



Expressive: Affective critique of Carl Sandburg's Select poems

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Abstract

This literary study assumes that Carl Sandburg's select poems reveal his presence in the personae, addressing his readers through the visions' affect via the images. The verbal data supporting this assumption are descriptively analyzed based on the theories of expressivism, affectivism, and formalism which are elaborated in the first three chapters of the study. Related literature and studies and the analysis of the five selected poems exhaust the evidence to support the assumption. Arriving at these findings revealed: there is a vivid manifestation of the writer's presence through the personae. Sandburg's presence is mirrored in the personae of his poems as there can be found a striking similarity in their personalities. The vision deeply affects the addressee via vivid and clear images. The addressee or reader undergoes a catharsis and produces a reader response. Five poems are produced as a textual response to the five poetic visions.

In conclusion, it has been proven that Carl Sandburg's select poems reveal his presence in the personae, addressing his readers through the visions' affect via the images.

Consequently, the following are recommended: The literary scholars should venture into discovering the presence of writers in their work by conducting expressivist-historicist critiques of less known poems; literary critics should view Sandburg's poetry in a psycho-social manner in relation to themselves; and literary researchers should produce a formalistic reader response using or modifying the poetic style and vivid imagery of Sandburg.

Keywords: personae, addressee, visions, reader-response

Introduction

The striking and elegant simplicity of Sandburg's poems have captivated people throughout the years. At present, only a handful of people continue to immortalize Carl Sandburg by reading and quoting his poetry. Since 1914 his poetic visions and vivid images depict life and the ordinary with which the reader can compare within one way or another, transcending milieus. An attractive mystery that draws one to determine why Sandburg's poems have survived until this time and age. It is likewise surprising to discover along the pursuit of this study that despite his prominence in American Literature and history, his works are not among the literature taught to children.

Reading poetry does not only entertain the reader – it goes beyond that. As the reader empathizes with either the persona or the addressee in poetry, he experiences catharsis – a purgation of the soul, stirring emotions within the reader causing him to reflect on his life. This stimulation triggers within the reader the desire to release his emotions. Poetry, being an outlet, according to Kuperavage, reinforces how it is the only way one can express his/her innermost thoughts and feelings. Hence, reading poetry produces poetry as the purged emotions of the reader demand to be released. The affect plays a great role in the release of emotions, as it is essential in the reader-writer interaction which is technically called the persona-vision-addressee transaction.

The quest to discover what made these poems a timeless and universal masterpiece is to be conducted through a biographical correlation with selected poems and an introspection of the emotions it rouses in the poem's readers, paving the way for readers to empathize with the persona in a poem since it is the addressee that is often the

element being related to by readers of poetry.

As poetry remains a widely used vehicle of expression and inspiration, individuals respond to poems and exude their emotions through verses and rhymes illustrated by images in the text. The study, with the mention of three powerful theories in literature, aims to interpret Carl Sandburg's poems and provide credible literary proof in answering the problem and sub-problems. Furthermore, the study dedicates itself to the pursuit of presenting Sandburg's works as a possible classroom topic and encourage the use of his poetry to inspire individuals, to do further researches, and to produce eminent literary genres.

This literary study assumes that Carl Sandburg's select poems reveal the writer's presence in the personae, addressing his readers through the visions' affect via the images.

This research argument is supported by the literary theories of expressivism, formalism, and affectivism.

A poem is characterized by a three-element exchange called the persona – vision – addressee transaction and it is analyzed using the interrelationship of the three-element exchange supported by the critical literary theories.

The persona of the poem in relation to the theory of expressivism is the poet himself or the speaker in the poem. The voice of this speaker comes from the poet but may not necessarily be his own. It can be that of inanimate objects, animals or of another person but in the context of the expressive art form, which values text as a product of the writer's own experiences, the persona in the poem is a reflection or revelation of the poet's inner psyche.

The use of expressivism supports the search for the manifestation of Sandburg in the persona of his poems. The

persona as defined in the Poetry Archive Home Page, is from the Latin for mask, and is therefore a character taken on by a poet to speak in first person.

Wilson (Newsletter Issue, 130) also states that “the real elements...of any work of fiction, are the elements of the author’s personality...” This leads the literary intellectuals to one understanding that expressivism does indeed focus on the poet and his life and where one can use the poet’s life as a vantage point to view the criticized work, making the theory support the claim that Sandburg’s poems are a result of his moment since the definition of the Expressive Theory is that “poems are the products of the poet’s feelings” (Caturza, 1).

Sandburg’s own experiences during his hobo travels and his years in the newspaper industry, observing the people around him and his personal intuitions have impacted his poetry so much that he is able to write in a manner where people can easily feel the feeling he is sending through his poems. Here is where the affective and expressive senses merge together.

Avenido (16) writes that in the expressive approach certain works are better understood if the reader is knowledgeable about the author’s race, moment, and milieu. Hence, the poet’s biography will be used to provide the important details that precedes the writing of the poetic works.

In poetry, the poetic vision is delivered through images that play a very important role in poems as these become vehicles and stimulate the reader’s emotions. What the readers make of the poem and its message is determined by how vivid and how well the images produce a sensory experience in the mind of the readers.

Being an essential building block to poetry, images allow the reader to see something exactly as how the writer does. Yet despite the writer presenting the subject exactly as it is, the interpretation is highly relative to the imagination and background of the reader.

Consequently, there is a need to isolate the images from the text and take them as a separate unit during the analysis. The theory of formalism plays an important role in the conduct of this study as the way of handling the dominant element of the poems in study – the images. In Pesirla’s lecture notes (5), the formalistic theory holds a text as generating its own unique form so that no external formal laws can be applied to it. In the formalistic analysis, the meaning of a text is inside it and not outside of it. He further explains that: *the component elements of each literary genre unlocks the meaning behind the literary text if put together again as a unified whole after each element is associated with the subject being talked about in the text.*

Hence, in the genre of poetry, the formalistic structural elements are versification and pragmatics. Whence in this study, the persona-vision-addressee transaction and the images in the text are the variables for interpretation.

In the pursuit of extracting the persona, vision, and addressee in the selected poems, several other critical theories will be used. As the person may be the poet’s mask, expressivism will be used. The vision will be determined via the images in the text and their affect on the addressee who produces the write back, where affectivism or reader-response is utilized.

As the text is considered as an organic unit which makes it an entity with its own independent integrity, the interpretation of the images that serve as vehicles for the poetic vision to be delivered to the addressee will be done

separate from the poet’s background and biography but dependent on the affect of the reader.

In light of the formalistic Theory, text, like all visual art, has an intrinsic value. This value is determined by the artist’s ability to achieve an aesthetic order and balance.

The reader’s interpretation of the images produce an observable manifestation of an emotion which is called the affect. This bridges the gap in the text between the author and the reader.

Affective criticism, according to Mansell (1), concentrates on the affect the work of art has on its perceiver. Also known as reader-response criticism, it attempts to describe what happens in the reader’s mind while interpreting the text. In the study the analysis and interpretation of the poetic vision will be subjective.

Otherwise known as reader-response criticism, affectivism is used in the study to fill in the “gaps” in the text. These “gaps”, according to Wolfgang Iser, are present in the text but are creatively filled by the reader. But, for the reader to fill in these gaps, he has to first have felt a similar instance as that of the text or a past experience that triggers the emotion to well up inside the reader. Here, we see how expressivism plays a part in the affect and vice versa.

This critical theory is utilized as a support to the assumption that the poetic vision delivered through the images in the poem affect the addressee as it sees the text in its relation to the reader, specifically, its result in the reader. Adams (3) asserts that in reader-response, the reader undergoes a catharsis. This releases emotions in the reader and induces a response.

Such response may be in the form of another emotion, or contemplation and may be manifested in any of the different forms of art such as writing, singing, and painting. In the case of this study, Affectivism is utilized to produce a write back.

Although reader-response has been merely classified as “affective fallacy” by the New Criticism advocates Wimsatt and Beardsley in an influential essay, Mailloux along with other reader-response critics advocated the primacy of a reader’s response to text, stressing that there is no such thing as an “objectively correct interpretation” (Enotes Reader Response Page). A reader’s response is subjective because it is taken from the reader’s experiences and emotion.

The transaction would not be completed without an addressee or the audience of the poem. This addressee interprets the images and extract the poetic vision and become the same creator of a reader-response write-back composed of poems fuelled by the interpretations.

2. Problem Statement

The study analyzes the poet’s presence in the personae in Carl Sandburg’s select poems vis-à-vis the addressees. Specifically, this study introspects into the following:

1. The writer’s presence in the personae;
2. The visions’ affect on the addressees via the images;
3. A reader-response textuality.

3. Methodology

The study uses the qualitative method of discourse analysis. Tannen defines discourse analysis as the analysis of language beyond the sentence (Linguistic Society Discourse Analysis Page). The method is a non-numerical presentation and interpretation of data. Widdowson describes this method as employing procedures not essentially different

from literary criticism in identifying the ideological bias in texts (Sage Journals Language and Literature Page). In this study, text is studied and analyzed through expressive critical and formalistic criticism to reveal the answers to the sub-problems of the study and produce a reader response textuality. The main source of this data is the compilation of Carl Sandburg's poems lifted from Electronic Scholar Publishing entitled *Chicago Poems*. The book contains the texts that are used for this interpretation. The secondary sources are taken from web reviews, critiques, books, and unpublished studies related to the topics in the study. The procedure of verbal generation follows three phases: the first phase is the analysis of the manifestation of the poet's inner psyche through the personae, the second phase is the vision's affect on the addressee via the images, and the third phase is the reader response write-back.

4. Results and Discussion

This section organizes the two analyses and five poems in response to the sub-problems raised:

The Analysis of the Manifestation of the Writer's Presence through the Personae

Four of the poems in this study are taken from one collection published in 1916, *Chicago Poems*, but were written long before. These poems are: *Monotone*, *Dreams in the Dusk*, *The Junk Man*, and *Lost*. *Under the Harvest Moon* was written in 1919, published in 1920 with the collection, *Smoke and Steel*.

In the poem *Monotone*, the persona identified is an appreciative and contemplative person. The event in the poet's life when this poem was written is the birth of his daughter Janet on June 26th. Sandburg is overwhelmed with joy at this event that he finds beauty in all that he sees, even the smallest, most trivial of things like the sound of the rain and the rising and setting of the sun.

The persona in the second poem, *Under the Harvest Moon*, is curious and contemplative. By the time this poem is written, Sandburg's eldest daughter was diagnosed with epilepsy and his second daughter died at childbirth. The aftermath of the war years had a serious effect on Sandburg and his priorities. It was a time when he reviewed what mattered more and how he could keep up with the events in his hometown.

A man who has seen the bitter and dark realities of dream is the persona of the third poem, *Dreams in the Dusk*. Having lost his job and desperate to find work that would support his family, Sandburg has practically given up the idea of poetry. He has lost his faith in the art he believed would take him anywhere.

In the fourth poem, the persona is fearless of death, seeming happy to die, as he sees it as rest for the tired. Sandburg wrote this in the time of World War I, when politics intensified and he was pressured and tired of seeing violence and death strike his beloved land. He saw that death is a favor for the tired, a collector of the weary and broken, hence the earning the title of *The Junk Man*.

Sandburg became a hobo because he struggled to understand who he was and what he could become, and because personally he was lost and lonely, believing that he could only realize his full potential if he found "the one". The persona in the poem *Lost* is lonely and "searching for the harbor's safe breast", of which in relation to Sandburg, who found his "harbor" in the company of his wife.

It is evident in the five poems under study that the events in the author's life would lead to the kind of persona that is found in each respective poem.

Interpreting the vision's affect on the addressee via the images.

Upon reading the poetic text, vivid images are being portrayed and these will produce the addressee's interpretations. In this case, the addressee is the researcher herself. The poems under study are rich in images but there are the dominant images which are focused in each poetic analysis.

As defined by Kate Prudchenko of Demand Media, imagery can be divided into different categories, according to which sense it appeals to. Images as they appeal to the reader's senses are more effective if the image seems closer to reality and give the reader a vivid mental picture despite the reader having no prior personal experience of what is being described. Through the description, the reader experiences. This will be proven in the analyses that follow.

Monotone. The poetic vision is constant change, as suggested in the images of *the sudden rise and slow relapse* (rain), *captured sunset sea-flung bannered with fire and gold* (sun), and *beautiful with fire and gold of sky and sea and the peace of long warm rain* (face). These images' affect on the addressee is the realization that there is a pattern for all things and that these are all beautiful.

Under the Harvest Moon. The images of *the soft silver drips shimmering over the garden nights* (moon), *the gray mocker; a beautiful friend* (death), *summer roses, flagrant crimson, wild red leaves* (love), and *little hands that come and touches you* (life) imply the poetic vision that death stirs up memories and love brings curiosity. The affect here is a contemplation on why death should exist and what beauty there is in dying.

Dreams in the Dusk. The poetic vision insinuated by the images of *gray things, dark things, far, deep things of dreamland; old remembered pictures* (dreams), and *day's close* (dusk) is that there is a dark side of dreams, and that dreams can be lost and broken. The addressee realizes that dreams are not always candies and clouds and unicorns. They can haunt you and bring you to tears. A melancholic sunset can be a dangerous time to be left with dreams and memories.

The Junk Man. The vision implied by the images *the big Junk Man with his wagon* (death), and *wheels are worn, ticking and telling the wrong time, from hour to hour; a bum* (clock) is that God sent death to give rest to the weary, and it is a helper of the tired. The affect on the addressee is natural, as they share the same sentiment with the author, who does not fear death for it comes when it is time.

Lost. *Loneliness and the constant search for meaning and safety in life are hinted in the images of desolate, lone, foggy and misty* (lake), *calls and cries unendingly* (boat), and *lost in tears and trouble* (child). The affect on the addressee is a deep realization that there will be a time in life when one will feel lost. Like a child feels helpless and hopeless, crying and searching for that safety where they can feel okay again, everybody feels that.

Producing the reader response textuality

Five poems have been analyzed expressively and affectively, likewise five new poems are expected as the produce of this study. The five poems in the succeeding

pages are the affect of the author, produced by the catharsis undergone in relation to the five poems of the study. There may be similar representations in poetic vision, as in some, the author agrees with Sandburg's poetic visions, hence, the textualities that are supported are the response to the visions. Textualities are how a reader attaches meaning to the text. These meanings are taken from past experiences or reflections revived in the instance of reading the text, causing therefore the reader-researcher to produce her response, presented as follows:

Patterns (in response to "Monotone")

A golden ball (of fiery orange)
Sets the horizon on fire
Twice the same time
Each day; burning, scalding
Every soul with a passion
Stronger than it's flame.

A drop of rain (transparent and fragile)
Fall bravely – again and again –
To soften the dry earth
And every parched mouth, every shriveled heart.
Courageous, it dries
To go back to the sky to fall once more.

The repetitions of the world
Are beautiful;
Each turn always the same
Yet breathtakingly different.

Gazing at the Skies (in response to "Under the Harvest Moon")

Gazing up into the sky
Hoping to find answers
But see the same memories play
The lessons I need to learn but never mastered.

Patches of our lives
Intangible but not invisible
Stars in an endless sky
If only we could touch these people again.

But the stars in the galaxies,
The moon and the clouds –
They are so far away. How many ladders must
I pile on top of another to touch them with my fingers?

Only my gaze can hold them;
Scattered in a vast expanse called life.

Dream with Open Eyes (in response to "Dreams in the Dusk")

To dream with open eyes
Is to work and toil the earth
Watering it with sweat and tears
Until it bears fruit – the fruit of your dreams.

To dream with open eyes
Is to sing with birds, dance with leaves
And gallop with horses, swim with fishes

In the sea, against the current – until you are there.

To dream with open eyes
Is to wish and live each day – make it happen.

The Caretaker (in response to "The Junk Man")

Let him put you to sleep;
He who has made your bed
For your weary soul to rest upon.

The soft earth cushions your battered body
A pillow of fragrant flowers, a blanket of clouds
Let him put balm on your burns from toiling
Under a thousand midday suns.

Let him carry the weight of the world
From your shoulders, so you will
No longer bend from it.

"You have done so much,"
He said, "for too long."
Let me take care of you from now on...
And you are happily carried to bed.

Broken Compass (in response to "Lost")

I wish to go home
Followed the path I always did
Along the way, I must've taken
To the wrong direction –
I've been here, everything looks the same.

I took out my compass
(dusty and rusty from disuse)
Trusted its magnet and arrow
But ended where I started –
I was here, *wasn't I?* Everything a familiar feeling.

Desperate –
I tried to follow the direction
You gave me. But I end up
In the same place all the time;
Is it me that is broken?

The two phases of this study have presented the analyzed the select poems expressively and affectively with each analysis leading to the reader response poetic write-backs in the third phase of the study. Each of the five poems reflect an event in Carl Sandburg's life and that his inner psyche and experiences are woven into the fabric of his poetry. Further, the images in the poetic text effectively deliver the poetic visions and thus cause a reaction from deep within the reader. Lastly, the reader produces textual responses in poetic form in relation to the poetic visions of the poems.

5. Findings

Based on the analyses, the following findings are hereby presented:

1. There is a vivid manifestation of the poet's inner psyche through the personae. Sandburg's inner psyche is evident in the five selected poems due to how his condition during the composition of the text is mirrored in the personae of his poems.

2. The vision deeply affects the addressee via vivid images. The addressees' reaction to the poetic vision are neither scripted nor planned. Through the images in the text, the addressees are able to form a vivid picture in their mind and an almost-real sensation, causing the addressees to undergo catharsis and produce reader-response.
3. Five poems are produced as a textual response to the five poetic visions. Write-backs in poetic form using the interpreted visions from the five selected poems are crafted.

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings, this generalization is arrived at: Carl Sandburg's select poems reveal his presence in the personae, addressing his readers through the visions' affect via the images.

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations are hereby offered based on the findings and the conclusion:

1. The literary scholars may venture into discovering the presence of writers in their work by conducting expressivist-historicist critiques of less known poems;
2. Sandburg's poetry may be viewed in a psycho-social manner in relation to themselves; and
3. Literary researchers should produce a formalistic reader response using or modifying the poetic style and vivid imagery of Sandburg.

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