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Cognitive appraisal and coping in poetry

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Abstract

Emotion has recently been receiving special attention from cognitive psychologists, developing different methodologies and terms. Although poetry is most commonly associated with and expressive of emotions, few studies have attempted to apply cognitive psychology methods to poetry. Such an adventure has two benefits: the application evinces the pros and cons of the theoretical framework for literary appreciation. The new perspective it provides results into a more systematic and detailed literary interpretation. This paper investigates how appraisal and coping contribute to a fictional character's cognition and understanding of his/her situation. It argues emotions are performatives and thereby analyzes the selected poems in this light. The selection is based on expressions of positive and negative emotions. The findings of the study show cognitive appraisal and coping have the potential to encompass extratextual factors like readers' aesthetic appraisal of literary works.

Keywords: cognitive, emotion, appraisal, poetry, illocutionary traits, coping

1. Introduction

Literature is a creative activity which draws upon potentials of language to express, justify, explain, describe, (de)construct, and expose its themes. Among literary genres, poetry is more commonly associated with and expressive of emotions. It also provides readers with virtual chances to cognize, appraise, and appreciate the fictional character's emotional and cognitive life. Envisaged as such, poetry has a fertile domain for such experiences and the analysis of these experiences. The emerging cognitive psychology is expanding and developing different

methodologies and terms which have been applied to various fields of study such as education, politics, etc. However, no scholar has attempted so far to focus on cognitive appraisal of emotions and the coping strategies of the emoter in poetry. The present study tries to fill in this gap.

The present paper has selected seven poems composed by poets of different nationalities. This selection has been based on both negative and positive emotions. The poems are M. Rukeyser's "St. Roach" (1978); D. Levertov's "A Woman Alone" (1978); K. Spivack's "The Insult Sonnet" (1981) and "The Moments-of-Past-Happiness Quilt" (2007); M. Yamada's "Cincinnati" (1976); D. Walcott's "Dark August" (1986) and "Love after Love" (1986). All the poems are taken from the anthology edited by Axelrod, Roman, and Travisano.¹The study adopts a hybrid methodology, mixing cognitive psychology with pragmatics in order to attend to both linguistic and psychological dimensions of the poems. It argues that emotions are performatives and like speech acts they bear illocutionary traits. The study analyses each poem in the light of its speaker's cognitive appraisal and coping strategies with respect to the stimuli s/he gets exposed to. The paper shows a tilt toward the reader's cognitive appraisal as well.

The present paper first introduces cognitive appraisal and coping; it then attends to the pragmatic and performative aspect of emotional experience. The pragmatic side of the framework helps a more comprehensive analysis of "whatness" and "howness" of the emotional reaction. The main objective of the study is to find out the pros and cons of cognitive studies for literary analysis.

1.1.Cognitive appraisal

Cognitive psychologists (Lazarus, 1991) have worked widely on emotion and its indispensable role in human cognition. Royce and Powell (1983) regard cognition as the "identification of environmental invariants" (p. 11; in Leontiev, 2012, p. 72). This identification, which can be either logical or emotional, is the basis of the individual's motivation which manifests itself in (re)actions and behaviors. Lazarus, Averill, and Opton (1970) take each emotional reaction as "a function of a particular kind of cognition or *appraisal*" (p. 218). The concept of appraisal has been firmly established in cognitive conceptualization of emotion by Arnold, although she tries to give it a physiological base (1945; 1960; 1968; 1970a; 1970b). For Arnold, appraisal is immediate, automatic, and almost involuntary evaluation, with respect to oneself, of anything one encounters (Strongman, 2003, p. 78). Similarly, Frijda, Markam, Sato, and Wiers (1995) define appraisal as 'the perception of properties in the event that constitute its personal meaning' (p. 127).

Referring to human urge to survive and flourish, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stress the necessity of the appraisal process in order to distinguish between benign and dangerous situations (p. 23). For these psychologists, cognitive appraisal is one of the essential processes that mediate the person-environment relationship (p. 19). They define cognitive appraisal as 'an evaluative process' that gives an emotional base to a particular transaction or a series of transactions between the person and the environment (1984, p. 19).

Since emotions are 'by necessity connected to actions' (Snævarr, 2010, p. 339), an individual's cognitive appraisal finds expression in his/her actions (including speech acts). On the relationships between action and emotion, one can refer to the traditional theory of specific action tendencies and Fredrickson's broaden-and build theory. Key to many emotion theorists' models of emotion is the idea that emotions are, by definition, associated with specific action tendencies (Frijda, 1986; Frijda, Kuipers, & Schure, 1989; Lazarus, 1991; Levenson, 1994; Oatley & Jenkins, 1996; Tooby

& Cosmides, 1990). For example, fear is linked with the urge to escape, anger with the urge to attack, disgust with the urge to expel, and etc. (Fredrickson in Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006, p. 86). Fredrickson reserves the traditional theory of specific action tendencies to negative emotions and in contrast develops her theory of broaden-and build which deals with positive emotions. She is of the view that unlike negative emotions, positive emotions are associated with various action tendencies as they ‘appear to broaden people’s momentary thought-action repertoires and build their enduring personal resources’ (2006, p. 88; 1998). They broaden ‘habitual modes of thinking or acting’ (2006, p. 88). For Fredrickson, positive emotions broaden the scope of attention, cognition, and action and build physical, intellectual, and social resources’ (2006, pp. 90-91). This theory is supported by different laboratory experiments, using dependent measures of global-local visual processing (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), self-other confusion (Waugh, Hejmadi, Otake, & Fredrickson, 2005), and covert attentional orienting (Johnson et al., 2005).

1.2. Coping

Coping plays an important role in Lazarus’s cognitive approach to emotion. Lazarus and Folkman base the concept of coping on efforts to manage the demands of the stimuli, regardless of the outcome (1984, p. 134). They define coping as “a subset of adaptational activities’ that ‘does not include everything that we do in relating to the environment” (p. 132). While negative emotions facilitate avoidance or preventive behavior, positive emotions facilitate approach behavior (Cacioppo, Priester, & Bernston, 1993; Davidson, 1993; Frijda, 1994), or continued action (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Clore, 1994). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) enumerate two types of coping: emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping. If coping is oriented toward emotion-regulation, it is emotion-focused. In problem-focused coping, something is done to relieve the problem. An encounter judged as requiring acceptance is associated with emotion-based coping; “whereas an encounter a person felt could be acted on was associated with a greater emphasis on problem-focused coping” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 44).

Fredrickson (2006) argues that in emotion-focused coping, positive emotions broaden thought-action repertoire, functioning as efficient antidotes for the lingering effects of negative emotions (2006, p. 96). Positive psychologists call this the “undo hypothesis” (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998; Fredrickson, Mancuso, Branigan, & Tugade, 2000). In other words, positive emotions might ‘correct’ or ‘undo’ the aftereffects of negative emotions.

Evidence for the undo effect of positive emotions would help people to cope (Folkman, 1997; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Lazarus, Kanner, & Folkman, 1980). In this regard, the notion of psychological resilience is developed. Resilient individuals are said to “bounce back” from stressful experiences more quickly and efficiently, just as resilient metals bend, but do not break (Carver, 1998; Lazarus, 1993). According to Tugade and Fredrickson (2002), resilient individuals utilize the undo effect of positive emotions more than less or non-resilient ones.

Studies draw a direct link between the broaden-and-build theory and coping. The more positive emotions broaden the scopes of attention and cognition, enabling flexible and creative thinking (psychological resilience), the more and the better they augment the individual’s enduring coping resources (Aspinwall, 1998, 2001; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002; Isen, 1990).

In problem-focused emotion, Fredrickson introduces the theory of broad-minded coping. This type of coping is based on two reactions to the demanding stimuli: “think of different ways to deal with the problem” and “try to step back from the situation and be more objective” (2006, pp. 96-7). Both cases develop out of the reciprocal relations between positive meaning and positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2000). This reciprocity is the basis of Snævarr’s attempt to show that emotions are imbued with and constituted by meaning (2010, p. 339). The illocutionary aspect of emotions which are meaningful and contribute to the meaningfulness of emotions is one of the reasons that he provides for the reciprocal relation between emotion and meaning (p. 339). He provides six other reasons, but the scope of the paper narrows down only to the illocutionary traits of emotions as expressed in poetry.

Snævarr draws comparisons between emotions and speech acts and argues for their being performative. Austin believes all utterances are performative ‘in the sense of constituting a form of action, rather than simply a matter of saying something about the world’ (Leech, 1983, p. 176). Snævarr starts with Austinian view that ‘utterances involve by necessity illocutionary acts’, that is, they have a certain conventional force (2010, p. 5). Searle (1976) enumerates five basic kinds of action that one can perform in speaking by means of five types of utterance as representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. As clarified by Levinson (p. 240), representatives commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition and its paradigm cases are asserting, concluding, etc. Directives are attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something and its paradigm cases are requesting and questioning. Commissives commit the speaker to some future course of action; its paradigm cases are promising, threatening, and offering. Expressives express a psychological state through paradigm cases as thanking, apologizing, welcoming, and congratulating. Declarations affect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and tend to rely on extra-linguistic institutions; its paradigm cases are excommunicating, declaring war, christening, firing from employment.

Like Petter Nafstad (2001), Snævarr assigns illocutionary traits to emotions (2010, p. 345). Taking illocutionary acts as actions, Snævarr draws logical connections between actions and emotions. Similarly, for Taylor (1985), the experiential meaning of actions and emotions are interwoven. For Taylor, actions are characterized by the purposes sought and explained by desires and emotions. The language that describes goals, emotions, and desires, also defines the meaning things have for a person (p. 23). This paper draws on the illocutionary forces of emotions in the selected poems to show the links between emotion and action.

2. Methodology

The present study carries out a close reading of some selected poems in order to show the performativity of emotions. It adopts a hybrid methodology of cognitive psychology and pragmatics. Since it addresses positive and negative emotions expressed in poetry, it draws on both traditional and Fredrickson’s theories of broaden-and-build theories. The study selects eight poems from poets of different nationalities (both colonial and postcolonial). The poems are M. Rukeyser’s “St. Roach” (1978); D. Levertov’s “A woman alone” (1978); K. Spivack’s “The insult sonnet” (1981) and “The moments-of-past-happiness quilt” (2007); M. Yamada’s “Cincinnati”(1976) and “Thanks” (1988); D. Walcott’s “Dark August” (1986). The selected poems are mainly based on and develop through a specific emotion. Care has been taken to include both positive and negative emotions. Such emotions as fear, disgust, anger, and depression are among the negative emotions

that are analyzed in the poems. Positive emotions that are studied are reverence, joy, happiness, and love.

The paper first analyzes each poem in the light of the speaker's cognitive appraisal of his/her situations; that is, how the speakers evaluate their immediate situations. The immediate situation can be benign or dangerous, permissive or preventive, pleasing or provoking. It then investigates how each speaker copes with the stimuli. The analysis of coping strategies leads the research to a focus on the reciprocal relations between emotion and meaning and how emotions acquire illocutionary force in the person-environment relationship.

The following tables summarize the emotions detected in the poems and the most relevant illocutionary acts that they signify.

Table 1. Negative emotions and their most relevant illocutionary acts

Emotion	Illocutionary act
Fear and disgust	Representatives resulting in declarations
Anger	Declarations resulting in directives
Depression	Declarations resulting in declarations

Table 2. Positive emotions and their most relevant illocutionary acts

Emotion	Illocutionary act
Reverence	Declaration resulting in directives and commissives
Joy	Expressives resulting in directives
Gratitude	Expressives and declarations resulting in declarations and expressives
Love	Expressives resulting in expressives

Two points about illocutionary acts as presented in these tables need clarification. The first illocutionary trait belongs to the emotion as it finds expression in the poem. This is related to the stage of cognitive appraisal. The second trait is related to the emotion as it is enacted and therefore it belongs to the coping stage.

3. Analysis

This part is divided into two main sections: one section focuses on negative emotions and the other one deals with positive emotions. In each section, the related poems are analyzed.

3.1. Negative emotions

Negative emotions typically arise in critical and highly demanding moments of life which are usually marked with racism, classicism, and/or sexism. In such situations, the speaker feels distressed existentially, emotionally, mentally, or personologically. This part detects and analyzes such negative emotions as fear, disgust, anger, and depression and their illocutionary traits in some of the selected poems.

3.1.1. Fear and disgust

In Muriel Rukeyser's poem, "St. Roach" (1978), two key emotions of fear and disgust are highlighted and given a performative role. The situation the poet deals with is a racist one evaluated by a colonizer who does not approve of colonization. The speaker is just an heir to racism. Caught up in a racist and violent situation, the speaker tells why she has always avoided the racially other. The first two lines provide an emotional justification, referring to "dread" and "disgust":

For that I never knew you, I only learned to dread you,

for that I never touched you, they told me you are filth.(p.77)

While the word "dread" in the first line refers to fear, the word "filth" in the second line implies the sense of disgust. The verb "learn" shows the speaker's racist socialization; and the pronoun "they" in the second line refers to the blameworthy colonizers. Here, fear and disgust "justify" the speaker's avoidance from the racially other. The speaker says because they have taught her to fear the racially other and told her the other is filthy, she has never touched or known the other. Therefore, fear and disgust as "attention-grabbing negative emotions" (Fredrickson in Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006, p. 86) are representatives, having the illocutionary act of justification and conclusion. The speaker thus avoids the racially other because of an existential urge; the racially other is presented as a threat to the speaker's life, health, and social security. In fear, the sense of dread and the threat warns against the racially other as being dangerous or posing a threat to one's survival and thus should be avoided.

Disgust is also representative of the other's degraded and unworthy state with respect to self and thus deserves no attention, "for that in childhood I lived in places clear of you" (p. 77). The poem then refers to the violence the colonizers have perpetrated on the racially other by making wars, lynching them, and crushing them down. Then the speaker refers to her estrangement from the other in all aspects, in language, culture, traditions, customs, literature, etc. Not sufficing to this, the poem recounts how the speaker ventures to get to know the other, "Yesterday I looked at one of you for the first time. | [. . .] |Today I touched one of you for the first time" (p. 78). The speaker's adventurous curiosity and courage to go against the colonial norms signify the absence of fear and disgust in her. Without these negative emotions towards the other, the speaker finds the other quite lovely. The poem ends with the speaker's new experiences, finding the other "Fast as a dancer, light, strange and lovely to the touch | I reach, I touch, I begin to know you" (p. 78). When the illocutionary trait of fear and disgust are removed, love "corrects" or "undoes" the negative emotions (Fredrickson in Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006, p. 92). The adventurer's new cognitive experience of the other gives him an exciting emotion with a declarative illocutionary trait. Her cognitive coping strategy thus declares the invalidity of the otherness of the other.

3.1.2. Anger

The emotion of anger can be well detected in K. Spivack's "The insult sonnet" (1981). In this poem which has a dialogic structure, since the first line is a direct quotation, it reads,

"We have a short life span," you shrug, "why fight?" (p. 315).

The speaker of these words is most probably a lover who is trying to persuade his beloved into reconciliation on account of life's transiency. The theme of the quoted speech reminds one of Marvell's famous poem, "To his coy mistress" in which a male lover reminds the beloved of the brevity of life and thus argues against her coyness, showing it as being unjustifiable. Spivack's poem can be interpreted as having intertextual relationship with the famous canonized poem. This intertextuality, however, bears a forked irony and is thus paradoxical. On the one hand, the intertextual relation with Marvell's poem grapples with Western male sexist discourse of love. In this sense, the poem is tinged with a sense of humor. On the other hand, it loads the poem with heavy emotional consequence, since it takes the beloved into rages against the male lover. The speaker gets angry and reacts to the offender, saying:

Remember, you bastard, that ain't no excuse. (p. 315)

This emotional reaction positions the speaker of the quoted speech no longer as a lover, but an offender. The speaker's anger declares that the offender's comment is an insult and requires immediate reaction. The speaker feels humiliated by the offense and thus takes defensive action,

I'll match you tooth for tooth till you understand

me, understand? Take back, give in, unsay . . . (p. 315)

The speaker's cognitive appraisal of the situation bears the illocutionary trait of declarations; her anger declares the lover's claim is an offence and deserves to be reacted to. In the context of Spivack's poem, the lover's speech is no longer a note or token of love as it is in Marvell's poem. Rather, it turns into an offending gesture on the part of the male lover; and thus he appears as a sexual exploiter who justifies his aim by resorting to the philosophy of *carpe diem*.

The speaker's coping strategy shows her minimum flexibility towards the provoking situation. She responds back by calling the lover names, such as "bastard", and waging a war against him. Therefore, her cognitive coping takes the illocutionary trait of directives. She challenges him, "I'll match you tooth for tooth". Most of her speech is imperative, ordering the offender to do or not to do something: "understand?", "Take back", "give in", "unsay", "let go or face me", "keep your distance", "Test me, put for shove, |till I heave you to the floor". At the end, she prefers to have him only in dreams than in real life, "I will snore |above, in bed . . . and dream |of having you many ways. (Oh, *many ways*)" (Original emphasis; p. 315).

3.1.3. Depression (sadness)

The speaker of Yamada's "Cincinnati" gets exposed to a provoking situation in a racist society. In this poem, the speaker who has just been released from the internment is insulted, being called "dirty jab" (p. 166). Walking in the city for the first time after being released, she is aware she is new to the city where no one knows her. She is not only given names but also the offender spits on her face, "warm spittle on my right cheek" (p. 166). More than feeling angry, she feels sorrowful and depressed, because her first emotional reaction is crying, "My hankie brushed | the forked | tears and spittle |together" (p. 166). The depression the situation arouses in her comprises her cognitive appraisal. She is degraded and humiliated, being insulted with no reason other than her racial alterity. Her depression declares something goes wrong with the situation for which she is not responsible and nothing can be done. It declares the situation as an offensive one but since she has no voice over the forces of the colonial society and therefore finds herself quite helpless and

powerless in such a situation, she gives way to sorrow more than to anger. At the stage of cognitive appraisal, her emotion has the illocutionary trait of a declaration.

Instead of reacting angrily to the offense like the speaker of “The insult sonnet”, the speaker decides to “edge toward the curb” (p. 166). This decision comprises her coping strategy which is a broad-minded coping. She controls her anger and instead of giving way to frustration, she tries to look at the problem from a more objective point of view and look for other ways of handling the situation. Her decision to edge toward the curb signifies her coping strategy to get away from the provoking situation. In this poem, the word “curb” has a pun. As a noun, it denotes two things: first, it means an edge between a pavement and a roadway; since the speaker is literally walking in the town and is around the Government Square, this meaning is quite applicable. However, apart from this literal meaning, “curb” also means “the act of restraining power, action or limiting excess”. Figuratively and with respect to the offensive and provoking situation the speaker experiences, this second meaning of the word sounds apt here. The immediate “undo” effect of this broad-minded coping is her psychological release from tensions; this relief has both physical and social manifests; its physical manifests are: “loosened my fisthold | and the bleached laced | mother-ironed hankie blossomed in | the gutter atop teethmarked | gum wads and heeled candy wrappers” (p. 167). Socially speaking, there is a shift in other people’s attitude towards her. While in the beginning, “no one knew me” (p. 166), now “Everyone knew me” (p. 167). Thus, she steps from being a stranger to a well-known figure. She proves to be more resilient, capable of bouncing back from her stressful situation more quickly and efficiently than the angry speaker of “The insult sonnet”.

3.2. Positive emotions

Unlike negative emotions, positive emotions seldom occur in life-threatening situations (Fredrickson, 2006, p. 89). This gives them a complementary effect; in Fredrickson’s words, they broaden people’s momentary thought-action repertoires and widen the array of the thoughts and actions that come to the mind (p. 89). The positive emotions that are to be analyzed here are reverence, joy, happiness, and love.

3.2.1. Reverence

In “The moments-of-past-happiness quilt” (2007) written by Spivack, the speaker expresses a deep sense of reverence for a moments-of-past-happiness quilt. This special quilt has been woven by many women in their moments of happiness whenever they enjoyed a strong sense of individuality (p. 315). The stitches on the quilt show how weak or strong those moments have been for women. The fact that women have woven the quilt out of their rare moments of happiness assigns sanctity to the quilt. This sanctity arouses a sense of reverence in the speaker. Reverence is central to spiritual experience. For Roberts, “reverence is typically reserved for those things or persons esteemed worthy of it, in a positive or moral sense” (Emmons in Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006, p. 73). For Solomon, reverence is active, in contrast to awe which is passive; “reverence leads to active engagement and responsibility toward that which a person reveres” (ibid). Reverence for the quilt shows her active engagement and responsibility toward the quilt. Her reverence has a declarative illocutionary trait, since through this emotion she implicitly declares the quilt to be a precious and holy entity; it thus stands for the speaker’s cognitive appraisal of the quilt. This reverence therefore justifies the speaker’s imperative tone with respect to the addressee:

Don't look so hard, my friend.

You will ruin it

[...]

Fold the quilt

quickly;

Put it away in the box. (p. 316)

The directive illocutionary trait signifies the speaker's cognitive coping strategy. In addition, the speaker's cognitive coping to protect the quilt against any harm shows her sense of responsibility towards the quilt. The sense of responsibility she develops gives her cognitive coping a commissive illocutionary trait and the same commissive trait fuels and |or justifies her directive stance with respect to the addressee. Thus she informs the addressee of the quilt's delicacy and states, "It won't wash. |It won't wear. |It won't do to wrap babies in" (p. 317). Reverence corrects or undoes ignorance |disrespect towards the revered entity.

3.2.2. Joy

The poem, "A woman alone", by Denis Levertov (1978, p. 159-60) shows how joy as a positive emotion produces a broad thought-action repertoire. The poem is about how an aging woman comes to accept and enjoy her aging and ensuing state of solitude. Old age is usually seen as a period "when the balance between developmental gains and losses tips toward the negative, and this picture also emerges in self-ratings of the elderly people" (Brandtstadter, 2006, p. 146; Heckhausen, Dixon, & Baltes, 1989). Aging is itself a challenging situation since it imposes some irreversible losses like loss of adaptive reserves and action resources on the individual (Brandtstadter, 2006, p.146; Seligman & Elder, 1986). Besides, this period is usually described through widespread negative stereotypes about aging and the aged which leave potentially insidious effects on the elderly person's self-view (Brandtstadter, 2006, p. 146; Rothermund & Brandtstadter, 2003). The important challenge aging poses to the individual is the person's self-view which usually results in depression and dissatisfaction.

The lonely woman in Levertov's poem is exposed to such a life phenomenon which first manifests itself in her loss of memory,

When she cannot be sure

which of two lovers it was with whom she felt

this or that moment of pleasure . . . (p. 159)

However, instead of feeling depression and dissatisfaction as expected, the lone woman feels joy. This sense of joy comprises her cognitive appraisal of the new phase in her life, despite its normal losses. Here, the woman experiences some losses; but these losses bring her freedom instead of limiting her. She can sit or walk for hours after a movie; she can talk with her friends without being worried about being late; she is free to have her dinner at midnight; she can read books at night without keeping awake some other person by the reading light, and etc. Having a new self-view as

an independent person, free from responsibilities towards others, she feels “a joy |untainted by guilt” (p. 160).

The poet does not idealize or romanticize the aging woman. The woman is aware of some irreversible losses her body has to endure, “She has fears, but not about loneliness, |fears about how to deal with the aging |of her body – how to deal |with photographs and the mirror” (p. 160). The woman herself dreams of identifying with “Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby from *The Water Babies*”; however, she is well aware that in real life, “no one can walk the world any more” (p. 160).

In her cognitive appraisal of aging, she feels joy; this joy has the illocutionary trait of expressives, because the joy asserts her state of freedom from any responsibility towards others. The coping strategy to deal with the fears of aging has the illocutionary trait of expressives as she welcomes aging for the freedoms it brings for her. It promises that being alone is getting rid of responsibilities and the limitations they bring for her. It is this promising overtone that motivates her to accept with cherish her loneliness, saying “O blessed Solitude” (p. 160). In this way, the positive emotion of joy “corrects” or “undoes” the woman’s fears of aging.

3.2.3. Gratitude

In his essay on spirituality, Emmons defines gratitude as an emotional response to a gift (2006; p. 71). The sense of gratitude is mostly religiously based or associated with reverent wonder toward an acknowledgement of the universe (Goodenough, 1998). Gratitude is among those positive emotions that one experiences usually when a life-threatening situation which is cognitively appraised as being dangerous or fatal is avoided. Yusef Komunyakaa’s poem entitled “Thanks” (1988) is one such a poem that develops out of the speaker’s expression of gratitude for having survived disastrous situations of the Vietnam War. The poem reveals the dangers that military reporters faced at the warfront. The speaker is a military reporter who recounts and expresses his wonder and simultaneously gratitude for having survived the dangerous situations.

The word “Thanks” is repeated four times in the poem; revealing to the reader five critical situations that could have culminated in the death of the speaker. The poem starts with, “Thanks for the tree |between me and the sniper’s bullet” (p. 377). The situation arouses in the speaker that his distance from death has been only a tree; his immediate cognitive appraisal of this situation is fear and wonder at the same time. His sense of gratitude that he experiences only after knowing what has saved him from near death comprises his cognitive coping strategy; this gratitude bears the illocutionary trait of expressives, since it arouses his thanking urge. In the second occasion, the speaker states, “Thanks for deflecting the ricochet |against that anarchy of the dusk” (p. 377). The same applies to the second occasion which similarly reveals a physical engagement. In the third situation, however, does not bear a physical revelation, but a cognitive one,

. . . Thanks

for the vague white flower

that pointed to the gleaming metal

reflecting how it is to be broken

like mist over the grass,
as we played some deadly
game for blind gods. (p. 377)

Finding himself involved in a war which looks more like “some deadly | game for blind gods” is the realization that he experiences when he sees a white flower pointing to the gleaming gun. The proximity of a beautiful natural element with the man-made destructive weapon reveals to the speaker the absurdity of war and its losses. In this epiphany, his sense of gratitude arises not out of his fear, but out of realizing his blindness or ignorance about the reality of the war incident. In his cognitive appraisal of the situation, he experiences absurdity of war; the insight he gains arouses his gratitude, which is his coping strategy in the epiphanic moment. Usually, such epiphanies about war result in depression and frustration. The monumental example of this negative emotional experience is Wilfred Owen’s “Dulce et Decorum est”. In this poem, the speaker who is a soldier gets exposed to the harsh realities of warfront which are not praiseworthy at all. The speaker feels deeply depressed, finding himself unable to cope with this revelation. By contrast, the speaker of *Komunyakaa* experiences gratitude for having realized the absurdity of war. His gratitude has the illocutionary trait of declarations, because by this he declares wars are absurd.

In the fourth situation, he states, “thanks for the dud |hand grenade tossed at my feet | outside Chu Lai” (p. 378). This situation is the same as the first one: the cognitive appraisal is fear and its cognitive coping strategy is thankfulness because he finds out he has escaped a fatal situation. The same also applies to the final situation at which the speaker expresses his wonder,

I don’t know why the intrepid
sun touched the bayonet,
but I know that something
stood among those lost trees
& moved only when I moved. (p. 378)

The poem “Thanks”, therefore, draws on different cognitive appraisals and shows the speaker’s different coping strategies.

3.2.4. Love

Derek Walcott’s “Dark August” (p. 258) exposes the speaker to a gloomy and dark atmosphere of an August day. It is dark because “the sun |broods in her yellow room and won’t come out” (p. 258).The dark atmosphere is a disappointing one that arouses depression in the speaker. The speaker finds himself helpless at natural phenomena, “Don’t you know I love you but am hopeless |at fixing the rain?” (p. 258). Although the speaker does not explicitly refer to his gloomy emotional state, the way he describes the August day evinces his dissatisfaction. The first words with which the poem start have a complaining tone, “So much rain, so much life like the swollen sky | of this black August” (p. 258). The repetition of quantifiers “so much” implies the speaker has got fed up with the rain and blackness of the day. Literally, the speaker complains of the gloomy and dark

August day. Figuratively, however, he targets the whole life in his lament. The juxtaposition of “So much rain” with “so much life” encourages this figurative interpretation. Therefore, the lamenting tone of the speaker shows his cognitive appraisal to have the illocutionary trait of expressives.

Despite the discouraging atmosphere, the speaker learns to develop new emotional experiences in his life:

. . . . But I am learning slowly
to love the dark days, the steaming hills,
the air with gossiping mosquitoes,
and to sip the medicine of bitterness (p. 258)

His attempt to love the non-satisfying aspects of life metaphorized in the absence of the sun, too much rain, the fuming of the mountains, the disturbances of mosquitoes, and the bitterness of medicine comprise his broad-minded coping strategy. He knows he is helpless at changing the situation, so he learns to look at the situation from the perspective of love rather than through the narrowing lens of hatred, anger, or depression. This coping strategy broadens his resilience and enables him to accept the embittered moments of life. The love that he learns to develop through towards the gloomy and dark moments of life has the illocutionary trait of the expressives. He learns to be receptive of and welcoming to the embittered situations instead of giving way to frustration and hopelessness.

The personological change the newly developed love brings to him is obvious in the contrast that he draws between the self-views he develops in the two love moments. Addressing the sun, he says, “when you emerge . . . | all will not be as it was, but it will be true” (p. 258). The new love experience helps him forge a new identity for himself, because “then | I would have learned to love black days like bright ones, | the black rain, the white hills, when once | I loved only my happiness and you” (p. 258).

3.3. Aesthetic appraisal

One aspect of cognitive appraisal is missing in the whole analysis of the poems here and that is the aesthetic appreciation of poems. The focus on the speakers and their cognitive appraisals of their contexts has left no room for the reader’s aesthetic appraisal of each poem. Although intertextuality and finding similarities between poems may help in this respect, the aesthetic features of each individual poem are not addressed. Since the scope of the paper is limited, the study can refer briefly to the most prominent aesthetic feature of each poem and investigates how it influences the reader’s cognitive appraisal.

The prominent feature of “St. Roach” is its parabolic style rendered in simple diction. The simplicity of its language, the clear vision it gives of the mistreatment of the racially other, and the dialogical structure the poem has are the aesthetic merits of this poem. The poem depresses the reader without intriguing him/her in comprehending vague rhetorical overtones. The depression and the disgust the reader experiences in the first reading come out of the violence that is inflicted on the speaker’s addressee. Neither does the poem metaphorize, nor does it use other rhetorical

devices to portray the violence. The poem's narrative policy to stick down to the earth serves the aim of providing a quite clear picture of the atrocities without giving the reader the slightest clue for doubting its truthfulness. The reader's cognitive appraisal is first depression and disgust; but as the poem goes on, the speaker's new adventures against the racist norms uplift the reader cognitively, inspiring admiration.

The next poem, "The insult sonnet", arouses aesthetic appreciation in the reader by defamiliarizing the genre of the sonnet. Sonnet is by convention a romantic genre, apt for expressing love; it is also used by poets to share their philosophical insights. "The insult sonnet", however, is expressive of anger rather than love. The angry speaker's reactions also bear no thoughtful dimension. This generic challenge along with its intertextuality with Marvell's poem is the aesthetic merit of the poem tinged with humor. In addition, there is a tension between the title of the poem and its body. The reader cannot decide what the word "insult" refers to: does it refer to the offender's speech or to the speaker's overt insult? Such an ambiguity enriches the cognitive appraisal of the poem, because it leaves the mind of the reader open to both interpretations instead of closing it up to either one of them.

"Cincinnati" amuses the reader by its irregular line lengths: the shortest comprises one word, and the longest covers up to six words. The stanzas also follow no special pattern. The poem draws a line of development from "no one knew me" in the beginning stanza up to "Everyone knew me" at the end of the poem. More than its form, the theme of the poem involves the reader emotionally. The trauma of racism, its continuation in the society, and the way the offended reacts prove to be more appealing. Rhetorically, the use of pun on the word "curb" adds to the aesthetic merits of the poem as it marks the climax of the story.

"The moments-of-past-happiness quilt" owes its aesthetic charm to the extended metaphor the poem develops through. Each woman in her moments of happiness when she used to enjoy her individuality has contributed to the weaving process of the quilt. The whole quilt therefore bears the moments of a lot of women's past happiness. Metaphorically, the strength or weakness of this sense of happiness is evident in the stitches on the quilt. The happier the woman is, the more and the stronger the stitches are. The weaker the happiness is, the less the stitches are. The novelty of this metaphor arouses the reader's aesthetic appraisal and like the speaker's addressee, the same sense of admiration and reverence is aroused in the reader as well.

The next two poems, "A woman alone" and "Thanks", draw on their thematic charms rather than stylistic or rhetorical schemes for affecting the reader. They have simple styles, draw on commonplace life incidents, and try to appear as matters of fact. It is only in Walcott's "Dark August" that the poet utilizes rhetorical devices such as personification and metaphor to show his cognitive appraisal.

4. Discussion

The present study approaches the emotional life of speakers in seven poems of different poets. Following Snævarr's lead, the close reading of each poem attempts to show how emotions influence the emoter's cognition through their illocutionary traits. Like speech acts, emotions have illocutionary traits that not only evince the appraisal of the situation but also determine the speaker's coping strategy. The analysis of the poems displays that emotions comprise part of an individual's cognition and are highly context-bound. The speakers of two poems may feel

somehow the same, for instance, they may feel sad; but each one's sorrow is peculiar and specific to his/her own context. Speakers of "The insult sonnet" and "Cincinnati" feel angry as both are humiliated, one by a racist situation and the other by a sexist one. However, "The insult sonnet" provides the emoter the chance to show and enact her anger and thereby procure her social self-esteem; by contrast, the speaker in "Cincinnati" is helpless and knows display of her emotion would take her to internment once again.

The analysis of the poems has been on the level of the character. However, it should not be ignored that each poem exposes an emotion-loaded situation to the reader as well. One of the merits of poetry, and of literature on the whole, is that reading a literary work involves the reader emotionally and intellectually. However, there is a difference between the stimuli provided by poetry and those in real life. The difference lies in that the situation is already filtered through an emoter's cognitive appraisal and what the reader comes to know about the stimulating situation is in fact the reality as cognized and appraised by the speaker. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage which renders it paradoxical. The advantage of such a feature is that the reader comes to know about the way others appraise and cope with the stimuli; in this sense, it is a broad-minded experience since it offers the reader alternative ways of approaching the situation. On the other hand, the disadvantage of the same merit lies in the fact that the poem limits or reduces the scope to only one or, at most two appraisals, and other emotional reactions are denied to the reader.

Such limitations may be reduced when poems are read in the light of one another. Intertextuality of the poem is of help in this respect because it creates a space to bring onstage other poem(s) with a different cognitive appraisal. The other strategy that can help one escape the limited scope of a poem is finding similarities between the poem and the other(s). These comparisons could be between the themes, the emotions that are experienced, the situations that are appraised, and the coping strategies that are adopted. For each case, this study offers an instance. There is a sample of intertextuality in analysis of "The insult sonnet" and one case of similarity of situation in its analysis of "Thanks". Since emotions lie at the core of the analysis of appraisal, finding speakers who experience the same emotion can also help in alleviating the reductive force of a poem. As an instance, this paper has drawn comparisons between speakers' angeraroused by their humiliating contexts in "The insult sonnet" and "Cincinnati".

5. Conclusion

The findings of the study prove that poetry, or literature at large, provides good samples for studying cognitive and emotional appraisal and coping strategies. Just as poems show their speakers involved emotionally in a particular situation, they help the reader experience the same situation virtually. Such an experience would develop the readers' resilience and their broad-minded coping. Furthermore, the perspective and terminology emotional appraisal theory provides have proved to be useful in analysis and appreciation of the speakers and the demands of their contexts. They help a systematic design for analysis of fictional character's emotional life. Investigating reader's cognitive appraisal of each poem, carried out only briefly here, would be a more promising enterprise in such interdisciplinary studies.

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ⁱAll references to the selected poems will be to Steven Gould Axelrod, Camille Roman, and Thomas Travisano (eds.), *The New Anthology of American Poetry, Volume Three: Postmodernisms 1950-Present* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2012). Further references to the poems included in this edition are given after quotations in the text.