

READING AN EPOCH OF LIFE: A MULTI-CRITIQUE ANALYSIS OF *THE TIDE RISES, THE TIDE FALLS* BY HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

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ABSTRACT

Literature has always been a medium to present the triumphs and struggles of life. It serves as a guide and inspiration to live life to the fullest. Poetry has been dubbed as the highest form of literature. In it, the weaving of language to form an intricate masterpiece as it portrays life has been a practice since time immemorial. This qualitative content analysis investigated the extent of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, *The Tide Rises, The Tide Falls*, in terms of the imaginary transaction, versification, poet's presences and lastly, a write back. Through these four components, the representation of life and its cycle was further analyzed by utilizing the four prominent approaches in literary critical theories namely, mimesis, expressivism, objectivism and affectivism. The analyzed data from the poem revealed that first, the imaginary transaction, the persona is one who is experiencing loss and is coping with it by speaking to a hopeful addressee about continuing life despite the struggles and pain of loss. Second, for versification, the poem is a cinquain with three stanzas but has no fixed meter and feet but with a dominant iambic tetrameter with a rhyme scheme. Third, for poet's presence, it is evident in the poem that Longfellow's life and struggles were well-represented. Lastly, a reader-response in the form of poetic text is produced as a write back to the vision presented in the chosen poem. Therefore, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Tide Rises, The Tide Falls* reveals life's message behind the text, poetic form, writer's expression and reaction.

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INTRODUCTION

Life has always been the center of all existence but has an end. All living creatures are destined to live as well as destined to perish. It is a cycle all living things go through and death is welcomed with dread or with open arms. Nothing and no one can predict what happens and it is essentially in this in between of uncertainty, all beings strive to survive. As in all things, especially life, literature plays a critical role as a medium of its expression. It is essential in terms of understanding life as well as reflecting about it (Baumbach, Grabes and Nünning 6). Writers and readers have a collaborative effort in order to produce and understand literature as it teaches lessons about the cycle of life. One of the most studied form of literature is poetry.

As cited by Zhu from Liu, poetry is the highest form of literature (35). It has a mixture of music, beauty and imagery hidden by figurative language. Readers have the ability to interpret a masterpiece with their own ideas and thoughts. This presents numerous possibilities of understanding a single poetic text. Hence, studying it leads to a deeper understanding of life and of self.

Rationale

Poetry, being the highest form of literature, is held with high regard. Beautiful figurative language is weaved together by words to form magnificent masterpieces reflective of life. Hence, to further understand it, unlocking of these words is essential to love, understand and learn about life.

Theoretical Background

This paper argues that the poem “The Tide Rises, The Tide Falls” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow reveals life’s message behind the text, poetic form, writer’s expression and reaction.

This argument is supported by the literary critical theories of mimesis, expressivism, objectivism and affectivism.

As one of the oldest and most fundamental concepts in Western aesthetics, mimesis, has been utilized as a primary tool for analyzing literature (Gu 459). According to Baktir, mimesis in the literary world has two applications: give meaning to the nature of literature and to determine the relationship of said literature to the real world (168). Plato and Aristotle have utilized mimesis as a descriptor for the nature of art but have given it their own respective definitions. As what Pesirla (“Literary Critical Theories” 2) has explained, Plato defines mimesis as a literary piece of which it is a copy of a copy of a reality. The writer is confined with the appearance of a certain occurrence and makes copies of copies of realities which results to the product as twice removed from reality. Aristotle defines mimesis as the writer’s form of imitating reality and then reshaping it into another medium.

Expressivism originating from German romanticism is believed to involve personal experience not as a way to isolate an individual but rather, to identify with other people in a community (Gatto and Roeder 96). It considers a text as an expression of the author emphasizing his presence in the text. Thus, the text is considered a reflection of the writer’s life (Pesirla, “Literary Critical Theories” 4).

Objectivism focuses on the text being considered and analyzed based on its features. This meant studying the structure of a poem and see how it was constructed. It sees the text as a serving a purpose in which the reader examines the literary piece’s textual unity (Pesirla, “Literary Critical Theories” 6). External formal flaws can be used for analysis.

Affectivism is also known as the reader-response theory. It mainly concerns the emotion a literary text evokes from the reader. The reader has the freedom to understand and assess the writer’s work and later on interpret the work relating to one’s experience (Pesirla, “Literary Critical

Theories” 6). Thus, it analyzes literary works based on the feelings arising from the reader’s reaction.

Problem Statement

The paper analyzes the poem *The Tide Rises, The Tide Falls* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow through multi-critical literary approaches.

Specifically, it answers the following sub-problems:

- 1) How is life’s message revealed in the imaginary transaction?
- 2) How is the poetic form reflected in versification?
- 3) How is the writer’s expression mirrored in the poet’s presence?
- 4) How is the reader’s reaction expressed in a poetic write-back?

Significance of the Study

This study benefits the literature academics, literature majors and literary researchers.

Literature academics can use this study as a stepping stone for further analysis of not only poetry but as well as other literary forms. Furthermore, this paper can also be used for further analysis of another text.

Literary majors can apply the different approaches used in this study to their own analysis. This further allows them to be creative with their own outputs in producing literature that reflects an imaginary transaction, versification and presence as well as creating their own write-back.

Literary researchers can utilize this study can be utilized as a key component to further study other literary forms. In addition, this elevates the production of quality scholar write-ups as it deepens an academic’s scope which can lead to a more mature analysis.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of the study is focused on the poem *The Tide Rises, The Tide Falls* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The limitations of the study are the parameters of imaginary transaction, versification, poet's presence and write-back.

METHODOLOGY OF LITERARY RESEARCH

This literary research uses descriptive analysis which is a qualitative content analysis. According to Hsieh and Shannon, qualitative content analysis is a research method practice through subjectively interpreting the content through a systematic classification process (1277). It focuses on the material as a form communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text. It is not simply analyzing the words thoroughly for the purpose of classifying it but rather, it can present explicit and implicit messages. It is a data analysis technique within a rule guided research process and the research process is bound to common research standards (Mayring, "Forum: Qualitative Social Research Sozialforschung"). Qualitative content analysis allows researchers to understand social reality in a subjective yet, specific manner and explore the meanings underlying messages.

The qualitative data are sourced out from the textuality of the poem "The Tide Rises, The Tide Falls" by Hendry Wadsworth Longfellow (The Poetry Foundation. Retrieved on July 14, 2019).

The monograph, *Literary Critical Theories* by Angel O. Pesirla (1-10), *Versical-Syntactic Structure of Poetic Texts* by Angel O. Pesirla (1-4), and *Criteria in Writing a Poem* by Angel O. Pesirla (1-3).

The verbal data were generated in four phases; imaginary transaction, versification, poet's presence and write-back.

Imaginary transaction implies the interaction between the writer and the reader of the poem. This is further divided into three parts, vision, persona and addressee. Vision refers to the message of the text, persona refers to the speaker of the text and addressee refers to the reader of the text. These three components work together to produce a wholesome interpretation of the chosen text. To gather the imaginary transaction of the chosen poetic text, the poem was read

several times and analyzed based on the parameters provided by the components of the imaginary transaction.

Versification refer to the structure of the text. It is composed of the stanza and its measurement, meter. Furthermore, meter is measure by foot which is a group of stressed and unstressed syllables. This is one of the essential parts of a poem in order to establish the presence of rhythm or lack thereof. To gather the data for versification, the number of stanzas and lines per stanza was established. Then, meter was by first analyzed by establishing the feet contained per line. Lastly, the stressed and unstressed syllables were analyzed.

Poet's presence presents the author's life and personality as it is reflected in the text. A thorough reading of the poet's life is essential in order to establish a connection as well as to see a reflection of the writer. To gather data about the poet, thorough research and reading about the life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was conducted. Then, the poem was once read again and careful analysis was done in order to see reflections of the author's life in the poem.

A write-back is a written literary piece in response to the poem analyzed. It is a creative writing process in response to the poem analyzed. To write the response, the researcher reflected on the details and imagery of the poem and applied similar concepts to the write-back.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Imaginary Transaction

This paper argues that the imaginary transaction of the poem is from a persona experiencing loss and is coping speaking to a hopeful addressee about continuing on despite the pain brought by loss because life is a continuous cycle.

Vision refers to the overall message or theme of the poem. The first stanza of the poem implies that it is already the day is almost ending and darkness is coming. With the night coming, it can also be implied that something significant is about to end. Although not clearly stated, it is giving a hint about death. The stanza introduces a traveler who is rushing to town. The town could mean that he is going to a certain destination, it could be the place where one goes to die. The end of the stanza sounds like the persona is telling the addressee that "life will continue" or "we live

then we die,” just like the rise and fall of the tides. The second stanza of the poem talks about darkness and how once the day ends, darkness comes to settle. The ocean dampens the sand and the traveler’s footprints are taken away by the tides. This could mean that the traveler’s footprints represent his life and his legacy and the tides almost removes any trace of the traveler’s existence. The last line of the stanza is the same as the first stanza’s and once again, this implies that life goes on. Despite the loss of the traveler, everything continues. The third stanza of the poem discusses the arrival of morning, a new day of which symbolizes new life. It is a way for the persona to inform the addressee that indeed, life goes on. Even though the traveler is gone, life goes on. Everyone experiences life which is represented by the tide rising in the poem and of course, everyone experiences loss and even death, which the tide falling in the poem represents.

Persona refers to the imaginary speaker of the poem. Throughout the poem, the persona is an observer of his surroundings. He has a vivid imagination who can describe his surroundings with great detail which helps the addressee visualize. The persona has experienced great loss and is trying to move on from the pain as it is reflected in the poem. He is sharing his experience to the addressee. In relation to the vision, it is reflected that the persona’s feelings towards life is similar to the emotions portrayed by the poem. As presented in the second stanza, the talk of darkness consuming the traveler and having his footprints erased reflects the pain of the persona.

Addressee refers to the imaginary listener of the poem. With the vision of the poem established, it is clear that the addressee of the poem is someone who has also experienced the pain of loss and having to cope with it despite the pain. As reflected in the third stanza, it presents a hopeful mood which the addressee grasps since he has also experienced loss. The addressee understands the circle of life and that everyone goes through it. Even though there is loss, life will continue.

Therefore, it is proved that the imaginary transaction of the poem is from a persona experiencing loss and is coping by speaking to a hopeful addressee about life continuing despite the struggles.

Versification

This paper argues that the poem has three stanzas which contain a cinquain per stanza with no fixed meter and feet but with a rhyme scheme of AABBA AACCA AADDA.

As it appears in Wadsworth's entire poem, there are three stanzas which each contains five lines, a cinquain.

In terms of meter and feet, the poem doesn't have a fixed one throughout. The first stanza of the poem will be used for analysis.

The tíď / rísĕs, thĕ / tíde fálls,

This three feet line starts with an iamb then moves to become a trochee and then return to another iamb, hence, this line is an iambic-trochaic trimeter.

Thĕ twí / líght dǎrkéns, / thĕ cúr / lĕw cálls;

This four feet line begins with an iamb then an anapest next and an iamb throughout the remainder of the line. However, since it is dominated by iambs, hence, this line is an iambic tetrameter.

Ǻlǒng / thĕ séa- / sánds dámp / ánd brówn

This four feet line begins with a phyrhic followed by an iamb, a spondee and then ends with another iamb. Since it is dominated by iambs, this line is an iambic tetrameter.

Thĕ trá / věllĕr / hástĕns / tǒwǎrd / thĕ tówn,

This four feet line contains two phyrrics, two iambs and a trochee and since the dominant meters are phyrrics and iambs, this line is a phyrhic-iambic tetrameter.

Ǻnd thĕ tíď / rísĕs, thĕ / tíde fálls.

This three feet line contains an anapest, dactyl and spondee. Since this line is a mixed feet trimeter, this supports the argument that the poem has no specific pattern for meter and feet.

For rhyme, in the first stanza, the pattern is AABBA since "falls" from the first and fifth line rhymes with "calls" from the second line and the "brown" from the third line rhymes with "town" from the fourth line. The same can be said throughout the poem as it faithfully follows the pattern.

In conclusion, the poem contains three stanzas with five lines with no specific meter or feet but with a distinct rhyming patter that brings with it unity and organization.

Therefore, it is proved that the poem has three stanzas which contain a cinquain per stanza with no fixed meter and feet but with a dominant iambic tetrameter and a rhyme scheme of AABBA AACCA AADDA.

Poet's Presence

This paper argues that the poet's presence is evident in the poem as it reflects his experiences and struggles during his life.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow attended Bowdoin College and later studied modern languages in Europe. He married Mary Potter, a Portland neighbor who was a friend of his sister. Longfellow then went on another European travel with his wife and two of her friends. While in Amsterdam, Mary fell sick and suffered a miscarriage which resulted to her eventual death. Grieving, Longfellow immersed himself with German literature. Longfellow later fell in love with Frances Appleton but he was crushed when she rejected his marriage proposal. They eventually got married and had six children. Tragedy struck when Frances suffered fatal burns when the candle she was using ignited her dress which resulted to her death the following day. At the same time, he was also traumatized during the Civil War. To cope with such trials, he focused on his literary work.

Longfellow often pours himself into writing, especially during times of struggle. He feels his emotions deeply and brings himself to produce these pieces reflecting these emotions. As presented in line six of the poem:

Darkness settles on roofs and walls

This is a representation of the darkness he felt when he lost his wives. The pain of losing someone is lasting and through this line, the darkness that he feels is surrounding him. It settles in every corner of his home since their home constantly reminds him of his wife as it has been empty and dark since her death. It is evident that the poem reflects death that has caused so much sorrow in his life.

The poem examined was published in 1979, three years before his death in 1882. Longfellow was aging and knew that death was inevitable and that eventually things will continue. As presented in the title as well as the constant repetition in the poem:

The tide rises, the tide falls

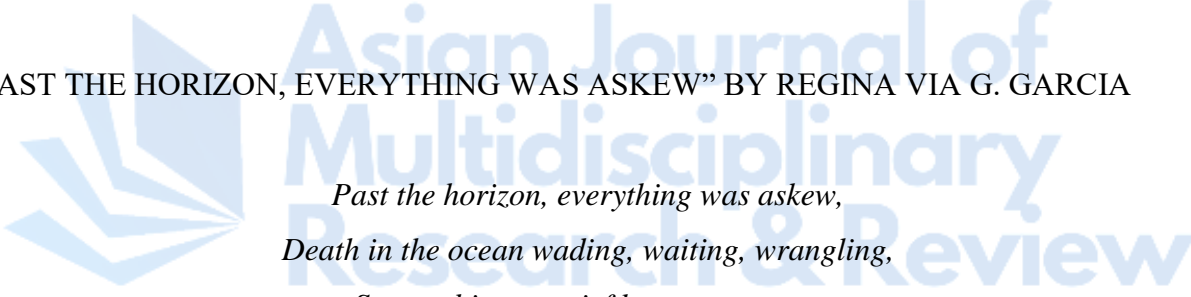
The “rises” can refer to the memorable events or life in general. The “falls” could signify death, it’s inevitable drop or end of life. However, the tide will once again rise, which could mean that life will continue despite a loss. Longfellow, aside from knowing that he was near death, also suffered extreme loss during his lifetime. Despite these, he still continued to live and write his masterpieces.

In conclusion, Longfellow’s presence in the poem is represented through the dark tone of the poem and its topic about death and life’s continuous cycle despite death.

Therefore, it is proved that the poet’s presence is evident in the poem as it reflects his experiences and struggles during his life.

Write-back

“PAST THE HORIZON, EVERYTHING WAS ASKEW” BY REGINA VIA G. GARCIA



*Past the horizon, everything was askew,
Death in the ocean wading, waiting, wrangling,
Succumbing to grief has come anew,
Loss came in waves, never with good tiding.
Past the horizon, everything started to numb,
Comfort, love and joy unknown,
Drowning an empty heart with rum,
Intoxicated, inhibited, isolated, one was alone.
Past the horizon, everything was a silhouette,
Everyday tried to escape the kiss of waves
For fear that happiness adores regret,
Yet, tomorrow promises healing hope braves.
Past the horizon, everything started to rise,
Time came to heal and not replace,*

*Smiling at his presence felt with tear-stained eyes,
Like the ocean's salty water coming to embrace*

SUMMARY

The following are the findings revealed in the analysis. The persona is experiencing loss and is coping by speaking to a hopeful addressee about life continuing despite the struggles and pain of loss. The poem has three stanzas which contain a cinquain per stanza with no fixed meter and feet but a dominant iambic tetrameter with rhyme scheme. The poet's presence is evident in the poems as it reflects his life experiences and struggles. A reader-response in a form of poetic text becomes a write-back to the poetic vision of *The Tide Rises, The Tide Falls* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow that life continues despite the struggles; *Past the Horizon, Everything was Askew* by Regina Via G. Garcia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommended for future studies:

- 1) This study can be used as a model for creative writing and write-back activities.
- 2) Another poetic text of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow can be analyzed using the four different approaches utilized in this study.
- 3) A different literary theory can be applied to study the chosen poetic text.
- 4) Figures of sound and figures of sense can be analyzed as it is presented in the chosen poetic text.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it has been concluded that the poem *The Tide Rises, The Tide Falls* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow reveals life's message behind the text, poetic form, writer's expression and reaction.

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