

AN ANALYSIS OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGES ON ROBERT FROST POEMS *THE ROAD NOT TAKEN* AND *STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING*: A REFLECTION OF AMERICAN CULTURE IN GENERAL

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ABSTRACT

Literature is a product of thoughts, ideas, concepts, and also imagination which are the reflection of the life around the author. Poetry as one type of literary work is arguably unique and different compared to other types of literary works. This is because of the figurative language that surrounds a poem that creates the meaning implied in the literal meaning. This research is intended to find out what kind of figurative language is used in Robert Frost's selected poems based on Perrine's theory, so that we can find out the implicit meaning of the two poems. The whole process is carried out using the desk observation research method, where primary data and secondary data are collected to understand the entire research object. The results of the analysis process show that Robert Frost uses metaphor, symbol, personification, and simile in the poem "The Road Not Taken". Whereas in the poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", Frost uses metaphor, symbol, personification, and hyperbole. From these results, the implied meaning of the two poems is revealed. Where "The Road Not Taken" describes Individualism and its influence on the "decision making" process, while "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" illustrates the level of self-consistency. Both of these poems describe the culture of American society in general.

Key Words: Figurative Language, American Culture

INTRODUCTION

Poetry is one of the more expressive literary works in the use of figurative language and connotative meaning compared to other literary works such as prose and drama. Frost stated that "Poetry provide the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another" [1]. According to Riffaterre, poetry is indirect expression, meaning that it describes something by using connotative meaning [2]. Indirect expression is caused by displacing of meaning, distorting of meaning, and creating of meaning. Therefore, poetry is multi-interpreted which makes each individual have their own interpretation. That is why understanding figurative language is important. Tjahjono stated that "figurative language is one of the important elements to write poetry" [3]. Because in writing a poem, the poet must use the right word that can describe something clearly in the reader's mind which aims to strengthen the imagination in order to achieve the desired effect.

American poetry is unique to the place it is written. It has themes of regionalism, racism, manifest destiny, and it is written by individuals in their own voice created by the place they live. It does not imitate the British, nor should it. American poetry has its own voice. It's often about independence, perspective, and abstraction. A poem by Emily Dickinson might stress an individual's point of view and also the strength from being on one's own. A poem by Carl Sandburg might celebrate the location but still voice the poem by one point of view.

Pinsky states that "The poet laureate reflects on what makes the American people 'a people' and what our poetry can teach us about the fragile, heroic enterprise of remembering [4]." In general, American poetry expresses American culture, about the past, the present and the future. Pinsky also states that "A people is defined and unified not by blood but by shared memory." American poetry is a national shared memory showing the evolution process of American memory about how it became a great nation as it is today.

Related to the explanation above, to understand the meaning of a poem properly, it is necessary to understand the figurative language used in the poem. Misinterpretation of figurative language will make a wrong understanding of the meaning of an analyzed poem. This led to an error in interpreting the cultural message of the poem. Therefore, on this research the researcher is interested in analyzing the figurative language used in Robert Frost's poems followed by an analysis of the meaning of the poems.

Robert Frost is one of the most popular and respected poets in America. His poetry reflects his broad view and realistic approach. Known as a philosophical American poet, he is considered as one of

the most prominent poets of the period as he typifies in his poems a picture of death, questions about life, social and political problems, and man's purpose in the world. Frost is a nationalist, he believes that an individual's natural relationship to society is extended to his family, close friends, home city or local community, and finally the country. Frost's poems create a memorable and pulchritudinous impression by the extraordinary presence of nature.

Frost saw nature as an alien force capable of destroying humans, however he also saw man's struggle with nature as a heroic battle. Therefore, the researcher took two poems by Robert Frost as research objects, namely *The Road Not Taken* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* which reveal a definite relationship between the narrator and his natural surroundings, as with the research to be conducted entitled *An Analysis of Figurative Languages on Robert Frost Poems The Road Not Taken and Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening: A Reflection of American Culture In General*.

METHOD

Research design is a plan for collecting and analyzing the data in order to answer research question. Ary, Jacobs, Irvine, & Walker stated that research design is the researcher's plan of how to process to gain an understanding of some group or some phenomenon in its context [5]. Research design articulates what data is required, what methods are going to be used to collect and analyze the data and how all of this is going to answer the research question.

This research is a research that uses a qualitative descriptive approach with formal objects namely *The Road Not Taken* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* by Robert Frost. Lambert stated that the goal of qualitative descriptive research is a comprehensive summarization, in every term, of specific events experienced by individuals or group of people [6]. Therefore, the data will be presented in form of words instead of numeric analysis.

Technique of Data Collection

In this research, the process of collecting data is done by library research and desk observation technique because the data are gained from written materials which are relevant to the subject of the research. The data of this study are taken from Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*. In the procedure of data collection, the researcher focuses on categorize the data collection into primary data and secondary data.

Primary Data

The primary data refers to the main data that the researcher uses for conducting the analysis which are two poems by Robert Frost, namely *The Road Not Taken* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*.

Secondary Data

The secondary data refers to the data that are taken from other sources, such as literary books, criticism, journals, and articles related to the subject of the research which were collected from library and access of internet. These data are important to support the primary data.

Technique of Data Analysis

According to Bogdan & Biklen, data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that the researcher accumulate to increase the researcher understanding [7]. In this research, the researcher conducts three steps in analyzing the data.

Data Reduction

In data reduction, the researcher collected the data with three steps as follow:

- a. Reading the poems many times
- b. Identifying the figurative languages
- c. Specify the data follow the information

After collected the data, the researcher needs to reduce the data. The reducing process involve summarizing the data, choosing and focusing on important data relevant to the topic analysis.

Data Display

After completing the reducing data, the researcher needs to display through data display. The data required to organize in good form and structure.

Data Verification and Conclusion

The verification should be focused on the topic of analysis. It should be detailed and straight forward to the topic of discussion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Here are the poems:

The Road Not Taken;

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both*

*And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;
Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,
And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I marked the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way
I doubted if I should ever come back.
I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening:

*Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village, though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.
My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.
He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.
The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*

Figurative Languages Found in the Poems

The Road Not Taken:

1. Metaphor

“*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood*” (line 1), the narrator uses the words “two roads” to describe two crucial choices in life.

2. Symbol

“Two roads diverged in a yellow wood” (line 1), “yellow wood” indicates that the condition in which the narrator must make his choice is in the autumn which symbolizes the preservation of life and its basic needs. *“To where it bent in the undergrowth”* (line 5), the mysterious nature of “undergrowth” that always covers the path symbolizes the risk in life choices that will be chosen by the narrator. *“And both that morning equally lay”* (line 11), “morning” symbolizes a new beginning in starting something. It signifies that the narrator is embarking on a new journey of life.

3. Personification

“Because it was grassy and wanted wear” (line 8), roads are inanimate objects that don’t have the will. Therefore, the use of “wanted wear” is as personification, where the narrator expresses the roads with human characteristic, which is to have a sense of wanting.

4. Simile

“Then took the other, as just as fair” (line 6), it shows how the narrator has linked the roads less taken to the easy way through life.

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening:

1. Metaphor

“He gives his harness bells a shake” (line 9), “bells a shake” is a metaphor of a warning. *“And miles to go before I sleep”* (line 15), “miles to go” in the third and fourth lines of the fourth stanza is a metaphor of the journey of life that still needs to be traveled. *“And miles to go before I sleep”* (line 15), “sleep” in the third and fourth lines of the fourth stanza is a metaphor for death or the end of one's life journey.

2. Symbol

“Whose woods these are I think I know” (line 1), “woods” symbolizes the glamor of the world that often makes a person trapped in it and forget the purpose of his life. *“His house is in the village, though”* (line 2), “the village” symbolizes human civilization. *“My little horse must think it queer”* (line 5), “my little horse” symbolizes the human subconscious which often reflects the contents of the mind in the form of questions. *“To stop without a farmhouse near”* (line 6), “a farmhouse” symbolizes a world that is familiar to the narrator in which there is civilization.

3. Personification

“My little horse must think it queer” (line 5), a horse is an animal. Therefore, it is impossible for a horse to be able to think. The narrator gave human characteristics to the horse to reflect the contents of his mind. *“To ask if there is some mistake”* (line 10), again, the narrator gave “to ask” as human characteristics to the horse to reflect the contents of his mind.

4. Hyperbole

"To watch his woods fill up with snow" (line 4), it is impossible for a woods to be completely fill up by snow. Therefore, "fill up with snow" is a hyperbole which aims to emphasize the high of the temptations of the world's glamor.

Meaning Found in the Poems

The Road Not Taken:

Individualism

The poem "The Road Not Taken" begins with the description of someone who is being confronted with two roads where he has to choose one of these roads. The narrator describes the location of the action taking place in the woods, making the character in the poem in the condition of a lone journey. The traveler must decide for himself which path he should choose with all the risks in it. In addition, the use of lexical choice where the pronoun "I" as dominant (in stanza 1, 3, and 4) *I could not travel both, I stood, I could* (in stanza 1), *I kept the first, I doubted, I should ever come back* (stanza 3) *I shall be telling this with a sigh, and I, I took the one less travelled* (stanza 4) makes it clear that this poem illustrates the nature of individualism or self-reliance. The occurrence of this pronoun designates the person who is speaking (I) to be excessively personal. Someone has to make a decision and own it. This is in line with the characteristics of American society that is individualistic and holds the life concept of American dream as the value of American culture.

In an individualistic society, the needs and wants of an individual take precedence over the needs of the group. Positives to individualism include the freedom for a person to choose his or her own destiny. From early on, this has been valued in American life.

Decision Making

In the first stanza, *'Two roads diverged ...'* (line 1). The paths in the poem are combined where the speaker stands but leads in two different directions signifying two different paths in life. In the second line, *'...sorry I could not travel both'* (line 2) expresses curiosity to explore several possibilities in life. It also forms a sense of remorse for not being able to know what can lie ahead in an unselected path and the limitations of the speaker for a lifetime. *'And be one traveler ...'* (line 3), the speaker realizes that he needs to make choices and choose one path over another. The difficulty of the speaker in predicting the outcome of the decision he must make is shown when he, *'...stood - And looked down one as far as I could'* (lines 3-4). The last line of the first stanza, *'To where it bent in the undergrowth'* (line 5), shows that both paths lead in the unknown, as do many choices in life.

In the second stanza, the speaker continues to examine both paths and ponders which path to take. In the first line the speaker uses the phrase, '*...just as fair*' (line 6), to state that the decision needs to be carefully considered because once the decision is made, there is no turning back. Once again, the speaker points to uncertainty in the future by using the word '*...perhaps...*' (line 7). The speaker then explains the path as '*...grassy and wanted wear*' (line 8). From this line, the reader gets the impression that the speaker takes a path rarely traveled by to escape from the influence and control of society. Although the paths have a slight difference in appearance because they are "*worn ...about the same*" (line 10), both lead to an indeterminate future.

The third stanza makes it clear that every time a choice arises, there is a new journey to pass. This is indicated in the first and the second lines from the third stanza when the speaker says, "*And both that morning equally lay - In leaves no step had trodden black*" (lines 11-12). Then the speaker continues by saying "*Oh, I kept the first for another day!*" (line 13), showing his doubts and regrets that he can not take both, but can only choose one. The speaker acknowledged that his decision at this moment would be permanent by saying, "*...way leads on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back*" (lines 14-15). He basically said that what path or choice he chose now would affect his life and could not be undone.

At the end of the poem, the speaker finally makes a decision. In the last stanza, the speaker uses the word "*...sigh...*" (line 16) which can be interpreted as a feeling of relief, regret, or frustration for not being able to try the not taken path. The speaker then creates a sense of nostalgia, "*I shall be telling this... - Somewhere ages and ages hence*" (lines 16-17), this indicates that the speaker has little remorse and is satisfied with the choice he made. The speaker realizes that the chosen path can make a difference in who you are and the way you live. He made this clear in the last three lines, "*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I - I took the one less traveled by, - And that has made all the difference*" (lines 18-20). In the end the speaker made the decision to take the path less traveled on the basis of his personal beliefs and considerations, without the influence of society in harmony with the attitude of individualism that promotes freedom of choice.

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening:

Desire and Responsibility

The desire of the speaker to stop and experience that natural beauty is a situational picture of a larger theme, which is a man who is being swallowed up by his own desires. Towards the end of the stanzas, the forest becomes more hypnotizing ("*easy wind and downy flakes ... lovely, dark, and deep*"),

strengthening the power of the temptations of human personal desires that make simple sacrifices into noble and heroic actions.

In the first and second lines of the first stanza, *"Whose woods these are I think I know. - His house is in the village..."* (lines 1-2), Frost illustrates that the character seems to care about who owns the woods and the character seems convinced that the owner can not see it when he stops in the woods. In the third line, *"He will not see me stopping here"* (line 3), he illustrates that the beautiful view of the forest really fascinated him. Which then motivated him to suddenly stop from his journey when he saw the woods. In the last line of the first stanza, he illustrates that the woods are currently filled with snow *"To watch his woods fill up with snow."* (line 4).

In the first and second lines of the second stanza, *"My little horse must think it queer - To stop without a farmhouse near"* (lines 5-6), he described that the horse could not possibly understand the man's unreasonable reasons to stop. The horse used to stop to eat and rest at the farmhouse, but not here, in the middle of the woods. Here, the horse is pictured thinking but the reader knows that the mind of the horse is the speaker's subconscious mind. In line three and four of the second stanza *"Between the woods and frozen lakes - The darkest evening of the year."* (lines 7-8), he explained the beautiful view of the woods with its silence and quietness really fascinated him.

In the third stanza, *"He gives his harness bells a shake - To ask if there is some mistake. - The only other sound's the sweep - Of easy wind and downy flake."* (lines 9-12), he described that he seemed to enjoy the silence of the night with *"easy wind"* and *"downy flake"*, he also seemed to have some doubts about what he should do in the future.

In the last stanza, *"The woods are lovely, dark and deep, - But I have promises to keep, - And miles to go before I sleep, - And miles to go before I sleep."* (lines 13-16), he described that he had duties and responsibilities to do. When he truly enjoyed the beauty and silence of the woods, he felt happiness as if he had no problems in his life and thought that he would enjoy the beauty of the woods continuously for a long time (in line 13) because it was so tempting. But he suddenly realized that he had duties and responsibilities that had to be carried out in his life before he died (in lines 3 and 4) as he was talking about the life responsibilities. Therefore, the speaker willing to continue his journey is something that is very difficult because his heart has been bound to the woods. This situation, finally, brought him into a difficult dilemma. On one hand, he must continue his journey to fulfill his duties and responsibilities. In addition, he found it difficult to leave the woods, because in the woods he found happiness and comfort that made him free from the community.

Self-Consistency

Self-consistency is very much influenced by the culture of the speaker. As the poem is based on what Robert Frost felt in American society, it can be said that this is a picture of American society in general. Individualistic American culture has a big influence on how the self-consistency of the speakers in this poem is formed which is part of their psychology. The speaker analyzes and decides the choice he makes based on what he thinks is good, because based on the description of this poem, it can be concluded that the speaker is in a period of adult psychology. It can be said that someone who has reached a fully functioning psychological condition and has a healthy personality will seek behavioral guidance primarily from his inner beliefs and values rather than from external sources (e.g., norms, expectations). Thus, self-view of a mature person is very consistent across social contexts.

Self-consistency is very important especially for those who are undergoing something that will determine their future. Having confidence in what he is doing can lead to success, namely achieving the desired goals. No wonder the United States is able to become the most advanced country in the world in only a short time because each society upholds individualism which leads to self-reliance and self-consistency, free from external views. Imagine if everyone could implement the concept of life of individualism where each individual competes to achieve the life goals they want and does not depend on the thoughts or abilities of others. Then an independent community group will be formed where each member can feel the equal freedom to succeed.

Comparison with Indonesian collectivism

Indonesian society which is collectivism lives where each individual is bound by a few groups, but the attachment to the group is stronger and longer. Relations between individuals in collectivism are total. It is not recommended for individuals to stand out on their own. Individual success is a group success, individual failure is a group failure. So, it is often heard the slogan "*Putra / Putri Bangsa*" in the mass media, print media, and social media, every time someone who comes from Indonesia achieve success. Although the success achieved is a personal achievement, without having to do with the state. However, the collectivism nature of Indonesian society makes group identity the main thing.

The collective community is very concerned with the events experienced by the group. A person can be seriously offended just because they are not invited by other members in the group to attend their wedding. In contrast to individualistic societies such as American society which only feel obliged to help their immediate family, in a collectivist society people feel obliged to help extended families, distant relatives, even their village friends who are still unemployed. Which often results in the practice of abuse of power, where a person is given a job that is not his expertise, but because of the kinship within a group and this is considered normal. Such practices also often develop into corrupt practices.

With the community being collectivist and holding the concept of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), making corruption is considered normal and the perpetrators also do not feel significant remorse. This is because the practice of corruption is carried out together in congregation so that personal feelings of regret disappear cause the blame was shared.

However, as has been mentioned above that collective society is family-like where helping one another becomes an obligation. This is a great advantage possessed by collectivist societies that are not shared by individualist societies. Where a sense of family is one that is needed by people in the world today. Because the 20th century was a transition from the previous generation and was marked by the start of the millennial era. The era where the space for communication between people moves from conventional interactions to social media. The expansion of social media networks makes more and more people grow into individualist self-interest figures which have a negative impact on their psychological behavior.

The culture from which a person grows will also influence the way he makes decisions. There are fundamental differences in "Decision Making" between individualist (American) societies and collectivist (Indonesian) societies. Just as individualists use inner and self-values in making decisions, collectives use deliberations with many considerations that must be considered (norms, group expectations, and customs) to make a decision.

Contrary to the concept of life of individualism in American society that demands them to live and die as somebody, because that is the American dream that every American has always dreamed of, the freedom to be what they want to be. While collectivist like Indonesian only live as the people in the group live without the desire to choose their own path. Thus, causing consistency in a choice that has been made may change at any time due to external influences (e.g., family, norms, customs).

CONCLUSION

It was concluded that the two selected poems by Robert Frost used metaphor, symbol, personification, simile, and hyperbole and the meaning found in the two Robert Frost's selected poems was a reflection of America's culture in general, namely individualism and self-consistency. Where "*The Road Not Taken*" tells how the American community on "decision making" and "*Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*" tells how's the consistency of Americans with the choices they made.

Lastly, from the analysis of the meaning of Robert Frost's selected poems, the researcher concludes that there are large differences in the way they make choices (decision making) and also the level of self-consistency between Indonesian society and American society due to the basic differences in the way of life (Collectivism and Individualism).

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