RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE ROLE OF IMAGERY IN SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY: A STUDY THROUGH THE SELECTED TEXTS OF KING LEAR AND HAMLET

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ABSTRACT

Through the use of conceptual metaphors and image schemas Shakespeare exploits the intricacies of meaning in his plays. In view of the cognitive theory, metaphor and image schemas are not just a figurative language of thought but rooted in our everyday world of experience. There are two conceptual domains linked in a metaphorical mapping known as source domain and the target domain. The source domain is concrete and can be experienced or perceived 'directly' whereas the target domain is more abstract or concerns 'subjective' experience. Image-schemas are defined as the pervasive organizing structures in cognition which emerge from our bodily and social interaction with the environment. Shakespeare very much aware of the cultural and social behaviour of the Elizabethan period extensively uses the metaphors in order to interact with the cultural world of the time. The metaphorical mapping from the source domain to the target domain, as expressed in his two texts- King Lear and Hamlet, reveals the organization of the society, hierarchical relationships and the patriarchical doctrine. The present paper will try to investigate this aspect of Shakespearean tragedy and its relevance in the contemporary times.

Key words: Figurative Language, Conceptual Metaphor, Image Schemas, Shakespearean Tragedy

INTRODUCTION

In the present paper we study the imagery i.e. metaphor and image schemas applied to a tragedy discourse in the period of Renaissance in order to clarify abstract ideas, themes , concepts that belong to the period of Renaissance in the history of English Literature. Through the use of imagery Shakespeare tried to create each of his plays as a dramatic whole. In the Renaissance period in England different patterns of words known as figures or figurative language were presented in a text to confer beauty and heighten the expressive powers. The creative interplay of language and thought is reflected in the use of figurative language in the text. These figures not only provided emphasis and elegant variety but also well articulated the inner lives of characters. The use of conceptual metaphor motivates our understanding of the language in general. Metaphor is not a property of (and problem for language) but it is a

property of our conceptual system (Lakoff and Jhonson 1980).

Now, an image is a comparison between two things– one literal and one figurative. Its expression is manifested in the form of a simile and metaphor. Through the use of conceptual metaphors and image schemas Shakespeare exploits the intricacies of meaning in his plays. In view of the cognitive theory, metaphor and image schemas are not just a figurative language of thought but rooted in our everyday world of experience. Lakoff and Jhonson says,

[W]e have found that most of our conceptual system is metaphorical in nature. And we have found a way to begin to identify in detail just what the metaphors are that structure how we perceive, how we think, and what we do (1980, 4).

There are two conceptual domains linked in a metaphorical mapping known as source domain and the target domain. The source domain is concrete and can be experienced or perceived 'directly' whereas the target domain is more abstract or concerns 'subjective' experience. Image-schemas are defined as the pervasive organizing structures in cognition which emerge from our bodily and social interaction with the environment. Image schemas are primary means by which we construct or constitute order and are not mere passive receptacles into which experience is poured (Johnson 1987). In cognitive perspective these generalizations of basic experiences of space, motion are well considered to give meaning to different aspects of conceptual structures. Accordingly it is proposed that image schemas arise from the embodied experience. Even infants at an early age attend to objects and spatial displays in their surrounding environment. Thus the CONTAINER image schema involves the configuration of one entity supported by another in it. This schema arises from our embodied experience of containers in day to day life. Among the several image schemas defined by Lakoff and Johnson are such as CONTAINER, PATH, FORCE, CENTETR/PERIPHERY, MASS/COUNT etc. For instance we experience our bodies as wholes with parts, and similar part-whole configurations are meaningfully perceived in other everyday physical

objects. It can be applied to a range of abstract notions e.g., *split u*p, *break up* of a couple in love and later they *come together again.* Containment image schema profiles a container with the inside and outside in the domain of three dimensional space. As such different linguistic expressions are conceptualized as containers e.g., *put ideas into words*, *the contents of an essay* etc. A significant aspect of these image schemas is that they are deeply grounded in our common experiences. They derive from the most immediate of all our experiences i.e., the experience of human body. In *Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, there are two major roles of the conceptual domains: source domain (the more general and more concrete domain, usually the physical domain) is the domain which "provides structure by virtue of metaphor" and target domain (normally the more abstract domain) is the domain "being structured by virtue of metaphor" (Evans 2007).

The metaphorical quality of Shakespeare's language has been ignored in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As regards the use of metaphor in Shakespearean tragedies there are different views perceived. Metaphor is viewed as the controlling structure which controls the entire organization of the play (Berry 1978). There are two features in Shakespearean drama: its use of performance as a metaphor of reality, and the subjective nature of that reality (Van den Berg 1985). Again Shakespeare's metaphors are based not on the magical properties of words, but on the likeness of speech to music (Donawerth 1984). Now according to the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor, it is a means by which abstract and intangible areas of experiences are conceptualized in terms of the concrete objects and familiar experiences. For example in the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR the domain of intellectual argument can be understood in terms of war. Elements from the domain of war like attack, defence, retreat etc. are mapped into the abstract domain of intellectual argument. The cognitive process that relates literal meaning to the extended meaning is known as mapping. There are two conceptual domains linked in a metaphorical mapping known as source

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domain and the target domain. In metaphor one conceptual entity is mapped onto the structure of another domain. In metonymy one conceptual entity is mapped onto another within the same domain. The domains are conventionalized in the language, and they underlie a range of everyday linguistic expressions. This theory of metaphor applied to a literary text will derive in the understanding of the conceptual world of the poets. Different kinds of metaphors according to the cognitive theory of mapping involved in the metaphorical process, such as structural and ontological metaphors (see Lakoff and Johnson, 1989), as well as image-schemas (see Johnson 1987; Lakoff and Turner 1989) are observed in the text of King Lear and Hamlet. These will be discussed in the present paper. The conceptual basis of experiential quality of Metaphor is provided by (Evans and Green 2006) in the following way.

Mappings for LOVE IS A JOURNEY

Source: JOURNEY Mappings Target: LOVE

TRAVELLERS → LOVERS

VEHICLE → LOVE RELATIONSHIP

JOURNEY → EVENTS IN THE RELATIONSHIP

DISTANCE COVERED → PROGRESS MADE

OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED → DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED

DECISIONS ABOUT DIRECTION → CHOICES ABOUT WHAT TO DOS

Imagery in King Lear and Hamlet: In the doctrine of "great chain of being" human beings occupy the highest position followed by animals, plants, complex objects and natural physical things in the entire kingdom. Here, we perceive two kinds of metaphors: the "basic great chain metaphor", concerned with the relation of human beings to "lower" forms of existence, and "the extended" (based on the semantic process of extension) such as its relation with the cosmos, the universe and the gods. Thus we map the emotional, psychological, social attributes and behaviours of a person onto the physical nature and the elements of weather (Lakoff and Turner 1989).

We observe an anti conventional metaphor in the text of King Lear. It is that of Lear's shocking at Goneril's ingratitude invoking nature as a force to make her childless. Nature here is personified and also perceives as a powerful force against the humanity. Lakoff and Turner (1989) said about two great chain of metaphors related to the great chain of being of human existence. The ontological metaphor in the sense that nature is personified and acts as a powerful force against humanity and the extended great chain metaphor that the emotional state is mapped onto the physical nature is reflected in the following lines from the text of King Lear.

> Hear, Nature, hear, dear goddess, hear:
> Suspend thy purpose if thou didst intend
> To make this creatures fruitful.
> Into her womb convey sterility…
> Create her child of spleen that it may live
> And be a thwart disnatured torment to her.
> (Act I. Scene IV. 268-275)

Again traditionally we know, "womb" is a symbol of procreation. It is metaphorically perceived as a container for a baby. In the above lines "womb" is perceived as a container for sterility. In the expression "disnatured torment," Lear understands a part-whole metonymy that forms the basis of a great chain metaphor. Applying the metaphorical mapping phenomenon of cognitive theory of metaphor we find that inhuman behaviour is mapped onto aggressive weather.

Again the concept of thunder is introduced to heighten the distresses of Lear. The storm from the heaven with its aggressiveness can be compared to the violence of his own mind. Edmund's soliloquy expresses his dissatisfaction with society's attitude toward bastards:

> Edm. Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law
> My services are bound. Wherefore should I
> Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
> The curiosity of nations to deprive me,
> With base? with baseness, bastardy? base, base?
> Who in the lusty stealth of nature take
> More composition and fierce quality…
> I grow, I prosper:
> Now gods, stand up for bastards!
> (Act I. Scene III.1-22-24)

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At the beginning of this soliloquy, Edmund views *nature as a powerful and procreative force* and dedicate himself towards its existence. Edmund expresses his dissatisfaction with the society's attitude towards bastards. In the expression "stand in the plague of custom, and permit......base, base" he must remain subservient to the laws of society. But he rejects its norms. Edmund rebels against the society which has denied his existence in the world. It is the society which disdained him as well as any share of the inheritance from his father's property. Edmund's treachery is not to get any inheritance from his father but to get recognition from the society which has labelled him as bastard. Contrarily he dedicates himself to nature with its very pristine and unconstrained existence. He accepts *nature as a power against custom, morality and order*. Shakespeare presents two contrasting views of nature in this play to dramatize the conflict between medieval society and nascent capitalism. These two views are that of the traditional view of Hooker and Bacon which runs under assumption that nature is benignant, rational and divinely ordered. The other view is that of the rationalists that man is governed by appetite and self interest. Again in the expression "in the lusty stealth of nature" we perceive a **container image-schema** for *lust*. It is the stolen hours of lust. The use of animal imagery in the play is to show man's position in the Great Chain of Being. It brings out the sub-human nature of evil characters, partly to show man's weakness compared with the animals. It also compares partly human existence partly to the life of the jungle.

Several image-schemas related to broken or disarticulated part of a body is found in the text of King Lear. In this context first we encounter is that of **container image schema** of young bones as containers for anger. The same kind of expression 'young bones' for unborn progeny is also found in Tourneur's *The Atheist's tragedy.*

> All the stored vengeances of Heaven fall
> On her ingrateful top! Strike her young bones,
> You taking airs, with lameness!
> (Act II. Scene IV.87)

These examples of container image schemas highlight the ways that we use our general ideas about containers to conceptualize aspects of human trait. These image schemas, each of them makes sense to us, both as ordinary readers and experienced critics, because of our own embodied understanding of containment experiences, which give rise to a whole host of conventional metaphors seen in everyday language (Gibbs, R.W. Jr. 95).

Heart is conceptualized in a part-whole schema (related to the concept of Metonymy) where *heart* is *a container for sadness*. The sadness arises out of family disorderliness. This is evident in the following lines.

> Let sorrow split my heart if ever I
> Did hate thee or thy father
> (Act V. Scene III.175-6)

In the following lines, Edgar, aware of the chaos in both Lear's and his own family, also conceives *a broken body* as a container for *emotions*:

> I would not take this from report: it is,
> And my heart breaks at it
> (Act IV. Scene VI.137-8)

Thus Shakespeare's use of imagery in his tragedies produces an immediate dramatic effect such as conveying the character's emotion vividly to the audience. A dramatic unity is created through the powerful binding of scenes and acts together. Meaning is embodied in nature. Our body and its various parts are the vehicles for understanding of the world and the self. The **up and down image schema** illustrates Edmund's bad behaviour as evident in the following extracts.

> "And from the' extremest upward of thy head
> To the descent and dust below thy foot
> A most toad-spotted traitor"
> (Act V, Scene III, 134-6)

In 'Hamlet' comparison of his uncle's guilt to an open wound is evident in the following line:

> I'll tent him to the quick
> (Act II, Scene II, 593)

Quick can be imagined as Claudius's heart, the centre of life in his body. This is the image of probing beneath a skin and finding that the body is infected inside

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(Marsh 1998). It conveys the idea of repulsion associated with disease and foul play.

In Hamlet different character's emotional and mental state is structured and shaped by the cognitive metaphors employed in the text. To cite an example, Hamlet's torment is expressed by the metaphorical expression of sickness and disease. This is evident in the following **'**Disease schema' as observed in the text. Denmark

> "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark".
> (Act I, Scene IV, 90)

Claudius and Gertrude

> "It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,
> Whiles rank corruption, mining all within,
> Infects unseen"
> (Act III, Scene IV, 149-151)

Conclusion

The poetic metaphors and image schemas shown in Shakespearean tragedy interact with the cultural and conventional world of the Renaissance period. The metaphorical mappings connect ideas of the tragedy, such as the organization of society, hierarchical relationships and patriarchal doctrine with the conventional society. Therefore, the metaphors describe the powerful role of culture and its interaction with the characters, which make use of cognitive models through their experiences. This approach to the study of Figurative Language in Shakespeare's tragedies provides us a new insight into the study of literary discourse. Meaning is conceptualized through experiences of the characters emerging from the embodied experience. These figures not only provides emphasis and elegant variety but also well articulated the inner lives of characters.

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