

Using Conceptual Metaphor Theory to Analyze the Evaluation of Seventeenth-Century France in

Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy's *The White Cat*

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Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy was the first writer to distinguish the term "conte de fées" or "fairy tale" as a category for her collection of stories. She was a member of the salon community of seventeenth-century France. These communities gathered and discussed literature, art, and other progressing subjects of the time. The salons created a competitive atmosphere for writers who often wrote in reaction to each other, or to society. Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy reacted to the class hierarchy system and the audience for whom she was writing. She lived during the period called *Le grand siècle*, where aristocracy ruled the bourgeoisie class. The aristocracy was wealthy and literate, able to buy and read books. Living in the aristocratic class, d'Aulnoy knew their values, disagreed with them, and inserted her objection into her stories. In *La chat blanche*, or *The White Cat*, d'Aulnoy demonstrates equality in the structure and purpose of life in addition to the importance and beauty in small statures of art and people accomplished through reworking universal and cultural conceptual metaphors.

Universal Metaphors

Universal metaphors act as a connector to an audience. They are understood across cultural and societal boundaries, and they are created because of common circumstances in human's lives. In addition to using conceptual metaphors to object the aristocracy, d'Aulnoy uses metaphors to comment on aspects. She criticizes the hierarchy and comments on their perception of valuable materials. D'Aulnoy combines two universal metaphors to demonstrate an equality of humans at a basic level, and she extends a universal metaphor to accuse the aristocracy of exorbitance.

Madame d'Aulnoy combines the universal metaphors LIFE IS A JOURNEY and LIFE IS A GAME to reveal the equality in universal structure and purpose of life, as opposed to the aristocratic idea of personal hierarchy. By combining the two concepts, d'Aulnoy creates a world relatable to the aristocracy, but exceeds their comprehension. Zoltán Kövecses, one of the founders of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, considers the combination of metaphors as “the most powerful mechanism to go beyond our conceptual system (but still using materials of everyday conventional thought)” (Kövecses 55). Combining complicates concepts that seem simple. When d'Aulnoy combines LIFE IS A JOURNEY and LIFE IS A GAME, she redefines the structure and purpose of life. Instead of life as just a journey or life as only a game, life becomes a competition and a race. In each instance, people begin with equal settings—a race is the same distance, a game has the same score, a competition has the same start time and event requirements. The purpose of life essentially becomes to win, as to what constitutes the trophy, that is up to the person; but d'Aulnoy also indicates the equality of life.

D'Aulnoy demonstrates LIFE IS A JOURNEY through the quests of the three princes. The king instructs the three princes to go on quests annually for three years. He does this so that he may remain king before the brothers become old and strong enough to take the throne. He devises the plan, telling his sons, “I shall not follow the usual custom of leaving the crown to my eldest son, but whichever one of you shall bring me the handsomest and most intelligent little dog shall become my heir” (d'Aulnoy/Fields 2). The competition is a journey in that the brothers must go on their own paths and seek a reward. They will encounter their own obstacles and different choices for the “tiniest, smartest dog” (d'Aulnoy/Douglas). In the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, the concepts include: the princes as journeyers, their horses and feet are vehicles, roadways throughout and between kingdoms are paths, their return with the dog is the

turnaround, and the return with the selected princesses is the end. For the youngest prince, and protagonist of the story, his visits with White Cat are rest stops on the journey. The way d'Aulnoy intertwines LIFE IS A JOURNEY and LIFE IS A GAME complicates the ability to distinguish and explain one from the other.

LIFE IS A JOURNEY establishes the structure of life, while LIFE IS A GAME offers a purpose. There are many roads with stops, ends, and turnarounds. The purpose of exploring the roads is to compete a goal. A game is a distraction and played for entertainment. The king uses the journeys to distract his sons while he continues to rule and to be entertained by what they find. There are rules, there are winners and losers, and there are goals to accomplish and win. The rules dictate the princes are to return in exactly a year to share their prizes. The winners are the princes who bring back the tiniest dog, thinnest cloth, and prettiest woman. The ultimate winner is the prince who wins all three mini-games and becomes ruler of the kingdom. LIFE IS A GAME provides purpose to what the princes do while the king rules. The game keeps them side-tracked and amuses the king. Their games, however, need structure, or a means to complete it; therefore, LIFE IS A GAME and LIFE IS A JOURNEY.

D'Aulnoy's combination of LIFE IS A GAME and LIFE IS A JOURNEY creates a third conceptual metaphor that surpasses a general understand of the joined metaphors—LIFE IS A COMPETITION OR RACE. Competitions and races begin on equal standards, provide equal regulations, and end with a hierarchy of winners and participation prizes. When the king delegates his plan to keep the kingdom, the brothers have equal opportunities to obtain the throne. They each start in the same kingdom, have the same quest (tiniest dog) and goal (the crown), and have the same amount of time to complete it. They face their own adversity in circumstances, but ultimately compete in the same race. It would be like a cross-country race

where all runners start at the finish line, run the same grounds, but come with diverse background and training. The brothers are required the same amount of time to return for the chance to receive the throne. Each time they return, the king creates a new proposition for them retrieve. They keep their prizes, as in, are rewarded with participation prizes. Also, when the youngest son wins the final competition and marries the human form of White Cat, the princess gives the king and brothers consolation grants of land, so that each may rule a kingdom. The brothers begin the race on an equal basis, compete at various levels, and the youngest brother wins. Their lives are a competition, but it is a friendly competition. They begin with a handshake and pronouncement of friendliness, become serious through the journeys/games, and return to camaraderie when White Cat offers a portion of her kingdoms for participation.

The equality in a competition demonstrates how d'Aulnoy protested the aristocratic values. Where they are concerned with hierarchy, she values equality. She captures her audience using conceptual metaphors, but reworks universal metaphors to object and unconsciously instill her views into her audience. Conceptual metaphors rely on connections humans already subconsciously know from life experiences, but reworking them, such as combination, creates new connections in the reader's mind. Therefore, LIFE IS A JOURNEY and LIFE IS A GAME creates LIFE IS A COMPETITION OR RACE, and a hierarchical view on life becomes revalued to equalitarian.

In addition to combination, Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy extends LIFE IS A GAME to WAR IS A GAME. Her extension becomes another universal metaphor people unconsciously understand, but d'Aulnoy enhances her alteration through an extended metaphor and creates a uniquely culture-bound universal metaphor. She mocks the extravagance of aristocratic life with an ironic portrayal of Louis XIV's mock naval battles he hosted at Versailles.

D'Aulnoy imitates the battle as a game White Cat shows the youngest prince during one of his excursions to her castle. The queen instructs her cat army to mock a battle at sea with the rat army. "My cats may hesitate since they are afraid of water; they would have too great an advantage, and one must make things as even as possible," White Cat explains to the prince (d'Aulnoy/Douglas). White Cat hosts the battle in the water to provide a disadvantage to her army because they despise water. She ends the battle when the cat general eats the rat general, justifying the truce by declaring they will depend on the rats later for food and should not waste their resources.

By displaying the battle in an entertaining mode, d'Aulnoy shows how war is a game, a battle is used for entertainment. She demonstrates the folly in King Louis XIV's mock battles, of which her audience would have been aware. She also explicitly comments on the wastefulness of aristocratic people. She uses a circumstance from society, the mock battles, and emphasizes its lavishness through the White Cat's argument that there is no point in destroying their food source for entertainment. Through an extended metaphor, d'Aulnoy extends a universal metaphor into another universal metaphor, controlled by cultural circumstances. By doing so, she criticizes the aristocratic proclivity for exuberance.

Cultural Metaphors

Just as d'Aulnoy uses the extended universal metaphor to scrutinize the indulgence of aristocracy, she applies cultural metaphors on commentary of the aristocratic view of size. She exploits the audience's innate orientation metaphors, then reworks the metaphors into an expression of her own opinion. The orientation metaphors act as the universal metaphors, depending on a basic human experience—spacial awareness. In a hierarchical society, the upper class is perceived as high, good, and large, while the lower class is noted as low, bad, and small.

D'Aulnoy questions SMALL IS BAD through the character of White Cat and the three trials, establishing SMALL IS GOOD. She also extends SMALL IS GOOD into ART IS A CONTAINER, thereby displaying small stature as an art to appeal to an audience focused on art, beauty, and riches.

Seventeenth-century France consisted of a deep distinguish between social classes. There was a large focus on wealth, “aristocratic splendor,” and an “inflated sense of French greatness” (Bloom). The society assessed a person and their size upon the amount of their wealth, therefore a wealthy person was large while a poor person was small. D'Aulnoy uses additional orientational relationships to translate this cultural phenomenon into her story through the conceptual metaphor SMALL IS BAD demonstrated in the character of White Cat.

White Cat knows she is small and delicate in stature. She admits her shortcomings and feels she does not deserve the prince's affection. She feels that she and the prince have a physical incompatibility, which comes from both the form as a cat and her small size (Bloom). She tells him, “I am grateful for your attachment to a little white cat that in the end is only good for catching mice” (d'Aulnoy/Douglas). She devalues herself and feels as if she is not good enough. The White Cat's negative attitude towards herself demonstrates how small is considered bad. The White Cat could never let her friend love her because of her size, which serves as a “comic effect by exploiting its negative connotations of deformity or inferiority” (Bloom). D'Aulnoy uses SMALL IS BAD to represent the inferiority of small, lower class, poor people in the French culture.

However, d'Aulnoy believes SMALL IS GOOD and questions the aristocracy's value in wealth. The White Cat is “the smallest little white cat that ever existed” and the most beautiful cat the prince had ever met (d'Aulnoy/Douglas). The positive connotations of her descriptions

present White Cat in a positive light, despite the shortcoming of her small size. White Cat is tiny, but she is powerful. She is a princess in cat form because of a fairy spell. Although she was turned into a cat, she remains beautiful, friendly, and a graceful leader. The White Cat is the youngest prince's friend throughout the story. She entertains him over the three years and offers him the items he needs as gifts. She does not expect anything from the prince and is surprised when he returns. In addition to her characteristics, modest and friendly, is also a queen, ruler of six kingdoms. Her position of superiority and power contradicts the meaning of her small physical stature. Because d'Aulnoy describes the White Cat in a positive manner—she is beautiful, friendly, powerful, and wealthy--, d'Aulnoy exhibits how small size is good, and how SMALL IS GOOD relates to her audience.

D'Aulnoy uses an extension of SMALL IS GOOD to emphasize the importance of small nature. She questions the orientational metaphors high, rich, good, and low, poor, small to realign the audience's subconscious connections. SMALL IS GOOD replaces SMALL IS BAD. D'Aulnoy creates a visualization of SMALL IS GOOD through extending it into ART IS A CONTAINER WITHIN A CONTAINER. She recognizes that the aristocracy appreciates art and beauty, so she presents size as an art; she “celebrates [the small size] as a particular form of beauty” (Bloom). ART IS A CONTAINER WITHIN A CONTAINER attracts the aristocratic audience because they are obsessed with art, therefore they can become fascinated with the small stature, and establish a positive connection with smallness, meager, and lowness.

D'Aulnoy demonstrates ART IS A CONTAINER WITHIN A CONTAINER through the three objects after which the princes are sent. D'Aulnoy presents each gift as article of art inside a container of sorts. The first acquisition, the smartest tiniest dog is hidden inside an acorn.

Opening it without more ado, he revealed a tiny dog lying upon cotton. So perfectly formed was it and so small that it could pass through a little finger ring without touching any part of it...the little creature arose on its hind legs and began to go through the steps of a tarantella, with tiny castanets and all the airs and graces of a Spanish dancer! (d'Aulnoy/ Field 15)

The dog is tiny and fragile, but it is intelligent and dances. D'Aulnoy describes the dog in admiration and detail, creating a sense of Art in both its appearance and its ability in performing arts. D'Aulnoy also promotes visual art through the second item—the “finest fabric to pass through the smallest needle” (D'Aulnoy/Douglas). The White Cat hides the fabric in a grain of millet inside a grain of wheat in an almond-shaped seed in a cherry pit in a hazelnut in a walnut. The fabric is work of visual art, measuring 400-yards long and “so marvelous that all birds, animals, and fish of the earth were painted on it along with the trees, fruits, and plants, rocks and rare minerals, seashells, the sun, the moon, and the stars and planets” (D'Aulnoy/Douglas). The last errand the king sends it for the most beautiful woman, so the White Cat gives herself. She instructs the prince to cut off her head and tail and throw them in a fire. She emerges in human form as the queen. In front of the King, she hides herself in a crystal rock. Then for the presentation she reveals herself, “revealing her in all her beauty, more dazzling than the sun itself. Her hair fell in golden ringlets; she was crowned with flowers and she moved with incomparable grace in her gown of white and rose-colored gauze” (D'Aulnoy/Fields 29). Inside her crystal rock, the White Cat princess is the ideal presentation of Beauty in the standards of aristocratic values. Within each form of art—performance, visual, and beauty—d'Aulnoy explores art in a container, and ART IS A CONTAINER IN A CONTAINER. Each layer that hid inside it another piece of art, is art of itself because of the precision, skill, and magic required

to nest objects inside. The art in the containers provide difference examples of types of art and supports the idea that SMALL IS GOOD. If the aristocrats like art, believe art to be good because it exists in their social class, and art is small, then SMALL IS GOOD. D'Aulnoy uses logic and subconscious connections in conceptual metaphors to object aristocratic values and enforce revolutionary ideas of social class and perception of art.

In the introduction of d'Aulnoy's first collection translated to English, Elizabeth MacKinstry states, "Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy seems forever to have moved in high society and about courts, but forever on the under, and slightly shady side." d'Aulnoy, [Field]. D'Aulnoy lived in the aristocratic party, she participated in salons, and used the opportunities the upper class allowed for female writers. As such, she employed her work to prompt change in the values of the aristocracy. Because she was a member, she could not explicitly state her oppositions, so she wrote her opinions and evaluations into her stories through conceptual metaphors.

Conceptual metaphors depend on a reader's human experience and the connections between domains they create. D'Aulnoy reworks cultural and universal metaphors to restructure aristocratic view on hierarchies and art. She demonstrates how life is equal for all people, as it is a combination of a journey and game. She shows the over-indulgences of aristocratical games through mimicry in an extended metaphor of cultural phenomenon. She questions the aristocratic orientational concepts and creates cultural metaphors which add a new perspective on social classes and art appreciation. D'Aulnoy presents her story as aristocratic, while reconnects concepts through metaphors. Just as she lived on the "slightly shady side," Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy wrote *The White Cat* for the subconscious absorption.

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