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HUMANITY AS SEEN THROUGH METAPHOR IN ROBERT FROST'S "NOTHING GOLD CAN STAY"

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Abstract

The research aimed to discuss the humanity as seen through metaphor in Robert Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay". The objective of the research as to portray the metaphor dealing with humanity in Robert Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay". In analyzing a poem, the writer needed more concern with the sense devices in understanding poetry. The main theories that were used to analyze the data were the theory of figures of speech, that is, metaphor. Furthermore, the descriptive method was used to analyze the data, and the technique of collecting data was library research. There were two approaches used in the analysis. They were structural approach and formalist approach. In the poem entitled "Nothing Gold Can Stay", the speaker uses figurative language, like metaphor, to talk about nature. It means that what the speaker says about nature can be broadened to figuratively say something about humanity. The finding of the research was the most significant meaning could be taken away from "Nothing Gold Can Stay" is that, nothing gold can stay. The most beautiful things in life often had the least longevity. The poem used the examples of spring blooms, the Garden of Eden, and sunrise to get this point across, leaving the readers to think about all the things in life that was so wonderful and so transient. Whether it was the euphoria of winning a soccer game, or the youth of our minds and bodies, people experienced something wonderful that had faded away incredibly fast.

Keywords: Humanity, Figure of Speech, Metaphor

Introduction

Robert Frost is one of famous poets. He is an American poet who is highly regarded for his realistic depictions of rural life. Frost was honoured frequently during his life time. He becomes one of America's rare public literary figures. His literary works stand at the crossroads of the 19th century American poetry and modernism. He is a realist and his works abound in metaphors of life using nature. His works make use of colloquial American language, and many of his poems can be interpreted on many levels. Much of his poetry holds undertones of sadness and tragedy.

"Nothing Gold Can Stay" is one of Frost's poems dealing with ephemera of the square of life of the people. He describes it beautifully by using metaphorical statements that picture the beauty of Spring. The poem

only consists of eight lines and was firstly published in 1923 in America. Frost uses the word 'gold', 'leaf', 'flower', and 'dawn' to visualize the image of nature that can fade away easily. The research focuses on a figure of speech. De Boer says about the significance of figure of speech that the vividness of language can be heightened through the use of figure of speech (1982:54). It can be said that figures of speech itself are the expression that make comparison by using words in a different way. Baldick says "figures of speech are an expression that departs from the accepted literal sense or from the normal order of words, or in which an emphasis is produced by patterns of sound" (1990: 83). Figure of speech that is clearly pictured in the poem is metaphor.

Concerning the figures of speech, metaphor is important to create pictorial effects and suggest comparison to force the reader or listener to find the similarities. According to Crimon, “metaphor is a figure of speech that compares one thing with another by speaking of the one as if it actually were the other”(1967: 369). In metaphor, the quality or characteristic is given to a person or thing by using a name and image. In addition, Steen asserts “metaphor has become intelligible as a highly revealing instance of the human capacity for making sense” (1994: 3). It means that metaphor is used by people to interpret such a literary work. Furthermore, Mooij states “Metaphors may help to cover new situations or to elucidate new aspects of already familiar ones” (1976: 9). It can be said that metaphor is something to describe something else. Metaphor is used to create new combinations of ideas and it is impossible to write poems without metaphor.

Methodology

The poem entitled “Nothing Gold Can Stay” written by Robert Frost is the object of research. The poem consists of eight lines which become the source of data of the research. Two approaches are used to support the analysis. The approaches intended include structural approach and formalist criticism. Structural approach is applied in this research because this kind of approach is very effective for analyzing a poem which has some poetic meaning of the words. Structural approach concentrates on each constituent of the construction. By understanding the meaning of the words, the truth can be discovered. D’haen states that structural approach is producing relevant results by looking in places where one would not look without being urged by sturdy model (2011: 143). In other words, the structural approach is used to get the mastery over the structures. It concentrates on each word to get the detailed meaning.

Formalist criticism regards literature as a unique form of human’s knowledge that needs to be examined in its own term⁶. The natural, sensible starting point is the interpretation and analysis of the works of literature themselves. To explore the intense relationship within a poem is done by close reading, a careful step-by-step analysis and explication of a text. The formalist criticism which is now called as the new criticism or formalistic approach is defined by Guerin as the assumption that a given literary experience takes a shape proper to itself, or at the least that the shape and the experience are functions of each other (2005: 83).

The most suitable method of research used is descriptive method. Punch explains that descriptive method is setting out to collect, organize and summarize information about the matter being studied (2000: 38). Hence, this method is aimed to describe two figures of speech, that is, metaphor and personification that are used to portray the humanity in the poem “Nothing Gold Can Stay” written by Robert Forst.

The primary data that are used in the research are lines that describe metaphor. Therefore, the most suitable method of collecting the data is the library research. George states that library research involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal/expert opinion on a research question; necessary component of every other research method at some point (2008: 6). It means that some materials in the form of printed media are needed in order to support the analysis. Moreover, the data are also collected from some literary sites in the internet to support the analysis.

Finding and Discussion

Nothing Gold Can Stay
Nature’s first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf’s a flower;

But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

The poem explicitly describes identical moments in three temporal cycles: the daily, the yearly, and the mythic. In each case the poem depicts the moment when the promise of perfection declines into something lesser. Those cycles happen to the human. Humanity as the topic of the research means that it talks about people in general, that is, temporal cycles that happen to the people in general. Metaphor Portraying Humanity in Robert Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay"

1 A metaphor is a figure of speech that describes an object or action in a way that is not literally true, but helps explain an idea or make a comparison. It equates those two things not because they actually are the same, but for the sake of comparison or symbolism. "Nothing Gold Can Stay" is a metaphorical poem in which Robert Frost uses some metaphorical images that describe humanity. Pay attention on the following lines:

Nature's first green is gold, (1)

In the first line of the poem, the speaker does not just describe nature directly. He uses metaphor to talk about it. That means that what he says about nature can be broadened to figuratively say something about humanity, people in general or what happens to the people when they live their lives in the beautiful earth God has created. "Gold" in "...green is gold", after all, could just be precious metal, we think it is important to see that meaning of gold is not restricted to spring blooms here. In fact, gold becomes a symbol for all that is new, young, and beautiful. Gold the metal can actually stay gold for a while, but the golden things in life, the speaker suggests, always seems to fade away. Green is the first mark of spring, the assurance of life, but gold is the fact. The

"nature" in the first line may also be human nature, or the lifetime of a person in comparison to the seasons of the natural world in which that person lives. Following the inclusive abstraction of "nature" is the idea of it having a "first green," suggesting both the green of leaves on trees and other plants or the early youth of individual. The word "gold" either suggests the early leaf which lacks sufficient chlorophyll to be completely green, or perhaps as gold as in a golden age, an idealistic time in one's life, or perhaps even monetary gold, that signifies the physical component of things which cannot stay forever.

Additionally, further metaphorical image of "green is gold" is continued to the next line:

Her hardest hue to hold. (2)

The pale green leaves of early spring are gold-like in their light-reflecting colours, as well as in their preciousness and promise. It is the "hardest hue to hold" because its appearance soon changes and its ideal beauty flees the mind. The green-gold leaves darken quickly, a change that symbolizes the brevity of all ideal heights. The early colour of leaves before they fully develop is seen as so heavy that the leaves metaphorically drop it from their hands. Ironically, the lighter gold of early leaves is much heavier than the darker green that replaces them. The implied weight of this "gold" makes it much more precious than what follows the initial blossoming of things in nature. In regard with it, the golden moment of time experienced by human is extremely something that human really wants to live the life. He wants to hold his wealth, prosperity and beauty of the world as long as he could. He wants to utilize his time as well as possible in order that he can actualize everything he has as long as he lives in the world.

5 The following lines show metaphor:

Her early leaf's a flower; (3)

But only so an hour. (4)

Here, nature's "early leaf's a flower; / But only so an hour" shows the peak of youth. It is the time of life when one is young, but often means the time between childhood and adulthood (maturity). It is also defined as "the appearance, freshness, vigour, that is, the characteristic of one who is young. Both "leaf" and "flower" are parts of tree, but they have different beauty. Leaves are always there in the tree. The colour of leaf that is green also beautifies the tree. It shows that the tree is alive because of the green colour of the leaves. The leaf, however, is a flower. Its characteristic becomes more beautiful and dazzling. Literally, a flower is the part of plant which is often brightly coloured, grows at the end of a stem, only survives for a short time. It is similarly the temporal cycle of human, that is, youth. It is a golden time of life when human is serious about life and wants to live for some purpose and meaning. It is the state when human experiences the challenges in life. Even though flower is beautiful and nice to see but its existence does not last long. Its beauty decays because of time and the changes of climate. Similarly, young people also face the changes. Their appearance will never stay young forever.

Additionally, the next line follows the description of the flower itself:

Then leaf subsides to leaf. (5)

Taken literally, the line suggests that the leaf is always intended to be only a green leaf, not a golden flower. If the flower lasts only an hour, the leaf, the poem suggests, survives for longer. Viewed as a description of the natural world, this observation appears eminently reasonable. A branch might blossom for only a week but the resulting leaves last for months. Moreover, the speaker brilliantly compares the two leaves he has mentioned – the early leaf, which he has described as a flower, and the green leaf. The speaker denotes that the early golden leaf which is pretty, changes or "subsides" to a leaf that is green. The use of "subsides" is

interesting because this denotes that the speaker places the green leaf on a lower level than the golden leaf. The green leaf denotes something ordinary, while the golden leaf is something special.

The fifth line of the poem indicates the decay of leaves that once, in the earliest moment of their lives, holds onto something as pure and precious as gold. "Leaf" here is a vehicle for the material components of life, from the early leaves of spring decaying and falling upon leaf after leaf on the dry, brittle floor of autumn to a person's body as eyesight diminishes, motor skills fade, and control over various bodily processes is relinquished with age. We find the green which appears as gold becoming the real green of leaf; the leaf which appears to be flower with all the possible colour of flower becomes the true green of leaf. Our expectations are borne out: apparent gold shifts to green; apparent flower subsides into leaf. In each case, however, an emotional loss is involved in the changed conditions. The hue of gold with all its value associations of richness and colour cannot be preserved. Nor can flower, delicate and evanescent in its beauty, last long; hence we are touched by melancholy when gold changes to green and flower changes to leaf (actually "subsides" or sinks or falls into leaf). Yet in terms of the poem, the thing which metamorphoses into its true self (gold to green of life and flower into leaf which gives life to the tree or plant) undergoes only an apparent fall.

In regard with it, a fall is a rise into a new value. It is with this movement of paradox that Frost arrives at the final term of his argument, developing the parallel between acts within nature and acts within myth. "**So Eden sank to grief**" (line 6) with the same imperceptible movement that has transformed gold to green and made flower subside to leaf. By analogy, the third term in the poem takes on the character of the first two; gold is green; flower is leaf; Eden is

grief. In every case the second element is actually a value, a part of a natural process by which the cycle of fuller life is completed.

Thus, by the very movement and order of the poem, we are persuaded to accept each change as a shift to good rather than as a decrease in value; yet each change involves a seeming diminution, a fall stresses in the verbs "subsides" and "sank" as well as in the implicit loss in colour and beauty. The sense of a fall which is actually a part of an inherent order of nature, of the nature of the object, rather than being forced, is reinforced as the final natural metaphor recapitulates the first three movements of the argument: "**So dawn goes down to day.**" (line 7), the fall is really no fall to be mourned. It is a light-bringing. Our whole human experience makes us aware that dawn is tentative, lovely, but incomplete and evanescent.

In the seventh line of the poem, the speaker focuses on the moment when the sky is freshly awakened by the sun, when the full power of daylight is not quite realized, but a softer light, much like the softer gold of leaves before they are green, is present. Our expectation is that dawn does not "go down" to day, but comes up into the satisfying warmth of sunlight and full life. The hesitant perfections of "gold", of "flower", of "Eden", and finally of "dawn" are linked to parallel terms which are set in verbal contexts of diminished value. Yet in each case the parallel term is potentially of larger worth. If the reader accepts green leaf and the full sunlight of day as finally more attractive than the transitory golden flower and the rose flush of a brief dawn, he must also accept the Edenic sinking into grief as a rise into a larger life. In each case the temporary and partial becomes more long-lived and complete; the natural cycle that turns from flower to leaf, from dawn to day, balances each loss by a real gain. Eden's fall is a blessing in the same fashion, an entry into fuller life and greater light.

Both through language and through structure, it has been emphasized in "Nothing Gold Can Stay" not merely the melancholy of transitory beauty of Paradise, but an affirmation of the fortunate fall. The subsidence, the sinking, and the going down are, by the logic of the poem, a blessed increase if we understand the cycle of flower, leaf, bud, fruit, into the full life that includes loss, grief, and change. The poem, "Nothing Gold Can Stay" has been so magnificently transcended into a universal vision of the human condition.

Conclusions

In the poem, metaphor is used to describe the word "gold" that unabashedly becomes a symbol, a very traditional one, for the highest value and most radiant beauty. Spring, dawn, and Eden are each a sort of Golden Age, an impermanent paradise. What lies ahead is never stated overtly, but it is inarguably present by implication. The beautiful day is inevitably followed by night. Summer is succeeded by fall and winter. The green leaf eventually turns brown and decays. The loss of Eden gave Adam and Eve mortality. Human youth is implicitly followed by maturity, old age, and even death.

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