

## 6. The Moment of Diagnosis and Metaphoric Transformation

If the pathological drama surrounding cancer may be thought of as a path full of emotion, then there are several reasons why the moment of diagnosis may be considered the most critical point on this path. Most people lack any personal experience of cancer and, therefore, the moment of diagnosis is often one that evokes in the patient the most drastic cultural images. As I pointed out in the previous chapters, these images contain information gained via language, tradition and the everyday communication framed by social and cultural setting. According to popular explanatory models, cancer is imagined as a secretive, evil and dramatic illness, which has achieved the qualities of a modern mythological disease. The material at hand as well as the current discussion forum for Finnish cancer patients demonstrates how people are afraid of cancer because of its unknown origin and direct associations with death.

It is worth emphasising that because of the close connection with death and the lack of accurate scientific clarification of what actually causes it, cancer represents a threat to human existence and therefore the concept of cancer represents a taboo in the individual mind as well as in cultural discourse. Having cancer is still considered an abnormal situation, and is even approached in some cases as a form of deviance. According to current social arrangements, individuals diagnosed with cancer must adopt the role of cancer patient, which separates them from others. For these reasons the moment of diagnosis represents an event that irrevocably breaks the normal flow of life.

It is important to note that most people who receive a cancer diagnosis find themselves in an entirely new and surprising situation. In many cases the diagnosis of cancer causes people to lose their negotiated identity and their previously established place within society. Using the terms and language of cultural studies, they go through a transformation. In his work concerning stigma and identity, the sociologist Erving Goffman put forward the idea that “the stigmatised individual tends to hold the same beliefs about identity that we [others] do” (Goffman 1963, 7). Although some modern cancer patients refuse to adopt the role of stigmatised cancer patient, despite social expectation (Frank 2000, 135–156), none of them is protected from the shock that follows diagnosis. Thus, Goffman’s statement stands: when the diagnosis of cancer is received, most people identify themselves with reference to the existing cultural understanding as stigmatised cancer patients. Because of this understanding of cancer as a lethal disease, many people treat the cancer diagnosis as a death sentence. Accordingly, the moment of diagnosis is filled with uncertain inner feelings that are difficult to express (see also chapter 9).

In this chapter I analyse Finnish cancer patients’ writing using their own cancer experiences in order to point out how metaphors and metaphor-like expressions are employed to express cancer patient’s inner feelings. I demonstrate the significance of metaphors as a culture-bound key that accurately allows description of the significant transformation that takes place within individuals when they receive the cancer diagnosis. According to the materials analysed, the moment of diagnosis may be interpreted as the most crucial in terms of the cancer experience, which for many patients causes inner chaos and loss of self. In recent discussions, metaphors about illness and health have been interpreted as stigmatising markers in political, social and cultural discourse.

### **The moment of diagnosis and subsequent expression of emotion in writing**

In order to become calm after the discovery of cancer, people must go through various emotions in the attempt to regain their ‘original’ identity. The philosopher and humanist Georg Henrik von Wright has suggested that with the help of language, people may express,



Figure 13. Picture added to a cancer narrative

describe and compare their emotions so that others may understand them (von Wright 2001, 595–622). Verbalising the cancer experience is a complicated task for two reasons: firstly, cancer represents a taboo in everyday communication, and secondly, cancer evokes strong emotions. For these reasons, cancer patients must carefully decide on the audience, time and place when expressing their concerns, thoughts and feelings about cancer. Otherwise, as expressed in the pathographies (084, 050, 136, 233, 240, etc.), they might risk losing their work and social position as well as friendships and relationships with colleagues.

It is also difficult for family members to discuss cancer, and in cases where the progress of the illness causes physical or psychological issues, patients often prefer to stop discussing it, or even hearing about it. Therefore cancer patients must find and employ other methods of self-expression.

Some discover painting as a form of therapy (Figure 13), others music or reading, but perhaps the most common way to express unspoken issues is through writing. Writing is a possibility for self-expression, which helps to clear the mind and make complicated issues understandable. In addition, people choose to write instead of speaking because, as cancer patients, they will soon have experiences reinforcing the fact that cancer is a culturally stigmatised issue that should not be discussed in public.

The moment of diagnosis marks the beginning of an individual's 'cancer path'. According to the descriptions this particular experience is often sensed as a physical experience, containing vivid images and feelings, which remains beyond the understanding of others. Although many people seem to succeed in staying calm and controlled at the moment of diagnosis, their stories prove that for a while they lose their connection to the outside world. They forget the hospital personnel or other people around them, as well as their sense of reality. As they absorb the diagnosis, they go through a variety of emotions. For example in Seth, Hanna and Ruth's writing, which were presented in chapter four in full length, the moment of diagnosis is described with varying intensity. For Seth and Hanna the pre-symptomatic period caused health concerns beforehand and thus, for them, the moment of diagnosis has different meaning than for Ruth, who feels herself happy and full of life. For Ruth, as for many other cancer patients without pre-symptomatic issues, it is really difficult to comprehend being diagnosed with an illness that has a lethal image.

After reading numerous accounts I realised that the participants in the competition employed particular words when expressing their emotions and feelings. I noticed that instead of unfolding a set of emotional ups and downs after receiving the diagnoses, many respondents used metaphoric expressions containing various images and feelings. For example, regarding the moment of diagnosis, the expression *pudonnut syvään mustaan kuiluun* (fallen into deep darkness) was repeated so often (027, 031, 041, 067, 089, 106, 332, 482, etc.) that it became repetitive. There were also numerous other metaphoric expressions that were used repeatedly, such as *kuolemanlaakso* (death valley) (031, 106,

155, 204, 243, 419, 436, 451, 463, 476), and also *viimeinen ranta* (last coast) (059) or *lähdön maisema* (take-off landscape) (173). The latter are mainly connected with patients' feelings about death and dying. Thus, not only the moment of diagnosis, but also the patients' ideas regarding death and dying, were often veiled in metaphoric expressions, which demonstrates that culturally marginal situations, thoughts and emotions are expressed using different vocabulary.

As an observer, I could not stop myself asking why people used such fuzzy expressions, rather than using other, better defined, words that would perhaps have been more accurate. At first I suspected that the use of metaphoric expressions contained linguistic or social constraints of some form that forced people to hide their true feelings. After having posed this to my colleagues on several occasions I began to doubt whether this primary assumption was correct. In fact my colleagues from within the field of folklore took a contrary view, pointing out that the use of metaphor should be considered more as a form of poetic freedom that can describe feelings far more accurately than other forms of description. According to Anna-Leena Siikala, metaphors, words of effect and verbal associations used as individual expressions in narratives "may, because of the unusual nature, draw attention to particular items and thus act as expressions of evaluation" (Siikala 1990b, 23–25). Consequently, the use of language in connection with significant feelings aroused my curiosity and encouraged me to observe and study the use of metaphoric expressions within cancer narratives. During this process my initial assumption about the way metaphors are used in the expression of emotions altered several times, leading to the conclusion that metaphoric expressions have major significance in the communication of personal emotions.

## **Metaphors in health and illness discourse**

The use of metaphors in the discourse on health and illness is not a new topic. Susan Sontag is well known for her criticism of illness metaphors in political and social discourse (Sontag 1978; 1988). Above all, Sontag has pointed out the significance of metaphor in the construction of meaning within illness discourse. Her statement is clear: plague, cancer, AIDS, are names for illnesses which, in their own value-laden

and stigmatising way, are used as markers in political, social and cultural discourse.

The folklorist, Mojca Ramšak (2007), has examined the use of metaphors in both cancer patients' and doctors' accounts of cancer. Inspired by Sontag's writings, and Lakoff and Johnson's works on the significance of metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1987), Ramšak exposes numerous "killing metaphors" based on the characteristics of binary opposition present within Western reasoning: everything concerning illness is bad, everything concerning health is good; everything that is up is good, everything that is down is bad (see also Onikki 1992, 33–59). Consequently, Slovenian cancer patients fall into depression as they hear their diagnosis. They are forced down by their illness, or their life becomes "shadowed by darkness". Cancer marks "the end of the life path" or "the end of the earthly road." (Ramšak 2007, 23–45). The empirical and cross-cultural study of Ulrich Teucher allows an assumption that similar metaphoric expressions are common to all Western cancer patients (Teucher 2003, 5–9).

In the following model (Figure 14), the most dominant metaphor clusters relating to cancer as a "growth inside", "intrusion", "invasion", "obstacles" or "oppressive surroundings" are shown in multi-dimensional structure. The image of cancer as an outside intruder also explains why the treatment process (Figure 15) is most typically regarded by cancer patients as a "battle", "hope", "task", "work", "race", or "contingency" (Teucher 2003, 6–8). The same metaphors are used also in Finnish cancer patients' written narratives.

Metaphors relating to health and illness are based on an opposition in which health is presented as the normal condition, and illness as abnormal. Michael Foucault has argued that such binary thinking began to spread in Western medicine as medical science began to distinguish the difference between the normal and pathological condition (Foucault 2006, 40–41). Nevertheless, ethnomedical studies of rural tradition and folk medical thinking demonstrates that folk healers, as well as mainstream doctors, define diseases as different kinds of malevolent force. Falling ill was, and apparently still is, interpreted as a violation of norms, with illness seen as a punishment for transgressive behaviour (Harjula 1986, 15). In a similar way, conventional medicine represents ill health as an abnormal condition that ought to be avoided by all means. There is nothing new about defining illness as a deviance. Thus, falling ill is just another cultural experience mediated by language.

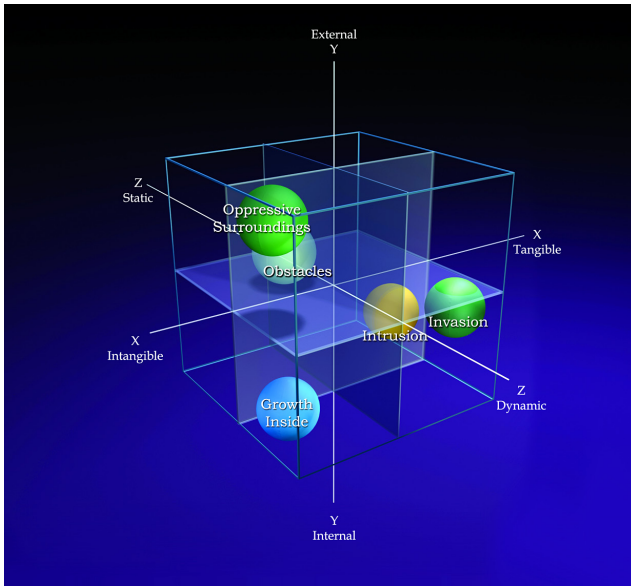
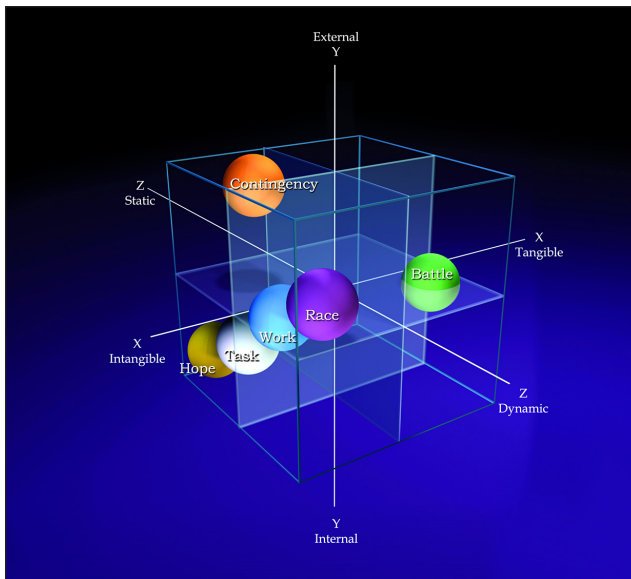


Figure 14 (above). Cancer Metaphors (Teucher 2003, 7)

Figure 15 (below). Cancer Treatment Metaphors (Teucher 2003, 8)



Susan Sontag's followers have claimed that illness metaphors used in political, medical, and social discourse are entirely inexcusable. Illness metaphors, including the word cancer, are interpreted as stigmatising, divisive and politically incorrect. I agree that viewing patients as 'diseased bodies' represents a serious and unfortunate confusion on the part of modern medicine. However, I hope to show that even if we succeed in changing the healthcare system, the way people think and express themselves would remain unchanged, because serious illness is and will be the greatest threat to the human myth of continuous life (Becker 1973, 73).

Ulrich Teucher suggests, somewhat differently, that the texts as metaphor and the metaphors in the texts can reveal a writer's general orientation towards the body and the self, illness, life and death. As such factors and orientations differ, often radically, each cancer narrative tells a distinct story. Moreover, the language of each narrative reveals an astonishing variety of attributed or assumed meanings that appear particularly crucial in cancer. Metaphors that may seem constructive and therapeutic to one patient or writer (or to his/her readers) can be destructive and further traumatising for others. (Teucher 2003, 1–2) Thus, what Teucher says is that it is necessary to analyse the range of metaphoricity in cancer discourse in order to conceptualise cancer within particular linguistic and cultural settings.

Because of my use of a folkloristic approach, my particular interest is somewhat distant from the study of political, medical or social issues relating to health and illness. My primary aim is to comprehend how individuals feel on hearing the word cancer, how they experience the illness process, how they express their experiences and why. This is not a psychological concern, rather it is a desire to present the complexities present when trying to understand how metaphors work. Using the broadest meaning of cultural studies, in this section I aim to present the way in which metaphors function as 'picture words', "in constant interaction with social situation, cultural values, the poetic tradition, and so forth" (Friedrich 1991, 24). In order to illustrate the complexities present in understanding the role of metaphor, I examine how metaphors work and what they do in particular situations. Based on the material at hand I present the metaphoric expression as a valuable linguistic tool used in the sharing of ideas, including those relating to the social transformation, physical suffering and emotional rollercoaster that follows the diagnosis of cancer.



## The meaning of metaphors

In every language there are numerous words that describe inner feelings. Words like fear, confusion or sadness are foremost culturally agreed markers. Words describing emotions carry certain cultural meanings. The Canadian literary theorist Northrop Frye has said, “what makes a word a word is its difference from other words, and what gives the words a public meaning for a community is the disentangling of them from the associations of those who use them” (Frye 1985, 585). My analysis of cancer narratives illustrates that culturally agreed words describing emotions are not necessarily the best tools with which to describe the personal experience of cancer. Rather, people employ various primary genres, such as narratives, sayings, poems or metaphors, that make their reasoning comprehensible in the cultural context.

Concerning Man, culture and the use of language, various studies have pointed out that our everyday language use is restricted by subconsciously accepted rules and customs that lack rational explanation. For researchers this, above all, means paying careful attention to a community’s sense of self-expression and language-bound ideologies (Hymes 1974, 31). This notion refers again to cultural frameworks placed over our self-expression and argumentation in different contexts, which we must understand if we want to understand the meanings of utterance of any kind. On the other hand, folklorists and anthropologists have demonstrated that people share mythical images which, in oral and literary tradition, as well as in everyday reasoning, may be interpreted as poetic formulae. In fact, poetic self-expression, in a similar way to ethnographic writing, may help to overcome anxiety and fear, and to soothe trauma (Timonen 2004, 307f.). Accordingly, one might suggest that the use of ‘picture words’ during the verbalisation process is a subconscious decision fixed by a form of linguistic code. It is more challenging to decide whether the code that directs the use of metaphors in texts should be approached as a linguistic restriction or a poetic freedom.

In his study of polytrophy, the anthropologist Paul Friedrich attempts to unite the two opposing approaches (Friedrich 1991, 17–55). Friedrich has proposed that tropes, or ‘extended words’, may express images, modality, formality, contiguity, analogy, vertical analogy, condensation or expansion. According to Friedrich’s assumption, the

main task of the metaphoric expression is to mediate the real (external) world (Friedrich 1991, 54–55). The problem with Friedrich's conclusion is that it is based on a poetic account (literary text) full of figurative speech, while the content and structure of written cancer narratives lies between the oral and written tradition of self-expression, without fulfilling the expectations of folklore or literature (Peltonen 2006, 110–111).

Apparently, the pathographies have qualities of their own. The main task of cancer narratives is to represent the self in various aspects (Hawkins 1999, 10). The respondents do not only mediate the real world, but with the help of selected voicings, they also express multiple images of the self that in various ways relate to cancer. During the composition of thematic narratives, the respondents combine methods of traditional expression (folklore) with elements of literary tradition (literature), making the interpretation process more complex. However, because of their 'fixed' written form, cancer patients' writings may be approached as autonomic discourse.

In chapter two I suggested that the dominant emotions in cancer narratives that follow the development of pathological drama are bound up with the idea of dying, which means that the course of the pathological drama usually consists of phases of shock, denial, anger, trade, depression and acceptance (see Chapter 2). My assumption is that, according to patients' internal reasoning, these feelings reoccur and become interpreted continuously according to the situation. Continuing on from this, I wish to demonstrate how these feelings become expressed in writing following the structural segments of narrative. To begin and exemplify my analysis in the extended context of secondary narrative I return to analyse the three pathographies introduced in chapter 4. When analysing the feelings verbalised and expressed in Seth, Hanna and Ruth's stories I examine some single episodes, and the emotions they reveal, starting from the moment of diagnosis (Figure 16). The episode in question is referred to by number [S1], [S2], etc.; so the reader can easily look up and match episodes with their secondary context, which is significant when attempting to understand the mediated meaning(s).

Close analysis reveals the general lack of poetic self-expression in Seth, Hanna and Ruth's accounts. I suggest this, and a lack of description, is connected with the ethnographic style these three, along with many other writing competition participants, use to write their cancer

Emotion	Seth's story	Hanna's story	Ruth's story
Shock			[R2]
Denial	[S10]		[R2]
Anger		[H8], [H13]	[R3]
Trade	[S12], [S23], [S24]		[R9]
Depression	[S21], [S22]	[H11], [H15]	[R4], [R5], [R6], [R8]
Acceptance	[S1], [S2], [S11], [S13], [S16], [S19], [S25]	[H4], [H5], [H16]	[R11], [R12], [R14]

Figure 16. Dominant emotions following the moment of diagnosis

experiences. According to Paul Ricoeur, feelings, in particular poetic feelings, imply bodily emotions, being in relation to the literal emotions of everyday life (Ricoeur 1978, 157). Such intimate self-references are not necessarily important in the context of the writing competition, however where they occur in the texts, we must pay attention to their significance.

Seth describes the moment of diagnosis as follows: *Puoli vuotta jatkunut hajaannustila, romahdus, lähestyvän maailmanlopun tunne, epätoivoinen masennus oli saanut vahvistuksen: Kasvain! Pyörähdin melkein iloisesti tutkimussängyltä ja nostin housut jalkaani. Helpotuksen tuntein varasin seuraavan poliklinikka-ajan*, “The half-year long ignorance, crash, the feeling of the world ending, the desperate feeling of depression received a confirmation: a growth! Quite happy I stepped down from the examination table and pulled up my pants. Feeling relieved I booked a next consultation time” [S1]. To demonstrate the variation in cancer patients’ writing, Seth is not in shock, but because he has already suffered pre-symptomatic conditions for a half a year, he feels relieved. He does not yet know if the growth is benign or malignant, but he has finally received an official confirmation of his inner struggle and suffering – something IS wrong with him.

Like Seth, Hanna also knows that something is not quite right with her. She is tired and she can feel something growing in her stomach.

After the check-up Hanna's first idea is: *Nyt se on sitten minussa*, "Now it is in me!" [H4]. Hanna, however, is not relieved, seemingly she is also not shocked. Her story in this sense is really more like a report. Nevertheless, she uses the word *it* to refer to cancer, a word that illustrates the culture-bound fear of naming cancer and of the concept in general. Thus, the deictic references to cancer in episode 4 and several other episodes [see H11, H17, H18, H19], allow the suggestion that inside her body and mind Hanna feels very uncertain about her situation: partly because her individual status as a mother of a very young child, and partly because cancer's lethal image.

Unlike Seth and Hanna, for Ruth the cancer diagnosis comes as a great and foremost unexpected shock [R2]. The feeling of shock is a powerful and negative feeling, which must be expressed accordingly. Thus, for accurate self-expression Ruth has to select the proper tools. Naturally, conveying emotional experiences through language is not an easy task. The inner feelings may be named, described, or transmitted through the narrative structure (Ruth & Vilkkö 1996, 173). With culturally suppressed themes, issues that are sometimes important occur even in significant silence. The latter means that when dealing with interpretations of emotions, we may sometimes have significant context(s) mediating the feelings instead of significant words or expressions. In her story, Ruth (see below), like several other respondents, uses metaphor to describe her situation and therefore in this chapter I wish to continue discussing metaphors and what they do when placed in text.

### **The interpretation of metaphors as "works in miniature"**

Paul Ricoeur (1974, 65–110) has pointed out two main problems with the study of metaphoric expressions in text. The first problem concerns the process of interpretation, and the second the role of metaphor. As indicated above, metaphors in a text are tools of both self-expression and self-interpretation. Interpretation is generally seen as reader dependent, whereas the process of interpretation contains both textual interpretation and self-interpretation. Thus, the metaphoric expressions in text may be approached from multiple perspectives, and be understood in multiple ways. For textual studies this means that in

different texts, metaphors contain different meanings depending on the context in which they are being employed. Thus, the main problem of interpreting the use of metaphoric expressions, lies in the complexity of their character, a situation exacerbated by the desire of respondents to make their experiences understandable. Therefore, we may ask how metaphor functions and what metaphor does in written narratives that describe the moment of diagnosis.

In his writing Ricoeur asks: “Is metaphor a work in miniature?” (Ricoeur 1974, 97–98). Is metaphor the smallest possible primary textual unit within a background text? And if we define the metaphoric expression as a primary unit, is a metaphor a narrative? In order to be defined as a primary textual unit the metaphor must, according to Ricoeur’s suggestion, adopt at least five criteria involving paradox, which I shall examine in more detail.

Firstly, to consider a metaphoric expression as a discourse it must occur as an event that includes a general meaning (event and meaning). Although metaphoric expressions are used in text in various ways, they clearly contain the idea/picture of a person being transformed as they move towards a new situation. Thus, in the current context the cancer diagnosis causes for an individual the culturally accepted transformation to cancer patient. This latter contains the meaning of the transformation event.

From the folklorist’s point of view, the moment of diagnosis (event) may be interpreted as a symbolic act of transformation: moving from one status to another (meaning). The metaphors used in the cancer narratives are not refined in the literary sense. To refer to their feelings people use spontaneously chosen metaphors that have a more ‘fixed’ meaning in culture and language:

*Sitten koitti se musta perjantai, joka pudotti minut ihan jonnekin mustaan monttuun.*

Then came the black Friday, which dropped me entirely into some kind of black hole. (332)

*Tultuani kotiin sairaalasta, silloin vasta tunsin kuin olisin pudonnut johonkin pimeään monttuun. Yhden illan itkin aivan ääneen, se itku tuli jostakin hyvin syvältä minusta, samalla aivan kuin olisi isketty joku leima olemukseeni: syöpäsairas, se olet nyt.*

When I came home from the hospital I felt as though I was falling into some kind of dark hole. One evening I cried out loud. This cry came from some kind of deepness inside me. At the same time some kind of stigma

was set into my nature: cancer patient, that's what you are now. (155)

*Siitä alkoi varsinainen surutyö, päivisin yritin olla iloinen ja huumorinkin joskus pääsi esiin. Mutta yöt olivat tuskien taivalta. Olin aivan kuin syvän kuilun reunalla. Valoa ei näkynyt mistään, ei pilkahdustakaan. Yritin tasapainotella etten putoaisi syvyyteen. Itkin itseni uneen.*

So began my sorrow. During the day I tried to be happy and even made jokes. The nights were full of misery. I felt as though I was hanging above a deep hole. There was no light to see, not a sight of it. I tried to balance and not to fall into the deepness. I cried for so long that I fell asleep. (482)

Secondly, according to Ricoeur's second paradox, the metaphor must contain contrasting traits, involving certain inner opposition (singular identification and general predication). When I was examining the narratives and deciding on themes for further analyses, I noticed the importance of nature and seasonal change for cancer patients (as already mentioned above):

*Kyllä syöpään sairastuminen, kuten muutkin vakavat sairaudet, pysäyttää ajattelemaan tätä elämän raadollisuutta, vaikka kuinka yrittäisi näytellä toista. – Luonto tuli yhtäkkiä tärkeäksi. Maisema ympärillä avautui aivan uudella tavalla. Olin asunut neljännesvuosisadan maalla, mutta vasta sairastuttuani aloin kuunnella mm. lintujen laulua ja opetella tuntemaan eri lintulajeja.*

Falling ill with cancer, or some other serious disease, certainly makes you stop and think about the wretchedness of life, even if you try to behave as though it does not. – Nature became suddenly important for me. The surrounding landscape opened up in a new way. I have lived twenty five years in the countryside, but only after falling ill did I begin to listen to birds singing, and study different species of bird. (085)

It appears that nature in its various forms is often used as a tool for self-expression and internal identity negotiation (020, 025, 031, 064, 069, 130, 136, 153, 173, 229, 233, 236, 256, 331, 391, etc.). Accordingly, respondents make use of nature and seasonal change to express their feelings:

*Kotiin tultuani seisoin ulko-oven edessä. Asumme rivitalossa, jonka edessä on koivikko. Koivikossa oli juuri lintujen kevätkonsertti parhaimmillaan. Aurinko paistoi. Kevättuuli puhalteli leppeästi. Totesin, että, koska voin tuon kaiken herkästi aistia ja siitä iloita, olen psyykkisesti voittanut koko syöpäjutun.*

When I arrived home I stood in front of the entrance. We lived in a row house and in front of it was a birch forest. In the birch forest birds gave their best spring concert. The sun was shining. Spring wind was blowing smoothly. I noticed that, as I was capable of sensing all of this and enjoying it, I had psychologically overcome the whole issue of cancer. (391)

Certainly, the most pregnant metaphor was a tree as a symbol both of the human being and of continuous life (016, 031, 040, 062, 098, 101, 434, 462, etc.). As I pointed out in chapter four, the tree metaphor already occurs in folk medical or historical cancer discourse. The image of a tree is similar to cancer, which was believed to plant roots in the body. These roots had to be removed during the healing process (see Chapter 3). Returning to pathographies, one respondent even built up an entire story based on a birch tree with two main boughs growing in her courtyard. Her story begins:

*Kotipihallamme kasvoi kaksihaarainen koivu. jostain syystä sen toinen haara alkoi voida huonosti ja perheeni kanssa ajattelimme kaataa puun. Se oli ollut siinä koko avioliittomme ajan. Koivu kasvoi tyttären ikkunan alla ja oli muisto hänelle lapsuudesta. Kesäaamuisin sen oksilla linnut visersivät iloisina. Emme halunneet hävittää sitä. Jouduttuani sairaalaan rintasyöpä leikkauksen takia, mieheni tuli sinne minua katsomaan. Hän sanoi kaataneensa huonoimman haaran koivusta ja nyt puu muistuttaa minua. Kun nyt katselen koivua ajattelen, että meiltä molemmilta puuttuu osa itseämme, mutta saamme kuitenkin elää, sillä meitä vielä tarvitaan tuomaan iloa ja olemaan tukena läheisille.*

In our yard grew a birch tree with two boughs. For some reason the second bough began to suffer, and together with my family we thought about cutting it down. It had been there throughout our marriage. The birch grew under my daughter's window and was a reminiscence from her childhood. In summer mornings birds used to sing happily on its branches. We did not want to destroy it. While I was in hospital because of breast cancer surgery my husband came to see me. He said he had cut down the diseased bough and now the tree is reminiscent of me. When I look at the tree I think that we both miss part of ourselves, but we may live, as we are still needed to bring joy and support to our nearest and dearest.

And ends as follows:

*Kotipihamme koivu voi hyvin. Sen oksat ovat tuuhettuneet ja puu on muotoutunut kauniiksi. On kuin puu viestisi pihapiirimme iloa siitä, että se on pystynyt hyväksymään menetyksensä ja on saman vertainen muitten koivujen kanssa – ehkä vähän kauniimpikin.*

The birch tree in our courtyard is fine. Its branches have grown stronger and the tree has taken on a beautiful shape. It seems as though the tree shares its joy with our courtyard and that it has succeeded in accepting the loss, and is equal with other birches – perhaps even slightly better. (480)

Equally important is the road metaphor, symbolising the course of life, and even more significant the metaphor of a side road (the unknown path) as a representation of the illness process (025, 026, 059, 061, 111, 120, 131, 173, etc.). This refers to the ancient myth of the journey, which according to Anne Hunsaker Hawkins is typical in many pathographies. She writes: “The use of journey theme as pathological formulation varies from intuitive, half-conscious allusions to highly articulated mythology.” (Hawkins 1999, 80). Metaphors and metaphoric descriptions like these need careful examination in another text rather than this thesis, as they describe situations that are not covered within the current chapter. However, it is worth citing both examples – nature and the road – in order to emphasise the fact that metaphors are a very important form of self-expression for cancer patients. It is possible to argue that metaphoric expressions are not only figurative speech referring to physical sensations, but that they also, at least in the context of cancer narratives, contain representations of significant events.

Thirdly, the metaphoric expression must include some polarity between ‘I say’, and ‘I do by the act of saying’ (the propositional act and the illocutionary act). For example, the metaphor ‘fallen into deep darkness’ demonstrates how lightness turns to darkness and the sensation of being up changes to being down. The linguists Ladislav Holy and Milan Stuchlik have proposed that the way people use language is dependent on the situation in which they find themselves, and that every expression forms part of the discourse (Holy & Stuchlik 1981, 22–23). The examples given (155, 332, 482) indicate that the extent of physical feeling influences the way in which metaphor is employed. In addition, the shock caused by cancer may extend over a longer period, appearing occasionally as emotional outbursts hidden from others. In the first two of the three examples above, the diagnosis of cancer made the recipient feel ‘as if they were falling’ (155, 332), thus, by using this saying (I say) they accurately picture their feelings (I do by saying) regarding the symbolic act of transformation. In the third example, the person felt as though she was ‘hanging above a deep hole’ (482),



which indicates the continuous inner struggle against the expected transformation. Thus, these examples clearly indicate the powerful nature of metaphoric expression as being dependent on situation and context, which also affects the interpretation process.

Fourthly, there must be an implied polarity between sense and reference, between what is said, and what it is said about. Here again, to trace the inner paradoxes within metaphors and to discover the fourth criterion, it is important to be aware of context and situation, and even more, of the cultural frameworks of illness discourse. In written texts, unlike oral communication, the number of thoughts that remain unfinished, and the number of implied meanings, is limited as the writer has no option for self-expression other than carefully chosen words. The preference for metaphoric expression over culturally defined words during the verbalisation process may be explained as a human desire to be understood.

In her story, Ruth describes the moment of diagnosis as following: *Elämäni täytti tyhjiys. Tunsin kuolevani siihen paikkaan, tai oikeastaan ajattelin, että enhän voi kuolla, koska olen täysin terve, onnellinen ja niin elinvoimainen. Kielsin koko asian*, “My life was filled by emptiness. I felt I was dying on the spot, or actually I was thinking that I cannot die, because I am fully healthy, happy and so energetic.” As we are familiar with the context(s) from which this emptiness metaphor derives, it becomes easier to follow how the writer operates in this situation. First, after hearing the diagnosis her life becomes full of emptiness. This is how she feels and this also refers to her newly (although briefly) adopted condition as a cancer patient. These thoughts, however, oppose her reasoning about her health condition, so she argues, “I am fully healthy”.

Willingly or unwillingly, with her selection of metaphors, she extends the meanings of her words towards what is ideology common to language. She indicates that life with illness, as well as implementing the patients' role, is culturally understood as empty, which contrasts with the healthy life she has led until the moment of diagnosis. The healthy life is full, and not only with health, but also happiness and energy, which are not normally connected with illness. As a result of her internal, but culture-bound, argumentation, Ruth denies the whole thing.

When discussing metaphors, Mark Turner has proposed that a metaphor unites different spheres of perception and accordingly enables concepts or words to expand (Turner 1987, 17). According to

Turner's suggestion, people employ metaphoric expressions to verbalise personally experienced feelings in this expanded way. As mentioned above, all human beings have their own set of physical feelings based on experience. An individual's feelings, therefore, form an inner sphere of experience. As physical experience becomes verbalised, it becomes a part of the conceptual sphere, and thus graspable by others. In fact, this assumption is one of the central ideas in linguistic discussion of the meaning of metaphoric expression in discourse. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have suggested that metaphor guides conceptual distinction in ordinary conversation (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 4). Consequently, the task of metaphor is to unite conceptual spheres while expanding the meaning of words.

Fifthly, the final criterion regarding the use of metaphors considers discourse as having two kinds of reference: the 'reality reference' and the 'self reference'. In this sense the expression 'falling into deep darkness' is comprehensible as an appropriate linguistic tool for the 'reality reference' as well as the 'self reference'. It accurately demonstrates the significant event of diagnosis, referring to individual feelings, the moment of transformation and the extent of feelings experienced by the patient. Nevertheless, it is interesting to observe how the selected metaphoric expression as marker of a critical transformation, becomes understandable and meaningful to the reader. In my opinion it is most important here to realise that when writing, people go through their feelings and experiences gained in the past.

Although 'picture words' occurring in the texts aim to recall embodied experience, their connection to reality, or the extent of 'reality reference', is flexible. This is connected to the verbalisation process needed to express oneself. Thus, the use of metaphoric expressions tells of the linguistic competence necessary for (written) self-expression. The metaphoric expressions in the pathographies, in a similar way to the descriptions of natural milieux, have in my opinion a strong narrative value, which allows the literary demonstration of what happened to a person diagnosed with cancer. Not all people are capable of using such linguistic tools, others might just go for words, but most importantly – as Seth, Hanna and Ruth's stories demonstrate, lived experiences are different. Ruth's story, also demonstrates that the metaphors used according to cultural expectation, give us access to self-reference in an (un)expected and life endangering situation. Although in reality the world is not changing, people describe their sense of transformation. Polarities change, not only in the world but also within an individual:

good becomes bad, full becomes empty, bright becomes dark and up becomes down. In this manner metaphoric expressions do indeed seem to appear as miniature works within the context of wider thematic narratives.

## Metaphor as a culture-bound key to inner feelings

As I studied the available texts I discovered three types of metaphor used to signify the event of transformation. The cancer diagnosis may cause changes to vertical, external or inner alignment within Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) categories of structural, ontological and orientational metaphors. Firstly, changes of vertical alignment signify movement from above, similar to the falling presented previously. In this way, cancer patients (038, 046) describe their situation as *hukkuminen* (drowning) or *uppoaminen* (sinking). The patient may also feel that *pato murtui* ("a dike broke"):

*Aavistin jonkin olevan huonosti, kun minut kutsuttiin lääkärin huoneeseen. Ruokakärryt olivat juuri käyneet, mutta siihen se ruoka jäi. "Pato murtui". Vaikka sain jotain rauhoittavaakin, tuntui kuin elämä olisi siihen loppunut. Syöpä oli silloin vielä kova sana, "Ei siitä selviä," ajateltiin.*

I sensed something was not right as I was invited to the doctor's office. They had just brought some food, but there it stayed. 'The dike broke'. Although they gave me some sedatives, I felt that my life was coming to end at that moment. Cancer was a tough word back then: 'This is not survivable,' people thought. (030)

Secondly, external changes may be projected onto the world, which stops entirely (*aika pysähtyi*) as with the first example, or onto the sky, which suddenly becomes covered with a *musta huivi* (black veil), *musta sumu* (dark smog) or *sumuverho* (smog clouds) (see also 124, 476):

*Oli se kurja päivä, kun sain sen tiedon. Lääkäri seurueineen seisoi siinä sänkyäni päällä. Sanoin että se oli sitten syöpä. Niin oli, he vastasivat. Oli niin kun musta huivi olisi heitetty pääni yli.*

That was a rough day, the day I received this knowledge. The doctor stood there by my bed with his assistant. I asked if it was cancer. Yes, it was, they answered. It was as though a black veil had been thrown over my head. (023)

Thirdly, the type of metaphor represents change in the self. Accordingly, people say that the diagnosis felt like a tree trunk (*puun runko*) (462), or that a stone (*kivi*) fell on the person (*kaatui / putosi päälleni*) (046, 124). The diagnosis may also cause a feeling of cold (*kylmyys*) (046, 061, 104, 157), brokenness (*rikki*) and emptiness (*tyhjyys*) (353, 377):

*En tiedä miten kykenin ajamaan kotiin, olin ihan poikki, itketti, mutta ei kyyneltäkään tullut. Olin ihan tyhjä kuin pois heitettävä maitopurkki, pelkät kuoret jäljellä.*

I do not know how I managed to drive home. I was totally broken, I felt like crying but no tears came. I was as empty as a milk carton that ought to be thrown away, only the container was left. (046)

The role of the metaphors used as examples here is particular to the context of cancer narratives as they unite the experience, the emotions and the imagination. Paul Ricoeur has said, on the nature of metaphors, that, “there is a structural analogy between the cognitive, the imaginative, and the emotional components of the complete metaphorical act and the metaphorical process draws its concreteness and its completeness from this structural analogy and this complementary functioning” (Ricoeur 1978, 159). Thus, changes in vertical, external, and inner alignments captured in metaphors represent the symbolic transformation process. Accordingly, what Ricoeur has called “works in miniature” accurately represents the situational changes, changes in the world, and, first and foremost, changes in the self, that make metaphor an important textual unit when ‘reading’ cancer patients’ experiences, thoughts, and, more importantly, their inner feelings.

In folklore studies, metaphoric expressions have been interpreted as the relics of mythical reasoning (Siikala 1992, 155–183), or, in contrast, as representations of organised human reasoning set within a particular context. (Apo 1995, 26–29; 2001, 66–68; Timonen 2004, 307–328; Tarkka 2005, 76–79) Therefore metaphors transmit ancient human experience, while in certain situations they appear as context dependent representations. For example, sorrow as an emotion may be described as a central feeling in Kalevala-metre lyric songs. According to Finnish folklorist Senni Timonen, this emotion is described as something inside the singer’s body: in the head, in the heart, in the torso or under the feet. Folk singers picture their sorrow as feeling like ice or burning like fire. Sorrow may also appear as a being who

changes the self (Timonen 2004, 326–328). It seems that the images of transformation used in cancer narratives represent mythical thought, acknowledged as a well established, pre-existing, part of culture. I suggest that the poetic freedom present within metaphor is used when respondents construct their particular “work in miniature” and make it a part of their thematic writing. Metaphor contains the freedom to choose a suitable word order, as well as the requisite amount of emotion in order to mediate the situation in which cancer sufferers find themselves.

As the relics of mythical reasoning, metaphors constantly reappear in new contexts and situations. To understand this statement, it is necessary to return to Paul Friedrich’s assumption about the culturally complex nature of metaphor posed at the beginning of this chapter. By its origin, metaphor is culture bound and rich in mythical images. Within the text, this image becomes interpreted and verbalised either consciously or subconsciously according to the situation and context. Metaphor may be defined as a heterogeneous tool containing linguistic code. This code mediates our cultural, social, and poetic understanding of the world, for example making the metaphor “the sinking ship” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) into a true image of serious trouble.

From my point of view, what metaphor does regarding the moment of diagnosis in cancer patients’ writings is crucial. Following on from Senni Timonen (Timonen 2004, 309) I want to point out that metaphor works as a “culturally bound key” to the world of emotions. In the form of a “miniature work” metaphor allows people to describe their feelings about significant experiences. As representations of personally experienced shock and transformation, metaphors appear as coherent, poetic, utterances within the cancer narratives. Thus, they give an opportunity for a reader to understand, picture and feel the lived emotions of cancer sufferers.

## Conclusions

The moment of cancer diagnosis may be interpreted as the most crucial in the cancer experience. A moment which, for many cancer patients, causes inner chaos and loss of self. The metaphor appears to be an excellent linguistic tool, extending the empirical and conceptual spheres and making real events and personal emotions comprehensible in a variety of ways. I concentrated on the metaphors used in Finnish can-

cer patients' written narratives because these texts create a suitable context within which to understand that metaphors are, in primary terms, used for self-expression and self-interpretation.

Approaching metaphors from multiple perspectives demonstrates the significance of metaphors as works in miniature when they refer to an individual's emotions at the time of diagnosis within the context under study. The use, meaning and function of metaphors within the discourse on a particular culturally stigmatised illness, namely cancer, demonstrates how experience becomes verbalised and expressed as a culture-bound key with which to comprehend, and make comprehensible, individual emotions.

When using metaphors, cancer patients are able to demonstrate their changed situation: their transformation into cancer patients. This particular event, represented in metaphor, contains respondents' feelings about the cancer diagnosis as well as their cultural understanding of being a cancer patient. Individuals suddenly face the world from a different perspective. The outside world is no longer the same, and, which is more important, as a result of these changes people with cancer do not feel themselves to be the same people they were before their diagnosis. They have *become* cancer patients.

# WRITTEN CANCER NARRATIVES

## An Ethnomedical Study of Cancer Patients' Thoughts, Emotions and Experiences

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<http://www.folklore.ee/ri/pubte/ee/sator/sator10/>

ISBN 978-9949-490-31-8

Tartu 2012

Printed version: Piret Paal. Written Cancer Narratives.  
An Ethnomedical Study of Cancer Patients' Thoughts, Emotions  
and Experiences. SATOR 10.  
Tartu & Helsinki 2010

Author: Piret Paal

Series editor: Mare Kõiva

Language editor: Daniel Edward Allen

Cover design: Tero Leponiemi

Layout: Liisa Vesik

HTML: Diana Kahre

Academic dissertation to be publicly discussed, by due permission of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Helsinki in Arppeanum lecture-hall (Helsinki University Museum), on the 15th of January, 2011.

The publication is related to the target financed project SF0030181s08.

Electronic version editing is supported by ECRM04-29 Expansion of the sphere of use and introduction of the Estonian language, culture and folklore in electronic information carriers.

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Cover Tero Leponiemi