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“THE BUTTERFLY LION” ASARIDA RAMZIY OBRAZLAR VA INSON-TABIAT MUNOSABATLARINING IFODALANISHI

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O‘zbekiston davlat jahon tillari universiteti, o‘qituvchi

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada Michael Morpurgoning *The Butterfly Lion* asarida ramziy obrazlar orqali inson va tabiat o‘rtasidagi munosabatlarning ifodalanishi tahlil qilinadi. Asarda oq sher va kapalak kabi obrazlar nafaqat badiiy unsur sifatida, balki chuqur ramziy ma’noga ega bo‘lib, erkinlik, sadoqat, xotira va mehr kabi insoniy qadriyatlarni ifodalaydi. Tadqiqot davomida ramziy obrazlarning poetik funksiyasi, ularning qahramonlar ruhiyati va asar g‘oyasini ochib berishdagi roli yoritiladi. Shuningdek, inson va tabiat uyg‘unligi masalasi bolalar adabiyoti kontekstida ko‘rib chiqiladi. Maqolada ramziy obrazlarning badiiy-estetik ahamiyati ham tahlil qilinib, ular orqali muallifning g‘oyaviy niyatlari ochib beriladi.

Kalit so‘zlar: ramziy obrazlar, inson-tabiat munosabatlari, oq sher, kapalak, bolalar adabiyoti

СИМВОЛИЧЕСКАЯ ОБРАЗНОСТЬ И РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЯ ВЗАИМООТНОШЕНИЙ ЧЕЛОВЕКА И ПРИРОДЫ В ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИИ «THE BUTTERFLY LION»

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Аннотация

В данной статье анализируется репрезентация отношений между человеком и природой через символические образы в романе Майкла Морпурго «Бабочка-лев». Такие образы, как белый лев и бабочка, выступают не только как художественные элементы, но и как глубокие символы, выражающие человеческие ценности: свободу, верность, память и любовь. В ходе исследования раскрывается поэтическая функция символических образов, их роль в раскрытии внутреннего мира героев и основной идеи произведения. Также рассматривается проблема гармонии человека и природы в контексте детской литературы. В статье анализируется художественно-эстетическое значение символических образов, через которые раскрываются идейные намерения автора.

Ключевые слова: символические образы, отношения человека и природы, белый лев, бабочка, детская литература

SYMBOLIC IMAGERY AND THE REPRESENTATION OF HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONSHIPS IN “THE BUTTERFLY LION”

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Abstract

This article analyzes the representation of human–nature relationships through symbolic imagery in Michael Morpurgo’s novel “The Butterfly Lion.” Images such as the white lion and the butterfly function not merely as artistic elements but as profound symbols expressing human values: freedom, loyalty, memory, and love. The study explores the poetic function of symbolic imagery, its role in revealing the characters’ inner worlds and the novel’s central idea. Additionally, the issue of harmony between humans and nature is examined within the context of

children's literature. The article also analyzes the artistic-aesthetic significance of symbolic imagery through which the author's ideological intentions are revealed.

Keywords: symbolic imagery, human–nature relationships, white lion, butterfly, children's literature.

Michael Morpurgo's *The Butterfly Lion* (1996) stands as one of the most emotionally resonant works in contemporary children's literature. The novel weaves together multiple narrative layers, bridging the vast landscapes of rural South Africa with the confined spaces of an English boarding school, and spanning from the early twentieth century to the present day. At its heart, the novel explores the profound connections between humans and the natural world, using powerful symbolic imagery to convey themes of freedom, loyalty, memory, and love. As one literary analysis notes, the story presents “a poignant exploration of loyalty and the enduring power of memory,” examining how “narrative connects separate lives through the common thread of an extraordinary bond” [1].

The story unfolds through a double narrative structure. A young boy, who shares the author's name—Michael—runs away from his boarding school in Wiltshire and encounters an elderly woman named Millie Andrews. She takes him into her home and tells him the extraordinary story of her late husband, Bertie. As a child growing up on a remote farm near Timbavati in South Africa, Bertie rescues a white lion cub from hyenas and raises it as his closest companion. The bond between Bertie and the lion becomes the central thread of the narrative, a bond that endures despite separation, war, and the passage of decades. The novel's structure—a story within a story—has been praised for its effectiveness: “the use of a nested narrative structure affects the way your reading circle perceives the boundary between truth and myth” [1]. This narrative layering invites readers to consider not only the events of the story but also the very nature of storytelling itself. The novel's title itself points to its central symbolic duality: the lion and the butterfly. On a literal level, these are real creatures—the white lion that Bertie saves from hyenas and the Adonis Blue butterflies that eventually gather on the chalk hillside. On a deeper level, however, they function as complex symbols that illuminate the novel's exploration of human–nature relationships.

The white lion carries multiple layers of meaning. For Bertie, the animal he rescues is the embodiment of loyalty and friendship, but also of the loss of the wild that comes with domestication. For Monsieur Merlot, the French circus owner, the white lion represents the exotic product of South Africa that he can exhibit for money—one of the many ways colonialism extracts resources from dependent regions. For the British military authorities whom Bertie convinces to allow the lion to accompany him to England, the lion becomes a living symbol of Britain's might—a creature associated with courage and bravery, and a long-standing emblem of the British monarchy, present in heraldry since the reign of Richard the Lionheart [2]. During the First World War, this symbolism was actively used in British military recruitment posters depicting the lion standing up to the tyranny of Germany [2].

The lion's white color also carries symbolic significance. In Western cultural tradition, white is associated with innocence and purity. The white lion is innocent when it is with its mother in the South African veld. Once the lioness is killed, the cub loses its innocence while struggling to survive in the wild. Bertie and his mother find it so muddy that it takes several washes to restore its coat to its original white color [2]. This transition from innocence to experience mirrors Bertie's own development as he moves from childhood through separation and war.

The butterfly, with its brief but brilliant life, becomes a symbol of memory, transformation, and continuity. The novel opens with a meditation on the ephemeral nature of butterflies: “Butterflies live only short lives. They flower and flutter for just a few glorious weeks, and then they die. To see them, you have to be in the right place at the right time” [3]. Yet by the novel's conclusion, the butterfly represents not transience but endurance—the endurance of

memory and love. The chalk carving of the lion on the hillside, animated each summer by the Adonis Blue butterflies, becomes what the title names: a “butterfly lion,” a living monument that “breathes again like a living creature” [3].

The novel constructs a deliberate contrast between two opposing worlds. Africa, with its open veld, waterholes, and wildlife, represents freedom, authenticity, and harmony with nature. Bertie’s childhood home is defined by a fence designed to keep dangerous animals out, yet this same structure becomes a symbolic barrier separating him from the natural world he longs to join. England, by contrast, is depicted through images of confinement: the boarding school with its strict rules and punishments, high walls, and rigid routines.

The novel also engages with the destructive impact of war. Set against the backdrop of the First World War, it shows how conflict disrupts the fragile harmony between humans and nature. Monsieur Merlot is forced to kill his animals due to lack of food; only the white lion survives. Bertie is wounded in battle, yet his determination to reunite with the lion demonstrates the enduring power of loyalty and love. The war narrative is mediated through Millie, emphasizing the difficulty of directly representing trauma [4]. The novel’s treatment of grief further deepens its themes. Bertie’s mother and Millie are both described as dying of broken hearts, highlighting the emotional intensity of human attachment. Bertie’s long effort to carve the lion into the hillside transforms grief into a lasting symbol, while the butterflies that gather there each year transform that symbol into something living.

The white lion functions as the central symbol through which human–nature relationships are explored. Unlike traditional representations of lions as threats or symbols of power, Morpurgo presents the lion as a being with agency, emotion, and dignity [2]. Bertie’s refusal to name the lion suggests a relationship based on respect rather than ownership. Their reunion later in the novel confirms the endurance of this bond despite separation. At the same time, the novel emphasizes the tension between freedom and captivity. The lion cannot fully survive in the wild, yet captivity is equally limiting. The resolution lies in creating a balanced space where the lion can live freely while still being cared for.

Michael Morpurgo’s *The Butterfly Lion* uses the symbolic figures of the white lion and the butterfly to articulate a vision of human–nature relationships based on respect, memory, and transformation. The white lion represents the possibility of connection across species boundaries, while the butterfly symbolizes continuity and remembrance. Through the contrast between Africa and England and the depiction of war, the novel highlights the consequences of disrupting natural harmony. Ultimately, the text promotes empathy, responsibility, and respect for all living beings, suggesting that meaningful relationships with nature are built on recognition, balance, and care.

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