

## THE ROLE OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS IN PORTRAYING PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES IN MODERN LITERATURE

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**Annotation** *This article explores the role of conceptual metaphors in describing psychological states in modern literature, focusing on Sally Rooney "Common people", Matt Haig's "Midnight Library", and Dave Egger's "Circle". Drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory, he analyzes how metaphors such as "isolation is displacement", "life is Library", and "anxiety is a storm" look like complex emotions such as anxiety, depression, and trauma. This metaphor reinforces the characterization, reinforces students' empathy, and reflects contemporary mental health discourses. The study highlights the cognitive and cultural significance of metaphors in the reproduction of personal experiences and universal concepts, suggesting pathways for further cross-cultural research.*

**Keywords:** *Conceptual metaphors, psychological states, modern literature, mental health, cognitive linguistics, empathy, Normal People, The Midnight Library, The Circle, isolation, depression, anxiety, metaphor theory, narrative, cultural associations.*

### Introduction

Metaphors are not just tools for decorating words, but tools in our minds that help us understand how we feel and think. Complex. For example, as Lakoff and Johnson put it, we often imagine things that are difficult to understand, such as our emotions, using simple and clear images. In modern literature, however, metaphors make the character's inner feelings closer and more understandable to the reader, especially in works where psychological states are heavily portrayed. With the explanation of complex and difficult-to-express emotions through simple images, the authors associate with personal experience situations that everyone understands.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), developed by Lakoff and Johnson, explains metaphors as cognitive structures that link one conceptual domain (the source) with another (the target). For example, the metaphor "ANGER IS HEAT" allows us to understand emotions through physical sensations: "He was burning with anger". Metaphors are not just linguistic tools but are central to how we think and communicate, especially when expressing abstract concepts like emotions or mental states. CMT classifies metaphors into three types: structural ( "LIFE IS A JOURNEY"), ontological ( "THE MIND IS A CONTAINER"), and orientational ( "HAPPINESS IS UP"). These frameworks are



particularly relevant in literature, as writers use external images to depict internal experiences, making them clearer and more understandable for readers. In modern literature, where psychological realism is significant, metaphors serve as a “cognitive skeleton,” helping readers understand the mental worlds of characters.

### **Conceptual metaphors and psychological states**

Conceptual metaphors are especially effective in constructing emotional and mental experiences, and these situations are usually abstract and difficult to express verbally. Kövecses (2000) identifies common metaphors regarding emotion: for example, “depression is a dark place”, “anxiety is a storm”, or “consciousness is a container”.<sup>1</sup> These metaphors rely on ontological and orientational foundations and give form to non-immediate States. For example, orientational metaphors such as “mood inferiority is going down (“he is depressed”)” represent a cultural connection between physical condition and mental state. Ontological metaphors, however, compare psychological pain to physical trauma, such as “trauma is a wound” (“the past has left its mark on it”) (Charteris – Black, 2004)<sup>2</sup>. These metaphors are not universal but depend on a cultural context, defining how the author and reader understand emotions (Lakoff & Turner, 1989).<sup>3</sup> In literature, such metaphors serve two purposes: they clarify the inner anguish of the hero and evoke sympathy in the reader through familiar images. Through this, it is possible to understand the complexities of mental health in modern literature

### **Analysis: Conceptual Metaphors in Literary Modern Works**

*Sally Rooney-Normal People (2018) Normal People*

In Sally Rooney's novel *Normal People*, the metaphor of “laziness is creep” represents the psychological states of protagonists Connell and Marianne. Connell feels like he is “standing outside the world”: “he feels like he is outside the world, looking inside” (Rooney, 2018, P.112). This metaphor expresses his depression and anxiety through space. As Semino (2008) points out, by describing mental states with spatial or physical concepts, the reader can clearly visualize this state of affairs. Through this metaphor, Rooney reveals Connell's social anxiety and class ambiguities.

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2. Charteris-Black, J. (2004). *\*Corpus Approaches to Critical Metaphor Analysis\**. Palgrave Macmillan.

3. Lakoff, G., & Turner, M. (1989). *\*More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor\**. University of Chicago Press.

*Matt Haig – The Midnight Library (2020)*

In Matt Haig's novel *The Midnight Library*, the metaphor of “life is a library” reveals the protagonist Nora's depression and dissatisfaction with life. The central idea in the novel – a library with endless life options – shows that psychological states are formed through choices and opportunities. Nora describes her depression as “thick fog”, and her regret as “a burden to carry on the shoulder” (Haig, 2020, P.45). These metaphors – depression is a dark place, regret is a burden – have an ontological basis, clearly representing Nora's mental state (Kövecses, 2000). Dancygier and Sweetser



(2014) argue that such metaphors allow the reader to understand the character's spiritual journey.

*Dave Eggers – The Circle (2013)*

In Dave Eggers' novel *The Circle*, the metaphor of "anxiety is a storm" expresses the mental tensions the protagonist Mae Holland is experiencing in technological dystopia. Mae describes her concerns as "a wave crashing over it" or "a storm in her chest" (Eggers, 2013, p.204). These metaphors represent the out-of-control and destructive power of anxiety. As Charteris-Black (2004) put it, such metaphors clearly represent psychological problems through uncontrollable States in nature. Eggers uses this metaphor to also reflect societal concerns about technology.

### **Discussion**

The analyzed works demonstrate the power of conceptual metaphors in making psychological states vivid and understandable. In *Normal People*, Connell's loneliness is portrayed by "being outside". In *The Midnight Library*, Library and cargo metaphors bring Nora's depression into narrative form, giving the reader hope. In *The Circle*, the storm metaphor also reveals anxiety in the wider society by representing Mae's internal tensions. These examples suggest that metaphors are an important tool in bringing mental states to the public, evoking empathy, and leading to the usual discussion of the topic of mental health. Cameron (2003) noted that metaphors facilitate the process of understanding and learning. While such metaphors are typical of Western culture (e.g., "falling down – depression"), analysis of similarities or differences in other cultures would be important to future research.


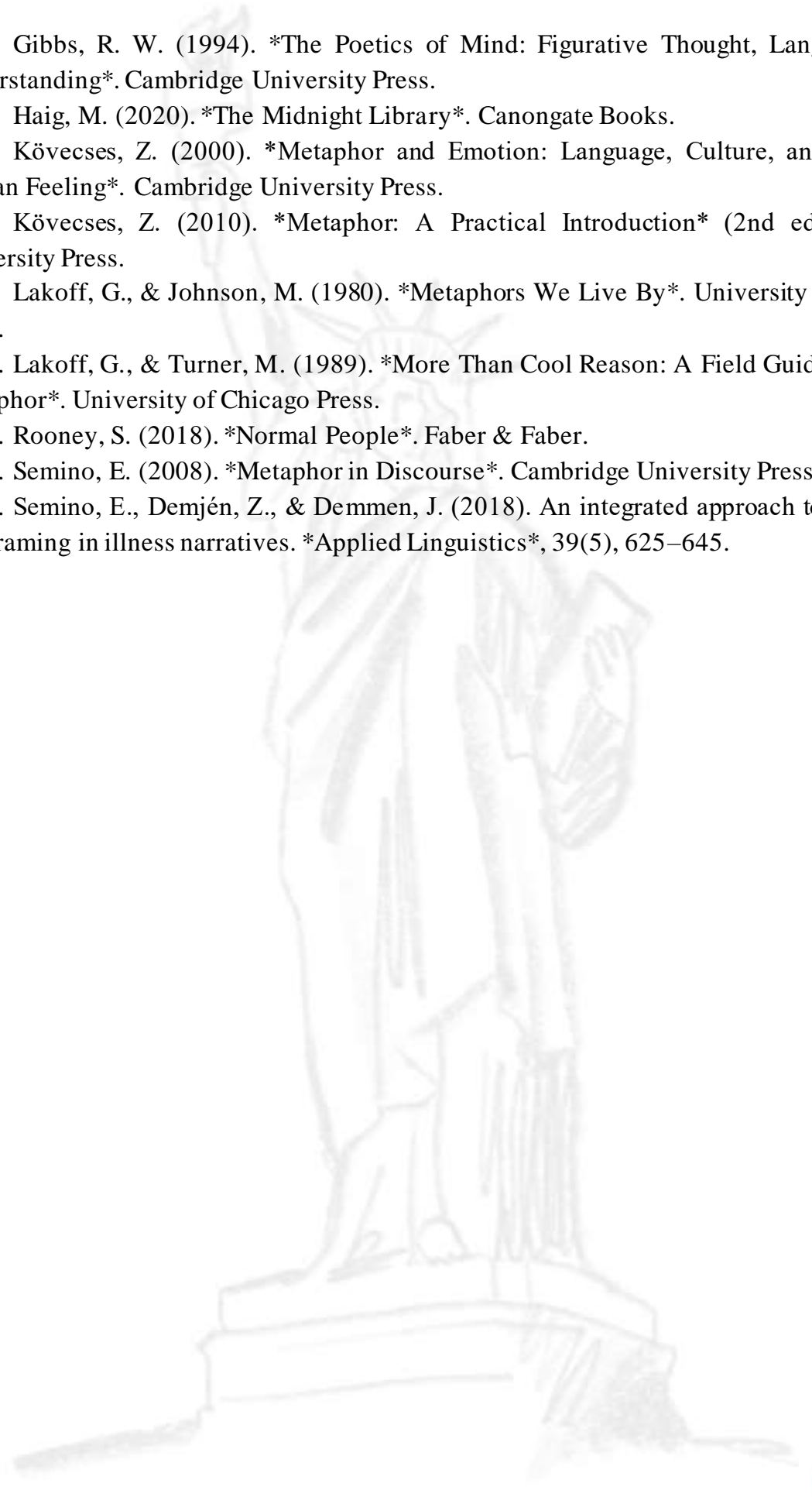
### **Conclusion**

Conceptual metaphors are an indispensable tool in the description of psychological states in modern literature. In *Normal People*, *The Midnight Library*, and *The Circle*, metaphors such as "laziness is a push", "life is a library", and "anxiety is a storm" describe complex mental states, deepen the characters' character, and evoke empathy in the reader. These metaphors not only reflect cognitive processes, but also correspond to modern society's concerns about mental health, personality, and technology. Future research can further expand this field by analyzing other cultural metaphors or how metaphors are used in nonverbal media such as cinema

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