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DEATH IS LIFE: A Cognitive Analysis Of Sohrab Sepehri's "Water's Footsteps"

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Abstract

Sohrab Sepehri's poetry is a rich source of novel metaphors. As a poet deeply preoccupied with convincing us to see things differently, Sepehri redefines such key concepts as life and death in his poems. To give us a new understanding of these concepts, he creates numerous metaphors. Probing into his metaphors through a Cognitive Poetic approach helps find out how he constructs them. Cognitive Poetics is a new literary discipline which, among other things, tries to find the relationship between literary works and everyday language. This paper aims to disclose the underlying cognitive structure of Sepehri's metaphors of life and death in his "Water's Footsteps." Such an analysis reveals how the poet rejects the common way of comprehending the concepts of life and death to give them new meanings. The authors argue that the poet resorts to a kind of cognitive defamiliarization by refusing to employ the common Conceptual Metaphors for death and life. Instead, he constructs the metaphor of DEATH IS LIFE. Also discussed is wherein the poem the poet comes round to the common conceptual metaphors of death.

Keywords: Sohrab Sepehri, Conceptual Metaphor, cognitive poetics, death, life

Introduction

The works of Sohrab Sepehri, as one of the great modern Iranian poets, are rich sources of metaphors. His use of metaphors is a shaping factor of his style as a modern poet with mystical tendencies, one deeply concerned with offering a new understanding of key concepts of life, and the very meaning of life and death. "Water's Footsteps" is Sepehri's fifth book of poetry, which is, in fact, a long poem (Fomeshi, 2013: 81). The death of Sepehri's father and his attempt to give solace to his mother inspired him to write this piece (Fomeshi 81; Hojatifar, 1393: 75). The poem offers interesting definitions of life and death, and, in Shamisa's words, its "main subject is death" (Fomeshi, 2013: 81). Shamisa argues that Sepehri's view of death is in line with "Islamic Sufists" who saw life and death as unified and considered death as the continuance of life (Fomeshi, 2013: 82). According to what the poet himself declared in the prologue of his *Torrent of Sun* (1961), he was familiar with Sufism, Buddhism, and Hinduism (Turner, cited in Fomeshi, 2013:82). He was fully aware of the role of religion in man's view of death; after the death of his father, he declares in a note that religion "provides the modern man with a meaning of death and distinguishes it from annihilation" (Turner, cited in Fomeshi, 2013: 82).

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To give us a new understanding of life and death, he constructs various metaphors. Metaphor is Sepehri's language, and the best way to study this language is to probe into their underlying structure. We have chosen cognitive poetics to do so, as it has a revolutionary approach to metaphor. The traditional view of metaphor is concerned, in Stockwell's words, with "the use of one expression to refer to a different concept in a way which is still regarded as meaningful," associating this with poetry (2002: 105). Cognitive poetics, however, as a new approach to examine literary texts, sees metaphor as a phenomenon beyond linguistic expression and considers it a conceptual process. Stockwell introduces cognitive poetics as a discipline pursuing "language and creative language in everyday use" (2000:4). Cognitive poetics, as Steen and Gavins put it, sees literature as "a specific form of everyday human experience and especially cognition" (2003:1). In the same vein, Lakoff and Johnson argue in their *Metaphors We Live By* (1980: 4) that our thought system is "fundamentally metaphorical in nature," that is, we understand the world metaphorically.

So, what is the connection between Sepehri's deep interest in Sufism and his frequent use of metaphors? The language was of great importance in Sufism (Rouhani, 1388: 112). Sufists were fully aware of the power of language in shaping our views of things; for them, language makes us understand everything based on habits – which in turn influence our unconscious view of things (ibid.). Sufists' strategy toward this power of language was to dismantle the familiar conceptualization of things, to "defamiliarize"¹ them; their frequent use of paradox is a piece of evidence for this (ibid.). Like Sufists, Sepehri tries to convince us to see things differently: "Eyes should be washed to see things in a different way/ Words should be washed" (Sepehri, *Water's Footsteps* lines 291-92).

In an attempt to provide a different understanding of things, Sepehri speaks about them via different metaphors. The present paper, thus, seeks to investigate through the cognitive poetic approach his metaphors of life and death in his "Water's Footsteps" ("Seda-ye pay-e āb"), a long poem rich in imagery and metaphors of the two concepts, hence providing ample ground for an analysis of how the poet dismantles our familiar understanding of the concepts of life and death and constructs new meanings for them.

Conceptual metaphors

Lakoff and Johnson (1980c: 5), argue that the "essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another". Therefore, when we say "He *attacked* every weak point in my argument" or "Your claims are *indefensible*," we understand the concept of argument in terms of the concept of "war," and we may "lose" or "win" an argument or we consider the person we argue with as an "opponent" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980c:4-5). In cognitive poetics, metaphor is defined as a "mapping" between two "conceptual domains" resulting in the formation of a "blended space" which offers a new conceptualization (Stockwell, 2002:106-107). Lakoff and Johnson (1980b) also explain that most of the concepts in our life are "abstract," and we use metaphors to define them in terms of "concrete" concepts (1980c: 198). The concept of the argument above is an instance of an abstract concept which we necessarily define in terms of the more concrete concept of war.

Lakoff and Johnson call the underlying structure of the metaphors of argument in the two examples above the "conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR", and believe that "Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (1980c: 4-5). As Kovecses (2005: 9) puts it, metaphor is "a linguistic, conceptual, sociocultural neural, bodily phenomenon" which "exists on all of these different levels at the same time". Cognitive poetics sees mind and language, and literature as their product, as "embodied," that is embedded in human biological experiences (Stockwell, 2002: 4-5). Lakoff and Johnson (1980c: 14, 25) classify the conceptual metaphors into three broad groups which are based on our physical interaction with the world: "structural," "orientational" and "ontological".

¹. In fact, "defamiliarization," a key notion in Formalism, played a pivotal role in Sufism.

The first group include such conceptual metaphors as ARGUMENT IS WAR by which we reason about the concept of argument in terms of the concept of war (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980c: 14); the second group, are those conceptual metaphors associated with spatial orientation, such as HAPPY IS UP which are expressed in "I'm feeling up today" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980c: 15); the third group includes such metaphorical conceptualization as "personification," and "container metaphors," (which demonstrate that we conceptualize our bodies or different objects as "containers," as in "The ship is *coming into view*") (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980c: 25, 30).

Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 60-61) also put forth the notion of "primary metaphors" which act as atoms to form a molecule. What forms the conceptual metaphor "A PURPOSEFUL LIFE IS A JOURNEY" are the two primary metaphors "PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS" and "ACTIONS ARE MOTIONS". It should be noted that we unconsciously use more than one conceptual metaphor to refer to an abstract concept, since "no single, concrete, nonmetaphorical concept is ever structured in exactly the right way to completely and precisely define any single abstract concept" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980b: 198). For instance, Shakespeare's statement "Black night doth take away the twilight," is constructed by the conceptual metaphors "LIGHT IS A SUBSTANCE," "EVENTS ARE ACTIONS," "LIFE IS A PRECIOUS POSSESSION," "A LIFETIME IS A DAY," and "LIFE IS LIGHT" (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 71).

The role of conceptual metaphors is best understood concerning Stockwell's distinction between "the linguistic expressions of metaphor" and "their underlying conceptual content"; 'shark-man,' 'he was in a feeding frenzy,' and 'he's sharking' all lead us to the conceptual metaphor "THE MAN IS A SHARK" (2002: 105). Thus, investigating the various linguistic metaphors in a wide scope, e.g. throughout a literary text, can help us find the conceptual metaphors the poet has used. Poets more often construct novel poetic metaphors with the common conceptual metaphors in their culture. Lakoff and Turner (1989: 67-70) explain the four strategies poets use to construct their metaphors: "extending," "elaborating," "questioning," and "composing". When a poet uses those properties of the source domain which are not commonly mapped onto the target domain, he/she "extends" that conceptual metaphor; Shakespeare, for instance, extends "DEATH IS SLEEP" to talk about the dreams one may have after death (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 67). Elaborating, however, occurs when a poet fills the "slots" of the source conceptual "schema" in "unusual ways"; to talk about death as "the eternal exile of the raft" is an example of elaborating of the conceptual metaphor "DEATH IS DEPARTURE" (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 68). Sometimes, poets go further and "call into question" the "boundaries" of the common metaphorical ways we understand a concept; talking about life as a candle demonstrates the limitations of the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A DAY in that it fails to convey the concept of immortality since there is always a sunrise after a sunset (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 69). The last and the most powerful strategy to make poetic metaphors, however, is composing different conceptual metaphors at the same time in a literary text (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 70).

Finding the conceptual metaphors underlying the various linguistic expressions in a literary text is not the end of our work. We can also find the "mega-metaphors," which, as Stockwell (2002: 111) explains, are constructed "when certain conceptual metaphors occur repeatedly throughout a text often at pivotal moments and often in the form of thematically significant extended metaphors". Finding the mega-metaphors in a text can help us disclose the poet's overall view about a certain concept.

As mentioned above, to find how a poet constructs his metaphors, we can go beyond the linguistic expressions and find the conceptual metaphors he/she has used. We can also find out how the poet can change our understanding of a specific concept, since as Lakoff and Johnson (1980c: 142) argue, poetic

metaphors have the power to produce "a new meaning"; the metaphor "LOVE IS A COLLABORATIVE WORK OF ART", for instance, "highlights" some parts of the concept of love (such as "the active side of love" which is related to "work") and "hides" some others (such as the lover's uncontrollable "emotions"), and consequently, offers us an array of love experiences "that our conventional conceptual system does not make available". In a similar line of thought, Goatly (2007: 26), quoting Foucault's words "discourse does not describe a pre-existing reality so much as bring reality into being," contends that metaphors have strong associations with "discourse".

Discussion

To give a cognitive analysis of metaphors of life and death in Sepehri's "Water's Footsteps," the two major stanzas, one focusing on life and the other on death, are cited separately here, and the other lines having metaphors of the two concepts are mentioned throughout the following part. The cited parts are translated by Karim Emami:

Life is a pleasant custom.

Life's wings spread out as much as death's.

Life leaps are as high as love.

Life is not something to be left behind by you or me on the edge of the habit's shelf.

Life is the ecstasy of a hand picking.

Life is the taste of the season's first black figs in the acrid mouth of summer.

Life is one dimension of the tree in the eyes of an insect.

Life is the experience of a moth in darkness.

Life is that strange sense possessed by a migrating bird.

Life is a train's whistle reverberating in the sleep of a bridge.

Life is seeing a flower bed from the enclosed window of an airplane.

Life is the news of a rocket launched into space.

Life is feeling the moon's loneliness.

Life is the idea of smelling flowers on another planet.

Life is washing a dish.

Life is finding a *10-shahi* coin in the gutter.

Life is the square root of a mirror.

Life is a flower raised to the power of eternity.

Life is the earth multiplied by the number of our heartbeats.

Life is the simple and uniform geometry of our breathings. (Emami, 55-57).

[...]

Let's have no fear of death.

(Death is not the end of the pigeon.

Death is not the inversion of a cricket.

Death flows in the mind of the acacia.

Death is a dweller in the fine climate of thinking.

Death heralds the morning in the very midst of the night of the village.

Death rides a bunch of grapes to our mouth.

Death warbles in the throat of the red throat.

Death is responsible for the beauty of the butterfly.

Death sometimes picks sweet basil.

Death sometimes drinks vodka.

Sometimes death sits in the shade and just looks at us.

And we all know

That the lungs of pleasure are filled with death's oxygen.) (Emami, 67)

Dismantling DEATH IS THE END OF LIFE'S JOURNEY

Near the end of "Water's Footsteps," in a long stanza cited above, the poet asks us to see death as completely different from the common belief; as something that does not put an end to our lives. He declares that death is not the end of anything. This is while we understand, quite unconsciously, the concept of death through the conceptual metaphor "DEATH IS GOING TO A FINAL DESTINATION" (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 7). Disclosing the underlying structure of this conceptual metaphor helps us find the way Sepehri constructs his metaphors. One of the components of this conceptual metaphor is the primary metaphor "LIFE IS BEING PRESENT HERE" (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 1) or "Existence Is Being Located Here," manifested in such statement as "taking him out" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1989: 186). This, in turn, leads us to the basic metaphor "STATES ARE LOCATIONS," which holds that "one can be in, enter, or leave"; being the "final state," death is, therefore, the "final location" (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 7). Thus, "a change of state is metaphorically a change of location" (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 7). In Sepehri's definition of death in the above stanza, there is not any reference to a change of state and, consequently, a change of location; all is about the presence of death 'within' creatures alive. In his account, death is not considered as location to which we depart, and interestingly, not as a location at all. Significantly, the poet avoids using any notion of a location for death¹. This is better understood if we think of other ways the poet could use to declare that death is not the end; he could say, for example, 'death is not going away,' or 'death is not going to another abode.' He, instead, does not offer us an image of a location for death.

¹. We are talking only about Sepehri's definition of death in this poem; in another poem, "And," he uses the concept of location for death as the basis of his work.

Sepehri's rejection of DEATH IS GOING TO A FINAL DESTINATION is highly relevant to the conceptual metaphor DEATH IS THE END OF LIFE'S JOURNEY (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 8), which itself is relevant to DEATH IS DEPARTURE¹ (Turner, 1996: 106; Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 1).

These conceptual metaphors are in close association with the structural conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY² (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 3). Similar to his avoidance of defining death in terms of a location, the poet does not opt for mapping the conceptual domain of departure onto that of death. Interestingly, he does not even use LIFE IS A JOURNEY. His description of life consists of moments and simple events; no reference is made to the idea that life is like a journey. According to Lakoff and Johnson's explanation about "questioning" (1989: 69) discussed above, Sepehri calls into questions LIFE IS A JOURNEY, since it fails to convey the concept of immortality. He does not define life as a journey, for he tries to ignore the fact that there is a 'destination,' the last point, for the journey. If death is not the end of life's journey, then life is not a journey! All our poet talks about is feelings; life and death are experiencing simple events, from tasting a fig to hearing the warbles of a bird. All this becomes challenging when we take into view the fact that the whole poem is actually about a long journey – both physical and metaphysical. It is, thus, specifically in the life stanza above that the poet puts aside the LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor to view life as not having a final point.

Quite ironically, LIFE IS A JOURNEY has a crucial role in Sepehri's body of poetry. Not only does he set it as the background of "Water's Footsteps," but also he uses this metaphor in "Traveller" to relate a long journey through history, which is an account of the speaker's journey of life. Sepehri also conceptualizes death as departure/destination in "And." Despite its centrality in Sepehri's poetry, LIFE IS A JOURNEY fades away in the life-obsessed stanza above – the poet's most direct definition of life – since it implies that death would be the final destination. The last resort for the poet, thus, is to shun LIFE IS A JOURNEY for a while!

Constructing DEATH IS LIFE

Having dismantled our familiar conceptualization of life and death, Sepehri then begins to give them new definitions. "Death is a dweller in the fine climate of thinking," "Death heralds the morning in the very midst of the night of the village," "Death warbles in the throat of the red throat," "Death is responsible for the beauty of the butterfly," "Death sometimes picks sweet basil," "Death sometimes drinks vodka" all have two things in common: first, all refer to the sweet nature of death, an idea which is strongly associated with Islamic Sufism; second, all are instances of personification of death. We understand these metaphors through the generic-level conceptual metaphor "EVENTS ARE ACTIONS"³, which holds that every event has an agent; in fact, "as human beings, we can best understand other things in our own terms"; personification helps us understand such things as "common events, abstract concepts, and inanimate objects" (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 72). It is important what kind of agent we identify death with. There are two basic metaphors for death, 'DYING IS LOSING A CONTEST AGAINST AN ADVERSARY' and "STAYING ALIVE IS A CONTEST," that indicates that we personify death as an adversary (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 16). In Persian, this conceptual metaphor is used in such statements as "He is struggling with death." Sepehri's personification of death, however, rejects the death-adversary conceptualization; instead, he describes death as living in the fine climate of thinking and speaking to us about the morning. More importantly, he goes further and describes death as 'a real person,' one who is with us, sometimes picking sweet basil and sometimes drinking vodka. Thus, if events are actions, we can consider our desired agent for them – a Sufist strategy to redefine things. This personification of death as a real person among us, however, can give rise to other new meanings, discussed later in this paper.

¹. Sepehri uses this conceptual metaphor in "And" where he describes death as a journey, a new beginning.

². Sepehri uses this conceptual metaphor as the basis of another poem, "Traveller," in which the speaker goes on a journey through history.

³. Such metaphors are called "generic-level metaphors," since their source and target domains are not "fixed," and their mapping does not have specified entities (Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason* 81).

Sepehri's personification of death as a real person who "sometimes picks sweet basil" has intertextual references that can construct new metaphorical readings. In "Light, Flowers, Water, and I," the poet says "Mother is picking basil leaves"; the only difference between this line and "Death sometimes picks sweet basil" lies in their subject. This is an example of what Goatly (1997: 265) calls "Multivalency." Multivalency occurs when a source domain is used for more than one target domain, resulting in "a sense of equivalence between the two topics" (265). Describing both death and living people (his mother) as picking basil leaves suggests that he sees the two as equivalent in some respects. This equivalence is rooted in Sufists' view that life and death are one. Sepehri, intriguingly, is trying to make us understand death as 'ourselves'; death is we. This Sufist idea of death and life is itself rooted in the Islamic Sufist doctrine of Unity of Being¹. As Nourbakhsh argues, Sepehri's view of death in "Water's Footsteps" is very similar to the notion of 'mystical death' (Parak, Hoseini & Shakeri, 1393: 64). This understanding of death can also be traced in the two lines "Death flows in the mind of the acacia" and "Death warbles in the throat of the red throat" which both suggest that death is within us. Sepehri leads us to the Sufist redefinition of death step by step: first, death is within us; then, it is we.

Another way Sepehri makes us understand death and life as equal is his use of the same metaphors for them. Obviously, in doing so, he continues to dismantle our common understanding of death. "Death heralds the morning in the very midst of the night of the village," the poet rejects the conceptual metaphors DEATH IS NIGHT (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 8), DEATH IS DARKNESS (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 87; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980c: 251) and DEATH IS SLEEP (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 18). He, instead, uses the conceptual metaphors for life: LIFE IS A DAY (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 6) and LIFE IS LIGHT (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 87) to describe death.

The oneness of life and death is also declared in line 252 of "Water's Footsteps," when Sepehri describes life as having "wings spread out as much as death's." What shapes this description of life is SOUL IS A BIRD, which is, in fact, a conceptual structural metaphor both in Persian – manifested in "He winged", meaning he died – and in Sufism. The parrot in "The Merchant and the Parrot," in Rumi's *Masnavi*, is a symbol of the human soul, and Attar's *The Conference of the Birds* is a parable of the men soulfully looking for God. In Sepehri's line above, life, like soul, has wings. The 'multivalent' source domain – having wings – suggests that the two target domains (life and soul) are one. The poet then continues to say that these wings "spread out as much as death's," indicating their oneness.

The oneness of life and death suggested by their common property of having wings spreading to the same extent is ambiguous.² However, if one reads the line in Persian, one cannot be sure whether the poet sees life as having wings as large as death, or as having wings as large as death's wings. The crucial 's' in *death's* plays an important role here. Though Emami has translated the line as "Life's wings spread out as much as death's," one can take Sepehri's metaphor in Persian in two ways. According to Empson's comments on ambiguity, this ambiguous definition of life – and in consequence, of death, for the poet maps the conceptual domain of life unto the conceptual domain of death – can be of poetic significance. Considering Empson's view of ambiguity, the grammatical structure of the line leaves it to the reader to decide if the wings of life

¹. Sepehri's works present mystical love. Khadivar and Hadidi maintain that "Sepehri – like Islamic Sufists – thinks that only by way of love, one can perceive the true nature of the world (Jaberi et al 146).

². For the authors of this paper, the line seems hardly likely to be read as attributing the property of having wings to death. However, with Emami's translation in mind, it is necessary to take both ways of reading into account.

are as large as those of death or as large as death itself while imposing both ways of reading on the reader at the same time and making him/her re-read the line (1949: 51). Re-reading this line reveals the function of Sepehri's metaphor in terms of cognition. Facing the dilemma of *death* or *death's*, we are not sure if death has any wing at all. Unsure about the shape of death, we are unsure also about the shape of life since the metaphor is a mapping between the conceptual domain of life and that of death. The vagueness of this metaphor of life is grounded in the conceptual metaphor "UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING"; "Something difficult to understand or understood only partially is indistinct or shapeless," Goatley (1997: 51-52) says: It is "*blurred*"; It is "*pale*"; It is "*sketchy*"; etc. Through the ambiguous description of life as having wings as large as death or death's, we cannot *see* the shapes of life and death. Thus, the very ambiguous nature of Sepehri's description of life in this line is connected with the abstract and sketchy concepts of death and life, revealing one of the reasons behind the poet's attempt to define them in his way.

So far, our focus has been on the oneness of life and death in "Water's Footsteps." According to Stockwell's definition of "mega-metaphor" (2002: 111), Sepehri's use of the same metaphors for life and death, alongside his dismantling of the familiar ways of comprehending death throughout this poem constructs the mega-metaphor DEATH IS LIFE. The question raised here is that if death is life in this poem, can we say that life is death. "A principle of invariance suggests that the mapping is mainly in one direction," says Stockwell (2002: 110) about conceptual metaphors, and continues to say that some certain metaphors in a literary text "seem to be so strong that they make the reader re-think the source model in the light of its mapping with the target". Embedded in Sufist ideologies, Sepehri's DEATH IS LIFE is also reminiscent of Krishnamurti's view that living is dying (Hojatifar, 2014: 76). As Shamisa writes, Sepehri's views have so much in common with Murti's that we can believe he was in touch with Murti's works (Rouhani, 2008: 113).

Inconsistency of DEATH IS LIFE

Finding the underlying structure of Sepehri's metaphors of life and death sheds light on the fact that DEATH IS LIFE does not apply to every line of this poem. With a look over the two stanzas cited above we realize that unlike death, life is not personified in every line. This is the first sign of the fact that in "Water's Footsteps," life and death are not one in every respect. The personification of death makes us see death as an agent, going back to the conceptual metaphor "DEATH IS A MOVER AND MANIPULATOR"; it comes upon us and takes us with itself (Turner, 1996: 47). In Sepehri's poem, death is active and does something. Life, on the contrary, is defined as an experience; it is something 'we' do: "Life is seeing a flower bed from the enclosed window of an airplane," "Life is the idea of smelling flowers on another planet," and "Life is washing a dish." This idea can also be found in his view that "Life is the ecstasy of a hand picking" which refers to the fact that the person is the agent. On the other hand, when he says "Death rides a bunch of grapes to our mouth," he does not refer to any human agent; the agent is death itself.

Another instance of the inconsistency of DEATH IS LIFE is "Death heralds the morning in the very midst of the night of the village." That death speaks of 'morning' is based on the components of the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A DAY. In this metaphor, birth is morning, the rest of life is the rest of the day, and death is sunset or night (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 6). The poet sees death as the morning, convincing us that it is another birth. But, we cannot experience the same morning twice; the next morning comes after this one. Therefore, the metaphor of death-morning reminds us that death is another birth and not the one with which our life began; death is not life. We can find this in the poet's view of the past ("Behind us, there is no living space") and in the following stanza, both of which make it obvious that, unlike what the poet says in the life stanza, death is the end.

A baby's rattle murdered on the siesta mattress
 A story murdered at the crossroads of sleep
 A sorrow murdered at the orders of a song
 Moonlight murdered by neon
 A willow tree murdered by the State
 A depressed poet murdered by winter flower. (Emami 47)

Among the metaphors of death in "Water's Footstep" that do not match his redefinition of death and life are his description of "the high leap of joy over the moat of death" (line 50) and a driver "longing for death" (Line 33). According to Lakoff and Turner's explanation about "elaborating" metaphors (68), Sepehri is elaborating the conceptual metaphors "DYING IS LOSING A CONTEST AGAINST AN ADVERSARY" and "STAYING ALIVE IS A CONTEST" when he is telling us about "the high leap of joy over the moat of death" (line 50). And when he describes a driver as "longing for death" (Line 33), he is using the conceptual metaphors "DEATH IS DELIVERANCE" and "LIFE IS BONDAGE" discussed by Lakoff and Turner (23), which contradicts his attempt to define life as "a pleasant custom."

It was mentioned earlier that the ambiguous nature of Sepehri's metaphor for life as having wings as large as *death* or *death's* goes back to the sketchy nature of death and life, and by definition, to the conceptual metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING. This conceptual metaphor can be found in the poet's definitions of life in the life stanza above: life is *seeing* "one dimension of the tree," *seeing* "a flower bed from the enclosed window of an airplane," and *finding* a 10-shahi coin in the gutter, which is clearly a matter of seeing. On the other hand, the definitions of death in the death stanza above do not involve seeing. This reveals a fine difference in the strategies to define the two concepts which is resulted from their different nature. The concept of death, therefore, is depicted as less understandable than the concept of life, resulting in a sense of inconsistency of DEATH IS LIFE throughout "Water's Footsteps."

Conclusion

As a poet concerned with convincing us to see things differently, and as a poet strongly influenced by Islamic Sufism and eastern mysticism, Sepehri tries to redefine for us such key concepts as life and death (Fomeshi, 2013: 82). Like Sufists, he is aware of the fact that our understanding of things is shaped by habit and we can change it (Rouhani, 2008: 112). To redefine life and death for us, he goes beyond the familiar metaphorical way of understanding these concepts, since he sees them inadequate to convey the true meaning of these concepts. He, thus, constructs his metaphors in a way that contradicts the most familiar way of comprehending them. He avoids, for instance, using the common Conceptual Metaphor of LIFE IS A JOURNEY, since this would imply that death is the end of life's journey. He also dismisses DEATH IS NIGHT and some other common conceptual metaphors of life and death. Instead, he constructs the "mega-metaphor" of DEATH IS LIFE. Significantly, this mega-metaphor works also in reverse, since the poet tries to see life and death as unified.

DEATH IS LIFE is most manifested in one of the last stanzas of the poem in every line of which the poet redefines death. In other stanzas, however, some metaphors of death do not match with DEATH IS LIFE. This inconsistency of metaphors of death in Sepehri's poem can be meaningful in the sense that the poet's redefinition of death is real. It is, in fact, entrenched in the "partial nature" of metaphorical understanding; metaphors help us comprehend the only part of a concept in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980c: 13). A conceptual metaphor "hides" some parts of a concept and "highlights" some others (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980c: 142). Thus, the inconsistency of the metaphors of death in "Water's Footsteps" results from the poet's attempt to give us insight into different aspects of death.

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