes to children's literature by offering light on how metaphors improve narrative depth and reader cognitive engagement. This study examines Burnett's use of metaphorical language to illustrate the ongoing popularity of *The Secret Garden* and its capacity to express themes of healing, growth, and human evolution.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on metaphors in literature has primarily concentrated on adult issues and genres (A'zamjonovna & Qizi, 2023; Qiuming & Danyang, 2020), whereas research investigating metaphors' cognitive and affective impacts in children's literature is sparse. This study fills that gap by investigating *The Secret Garden* to see how metaphors aid cognitive comprehension and emotional resonance in young readers, particularly on themes of healing and personal growth.

According to Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive theory of metaphor, metaphors are more than just language decorations; they are essential to human cognition and comprehension. Metaphors pervade language, cognition, and behavior, influencing how people perceive abstract concepts using familiar, tangible terminology. This concept has been useful in metaphor studies spanning literature, everyday language, and sociocultural discourse (Lakoff & Johnsen, 2003). In the context of children's literature, the theory provides a platform for investigating how metaphors convert complicated emotions such as hope, despair, and joy into physical images, thus increasing young readers' cognitive and emotional involvement with the material.

Metaphors have been a key emphasis in the study of adult literature, with several studies looking at how metaphors are employed to portray difficult topics like love, power, and existence. In their book *Metaphors, We Live By*, they claim that metaphor is more than simply a stylistic feature; it is also a fundamental component in how people interpret and view the world. Metaphors relate abstract events to more tangible imagery, so influencing our cognitive framework. Several studies have shown that metaphors in adult literature assist readers grasp philosophical and psychological topics that are difficult to convey (Lakoff & Johnsen, 2003; Semino & Steen, 2008). This study demonstrates how metaphors may be used to enrich the text and provide emotional depth to the story.

Children's literature, while simpler in structure and vocabulary, uses metaphors to express deeper moral and emotional truths. Metaphors in children's literature have been shown to help readers grasp abstract ideas such as personal growth, human values, and emotions (Trim & Sliwa, 2019). Metaphors are frequently used in children's books to connect the creative world with the reality of everyday life, allowing children to better comprehend and cope with their life experiences. For example, in *The Secret Garden*, a garden is used as a metaphor for healing, which not only introduces young readers to the concept of emotional development but also helps them to grasp the process of personal growth via the experiences of the main character. These studies underline the importance of metaphors in children's learning since they not only teach them about their surroundings but also help them develop emotional intelligence.

Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory of metaphor is especially useful in this study because it provides a strong foundation for understanding how metaphors function in literary works for both adults and children. According to their thesis, metaphor is an important means of structuring our cognitive experience and knowledge of the world. Lakoff and Johnson identify three categories of metaphors: ontological, structural, and orientational. Ontological metaphors, such as "the garden as a hidden heart" in *The Secret Garden*, give abstract notions physical expression. This theory provides a more in-depth explanation of how the metaphors in this story represent the characters' emotional and psychological processes, as well as how these metaphors assist young readers in connecting their experiences to the larger world. This theory has been frequently used in the study of metaphor in literature, and it serves as a good framework for analyzing metaphor in *The Secret Garden*.

Metaphors in literary contexts have been extensively researched for their capacity to communicate complicated emotional states and cultural values. For example, (Qiuming & Danyang, 2020) examined love metaphors in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, revealing their significance in conveying complicated emotional experiences and cultural conventions. Similarly, (A'zamjonovna & Qizi, 2023) investigated metaphorical representations in Orwell's *Animal Farm*, focusing on their function in criticizing political issues like authoritarianism and corruption. These studies demonstrate how metaphors go beyond descriptive purposes, allowing authors to include deeper emotional and social implications in their stories.

(Layegh, 2020) extended this idea by investigating how conceptual metaphors, such as "time is money" and "argument is war," influence cognition in both ordinary speech and literary works. The findings confirm Lakoff and Johnson's argument that metaphors frame abstract concepts, making them more accessible and familiar to readers.

(Hebda, 2010) and (Rossi & Hong, 2021) underline the variety of metaphor forms (ontological, structural, and orientational) and their respective roles. Ontological metaphors give physical properties to abstract notions, structural metaphors transfer one concept onto another to improve comprehension, and orientational metaphors transmit meaning through spatial interactions. These classifications are critical for understanding metaphorical language in *The Secret Garden* because metaphors play an important role in conveying themes of emotional healing and development.

The Secret Garden stands out for its wide use of natural metaphors to address themes of healing, restoration, and human development. Ontological metaphors permeate the book, as seen by descriptions such as "the garden was a secret heart" and "hope was a seed buried deep in the soil." These metaphors relate abstract emotions to the natural world, making the healing and growing processes more understandable to readers, particularly youngsters. Structural and orientational metaphors provide further support for these topics by depicting growth and emotional transformation using spatial or relational imagery.

While extensive studies have been conducted on the use of metaphors in literature, few studies have focused on natural metaphors in children's literature. Existing books, such as *The Routledge Handbook of Metaphor and Language*, offer broad insights into metaphor applications but pay little attention to how nature-based metaphors affect young readers' emotional and cognitive reactions. This gap emphasizes the necessity for a thorough examination of how *The Secret Garden* uses environmental metaphors to increase narrative depth and reader involvement.

Despite the number of metaphor studies, few investigate their use in children's literature, particularly natural metaphors associated with themes of healing and growth. This study tackles an underexplored topic by looking at how metaphors in *The Secret Garden*, particularly ontological metaphors, boost emotional resonance and cognitive accessibility for young readers.

Furthermore, while fundamental studies (Lakoff & Johnsen, 2003) and (Semino & Steen, 2008), give theoretical insights, and actual research on how different types of metaphors influence readers' involvement with topics such as emotional recovery is scarce. This study aims to close this gap by investigating how ontological, structural, and orientational metaphors in *The Secret Garden* help readers grasp the novel's main themes.

The purpose of this study is to answer the following question: how can ontological, structural, and orientational metaphors in *The Secret Garden* help readers comprehend emotional healing and personal growth? The research will look into how these metaphors promote cognitive and emotional engagement, notably through the novel's depiction of human-nature linkages and character emotional shifts.

METHOD

This study uses qualitative methods to investigate 50 metaphors from *The Secret Garden* chosen for their thematic significance to healing and progress. Using Lakoff and Johnson's theory, metaphors were classified as ontological, structural, or orientational, and each categorization was supported by cross-referencing with previous metaphor research. In Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, which concentrates on around half of the novel. Metaphors were picked through deliberate sampling based on their thematic significance to healing, growth, and transformation. This chosen technique guarantees that the novel's main themes are covered within a manageable dataset, offering insight into how metaphor works in children's literature without requiring a thorough analysis of the full book.

A validation method was undertaken to confirm the findings' credibility. This includes triangulation, which involves cross-referencing metaphor classifications with existing literature on metaphor theory and *The Secret Garden* thematic studies, and peer assessment by literary studies and

cognitive linguistics specialists. The feedback from these evaluations was utilized to improve the analysis, resulting in correct metaphor categorization and interpretation. The study followed ethical criteria for citation and interpretation, maintaining transparency throughout the research procedure. This study seeks to gain a better understanding of how metaphors in *The Secret Garden* enhance readers' emotional engagement and contribute to the novel's exploration of healing, transformation, and personal growth by systematically identifying and categorizing metaphors and employing rigorous validation methods.

FINDINGS

The study finds that ontological metaphors, which account for 60% of all metaphors, are the most successful at conveying emotions such as hope, despair, and joy. Structural metaphors (30%) and orientational metaphors (10%) contribute to ideas of progress and healing. The table below provides a breakdown of metaphor kinds. This is consistent with the novel's focus on nature and emotional development, making complicated emotions more understandable for young readers through tactile images. While based on a limited dataset, these findings demonstrate the novel's thematic emphasis on nature-based metaphors. Metaphors like 'hope was a seed buried deep in the soil, for example, not only depict growth but also connect with young readers by using vivid, relevant imagery. Given the novel's persistent emphasis on healing and change, this thematic focus is likely to carry over into other sections of the narrative. The following is a comprehensive table of metaphors from the novel, organized by kind, emotion, function, and chapter/page reference:

Table 1. Findings

Type of Metaphor	Frequency	Percentage
Ontological	30	60%
Structural	15	30%
Orientalional	5	10%
Total	50	100%

The table presents the results of a metaphor-type analysis in *The Secret Garden*. It demonstrates that ontological metaphors which offer tangible shapes to abstract notions like hope, despair, and joy are the most common kind in the novel, accounting for 30 out of 50 metaphors (60% of the total). This popularity shows that the work regularly employs ontological analogies to deepen the feelings of the characters, emphasizing themes of emotional healing and progress. In contrast, structural metaphors, in which one notion is interpreted in terms of another (for example, life as a journey), are less prevalent, accounting for only 15 occurrences (30%). Orientalional metaphors, which reflect spatial relationships to convey emotions, are the least frequent, with 5 instances (10%). This arrangement emphasizes the garden's relevance as a symbolic area for personal growth, particularly in how the characters' emotional landscapes intersect with the natural world around them.

Type Of Metaphor

I. Ontological Metaphor

Ontology metaphors refer to events, actions, feelings, and thoughts classified as objects. According to (Lakoff & Johnsen, 2003), if we can see our experiences as entities or substances, we may refer to, categorize, group, measure, and think about them. Personification might be viewed as an ontological metaphor. For example, my intellect is not functioning well today. This term depicts the speaker's ideas as having physical features.

1) DATA/OG/CP1/PG5 "There was no one left but her."

This metaphor represents Mary's abandonment, stressing her seclusion and loneliness. The statement "no one left" turns to be alone into an ontological metaphor, representing her emotional blank and setting the stage for her ultimate journey toward connection and belonging.

2) DATA/OG/CP1/PG7 "It was as if the house had forgotten her"

The house is symbolically given the capacity to "forget," emphasizing Mary's sense of neglect. This ontological metaphor highlights the topic of abandonment in her life by making the surroundings look uncaring, mirroring her inner despair.

3) DATA/OG/CP4/PG25 "The silence felt heavy, like a shroud covering the house"

Silence is personified as a palpable force, creating a sense of domination over the mansion. This metaphor emphasizes Mary's psychological weight in the secluded situation, highlighting her inner experience of being trapped in a strange, unwelcoming surrounding.

4) DATA/OG/CP5/PG39 "The locked garden seemed to hold its breath, waiting for someone to find"

The garden is personified as if it is holding its breath, representing restrained energy that has to be released. This ontological metaphor depicts the garden's transforming potential, forecasting Mary's emotional recovery as a result of discovering its hidden beauty.

5) DATA/OG/CP3/PG20 "The wind roared as if it were alive"

By giving the wind life, Burnett heightens Mary's amazement and admiration for nature's power. This personification depicts her growing awakening to the natural world, indicating her expansion of knowledge and acceptance beyond her own limited perspective.

6) DATA/OG/CP2/PG16 "Mary felt small and lost in the big, closed-up manor"

The overwhelming scale of the manor makes Mary feel little and defenseless, serving as an ontological metaphor for her psychological seclusion. This metaphor emphasizes her sense of helplessness and detachment in an unfamiliar world, predicting her quest for belonging.

7) DATA/OG/CP3/PG22 "The cold, stone walls of the manor seemed to stare back at her, silent and watchful."

Mary's discomfort is conveyed by the personification of the walls as watchful entities, mirroring her impression of the manor as an imposing and sentient presence. This metaphor produces psychological tension by conveying her sensation of being an outsider scrutinized in an unwelcoming environment.

8) DATA/OG/CP3/PG21 "She felt as if the moor was calling her, whispering with every gust of wind"

This metaphor gives the moor a voice and implies a mysterious fascination. Burnett uses this ontological metaphor to express Mary's developing affinity with the natural world, portraying the moor as a companion to her loneliness, inviting her to explore and transform.

9) DATA/OG/CP5/PG40 "The garden wrapped around her like a comforting blanket"

This metaphor represents the garden as a source of comfort, similar to a protecting blanket. The ontological metaphor emphasizes Mary's consolation in the garden, indicating her transformation from solitude to belonging inside nature's nurturing embrace.

10) DATA/OG/CP2/PG14 "The manor`s empty halls echoed like the lonely spaces within her"

The manor's halls are thematically linked to Mary's empty spaces, expressing her internal misery. This ontological metaphor reflects her psychological state, describing her physical and emotional circumstances as barren but ready for renewal.

II. Structural Metaphor

A structural metaphor occurs when one notion is figuratively embedded in another. (Hetmański, 2021), argues that the "conduit metaphor" views ideas as objects, language phrases as containers, and communication as transmission.

1) DATA/ST/CP4/PG24 "The garden was hidden, locked away like a secret."

This metaphor depicts the garden as a "locked secret," stressing its mystery and the healing power buried within. The structural metaphor emphasizes the concept of self-discovery, with Mary having to unlock both the garden and herself before finding serenity.

2) DATA/ST/CP5/PG42 "The garden was a hidden heart of the manor, pulsing quietly."

Burnett's description of the garden as a "hidden heart" highlights its emotional and spiritual value. This metaphor emphasizes how the garden becomes a source of life and connection for Mary and Colin, representing the foundation of the manor's—and their—potential for growth.

3) DATA/ST/CP2/PG10 "Mistress mary, quite contrary.."

This structural metaphor uses a nursery rhyme to portray Mary's reluctance to change and contradictory personality. It reflects her social isolation and defiance, which she must soften in order to connect and grow through her connections with others.

4) DATA/ST/CP8/PG58 "The garden blossomed under her care, like her own spirit awakening"

The garden's growth is linked to Mary's emotional development, signifying her internal transformation. This metaphor emphasizes the notion of mutual care, as Mary and the garden prosper together, symbolizing her emotional restoration.

5) DATA/ST/CP8/PG60 "Her heart was like a tightly closed bud, slowly starting to open"

Burnett compares Mary's heart like a blooming flower, symbolizing her emotional openness. This metaphor depicts her progressive journey towards empathy and vulnerability, paralleling her care for the garden with her own psychological maturation.

III. Orientational Metaphor

Orientational metaphors refer to spatial orientations derived from our physical or cultural experiences, such as up and down, in and out, high and low, front and back, and so on (Lakoff & Johnsen, 2003). The term "orientational metaphor" alludes to the fact that most metaphors for this function deal with fundamental human spatial orientations such as up-down, center-periphery, and so on. For example, his compensation was cut last year. The phrase fell is an orientational metaphor. The term fall implies a downhill tendency. Downhill is connected with negative assessments, whereas upward is associated with positive ones.

1) **DATA/OR/CP3/PG18 "The moor was a vast, rolling ocean."**

The moor's description as a "rolling ocean" highlights its overwhelming and infinite aspect. This orientational metaphor reflects Mary's first amazement and insignificance with respect to nature, laying the groundwork for her journey from isolation to connection with the environment.

2) **DATA/OR/CP3/PG18 "The moor seemed to swallow her up as she walked along."**

Burnett's description of the garden as a "hidden heart" highlights its emotional and spiritual value. This metaphor emphasizes how the garden becomes a source of life and connection for Mary and Colin, representing the foundation of the manor's—and their—potential for growth.

3) **DATA/OR/CP6/PG48 "The sky stretched above her, wide and open as her heart began to feel"**

The comparison of the sky to Mary's heart emphasizes her newfound sense of freedom and possibility. This orientational metaphor links the vast sky to her emotional development, demonstrating her willingness to welcome change and connection.

4) **DATA/OR/CP3/PG19 "The moor spread out in all directions, endless and open"**

The infinite expanse of the moor represents freedom, in contrast to Mary's former imprisonment. This orientational metaphor emphasizes the concept of personal expansion, as Mary's emotional potential are opened up by the natural world.

5) **DATA/OR/CP3/PG20 "Mary felt like she was fading into the vastness of the moor"**

This metaphor captures Mary's sense of dissolution as she sees herself blending with the moor. This orientational metaphor emphasizes her isolation, depicting her struggle to establish identity and significance within the enormous vastness of her surroundings.

The study's findings show how metaphor types in *The Secret Garden* contribute to the narrative's emotional and thematic depth in different ways. Ontological metaphors, which account for 60% of all known metaphors, excel in transforming complex emotions such as hope, grief, and joy into tangible, accessible experiences. Structural metaphors enhance the narrative by illustrating development and transition. Orientational metaphors emphasize geographical relationships that reflect emotional feelings.

This metaphorical pattern is congruent with the novel's emphasis on nature as an emotional healing aid, emphasizing themes of self-discovery and personal development. Future study might build on this method by looking at metaphorical themes in other parts of the novel or comparing *The Secret Garden* to other works in children's literature. (Lakoff & Johnes, 2003; Zhang et al., 2020).

DISCUSSION

Metaphors play an essential part in *The Secret Garden*, bringing abstract concepts like healing and personal growth to life. Frances Hodgson Burnett depicts intricate psychological changes using ontological analogies. For example, describing hope as a "seed buried deep in the soil" indicates that it develops and evolves like a plant. This relates Mary and Colin's emotional healing to the physical growth of the garden, enabling young readers to see emotions as natural processes. As the characters work to restore the neglected garden, they encounter and overcome personal problems, making a symbolic link between caring nature and self-discovery.

The story's structural similarities underscore the concept of metamorphosis, likening the garden to a "hidden heart." This metaphor emphasizes the garden's twofold significance as a necessary component of the mansion and as a fundamental emblem of the characters' emotional journeys. Mary's persona "blooms," turning from a shy, lonely kid to someone with a feeling of connection and purpose as she tends to the garden. These metaphors highlight the connection of the environment and personal well-being, making complex emotions more accessible to younger audiences.

Finally, orientational metaphors, such as describing the huge moor as a "rolling ocean," employ spatial orientation to portray Mary's feeling of amazement and her interaction with the environment around her. The moor's broad and dynamic description depicts her emotional journey from loneliness to a feeling of connection. Through these intertwined metaphors, *The Secret Garden* employs nature as a strong medium to teach young readers about healing, resilience, and the immense power of being connected to the natural world. These topics have important instructional implications, particularly for promoting emotional literacy and environmental awareness among youngsters. For example, instructors might utilize the work to spark talks about personal development and empathy, assisting students in connecting literary analysis to real-life emotional situations.

CONCLUSION

In *The Secret Garden*, Frances Hodgson Burnett displays the transformational power of metaphors to portray themes of healing, development, and emotional resilience. The narrative connects abstract emotions to real parts of nature using ontological, structural, and orientational metaphors, making these concepts understandable to young readers. The analogies not only enrich the story, but also invite readers to consider the interdependence of human emotions and the natural environment.

This study focuses on how metaphors in children's literature might lead to a better understanding of emotional and psychological development. Burnett's use of metaphor goes beyond stylistic choice, providing a framework for investigating the link between personal growth and natural cycles. By doing so, the novel contributes significantly to the discipline of metaphor studies, particularly in its application to young audiences, emphasizing the function of literary techniques in forming cognitive and emotional perceptions.

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