
Analysing the Concept of “Beauty”

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Abstract:

The article reveals the origin and expression of the concept of “beauty” as one of the central concepts of “The Collector” by John Fowles.

Analyzing this work within the study of cognitive linguistics, authors used the method of linguo-poetic description of the text to embrace the variety of its semantic units and to discover its complexity and multivalence.

Considering the number of mentioning and the diversity of lexical units, authors represented the linguistic expression of the aesthetic assessment of the concept of “beauty”.

Authors concluded that the value and the significance of the concept of “beauty” are rather high as it gains broad semantic diversity, demonstrates the variety of connotations and presence of assessing component.

Keywords: *Concept of “Beauty”, The Collector, John Fowles, Linguistic Expression, Linguo-Poetic Description, Aesthetic Assessment.*

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1. Introduction

Beauty as a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon of not only physical but also emotional and mental life of a man, is one of the central concepts in many human sciences such as anthropology, art history, social studies, philosophy, ethics, aesthetics and others. In linguistics, the researches of the linguistic expression of the term “beauty” were conducted by the researchers as Arutyunova (1988), Dem’yankov (2001), Mescheryakova (2016), Okuneva (2009) and others.

The concept “beauty” in modern English is expressed with the word “beauty” (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2003; Hornby, 2005; Kahn, 1989). “Beauty” came to the medieval English from the medieval French which borrowed it from Latin “bellus” the roots of which go back to the word “bonum” which had the meaning of “good” (Kipfer, 2002; Kertesz, 2004; Talmy, 2003). So, the idea of beauty is the specification of the general assessment of the positive features (Crawford, 2000). In this case it should be noted that the semantic convergence of general positive assessment and positive aesthetic assessment is the natural assessment qualification of objects and this qualification is realized in the shuttle mode: good – beautiful – good (Zwaan, 2004).

2. Methodology

There is a small number of works dedicated to the linguistic study of the works of John Fowles. So, we think it is necessary to study “The Collector” of John Fowles in the conceptual aspect.

One of the main problems in cognitive linguistics is the problem of the study of the concept in the process of linguo-poetic description. One of the main specific features of the art of declamation is to embrace the variety of semantic units and going through the text to become as if it were the equivalent of the entire piece of work (van Brederode, 1995; Kertesz, 2004; Talmy, 2003; Vezhbitskaya, 1996). This fact allows us to consider the language of the fiction as the specific form of creative learning of the world and in its turn to consider the linguistics as a part of poetry. In this regard the usage of methods of conceptual analysis in linguo-poetic description of the text is the most preferable.

3. Results and Discussion

“The Collector” is the novel by John Fowles written in 1963. This work is one of the most well-known novels of Fowles, though it comes short of the glory of such works as “The Magus” and “A Maggot” (Fowles, 1963). But namely this novel, which according to the inner expression could be compared with the prose of William Golding, creates the distinct view of the philosophical and aesthetic conception of Fowles (1963). The classic story of John Fowles about possession, obsession and love is one of the greatest pieces of work in modern literature. This work had a great

impact on the literature of post-modernism. The film was released after the book (*The Collector*, 1965), the performances the scenarios of which were written on the bases of the book are still successfully on the run. The references to the book are found in modern literary works («*The Dark Tower*», Stephen King), comics (“*The Doll's House*”), music (“*The Collector*” Sonny Curtis, “*Purity*” Slipknot, “*The Butterfly Collector*” The Jam and others) and serials (*Criminal Minds*, “*The Fisher King*”).

The novel is about a lonely young man, Frederick Clegg, who works as a clerk in a city hall. In his spare time a young man collects butterflies. The first part of the novel tells the story from his point of view. He is obsessed with Miranda Grey, a student of the art school. But Clegg is not well educated, he is interested only in butterflies and he lacks the courage to get acquainted with her. He admires her in distance. Having won a large prize, Clegg decides to add Miranda to his collection. Clegg thinks through every detail of abduction. Clegg is sure that living in his house Miranda will grow to love him.

The second part of the novel is a “diary” of Miranda, which she wrote being in captive in the cellar of the house bought by Clegg and her remembrances. Miranda is sure that the abduction was conducted with the sexual motives, but sooner she understands that she was wrong and starts to pity her captor, comparing him with Caliban. Miranda several times tries to escape but every time she is stopped Clegg. She also tries to seduce him, but the only result she gets is that he gets angry.

The minginess of the inner world of the main hero does not allow him to understand, let alone to accept the principles and the views of Miranda, does not give him the opportunity to go with her on a par: “... poor Caliban, always stumbling after Miranda ...”. He can only comprehend her outer beauty, however her inner world is not achievable for him and that is why he is indifferent: “He doesn’t care what I say or how I feel – my feelings are meaningless to him – it’s the fact that he’s got me. As he caught a butterfly... He needs me, my appearance, not my feelings, thoughts, soul, and even my body. Nothing that is humane in me”.

A great number of mononuclear and incomplete sentences give the intonation of real speech, dynamics, and emotions to the narration of Miranda. From the beginning of Miranda’s description, we face a group of lexical items the meaning of which relates to light: “I ask him for light. Literally. Daylight. I cannot live without light. Artificial light...” and so on.

Miranda is associated with the beauty, light, freshness, and purity. Miranda is the world of beauty. And the world of Caliban which is the world of darkness, ugliness, artificiality, limit, cruelty, and evil is opposed to it. As it was mentioned above, the lives of the main heroes can be opposed as they are on the different levels of education, upbringing and social status. In this regard the inner world of heroes is also different, and their views are totally opposite. These differences are also found

in the words they use in their speeches and their understanding of the concept of “beauty”. The difference of the views of the heroes to the concept of “beauty” can be understood by paying attention to the quote of the story, in which Miranda speaks with her tormentor. “You despise the real bourgeois classes for all their snobbishness and their snobbish voices and ways. You do, don’t you? Yet all you put in their place is a horrid little refusal to have nasty thoughts or do nasty things or be nasty in any way. Do you know that every great thing in the history of art and every beautiful thing in life is what you call nasty or has been caused by feelings that you would call nasty? By passion, by love, by hatred, by truth. Do you know that?”

During the semantic analysis of the book there were found 166 definitions closely connected with the concept of “beauty” (Burke, 2001). These contexts include not only the nucleus and perinuclear definitions of the concept of “beauty”, but the definitions of synonyms and antonyms of the concept as well (Crabb, 1979). Most frequently used words in the context of the concept of “beauty” with the conditional positive emotional assessment are “beautiful” (mentioned 34 times), “pretty” (15 times), “lovely” (11 times), “nice” (8 times), “beauty” (6 times). Also, there were found 9 positive metaphoric comparisons:

“...and it took my breath away it was so beautiful, like a mermaid.”

Most frequently used words in the context of the concept of “beauty” with the conditional negative emotional assessment is “ugly” (mentioned 19 times), “ugliness” (13 times), “horrible” (4 times), “horrid” (3 times). These lexical units can be grouped into the so-called thematic groups on the bases of those objects they characterize (Blakemore, 2003). In this work the following thematic categories can be pointed out in the framework of the study of the concept:

1. Appearance;
2. Objects (in the house, pieces of art, furniture, clothes);
3. Behaviour/situations;
4. Nature/landscape;
5. Author’s category.

Almost all the lexical units which refer to the theme of “Appearance” are used in the reference to the main heroine, thus repeatedly emphasizing her unusual beauty: external and internal beauty. It is not surprising, as namely her phenomenal beauty caused the beginning of many events in the story.

To describe the appearance the lexical units “beautiful” and “pretty” are quite often used:

“She was too beautiful”.

“She all pretty with her pale blonde hair and grey eyes and of course the other men all green round the gills”.

"Beautiful, I said. I didn't know what to say, I wanted to look at her all the time and I couldn't".

"All she did was stare at me, then she smiled and got up and stood by the fire, really beautiful".

"You're so pretty you don't even have to try".

"You'd be a bloody bore if you weren't so pretty".

"She isn't as pretty as Miranda, of course, in fact she's only an ordinary common shop-girl, but that was my mistake before, aiming too high".

The thematic category "Objects" in the context of the concept includes various descriptive lexical units, which have negative and positive emotional coloring:

"And those pictures – horrible"!

"It's a lovely room".

"And you can't do things like that to beautiful things like this old, old room so many people have lived in".

"I've broken all the ugly ashtrays and pots".

"I had some pictures of the woods behind the house, and some of the sea coming over the wall at Seaford, really nice ones..."

The description of the behavior of heroes, actions and situations often goes through the prism of the concept of "beauty":

"I always hated vulgar women, especially girls".

"She was common".

"He was terrible".

"We didn't say anything, it was nice".

Since the plot of the story takes place within the same premises, there is little description of nature. However, any time the author mentions natural phenomena and landscapes he uses strong emotional context, perhaps, creating the contrast between the hero's captivity in the house and freedom outside:

"That air was wonderful".

"Strange, it was a beauty, I don't believe there was a cloud all day, one of those cold winter days when there's no wind and the sky is very blue".

"The beautiful clean sun on the blood-red stems".

Also, the specific view of the author to the concept of "beauty" should be mentioned. In this context the author considers the "beauty" as something spiritual. In this regard, the nouns and not the adjectives as in the other categories are often used:

"I'm thinking of all the living beauty you've ended".

"Why do you kill all the beauty?"

"I just think of things as beautiful or not".

"I mean, the beauty confuses you, you don't know what you want to do any more, what you should do".

"He is ugliness".

“But you can’t smash human ugliness”.

“But I want to make beauty”.

“I’m meant to be dead, pinned, always the same, always beautiful”.

“He knows that part of my beauty is being alive, but it’s the dead me he wants”.

So, we can assume that through the prism of author’s concept of “beauty” the heroes express not only their attitude to the entire beauty/ugliness, but mostly their inner world is reflected.

Another component of the author’s concept in this story can be considered the references to butterflies in the context of the concept of “beauty”. The author gives great importance to these comparisons, making it clear, that the model of grace and beauty for the main hero is the butterflies, collecting which takes a special place in his life. The highest level of beauty for Caliban is his collection of butterflies and the author compares it with the admiration of death. We can assume that the author deliberately made Clegg as the collector of butterflies. The collectors admire the slain butterflies. That is why the main hero is not able to bring his ideal into the line with the reality: the main heroine – alive, her world is the search, movement, creativity. The world of Clegg himself is the underground, closed space, where such a creative individual as Miranda would never be able to live. The hero compares the girls with butterflies within the negative context as well:

“Like a specimen you’d turn away from, out collecting”.

“Seeing her always made me feel like I was catching a rarity, going up to it very careful, heart-in mouth as they say, A pale Clouded Yellow, for instance”.

4. Conclusions

So we can assume that considering the number of mentioning and the variety of lexical units combined with the concept of “beauty”, it becomes one of the central concepts in “The Collector”, which gains special author’s emotional coloring. The linguistic expression of the aesthetic assessment is divided into special expression of the concept of “beauty” in its two images (beautiful - ugly) and integrated embodiment of this concept (in various combinations with the concepts of “appearance”, “good”, “evil”, “health”, “nature”, “art”).

The general features of the concept of “beauty” in English on the example of the story “The Collector” come to the compliance with the certain ideal, the presence of specifications, ambivalent characterization of attractive appearance (in this regard it is possible to recognize moral deficiencies in visual appeal) in relation to the positive aesthetic assessment and to the fear of the extremely ugly appearance, contempt towards usual appearance in relation to the negative aesthetic assessment.

The concept of “beauty” in the artistic discourse of John Fowles is complex and multivalent. The value and the significance of the concept of “beauty” are rather

high, as in the framework of literary text the concept of "beauty" gains broad semantic diversity. Lexical paradigms of the concept of "beauty" in the novel of John Fowles are presented by the relations of conceptual synonyms and conceptual antonyms. Numerous combinations of the lexical item of "beauty" tell about the variety of syntagmatic relations of this lexical item and present the strong generalizing potential of the concept of "beauty" in "The Collector". The analysis of the concept of "beauty" in the novel of John Fowles allowed us to discover the variety of connotations, the presence of assessing component of this concept.

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