

# Linguistic Understanding of the Image of the "Mother" in English and French Literature

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**Abstract.** The image of the mother is immensely important both in literature and culture all over the universe. Mother is the bedrock and the symbol of life. That's why the image of mother is frequently depicted in fiction literature by various authors whose principal role is to raise the mother's image to the level of character which is not an easy task to be done at all. The writer should tend to harmonize the features of the mother, which in most cases are similar in every nation, and create a highly sensitive text which will possibly express and highlight all the important pragmatic features of the mother. It is important to mention that mothers are rarely negatively characterized by the writers in the literature of any country because the mother is considered to a source of inspiration for many writers, no matter what era or literary movements do they belong to.

The goal of this study is the analysis of the image of the mother based on the literary texts belonging to the English and French literature. For this reason, we have identified certain texts i.e. literary works. Thus, we aim to make linguistic analysis and more specifically stylistic analysis of the portrayal of the mother from the English and French literature. Based on our findings we will try to discover and outline the general qualities of the mother and motherhood and the ways how they are represented throughout the texts.

**Key words:** *Image of the mother, pragmatic features of the mother, English literature, French Literature*

The image of the mother is immensely important both in literature and culture all over the universe. Mother is the bedrock and the symbol of life. The way mother raises her child has a great influence on her child's life and attitude towards the world. Correspondingly, mothers occupy an important place in children's life. According to Fraustino and Coats (2016: 3) "[l]iving or dead, present or absent, sadly dysfunctional or merrily adequate, the figure of the mother bears enormous freight across a child's emotional and intellectual life". For this reason, that writers often integrate the image of mother in their literary works.

In general, the stereotypical image of mother is that of the child's protector and educator who teaches her child the values of love and care. According to Mcknight (1997:5), "motherhood was the corn stone of the social structure". That's why the image of the mother is frequently depicted in fiction literature by various authors whose principal role is to raise the mother's image to the level of character which is not an easy task to be done at all. The

writer should tend to harmonize the features of the mother, which in most cases are similar in every nation, and create a highly sensitive text which will possibly express and highlight all the important pragmatic features of the mother. It is important to mention that mothers are rarely negatively characterized by the writers in the literature of any country because the mother is considered as the source of inspiration for many writers, no matter what era or literary movements do they belong to.

The goal of this study is the analysis of the image of the mother based on the literary texts belonging to the English and French literature. For this reason, we have identified some literary texts. Thus, we aim to make a linguistic analysis and more specifically stylistic analysis of the portrayal of the mother from the English and French literature. Based on our findings we will try to discover and outline the general qualities of the mother and motherhood and the ways how they are represented throughout the texts.

For this reason, we have selected patterns describing either the portrait of the mother or her image, qualities and characters in various literary texts from the English and French literature as an empirical material.

Melinda Cross in her literary work "One Hour of Magic" gives a distinct depiction of the nature of motherhood by the following words: "***Motherhood doesn't have a nationality***", which once again proves that motherhood is a sacred duty in every nation life and the representation of this essence is extraordinary diverse and literal throughout the literature.

One of the literary texts attracting our interest during the analysis appeared to be "Little Women" by Louisa May Alcott. The story is about the sisters who grow up, find love and manage to find their place on the world. With them there stand their mother who is also one of the main characters of the story. Under the author's decision the word "Mother" is used with the capital letter in the whole text which, to some extent, is a respect towards parental issues.

Very interesting epithets are used to describe the mother throughout the text. E.g. the author uses quite many fixed epithets such as: "***cheerful lady***" ..... "***motherly lady***" .... "***motherly face***".... "***the mother of invention***", as well as the argumentative epithets which precisely express her soul and inner character: a "***can I help you***" look..... "***a born singer***".

Mrs. March is always happy to be with her children and extremely enjoys their tender attitudes toward her in such a way "***than if it had given back the rosy roundness of her youth***". The very last line is extraordinary artistic phrase which may serve for expressing several literary means (simile, hyperbole, metaphor) simultaneously.

Mother is the only person who knows immediately what is going on in her children's heart: "***For motherly eyes are quick to see any change in children's faces***".

The following example extracted from a very famous novel "The Time Travelers Wife" by Audrey Niffenegger metaphorically describes mothers' relations towards their children: "***Think for a minute, darling: in fairy tales it's always the children who have the fine adventures. The mothers have to stay at home and wait for the children to fly in the window.***"

The depth of love and care towards children is compared to some illusory feelings with the help of the simile in the following words "***Mothers are all slightly insane***"

(J.D. Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*).

Janet Fitch in her work "White Oleander" uses a very interesting stylistic device – metonymy for describing the essence of motherhood: "*You were my home, Mother. I had no home but you*".

There are numerous examples presenting the image of mother in the French literature. In 1954, poet and writer Albert Cohen dedicated a magnificent ode to his late mother. The story "My Mother" (Albert Cohen - "Le livre de ma mère") is addressed to all mothers all over the world. The author uses highly literary terms for expressing the image of the mother:

1. „Holy Mother“/"sainte mère"
2. „guardant of love“,"guetteuse d'amour"
3. „benevolent“/"bienfaitrice"
4. „luscious distributor“/ "douce dispensatrice"
5. „a genius of love“/ "génie de l'amour"

It should also be noted that Cohen's mother is sometimes compared to a small vulnerable girl, and the author uses the following expressions, which mainly use the words poor, little, girl, child:

1. My innocent/"mon inoffensive"
2. My miserable one/ "ma pauvre chérie"
3. A bashful child/ "une timide enfant"
4. My miserable enthusiast/ "ma pauvre enthousiaste"
5. My little child/ "ma petite enfant"
6. My ear little girl/"ma petite fille chérie"
7. My dotish little girl/"petite fille pas dégourdie"

It should also be noted that Cohen often uses slang words to describe his mother, e.g.

1. Car elle était peu **ROUBLARDE** en toilette, p. 16
2. Car elle avait, *ma pauvre chérie*, un complexe d'infériorité **PAS PIQUÉ DES COCCINELLES** p. 47
3. Elle était un peu **NIGAUDE** p. 66
4. Elle était peu **DÉBROUILLARDE** p. 57
5. Si **EMPOTÉE** p.66

Cohen can also dramatically describe his own mother:

1. Elle me considérait si tendrement, avec folie et malheur /.../ d'elle soudain si vieille, défaite et décoiffée et le chapeau mal mis et absurdement de travers, la bénédiction d'elle, exposée, déconfite, misérable, vaincue, paria, si dépendante et obscure, un peu folle de malheur, un peu imbécile de malheur, p. 107
2. Impuissante et condamnée, p. 108.
3. Debout et piteuse à la portière du wagon p. 111
4. Décoiffée, le chapeau piteusement de côté, la bouche stupéfaite de malheur, les yeux brillants de malheur p. 166
5. Somnolence d'esclave p. 85

6. Servante p. 84
7. Somnolence d'esclave p. 85

Sometimes when talking about mother, there is an ambiguity in the words, e.g.

1. Elle se faisait belle et ornée, ma mère p. 14
2. Émue comme une petite fille de distribution de prix, ma vieillissante mère p. 16
3. Et ils verraient quelle femme capable elle était, quelle reine de maison. p. 17
4. Ses petites mains potelées et de peau si fine /.../ Elle était si adroite pour la cuisine, si maladroite pour tout le reste. Mais dans sa cuisine, où elle gardait son pimpant de vieille dame, quel fameux capitaine résolu elle était. p. 18
5. Grâce gauche et majestueuse, p. 18
6. Très sage en sa domestique prêtrise, satisfaite de son pauvre petit convenable destin de solitude /.../ /.../ Un mari, un fils à guider et à servir, avec une humble majesté. p. 19
7. Cette guetteuse d'amour, /.../
8. Emue, digne, presque coquette /.../ émue d'être digne et embellie de sabbat /.../ elle était alors si jolie, ma vieille Maman qui se mouvait avec peine, ma Maman. p. 22
9. Elle était déjà vieille en ce temps-là, petite et de quelque embonpoint. Mais ses yeux étaient magnifiques et ses mains étaient mignonnes /.../ avec sa petite main. 27
10. Reine de Saba déguisée en bourgeoise p. 45
11. Très sages et bien élevés /.../ on était des naïfs p. 48
12. Une timide enfant p. 59
13. Linotte et petite fille p. 64

It is worth noting that in the physical description of the mother, Cohen describes the features characteristic of the mother and does not paint us a real portrait; these features are never positive, because he systematically uses the verb "slightly, a little" or the adjective "poor" as if emphasizing the inferiority of the mother,:

1. *Car elle était peu ROUBLARDE en toilette, p. 16*
2. *Elle était peu DÉBROUILLARDE p. 57*
3. *Elle était un peu nigaude p. 66*
4. *Pauvre ROULÉE d'avance. p. 55*
5. *Ma pauvre chérie p. 66*
6. *Ma pauvre enthousiaste p. 72*

Cohen often uses words or nominal groups together with adjectives to give a special emotional coloring and to emphasize his love for his mother.

1. *«Chérie»;*
2. *«mon adorable»;*
3. *«ma bien-aimée»;*
4. *«ma petite fille chérie»;*
5. *«mon incomparable»*

Cohen has often used euphoric/emotional comparisons when describing his mother:

1. Naïve dignité de fille de notables d'un âge disparu. p. 14.
2. Son honneur de dame d'Orient. p. 15

3. Prêtresse de son fils, ô majesté... p. 15
4. Majesté de ma mère. p. 18
5. La servante et la gardienne. Cette femme, qui avait été jeune et jolie, était une fille de la loi de Moïse, p. 19.
6. Le saint amour de ma mère p. 19
7. Ma sainte mère p. 21
8. Sainte sentinelle p. 22
9. Une vraie sainte, qui ne savait pas qu'elle était une sainte p. 75
10. Toi *humble* et méconnue, ma géniale, p. 75.
11. Chérie, p. 76
12. Mon adorable. p. 82
13. Ma bien-aimée p. 83
14. À la bonté la plus sacrée p. 88
15. La bienfaitrice, la douce dispensatrice. p. 96
16. Ma mère était un génie de l'amour. p. 102
17. Mon incomparable. p. 108
18. La sainte Maman p. 156
19. C'est la majesté de l'amour, la loi sublime, un regard de Dieu. p. 167
20. Une femme âgée et bonne, *qui pleure comme une petite fille* p. 168.
21. Jérusalem vivante. p. 79.
22. Sainte patience. p. 165

It is also worth noting that Cohen often uses nouns and adjectives such as "Sainte" to address his mother. In the French language, this word is used in several definitions:

1. as a noun - A person who, after his death, is the object of public veneration by the Catholic Church, because of the Christian perfection he achieved during his lifetime.
2. A person of exemplary virtue and patience
  1. *The holy love of my mother/Le saint amour de ma mère p. 19*
  2. *My holy mother/Ma sainte mère p. 21*
  3. *The spark of sanctity/Sainte sentinelle p. 22*
  4. *A true saint who did not even know that he was a person of exemplary virtue and patience/ Une vraie sainte, qui ne savait pas qu'elle était une sainte p. 75*
  5. *My holy mother/La sainte Maman p. 156*
  6. *Model patience/Sainte patience. p. 165*

In French literature, it is hard to find a work where so many metaphors, epithets and comparisons are used to create a mother's image, not only an ideal, flawless image, but sometimes ironic, derogatory. It is impossible to be found in any literary work such an expression as *a Living Jerusalem/ Jérusalem vivante. p. 79*

In conclusion it can be said that motherhood and mother's image are a very interesting issues of discussion in the literature of any country. Writers and poets of all nations use interesting literary devices to portray the image of mother in their literary works.

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## „დედის“ სახის ლინგვისტური გააზრებისათვის ინგლისურ და ფრანგულ ლიტერატურაში

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## აბსტრაქტი

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წინამდებარე კვლევის მიზანია „დედის“ სახის ანალიზი ინგლისურ და ფრანგულ ლიტერატურულ ტექსტებზე დაყრდნობით. ამგვარად, ჩვენი კვლევის მიზანია დედის იმიჯის ლინგვისტური, უფრო ზუსტად კი, სტილისტური გააზრება. მიღებული დასკვნების საფუძველზე, შევეცდებით, გამოვავლინოთ და გამოვყოთ დედისა და დედობის ზოგადი თვისებები და მათი წარმოჩენის გზები მხატვრულ ტექსტებში.

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