The Nature of Poetry:
Exploring the Metaphorical Relationship Between Man and Nature

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Purpose of Thesis

This discussion about the nature of poetry first includes an essay which explains metaphorical relationships and nature poetry. The purpose of the essay is to show how metaphorical relationships between Man and Nature are created through our own experiences of perspective, emotion, and truth. Nature poetry utilizes the metaphor in order to illustrate these relationships. Following the essay are three poems from my personal collection; the purpose of including these is to provide my readers with contemporary examples. Accompanied by appropriate explications, these poems are intended to support the statements in my essay. The second part of this thesis presents to my readers seven original poems, which are also from my personal collection. These are included simply for enjoyment and to serve as further examples which allow the reader to interpret them on a personal basis.

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I:
The Nature of Poetry
The Nature of Poetry:

Exploring the Metaphorical Relationship Between Man and Nature

The reflective relationship between Man and Nature results in a metaphorical representation found within all genres of literature. This essay will focus upon one particular genre: nature poetry, and attempt an explication of metaphor as "an implied ANALOGY imaginatively identifying one object with another and ascribing to the first object one or more of the qualities of the second or investing the first with emotional or imaginative qualities associated with the second" (Harmon 298).

What scholars call nature poetry "at its best 'is not merely description of landscape in metrical form, but the expression of one or another of many vital relationships between external nature and the deep heart of Man'" (Keith 4); these relationships are illustrated by metaphor. Following are descriptions of both metaphor and nature poetry so that an understanding of the poetic process can be reached. I will then explicate three poems from my personal collection.

PART I: Metaphorical Relationships

A metaphor, in simpler terms than the statement above, involves the transfer of a characteristic from one object to another on the basis of a perceived similarity. There are three basic personal experiences which display similarity between Man and Nature: perspective, emotional response, and determination of truth.
I will first discuss Man and how the three experiences are related to him. Perspective is associated with seeing things; it is defined as to what depth we perceive things and how we perceive those things as related to other things. For example, all people have at least one common experience; everyone who is born into this world experiences life. However, everyone is different; this means that we all see life from differing perspectives. What one person thinks is a positive experience may be thought of by another person as a negative experience.

Emotional response results from that perceiving. We perceive all the things we experience; experiences give us feelings (i.e. sadness, happiness, anger). All people ride through life on a cycle of emotions; what we experience from day-to-day is responsible for the change and continuity of our cycles of emotions. The speed and motion of the cycle vary from person to person, but we all do in fact experience changing emotions with the changing of circumstances.

Perspective and emotion help us to determine truth on a personal level. For example, a lover of classical music may listen to a sample of rock’n’roll music and perceive it as being confusing to the senses. Such a perception would probably make him feel uncomfortable and uneasy; the truth that he could determine would be that hard rock is not appealing to him though it is to other people, for our tastes are not always the same. It is difficult to determine the truth of something for ourselves until we actually experience it in some way; experience here is a combination of
one's perspective and emotional response. "Informing eighteenth- and nineteenth-century doubts over self-embodiment was the fundamental belief that the self is divided into the living subject and the dead object of perception, the 'true' and the 'false'" (Rzepka 10). People consist basically of a true side and a false side; experience in life helps each one of us to determine the difference between the two.

Nature is directly related to Man. According to Lacey, "Earth and man are animated by the same forces" (5-6). This is where the idea of metaphor fits in; things that share related qualities can be compared. As a result, Nature can be considered as a teacher for Man. Wordsworth says that we need to stop analyzing the mind of the human. "Give up attending to science and art: come forth into the open air and let Nature be your teacher" (Lacey 4). This is precisely how I wish to demonstrate Nature in my essay--as closely knitted with Man and functioning as a teacher for him and his concerns.

Just as life is viewed from differing perspectives, so is Nature. One person may think of rain as dull while another person may think of rain as comforting; this may, of course, change in a person from time to time. As mentioned earlier, people ride through life on a cycle of emotions; a similar thing happens in Nature. Nature herself experiences a cycle of weather. Just as everyday experiences change our cycles of emotions, environmental changes produce a cycle of weather in which weather patterns evolve and consequently affect Man. For instance, it is suggested that
"Nature through her beautiful forms can restore the spirit of man" (Lacey 3); this may contain the possible implication that through her unpleasant and unattractive forms, Nature dissatisfies and disorients Man. Finally, once again, we arrive at the matter of truth.

"But it follows that truth is most likely to be found with those who live closest to nature" (Lacey 74). Analogies (a broad type of metaphor) are said to help people understand difficult concepts by relating them to familiar ones. Nature allows this similar experience so that Man can exist within his metaphoric context; this results in truth and understanding, a separation from the false. Just as experience in life reflects different perspectives, emotions, and truth in differing situations, so does Nature's weather pattern affect our perspectives, emotions, and truths.

PART II: Nature Poetry

Poetry channels through these relationships between Nature and Man, and demonstrates this by its communication. The specific type of poetry is called, most typically, nature poetry, although, through my research, I have discovered many views on poetry and how various poets most often have expressed them.

Wordsworth and Coleridge seemed to agree that the poetry-making process stems from within--from the inner feelings of the author. Wordsworth says that poetry is "the spontaneous overflow
of powerful feelings...and specified that the essential materials of a poem were not external people and events, but the inner feelings of the author, or at any rate, external objects only after these have been transformed or irradiated by the author’s feelings" (Abrams 1298). Poetry is written spontaneously as a result of deep, meditated feelings. In his poem, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," he compares his peace to the beautiful peace of Nature. He uses words such as "wandered," "fluttering," "dancing," "twinkle," "sprightly," "sparkling," "jocund," and "pleasure," all of which are pleasant words that convey a feeling of happiness. Just as the clouds in pleasant weather float in the skies and observe the beauty below them, so did the author lie upon his couch "in vacant or in pensive mood" concentrating on only the beautiful and peaceful things in his life, while enjoying his solitude. It is certain that the essential elements of his poetry come from inner feelings.

Likewise, Coleridge "conceived a great work of literature to be a self-originating and self-organizing process that begins with a seedlike idea in the poet’s imagination, grows by assimilating both the poet’s feelings and the diverse materials of sense-experience, and evolves into an organic whole in which the parts are integrally related to each other and to the whole" (Abrams 1298). Coleridge felt that a great work of literature combined the poet’s feelings with his sense-experience; these two things working together result in a whole. The parts of the created whole are related to one another as well as to the whole. "The Rime of the
Ancient Mariner," one of his more famous works, combines his feelings about mystery and demonism with his experience of how he senses them both; the poem results in a whole that consists of seven parts all fitting together to form a cycle of the entire situation.

According to Harmon, one way in which poets use Nature in poetry is "as a symbol of the spirit" (324). One particularly fine example of such usage is found in a poem by William Blake called "The Garden of Love":

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.
And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And "Thou shalt not" writ over the door;
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love,
That so many sweet flowers bore,
And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tomb-stones where flowers should be;
And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars my joys & desires. (1-12)

Generally speaking, this poem is about a particular individual who has returned to a place to which he had not been for some period of time. The speaker had highly admired the garden; it was beautiful and a place "That so many sweet flowers bore..." However, upon returning, the speaker discovered that a Chapel had been built...
there and that "it (the garden) was filled with graves,/And tombstones where flowers should be...." Many people do not truly understand the meaning of change until they experience it. We do not capture the reality of change until something we thought would always be the same experiences some sort of transition. Nature, here, symbolizes the spirit because it represents change in itself as well as in the spirit of the author as he realizes the differences within the garden. From a metaphorical viewpoint, the spirit of the garden has been diminished as well as that of the person speaking because the setting of the garden is no longer impeccable.

Poets also use their writing as "an imitation of human life - in a frequent figure, 'a mirror held up to nature'" (Abrams 1298). Two poems by Robert Frost are excellent examples. In "After Apple-Picking," the apple-picking and what happens as a result of it are metaphors of a life experience. Apple-picking represents that experience in general terms. The conclusion of the apple-picking season--Fall--and the beginning of Winter symbolize the fact that nothing lasts forever. Yet the author's dreaming about apple-picking expresses its profound effect on him; the most significant things in our lives are the things we dream about, "dream" meaning those things of Nature we internalize. The poem ends with mention of bruised and spiked apples. No matter how carefully the author did the apple-picking, it could not be perfect; regardless of how hard we try, nothing in life is perfect.

The second poem by Frost is "The Road Not Taken." Straight-
forwardly, this poem is about a man who is in the woods when he discovers a fork in the road. Each road looked the same as the other; it was up to him to choose the one upon which to travel. Each road lead to a different destination, only one of which the speaker would know because only one road could be taken. He made his choice and in the end was quite content with it. This poem represents making decisions in life. There are several choices and decisions we can make about all kinds of things in life; we can do what everyone else does or we can do what we truly feel is the right thing to do. The decision made by the speaker was not by consensus. Even so, he still felt sufficiently confident with his choice because of his poetic perspective. These two poems by Robert Frost are certainly imitations of life and mirrors of Nature which establish the metaphoric reality.

PART III: Explication of Three Original Works

Following are three examples from my own work along with appropriate explications which I hope will clarify the struggle with metaphor.
The Storm

Blackened clouds of sadness spurt their sheeted wetness down her weather-beaten face as she walks in thought, deepening thought, splashing through the i p l ng puddles of her mind. She is drenched from head to toe, shaken by the thunder, scorched by the lightning and blown crazy by the wind of the storm, her storm, struggling to breathe, searching for shelter, but only falling victim to the rushing rapids of her contemplation.

This poem was written in 1990 as a result of a rather distressful emotional situation. The inner pain that I was experiencing at the time was something which I perceived as being very sad. The "blackened clouds of wetness" symbolize crying, thunder and lightning are painful feelings, and "rushing rapids" represent inner turmoil. The poem itself is a symbol of a sunken spirit because it imitates the human feelings and emotions by means of a violent storm. I feel that such a metaphor between feelings and storms helps to clarify how people actually feel inside, for the intensity of sadness can often seem to feel like the storm in the poem. I know how I felt and now think that I can understand and be aware of how other people might feel when affected by sadness. "The Storm" is scheduled to appear in the Fall 1993
publication of the Mustang Press Anthology.

Poem #2.

You remind me of a star in the sky.

When I first saw you,
I was blinded by the
indescribable light that sparkled in
your eyes. I wanted to
see what it was, so
I stared as deeply as
I could, as often as
time and space would allow.

I gazed upon you with
admiration, trying to find shape
and meaning behind your sight-stealing
rays. I knew that you
were the protector of another
world closer to you than
mine was and I had
no intention of taking your
light from her. But when
you began shining your light
on me, I couldn’t turn
my eyes the other way.
You made me want to
reach out and touch you
and feel the heat of
your glow, though every time
I extended my hand (myself),
you were just too far
away or I was just
too much of a coward
to believe that I could
grasp something so high above.

Then one evening, as we
stood face-to-face surrounded
by a changing wind, I
had decided to let you
remain a mystery. But before
I could run for shelter,
you shot powerfully across all
of the miles of my
darkness within a split second
and the heavens above us
opened and filled with brightness.
The way that you fell before me caused me to fall, too, making wishes in my head. And ever since that night, I've looked up to you every single day.

You are now and forever the center of my universe. Though Time has put eternal, physical distance between us, you will always be close enough to touch my heart, and I will hold you forever in the arms of my soul.

I wrote this piece in 1991 after having had some time to sit and look back upon a very significant relationship with a man in my life. Hopelessly in love, I could think of him as nothing but majestic; this is why I chose to compare him to a star when writing this particular poem. "Sight-stealing rays," "indescribable light that sparkled," "the heat of your glow," and "so high above" are all intended to describe the beauty of a star; metaphorically, they are to represent the beauty of the man who is the subject of the poem. My emotions are positive ones; I feel good, happy, and thankful that he is part of my life. "I stared as deeply as I could," "I gazed upon you," "I've looked up to you every single day," and "the center of my universe" convey warmth and intensity of admiration. And, as an admirer of space is too far away to touch any part of it from where he is standing, there are certain differences and separation factors which prevent me from "touching" him and communicating with him as I wish I could. Where the matter of truth is concerned, I feel that the word choice in this poem is
a very accurate description of my feelings toward him; I believe that I have learned more about the power of my own feelings through its construction. The poem is a symbol of the spirit of love and is an imitation of a real person’s effect on me, both of which are illustrated by the star’s existence and effects. Another way in which I made use of the poetic license (that readers would not know unless told) was by relating the five letters in the man’s name to the five points of a star; I attempted to create a metaphor for these two things by putting five* words in each line of the poem.

*The reason for the inclusion of the sixth word in the final line is simply due to a mistake in counting and also because I could not settle on any five word line to replace it.

Poem #3.

Tanka

I see a mirror  
Beneath my thoughtful footsteps  
And the world I’m in  
Is twice seen, but for the first  
Time, it is standing on me.

This tanka was composed for a class I took during my sophomore year in 1990. I had never written a tanka before we were required to do so in the class. My professor, Dr. Francis Rippy, suggested that I attempt publication; I took her advice willingly and "Tanka" was published during the following semester in an Honors College
booklet called *Odyssey*.

In explication, the universe here is perceived as being large and seen from every angle. "Twice seen" is suggesting that I see it (the world) all around me every day as well as through reflection in the water puddles. The scene in "Tanka" produces peaceful emotion—calm, almost indifferent—and creates a feeling of being at ease with the self and Nature. "Thoughtful" is the first indication that there is no intensity generated by the poem. Seeing life in the "mirror," or puddle, proves that there is a concrete world that is not only seen as a physical existence in front of us but also through a natural mirror, which almost verifies its presence. "Tanka" is a symbol of peace and calmness and imitates those feelings.
A BRIEF CONCLUSION

The three experiences of Man and Nature I have discussed are perspective, emotional response, and the determination of truth. In reference to the three explicated poems from my own works, I would like to consider the following observations from a larger point of view, which will hopefully make connections between the poems for my readers. In order, the perspectives of the poems move from a painful, personal perception of the self to an overwhelming, universal, neutral perception of the world. The emotional responses follow a cycle which begins with turmoil and eventually calms down to a tranquil feeling. Finally, in each, the metaphor proves a relationship; it illustrates the similarities between Man and Nature.
WORKS CITED


II:

7 Original Poems
Introduction

Following are seven original poems from my own collection. Though unaccompanied by explications, these poems, much like "The Storm," "You remind me of a star in the sky," and "Tanka" are intended to make use of the metaphor in poetry. The poems are in chronological order and deal with such subjects as love, death, friendship, and dreams.
The Dreamer's Race

The mind is a most powerful thing
For it can create a most believeable scene
While imagination runs the dreamer's race.
Wishes are made for Hope to chase!
Trust in this and dare to believe
That it takes true perseverance to achieve
Because only the dreamers who heartily strive
To better chance their dream alive
Will earn at least what's as good as the best
And never chance their dream at rest.
The Fire Inside

Every time I look at you,
the heat in your fiery eyes
causing emotions
to rush through
my entire body,
burning and roaring
like a wild fire escaping all control,
pressuring my heartbeat into a shiver
from the gusty flame that bursts in me
and scorching my once solid thoughts,
leaving behind a pile of confused ashes;
my heart becomes unaware of its boundaries
and I feel like a heap
of helpless flame dust
because I can’t hold myself together;
the breath in your glance
blows me away, every time,
and my thoughts drift aimlessly
on your winds of change.
Mixed Signals

It was two weeks ago today,
Our misunderstanding.
There isn't much for me to remember of you
Since I didn't know you well,
But I will never forget
Seeing your smiling faces that afternoon
And hearing you say, "See you at seven"
To all of us;
It proved itself the only clear thing
In my mind when we heard
(At something like eleven)
The many tangled stories
From both bystanders and professionals
Of green and red lights and
Bad judgments....

When we said our goodbyes,
We didn't realize
How permanent they were.

Until we meet in heaven.

August 1992
I was sober when I arrived.

I nervously entered the room 
In which you were sitting. 
I’d heard a few things about you 
But I knew nothing, really. 
For two years, I went
Back and forth from the room
Often enough to fulfill my desire
To admire your majestic appearance.
Every time, I wanted more and more
To touch you, but I didn’t
Dare do so. Then, one day,
A friend suggested how good you
Would be for me. I laughed
At her, but after she was gone,
I hurried back to the room and
Removed your cover with my mind.
To my surprise, you played along
And poured your heart in a glass.
I could no longer resist,
So I drank, tasting your words.
You mixed them with the look in your eyes--
I knew I was sinning but I couldn’t
Keep from raising to my heart
What I saw through your glass.

I never meant to get myself
Into such a condition,
But you looked so appetizing
And were just what I so
Passionately thirsted for.
As I turned to go (every time),
My head was spinning out of control.
I staggered and stumbled away.
My heart was pounding and burning;
My hunger for you was outrageous.
I wanted to shout to everyone I passed
How inebriated my emotions were
But I was considered too minor
To drink of such a major thing.
You were already the companion of someone;
Moral Law said only she could love you
Because only she was of legal age to have you
But I broke all the rules
And I loved you, too,
An addiction I will never overcome.
You are the sun,
And you are the moon.
Both of you have
Shined your light on me
In dimming times.
    I'll never be as great as you are,
    But at least you've made me into a star,
And I will use all of my power
To shine on you
When conditions make you fade,
For without the light of you both,
My universe would be nothing
But empty darkness.
Drowning In Your Eyes

in the waters of life
came naturally to me.
I grew up in a pool of people
who were basically shallow;
I could wade through them without being
in over my head.
Once in a while, I’d get caught in a small current,
But there was always a lifeguard on duty.

As I grew older,
I wanted to go the ocean
To search for things I couldn’t find in the pool.
"Swim at your own risk," the signs told me.
Of course, I jumped in immediately,
having no idea I’d come across you;
I didn’t know your kind existed.

You captured my soul the minute I saw you.
I could still swim,
But as you and I continued
To go deeper,
The waters were somehow **LARGE enough,**
**strong enough,**
and **strange enough**
to manipulate me....

The waves you generated
were powerful;
I tried to hide from you in the sand
But your effect on me could not be sheltered.
You weren’t doing anything out of the ordinary;
It was just natural for you
To rock me back and forth.
I thought I was a professional,
But you left me a breathless amateur
Drowning in your eyes.
"Silence is worth a thousand words," they say.

It was worth a million the night it
Was caught between their eyes.
It had been stuck there before
But it was never alone in the past
Or so rich with confusion.
He had forgotten about Her
And she had forgotten about Them
Because all their hearts had room for
Was each other and the silent conversation
They were having
For a second that seemed an hour.
Silence was the weakest thing to ever stand between them
And they’d forgotten about everything stronger that did;
All they needed was a few powerful words
To clear it out of the way
But speechlessness impeded their ability
To produce anything.
Intimidation sent his eyes running
Back and forth from hers
When she laid her fingers gently upon his throbbing chest.
His lips trembled as all of the words
He wanted to say to her
Suddenly erupted from his heart,
Desperately searching for a way out of him
But being abruptly halted
By the winning courage of silence
Which blackmailed his fear to swallow them.
Struggling to understand something
That he knew would never make sense to him,
He stared down at the harsh reality
On his finger,
Squeezed her hand against him
And pressed his cheek against hers
To share a falling tear.
"I love you" is what he felt
But "Goodbye" is what he said
As he pulled hesitantly away, turned, and left her
Wondering
In silence.