Imagery Conceptualization of the ILL BODY in Postmodernist Literary Text

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The paper focuses on the study of literary corporeality, special attention being paid to the modi of conceptualization of the ILL HUMAN BODY activated in the course of imagery system formation. The conceptual analysis, that implied the process of reconstruction of conceptual metaphors in the literary text, was applied to the research of English postmodernist literary prose. The results obtained revealed the wide scope and specific ways of figurative conceptualization of the HUMAN BODY in the poetics of postmodernism.

Key words — human body, corporeality, conceptual a nalysis, conceptualization, conceptual metaphor/metonymy, i magery space, literary text, English postmodernism.

I. Introduction

The phenomenon of human body has been in the focus of multiple scientific paradigms since ancient times, but it is in the XXc entury t he major apects of study in both natural sciences and the humanities. Apart from natural sciences, corporeality is investigated in psychology, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, literary studies, culture studies, cognitive science, etc., which analyze the representations of the body in a variety of discourses.

In the XXc entury the significance of corporeality is emphasized in culture forms which apply the ‘human body’ ph enomenon. The focus of reflection, but a means of image formation as well [3]. A human body gets referred and imagery functions while the authors of literary texts, through the authors’ intensions and cinematic images a human body is conceptualized in a general artistic and esthetic conception by means of projecting additional senses on a human body.

The review of previously completed studies of postmodernist prose was performed, which demonstrated, that the problem of “deformed” or “broken” bodies is of special interest. In the imagery and narrative structure of postmodernist literary text this image appears as ill, dead, murdered, mutilated, disabled bodies, etc.

For instance, the problem of ill body as a type of broken body is described in J. Winterson’s “Written on the Body” which was chosen as the material of the research.

The research aims at the study of the specific ways of figurative interpretation of HUMAN BODY (ILL BODY) in the poetics of postmodernism. The aim is to study the mental processes of image conceptualization in the course of imagery formation in postmodernist literary text and to reveal the specific ways of figurative representation of the image of ILL BODY.

The aim is realized with the methods of semantic and cognitive types of linguistic analyses, which imply the process of reconstruction of conceptual metaphors in the text. The methodological grounds of the research is the theory of conceptual metaphor [5], [6] and the theory of conceptual integration [2].

The results obtained revealed the specific ways of ILL BODY coceptualization as an example of the metaphoric interpretation of bodily sensations caused by the disease, figurative representation of deadly disease and death.

II. ILL BODY in the Imagery System of Postmodernist Literary Text

In the text of the novel chosen for the analysis the main character — Louise, the beloved woman of the narrator, after she fell ill with blood cancer (leukemia), is depicted as ILL BODY, that is characterized by her lover as having too many T-cells and 97 months to live: “Louise, dipterous girl born in flames, 35... 10 years married, 5 months with me. Doctorate in Art History. First class mind. ...2 arms, 2 legs, too many white T-cells. 97 months to live” [12, 144].

This brief characteristics given to the new acquaintance to the request to describe “what she was like” highlights the key phy siological aspects of the organism suffering from cancer (leukemia) — the fact of prev alence of white blood cel ls (lymphocytes) and td re of l eukemia. This fact makes literary texts of postmodernist period to be used for research of the subject of the text.

CorpoReal imagery of the literary text has been the focus of literary studies [4], [7], [10], in which di fferent apects of the human body is referred to in the literary texts of the modernist period due to the changes in people’s ou tlook stimulated by the dramatic e vents of the epoch [4], [7], [8], [10], and t he tendency to explore the literary text of the modernist period [9]. This fact makes literary texts of modernist period are posited modernist peri ods a perf ect material for the research of literary corporeality.

In view of the fact that the modernist period lacks linguistic and cognitive analysis, the research is the theory of conceptual metaphor [5], [6] and the theory of conceptual integration [2].

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For in stance, ILL B ODY i s coceptualized through the concept of deformed body BODY I LL WITH CANCER IS ITS OWN ENEMY, being figuratively interpreted as the body surrounded by enemies from inside, who besiege it, betray it, penetrate the body and ready to destroy it.

Cancer is metaphorically represented as B ETRAYAL O F THE BO DY, which is un controlled and un predicted. In the imagery space of J. W interon’s n ovel B ODY I LL WITH CANCER IS THE BODY BETRAYED BY ITSELF, compare: “Don’t
you know? Cancer is an unpredictable condition. It is the body turning upon itself. We don’t understand that yet. We know what happens but not why it happens or how to stop it.”[12, 105].

It is obvious that the author applies in both contexts the image of the BODY AS ITS OWN VICTIM. The BODY AS THE VICTIM of self-betrayal or self-besiegement is not random and th is d i rection of f i magey in interpretation is r ooted in the nature of phy siological processes s pecific to f bl ood cancer (leu kemia), – th e medical detail accen tuat ed i n Louise’s characteristics above (too many white T-cells).

Normally T-cells (white blood cells) or leukocytes play a central role in cell-mediated immunity. Forming part of the i mmune s ystem they help to p rotect th e b ody b y y signaling about t h e d is ease b y f inding, attacking dis eased cel ls (virus-infected, foreign a nd cancer cells) and eradicating them.

So, they are a n important part of the body’s defense against infective organisms and foreign substances. To defend the body adequately, a s s ufficient n umber of w hite b l ood c e lls m us t “receive a m ensage” th at an infective organ ism or f or eign substance has “invaded” the body, get to where they are needed, and then kill and digest the harmful organism or substance.

Usually a n organ ism produ ces a cert ain qu antity of leukocytes and an increase in the number of white blood cells may result from the normal response of the body to help figh t an infection. T hough, “too many white blood cells” indicates a disorder that might be the evidence of an aggressive, fast-growing type of leukemia (blood cancer) in which too many T-cells are found in the bone marrow and bl ood. T hus, bl ood cel ls t h a t sh ould be “good” at fighting the “invaders” o f a n organ ism start the destruction of the organism itself.

This f act i nds relevant i magery in t he literary t ext a nd explains the employment of t he i mages of SELF-IMPRISONED BODY and the BODY BETRAYED BY ITSELF.

It is also substantiated by the following fragments of J. Winterson’s te xt, i n wh ich th e c onceptual metaphor BODY ILL WITH CANCER IS A BODY THAT MADE A MISTAKE, compares: “The white cells, B and T types, just a few of them as always whistling as they go. The faithful body has made a mistake. This is no time to stamp the passports and look at the sky. Coming up behind are hundreds of them. Hundreds too many, armed to the teeth for a job that doesn’t need doing. Not needed? With all that weaponry?”[12, 116].

Here the conceptual metaphor REDUNDANT T-CELLS ARE ARMED FOREIGNERS is activated, while the body itself is figuratively represented as an organ that is full to overflowing but the keeper is asleep. The author creates the image of “invaders” which are in fact f ormer “helpers” as th e t ex t f ragment abov e i llustrates. T he diffi culty to r esist th e h e avy y interpreta tion in the literary text as the MISTAKE OF THE BODY which in the imaginary space consists in the fact that the organism goes on to take them for “workers” that are as if “authorized to enter”, while t he body does n ot pa y a ttention that something is wrong (it “does not stamp their passports”) and “guards” t urned i nto “bandits”, so, t hey f earlessly m ove in the bloodstream ("whistling as they go") with the aim to perform the job that they doesn’t need doing. T he mistake i s t h at t he “weapons” t hey have (with all that weaponry), initially designed to protect the body, they are going to use to kill the body that made a fail and produced the white bl ood cel ls a s a resp ose t o n on-exis ting
problem in the body and in too many numbers that the defenders trigger the danger themselves.

The images of a “coup” or “rebellions” of T-cells which occurs at the moment when the body makes a “mistake” that is employed in the imagery space of J. Winterson’s literary text to interpret the state of the ILL BODY, implies another vector of conceptual representation, generalized by means of the conceptual metaphor LEUKEMIC BODY I S A FOREIGN BODY, co mpare: “Here they come, hurring through the bloodstream trying to pick a fight. There’s no-one to fight but you, Louise. You’re the foreign body now”. [12, 116].

This text fragment emphasizes that the BODY ILL WITH CANCER is viewed through the prism of the image of a FOREIGN BODY, which is a “wishing-no-good-to-itself” body, a BODY-TRAITOR. It appears because of the over-increased qu anthity of T-cells, created as “guards” and running in the bloodstream, that are “trying to pick a fight”, since they have no other program, but to kill, and they destroy healthy cells not having found “enemies” – infected ones (There’s no-one to fight but you Louise).

The same direction of conceptualization of T-cells by means of the image of invaders is applied in the following fragment of the text, in which the conceptual metaphor REDUNDANT T-CITES ARE A REMEDIAL ILL INVADERS is activated: “Will you let me crawl inside you, stand guard over you, trap them as they come at you? Why can’t I dam their blind tide that filthies your blood? Why are there no lock gates on the portal vein?” [12, 115].

It is obvious from the context, that the narrator, who wishes to take some precautions to stop the “invaders” of the body of a beloved woman, expresses such imagery interpretation as a no-lock foot vision of the BODY as the invaded territory and its constituents – as invaders by expressing the desire of metaphorical “standing guard over” her, “trapping them” as they come, and being sorry for there is “no lock gate” on her portal vein, that might prevent the “traitors” from “swarming” in her blood.

In the text of J. Winterson’s novel the reader comes across another vector of imagery representation of the ILL BODY, which is generalized by the conceptual metaphor ILL BODY I S A BATTLEFIELD. It is observable: “Characteristic of the leukemic body is a rapid decline after remission. Remission can be induced by radiotherapy or chemotherapy or simply it can happen, no-one is sure why. No doctor can accurately predict whether the disease will stabilize or for how long. This is true of all cancers. The body dances with itself” [12, 175].

The image of the GAMBLE is not accidental, for, metaphorically, curing cancer is hazardous game of chance indeed – it is extremely harmful and destructive for a human organism with the smallest hope of survival. The treatment itself can cause death of the patient and be deadly for certain organs or the entire organism, because it is a dangerous treatment with “massive doses of steroids” that cause splenic irradiation, coagulation, bleeding, and toxic treatment with massive doses of steroids. This fragment of the novel provides true facts of brutal and toxic treatment with “massive doses of steroids” that cause splenic irradiation, coagulation, bleeding, and toxic treatment with massive doses of steroids.

It is obvious from the description that the consequences of the treatment of cancerous body are no less dangerous in the treatment of cancerous body are no less dangerous in the treatment of cancerous body are no less dangerous in the treatment of cancerous body are no less dangerous in the treatment of cancerous body are no less dangerous in the treatment of cancerous body are no less dangerous in the treatment of cancerous body are no less dangerous in the treatment of cancerous body are no less dangerous in the treatment of cancerous body are no less dangerous in the treatment of cancerous body are no less dangerous in the treatment of cancerous body are no less dangerous in the treatment of cancerous body are no less dangerous in the treatment of cancerous body are no less dangerous in the treatment of cancerous body are no less dangerous in the treatment of cancerous body are no less dangerous in the treatment of cancerous body are no less dangerous. The progeny of the stem cell stop dividing, or the rate radically slows, tumour growth is halted. The patient may no longer be in pain. Remission comes early in the prognosis, before the toxic effects of the treatment have battered the body into a wholly new submission, the patient may feel well. Unfortunately, hair loss, skin discoloration, chronic constipation, fever and neurological disturbances are likely to be the price for a few months more life. Or a few years. That’s the gamble” [12, 175].

The image of the BATTLEFIELD is not accident, for, metaphorically, curing cancer is hazardous game of chance indeed – it is extremely harmful and destructive for a human organism with the smallest hope of survival. The treatment itself can cause death of the patient and be deadly for certain organs or the entire organism, because it is a dangerous treatment with “massive doses of steroids”. This fragment of the novel provides true facts of brutal and toxic treatment with “massive doses of steroids” that cause splenic irradiation, coagulation, bleeding, and toxic treatment with massive doses of steroids.

In order to emphasize the nature of such treatment, the author employs her specific poetic interpretation of the image of the BATTLEFIELD, compare: “Wheel round the drugs trolley, bomb the battlefield, try radiation right on the tumour.” [12, 175].

The image of the BATTLEFIELD is supported by t he metaphorical “bombing” the body with drugs and radiation aimed at body therapy. In such “medical war” both “enemies” and “own soldiers” perish, that highlights the nature of the treatment as an undertaking with a possible lethal outcome.

In general, what makes the disease so problematic is, a well-known fact, that unfortunately, the patient rognoses a re mostly promising while deadening with different forms of cancer because of metastasis and this aspect was not out of focus of the author of the literary text. It finds reflection in the imagery system of J. Winterson’s novel. It is evident from the text that the conceptual metaphor CANCER IS A TRAVELLER is activated, whereas ILL...
The body is making way for worms—
their first line of defense. Even the ears enlarge like
persistent attempts to find the evidence of strong and
lover appears as “deceased person and may be considered a
type of tomb. In enclosing the interment space or burial chamber of a
accidentally, as a building, constructed as a monument
to marking your passageways,
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Here through the implication of the conceptual metaphor ILL BODY (DYING BODY) IS A M AUSOLEUM (that impressive mausoleum, your body), where the age of the latter is selected for tf he \textit{terary representation of f t he BODY not accidentally, a s a building, c onstructed a s a monument enclosing the interments pace or burial chamber o f a deceased person and may be c onsidered a type of f o mb. In this context it apparently implies that a CANCEROUS BODY is viewed as a TOMB, that still living body, but destined to die, is as if imprisoned in one’s own tomb or as if buried alive.

In view of such metaphorical vision of the BODY, Louise’s lover appears as “archeologist of tombs”. And no matter how persistent the attempts are to find the evidence of strong and healthy body (“funnels and wells of youth and health”), the BODY is viewed as a dying one, that is being decomposed and “making way for worms”, co mpare: “How tight and secret are the funnels and wells of youth and health. […] In the old or ill, the nostrils flare, the eye sockets make deep
pools of request.

Do the

metaphorical interpretation of the PHYSIOLOGICAL states and medical facts of the ILL BODY, but of the perception of this body by a beloved one.

Louise’s lover, un derstanding the i nescapable o utcome, percepts her body as a mausoleum, e.g.: “Let me penetrate you. I am the archeologist of tombs. I would devote my life to marking your passageways, the entrances and exits of that impressive mausoleum, your body” [12, 119].

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