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POETRY OF ROBERT FROST: MAJOR THEMES**

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# The Human Nature Dialogue in the Poetry of Robert Frost: Major Themes

Nidhika Bawa, nee Sharma<sup>1</sup> Prof. (Dr.) U. S. Bhardwaj<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Sai Nath University, Ranchi, Jharkhand

<sup>2</sup>B. A. (Hons.) M. A.

**Abstract – Although Robert Frost did not consider himself a "nature poet," did not like to be called one, and would point out the information that all but a few of his poems have people in them, his feeling for nature was obviously a very close one. Many critics of Robert Frost's poems, however, have not understood his position. In 1938, Robert P. Tristram Coffin stated that Frost presents nature with people stuck into it where they belong and that he treats of people in a state of only good nature, views which now seem far from accurate, as most critics agree. Robert J Langbaum remarked that Frost makes man and nature interweave so that they seem identical, an opinion that ignores the individuality of Frost's character.**

**Keywords: unipoetry, man, nature, poetry, relationship**

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## INTRODUCTION

Robert Frost is one of few poets in English literature who shall never become outdated because poetry is an echo of every sensitive man's experiences and his limitations. The main theme of his poetry is the despairing state of man in his life. Robert Frost has tried to communicate again and again that man's effort to gather happiness and love of his fellowmen in the universe.

Robert Frost's chief concern is with man. The focus in his poetry is on man's position and attitude and especially on his feelings. Robert Frost reveals a good deal about his conception of universe and external reality in his poetry. But what is important to him? It is man's thought, emotions and behavior as they determine or reflect his relationship with the universe. What does man do, and how does he feel in a universe as dark as this? That is the central question for Robert Frost. The answer is found largely by the fact that man is sharply limited as Robert Frost sees him. Man is limited both in his intellectual power and his awareness and understanding. He has a different way of seeing this universe. He is different in his thought and in his intellectual power.

In several poems, Robert Frost indicates that man fail to understand nature and its relationship with him. Man could not make a balance of nature with his relationship. Directly or indirectly in both agnostic and the puritanical poetry, Robert Frost considers man very much handicapped. He has certain limitations. In some

religious poems, Robert Frost represents man's limitations equally. In "The Trial By Existence" the universe which he shows is in different man and his plight.

"Nothing but what we somehow choose;

Thus are we wholly stripped of pride

In the pain that has but one close

Bearing it crushed and mystified."

Robert Frost considers man's rational limitations in "Masque of Reason" and in "The Lesson for Today". These limitations help in explaining the term, why the universe seems incomprehensible and uncontrollable. Man has no control over universe. He is unable to understand the realities of the universe. Man's position thus is permanently difficult in the universe. The universe seems to him empty or meaningless. According to his poem like "Nothing Gold Can Stay" and "Design" man finds himself isolated and alienated and cut off from other men of the universe. And because of alienation from other men of the universe and from the universe he is harmed easily by others. "An Old Man's Winter Night" clears the vulnerability of man in an empty universe. It affects man's feelings very deeply. This aged man can not keep a house. He is isolated, but he does not feel vulnerability in him because of his depersonalization through his age and tiredness. It may be possible that he does not realize, how

helpless he is, he seems much more in pitiable condition to us.

The human insecurity is only suggested by Robert Frost in "An Old Man's Winter Night" is clear. It gives continual emphasis on man's isolation. The speaker in the "Storm Fear" feels his isolation and his insecurity in the universe. In this poem he faces natural forces directly. His poem which can be compared with Wordsworth "Leech Gatherer", the man is determined and independent in the universe. He lives in the mountains and earns money by gathering gum. He is dependent on nature for his livelihood. The emphasis is given mainly and directly on man himself. Robert Frost explains man's liveliness and energy in the beginning of the poem. He invests him with independence in the course of the poem. At the end of the poem Robert Frost makes plain that man must find satisfaction in his life. He must unite his vacation and avocation in his life.

Although Robert Frost did not consider himself a "nature poet," did not like to be called one, and would point out the fact that all but a few of his poems have people in them, his feeling for nature was obviously a very close one. Many critics of Robert Frost's poems, however, have not understood his position. In 1938, Robert P. Tristram Coffin stated that Frost presents nature with people stuck into it where they belong\* and that he treats of people in a state of only good nature, views which now seem far from accurate, as most critics agree. Even as late as 1959, Robert Langbaum remarked that Frost makes man and nature intertwine so that they seem identical, an opinion that ignores the individuality of Frost's characters. And in his book, *The Major Themes of Robert Frost* (1963), Radcliff J. Squires asserted that Frost would like nature to concur with human intuition more than it is willing to do and that he is successful only in seeing nature as a friendly mirror in poems that merely record.

## THE THEMES OF ROBERT FROST

A fairly large body of criticism has been written on the poetry of Robert Frost, and we know the labels which have been used: nature poet, New England Yankee, symbolist, humanist, skeptic, synecdochist, anti-Platonist, and many others. These labels have their utility, true or half true as they may be.

They point to something in our author. But the important thing about a poet is never what kind of label he wears. It is what kind of poetry he writes. We are not interested primarily in his "truth" as such-as label, as samplerwork-but in the degree in which it is an organizing and vitalizing principle in his poem. For only insofar as it operates as such a principle-insofar as the poem becomes truly expressive-does the truth have meaning at all. Truths are very cheap and meaningless. But truths operative are neither cheap nor meaningless.

In any case I do not want to begin by quarreling with the particular labels. Instead, I want to begin with some poem-and try to see how their particular truths are operative within the poems themselves.

Readers of poetry who object to this process. They say that it is a profanation, that they simply want to enjoy the poem. Now my experience with such people is that very frequently they do not want to enjoy the poem; they want to enjoy themselves. Such a person is like a big overripe grape, ready to ooze or spurt juice at any pressure or pinprick, and any pressure or pinprick or poem will do to start the delicious Bow.

Frost himself has been especially shy of the dogmatists and has not shown too much sympathy with a reader who, to quote him, "stands at the end of a poem ready in waiting to catch you by both hands with enthusiasm and drag you off your balance over the last punctuation mark into more than you meant to say." Or we have the case of Coleridge and poor old Mrs. Barbauld, who objected that there was no moral in *The Ancient Mariner*. cCMadam/ he replied, ((the moral obtrudes far too openly."

## NATURE VIEWS

Nature, however, is not the most important element in Frost's poems. He emphasizes human beings and their family member to their surroundings. People are the central point in the poems that show them with nature as a backdrop for their actions. Though it is true that in his lines the poet gives a great deal of attention to nature, it is merely attention to a background that has influence on his central figure. Human characters and their actions and reactions are the important elements in the poems.

There is a pronounced ambivalence in the view of nature Frost portrays in his poetry. In one poem he may present nature as actively hostile, in another as merely indifferent, and in a third as warmly benevolent. It is tricky to attribute reasons for these divergent views of nature in particular poems. Frost did not date many of his works, and, from his letters, it is clear that he did not offer his verses to public view immediately after their composition; rather he tended to let them age before bringing them out for general appraisal. Thus it is not potential to attribute definitely any particular poem to any specific period of depression or of high spirits that was a part of his life. For example, the verse "Tree at My Window, 11 expressing a feeling of kinship between the poet and nature, follows "Bereft," lines which starkly express the speaker's fear of nature in high time of mourning. These two poems appear in *West-Running Brook*, a collection that also includes "Acceptance," which portrays the unquestioning acceptance that nature creatures have for its ways. Although two poems may be placed side by side in a volume of Frost's poems, there is no confirmation that they were created mutually or in the order in which they come into view. Robert Frost sees human beings as belonging to two main categories with varying

shades of characteristics in each. He portrays characters, either essentially strong or basically weak, in relation to the several faces of nature they observe. Among the secure, he presents those who are self-sufficient and, though they do not need other citizens, enjoy healthy relationships with others. His weak characters, on the other hand, are torn by conflicts within themselves. They lack warm relationships with others, yet they cannot long survive without them.

## **POPULAR POETRY COLLECTION OF ROBERT FROST**

- A Boy's Will(1913)

The first collection of poetry that will be examined is "A Boy's Will," which contains the poems "Mowing" and "Reluctance." The title of the work is a reference to a line from Longfellow's poem "My Lost Youth," which reads: "A boy's will' is the wind's will / and the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts." The majority of the poems in the collection have a pastoral quality and, though he is vague in terms of location, Frost clearly demonstrates a growing attachment to New England. The poem "Mowing," for example, which describes a whispered conversation between a farmer and his hard-working scythe, is clearly colored by thoughts of a New England harvest. As "Reluctance" reveals, Frost also begins to explore ideas of development and maturity—the journey from childhood to manhood—and questions the relationship between nature and mankind.

- North of Boston(1914)

With the 1914 collection "North of Boston," which contains the poems "Mending Wall," "The Death of the Hired Man," "Home Burial," and "After Apple-Picking." No longer vague in terms of location, Frost suddenly positions New England as the overt inspiration for his poetry, even incorporating it into the title. The poems "Mending Wall" and "Home Burial" have autobiographical elements that suggest a certain amount of homesickness. "Mending Wall," about two neighbors, who meet every year to repair the wall dividing their property, is taken from an annual activity that Frost performed with his French-Canadian neighbor in New Hampshire. The poem "Home Burial" describes the destruction of a marriage after the death of a child: a possible reference to the tragic death of Frost's first son during infancy. The poems "After Apple-Picking" and "The Death of the Hired Man" discuss more general themes of life in New England, particularly the loss associated with the changing seasons and the sense of isolation inherent in such a rural environment.

- Mountain Interval(1916)

Frost published the collection "Mountain Interval," which cemented his reputation as a prominent New England poet. This collection contains "The Road " Not Taken," "An Old Man's Winter Night," "A Patch of Old Snow," "Bond and Free," "Birches," "Out, Out—," and "The Sound of Trees." In these poems, Frost continues to explore the deeper meanings of everyday activity. In "Birches," for example, Frost suggests that the childhood game of swinging on birches expresses a human desire to escape the rational world and climb up to the heights of imagination. This conflict between desire and responsibility is also expressed in "The Sound of Trees," in which the narrator sees the constant swaying of the trees outside his house as a need to escape the "roots" of responsibility and considers taking the same action himself.

- New Hampshire(1923)

The 1923 collection "New Hampshire" contains the poems "Fire and Ice," "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," and "The Lockless Door." The piece "Fire and Ice" is a brilliant example of Frost's skill with form and line structure; in only nine lines, he outlines the central debate about the fate of the world and then undercuts it with an ironic quip. The poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," another of his most famous works, combines an autobiographical experience with discussion of the conflict between desire and responsibility in a classic New England setting. "The Lockless Door," also based on an actual event, revisits the theme of isolation as the narrator is so frightened by the sound of a knock (and the threat of a companion in his "cage") that he would rather abandon his home than face his fear.

- West-Running Brook(1928)

The 1928 collection "West-Running Brook" contains the poems "Once by the Pacific" and "Acquainted with the Night," both of which show a preoccupation with the themes of isolation and depression. "Once by the Pacific," about the destructive threat posed by the ocean, was inspired by a traumatic childhood experience in which Frost was accidentally left alone on a California beach as a storm approached the shore. The incident haunted Frost throughout his life, as did the fear of abandonment and complete isolation in the face of unspeakable danger. The poem "Acquainted with the Night" takes a more passive perspective on isolation by describing an individual's struggle with depression.

- A Witness Tree(1942)

The collection "A Witness Tree" was published after several unfortunate tragedies had occurred in Frost's personal life: his daughter Marjorie died of complications from childbirth in 1934, his beloved

wife died of heart failure in 1938, and his son Carol committed suicide in 1940. Despite these losses, Frost continued to work on his poetry and eventually fell in love with his secretary Kay Morrison, who became the primary inspiration of the love poems in "A Witness Tree." This collection is the last of Frost's books that demonstrates the seamless lyric quality of his earlier poems. This collection contains "The Gift Outright," which describes the quest for an American identity through a connection to the land. This poem emphasizes the traditional New England view of property and identity (also explored in "Mending Wall"), and was recited at the presidential inauguration of John F. Kennedy in 1961.

- Come In, and Other Poems(1943)

"Come In and Other Poems," which contains the piece, "Choose Something Like a Star" (titled "Take Something Like a Star" in some works). This poem revisits Frost's satirical side through its blended interpretation of science and religion and the human need for assurance from a higher power.

## CONCLUSION

Each of these poems reveals a somewhat different side of Robert Frost, just as the seven collections of poetry from different times in his life provides a quick look into his development as an artist. The understanding of Frost's poems instilled meaning into even the most basic aspects of a work related to nature, from the number of feet in a line to the specific sound of a syllable. As a result, the poems have never-ending possibilities in terms of import and understanding and should be seen as an opportunity for the mind to revel in traveling around.

Robert Frost depicts this position that men ignore any wider responsibilities. Robert Frost often reveals doubt about the nature of authenticity. He reveals doubt about the man's ability to struggle with the unipoetry. The surrounding area he utilizes most regularly as a backdrop of his verse. The human indecision is simply suggested by Robert Frost in his poem "An Old Man's Winter Night" is clear. It gives common significance on man's severance. The speaker in the "Storm Fear" feels his separation and his insecurity in the unipoetry.

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