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Pearl's character in the Scarlet Letter: A Cognitive Stylistic Approach

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Abstract

The article examines the nature of Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) by Nathaniel Hawthorne in the framework of cognitive stylistics, both linguistic and stylistic decisions and how they create mental and emotional perceptions of Pearl in the mind of the readers. Through the qualitative textual analysis, the study mentions how Hawthorne implies imagery, metaphor, symbolism, irony, and interaction with the characters that develop Pearl into a child and a living personification of sin, purity, and moral intuition. It also is based on cognitive stylistic theories and shows how readers form mental constructs of Pearl using cognitive functions of attention, memory, inference, and blending of concepts. The analysis of data reveals that the characterization of Pearl is an outcome of a complicated interaction between the narrative technique and reader cognition and demonstrates how the style used by Hawthorne contributes to creation of empathy, tension and the establishment of symbolism. In this regard, the paper refers to cognitive stylistics as a significant methodological device when interpreting literary characterization.

Key words: Cognitive Stylistics, Pearl, Character Construction, Stylistic Devices, Reader cognition

Introduction

The Scarlet Letter is a novel written by Hawthorne in 1850 and it is one of the books that have received the greatest number of commentators in American literature canon. It is set in seventeenth century Puritan New England, which places on the foreground eternal issues of sin, punishment, redemption, and moral hypocrisy. Since Hester Prynne is the center of the tale, she is publicly shamed because of the fact she bore rape child outside of marriage and is sentenced to wear an embroidered letter A on the front of her clothes throughout her life as a reminder of the fact that she was guilty in terms of adultery. Her daughter Pearl is, on the other hand, one of the most interesting characters in the work. Hawthorne refers to Pearl as a manifestation of the scarlet letter of Hester and a multifaceted living image. Meanwhile, she is her pure defiant and loyal, as well as with the burden of the sin of her mother upon her (Baym, 1986; Bercovitch, 1991). Pearl is a terribly fruitful object to study with this dualistic representation.

Cognitive stylistics or cognitive poetics can be very useful to analyze the character of Pearl. Cognitive stylistics is an interdisciplinary synthesis of methodology of linguistics and empirical results in cognitive science, psychology, and literature theory. It questions how readers interpret literary language, create mental images of characters and develop an emotional, symbolic, and conceptual response to stylistic selections (Stockwell, 2002; Gavins & Steen, 2003). Within this framework, characters are seen as "mind models," being entities the reader perceives as having feelings, motives, and symbolic meaning (Jacobs, 2017; Miall, 2019). The very characterization of Pearl with its rich use of symbols



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and metaphors is a good example of this kind of usage by Hawthorne.

The cognitive stylistics approach does not perceive Pearl as a child of the desired place, but a location of discursive intersection, a transitional zone where perspectives and conceptions of childhood met. The conceptual blending theory proposed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002) presupposes the ability of the reader to combine various mental spaces to form a new meaning. The author employs these themes in Pearl in an explicit manner to depict sinful and innocent places, punishment, and purity. Therefore Pearl seems to the reader as a naive and childish character, and, on the other hand, as a metaphoric reinterpretation tale in disobedience against the tyrannical method of judgment in the Puritan system. This multilayered meaning is underpinned by the way Hawthorne structures his work, in particular, by the profusion of metaphor, of light and illumination, and by an associative reference to Pearl and the scarlet letter (Reynolds 1988; Miller 1991). The symbolic agency of Pearl has been recorded in successive scholarly epochs. Early critics home in on her as a burden and also an object of shame (Matthiessen, 1941; Baym, 1986). Subsequent interpretations changed to the view of Pearl as an early example of resistance and moral intuition when set into the context of contemporary intellectual debates (Hawthorne, 1848, 1853; Reynolds, 1988; Person, 2007). The present research attempts to highlight the extent to which the Transcendentalist atmosphere of Hawthorne's time (one of emphasis on the individual over his/her community flourishing of an individual conscience) creates an important interpretative context for Pearl's symbolic eminence (Miller, 1991).

Cognitive stylistics details how lexical selections in the works of Hawthorne serve the purpose of symbolic processing of reading Pearl. This is because Hawthorne invites his audience to impersonate Empirical studies in cognitive poetics to testify to the ubiquity of embodied simulations when it comes to character conception, which indicates that the readers tend to project the emotions and actions of characters as reality (Harrison, Nuttall, Stockwell, and Yuan, 2019; Jacobs, 2017). The combination of innocent laughter of Pearl, questioning, and unspoken knowledge of the guilt of Dimmesdale, is employed to make the reader think, bringing both the affective and the symbolic into a unity (Miall, 2019). This study proposes to investigate the way that the reciprocal touch between the stylistic devices and cognitive functions comes into the unique circumstances of Pearl concerning the story.

Further, the study seeks to provide the emotional effect of Pearl through the cognitive stylistics. The readers, as Jacobs (2017) states, are invited to build characters on one hand at an intellectual level yet on the other hand they are also asked to build characters in a way in which they build empirically on an affective level. Pearl has received varied ways of reception such as tenderness when she embraces her mother, torment when she sexually teases Dimmesdale and awe when she portrays freedom and truth. This number makes her a kind of a swinging of the mind model within the mind of the reader. Pearl, for example, cannot be pinned down to the dual binaries of child and symbol; she is both at the same time, requiring cognitive dexterity (Harrison et al., 2019; Stockwell, 2002). This is what is essentially mysterious about the story-telling technique of Hawthorne.

It is these reasons that make the character of Pearl particularly well suited to analysis due to the cause of cognitive stylistics. She is characterized as a paradigm of how literature can form intricate mental images that are narrative, symbolic, emotional and conceptual (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002; Gavins and Steen, 2003). The researchers claim that the effective stylistic devices make the readers both realize that Pearl is a child living and at the same time be aware that she is a symbolic issue of Puritan orthodoxy (Reynolds 1988;



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Bercovitch 1991). It is the duality which reflects the key issues of the novel: the conflict between sin and redemption, and the dialectic between personal conscience and social judgment.

Thus, cognitive stylistics approach enables the scholars to see Pearl not merely as the daughter of Hester, but as a walking metaphor of resistance, innocence and possibility. The ability to connect the textual surface and the cognitive activity of the reader, the characterization of Pearl by Hawthorne is illustrative of the role of literature in presenting moral, emotional, and symbolic truths (Stockwell, 2002; Jacobs, 2017; Miall, 2019). The current study will build on the existing knowledge about the degree to which the character of Pearl can be regarded to indicate the potential of cognitive stylistics to disclose the rich interaction between narrative and text, reader thought and symbolic significance.

Statement of the Problem:

The research problem is approached with the consideration of the linguistic and stylistic tools employed by Hawthorne in building the character of pearl and the research problem also includes the cognitive understanding and interpretation of the pearl character by the readers. Using Pearl as the object of analysis, the study underscores the possibility in applying cognitive stylistics as an instrument of study to literature character and thus proposes a new path in the literary studies, especially in character analysis.

Research Objectives

- To explore the effect of style of writers on cognitive perception of pearl.
- To examine the linguistic and stylistic effects that Hawthorne applies when creating and building the character of pearl in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)

Research Questions

1. What is the cognitive implication of the style used by the writer on the mind of the readers about Pearl?
2. What are some of the linguistic and stylistic elements that Hawthorne employs to create and shape the character of pearl in the *Scarlet Letter* (1850)?

Significance of the Study

This research becomes important when this is understood in the light of the cognitive stylistic analysis of characterization in pearl, the Important character of *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), as it may give us the insight into the character of Pearl and her involvement in the novel. By analyzing the linguistic and stylistic tools Hawthorne employs to create Pearl and by exploring the mental process which occur when readers encounter and decipher this character, this research paper will help one understand the convolution of character building in literature. In addition, the second purpose of this study is to highlight how cognitive stylistics may be used as a literary analytic tool. Using the principles of cognitive psychology in the study of the text related to literature, this piece of research will demonstrate how devices, like metaphor, imagery, irony, etc., are used to make the readers perceive the characters, and how the latter is used to add to the meaning of a piece of literature.

Literature Review

The interdisciplinary subfield in cognitive linguistics is called cognitive stylistics and it studies the various manners in which texts bear emotional and cognitive utterance response in the mind of literate readers (Gavins and Steen, 2003). According to Semino and



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Culpeper (2002), the characters, entrenched in texts, via linguistic form, interpretive processes, elicit cognitive, affective reactions of readers. The field lies in a junction between linguistics, the cognitive science and literary studies epistemology, and rescues linguistic analysis of cognitive analysis and literary analysis of cognitive analysis (Stockwell, 2002; Semino and Culpeper, 2002). The characters in the narrative fiction are being treated as text-based mental models of potential individuals (Margolin, 2007) constructed in the mind of the reader. The liaison of literature and psychology is expounded as the products of the cognizing minds and interpretations as the products of the other cognizing minds in the physical and socio-cultural worlds in which they were produced and read (Freeman, 2000). The approach to metaphor as a thought process (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 1999; Lakoff and Turner, 1989; et al) has made its mark in the center-stage of human cognition and communication theories. This has made metaphors of particular academic concern in the analysis of narrative fiction (Turner, 1991; Semino, 2002; Zunshine, 2006; Palmer, 2007; et al.) both on linguistic and cognitive front.

Past researches have demonstrated the usefulness of cognitive stylistics in the process of examining the construction of characters in literature. Cognitive stylistics have been applied by Semino and Culpeper (2002) in the investigation of the character of Sherlock Holmes in the detective stories created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and how the character was created utilizing metaphor, imagery and other linguistic devices. A similar approach to character analysis Gavins and Steen (2003) used the character analysis perspective of using metaphor to characterise the protagonist in *The Great Gatsby*, by F Scott Fitzgerald, and in doing so they had also shown the use of metaphor as a vehicle of not only constructing a character but also a larger picture of the novel as a whole.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born on July 4, 1804 in Salem, Massachusetts and is considered to be a great American writer whose works consisted of short stories and romance novels. He played with different stylistic and genre rules all through his literary career, which, in its turn, testifies to his versatility. The short stories and two novels are his most popular writings and are so extensively read, especially *The Scarlet Letter*, published in March 1850, or *The House of Seven Gables*, published in 1851.

Traditionally, studies that explore the characterization of Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter* have dwelt upon such themes as sin and redemption. To exemplify, Capps (2006) has done studies on Pearl, the daughter of the main character in the novel and the following analysis has been made: Pearl works as a symbol of truth and innocence. Although the literature on *The Scarlet Letter* on the linguistic and stylistic attributes of the text which have performed analytical studies of the text through different methods, very few studies have utilized a cognitive stylistic approach so as to outline the building of Pearl.

Further, literary devices are employed by writers as a vehicle to ensure that the readers can easily relate emotionally to the story as a whole, certain characters or certain parts of the theme. Under literary devices, there are various techniques employed by an author/authors to generate unique and focused effect on their writing that would enable the researchers to convey information effectively and in the process enable the reader to detect the details conceal within writing. Literary devices should be mastered, and it contributes to the easiness and thrill of the written texts (Muniz, 2020).

The initial virtue of Hawthorne was in the fact that it was possible to build profound symbolic fables to mirror the inner worlds of morals. One of the most classic expressions of this is *The Scarlet Letter* that is a paradigmatic expression of his ideal and artistic style, the very first American symbolic fiction, which addresses the themes of alienation, sin, punishment, and guilt. The symbolization of significance that Townsend exemplified throughout the literary work as an A of *The Scarlet Letter*, is supported by several



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significance symbols (Zheng, D., 2017).

The current research paper attempts to fill a gap in The literature by proposing an examination of linguistic and stylistic decisions in presenting Pearl as a character in The Scarlet Letter besides the cognitive process within which the readers perceive and understand this character.

Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The research design used in the study is a qualitative one. The main sources of research in this case are the original text of the novel and the secondary sources are different published articles and reviews. The theoretical framework of the current study is in compliance with the ideas of cognitive stylistics based on the concept of cognitive psychology and literary criticism. Gavins and Steen (2003, p. 65) explicate the cognitive stylistics is a field in the literary criticism which studies of literary literature are viewed in terms of cognitive and affective processing of its understanding and interpretation. According to Zwaan and Radvansky (1998), understanding of characters in literature depends on their mental image of the character which is based on synthesis and integration of both the information found in the text and their background experience and knowledge of the world. Images schemas (Gavins and Steen, 2003), symbolism (Ruczaj, 1992: 241-22), metaphorical imagery (Zunshine, 2006) and irony (Fisch, 2007) are all instrumental in the creation of interpretation and comprehension of the character and plays a role in the overall meaning of literature work through the use of linguistic devices.

Data Analysis

Hawthorne employs several linguistic and stylistic techniques in the creation and the development of character of Pearl in the Scarlet Letter (1850). To begin with, Hawthorne has used symbolism and imagery to depict the other worldliness of Pearl. He calls her a child of great price-- bought with everything she possessed--the only treasure her mother has--the personification of the sin of Hester and even of her hope (81). Second, Hawthorne employs the vivid images of nature to relate Pearl with the wild nature. She is described as an imp of evil, symbol and the result of sin (88), but on the other hand, her pale complexion and wild, shining eyes (89) are the signs of purity and energy that makes her duality quite visible. Third, Hawthorne makes use of paradox and irony in the characterization of Pearl, despite the fact that she is the child of sin, she turns out to be a moral compass, and always reminded her mother of truth and repentance. These stylistic elements allow Hawthorne to introduce Pearl as a symbol and a living force, the moral and emotional ambivalence of The Scarlet Letter.

Fourth, Hawthorne manifests Pearl in her communication with other people to demonstrate various elements of her complicated personality. As an example, she is mischievous and sensitive to situations that could be conveniently depicted by her dealings with her mother, Hester. Throughout Chapter 6, "Pearl," Hawthorne identifies her as the scarlet letter, which possessed life, as pearl was a constant and therefore living reminder of the sin that her mother committed. Her flirtatious, but sharp queries like when she tells Hester why she carries the scarlet letter and why the minister has his hand over his heart (Chapter 15) are indicative of her great perceptiveness at a young age. Conversely, her communication with Reverend Dimmesdale reveals her innate knowledge of guilt and secret reality when she declines to get close to her until he admits it publicly (Chapter 19, "The Child at the Brook-Side").

Lastly, Hawthorne also relies on the speech and behaviour of Pearl to establish her



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symbolic and emotional meaning. She is both innocent and eerie at the same time, which is reflected in her tone. As an instance, in Chapter 6 when she throws wildflowers on the letter of her mother, she does so, showing curiosity and judgment (unconsciously).

In the *Scarlet Letter* (1850), readers get to know and interpret the character of Pearl via a few cognitive processes, such as attention, perception, memory and inferring. To begin with, the readers need to be attentive to the details of description and behaviour that create the identity of Pearl, her bright looks, involuntary movements, and mysterious speech. This interest entails the realization of visual elements (including her wild, bright, deep black eyes) and sounds (her clear melodious laugh) as mentioned in Chapter 6.

Second, these details are projected onto a unified mental image of the character of Pearl by the readers. This entails relating the images (her natural, untamed beauty) and sounds (her laugh or inquisitive questions) and the associations (her playing the role of a living personification of sin and truth).

Third, the reader is required to memorize previous textual aspects and incorporate them with the new information as the story develops. Through this, the readers are able to see Pearl as not only an imperial child, but also a mental symbol with the human sin of Hester, the guilt of the character of Dimmesdale, and the moral dilemma of the world around them. Through recalling earlier passages of textual evidence like her conduct at the mansion of Governor Bellingham (Chapter 7) and during the scenario with the woods (Chapter 18), the readers form a consistent mental picture of the character of Pearl, which corresponds to her moral and psychological complexity.

This mental process helps the readers to regard Pearl as a literal and symbolic character: the embodiment of passion, innocence, divine revenge, which was designed by Hawthorne with the help of his complex stylistic and linguistic framework.

The use of imagery is critical in the development of Pearl character in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). In Chapter 6, Pearl, Hawthorne says that she is a beautiful immortal flower, of the luxuriance of a guilty passion, of rank. Hawthorne introduces Pearl as a wild and pure person by using the symbols of nature, sun, flowers, and forest to show her relationships with nature and truth (Chapters 6 and 16). It is a description of her liminal position, which is between innocence and sin, and it supports her position as the living picture of her mother sin and redemption.

The use of metaphor is important in the development of Pearl character in the *Scarlet Letter* (1850). Hawthorne describes her as the scarlet letter and the giver of life (Ch. 6), which represents sin and innocence. Pearl, through this living metaphor represents the passion and guilt of her mother, and her brightness and wildness is in contrast to the stiff Puritanism world, which is a representation of innocence, truth and the wildness of human spirit.

Irony helps develop the character of Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) because, the daughter of sin, Pearl becomes the image of innocence and truth. She is the bane to society, yet, she is the savior of her mother, the symbol of purity born of sin (Ch. 6).

In revealing the mental mechanisms involved in understanding Pearl by readers, researchers could learn about the influence of literature in the forming of perception and feeling. *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) is one of such literary works where cognitive stylistic analysis of the personality of Pearl shows how the language Hawthorne uses leads people to think of her as a child and a symbol and explains the dynamic relationship between the mind, language, and literary meaning.

Conclusion

To sum up, a cognitive stylistic approach to the character of Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) indicates how the language and imagery used by Hawthorne determine the



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character of Pearl as a living and a living embodiment of the deviation and blamelessness. Pearl is a symbol of a curse to the society but to her mother, a symbol of life and survival. With the use of metaphor, irony and imagery, Pearl comes out as a reflection of her mother passion and the hypocrisy of the society. The stylistic elements used by Hawthorne trigger the thinking process of the reader and make him feel that Pearl is not only a character but also a figure of ethical truth and human nature. The building of Pearl, therefore, brings out the interweaving of literature, language and mind to come up with meaning outside the text.

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