



**Wilderness and inner peace in Robert
Frost's "The Wood pile" "The Tuft
"of flowers "and "Desert Places**

Dr.Widad Allawi Saddam

**Ministry of Education/ directorate
Risafa 2**

Wedad.saddam@yahoo.com



عندما عاش الانسان في عالمه فاحكم سيطرته على كل مافي هذا الكون احدث الكثير من التخريب للطبيعة مما ادى الى وجود علاقة بائسة بين البشر والطبيعة. اذا لا بد من طريقة ما لاصلاح تلك العلاقة وهذا ماكان محورالعديد من الادباء وبالاخص الشعراء. يناقش البحث مفهوم البرية ودوره في تطوير وتشكيل افكار الشعراء . يناقش البحث وجهات النظرالمختلفة لنظرية الطبيعة وبالاخص البرية في قصائد مختارة للشاعر روبرت فروست. يشير البحث ايضا الى الاحساس بالسلام الداخلي الذي يحدث للانسان عند اندماجه مع البرية . كذلك يتم توضيح كيف تلهم البرية الشاعر وتقوده الى تحقيق انجازاته المختلفة . صوت الشاعر فروست هو الصوت المختار لسماعه روحيا في هذه الدراسة و اما القصائد فهي "كومة الخشب" و "باقة الزهور" و "الصحراء"

الكلمات المفتاحية : البرية, الطبيعة , روبرت فروست و السلام الداخلي.

Abstract

Through their living in the world, People have ravaged the environment. Everything is under their rule and control. That leads to the miserable relationship between humans and natural world. Therefore, there should be a way to fix this relation. Nature is the focus of many writers, especially, the poets. The importance of the concept of wilderness in evolving and shaping the minds of writer is examined in this paper. Besides, it discusses different views of nature through the theoretical lens of ecocriticism in Robert Frost's selected poems. In addition, this paper follows the sense of inner peace and shows the readers how it is being shaped. This study shows how the natural world inspires the poet and leads him to gain different achievements. The selected voice to hear spiritually will be the voice of the poet Robert Frost. The selected poems are "Storm Fear," "The Wood-Pile" and "the Tuft of the Flowers."

Key words: Wilderness, ecocriticism, Robert Frost, Inner peace

Introduction

When we talk about wilderness, we talk about a state of nature which has not been altered by human hands. In wilderness, there is a sense of safety and stability both for natural habitats and occupants and for people who seek peace or spiritual awakening or they are just tired of the pollution of the human world (Garrand 2004). Ramachandra Guha refers to wilderness in remark about the characteristics of ecology, saying "is its focus on the preservation of unspoilt wilderness and restoration of degraded areas to more positive condition." (1)

Wilderness has a sacred halo around it promising a genuine relationship between man and nature that is based on reverence, purity and maybe humbleness. In spite of their influence by the revelations of modern science and the growing environmental crisis, the poets after Dickinson and Melville, looked for more romantic conception of nature to return to. Robert Frost was the most important poet among them. Robert Lee Frost, (1874-1963) is considered as one of American loved champion poets. Part of the Modernist Movement is shaped by him. He prefers to use more direct approach than the old raised poetic styles. Therefore he utilities more informal style, by indulging the events of everyday life in the countryside of New Hampshire to inspire him (Burns. 2002.p.125). This depiction of the farming life of New England, his dictation to the American conversational language, and his pragmatic verse depicting of the common people in everyday situations, all make the admiration for Robert Frost. Frost utilizes the natural objects as symbolic representation like his ancestries. Moreover, nature is considered the main subject of Frost's poetry. He presents the direct relationship of human and nature in his certain poems like "The Wood-Pile" and "The Most of It." Although wilderness has been widely discussed among ecocritical scholars, the selected three poems are left to be discussed in this paper.

Analysis of poems

Frost in his poem "The Wood-Pile" is walking through an icy sump. He wants to return to his place but decides to continue. Through his walking in this distant and cold place, he feels that home becomes far. It comes to his mind fluctuated thoughts between continuing walking towards this strange place and going back home. This loss is representative of the soulless society of men. In accordance with this, Cronon defines Wilderness as "the natural, unfallen antithesis of a natural civilization that has lost its soul. It is a place of freedom in which we recover the true selves we have lost to the corrupting influences of our artificial lives" (16)

Frost presents his poem as a fantasy story, at which, he is on a journey to a surprising fact, apprehension, and modification. It starts with a walking of a man through treed quagmire, suddenly on his way, while he decides to return home, a shape of animal emerges to guide him forwards. "Out walking in the frozen swamp one gray day, I paused and said, "I will turn back from here." (1-2) Unlike the fact of the human domination towards nature and animals, Frost breaks this fact and makes an animal guides human. An image of human is created by the poet in order to realize the aim inside restrictions of his structuring activity in his material life and natural one. (346 the poetic of frost). Then the poet is in contact with an image of a bird, the appearance of this animal is a good opportunity to humble the humans' feeling and ideas about this scene of wilderness through the natural world. Through this scene the poet finds his way to the right road.

A small bird flew before me. He was careful
To put a tree between us when he lighted,
And say no word to tell me who he was
Who was so foolish as to think what he thought.
He thought that I was after him for a feather. (10-14)

Thorough his wandering, a tiny bird appears and changes the poet's mode, although the bird seems to be scared of him. The cause of the bird's fear is that he thinks that any human is after his feathers.

One flight out sideways would have undeceived him.

And then there was a pile of wood for which
I forgot him and let his little fear
Carry him off the way I might have gone. (17-20)

Then, he looks at decomposed woodpile which makes him neglect the bird. The question comes to his mind that who made this woodpile and left here to rot. His wondering according to Michael R. Little may hint that the woodsman, the person who compiled the pile, is "a deity or spiritual presence" who may have created this and then abandoned it, symbolic of human abandonment in the world (2010, p. 128) He does not like this scene, which makes him depressed and uncomfortable. He keeps his mind busy thinking about the condition of life which appears to him as a sterile one. Life is sterile because human no longer cares about it. The woodpile represents whatever related to nature which becomes dark and neglected. The penultimate lines bring strange feelings to the poems. They talk of the woodpile as if they could burn and bring warmth but this warmth is to be enjoyed by whom? By the only human around there the poet or by the nature itself? Maybe this also does not matter since that woodpile has already changed the scenery for before it, the place was covered by snow and had repetitive features but since beauty is in the eye of the beholder, because of the presence of the poet in there it has already accomplished its task. By bringing the idea of warmth to the poet's mind in the middle of nowhere.

What held it, though, on one side was a tree

Still growing, and on one side a stake for a prop,

These latter about to fall. I thought that only

Someone who lived in turning to fresh tasks. (32-35)

While the bird flies from a tree and moves to another. The speaker is not satisfied with the movement and considered him as ridiculous. He conceives that the bird and all the belongings of nature is related to him, then to his decision of going forward or returning. He personifies nature as a person who cares about him and about his decisions. This is the real feeling of human, the sense of domination over the world with all its contents like nature and animals and this may be the cause that sensitive people like the poet keep going back to the wild to regain a sense of humility and respect that they have forgotten but long for in the city.

Could so forget his handiwork on which
He spent himself, the labor of his ax,
And leave it there far from a useful fireplace

To warm the frozen swamp as best it could

With the slow smokeless burning of decay. (36-40)

The poet in the “wood-pile” as Crowley wrote is in a “dreamlike state of meditation” (Modern American Poetry.org, 2013, para 1). The poet brings his lack of aim to the nature, hesitant all the time to what direction to move. His wondering showcase his uncertainties and homelessness (maybe spiritual). While the poet start with doubt and loss, he does not quite end up hopeful or decisive by then end. However, this wondering through nature makes him realize and be aware of his existence and those of other beings, it makes him conscious of his spiritual uncertainties.

In the poem “The Tuft of Flowers” the poet presents the image from the lives of the people. He sees a grass while it has been cut down by a neighbouring farmer. “I went to turn the grass once after one/Who mowed it in the dew before the sun”. (1-2) Suddenly, the farmer left this place, that makes the poet discomfited. He feels uncomfortable, since he has to accomplish the cut alone, he searches the farmer but cannot find him. “I looked for him behind an isle of trees; / I listened for his whetstone on the breeze”. (5-6) Then, his mode changes, he is cheerful to see the butterfly which appears to draw his attention to the bunch of flowers which has been left untouched by the farmer’s sickle. Therefore, the poet notices that he is surrounded by a fellow worker who shares with him the love for nature and its beauty. The butterfly shares the poet his admiration of nature that makes raise an inquiry by the reader about the confusion of the poet. This beauty of nature conveys a message of positiveness.

But as I said it, swift there passed me by
On noiseless wing a ‘wildered butterfly,
Seeking with memories grown dim o’er night
Some resting flower of yesterday’s delight.
And once I marked his flight go round and round,
As where some flower lay withering on the ground.(11-16)

After the leaving of the farmer, the poet notices the precision in the farmer’s work, and how he makes the grass in the same level ‘leveled scene’. Moreover, everything reflects how this farmer is diligent in undertaking his duty. Although he is alone, the poet feels the happiness of being with this beautiful scene of nature.

While he mentions the elevation of butterfly with the surrounding natural scene, he is adding a religious sense in a sacred reference. He repeats the words ‘wing’, ‘noiseless’ and ‘tremulous’ ‘a leaping tongue of bloom’. This straightforward reference is to ‘Pentecost’ in the Book of acts. Through their gathering, the followers of Jesus Christ were surprised by the resurrection of the Christ and his visit to them after being in heaven. Then they are revitalized and filled with a new sense of purpose. This story of revitalization in the past is connected with the story of butterfly and the flowers in the present. The refreshing of the mind of the followers of Jesus looks like the refreshing of the flowers with the coming of the butterfly. Then the poet also changes to be happy after being sad and conformable.

The butterfly and I had lit upon,
Nevertheless, a message from the dawn,
That made me hear the wakening birds around,
And hear his long scythe whispering to the ground,
And feel a spirit kindred to my own;
So that henceforth I worked no more alone. (30-35)

Frost keeps using his simple and informal language to connect his present moment with the scriptural reference ‘lit upon’. Rebirth is the most important sense like the poet’s appreciation of the ‘awakening birds’ and the continual mentioning of the dew. The poet uses soft onomatopoeia lovely in hearing ‘his long scythe whispering to the ground.’ In the last couplet he states: “With one whose thought I had not hoped to reach.” The poet also appreciates the farmer for his caring of the flowers which have natural beauty that fills the poet with happiness. It is noticed that the poet acknowledges all the subjects of nature. He strengthens his connection with nature and its effect upon him by saying ‘a spirit kindred to my own’ and later when they ‘held brotherly speech’.

The poet utilizes aphorism in the beginning and in the end of the poem in order to transfer a positive message to his readers. He gives them the opportunity to live with the poet his experience in connecting with natural beauty and the surrounding atmosphere, like co-worker and the butterfly and other examples.

But glad with him, I worked as with his aid,
And weary, sought at noon with him the shade;
And dreaming, as it were, held brotherly speech
With one whose thought I had not hoped to reach.
'Men work together,' I told him from the heart,
'Whether they work together or apart.' (25-30)

In the poem "Desert Places" in the first stanza, two contrary things happen in the same time, one 'snow' gives hope and happiness, the other 'night' presents the end of the day and on the other hands gives a romantic scene. Both are falling into the land. Through repetition, the poet describes the fast movement of the night 'fast' 'oh fast.' The snowy landscape adds romantic surveillance to the poet through his walking there; everything is "covered smooth in snow". This white scene levelled everything around the poet. The purity of nature is seen through the whiteness of snow which covered the floor and in the same time still shows "few weeds and stubble". Suddenly, it passed over the ground and covered it completely. Hence, it deleted all other scenes and stayed alone to be seen.

Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast
In a field I looked into going past,
And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,
But a few weeds and stubble showing last. (1-4)

As a result of the snow, the life of plant becomes absent. The snow covers all things; "woods around it have it." The poet looks at the surrounding world discovering that this snow does not serve neither humans nor animals. In line two, the word "smothered" strongly suggests how animals are trapped in their "lairs" by the covering snow. Due to the absence of the green colour, the poet feels that he is alone in the spiritless world. This loneliness becoming so strong now that there is no way to deal with it, is available in the mind of the poet. The poet feels he like those animals has become "absent-spirited" to a degree that he even cannot count in how many ways this loneliness and darkens have changed him.

The woods around it have it - it is theirs.
All animals are smothered in their lairs.
I am too absent-spirited to count;
The loneliness includes me unawares. (5-8)

The sense of loneliness perpetuates the rest of the poem as can be seen in the next stanza by being repeated several times. The poet feels that the night is the darkest before the dawn, his sense of loneliness is going to increase before it decreases during which period he knows he is unable to express any new ideas. The snow like a blanket has covered not only the natural wilderness but also all his human expressions and feelings leaving only the sense of seclusion.

And lonely as it is, that loneliness
Will be more lonely ere it will be less -
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow
With no expression, nothing to express. (9-12)

The poet contends that although the natural elements of the wilderness have made him feel lonely, they cannot frighten him "with their empty spaces" because for him in a human mind, there are many more empty spaces to which he refers to as "desert places."

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars - on stars where no human race is.

I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places. (13-16)

The poet in here first feels lost and the loneliness which he shares with the surrounding nature. As Mordecai Marcus (191, p. 128) says the desert places of the poet “are moral and spiritual wildernesses” of the poet.

Conclusion

It is concluded that the concept of wilderness is apparent in the selected poems of this paper. In “The Wood-Pile” wilderness is personified to be responsible for the poet’s decision either staying or leaving the place, it seems that it manages his life. while staying in the natural beauty scene, the poet gets his inner peace. This happens due to the existence of nature. Nature changes the feeling of people, especially the poet from being lonely and depressed to someone satisfied and happy. In “the Tuft of the Flowers” wilderness soften the poet’s spirit by finding himself similar to his ‘a spirit kindred to my own’ then it delivers him a ‘brotherly speech’. In the “Desert Places” the inner turmoil feeling turns to a peaceful one.

Works Cited

- Cronon, William. 1996. “The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature.” *Environmental History*, vol.1, no.2, pp.7-28
- Crowley, J. Donald. 1973. "Hawthorne and Frost: The Making of a Poem." In *Frost: Centennial Essays*. University Press of Mississippi. Accessed at <https://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/criticism/j-donald-crowley-wood-pile>
- Faggen, R. 2001. Introduction. In R. Faggen (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Robert Frost* (Cambridge Companions to Literature, pp. 1-6). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CCOL052163248X.001
- Frost, Robert. 1915. “Wood-pile”. *North of Boston*. Accessed at <https://www.bartleby.com/118/16.html>.
- , 1915. “A tuft of flower”. *A Boy’s Will*. Accessed at <https://www.bartleby.com/117/24.html>.
- , Accessed in June 2020. “Desert Places”. Accessed at https://www.internal.org/Robert_Frost/Desert_Places.
- Garrand, Greg. 2004. *Ecocriticism*. London: Routledge.
- Guha, Ramachandra. 1989. “Radical American Environmentalism and wilderness perserration.” *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 11, no.1, pp.71-83.
- Little, R. M. (2010). *How to Write about Robert Frost*. Infobase Publication: New York.
- Marcus, Mordecai. 1991. *Poems of Robert Frost: An Explication*. Boston, Mass. : G.K. Hall.
- Sears, John F., and Robert Frost. 1975. “William James, Henri Bergson, and the Poetics of Robert Frost.” *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 3, pp. 341–361. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/364863. Accessed 29 May 2020.