

THE USES OF SYNECDOCHE

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***Abstract:** Synecdoche is often used as a type of personification, by attaching a human aspect to a non-human thing. This is used in reference to political relations, including “ **having a foot**” used to mean a country or “ **the wrong hands**” to describe opposing groups, usually in the context of military power. It is also popular in advertising. Since synecdoche uses a part to represent a whole, its use requires audience to make associations and “**fill in the gaps**”, engaging with the “**ad.**” by thinking about the product.*

***Key words:** synecdoche, a rhetorical trope, conceptual substitution, representation*

A synecdoche is from Greek meaning " Simultaneous understanding", a figure of speech in which a term for a part of something refers to the whole of something ,or vice versa . An example is when referring to workers as "hired hands"<sup>1</sup>. Also, Nordquist defines synecdoche as a figure of speech in which a part is used to represent the whole (for example , ABCs for Alphabet or the whole for a part) and It can be defined as a word or a phrase in which a part of something is used to represent a whole ,or a whole is used to represent a part of something<sup>2</sup> Example, in Australia lost by two goals," Australia is used to represent the Australian team<sup>3</sup> . "Give us this day our daily bread " synecdoche in the Lord's prayer " bread" represents all food<sup>4</sup>.Fireside , hearth –home symbolized as apart of the fireplace , driven. Both singular and essentially repeatable ...when it is used it refers to this day 9/11/2001 , as if citation of this date is enough by the power of its

<sup>1</sup> Rhetoricea; 2014:2

<sup>2</sup> Nordquist 2006:1

<sup>3</sup> Hornby ; 2010 :1570 .

<sup>4</sup> .Nordquist,2006:1

referent , to understand that day and to be affiliated with all that this day entails."( Nordquist ;2014:2) Examples of synecdoches are: **Ivories** for a piano, **Lead** for bullets, **Pigskin** for an American or Canadian football, **Plastic** for a credit card, **Rubbers** for a condom, **Silver** for table wave - cutlery or the dishes or other dishes that were once made of silver metal, **Steel** for a sword<sup>5</sup>.

### **The Origin of the Word Synecdoche:**

The word "synecdoche" is derived from the Greek word =together-out accepting, from the prepositions and the verb (= I accept) originally<sup>6</sup> meaning accepting a part as responsible for the whole or vice versa. It means " shared understanding"<sup>7</sup> also it literary means a change of name (khan,2010:1).In addition ,synecdoche known as :intellectio ,quick conceit<sup>8</sup>.

### **1- Metonymy and Synecdoche**

Metonymy resembles and is sometimes confused with the trope of synecdoche . Synecdoche is a rhetorical trope and a type of figurative speech similar to metonymy – a figure of speech in which a term that denotes one thing is used to refer to a related thing. Indeed , synecdoche is sometimes considered a subclass of metonymy. It is more distantly related to other figures of speech , such as metaphor. More rigorously , metonymy and synecdoche can be considered sub – species of metaphor ,intending metaphor as a type of conceptual substitution<sup>9</sup>. According to Brook (1958:177) these two figures of speech are based not on similarity but on contiguity .It is often based upon the association of ideas. Synecdoche is often treated as a type of metonymy<sup>10</sup> . Hornby defines metonymy as the act of referring to something by the name of something else that is closely connected with it, for example using " the white House " for the US president ", the use of the word " tongue " for language is also carried out by the native speakers.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid,2006:4

<sup>6</sup> AL-USTATH No 212 volume Two 2015 AD, 1436 AH 206

<sup>7</sup> Nordquist 2006:1

<sup>8</sup> Nordquist 2006:1

<sup>9</sup> Gallagher;2013:3

<sup>10</sup> Burke;1969:p507-508

Some writers such as Larson, believes that a metonymy is in some ways like euphemism .

While Brook mentions that synecdoche is generally defined as a figure by which the name of the part is used to denote the name of the whole or vice versa. (See also,Trask,1996:44) e.g., the use of the word "rhyme " to refer to " poem".

Burke (1969:509)states that synecdoche in a very comprehensive and accurate way when he said that synecdoche is "...part of the whole , whole for the part , container for the contained , sign for the thing signified , material for the thing made ....cause for the effect ,effect for the cause<sup>11</sup>, genus for species , species for the genus ... as well as suggests that synecdoche patterns can include reversible pairs such as disease –cure and can be substituted for the word representation . e.g. the "**gray beard**" to refer to the old man,"**the long hair**" to refer to a hippie , "**wheels**" to a complete vehicle, '**London** ' to British Government , "**hands**" to the workers in a factory ,"**steel**" to sword , "**plastic** " for credit card , "**book**" for the **Bible** , "**john Hancock**" for the signature of any person ( Ibid).

As a way of an example ,the saying that " the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world " illustrates the difference between metonymy and synecdoche .Here' **the hand**' is a synecdochic representation of the mother of whom it is a part , while '**the cradle** ' represents a child by close association<sup>12</sup>. Sometimes people make an absolute distinction between a metonymy and a synecdoche ,treating metonymy as different from ,rather than inclusive of, synecdoche .there is a similar problem with the use of simile and metaphor. When the distinction is made ,it is the following : when "A" is used to refer to "B", it is a synecdoche if A is a component of B or if B is a component of A ,and a metonym if A is commonly associated with B but not part of its whole or a whole of its part .thus,"20,000 hungry mouths to feed "is a synecdoche because Australia is a whole of which the people who voted are part.On the other hand ," the White House said " is metonymy ,but not

<sup>11</sup> AL-USTATH No 212 volume Two 2015 AD, 1436 AH 207

<sup>12</sup> Nordquist ;2014:6

synecdoche ,for the president and his staff ,the building is not a part of the people .(Ibid)

### **The Uses of Synecdoche:**

Synecdoche is often used as a type of personification, by attaching a human aspect to a non-human thing .This is used in reference to political relations, including “ **having a foot**” used to mean a country or “ **the wrong hands**” to describe opposing groups, usually in the context of military power. It is also popular in advertising. Since synecdoche uses a part to represent a whole, its use requires audience to make associations and “**fill in the gaps**”, engaging with the “**ad.**” by thinking about the product. Moreover , catching the attention of an audience with such as “ **getting eyeballs**”<sup>13</sup> Within the science writing , synecdoches are common as well. For example ,DNA is a synecdoche for life ,the test tube for experiment,the statistical test for proof ,and Tally's corner for a kind of social organization.

More and more synecdoche is very common in spoken English especially in reference to sports. The name of cities are used to describe events and their outcomes. Such as “ **Denver won Monday's game**” ,when specifically a sports team was victorious (Ibid) . Also, synecdoche can be used within science writing , it is common as well. For example ,DNA is a synecdoche for life , the test tube for experiment, the statistical test for proof ,and Tally's corner for a kind of social organization.

Synecdoches are part of the general cultural heritage and exist in literature. Archetypes, mythic characters, gods and goddess have all been viewed as synecdochical ,as have some literary characters, such as Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Desdemona, Romeo, Juliet, Jane Eyre and Willy Loman (Ibid). Thus, synecdoche can be used to emphasize an important aspect of a fictional character for example, the x-Files character **the Smoking Man**. Sonnets and other forms of love poetry frequently use synecdoche to characterize the beloved in term of individual body

<sup>13</sup> AL-USTATH No 212 volume Two 2015 AD, 1436 AH 208

parts rather than a coherent whole. This practice is especially common in the Petrarchan Sonnet. Where the idealized beloved is often described part by part, from head to toe <sup>14</sup>.

## 2- Examples of Synecdoche in Poetry

### 1 -Example

Coleridge employs synecdoche in his poem "*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* "

"the western wave was all a-flame,

The day was well was high done !

Almost upon the **western wave**

Rested the broad bright sun"

The "**western wave**" is a synecdoche as it refers to the sea by the name of one of its parts i.e. wave. (Ryan;2011:10)

### 2-Example

*Shakespeare's Sonnet 116*

"O no! it is an **ever –fixed mark**

That looks on tempests and is never shaken "

The phrase "**ever –fixed mark**" refers to a light house .

(Ibid)

### 3-Example

Shelly uses synecdoche in his poem "**Ozymandias**"

"Tell that its sculptor well those passions read

Which yet survive , stamped on these lifeless things ,

**The hand** that mocked them".

' **The hand**' in the above lines refers to the sculptor who carved the ' lifeless things " into a grand statue.

### 4-Example

The use of synecdoche in the following lines from *the secret Sharer* by Joseph Conrad :

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid ,see also Nordquist ;2006: 2,3

" at midnight I went on deck, and to my mate's great surprise put the ship round on the other track. His terrible **whiskers** flitted round me in silent criticism .

The word "**whiskers**" mentioned in the above lines refers to the whole face of the narrator's mate .(Ibid)

### 5-Example

**Jonathan Swift** in the description of **the morning** uses synecdoche:

"prepared to scrub the entry and the stairs

The youth with **broomy stumps** began to trace

In the above lines the phrase "**broomy stumps** " refers to the whole broom.

### 6- Example

The use of synecdoche in **the lady or the Tiger? By Frank R. Stockton:**

His eye met hers as she sat there paler and whiter than anyone in the vast ocean of anxious **faces** about her".

" **faces** " refers to people ( not just their faces ) .

### 7-Example

The use of synecdoche in the poem of **the love Song of J. alfred prufrock .by T.S.Eliot.**

I should have been **a pair of ragged claws**

Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

"**a pair of ragged claws** " represents a carb or sea creature.(Ibid)

### 8-Example

**Robert burns** " To Dr. Blalock" , **A lady fair** '

"And let us mind ,faint **heart** n'er wan "

He uses **heart** as a synecdoche to refer to himself his body as a whole .  
(Nordquist;2014:8)

Also ,there are different examples from various novels and plays and Books in different fields such as :

### 9-Example

"Take thy **face** hence ' ( **William Shakespeare** , **Macbeth** )

### 10 -Example

#### -Robert Louis Stevenson, Treasure Island

Land ho! All **hands** on deck!"

He uses "Hands " as a synecdoche to refer to the persons on the deck.(Ibid)

### 11-Example

" Ed's buddy was in the market for *a new set of wheels* and wanted Ed's opinion about a particular model of Lexus.<sup>15</sup>"

(Ibid)

### 12- Example

"I left the toll road for our local highway and ,turning into our dirt road ,I was nearly rammed from behind by *a pair of headlights* that had been pushing ,Pennsylvania style ,six feet behind me".

(John Updike , "Packed Dirt ,Churchgoing ,a dying cat ,a traded car ."Pigeon Feathers and Others Stories<sup>16</sup> .

### 13 –Example

"**General Motors** announced four major plant closings, triggering fears of growing unemployment."

(Adam Winkler ,Gunfight .W.W. Norton ,2011) (Ibid)

### 14-Example

"Rationalizing guilt is a common trait of *white –collar* criminals<sup>17</sup> ."

Synecdoche is a special form of figurative language .Synecdoche has many complex patterns of usage, but our purpose here is to focus on literature so synecdoche occurs when a part of something represent a whole or vice versa, for example , '**ivories** ' for a piano, **London** refers to the British government.

So, synecdoche is a rhetorical trope and a type of figurative speech similar to metonymy –a figure of speech in which a term that denotes one thing is used to refer to a related thing. Indeed, synecdoche is sometimes considered a sub class of

<sup>15</sup> Douglas T. Kenrick ,Sex ,murder ,and the Meaning of Life .basic Books ,2011

<sup>16</sup> Alfred A. Knopf ,1962) ( cited in Nordequist ,2014:9

<sup>17</sup> Larry J. Siegel , Criminology ,2012) (Ibid) AL-USTATH No 212 volume Two 2015 AD, 1436 AH 212



metonymy. It is more distantly related to other figures of speech, such as metaphor. It is noticed that synecdoche is used in different fields in our life in social conversation such as things **bottles** or describing the features of people such as the parts of body like hand or heart to refer to “**love**” or material things such as **leather**, synecdoche is also used to refer to the historical things such as **Great Britain** and in abbreviation as well as its use in politics such as **boots** to refer to soldiers, in newspaper and magazines, radio, TV broadcasts and also in literature. This research stresses upon the understanding of synecdoche for the students of many different disciplines, as well as teachers or professors of linguistics, literature, journalism and politics is so important and they have to know more about synecdoche which is often very confusing to those who do not live in US. This research will learn them to know and understand the true meaning of the word and the intended meaning of the speakers to read the poem and can benefit from understanding how synecdochic words are used in literature.

Thus, the function of synecdoche in literature in that literary symbolism is developed by the writers who employ synecdoche in their literary works. By using synecdoche, the writers give otherwise common ideas and objects deeper meanings and thus draw reader's attention.

Furthermore, the use of synecdoche helps writers to achieve brevity, for instance, saying 'soldiers were equipped with steel' is more concise than saying 'the soldiers were equipped with swords, knives, daggers, arrows, etc.'

More and more, this research concludes that like any other literary device, synecdoche when used appropriately adds a distinct color to words making them appear vivid. To insert this "life" factor to literary works, writers describe simple ordinary things creatively with the aid of this literary device.

Finally, it is used to add a distinct color to words making them appear vivid. It is used to give common ideas and objects deeper meanings and thus draw readers and speakers attention so synecdoche make everyday speech more colorful, more



creative i.e the speaker or the writer describes objects in new ideas which extend the imagination of the readers and attract them for this use or new use of the word.

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