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ANALYZING A POEM *ON JOURNEY* BY SAKUTARO HAGIWARA**Îrina-Ana DROBOT¹**

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the poem *On Journey* by Sakutaro Hagiwara, abased on a theoretical framework combining Phenomenology, Psychoanalysis, and Reader-Response Criticism. The context of Modernist literature will also be taken into account, based on a New Historicist approach, according to which literary works have their meaning created by the historical and ideological context of the age they belong to. According to the phenomenological approach, the lived experience becomes the source of both meaning and values assigned to it. The subjective approach is a constant in poetry and in Modernist literary works. This is because during the Modernist age, everything held as true started to be questioned. The possibility of an objective perspective on reality made no exception. The image of the journey lies at the centre of this poem, an image which can be interpreted both literally and figuratively. Figuratively, the conceptual metaphor of life as a journey can be mentioned, together with the image known to readers of the journey of initiation found in many fairy-tales and mythologies. According to the psychoanalytic approach, the journey could be interpreted as one of self-discovery. The approach which unifies all of the other approaches is that of reader-response criticism, since the readers respond based on the way they relate emotionally to the text of the poem, as well as based on an interpretation which relies on their background knowledge and which can include the perspectives created by the previously mentioned approaches.

113

Keywords: Reader-response criticism, Phenomenology, Conceptual Metaphor

1. INTRODUCTION

Japanese poet Sakutaro Hagiwara (1886-1942) is a representative figure of Modernism in poetry (Hayashi, 1998). Western culture members are familiar with this movement, to which we own so much today, as it has shaped so much of our present-day culture. Postmodernism relies on Modernism, and it can be considered as a continuation of it. Modernism, in this sense, has set the basis for the way we view literature and life nowadays, relying on experimentalism and on the device of challenging previous expectations and traditions.

Sakutaro Hagiwara is a Japanese poet who started writing during the period when Western culture influences on the Japanese culture were at their peak, starting with the Meiji era (Wilson, 1966).

Hagiwara is, therefore, associated with innovation, as even when he started off writing tanka poems, which are traditional Japanese poems, he brought his own personal contribution and innovation to this genre (Tsukimura, 1976).

We Western culture members consider Modernism in association with creativity and breaking off with fixed, traditional, mindsets, which is why we can feel drawn to the work of Sakutaro

Hagiwara and feel that we can easily relate to it. He is one of the representatives of free verse, and of the breaking of conventions of poetry.

The poem chosen for analysis, *On Journey*, by Sakutaro Hagiwara, sounds as an experience which can happen at any time, and which can be relatable to readers of all historical periods. Travelling can be considered as an archetypal experience, if we consider fairy-tales and myths, as well as current everyday life practices of tourism. We feel attracted to knowing other cultures and to interacting with them.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework suitable for the analysis of the poem On Journey by Sakutaro Hagiwara relies on a combination of reader-response criticism (Mart, 2019), since we find that the active participation of the reader in interpreting the text is underlined by Modernist writers, and that readers are encouraged to contribute with their reaction, which can include emotions, as well as personal interpretations, and phenomenological and psychoanalytical approaches. Phenomenology shows how both readers and writers see experience based on their own, personal views, and also shows how readers are “involved in responding to that text” (Iser, 2022), while psychoanalysis completes the framework with the unconscious reaction of readers to a text (Maniadakis, 2016), explaining why a text appeals to them, and to their fantasies and needs.

2. METHOD

The analysis of the poem *On Journey* is based on a reader-response approach (Mart, 2019), as the poem invites a friendly exchange between the poet and the readers. The language is simple, colloquial, sounding very natural and which can easily be encountered in everyday, common conversations. The tone of the poetic persona is spontaneous and reader can feel that they are listening to the talk of a close friend, talking about his dreams. Reader-response approaches focus on the emotions experienced by the readers when having contact with any text, and on the way in which, relying on their background knowledge, they can start giving their interpretation of it, as they simply express how they can understand the respective text. The reader-response approach refers to the perception of the poem by the readers, which is based in turn on the way in which they relate to the poetic persona's experience. Both readers and poets assign value and meaning to the lived experience, which becomes meaningful because of the way they feel about various aspects. This is the phenomenological approach (Moran, 2002; Zahavi, 2018). It allows insight into the personal perception of the lived experience of both poetic persona and readers. The two personal perceptions can overlap and resonate with each other, and once readers identify themselves with the views of the poetic persona they can sympathize with him.

Textual analysis is the beginning of understanding the poem *On Journey* by Sakutaro Hagiwara. It is to the text that readers react, and it is through the text that the poetic persona shares his experience.

The poem starts with a mood of daydreaming: “I'd like to be off to France,/ But France is so frightfully far” (Hagiwara, 2024). Readers expect the poem to go along serious or daydreaming tones, yet the third line switches the daydreaming to a complete grounding in real, common life: “At the least though, I'll pick out a brand new suit” (Hagiwara, 2024). The poetic persona focuses on an apparently minor detail, which is, however, to him, personally meaningful. The new suit could be interpreted as a compensation for his not being able to go to France. At the same time, readers can interpret this statement as humorous, and as joking, as the poetic persona may not actually be that serious that the new suit actually compensate for the impossibility to visit France. Another interpretation suggested to readers can be related to the poetic persona's

practicing positive thinking, which is a term familiar to today's readers. It is part of our present day experience, and we can make free associations (Schachter 2019) with the attitude of the poetic persona interpreted as trying to be optimistic. Further on, the poetic persona can be interpreted as continuing along the same lines, thinking that, even if he cannot fulfill his dream of travelling to France, he can at least travel, and “carefree” (Hagiwara, 2024): “And mount on a trip carefree” (Hagiwara, 2024).

Readers understand that imagination can compensate for the impossibility of the poetic persona to travel to the destination he had wished for in the beginning. As the poetic persona presents, further on, details of the trip, readers wonder whether he is speaking about the “carefree trip” (Hagiwara, 2024) or about the trip to France: “When the train starts up the overpass,/ I'll lean on the azure window/ And think happy thoughts alone,/ This May day at dawn,/ Leaving it all to the new-grass-sprouting heart” (Hagiwara, 2024).

Readers can interpret that the ambiguity is there in order to suggest that the poetic persona goes along the “carefree trip” (Hagiwara, 2024) while imagining he is actually going to France.

The trip can be interpreted both literally, based on the idea that this is exactly what the poetic persona means, and figuratively, making readers consider the conceptual metaphor “life is a journey” (A'Beckett, 2005; Katz & Taylor, 2008). The literal interpretation is plausible since the everyday language used is perceived by readers as a sign of honesty and of expressing an authentic experience. The figurative interpretation relies on the expected figurative level of meaning which readers are familiar with when it comes to any poem. They expect any poem to point beyond what is literally said. The structure of Sakutaro Hagiwara's poem, from this point of view, mirrors the one of the conceptual metaphor, which refers to one domain in terms of another one (Lakoff, 2006). An abstract notion such as life acquires a more concrete reality (Vervaeke & Kennedy, 2004), that of the experience of a journey.

Readers can also make free associations with the journey as a means of initiation for the hero, which is found in fairy-tales and world mythologies. At the same time, knowledgeable readers can consider the journey as a means of self-discovery, an image which is around as the result of cultural practices such as the Grand Tour of Europe (Towner, 1985), when rich young Americans would go on a trip through Europe to see cultural heritage and to understand themselves better. In psychoanalysis, the journey of going through analysis is one of self-discovery. This is reinforced by Jungian therapy relying on the meeting with archetypes of the collective unconscious (Knox & Fonagy, 2003), which remind of characters found in fairy-tale journeys, such as the trickster, the shadow, the male or female part of ourselves, animus and anima, the wise old man, and others.

Readers can also rely on their background knowledge about Modernism, and relate the poem to this movement based on its experimentalism (Stephens, 2012). The poet does away with the usual figures of style, using everyday life language and relying, for the other level of meaning beyond the literal one, on the mechanism of the conceptual metaphor, itself part of everyday life speech.

As we have seen, the poem *On Journey* is not only grounded in the Modernist tome periodic mindset. It is also available for the understanding of readers from today. The New Historicist interpretation (Veesser, 2013), claiming that we are always the product of the ideology and its values and beliefs present in our society at a certain time should not, however, be disregarded altogether. If we still understand and relate to the contents of this poem, it is because some values and beliefs may last over time, or since ideology uses art and its contents to draw attention to certain aspect of life. Travelling suggests a search, and the Modernist related implication is that every individual searches for his own values and meaning of life. During

Modernism, society becomes less strong and controlling in shaping individuals to struggle to conform to a pattern and to all be similar.

3. FINDINGS

The analysis carried out in this paper starts from the textual analysis, or from the literary studies level, and then moves on to the cultural level and to the human psychology level, which can further be explored by considering phenomenology and psychoanalysis.

Literary works are not just texts. They also matter due to the way we engage with them as readers. Readers can always have a reaction, emotionally and from the point of view of interpreting and understanding, a literary text. The analysis of Sakutarō Hagiwara's poem has shows how we can relate and engage with his poem related to the topic of travelling. Travelling is a usual passtime nowadays, related, mostly, to entertainment. At the same time, travelling is related to the way we can understand ourselves and our relationship with the world and our own personal development. Based on the practice of travelling, we can discover new aspects of ourselves, as we get into contact with various different cultures, and different systems and values.

Reader-response criticism underlines the way in which readers relate to a literary text, and this approach is completed by psychoanalysis and phenomenology. A literary text looks like the way we see the world.

4. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

When we are young, we dream of visiting various countries, and of seeing the world, which is a classical dream. Many young people dream of seeing travelling to see many countries and cultures. Many young people are drawn towards adventures.

The poem *On Journey* invites readers to consider what the experience of travelling can mean more than its literal level. It can mean understanding ourselves better, as we come into contact with different values and beliefs, and which we can discover that we resonate with. New perspectives can become open to us after such experiences.

Contact with other cultures is inevitable nowadays. We can consider the experience of travelling as a means of us achieving intercultural communication, as well as personal knowledge. In relating to other cultures, we can consider the practice of travelling, which is an attractive, as well as useful one to adapt to today's world.

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