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# Archetypal and Conceptual Metaphors in the Poetry of John Clare and Mahmoud Hasan Ismail

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# Introduction

This study seeks to examine archetypal and conceptual metaphors that run through the poetry of two romantic poets: the British John Clare (1793 – 1864) and the Egyptian Mahmoud Hasan Ismail (1910 – 1977). John Clare's poetry is the product of both Clare the peasant and Clare the poet who is keen on acquiring various cultural representations, yet crippled with his own limitations of educational, social and economic statuses. Mahmoud Hasan Ismail, though he was well educated, unlike John Clare, he focuses on the peasantry life which makes his poetry a mixture of descriptive pieces of rural life and nature and a contemplation of human experiences related to man's crisis in his confrontation with the urban values.

John Clare's metaphorical mode gives the poet the opportunity to organize his world picture according to different archetypes as well as conceptual metaphors. Mahmoud Hasan Ismail as a romantic figure shares with Clare the love for nature that could be stemming in the two cases from the fact that both Clare and Ismail were brought up in rural areas where they experienced pure nature away from the materialistic complicated details of the urban landscape. John Clare's and Mahmoud Hasan Ismail's archetypal and conceptual metaphors that are employed to enhance their portrayal of nature, its creatures and of life in general from

the viewpoint of two peasants, is the ground upon which this study stands.

Archetypal criticism helps the thesis to shed light on different myths as they are deemed as "the expression of a profound sense of togetherness – a togetherness not merely upon the plane of the intellect … but a togetherness of feeling and of action and of wholeness of living" as Allen Tate puts it in *The Language of Poetry* (11). Myth criticism unifies human experiences of people who share both a religious and cultural history. In this respect, the study lends particular attention to Carl Jung's thought on archetypes and anthropology.

The thesis also lends particular attention to what could be called modern variations of archetypal criticism that are the conceptual metaphors as theorized by George Lakoff. In their *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor,* George Lakoff and Mark Turner argue that metaphor is not just an ornament in the poetic language, but it rather goes beyond this simple categorization, it is "a matter of thought". Moreover, Lakoff and Turner go further to assert that "metaphors are so commonplace we often fail to notice them" (1). Unlike the archetypal criticism which locates archetypal metaphors at the heart of the unconscious, Lakoff asserts that conceptual metaphors are located in the conscious mind. These two concepts of metaphors are selected due

to the fact that they could be viewed as two ways of metaphor categorization.

Relating the theoretical background to the poetry of both romantic poets embarks their own description of nature as well as meditations on man and life. In his early poetry, Clare, the peasant, who is a true nature lover finds himself the opportunity to flee from his tough poor life to wide nature. Clare's portrayal of nature is the pure realization of the poet's sharp observation of "everything that grew, flew, or moved in the area of his native village of Helpston" (McKitrick 327). In the early poems, nature and its creatures is the centre to which the poet always returns. They are mostly the heroes of his early poems rather than the poet himself. John Clare's later poetry is tightly related to his sense of exile in the asylum. In other words, Clare's later poetry could be looked upon as some meditations on human existence and suffering.

The study also lends particular attention to Mahmoud Hasan Ismail's first published collection entitled *Aghani el Koukh* [Cottage Songs] (1935). The collection revolves around two main themes. The theme of nature as envisaged by a romantic soul on one hand, and the realm of man's experience and miseries as the poet perceives them on the other. In addition, the thesis will refer to other collections from Mahmoud Hasan Isamil's *Collected Works.*

The study falls into three chapters. The first chapter deals with archetypal metaphors as well as conceptual metaphors as two ways of analyzing poetic experience. The Second Chapter examines the archetypal metaphors as well as the conceptual metaphors dealing with the descriptive poetry of the two romantic poets under study. Thus it is mainly concerned with concrete issues of nature. The third and last chapter deals with the same framework of analysis, applied to the poems of both poets that focus mainly on the poets' contemplation of life, man and what might befall his journey of life, and hence, it is concerned with abstract emotions rather than concrete objects of nature.

**Chapter One** The focus falls on archetypal criticism or myth criticism as a part of the cultural background of nations. John Clare's and Mahmoud Hasan Ismail's archetypal metaphor is the product of the poet's poetic concerns as it is of other romantic poets. The importance of archetypal metaphors lies in the fact that they act as "universal symbols" (Guerin 157) that underlie peoples' unconscious practices. Moreover, the myth critic, unlike the traditional critics, relies more on the writer's historical and cultural background in order to see "the work holistically, as the manifestation of vitalizing, integrative forces arising from the depth of mankind's collective psyche" (Guerin 164).

As a psychiatrist and an anthropologist, Carl Jung contributes to archetypal criticism by means of examining the evolution of archetypal

metaphor in the mind. Yung argues that archetypes are inherited throughout history and pass from one generation to the other. Thus, they are located in the "collective unconscious" (Jung 42). Jung believes that "the archetypes are elements of the common structure of every personality" (Helminiak 164). In other words, Carl Jung opposes the Freudian view that the mind starts as *tabula rasa* or a blank sheet, he rather argues that man is born with these structures of archetypes which are mainly inherited and imprinted in the "collective conscious", he further points out that

> [:] If it were possible to personify the unconscious, we might think of it as a collective human being combining the characteristics of both sexes, transcending youth and age, birth and death, and, from having at its command a human experience of one or two million years, particularly immortal (*Man and his Symbols* 349).

Therefore archetypes for him are able to organize the world picture.

The Canadian Critic Herman Northrop Frye builds on Jung's theory in his seminal article "The Archetypes of Literature" in which he argues that myth is the main source of literature, especially the myths that are related to heroes. From this particular myth, that of the hero, all genres of literature are derived: comedy, tragedy, satire and romance. In his classification of literary genres, Frye makes use of the four seasons of the year; he relates comedy to spring, tragedy to autumn, satire to winter

and he relates romance to summer. Each season derives certain images according to the context of that season.

The focus of the chapter falls as well on conceptual metaphors as theorized by George Lakoff and Mark Turner. According to Lakoff and Turner, conceptual metaphors are tightly related to the cognitive abilities of man as they could be deemed "a way of thought", therefore they exist in the conscious mind of man which differ from Aristotle's view of traditional metaphors, conceptual metaphors are archetypes that are "stable" and "universal". However, in 1980, in collaboration with Mark Johnson, George Lakoff wrote "Metaphors We Live By" where they point out the following:

> Our conceptual system… plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do everyday is very much a matter of metaphor… But our conceptual system is not something we are normally aware of. In most of the little things we do everyday, we simply think and act more or less automatically along certain lines (103).

In their categorization of metaphors, Lakoff, Johnson and Turner form groups as "families", the whole process is called "mapping". Each family has its own members who "share the same underlying cognitive

structure" (Givon 75). The cognitive metaphor or the conceptual metaphor involves the cognition of one idea in terms of another. For instance, Lakoff and Turner manage to analyze Robert Frost's "The Road not Taken" in terms of the conceptual metaphor of "life is a journey". In so doing, they offer an idea about life in terms of journeys. According to their terms, life is the "target domain" while journey is the "source domain". Another famous example of conceptual metaphors is that of "love as possession". An application of this metaphor could be realized through "if you love somebody, set him/her free" or "I have got a lover". Thus, conceptual metaphors work as a semantic tool.

**Chapter Two** examines the archetypal and conceptual metaphors in John Clare's and Mahmoud Hasan Ismail's descriptive poetry. These metaphors are scrutinized according to the main cores of categorization discussed in chapter one, namely Jung's theory of archetypes, Frye's categorization and Lakoff's Conceptual Metaphors. The study makes use of the archetypal endeavours to identify metaphors in addition to Lakoff's conceptual metaphors which are related to poems accounting for nature, rural life and peasantry as an obvious experience in the life of the two romantic poets.

The chapter focuses on Clare's early endeavours in nature description. In his early poetry Clare, the peasant, who is a true nature lover finds himself the opportunity to flee from his tough poor life to the

wide nature. His poetic experience is mainly controlled by the context of *flee* to nature that Clare creates for himself. It is argued that "Clare's poetic feeling is largely contingent upon the 'retreat' and 'solitudes' of nature (Walker 147).

Mahmoud Hasan Ismail's poetic experience is influenced by his early work at the Egyptian broadcast on one hand and by his own rural culture of the countryside on the other. However, Ismail suffered from severe neglect which creates a realm of tension in his poetry even those poems which are dedicated to show the poet as a nature lover (Youssef 243).

The process of examining John Clare's poetry together with Mahmoud Hasan Ismail's lends particular attention to Clare's early poetry that is written mainly before 1835 as well as Ismail's first published collection entitled *Aghani al Khoukh* or [Cottage Songs] (1935). The chapter is divided into clear sections; each examines one shared aspect of nature description in the two poet's poetic experience. The sections are ordered according to the prevalence of such shared aspects in the poetry of both poets. For instance the first section addresses what could be called 'the cottage experience' as the image of the cottage is a significant one in their metaphorical mode of expression. In addition, the chapter attempts at focusing on the metaphorical mode of the examined poems in terms of archetypal and conceptual metaphors as two ways of metaphor

categorization. The conceptual metaphors are semantically oriented whereas the archetypal ones are culturally oriented. A state of tension is sometimes generated between the two types due to the difference in origins. Nevertheless, they work harmonically to create the whole process of the metaphorical experience of the two poets. All examined poems written by Mahmoud Hasan Ismail are translated by the researcher. *See Appendix A* after the chapter.

**Chapter Three** deals with Clare's and Ismail's poetry that represents mainly pure meditations on life and man. Both Clare and Ismail could be claimed as poets of the 'meditative mode'. Their poetry counts much on the power of their sharp observation of what could be called hateful contraries. The two poles of the duality that create the contraries lie in the fact that they are not against the urbanization, with all its entailed cultures, but at the same time they are not able to savour it. Through their poetry they try to mitigate their souls by means of contemplating on both nature on one hand and the effect of cultures that are not inherent in man's nature, on the other. Poem after poem they find in their words a source of assuaging the loss of what they deem as the original mode of life.

The focus falls on the metaphorical mode of expression either cultural oriented, represented in the archetypal metaphors, or semantically oriented represented in the conceptual metaphors.

The poems are selected according to the two poet's mode of contemplating the general essence of man's experience in life. The examined poems are from late as well as early stages of both poets' life. The poems are classified according to their general theme which already falls within the general mode of meditation. Some poems address meditations on the essence of life and its real meaning, others offer the reaction of the two poets to the situation of death. Other poems show Clare's and Ismail's meditative style of presenting man's miseries befallen him due to various miserable situations. The last part focuses on poems that deals with the two poet's contemplation on love experience and how they react and handle love situations. The chapter is divided into clear sections; each examines one shared aspect of nature description in the two poet's poetic experience. The sections are ordered according to the importance their prevalence in their poetry. All examined poems are translated by the researcher. *See Appendix A* after the chapter.

Therefore, Metaphors either stemming from the conscious or the unconscious are unanimously the best delegate of the two poets' poetic sensibility as well as style. The fact that metaphors of unconscious

oppose those of conscious creates what could be deemed as contraries which enriches the poetry of both Clare and Ismail.

# Chapter One

# Metaphor: Archetypal and Conceptual

If metaphor is deemed as the keyword of poetic discourse, hence it is the underlying element of the poet's thought. The process of generating a metaphor starts with the link the writer creates in his mind between the tenor and the vehicle. In this respect it could not be denied that the process of metaphor evolution involves, by one way or another, the writer's mental capacities. Employing his mind, the writer then moves from the realm of the unconscious to that of the conscious, or the process could be vice versa.

Traditionally, according to Aristotle's poetics, a metaphor is "the application of an alien name by transference either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or by analogy" (Aristotle 41). The word "analogy" in Aristotle's definition could be regarded as the key word of the definition, which means that the writer has to pass through the process of drawing the "analogy". In so doing, the writer's conscious mind works on applying some meanings to certain objects or even concepts.

In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term 'metaphor' is defined as " the figure of speech in which a name or descriptive term is transferred to some object different from, but analogous to that to which it is properly applicable" (676). Metaphor is regarded by men of letters and