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Literature of The Land and Water
Oct.4.2018

Varying perspectives in nature writing

Through the beginning of the semester, we have been reading nature writing of various authors. Just like with anything else, different authors have different styles. These styles include perspectives of what they are writing about. For instance, one author could see a certain lake as a profoundly beautiful, serene place to take a break or for a picnic. However, another author could see the same lake as something unknown, something potentially dangerous. Something that they would be terrified to go into out of fear of the unknown. Some people are simply more scared of the unknown, and the future, than others. This being a recurring theme in writing. The perspectives of different writers is vast. One may have a perspective completely opposite to another.

The Open Boat, by Stephen Crane is a story about a few sailors who have probably been shipwrecked, and are on their way into the shore. The first couple of sentences in the story set the scene. "None of them knew the color of the sky. Their eyes glanced level, and remained upon the waves that swept toward them. These waves were gray, except for the tops, which were white, and all the men knew the colors of the sea."(Crane) This quote describes well what they were seeing out on the small rowboat. They were all fairly experienced at sea, however, a rowboat is a lot different than a proper ship. These men though are fairly comical about the whole situation. It is a story that one could laugh at. For instance, "If we don't all get to shore, said the captain, -if we don't all get to shore, I suppose you fellows know where to send news of my finish?" (Crane) The Captain is almost jokingly talking about his own life. Giving the story an undertone of macabre feeling about it. This leads the reader to believe that the author has a

certain “openness” to his feelings about death. The story of “The Open Boat” may be about a human lifetime. The water signifies how often it can change, fluidity. The waves being gray signify that the majority of life was gray, or not great. The white peaks signifying that some points in life will be awesome, and exciting. While there is also blue underneath, signifying that there can be bad parts as well.

In the story “Black Boy” by Richard Wright, the author is writing as himself. Discussing his childhood. He talks about his daily commute, and what he sees. He says “There was the tantalizing melancholy in the tingling scent of burning hickory wood”, and “ There was the saliva that formed in my mouth whenever I smelt clay dust potted with fresh rain.”(Wright) Here, he is talking about some things he sees, smells, tastes, etc... On a daily basis or a fairly regular basis. The hickory wood quote is especially interesting to me because I can fully relate to it. I love the smell of burning wood in the fall. It gives me a sense of comfort. While I can make myself comfortable in many places under many conditions, the first fire in the fall is always a special feeling. And how everybody huddles around it. Wright might even be referring to that when he talks about the wood. It’s a sense of comfort for him. The second quote about the rain soaking the clay dust is a little different. I don’t have a great idea of what that would smell like, though I have seen clay dust that has been rained on. And it looks very different from dry clay dust. While dry dust may have a very washed out color to it, freshly rained on clay dust could have a red, brown, or orange tint to it. And this will usually be pretty strong in pigmentation. These pieces of information would lead the reader to believe that Wright in his early years saw nature as a beautiful, and intriguing thing. Rather than the scarier, more unknown ocean or sea.

The third piece of writing is “Walden or, Life In The Woods”, by Thoreau. Thoreau was an interesting character by any stretch of the imagination. His time in the woods was about 18 months to 2 years depending who you ask. He wrote about many things, including his

“neighbors”. He writes about how the ants outside his house in the woods have an ongoing battle of supremacy. He says “I took up the chip on which the three I have particularly described were struggling, carried it into my house, and placed it under a tumbler on my window-sill, in order to see the issue.”(Thoreau) He then continues to describe how the red ant is biting at the leg of the black ant and exposing the vitals in it’s chest. This is a gruesome display of what goes on on a daily basis in nature. Ants will battle to the death every day. And the fact that Thoreau noticed this especially compared to other things he could have seen, may have something to do with the perspective of Thoreau. His writing is something that takes into account all that happens in nature around him. He focuses on the smaller bits. The ants fighting, the leaves falling, and things of that nature. Rather than the really big picture. Which could lend itself well to living in a cabin in the woods for 18 months to 2 years.

In conclusion, all three of these wonderful nature writers are equally valid. They have very different perspectives on nature. On one hand, Crane is talking about the water of the ocean being almost like a lifetime. It is dark, dangerous, and downright scary at times. But there are also high points that need to be taken into account. Wright writes about how nature is beautiful and how you can see beauty in it every single day. All you need to do is look. No matter your situation, you can see beauty. And Thoreau talks about nature integration. As he literally put himself into nature by living in a cabin deep in the woods for 18 months to 2 years. He writes about the more in depth bits of nature. The stuff that you would need a microscope to look at. Overall, the perspective of each author is different, but equally valid in it’s own way.

Citations:

Open boat: Crane, Stephen. The Open Boat: And Other Tales of Adventure. New York: Doubleday & McClure Co, 1898. Print.

Black Boy: Wright, Richard. Black Boy. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1944. Print.

Walden: Thoreau, Henry D. Walden, Or, Life in the Woods. London: J.M. Dent, 1908. Print.