

Critical analysis of robert frost

Profession, Writer



Benjamin Swan Prof. Bittenbender ENG208W: Studies in Poetry 04/14/13

Frost's Metaphoric use of the Natural World in Poetry Born in San Francisco in the spring of 1874, Robert Frost is considered to be amongst, if not solely, the greatest poets in American history. Around age eleven, Frost moved to New England where the majority of his poetic inspiration is presumably drawn from. Although he never managed to obtain a collegiate degree, he did attend both Dartmouth and Harvard, two of the country's most prestigious universities.

Publishing his first poem entitled "My Butterfly" in 1894, Frost began his career as a poet just as the modernist literature movement of the early twentieth century was gaining traction in the United States. Although Frost did not break from poetic convention as radically as some of his peers in the modernist movement, he is nevertheless considered a modernist poet in part due to the use of the New England vernacular that is present in the majority of his poetry.

Another influence on Frost's work as a poet comes from New England as well; this is the influence of growing up in New England's natural landscape and the life he led on a farm there. Frost's love for the natural and tendency towards including it in his writing is possibly the most distinguishable constant in his work. The following quote best describes this constant in his work, "As Frost portrays him, man might be alone in an ultimately indifferent universe, but he may nevertheless look to the natural world for metaphors of his own condition." (The Poetry Foundation).

The purpose of this paper will be to explore some of the pieces in which Frost's use of nature as a metaphor or simile for the human condition, as <https://assignbuster.com/critical-analysis-of-robert-frost/>

well as identifying the theme that the human race is alone in the vast universe where it occurs. Perhaps the best example of this recurring theme and Frosts use of nature as a metaphor can be found in his poem “ Nothing Gold Can Stay. ” In this piece, nature’s change from spring to summer is a metaphor for the loss of innocence in the world. Frost points to the fact that the world started out innocent when he opens by saying “ Nature’s first green is gold” (Line 1).

He glorifies our innocence by comparing it to the beauty of tree with golden buds just before they bloom. This observation and metaphor is true to the human condition as well, as we are born innocent. He continues on to describe how this doesn’t last for very long though when he says, “ Then leaf subsides to leaf” (5). He then makes an allusion to the Bible about this loss of innocence in the following line, “ So Eden sank to grief,” (6). As for the recurring theme, at the end of the poem man is left alone in the universe, stripped of innocence and disconnected from God.

Another prime example of the recurring theme and frosts use of nature to illustrate his point can be found in his poem entitled “ Desert Places. ” In this poem the theme is clearly the loneliness and isolation felt by Frost. He uses nightfall during winter in the woods as a metaphor for loneliness. His description and figurative language paint a picture of the most lonely and isolated place imaginable, a wintry desert place. From here he lets the reader know that this place will only get more lonely before when he says “ Will be more lonely ere it will be less” (10).

After painting this picture of the most lonely place the reader can imagine, Frost concludes by saying that “ I have it in me so much nearer home To

scare myself with my own desert places. ” (15, 16). This is where the recurring theme fits in; Frost internally is more concerned about his human condition where he finds himself alone in a vast universe that is indifferent to his existence. The entire poem sets up the delivery of these last two lines so that the reader can understand the significance of this theme to his life.

The next poem examined is entitled “ Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening. ” Although Frost does use nature as a metaphor for the human condition in this poem, it’s theme is in stark contrast to the one found in “ Desert Places. ” In this poem, the woods in winter are a metaphor for isolation and solitude rather than loneliness. This could be for a couple of different reasons; perhaps it is the fact the speaker has the companionship of his horse. Either way, the poem begins in the woods as the speaker thinks back to civilization and the man whose property he is on. He notes that it is an unusual place to stop in the middle of the night since it serves no practical purpose and that his “ horse must think it queer” (5). From here the speaker makes the observation that “ The woods are lovely, dark and deep,” and takes a brief moment to enjoy the beauty, isolation, and solitude they offer before carrying on about his business (13). In contrast to the theme in “ Desert Places” Frost appears to have found peace with the human condition in being alone in the woods that represent the vast and indifferent universe. Another poem that contains just one of the two constants being examined is entitled “ Birches. In this poem Frost observes birch tree’s that have been permanently bent from the weight of wintersnow and ice, this observation makes him nostalgic for the days he used to swing from the branches of these trees as a boy. He recalls being playing as carefree boy and the birch

trees become a metaphor for his childhood innocence that he longs to have back. Near the end of the poem Frost writes, “ It’s when I’m weary of considerations, And life is too much like a pathless wood” (44, 45) that he feels the most nostalgic for his carefree childhood.

This statement makes the “ pathless wood” a metaphor for the trials of adulthood that are like cobwebs and twigs that poke you in the eye in untamed woods (45). He longs to escape the reality of trials and this can be seen in the line stating “ I’d like to get away from earth awhile” (48). Although the recurring theme of the being alone in the vast universe does not present itself in this poem, the constant of nature as a metaphor can be found again in this piece.

The final poem that this paper will examine Frost’s use of nature as a metaphor and the recurring theme of the human condition is entitled “ Out Out---. ” In this poem Frost takes the reader to a logging community where the day’s work is coming to end. In this setting, nature is a metaphor for both the livelihood and mortality of a young man/older boy working with a chainsaw at a logging camp to make firewood. Frost paints the picture of beautiful landscape off of which the subject is making a living, but when he is distracted from his work he accidentally cuts hand nearly clean off.

Even with the doctor’s best effort to try to save the boy’s life, the boy passes away during the operation. It is here that the recurring theme reveals itself when Frost writes, “ No more to build on there. And they, since they Were not the one dead turned to their affairs” (33, 34). In this poem the bystanders represent the indifferent universe, they continue on with their lives, as the boy dies alone. In conclusion, the influence of the New England

landscape has clearly played a huge role in Robert Frost's life's work as a poet.

One is hard pressed to find a poem of his that does not contain some kind of metaphor inspired by the natural world surrounding him. Although the great poet does explore the recurring theme of the human condition where man is alone in the vast and indifferent universe, this theme is not nearly as constant as his metaphoric use of natural world. Frost was able to make a name for himself through this poetic style and will remain as one of the greatest American poets there ever was and will be. References " Robert Frost. " The Poetry Foundation. The Poetry Foundation, n. d. Web. 14 Apr. 2013.