

METAPHORICAL REPRESENTATION OF VINCENT VAN GOGH'S ARTISTIC IDENTITY IN IRVING STONE'S *LUST FOR LIFE*

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22638284>

Qabul qilindi: 1-sentabr 2026-yil • Ma'qullandi: 3-sentabr 2026-yil • Nashr qilindi: 5-sentabr 2026-yil

Keywords:

artistic identity, conceptual metaphor, creativity, Vincent van Gogh, Irving Stone

Abstract.

This thesis examines the metaphorical construction of Vincent van Gogh's artistic identity in Irving Stone's biographical novel *Lust for Life*. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the study focuses on recurring metaphorical models through which artistic creation is represented as mechanical activity, vital force, physical expenditure, transformation, and purposeful striving. The analysis demonstrates that Stone does not portray Van Gogh merely as a painter engaged in professional activity. Instead, artistic creation is constructed as the central force of his existence and as the principal means through which his identity is articulated. The selected textual examples reveal that the artist and his art are metaphorically interconnected. For example, paintings become extensions of bodily vitality, while creative time becomes a measure of life itself.

Introduction.

Artistic identity in literary representations of artists is often constructed through recurring images and conceptual patterns that connect creativity with bodily, emotional, spatial, and temporal experience. Irving Stone's *Lust for Life* provides a particularly productive material for such an investigation because Van Gogh's personality is consistently represented through his relationship with artistic creation. The present study approaches this relationship from the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. According to theory abstract domains may be structured through concepts originating in more concrete domains.

The aim of the study is to identify and interpret the principal conceptual metaphors through which Van Gogh's artistic identity is constructed by Stone. Instead of treating metaphor as an ornamental stylistic device, the analysis considers metaphor as a cognitive mechanism that organizes the representation of the artist. The central argument is that Van Gogh's identity in *Lust for Life* is constructed through a network of metaphors in which creativity is simultaneously conceptualized as productive mechanism, life force, transformative energy, bodily sacrifice, and movement toward an artistic goal.

Analysis. One of the most explicit metaphorical constructions occurs when Stone describes Van Gogh as "a blind painting machine" (Stone, 1934/edition used, p. 260). The expression activates the conceptual metaphor THE ARTIST IS A MACHINE. The source domain of a machine contributes associations of continuous operation, productivity, repetition, and absence of rest. These characteristics correspond to the narrative description of Van Gogh's working process. For instance, he rises before dawn, searches for subjects, returns with a finished canvas, and immediately repeats the process.

Significantly, the narrator adds that Van Gogh “no longer thought about his painting. He just painted.” The metaphor therefore does more than emphasize productivity. It represents artistic activity as an autonomous force that temporarily overrides conscious deliberation. Van Gogh’s identity is constructed through action: he becomes an artist by being continuously engaged in the act of creation.

A second important model is CREATIVITY IS A LIFE FORCE. In the novel, author states that Van Gogh could dispense with numerous aspects of ordinary human existence, but “could not do without something which was greater than himself,” namely “the power and ability to create” (Stone, p. 263). The conceptual opposition established here is between ordinary necessities and creativity. Food, security, comfort, relationships, and even religious belief are presented as dispensable, whereas creative ability is indispensable. The metaphorical framing of creativity as a power “greater than himself” consequently places artistic creation above the individual artist. Creativity becomes an existential necessity and the deepest foundation of identity. Stone further develops this representation through the metaphor THE CREATIVE MIND IS A CRUCIBLE. The narrator writes describing Van Gogh’s intense artistic period: “His brain was a burning crucible, turning out red-hot canvas after canvas” (Stone, p. 290). A crucible is a container associated with extreme heat and transformation. By mapping this domain onto the artist’s mind, Stone conceptualizes artistic consciousness as a site in which intense emotions and perceptions are transformed into paintings. The accompanying expression “red-hot canvas” extends the FIRE/HEAT domain to the products of creativity. The paintings are therefore not represented as static objects but as material traces of an ongoing internal process. The bodily dimension of artistic identity becomes particularly pronounced in the statement that Van Gogh was “spilling out a year of his life blood” with every painting he “tore from his vitals” (Stone, p. 290). Two interconnected conceptual metaphors operate here: CREATION IS THE RELEASE OF LIFE FORCE and CREATION IS PHYSICAL EXTRACTION. Blood is conventionally associated with vitality. Consequently, “life blood” conceptualizes artistic energy as something that belongs to the artist’s very existence. The verb “tore” and the noun “vitals” intensify the corporeal dimension. A painting appears to be extracted from the artist’s body rather than merely produced by his hands. The metaphor therefore establishes an almost inseparable relationship between artist and artwork. For example, The painting is represented as an extension of the artist’s own vitality. This relationship is reinforced by Stone’s unusual conceptualization of time. The narrator states that “time would have to be measured by the paintings he poured out, not by the fluttering leaves of a calendar” (Stone, p. 290). The underlying metaphor can be formulated as ARTISTIC PRODUCTION IS A MEASURE OF LIFE. Conventional chronological time is replaced by creative time. The value of Van Gogh’s existence is not determined primarily by the duration of his life but by what he produces within it. The contrast between paintings and the calendar consequently constructs artistic productivity as the principal scale through which Van Gogh’s life acquires meaning. Overall, finally Stone conceptualizes artistic achievement through the JOURNEY/GOAL schema. Van Gogh senses that his art has reached “the moment toward which he had been striving all these years” (Stone, p. 290). The source domain of movement toward a destination structures the abstract domain of artistic achievement. Years of artistic labour become a journey, while the culmination of artistic mastery becomes its destination. This metaphor is particularly relevant to artistic identity because it presents the artist not as a fixed category but as a self-constructed through continuous striving.

Conclusion. The analysis demonstrates that Van Gogh’s artistic identity in *Lust for Life* is constructed through a coherent network of conceptual metaphors rather than through isolated figurative expressions. The metaphors THE ARTIST IS A MACHINE, CREATIVITY IS A LIFE FORCE, THE CREATIVE MIND IS A CRUCIBLE, CREATION IS THE RELEASE OF LIFE FORCE, ARTISTIC PRODUCTION IS A MEASURE OF LIFE, and ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT IS A JOURNEY TO A GOAL collectively establish a model of the artist as an individual whose existence is inseparable from creative activity. The metaphorical system also reveals an important movement from external productivity to internal identity. Van Gogh first appears as a “painting machine,” emphasizing continuous activity. Creativity then becomes a force “greater than himself”. The mind becomes a crucible in which experience is transformed; and finally the artwork becomes a material expression of the artist’s life blood. Consequently, Stone’s representation of Van Gogh moves beyond the simple image of a productive painter and constructs the artist as a person whose identity, sense of time, bodily

vitality, and existential purpose are all organized around creation. This metaphorical construction is central to the novel's representation of Van Gogh as an artist whose life and art cannot be conceptually separated.

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