

Exploring the Theme of Nature and Environmental Preservation in Joseph Bruchac's "Birdfoot's Grampa"

N. R. Gopal

Associate Professor & Head, Dept. of English Director, Center for Tribal Literature of America Central University of Himachal Pradesh, Dharamshala

ABSTRACT

This article is a review of Joseph Bruchac's poem, "Birdfoot's Grampa," exploring its themes of family, tradition, community, nature, and cultural identity. The story follows the relationship between Birdfoot and his grandfather, Old Man, as they explore the natural world together and learn about their cultural heritage. The poem emphasizes the importance of passing down cultural knowledge, preserving traditions, and the need to protect and preserve the natural world. In addition, the poem encourages readers to consider their own relationship with nature and to explore the ways in which their cultural heritage shapes their identity.

Keywords: Culture, Nature, Storytelling, Heritage, Preservation, Joseph Bruchac.

The Native American View on Nature: A Profound Connection

Native American cultures have a deep and profound connection to nature. Many Native American tribes view nature as a living, breathing entity with which they are inextricably linked. Nature is not seen as something to be conquered or dominated, but rather as a partner in life, a source of sustenance, and a spiritual force. For many Native Americans, nature is considered sacred, and they believe that all living things are interconnected and part of a larger cosmic order. The concept of balance and harmony with nature is essential to many Native American cultures.

They recognize the need for humans to coexist with nature; many of their practices and traditions reflect this belief. Native Americans also have great respect for the land and its resources. They believe that humans are merely stewards of the land and are responsible for protecting and preserving it for future generations. Many Native American cultures have rituals and ceremonies honoring the natural world and expressing gratitude for its gifts.

The connection between Native American culture and nature is an essential part of Native American beliefs and practices. Here are a few instances of how Native American cultures express this connection to nature:

1. Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Native American cultures have developed a deep understanding of the natural world through centuries of observation and interaction with the environment. This knowledge is often referred to as traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and encompasses everything from medicinal plant use to sustainable hunting and fishing practices. Many Native American communities continue to rely on TEK for their subsistence and spiritual practices.

2. Sacred Places: Many Native American cultures consider certain places to be sacred, often because they have a spiritual or historical significance. These places may be mountains, rivers, lakes, or other natural features. They are sites of religious ceremonies intended to honor and give thanks to the natural world.

3. Animal Symbolism: Native American cultures often use animals as symbols to represent different facets of the natural world. For example, the eagle symbolizes strength and courage, while the buffalo represents abundance and gratitude. These symbols are used in everything from art and storytelling to religious ceremonies.

4. Seasonal Ceremonies: Many Native American cultures celebrate seasonal changes through ceremonies and rituals. These ceremonies are designed to acknowledge the interconnectedness of all things and thank the natural world for providing sustenance and life. Examples of these ceremonies include the Hopi Snake Dance, the Lakota Sun Dance, and the Navajo Blessingway ceremony.

The connection between Native American culture and nature is profound and multifaceted. Native American cultures deeply respect the natural world, viewing it as a source of life, spirituality, and sustenance. This respect is reflected in everything from their daily practices to their religious ceremonies and art. They view the natural world as a source of spiritual guidance, physical nourishment, and cultural heritage. Their view of nature emphasizes the importance of balance, respect, and harmony with the environment, and their practices and traditions reflect this belief.

Cultural and Spiritual Aspects in Joseph Bruchac's Poems

Joseph Bruchac is a Native American writer, poet, and storyteller known for his works that focus on preserving and sharing the traditional Native American culture. He has published numerous collections of poems that reflect the themes of his culture and experiences. Here are some of the common themes found in his poems:

1. Nature and the Environment: Many of Joseph Bruchac's poems focus on the exquisiteness of the natural world and the significance of preserving it. He often portrays nature as a spiritual force that connects all living things, and his poems highlight the need for humans to live in harmony with the environment.

2. Identity and Culture: Bruchac's poems often explore the themes of identity and culture, particularly his own Native American heritage. He celebrates the rich history and traditions of his culture and explores the challenges faced by Native Americans in contemporary society. In his poem "Ellis Island," for example, he reflects on the experiences of his ancestors who were forced to leave their homeland and the importance of remembering their history.

3. Family and Community: Family and community are important themes in Joseph Bruchac's poetry, as he often reflects on the relationships between family members and the interconnectedness of all people. His poems celebrate the love and support found within families and communities, and he often pays tribute to his ancestors and those who have shaped his life.

4. Spirituality and Belief: Bruchac's poems often reflect his spiritual beliefs and explore the themes of faith and belief. He draws on the spiritual traditions of his Native American culture and portrays the natural world as a source of spiritual connection and guidance.

5. Social Justice: Many of Joseph Bruchac's poems address social justice issues and the need for equality and respect for all people. He often reflects on the challenges faced by marginalized communities and explores the need for social change.

Joseph Bruchac's poems reflect the themes of his Native American heritage and his experiences as a writer, storyteller, and advocate for social justice. His work celebrates the natural world, family and community, spirituality and belief, and the need for social change.

Poetic Devices and Narrative Strategies in the Poetry of Joseph Bruchac

Joseph Bruchac is known for his ability to interweave the traditional Native American culture with contemporary themes and issues. His writing style is marked by his deep connection to the natural world and his roots in his Abenaki heritage. Bruchac's poetry is characterized by its lyricism and evocative imagery, which transport the reader to the heart of the natural world. He often uses figurative language and metaphors to convey his message and his poems are rich in symbolism and depth of meaning.

Joseph Bruchac's poetry writing style is characterized by its simplicity, clarity, and emotional depth. He often draws on his Native American heritage and incorporates themes of nature, identity, and spirituality into his poems. Here are a few examples of his poetry writing style:

1. The following is an example of the use of sensory imagery in the poem "The Wind Is Our Mother."

The wind gives us life, The hawk gives us vision, The sun gives us warmth, The earth gives us sustenance. (Bruchac, "The Wind is Our Mother" 39)

In this stanza, Bruchac uses vivid sensory imagery to describe the gifts that each element of nature provides. The wind is personified as a life-giver, while the hawk is given the power of vision. Likewise, the sun is described as providing warmth, and the earth as providing sustenance. Using this sensory imagery, Bruchac helps evoke a strong sense of the interconnectivity between humans and the natural world.

2. From "I Am Alone":

No crowds to separate me from the oneness of life, No noise to drown out the whispering of my heart. (Bruchac, "I am Alone" 119-120)

In these lines, Bruchac uses simple, straightforward language to convey a powerful message. The speaker expresses their appreciation for being alone in nature, without the distractions and noise of crowds. "The oneness of life" suggests

a deep connection to the natural world and a sense of unity with all living things. The use of enjambment between the lines creates a sense of continuity and emphasizes the speaker's desire for solitude and connection to nature. This is an excellent example of Bruchac's ability to convey complex themes and emotions through simple, evocative language.

Bruchac employs storytelling techniques in his poems to weave a narrative and create a sense of continuity and connection. A reverence marks his writing for the land and the natural world, and he uses his poetry to encourage readers to connect with nature and appreciate it. In addition to his connection to the natural world, Bruchac's writing is marked by his advocacy for social justice and commitment to preserving Native American heritage. He uses his poetry to give voice to the experiences of Native Americans and to raise awareness about the challenges faced by Indigenous communities. His writing is characterized by its righteousness and genuineness, and he is unflinching in his portrayal of the struggles and injustices faced by Native Americans.

“Birdfoot’s Grampa”

The poem "Birdfoot's Grampa" by Joseph Bruchac describes an old man's compassionate act of saving tiny toads from being killed on a rainy summer night. The speaker and the old man are in a car, driving through the rain when the old man stops the car to gather the toads into his hands. The speaker tries to convince the old man that he can't save all of them, but the old man persists, collecting the toads and placing them safely in the grass. The rain and the grass are described with vivid imagery, and the old man's leathery hands and white hair create a sense of connection with the natural world. The poem emphasizes the importance of protecting vulnerable creatures and the environment, as the old man believes that the toads "have places to go, too." The use of a first-person point of view creates a sense of intimacy between the speaker and the old man, while the repetition of the phrase "we've got places to go" emphasizes the tension between urgency and compassion. Overall, "Birdfoot's Grampa" is a moving poem that highlights the importance of kindness and respect for all living creatures.

The poem also hints at the theme of mortality, as the toads are at risk of being killed by the car, and the speaker reminds the old man that they can't save them all. However, the old man's response, "they have places to go, too," suggests that he recognizes the importance of the toads' lives and their inherent value, even in the face of mortality.

In addition, the poem also shows the contrast between the speaker's perspective and the old man's perspective. The speaker is focused on getting to their destination and the inconvenience of stopping for the toads, while the old man is focused on the lives of the toads and the importance of preserving them. This contrast highlights the different ways that people can view and interact with the natural world.

Thus, "Birdfoot's Grampa" is a powerful and poignant poem that encourages readers to consider the value of all living creatures and the importance of protecting the environment. The poem's use of vivid imagery, repetition, and contrast creates a sense of intimacy and urgency that resonates with readers long after the poem has ended.

"Birdfoot's Grampa" employs a variety of poetic devices and narrative techniques to convey its themes and create an emotional impact.

- One of the key poetic devices used in the poem is imagery. The poem's descriptions of the rain, grass, and toads are rich and vivid, creating a sense of immersion in the scene. For example, the toads are described as "blinded / by our light and leaping / live drops of rain," and the grass is "summer / roadside grass." These descriptions help to establish the setting and create a sensory experience for the reader.
- The use of the first-person point of view is another narrative technique used in the poem. By having the speaker narrate the events from their own perspective, the reader can engage with the emotions and thoughts of the speaker. In addition, it helps to create a sense of closeness and connection between the reader and the events of the poem.
- Repetition is also used in the poem to create emphasis and highlight key themes. The phrase "we've got places to go" is repeated several times throughout the poem, emphasizing the tension between the speaker's desire to continue their journey and the old man's desire to save the toads. This repetition helps to reinforce the poem's central conflict and creates a sense of urgency.
- Finally, the use of metaphor is another key poetic device in "Birdfoot's Grampa." The toads themselves can be seen as a metaphor for all vulnerable and overlooked creatures in the natural world. By emphasizing the importance of protecting the toads, the poem encourages readers to consider the value of all living creatures and the impact of human actions on the environment.

Through its rich imagery, first-person narration, repetition, and metaphor, the poem encourages readers to reflect on their relationship with the natural world and consider the value of all living creatures.

CONCLUSION

Bruchac's poetry is deeply rooted in his Abenaki heritage, and he uses his writing to preserve and share the cultural traditions of his people. Through his work, he seeks to break down stereotypes and to give voice to the experiences of Native Americans. He is unflinching in his portrayal of the challenges faced by indigenous communities, and his poetry is a call to action for social justice. Joseph Bruchac's poetry is a rich tapestry of cultural heritage, social commentary, and natural beauty. His writing style is unique, and his use of literary techniques, such as symbolism, imagery, and storytelling, is masterful. Through his poetry, he takes readers to a place where the lines between past and present, myth and reality, blur together. His poetry is a testament to words' power to inspire, heal, and bring about change.

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