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**THE SPECULATIVE WORLD OF MRS. WHIPPLE: A RE-READING OF *HE* IN THE LIGHT OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR THEORY**

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Contrary to the traditional linguistics which views metaphor as a means of rhetoric, Cognitive linguistics holds that metaphor, instead of being a deviant phenomenon of normal language, is a way of thought and a powerful instrument of cognition. Metaphor has become an essential part in people's cognitive mechanism instead of being perceived as language phenomenon ever since the publication of the masterpiece *Metaphor We Live By*, contributed by Lakeoff and Johnson. Conceptual metaphor, as an important concept in cognitive linguistics, refers to something internal, opening deep in human thought. Using the conceptual metaphor as a device to analyze the literary works is a part of what is called cognitive Poetics, where the theories and fundamentals of Cognitive linguistics shed

light on the literary reading.

The present paper attempts to re-read Katherine Anne Porter's short story *HE* by using some premises of Cognitive Linguistics specially, its pioneer theory of conceptual metaphor as a theoretical framework to investigate the beliefs and behavior of Mrs. Whipple, the central character of *He*. The first part of the paper will give a brief introduction to Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). The second part will discuss how CMT can be used for the stylistic analysis of a particular text. The third part will be an application of CMT to the short story *HE*. The final part by a way of conclusion, will focus on the findings of the paper.

**1. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) - Brief Introduction**

The main premise of cognitive Linguistics about metaphor is that, Metaphor is not only a linguistic issue but also a matter of thought. According to Lakeoff and Johnson's metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. (2003)

According to the cognitive approach, the human thought processes are essentially metaphorical, or say, as Gibbs stated, the human mind metaphorically works (Gibbs: 1994). In other words, in the cognitive approach, metaphor is not some rhetorical by- product of objective thinking, but in fact it is the foundation of the human conceptual system, (Verdonk: 1995). By this understanding of metaphor in the level of thought, CMT completely differs from the traditional understanding which considers metaphor as a feature of language. For example, in CMT tradition, human mind understands an abstract domain of life (Target domain) by using a well-known or experienced concrete domain (called Source domain) and presents that understanding in linguistic forms.

For example, we understand the love (an abstract domain) by using our experience about travelling, where the conceptual metaphor will be **LOVE IS A JOURNEY** (according to CMT terminology: **A IS B**, where A means the Target domain and B means the Source one). Thus

**LOVE IS A JOURNEY** is a conceptual metaphor by which the human mind understands love by using journey as the source domain, but at the level of language it can be expressed in many linguistic forms such as:

Look how far we've come.

We're at a crossroads.

We'll just have to go our separate ways.

We can't turn back now.

I don't think this relationship is going anywhere.

Where are we?

We're stuck.

It's been a long, bumpy road.

This relationship is a dead-end street.

We're just spinning our wheels.

Our marriage is on the rocks.

We've gotten off the track.

This relationship is foundering.

All the above linguistics metaphors (taken from Kövecses: 2010) are based on understanding (or mapping in CMT terminology) love as a journey. Using journey as domain for understanding love means the concept LOVE is metaphorically conceptualized as a JOURNEY. Thus, the knowledge of the domain of JOURNEY, a concrete domain of experience with a well-known structure in terms of actions, aims and the interties are involved to form the domain of LOVE. As in (Kövecses: 2010)

Source:	...	Target: LOVE
JOURNEY	.....	
	...	
the travellers	.....	the lovers
	...	the love
the vehicle	.....	relationship itself
	...	events in the
the journey	.....	relationship
the distance		
covered	.....	the progress made
the obstacles	.....	the difficulties
encountered	..	experienced
decisions about	...	choices about what
which way to go	.	to do
the destination of the		the goal(s) of the
journey	.....	relationship

The above set of symmetries allows human

mind to justify love using human experience of journey.

Mapping across domains (i.e. understanding the Target domain by using Source one) is not complete but partial. It means only some aspects of the source domain are used in recognizing the target one. The aspects that are used in mapping are said to be highlighted, as opposed to the unmapped ones that stay hidden. According to Evans, Hiding and highlighting in Conceptual Metaphor Theory is that when a target domain is structured in terms of a particular source domain, this highlights certain aspects of the target while simultaneously hiding other aspects. (2007). This partial mapping between Target and Source domains plays a crucial role for studying stylistics using Conceptual Metaphor Theory as a framework for stylistic analysis of a text not only for the author but also for its readers.

## **2. Conceptual Metaphor Theory as Stylistic Device:**

This disparity in highlighting and hiding is beneficial in the study of style for the metaphors in any literary and non-literary work since the predilection for highlighting some manifestations of source domain and hiding its other manifestations are totally

under control the author. Oncins-Martínez states that: “This distinction is of relevance for the analysis of style, since the preference for certain metaphors in terms of what they highlight or hide, or the particular ways in which they are exploited become available as elements with which to describe, assess and even differentiate styles.” (2011). In other words, since the mapping from one domain into another one is under the control of the metaphor user and is subject to his/her personal needs and experiences, it is helpful in understanding his/ her beliefs and actions.

Moreover, this will also open new windows to study the style a by using CMT as part of cognitive poetics since conceptual metaphor (as a part of Cognitive Poetics literature) gives hermeneutic dimension for cognitive stylistics, and this is fully consistent with Stockwell's view about Cognitive Poetics that (Cognitive Poetics) should be a hermeneutic theory with an integral poetic dimension, in order to capture the interaction of meaningfulness and felt experience in literary reading.(Stockwell: 2007).

In addition to the importance of metaphor for analyzing the style of the writer, metaphor has its influential role on the

readers, too. Since the understanding and interpretation of metaphors require the experiences that are stored in the memory of the readers and it is axiomatic that every reader has his/ her own experience that differs from others, the response will vary from one reader to another for a literary text in general and the metaphors in particular. This will lead to two main claims:

First, the relation between studying of Conceptual Metaphor may be related with Literary Criticism especially in the Reception and Reader Response Theories which need more researches to establish Cognitive Criticism along with Cognitive Poetics (or, Cognitive Stylistics).

Second, considering that there is no single and unique interpretation of a text by using Conceptual Metaphor Theory, This paper will consider one reading of the given story among other possible ones depending on the experience of the readers that makes their response to the text and metaphors are varied.

### **3. Practical Application of CMT to *HE*:**

The application of CMT to this short story depends on a very important hypothesis that Mrs. Whipple (and may be her husband, too) committed a major stupid

blunder although it is not linguistically expressed in the text and that Mrs. Whipple attempts to hide that mistake from the readers in spite of the fact that her society and her neighbors knew her sin.

The main conceptual metaphor that explores the hidden and unconscious conceptualized world of Mrs. Whipple can be found in the following lines:

*They (the neighbours) said. "It's the sins of the fathers," they agreed among themselves. "There's bad blood and bad doings somewhere, you can bet on that. (49 -50).*

Her society believed that the birth of an abnormal child is a curse for their wrong doings. Thus, this simple minded boy is a result of the sins of his parents - Mr. and Mrs. Whipple. So, the conceptual metaphor will be: **DISABLED CHILD IS FATHERS' SIN**. As Mrs. Whipple also believes such a conception and is aware of her sin, she attempts to hide her blunder. Thus,

*She refuses to speak about that even with her husband. (50)*

THAT here may refer to her sin. Her society and neighbors know everything about her mistakes and they talk behind her back and also indirectly blame her for that. That is why she says:

*"I get sick of people coming around saying things all the time." (51)*

She also indirectly admits that she is guilty of committing sin when she says:

*"What's done can never be undone, I know that as good as anybody; but He's my child, and I'm not going to have people say anything. I get sick of people coming around saying things all the time." (51)*

Her guilty conscience makes her think that everyone who sees her or speaks to her are indirectly referring to the blunder she committed even if they were watching her or speaking to her casually. Towards the end of the story, as they are on the way to the town hospital, she sees tears rolling down the cheeks of her son and thinks that even he is accusing her of something. She asks:

*"Oh, honey, you don't feel so bad, do you? You don't feel so bad, do you?" for He seemed to be accusing her of something. (58)*

She very well knows that this "something" which she thinks he is accusing her of is her sin that make her guilty in her son's eyes and in her society's opinion. But she tries to deceive the readers and herself when she gives other reasons for her son's accusing sights.

That is why the narrator says:

*Whatever it was, (the real reason: her sin) Mrs. Whipple couldn't bear to think of it. (58)*

Mr. Whipple's also has the same feelings and beliefs about the sin but his attitude is different. He gets used to live with the burden of the sin. Moreover, since the sin was committed in the past and they were facing the consequence of the sin in the form of the simple minded son, he accepts that nothing can be done now.

*"Mr. Whipple suddenly felt tired out. "Anyhow, it can't be helped now."(51)*

He also admits that their society knows everything about the sin and the neighbors had bad views about his family because of that major blunder. That is why when Mrs. Whipple tells him that her brother's family were very polite in not talking anything bad about them or He,

Mr. Whipple says: *"Who knows what they had in their minds all along?"(53)*

Depending on the above discussed conceptual metaphor, we can infer a new one:

**DISABLED CHILD IS INNOCENT**  
because the disability was not his fault but

the sin of his parents. Whenever Mrs. Whipple recalls and repeats the words of the preacher *"The innocent walk with God—that's why He don't get hurt", she always feels a warm pool spread in her breast, and the tears would fill her eyes.*" (50)

He is called innocent not in sense that he is naïve but in the sense of a person who is not guilty of a particular crime.

Quite often when a guilty person does not openly confess his/her wrong, but he/she is aware of it in his/her heart, the guilty conscience manifests itself in two types of behavior: Remorse and Inferiority. The same is true in the case of Mrs. Whipple.

a) Remorse of Mrs. Whipple:

Remorse can be defined as an emotional expression of personal regret felt by a person after he has committed an act which he deems to be shameful, hurtful, or violent. Mrs. Whipple wants to hide her trespass by compensating it with her superfluous concern for him. She justifies her love for him by saying:

*"It's natural for a mother," and tells her husband "You know yourself it's more natural for a mother to be that way. People don't expect so much of fathers, some way."(49)*

But if she loved him purely out of motherly concern, she had to equally love her other two normal children as well. The narrative tells us that *Mrs. Whipple loved her second son, the simple-minded one, better than she loved the other two children put together.*(49). So her claim that she loved him with a natural motherly feeling is not true. She only overstates her love and care for him as a recompense for her sin:

*It seemed to ease her mind. "I wouldn't have anything happen to Him for all he world, but it just looks like I can't keep Him out of mischief. (50)*

In reality, she lived with an obsession of fear that others will blame her again for her dereliction towards him.

*Mrs. Whipple's life was a torment for fear something might happen to Him. (50)*

She says: *"They can't say we didn't do everything for Him," she said, "even to sleeping cold ourselves on His account." (55)*

When He is sick and the doctor advises them to take him to the town hospital, she is afraid that her neighbours will accuse her for her negligence. She says: *"I won't have it said I sent my sick child off among*

*strangers." (57)*

Even on the way to the hospital in their neighbor's double-seated carryall, she continues to pretend that she loves and cares for him. She tells her neighbour:

*"Besides, it ain't as if He was going to stay forever," "This is only for a little while."(58)*

Thus it is evident that her exaggerated love for her simple-minded boy was only an atonement for the sin she committed in her life. Although it is not explicitly stated in the text that Mrs. Whipple committed a sin in the past, the conceptual metaphor reveals her sense of the guilt that is inherent in her.

#### b) Inferiority of Mrs. Whipple:

An inferiority complex is a lack of self-worth, a doubt and uncertainty, and feelings of not measuring up to society's standards. It is often subconscious, and is thought to drive afflicted individuals to overcompensate, resulting either in spectacular achievement or extreme asocial behavior. Most of the people who suffer from inferiority overcome that by arrogance and pride.

Mrs. Whipple suffers from that arrogance since she sees EVERYTHING FROM HIM



IS GOOD (Good here is used in the sense of the extraordinary or mystical) or EVERYTHING FROM THE DISABLED IS GOOD in the sense that whatever her simple-minded son does is good or extraordinary even if the others see it as bad. She considers his abnormal activities as his strength or ability and their oddity as funny and laughable even if it is an evidence of his anomalous character. She says:

*He's so strong and active, He's always into everything; He was like that since He could walk. It's actually funny sometimes, the way He can do anything; it's laughable to see Him up to His tricks. (50)*

This conceptual metaphor is contrary to her conceptualization that EVERYTHING FROM THE OTHERS IS BAD (Ordinary) or EVERYTHING FROM THE ABLE PEOPLE IS BAD. These opposite conceptual metaphors appear in many linguistic expressions such as:

*Emly has more accidents; I'm forever tying up her bruises and Adna can't fall a foot without cracking a bone. (50)*

He is good because unlike, Emly and Adna (her normal children) who often fall down

and get hurt, He never got hurt. That means THE TWO CHILDREN ARE BAD even if is common for children to fall down and get hurt.

The same conceptual metaphor HE IS GOOD is reflected in the lines:

*He did grow and He never got hurt. A plank blew off the chicken house and struck Him on the head and He never seemed to know it. (50)*

In spite of the fact that insensitivity to pain is something abnormal, she deems it as his positive trait. It is normal that children cry for food but according to her conception, her simpleminded son who does not cry for food unlike her other children is good. In other words, his inability to express his hunger is good.

*He didn't whine for food (HE IS GOOD) as the other children (OTHER CHILDREN ARE BAD) did, but waited until it was given Him. (50)*

*Again, He (IS GOOD) could carry twice as much wood and water as Adna (IS BAD). (50)*

Mr. Whipple says:

*Emly (IS BAD) had a cold in the head most*



*of the time—"she takes that after me (IS BAD)," so in bad weather they gave her (IS BAD) the extra blanket off His cot (IS GOOD). He (IS GOOD) never seemed to mind the cold. (50)*

*He (IS GOOD) climbed the peach trees much better than Adna (IS BAD) and went skittering along the branches like a monkey, just a regular monkey. (50)*

When her neighbours tell her: *"Oh, Mrs. Whipple, you ought not to let him do that. He'll lose His balance sometime. He can't rightly know what He's doing."* Mrs. Whipple almost screams out at the neighbor (IS BAD). *"He (IS GOOD) does know what He's doing!"* (50), although she is aware and afraid that something might happen to Him.

She considers his insensitivity as one of his good qualities and she criticizes the common weakness of her normal children. In her conception, her disabled son is an ideal human being. She tells her husband:

*Look at the bees, now. Adna (IS BAD) can't handle them, they sting him up ... But if He (IS GOOD) gets a sting He don't really mind. (51)*

When Mr. Whipple tells:

*"It's just because He ain't got sense enough to be scared of anything."*

(51)

She says:

*"You {Mr. Whipple, the father} (ARE BAD) ought to be ashamed of yourself, ... He sees a lot that goes on, He listens to things all the time. And anything I tell Him to do He does it (IS GOOD). (51)*

This conceptual metaphor about Him, generalized in the mind of Mrs. Whipple leads to another conception that EVERYTHING RELATED TO HER IS GOOD, which in turn is opposite to the conceptual metaphor EVERYTHING FROM OTHERS IS BAD.

This means that Mrs. Whipple uses what is called in the discourse studies, strategy of POSITIVE SELF-PRESENTATION and NEGATIVE OTHER-PRESENTATION. The major strategies of positive self-presentation are discursively realized in a variety of ways which encompass semantic, formal and interactional structures (Van Dijk, 2001).

In other words, according to CMT terminology, there are two related metaphors in her mind: SELF IS GOOD and OTHER IS BAD. In SELF IS GOOD, there are three features of the SELF:

A. (HIM)SELF – that is her simple-minded son is good as discussed above. We can represent the conceptual metaphor HE IS SUPERNATURAL. Indeed, she tries to covers her sin in showing her disabled son not as a punishment for her blunder but as a good and strong boy, even a supernatural one.

B. (OUR)SELF- represents Mrs. Whipple’s family. This means that the Whipple’s family is good. She says:

*"Don't ever let a soul (OTHERS ARE BAD) hear us (WE ARE GOOD) complain," she kept saying to her husband. She couldn't stand to be pitied. (49)*

*"Nobody's (OTHERS ARE BAD) going to get a chance to look down on us. (WE ARE GOOD)".*

Again, *"It's the neighbors," (NEIGHBORS ARE BAD) said Mrs. Whipple to her husband. "Oh, I do mortally wish they would keep out of our business (WE ARE GOOD). (51)*

Mrs. Whipple considers not only her neighbors as bad but also her relatives such as her brother as in:

*Get off that shirt and put on another, people {her brother's family} (ARE BAD) will say I don't half dress you! (52)*

When her brother praises her for the good lunch saying,

*"This looks like prosperity all right, ..... Mrs. Whipple felt warm and good about it. "Oh, we (ARE GOOD) have got six more of these;" (53)*

She tells her husband: *"I get awfully sick of people's remarks" (PEOPLE ARE BAD) (53)*

Again she tells: *"I hope you didn't say such a thing before Jim Ferguson, You oughtn't to let him know we're so down as all that." (55)*

When the doctor, who treats Him advises them to send him to the town hospital, she considers him bad. She says:

*"Maybe that's why the doctor (IS BAD) wants us to send Him—he's scared he won't get his money," (57)*

C. (HER)SELF – refers to Mrs. Whipple, which means Mrs. Whipple is good while in reverse, Mr. Whipple is bad. She sees herself and everything that

she does as good when compared to her husband. Mr. Whipple suffers much from her unfair treatment as bad person. Mr. Whipple tells her: *"you'll make people think nobody else has any feelings about Him but you."* (49)

She does not expect or hope for anything good from him. When her husband tells her that they had wasted three hundred pounds of pork (which will be worth of lot of money at Christmas) to please her brother and his family, she retorts:

*"Yes, that's like you," said Mrs. Whipple. "I don't expect anything else from you .... "Now it's all spoiled, and everything was so nice and easy".* (54)

Mrs. Whipple thinks that her husband is not reliable for any work.

*They swapped off one of the plow horses, and got cheated, for the new one died of the heaves. Mrs. Whipple kept thinking all the time it was terrible to have a man (MR. WHIPPLE IS BAD) you couldn't depend on not to get cheated.* (54)

Mrs. Whipple also considers her parents, brothers and sisters better than her husband's family.

She says:

*"You see? That's the way my whole family*

*is. Nice and considerate about everything. No out-of-the-way remarks—they have got refinement.* (53)

Every good quality that her children have imbibed is indeed from her parents, sisters and brothers because Mrs. Whipple sees her husband and his big family as bad. She tells:

*"Emly takes after my family, Ambitious every last one of them, and they don't take second place for anybody."* (56).

#### 4. Conclusion:

The above discussion shows how the conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) sheds light on the study of style considering that the writer selects the highlighting and hiding of some features between the domains in accordance with his/her psychological and aesthetic purposes. CMT has also beneficial consequence on reader's response to the texts because the interpretation of the metaphor is based on the personal experience of the individuals and since their experiences are different, their understanding of the same text will be varied.

Within a fictional text, (CMT) reveals the beliefs of the characters which make their actions and reactions within the fictional

world more logical and justificatory. This is of immense importance in studying and analyzing the plot in particular and the fiction in general.

A reading of Porter's *HE*, using the Conceptual Metaphor Theory exposed that Mrs. Whipple was convicted of her guilt in the fictional world and/or in her mental world. Therefore she is filled with remorse and shows pity towards her disabled son. Her belief in her sin leads her also to overstate her love and care for him but that exaggeration is justified for her since it is based on her conception. Her beliefs in her sins also makes another psychological behavior logical and predictable that is, her inferiority leading to arrogance and pride towards every person who may know her sin, whether it is her neighbors, friend, brother, doctor, husband or her two normal children. In other words, her actions and reactions are normal outcomes of her conceptualized world.

Thus, CMT can help us in having not one but many interpretations of the same short story and this paper is but only one interpretation of the text among the other possible ones since the interpretation

depends on the experience of the reader which makes his/her response to the text and metaphors diverse.

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