

## HUMANITY IN ROBERT FROST'S "NOTHING GOLD CAN STAY"

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### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membahas *humanity* (sisi kemanusiaan) dalam puisi Robert Frost yang berjudul "Nothing Gold Can Stay". Dengan tujuan utama untuk menggambarkan gaya bahasa, personifikasi yang berhubungan dengan *humanity* (sisi kemanusiaan) pada puisi Robert Frost berjudul "Nothing Gold Can Stay". Teori utama yang relevan, yaitu terori gaya bahasa dan personifikasi. Data penelitian ini adalah setiap baris pada puisi Robert Frost tersebut, dan metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah metode deskriptif, serta studi kepustakaan merupakan teknik pengumpulan data analisis. Ada dua pendekatan yang digunakan dalam menganalisis data, yaitu pendekatan structural dan formalis. Dalam puisi "Nothing Gold Can Stay", pembicara menggunakan gaya bahasa, personifikasi dalam menggambarkan alam dan dapat diperluas sehingga mengungkapkan hal yang berhubungan dengan *humanity* (sisi kemanusiaan). 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. Hasil penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa Hal yang paling indah dalam hidup seringkali tak berumur panjang. Dalam puisi "Nothing Gold Can Stay" terdapat contoh-contoh ungkapan figuratif, seperti *spring blooms, the Garden of Eden, dan sunrise* untuk menyampaikan kepada pembaca agar memikirkan semua hal dalam kehidupan yang begitu indah ini begitu sementara. Entah itu euforia memenangkan pertandingan sepak bola, atau kematangan pikiran dan tubuh kita, pasti semua orang mengalami sesuatu yang indah yang dapat memudar dengan sangat cepat.

*Keywords: humanity, figure of speech, personification*

### A. 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 personification.

Personification is a figure of speech in which a thing, an idea or an animal is given human attributes. The non-human objects are portrayed in such a way that we feel they have the ability to act like human beings. For example, when we say, "The sky weeps" we are giving the sky the ability to cry, which is a human quality. Thus, we can say that the sky has been personified in the given sentence.

As a literary device, personification is the projection of characteristics that normally belong only to humans onto inanimate objects, animals, deities, or forces of nature. These characteristics can include verbs of actions that only humans do or adjectives that describe a human condition. The characteristics can also be emotions, feelings, or motives given to objects incapable of thought. For example, if someone said, "the trees whispered their discontent," this would personify the trees both as able to whisper and of feeling unhappy.

According to Baldick, personification is a figure of speech by which animals, abstract ideas, or inanimate things are referred to as if they were human (1991: 166). To understand personification better, the following is the example of personification: Taken from L. M. Montgomery's "The Green Gables Letters", "I hied me away to the woods – away back into the sun-washed alleys carpeted with fallen gold and glades where the moss is green and vivid yet. The woods are getting ready to sleep – they are not yet asleep but they are disrobing and are having all sorts of little bed-time conferences and whisperings and good-nights." The lack of activity in the forest has been beautifully personified as the forest getting ready to sleep, busy in bed-time chatting and wishing good-nights, all of which are human customs.

Furthermore, Barnet states that personification is a kind of figurative language in which an inanimate object, animal or other nonhuman is given human traits (2005: 1541).

But Time did beckon to the flowers, and they  
By noon most cunningly did steal away.

-- Herbert

Herbert attributes a human gesture to Time and shrewdness to flowers. Of all figures, personification most surely gives to airy nothings a local habitation and a name.

## **B. 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 were used to support the analysis. The approaches intended include structural approach and formalist criticism. Structural approach was 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 could 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 was used to get the mastery over the structures. It concentrated 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 terms. The natural, sensible starting point is the interpretation and analysis of the works of literature themselves. To explore the intense relationship within a poem was 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 were used in the research were lines that describe metaphor. Therefore, the most suitable method of collecting the data was 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 were needed in order to support the analysis. Moreover, the data were also collected from some literary sites in the internet to support the analysis.

## **C. 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. The research focuses on the use of figure of speech to reveal the detailed meaning of the poem. The poem implicitly talks about humanity. The analysis deals with how humanity is personified in the poem.

### **Personification Dealing with Humanity in Robert Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay"**

Personification is the attribution of a personal nature or human characteristics to something nonhuman, or the representation of an abstract quality in human form. Consider the following lines:

*Nature's first green is gold,* (1)  
*Her hardest hue to hold.* (2)

The idea of nature having an easy or hard time holding onto something is an example of personification. It is not nature that is personified but it is made into a female figure. The speaker uses "gold" to replace beauty that human experience. Basically, "gold" is a very precious and valuable metal. "Gold" symbolizes materialism or wealth. Moreover, "green" represents temporal cycle of human, that is, the youth. When someone is still young, her/his appearance emits spectacular characteristic of a youthful figure. Her/his cunning and beautiful performance fascinated the surroundings.

Furthermore, the second line "*Her hardest hue to hold*" may mean that green is her hardest hue to hold as it is the most valuable just like gold and it will be taken away from her. Gold, precious and permanent as a metal, is here not considered as a metal but as a colour. Its hue is described as hard to hold, as evanescent as wealth itself. The hue of gold with all its value associations of richness and colour cannot be preserved. Similarly to woman, a young woman eradicates the beauty. The beauty of a young woman, however, does not last long. Her beauty fades away when her time goes by because she never stays young forever. From the phrase "*Her hardest hue*", 'her' personifies temporal cycle of humanity that emits the beauty of woman. In "*Her hardest hue*", the speaker makes nature become feminine, perhaps playing on the connotations inherent with this choice, from the cliché of mother earth to the general idea that nature is fertile, mother-like, and feminine force. The speaker speaks of the nature of flora which includes humanity. The "hardest hue to hold" is implied to be the one hue, or quality, desired the most to be kept.

Additionally, human youth, by implication, is followed by maturity, old age, and ultimately death. The use of the word "gold" in this poem shows intelligent and careful choice. The word "gold" represents colour and its namesake, the metallic ore that is valued both for its aesthetic beauty and financially for its rarity. By using this word to explain the brief state of beauty through which the things of the world pass, the speaker prefers using personified word of "her" to describe the strong mood dealing with the great value of life, that is, golden moment of age.

The expression using personification dealing with humanity continues to the next lines of the poem, as the following:

*Her early leaf's a flower;* (3)

*But only so an hour.* (4)

Once more the speaker of the poem mentions "her" in the third line "her early leaf's..." it proves that he is talking about something just born or created. He personifies "leaf" with woman by preceding possessive adjective "her". The new born human or God's first creation has a very amazing quality that beautifies the nature. The colour of the green leaf fascinates the atmosphere of the earth. Similarly to the human's prosperity, when human is in the condition of being prosperous, he is able to fulfil everything he really wants. The joys of wealth are brief. True happiness finds appreciation in natural world that is implied in the word "leaf" naturally having green colour. Comparing to the human cycle of life, perhaps it represents the first leaves or the first sign of a young person entering adulthood.

Thus far in the poem, the speaker has made an argument that the nature in which human lives and, by extension, the nature of human life begins at a point of great optimism in which all potentials represented by the flower's bud have been met in the open blossom. Similarly to the adulthood, human is in the state of being mature, and has right to decide the life he lives wisely. The prosperity, beauty and wealth he enjoys make him forget that it does not last long. The speaker then says, "but only so an hour." which makes evident that the beauty and innocence will only stay for an hour and then fade away. Since the gold of the leaves is its hardest hue to hold, it disappears quickly. The speaker says that it stays for 'only so an hour'. Here the hour does not denote exactly an hour; it stands for a very small amount of time. The gold stays for a small amount of time, and then quickly disappears from the leaves so that they can turn green. The beauty, prosperity and wealth human has does not stay the same, they will change into something common and ordinary that human experiences in the world.

Consider the following line:

*So Eden sank to grief,* (6)

The word "Eden" refers to the garden in heaven, that is, the Garden of Eden in which Adam and Eve lived before they were sent to the earth. "Eden sank to grief," the Garden of Eden has always been symbolic of Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit, so the speaker probably wants to say that nature's first flower, i.e. Adam and Eve were innocent and pure but after a certain time, they too were tempted by the fruit and they had to come down to earth and, therefore Eden was angst. "...dawn goes

down to day" just like dawn has to finally depart and the day has to end even gold has to take its leave.

The personification that is used in the line portrays that the garden feels grief. Only human that can feel grief. Furthermore, the speaker would like to describe that the use of "Eden" represents the pure world before human was created to name everything, to tend to the animals and the earth, and represents all beginnings, before there was knowledge of decay. The speaker illustrates the universality of his idea that all things in nature, including the lives of people, reach an apex before they sink "to grief".

In the sixth line, moreover, it shows biblical reference - that to the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve first lived. When the Forbidden Fruit was eaten, all the charm and the beauty of the Garden of Eden had reduced. It transformed from something special to something ordinary. The speaker makes a comparison to the Garden of Eden. The mere act of eating the forbidden fruit transformed the promise of a beautiful life in the Garden of Eden into the grief that we face today because we lost the opportunity to lead such a life. Similarly, the golden leaf 'sinks' into the normal green leaf.

The last expression of personification lies on the last line of the poem,  
*Nothing gold can stay.* (8)

The speaker still uses the word "gold". That refers to something beautiful, special, wonderful, dazzling, even amazing in life. This "gold," however, cannot stand still. By using this word to explain the brief state of beauty through which the things of the world pass, the speaker wants to describe the value of the plant's first shoot, of Eden, and of the sunrise in "So dawn goes down to day." The golden beauty is not rare, but it is fleeting. The speaker's point is about the transitory nature of beauty: nothing gold can survive.

The relationship between beauty and its own demise or death has been consistent throughout the world's history. Some societies find sorrow in the fact that beauty fades, as can be seen in the poem. In other societies, particularly based on Eastern philosophies, there is less emphasis on conceptual permanence that never really existed. Therefore, there is less disappointment over the fact that permanence cannot be reached and more appreciation for the role of fleeting beauty in the larger scope of life.

#### D. Conclusion

"Nothing Gold Can Stay" written by Robert Frost is very short poem with simple diction and only consists of eight lines. Explicitly, it portrayed particular moments in human's temporal cycle of life. In each case the poem depicted the moment when the promise of perfection declines into something lesser. The research focused on analyzing sense devices of poetic elements, that is, personification. The figure of speech was used to reveal the humanity in the poem. Besides, the theory of setting supported the analysis.

Moreover, there were two approaches used in the research, that is, structural approach that concentrated on each constituent of the construction, and formalist approach that regarded literature as a unique form of human's knowledge that needs to be examined in its own terms. By understanding the meaning of the words in the poem, the truth could be discovered.

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

The **theme of "Nothing Gold Can Stay"** which lied beneath the poem makes a wonderful comparison between the beauty of nature and the happiness of human achievements. It simply stated that nothing was permanent. It was a truth of life which the poet denoted to us in wonderful terms. The good phases and good things of life were denoted with the use of the 'golden leaf' and the ordinary things are denoted with the use of 'green leaf'. In life, we get a number of great things which gave us immense pleasure, but all of them must one day 'subside' to become ordinary. "Nothing Gold Can Stay" by Robert Frost told us that these 'golden' moments were truly special and helps us to realize that we had to appreciate them for as long as they were there.

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