Conceptual Mechanisms Involved in Different Readings of a Poem within the Framework of Cognitive Poetics: The Case of Kamran Rasoolzadeh

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Extended abstract

1- Introduction

From a philosophical perspective, one could say that during the history of literary criticism within the twentieth century, there have been two principal views on the nature of literary texts: One considers literary works as self-contained esthetic objects, which ambiguity, indeterminacy and uncertainty constitute an indispensable part of them; the other seeks to examine literary works as to reveal a single specific reading which represents historical consciousness in its different aspects, political, social and so on and so forth. Among various literary criticisms, cognitive poetics belongs to the first attitude to literary works, as it does not intend, by reducing literary texts to the historical, political and/or social context, to obtain one single interpretation. Rather, cognitive poetics, by describing the cognitive operations involved in the process of reading which experienced readers trigger in their mind while confronting literary texts, aims to study how different interpretations of one single literary text are formed. The formation of interpretations by readers is a cognitive operation which takes place through the unpacking of the text and recombining it into a meaningful integrated whole.

2- Theoretical Framework and Methodology:

The present article, in a descriptive and analytic manner, and within the framework of cognitive poetics, aims at a study of one poem by one of the Persian blank-verse poets through an analysis of the possibilities this framework could provide for the fact that how literary works are interpreted by different readers. The theory, which is thus put into practice from within the cognitive poetics framework, is called the conceptual blending theory put forward by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner (2002). Generally speaking, according to this cognitive theory of meaning construction, every poetic text could be considered as a conceptual blend, or a set of conceptual blends, which is created through a number of cognitive processes such as

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selective projection, mapping, compression, decompression, as well as the construction of networks called integration networks. And for a reader to reach a particular interpretation among the possible interpretations, it is necessary for him to repeat all these cognitive operations again in his own right in the mind. Difference in the reconstruction of the integration networks operating behind the conceptual blends, and also in the cognitive operations which lead to the reconstruction of the Integration Networks, brings about different interpretations of one and the same text. It turns out that the conceptual blending theory, taken in conjunction with some elements from another theory within the cognitive poetics framework, namely the conceptual domain theory proposed by Ronald Langacker (1987), provides a powerful theoretical tool for the description and explanation of how different readings of one and the same text emerge. Furthermore, the conceptual blending theory offers another instrument, called optimalty principles, which can be used to assess the extent to which one particular interpretation enjoys a well-formed semantic structure, a theoretical tool that could also provide reasons for preference of one reading over the other.

3- Results and Discussions:

The analysis of the selected poem, through the application of the theoretical instruments provided by the conceptual blending theory, theoretical instruments such as schema induction, vital relationships and their different kinds of compressions, together with the exploitation of a number of concepts taken from Langacker's conceptual domains theory like profiling, demonstrate that how and through what cognitive operations readers construct different meanings of one and the same text. Thus, during the process of meaning construction, through the operation of one particular cognitive function or the omission of it (for example, compression of vital relationships or selective projection of different conceptual structures), readers may reach different interpretations of the same text. In general, the possible interpretations of the poem selected for analysis in this inquiry can be subsumed under two categories: Those interpretations that occur within the conceptual domain of love. In each one of these readings, it is the conceptual domain of love that is activated from the long-term memory into the working memory, only that in each case a different part of the complex, intertwined network of the conceptual domain of love is profiled. In these interpretations, according to the readings the experimental readers have provided the researchers with, three patterns can be distinguished, which may designated as "modest", "boastful" and "passionate" or "romantic". The interpretations of the other category, instead of the conceptual domain of love, activate other ones, and thus are potentially infinite.

4- Conclusions and Suggestions:

To conclude, the conceptual blending theory, in a sense, can be regarded as the cognitivist account of the poststructuralist theory of unlimited interpretation, providing the relativist notion of reading with a description and explanation which are based upon empirical data. In addition, the present research demonstrates that poetic texts are capable of ambiguity, polyphony and the possibility of different,

even contradictory interpretations, and since the selected poem displays these features, it acquires one important criterion of poeticality. In addition, although the conceptual blending theory allows different interpretations of the same text, by applying its optimality principles, it chooses some of them over the others as optimal readings, and does not give all of them the same credit.

Key Words: Cognitive poetics, Conceptual blending, Reading, Ambiguity, Persian blank-verse poetry.

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