Imaginary World, Real Human-beings: A Study on the Conceptual Metaphors in Terry Pratchett's The Sea and Little Fishes

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Abstract: In the fantastical "Discworld" created by Terry Pratchett, conceptual metaphors played a vital role on mirroring the human nature and it mainly includes three categories: structural metaphor, orientational metaphor and ontological metaphor. "The Sea and Little Fishes" have three primary characters: Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg, and Letice.Through detailed analysis of the characters' actions, dialogues, and psychological activities, the essay reveals how Pratchett utilizes conceptual metaphors to map the complexities of human nature through this story in each category. Besides, by analyzing the source and target domains of the metaphors in the story, the essay demonstrates how Pratchett creates a rich and nuanced portrayal of human nature and highlights the significance of conceptual metaphor theory in understanding literary works. In summary, the essay demonstrates the power of conceptual metaphors in shaping our understanding of the world and human nature through analyzing the large quantity of conceptual metaphors in the short story and thus pointed out the final goal of the author to build this imaginary world was to uncover the complicated human nature of true human-beings.

Keywords: imaginary world, conceptual metaphor, Terry Pratchett

1.   Introduction

Terry Pratchett, the creator of an imaginary world named "Discworld", was very good at reflecting the real human being in the real society, especially the human nature, through metaphors. In his short story, *The Sea and Little Fishes*, he did it as well as usual.

The Sea and Little Fishes is a story without any relationship with sea or fish but about witches living on a flat and round world that "went through space on the back of four elephants standing on the shell of a turtle"[1], i.e. the Discworld. Witches here are very much alike women in human being world. They envied, they fought, they win or lost competitions, they cherish true friendship and thus naturally shaped a small society of themselves. Each of them is a walking human being with real human nature. But, how did the writer made success on these? How can we know he actually was telling a story of human beings in this fantasy world? By metaphors, I believe.

Metaphor, is a figure of speech that "use of one expression to refer to a different concept in a way which is still regarded as meaningful…has most prototypically been associated with poetic and literary usage"[2]. It includes metonymy, antithesis, hyperbole, and simile [3]. Studies on metaphor

can be traced back to ancient times, thus embracing a long history. In 1980s, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson co-authored a book named *Metaphors We Live by*, which connected the metaphor study with the cognitive science for the first time. They claimed that metaphor is not just a matter of language, of rhetoric, but also about our thoughts or actions: "the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor…most of our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature…"[4]. And "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another…metaphor means metaphorical concept"[4]. From then on, the term "conceptual metaphor" came into being. Professor Peter Stockwell, who is an expert in cognitive poetics, explained it in this way: Traditionally literary criticism has differentiated tenor (the familiar element) and vehicle (the new element which is described in terms of the old familiar element) …since cognitive linguistics is interested in the conceptual level primarily, these elements are seen as source and target cognitive models: the expression conveys the conceptual metaphor JULIET (target) IS THE SUN(source)…Cognitive linguistics models the process of metaphor as a mapping of properties between the two spaces or domains.[2]

It stated that in conceptual metaphor theory, the "source" and "target", which replaced its former name ---"tenor" and "vehicle", respectively represents the original familiar and the metaphorical element. And metaphor, is the mapping or refection from one to another. In addition, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson divided the conceptual metaphor into three categories: structural metaphor, orientational metaphor and ontological metaphor. Structural metaphor is "to use one highly structured and clearly delineated concept to structure another" [4]. According to Lakoff and Johnson, the metaphorical concept is systematic, structured and has fixed connotations, we therefore can understand the source element in a very clear way. TIME IS MONEY and LIFE IS JOURNEY are examples they gave. Here, TIME and LIFE are the "source", while MONEY and JOURNEY are the "target". And we can understand the former specifically and clearly through the latter. Orientational metaphor means using nouns of locality as the metaphorical concept, examples given in *Metaphors We Live by* include "I am feeling up", "He is in top shape" , "his health is declining", etc. which use "UP" and "DOWN" to map "HAPPY" and "SAD". The last one is ontological metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson offered three types of ontological: entity and substance metaphors, container metaphors, and personification. The first one is the most typical, i.e. "identifying our experiences as entities or substances" [4]. In other words, human being's experiences about the world are all abstract and if we use concrete entity or object to explain them, we can understand clearly. And for the second, "we are physical beings, bounded and set off from the rest of the world by the surface of our skin…each of us is a container…we project our own in-out orientation onto other physical objects that are bounded by surfaces…" [4].Examples given are like: I have him *in* sight; the ship is coming *into* view. That is to say, our body is like a container, waiting some other things to come in or come out.

This essay will make a careful study on the structural metaphors and ontological metaphors in *The Sea and Little Fishes*, with an emphasis on the latter, so as to find out how the writer use them to uncover the human nature for readers.

2.   The Conceptual Metaphors in *The Sea and Little Fishes*

In the title "*The Sea and Little Fishes*", Terry Pratchett presented the first structural metaphor. The "sea" maps the heroine---witch Granny Weatherwax, while the "little fishes" map the other three or four witches, the supporting roles. It implied that Granny Weatherwax has the structural characteristics of "sea", which you can understand as vast, containing, tolerance, calmness, most powerful, etc. While the other small witches who purposely make difficulties for Granny are little fishes, which can be understood as: small, noisy (as they usually live in crowds), weak, and easily to be killed. The implied meaning of the title therefore is clearly presented. Actually, the story teller has clearly presented this meaning in *The Night Watch*: 'I told you, Mister Vimes. History finds a way.

It's like a shipwreck. You're swimming to the shore. The waves will break whatever you do. Is it not written: "The big sea does not care which way the little fishes swim"? People die in their due time.' [5].The sentence explained the title: the great witch Granny does not care what other small witches do because she is the sea. That is one of human nature: people who are really great does not care which way common people live or do on them, and they usually spend time on their own.

In addition, Terry Pratchett made use of another two structural metaphors—"marshmallow" and "stormcloud" to reflect the personality of or human nature in a small witch named Letice and Nanny. He wrote: "Letice, like a lot of people with marshmallow on the outside, had a hard core that was not easily compressed…People learned to respect stormclouds, too. They refreshed the ground. You needed them. But they weren't nice." [1]When you see marshmallow, you will think of adjectives like white, soft, sweet, clean and others. Here, the author said the outside of Letice is like marshmallow, readers will sense these structural characteristics clearly, i.e. pretty, sweet and nice, which is contrary to her inside. And for the stormcloud, what you feel is darkness and depressing, and what the author added here: refreshing, necessary, and not nice. And that is what the personality of Nanny, or great persons like Nanny goes like.

Actually, Terry Pratchett uncover the human nature in this story mainly through ontological metaphors, in which the characters such like witches Granny, Nanny, Letice etc. are the entity "sources", and the "targets" are the abstracted human natures like arrogance, envy, friendship, innocent, domineering, being good at blaming, etc. The author mapped all these human natures on the witches in the story.

Let's see the first source, Granny, the greatest witch in the story. Totally speaking, Granny is a witch who can envy, who enjoy down-to-earth but interesting life, who is the most excellent, who can cherish friendship, and who wants to get along with people living around. She is alike those people in human world who are excellent but arrogant, and cannot get along with other people around themselves.

The story begun with a sentence: "Trouble began, and not for the first time, with an apple." [1] What is the trouble? It is Granny's jealousy: 'He named an apple after you?' Said granny. Each word was an acid drop on the air… 'oh, you ain't jealous, are you, Esme…''me? Jealous? Why should I be jealous? It is only an apple. It is not as if it's anything important.' [1].

With the development of the story, we perceived Granny's personality gradually through Nanny's descriptions and other witches: "Esme (Granny) needed something to make every day worthwhile and if it had to be anger and jealousy then so be it…a witch who is bored might do anything." [1]In other words, Granny is a witch who do not like boring life, and if getting bored, she will do harmful things to others.

"Granny rocked gently in her chair as the darkness wrapped itself around her…after a while the first maggot crawled out." "And there was none of the airy-fairy business with a pretty basket and a pair of dainty snippers. Granny used a knife." [1]She can sit there for a day letting the maggot grow up in the bag; she would gather up herbs but does not act like other witches who take decorated baskets or snippers but just a knife. And she herself said she "do not have to do no frills or fancy labels." [1]So, we can say she lives a careless and down-to-earth life.

Granny is surly a proud and arrogant witch who do not like communicate with other people. When other witches visited her, she did not show any welcome and politeness. People all think she is proud although Nanny think she is the sea. At the final part of the story, when she shows her good intentions to other people and helped them, they are all get frightened and even said "the bandidos have raided our villages position" [1]. In addition, she is the witch ranks No.1 in the disc world because each year she wins the witch competition, although other witches would reluctant to enter once know she enters. "It is very hard to get other people to enter when they know that Miss Weatherwax is entering." [1].

This is not a witch but a person who always ranks No.1 in human society. People like her are everywhere, on university campus, in high schools, in big companies, in governments, etc.

The most important personality in her, however, is that she cherishes friendship with Nanny and is willing to change herself to get along with other people, so as to make friend with them and make them feel happy. The story's core is her changing, from an arrogant and lonely witch to a helpful, enthusiastic witch. Firstly, she obeys her friend Nanny and plans not to enter the competition. Then, she goes to Percy Hopcroft's to give her blessing because he named the apple after her friend. Next, she goes to William Poorchick's house and wishes his milk cow can give more milk, although people were frightened by her, because she never showed any kindness to them. Finally, she tried to acted like other people, singing songs, wearing pink clothes with lace, making brightly-colored loops for the competition, taking care of babies, and even making cakes for others. All in all, she breaks her limitations in her characters and tries to show her kindness to other witches or people, in order to make them happy. That is a growing process of great mankind. In the actual human being world, you need to break limitations and walk out of your comfort zone to let yourself grow up and be a great man. People, actually, all want to be Granny.

The second source is Nanny, whose name shows everything. She is innocent, enjoying simple life and has no desire to win. She always thinking of others, and respecting and helping her friend – great Granny. We can see these personalities from below examples: "Foreign parts were all right to visit but they weren't really serious. They had interesting new drinks and the grub was fun, but forging parts was where you went to do what might need to be done and then you came back here, a place that was real. Nanny Ogg was happy in small places." [1]

"Nanny saw it as her job to stop Granny Weatherwax getting bored." "Then perhaps she would learn to be a bit more humble…what's she got to be humble about?" said Nanny sharply[1]. That is to say, Nanny always protects Granny. [1]

"People gave Nanny Ogg things." People like her and would like to give her things. [1]

"There was nothing with being a loser…Nanny had always pursued the policy of being a good loser…'she only just lost' was a much better compliment than 'she only just won'". [1]

In the whole story, Nanny is always trying to make Granny happy, by visiting her, by talking with her when she feels angry or unhappy. In the first half of the story, she is the only friend of Granny and the only witch who would like to visit her. Moreover, she never speaks evil words or acted in an evil way to the witches she does not like, and even speak good words for them before Granny. People like being with her. She is a walking witch mapping the kindness, sweetness, and good-temper in human nature.

The last source character is Letice whose targets are abstract concepts like domineering, meanness, and being good at blaming, which stand for the bad aspects of human nature. She, leading other two withes, goes to persuade Granny not to enter the competition without considering Granny's mood or emotion. She said Granny should learn to be humbler; She is keen on organizing a committee. She persuades Granny as if she is a philosopher and a friend: "Times are changing…but believe me when I tell you, as a friend, that you'd find it so much easier if you just relaxed a little bit and tried being nicer…but witchcraft isn't about being an old grump and frightening people anymore, I'm telling you this as a friend…"[1]And Nanny believed that "She would do you a good turn for your own good even if a good turn wasn't what was good for you. You ended up mentally turned the other way, and that wasn't good." [1]Obviously, she is a woman with a strong desire of domination on others. And apparently she likes to blame others. At the final part of the story, when Granny makes cakes, takes care of babies, Letice always suspects that Granny is doing something bad. After the competition, when all witches did not manage their witchcraft, Letice says it is because Granny put a spell on all witches and when Granny come to see who finally win the competition, she gives her a slap in anger, which gives rise to the story a climax:

"you are lying!"

Nanny Ogg heard the indrawn breaths, and hers was the loudest. Witches lived by their words.

…

"Do you deny that you set out to ruin my day?"

…

"You've been putting a 'influence on everyone!"

"I just set out to help, you can ask anyone…"

"You did! Admit it! "…

"…and I certainly didn't do any…"

Granny's head turned as the slap came. [1]

All in all, Letice is a metaphor of the evilness in human-being's nature, as a society should have both kind and evil human-beings.

From Granny, Nanny to Letice and other witch characters in the story, the writer included all kinds of human nature in this witch world. Besides, Terry Pratchett is also good at utilizing large number of psychological activities of characters to map the actual human world, for example: "Even if someone was your worst enemy, you invited them in and gave them tea and biscuits. In fact, the worse your enemy, the better the crockery you got out and the higher the quality of the biscuits." [1] That stated out human being's attitude toward their enemy and that is true. In many occasions, people should work with and even live with their enemies. Another typical example is "It is hard to contemplate, in the grey hours of the night, that probably the only reason people would come to your funeral would be to make sure you're dead." [1]When you see a person come to another's funeral, that does not mean he or she is the friend but maybe the enemy.

3. Conclusion

In the story *The Sea and Little Fishes*, Terry Pratchett, like usually he did in his Discworld series, created a witch world on a turtle's back in the universe and uncovered the true human nature, the true human world through large quantity of conceptual metaphors, which included all clear structural concepts or entities, leading common people to understand his imagery world. In other words, whatever the complicated of the metaphors, the final goal of the author was to uncover the complicated human nature of human-beings living in the true world, as he had said in the acceptance speech for the Carnegie Medal: Fantasy isn't just about wizards and silly wands. It's about seeing the world from new directions"[6].No wonder Terry Pratchett's imagery world attracted a large amount of readers and he became the best-selling author in 1990s in UK, and he deserved all the awards he received.

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