

Metaphor and poetic creativity: a cognitive linguistic account

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Context in poetry

Poets may describe the context in which they create poetry.
They may use context as a means of saying something else.

The sea is calm to-night.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits, - on the French coast, the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!

Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd sand,
Listen! You hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves suck back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

Physical context

The sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath

Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

HEALTH IS WHOLENESS and PERFECTION/ COMPLETENESS IS ROUNDNESS

Knowledge about the main entities of discourse

Speaker/ Poet

I reckon – when I count at all –
First – Poets – Then the Sun –
Then Summer – Then the Heaven of God –
And then – the List is done –

But, looking back – the First so seems
To Comprehend the Whole –
The Others look a needless Show –
So I write – Poets – All –

Their Summer – lasts a Solid Year –
They can afford a Sun
The East – would deem extravagant –
And if the Further Heaven –

Be Beautiful as they prepare
For Those who worship Them –
It is too difficult a Grace –
To justify the Dream –

POETIC CREATIVITY IS A NEW WAY OF SEEING (AS A RESULT OF THE SUMMER SUN).

summer → productive period
sun → inspiration
new way of seeing → being poetically creative (i.e., coming up with a poem)

POEMS ARE HEAVENS.

further heaven → poem
worshippers → people reading poetry
God → poet

God's grace, in this metaphor, corresponds to the poet's inspiration. Dickinson's inspiration, however, is a difficult one: it is her optical illness. She writes her poetry by relying on, or making use of, her illness. This is a difficult grace to accept.

Topic and addressee

Off that landspit of stony mouth-plugs,
Eyes rolled by white sticks,
Ears cupping the sea's incoherences,
You house your unnerving head -- God-ball,
Lens of mercies,
Your stooges
Plying their wild cells in my keel's shadow,
Pushing by like hearts,
Red stigmata at the very center,
Riding the rip tide to the nearest point of
departure,

Dragging their Jesus hair.
Did I escape, I wonder?

Cultural context

My mind winds to you
Old barnacled umbilicus, Atlantic cable,
Keeping itself, it seems, in a state of miraculous repair.

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS ARE PHYSICAL CONNECTIONS

Prayers of Steel, by Carl Sandburg.

LAY me on an anvil, O God.
Beat me and hammer me into a crowbar.
Let me pry loose old walls.
Let me lift and loosen old foundations.

INSTRUMENT USED FOR THE PERSON USING IT

Skyscraper:

BY day the skyscraper looms in the smoke and sun and
has a soul.
Prairie and valley, streets of the city, pour people into

it and they mingle among its twenty floors and are
poured out again back to the streets, prairies and
valleys.

It is the men and women, boys and girls so poured in and
out all day that give the building a soul of dreams
and thoughts and memories.

(Dumped in the sea or fixed in a desert, who would care
for the building or speak its name or ask a policeman
the way to it?)

SKYSCRAPER FOR AMERICA,

A CHARACTERISTIC PROPERTY FOR THE PLACE THAT IT CHARACTERIZES.

Social context

Lay me on an anvil, O God.

Beat me and hammer me into a steel spike.

Drive me into the girders that hold a skyscraper together.

Take red-hot rivets and fasten me into the central girders.

Let me be the great nail holding a skyscraper through blue nights into
white stars.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEW SOCIAL STRUCTURE IS THE PHYSICAL MAKING OF NEW TOOLS AND
BUILDING INGREDIENTS.

The combined effect of factors

LAY me on an anvil, O God.

Beat me and hammer me into a crowbar.

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Lay me on an anvil, O God.

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The interaction of context-induced and conventional conceptual metaphors

SKYSCRAPER FOR AMERICA.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEW SOCIAL STRUCTURE IS THE PHYSICAL MAKING OF NEW TOOLS AND BUILDING INGREDIENTS.

SOCIETIES ARE BUILDINGS.

COMPLEX SYSTEMS ARE COMPLEX PHYSICAL OBJECTS

the builders → the persons creating society
the process of building → the process of creating society
the foundations of the building → the basic principles on which society is based
the building materials → the ideas used to create society
the physical structure of the building → the social organization of the ideas
the building → the society

Conclusions

First, the analyses indicate that it is possible to go beyond some limited, and limiting, approaches to the interpretation of poetry. A related implication of the analyses for the study of metaphor in poetry is that we can provide an additional source of metaphorical creativity in poetry.

Second, the analyses have implications for conceptual metaphor theory (including blending theory).

Third, the view proposed here may have certain implications for the study of embodied cognition.

Fourth, and finally, the analyses in this paper may point toward a possibly new factor in the classification of poetry.

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