**The role of conceptual metaphors in reflecting the relationship**

**between humans and clones in Kate Wilhelm's "Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang"**

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In recent centuries, literature has increasingly explored themes of human identity, extending its gaze to entities that challenge and transcend traditional boundaries. In this context, the concept of the posthuman has gained significant traction in both cultural and academic discussions. Recent innovations in technological and biological fields are also creating new ways of understanding the relationship between humans and posthuman beings—those that already exist and those that will have to be faced in the future (robots, clones, AI, etc.). Therefore, our focus is on how literature represents the posthuman, specifically how authors construct its image and delineate the boundaries between the human and the posthuman, especially through the use of conceptual metaphors.

What we are interested in is conceptual metaphor as a complex phenomenon. In conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), metaphor is understood “as a process of understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another” [Crystal 2008: 98]. To know a metaphor, therefore, is “to know the systematic mappings between a source and a target” [Kövecses 2010: 10]. In literature, according to George Lakoff, Mark Johnson and Mark Turner, metaphors appear to be more imaginative and innovative than those present in other discourses. They offer unique perspectives and approaches to understanding common experience, and so fiction can be said to be both a mirror and a catalyst for the development of language.

*Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* (1976) is a post-apocalyptic novel written by a prominent American writer Kate Wilhelm. It explores the consequences of cloning as a means of human survival. By analysing the conceptual metaphors in this novel, we can reveal how language reflects and shapes collective perceptions of the relationship between human and posthuman characters.

One of the central structural oppositions in the novel is the one between *the collective* and *the individual*. The clones perceive themselves as parts of a larger organism, united in thought and action. The conceptual metaphor THE COLLECTIVE IS A BODY, A CLONE IS A BODY PART is made manifest in linguistic expressions. For example, the absence of one clone is compared to the loss of a limb, causing “phantom pain” to others (“One part of its body was missing, <...> [a]nd the missing part, like an amputated limb, caused phantom pain” [Wilhelm 1976: 99]). This metaphor highlights the clones’ inability to function independently. It is also mentioned that “[t]ogether they made a whole; the absence of one of them left the others incomplete” [Wilhelm 1976: 87], and that is how the opposition *whole* vs. *incomplete* is verbalised here.

Yet another conceptual metaphor to examine in this novel is A CLONE IS AN (EMPTY) CONTAINER. This metaphor reflects the idea that the bodies of clones serve as vessels devoid of the complex content that defines humanity which again underscores their incompleteness (e.g. “Miri looked empty” [Wilhelm 1976: 85]). Similarly, the metaphor CLONES ARE BARREN LAND illustrates their inability to reproduce naturally or generate original thought, aligning them with artificial sterility rather than organic vitality. For example, David, a human, sees one of the clones as a copy of the human it resembles but “with something missing, a dead area” [Wilhelm 1976: 49].

Since clones are artificially created beings, it makes sense to touch on how nature is represented in the text. The metaphorical role of nature, particularly the woods, further underscores the exploration of individuality and freedom. Interestingly enough, for Molly, a clone who differs from other clones in her thinking, NATURE IS A LIVING BEING (personification, a conventional ontological metaphor), that is, she perceives objects of nature as endowed with life and capable of the same as humans or, in her case, clones (“[a]ll that night the trees whispered to her. When she awakened, she knew the trees had accepted her; <…> they didn't stop their murmuring <…>”) [Wilhelm 1976: 126]. Nature stands in stark contrast to the artificial environment of the clone society, and clones normally fail to achieve a connection with nature characteristic of humans. This once again draws a line between clones and humans.

To summarise, in Kate Wilhelm's novel, conceptual metaphors emphasise existing oppositions that primarily define the differences between humans and clones, and thus articulate the boundaries between them at the linguistic level. At the same time, there is a character among the clones who is not alien to human-like way of thinking (Molly), but by and large she becomes an outcast among her own ones, which is also evident in terms of how conceptual metaphors are used in the text.

**References**

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