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Metaphor and its Existential Origins in 'The Stray Dog'

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ABSTRACT

Many writers have found animals as a suitable and complete mirror of human subject and have expressed human subject in the form of animals. This theme has been a dominant one in the world literature and finding and considering the human subject in an animal and giving human characteristics to it brings to mind the literary device of metaphor. Hedayat in *Stray Dog* considers a dog as a suitable and complete mirror of the human subject and makes use of metaphor for philosophical and existentialist purposes. Metaphor gives Hedayat the chance to express pain and loneliness of human subject so as to place a great deal of emphasis on the loneliness of human subject. This is done through defamiliarization and a sense of wonder which is the function of literature itself. The methodology of this paper is based on Jakobson's theory of metaphor which acts on basis of similarity, substitution, equivalence or contrast.

Keywords: Metaphor, Existentialism, Stray Dog, Human Subject, Jakobson's Theory

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1. Introduction

There are novels and stories that deal with animals. In some of these novels animals are the main characters that speak like human beings and deal with problems like human problems. The dominant element of these novels and stories is the literary device metaphor through which writers and poets give human attributes and qualities to animals. Metaphor is one of the most important forms of imagination that plays a very sensitive role in converting ordinary text into poetic prose. Its use is accomplished for various purposes, such as imaginative, descriptive, and enlightening issues, visual correlations, the expression of inner states, the creation of ambiguity, rigor, exaggeration, the persuasion of the audience, the making of pleasure and the expression of political issues. According to Jakobson in metaphor each element is *selected* from a set of possible elements and could be replaced for another in the set. Selection is a key word for Jakobson in the theory of metaphor. If we consider the word 'hut', it will produce a string of synonyms, antonyms, and other substitutions: 'cabin', 'hovel', 'palace', 'den', 'burrow'. (Selden, Widdowson, & Brooker, 2005, p. 72). Jakobson holds that some literary styles are metaphoric. Romanticism and symbolism

can be understood as metaphoric. David Lodge, in *The Modes of Modern Writing* (1977) holds that modernism and symbolism are essentially metaphoric.

Metaphor in *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* is the dominant device, and Robert O'Brien has used it to demonstrate his power in his art and writing skills. The novel copes with the plight of a widowed field mouse, Mrs. Frisby, who seeks the aid of a group of former laboratory rats in rescuing her home from destruction by a farmer's plow, and of the history of the rats' escape from the laboratory and development of a literate and technological society.

The diversity of repetition and the use of metaphor in *Guardians of Ga'Hoole* written by Kathryn Lasky, while sometimes surprising the reader, in many cases makes audiences uninterested and bored due to prolixity and verbosity. *Guardians of Ga'Hoole* deals with the adventures of Soren, a young barn owl.

The use of metaphor in *Charlotte's Web* a novel by American author E. B. White is for children purposes. The novel tells the story of a pig called Wilbur and his friendship with a barn spider Charlotte. When Wilbur is in danger of being slaughtered by the farmer, Charlotte writes



messages praising Wilbur in her web in order to persuade the farmer to let him live.

George Orwell makes use of metaphor for political purposes in *Animal Farm*. The metaphor is at the disposal of political ideas where a group of animals raise against their owner and topple him down and become oppressors themselves.

In *Watership Down*, Richard Adams employs metaphor for feminist purposes. In this novel a group of rabbits evacuate the place and set out on their own. They find out that living is impossible without their female counterparts. Another story in which metaphor is used for existential purposes is Kafka's *Metamorphosis* in which metaphor is used for existentialist purposes.

2. Review of Literature

The reviews about *The Stray Dog* (1979) are very diverse. All criticisms of this work have been studied in philosophical, adaptive, and non-philosophical aspects, but none have addressed the importance of the metaphor in this work. According to Baharlouian (2000), Hedayat in the *Stray Dog*, like the treatise *Humans and Animals* and his first short story, *The Lay of an Ass at the Time of its Death* deals with the equal and existential value of man and animal, and condemns oppression humans have toward animals. He believes that Hedayat condemns not only those who annoy Pat, but also accuses all people who badly treat animals. According to Baharlouian, the end point of the *Stray Dog*, like most stories of Hedayat, is death. Karimi Motahar (2001), has compared Chekhov's *Kashtanka*, with the *Stray Dog*. He believes that these two works have a lot of similarities, but they have been written with different worldviews. They are similar because they lose the owner initially, but they are different because they have different endings.

According to Katuzian (2007), the dream of returning to a childhood exists in *Blind Owl* and a short story *Zendeh be Gour* and reaches its peak in the *Stray Dog*. From the viewpoint of Katouzian, the return to the infancy or even the return to the uterus, which cannot be imagined because of the lack of memory, pain and suffering, cannot be imagined, is the stage before the consciousness and the period before the formation of the Oedipus complex, which in short stories *Stray Dog* and *Darkroom* are evident. Katouzian considers Pat as a symbol of Hedayat himself, and considers the story as Hedayat's own biography written by his own pen. From Katouzian's

point of view, Hedayat has visualized himself as an unclean dog in the eyes of the religious people that he must be beaten and imprison himself in himself in order to be expelled and die. Katouzian also considers the three crows waiting to take out the eyes of Pat at the end of the story as the symbol of shah, and the politicians; intellectuals; and religious and people who were waiting for Hedayat's death.

Karam Nayebpour, and Naghme Vargaian (2012) have comparatively studied *Stray Dog* with the two novels of *Timbuktu* (1999) by Paul Esther and *Ruslan Loyalard* (1975) by Georgi Vladimirov. They believe in all the three stories, there is a kind of contrast between the characters and the society, and all three dogs are captured and imprisoned by the environment that enslaves them and ends their lives.

Sedaqat Rostami (2012) has compared *Stray Dog* and *White Fang* from the four perspectives of story start, point of view, conflict, and theme and content. According to Sedaqat Rostami, both stories begin by explaining the setting; both use the third person point of view; in both humans conflicts with animals, and animals have conflicts with other animals in order to survive; also, the cruelty and oppression of humans, the priority of sexual need to natural and human needs, the lack of affection in society, death and morpheism, the relationship of sexual instinct with death and affection to beasts, are some of the similar characteristics of the two stories.

Roosbeh (2012) on the basis of the descriptive-analytical method of the comparative literature school, studied the two stories of *Stray Dog* and Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, from the perspective of existentialism. According to Roosbeh, "loneliness", "emptiness", "death", "despair", and "failure" are considered to be the basic similarities of these two works. Chaharmahali and Sharifi Voldani (2014), also show the feelings of Pat as a reflection of the Oedipus complex in relation to her mother, who is associated with the smell of rice-pudding. However, according to them, in this story there is no jealousy expressed towards the father, but the reflection of a large part of the Oedipal complex, "striving towards the mother," can be seen in the thoughts of Pat.

According to Chaharmahali and Sharifi Voldani (2014), the reflection of the archetypes especially anima in Jung's psychology is found in several scenes of the story. As an example, Pat considers the

pairing of his material in that part of the story that he abandons his owner following his instinctive behaviors. According to Chaharmahali and Sharifi Voldani, Hedayat has paid attention to the negative aspect of anima in the *Stray Dog* like the *Blind Owl*. As the scholarship on Hedayat's *Stray Dog* shows, none has looked at the place of metaphor in this short story.

3. Discussion

The metaphorical concept of *The Stray Dog* in the title attracts attention. The biggest and most important metaphor used in the story of the stray dog is the title of the story itself. A stray dog is a metaphor whose infrastructure is such a sentence: a dog is like a stray human subject; the infrastructure has been removed and left to the sole footprint and feature of the base. This is consistent with the description of the stray dog and its being considered as the hero of the story. In *The Stray Dog*, the writer chooses his story from animals, because this choice is the best way to depict the absurdity, coldness and loneliness and the scary isolation of the human subject, and the author is well aware of it. In *The Stray Dog*, Hedayat from the animals selects a dog as the hero of the story, and the story tells it artistically painful. This dog is metaphorical and symbolic, and Hedayat portrays a human subject through a dog that is lonely and crippled in a crippling world of pain and isolation and is condemned to failure. Hedayat's description of a dog in this story is more like the description of a human subject, and this shows the metaphorical nature of the story, and in this way, Sadiq Hedayat style based on the theory of Jacobson expresses itself as a leaning towards the metaphoric which uses the personification device, which is a kind of metaphor. For example, the dog is described as follows

His ears were large and floppy and his tail caught the light. His coat was wavy and dirty, and above his shaggy snout sparkled two eyes which betrayed a very human intelligence, the suggestion of a human soul. In the darkness which had overtaken his life something infinite surged in those eyes, an indecipherable message, caught just behind his pupils. It was neither light nor color. It was something else something unbelievable-like the eyes of a wounded gazelle. But not only was there some similarity between this dog's eyes and the eyes of a man, but a sort of equality was visible there. (Spooner, 1979, pp. 119-120)

The word "equality" in the above lines will completely lead the reader to the point that the author sees a human subject

or say, himself in the dog's disguise, and describes the world of suffering in a skillful and artistic manner. This dog has a human identity and is, in fact, a symbol of modern human subject. Hedayat in the stray dog portrays and criticizes the current beliefs of the community in a dramatic and painful story. The most striking images of the stray dog attract the reader are images of cruelty and unkindness towards this stray dog. For example:

In front of the baker's the errand boy hit him. In front of the butcher's the assistant threw stones at him. If he sought shelter in the shade of a car, the driver came and kicked him with his heavy studded boot, to amuse himself. And when these people all grew tired of tormenting him, one of the boys who sold rice took particular pleasure in tormenting him further. For every howl he raised, a well-aimed stone hit him in the small of the back, and a burst of laughter broke through the noise of his howling. The man who had thrown the stone swore, and the others joined in the laughter as though they were in league with him and slyly encouraging him. (Snooper, 1974, p. 120)

Based on Jacobson's theory of theory the element 'him' is selected from a set of possible human pronouns and could be substituted for the stray dog in the set. In such a way the metaphoric aspect is foregrounded. The implication is the subject and the animal are substituted for one another or as Jacobson puts it they are synonym. This element of substitution can be extended farther, that is to say the animal and the writer could be one. Thus, Hedayat as the writer feels the world is cold and unfriendly and is not worth living in. The world is not beautiful for him. This is the theme of existentialist stories that can be clearly identified in the works of Hedayat. Moreover, it is a religious theme and all religions have criticized the world and did not consider it worthy of attraction. The theme of pain has repeatedly been repeated in all stories of Hedayat, including *The Blind Owl*:

There are certain sores in life that, like a canker, gnaw at the soul in solitude and diminish it. Since generally it is the custom to attribute these incredible sufferings to the realm of rare and singular accidents and happenings, it is not possible to speak about them to others. If one does talk or write about them, people pretend to accept them with sarcastic remarks and dubious smiles. In reality, however, they follow prevalent beliefs and their own ideas about them. The reason is that these pains do not have a remedy. The only remedy is forgetfulness induced by wine, or artificial



sleep induced by opium and other narcotics. Unfortunately, the effect of these drugs is transitory. After a while, instead of soothing, they add to the pain. (Hedayat, 1975, p. 1).

The style and expression of Hedayat's existentialism has highlighted him among the writers, and his stories describe the pain and sadness that eats the spirit of the human subject. He selects the absurdity and sees himself in this wasteland like a wandering dog that uses all his efforts to find hope and enjoy it, but this world is a mirage for him.

The animal inevitably fled to the alley that touched the tower, hurting itself with the hungry belly, taking refuge in the blue path. He put his head on his coat, lifted his tongue, watched in a half-sleeping and half-awake state a green field that waved his head. The tension was tired and his nerves were hurt, in the damp air of the waterway, a special comfort swept through his head. The various smells of the half-brilliant bristles, an old-fashioned shoe of old shoes, and the smell of dead and living things in his nose revived the memorable memories of the (Snooper, 1974, p. 120).

In this situation, the writer or the artist, like the stray dog, has been caught in the cold and unconscious world and does not see any hope for himself in this mortal world. This world makes the human subject old and coward, and brings up youth and physical force to an end, and shakes on the human subject's extremity and shows that the human subject is a part of the rubbish. Inevitably, the human subject realizes that in this world he is a stranger and nobody, and all his thoughts are that he despises this eagerness, because there is not any way out:

all his attention was confined to searching in the dung for morsels of food, afraid and trembling, to being beaten all day, and to howling-the only means of defense left him. Before he had been daring, fearless, clean and lively. But now he had become timid, helpless, abject. Every noise, anything which moved near him, made him start and tremble. Even the lonely sound of his own voice was frightening. He had become quite accustomed to the filth and dung. His body itched, but he no longer had the patience to hunt his fleas or even to lick himself. He felt he had become a part of the rubbish, and that something in him had died. (Snooper, 1974, p 121)

In fact, in the story of stray dog, we are faced with a strange cold feeling about the world and the community. Pat is stuck in a black hole and follows strange looks, and nobody loves him in this world, because in this world, affection does not extend to anyone and there is no caretaker. In a stray dog, the need for love makes Pat suffer

more than anything else, but he does not find the affection and cuddle: "He needed to be stroked more than ever in this new and painful life. His eyes begged for it. He was ready to give his life for some affection or a stroke on the head (Snooper, p. 121)".

But there is no sign of being stroked, nor is there any sign of hope, and what exist are death and failure, and the human subject does not have a way back, and not a way ahead, and all his efforts have been futile. What exists is just death. In this dungeon of the world, "the stray dog" describes the death of Pat as follows:

All his efforts had been in vain. He could not think why he had run. He did not know where he was going. He had no way back and no way forward. He stopped, panting, his tongue hanging out. Everything went dark before his eyes. His head low, he dragged himself painfully from the side of the road. He went to a *jub* at the side of a field and rested his belly on the burning, damp sand. An instinctive feeling, which never deceived him, told him that he would not move again from this place. His head was spinning. His thoughts and feelings had become vague and dull. He felt a sharp pain in the pit of his stomach, and the light of sickness glimmered in his eyes. A series of spasms shook and twisted his body, and his paws and limbs gradually lost their feeling. A cold sweat broke out all over his body. It was a gentle, intoxicating coolness. (Snooper, 1974, p. 126)

If you read the above text for the first time, you might think that the text is about a human being who has become weak and broken, and that his heart is weak. This is not a human being however and the story is about Pat. Substitution of Pat for a human subject is ineluctable in the above lines. This is the metaphor that allows Hedayat to portray a human life through a dog to give a better image of the world. "Disabled and Broken" are human traits that have been used by Hedayat as a metaphor to point out the depth of the absurdity of life. Some literary critics have considered metaphor as the "language of the creature." (Ahmadi, 2003, p. 619). Jacobson considers the metaphorical and virtual language as the language of two metaphors, and he considers "metaphor as a process that selects a pink from the succession of axes and sits in its place" (Safavi, 1991, p. 47).

The pessimists are more serious and more conductive. In the story of the stray dog, people behave cruelly and unkindly. Such behavior means discouragement from this cool world. How can one be expected to love the human subject in a world where no one cares about someone's grief. In fact,

Hedayat's hero has been crushed and crushed in the claw and forehead of the cold world, and the only way to escape from this harsh and violent world is to die. Hedayat's main message is the expression of the loneliness and obscurity of the human soul. He does not intend to reassure his reader to disrespectful affairs. Hedayat's hero is a sickly, poor, teddy-bearish, frustrated, and secluded. Hedayat, with the creation of such a hero, has tried to make the readers familiar with the depth of the absurdity of life. Of course, Hedayat by creating the heroes of the alien community has tried to make readers familiar with the absurdity of life. The hero of the Stray Dog feels the coldness of the world and goes beyond life, meaning he does not find hope and all his effort has been futile.

The metaphorical description of the stray dog's story in the story highlights the stray dog as a human subject in the mind of the reader, and the author of these metaphorical descriptions attempts to convey a message to the reader. It is clear that the hero of the stray dog did all his best and endured his life. He sees his whole life meaningless in this world, his story is the story of a poor human being who has fallen in this world.

He believes life escapes human beings, and especially in a stray dog he tries to portray a contemporary man with his death-in-life experience. He bases this story on Sartre's thoughts, and introduces the stray dog as a symbol of modern man who has been distancing himself from the past in order to enjoy from living in a new world that suddenly faces a world that does not make him anything but an existentialist. (Mousavi and Homayoun, 2011, pp. 138-139)

Life became dark and blurry in front of his eyes and he is ashamed of his efforts on the brink of the road of life and does not even have the ability to move and is not able to live and awaits the pleasant cooling of death to end the hardships of life. Generally the story of 'Stray Dog' is not worth reading when considered as simply and only about a real dog, so it should be considered a story beyond a dog's story, and what leads us to this result is the author's making use of the imaginative element of metaphor which implies another signification and conceptualization to the reader. Scholars believe the dog is used "as a metaphor for outsider, alienated, rejected and persecuted human beings who are treated in the same way by their fellow humans. (Katouzian, 2008, p. 178). Hedayat hides himself behind the dog to

induce a sentimental, philosophical and existentialist conceptualization in the reader. Hedayat struggles to find the philosophy and the purpose of the creation of a captive human being, as if the pains and debauchery disturb the goal of his every moment of life, and interacts with more wounds. This harassment is so much that surprised others and "makes them believe that his search reveals a pathological curiosity about the meaning and purpose of life" (Mousavi and Homayoun, 2009, p. 28)

4. Conclusion

The metaphor is used to express many points. Metaphor can play ideological, political, social, philosophical, mystical, religious, and cultural roles. By using metaphor, writers can provide a different sense of affairs for their audience, replacing certain methods of conceptualization with other methods of conceptualization. Using metaphor, Hedayat uses philosophical concepts in stray dog to show his power and abundance in expressing philosophical issues. The philosophical concepts of existentialism in the stray dog are quite obvious. This is done through replacement and substitution in the words of Jacobson. The stray dog is a stray human being that is in darkness, there is no way ahead. In the world, there is no hope or faith. He seeks evidence of denial of the world and its truth, and death is justified as the last way of salvation. In the stray dog's world, frustration is on every side in the ambush and as a result lurks for the human subject. Pat, the hero of Hedayat, does not see good-natured life, and is living in a world of poverty which is totally worthless and thus Pat hopes for death. Death is a panacea for wounds and pains that slowly shrink of the soul throughout the life in such a world. The impasse are found in all aspects of the life which are artistically represented in the stray dog and all the writings of Hedayat. Even the title of one of the stories of Hedayat is "an impasse", and as a result of the stories of the author, he has been in the midst of life with unpleasant events that, like the events of his heroes, have been bitter, acrimonious and deadly.

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