



The Relationship between Man and Nature is a Ruling Theme in Robert Frost Poems

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Abstract: *Robert Frost is a nature poet. He is a world of towering mountains and curving valleys, dense woods and leaf-strewn road. Season follows season. Trees shed their leaves in autumn. Snow falls fast and flakes piles deep everywhere in winter. Flowers blossom and melted snow boils in creeks and rivers in spring. The summer sun stimulates blueberry buds. Day follows night and night follows day. The sun shines and the stars glitter. In frost's poetry nature is all pervasive, touching man's life at every point. The relationship between man and nature is a ruling theme with Frost. Frost's views on the relationship between man and nature are ambivalent. Man is nature's preservers as well as a destroyer. On the one hand, man and nature exist together, close to each other; on the other, they exist in different realms, remote from each other. Some poems reveal that nature is beneficent to man while others point out that it is indifferent and maleficent. At times man covers under the tyranny of nature, terrified; at others, he contends against it courageously and tries even to master it. Some of his persons look upon nature as a source of revelation while other reject this view and believe that nature has nothing to reveal. The actions of man toward nature are double-edged. As the preserver of nature, man assumes the stewardship; of his environment. As the destroyer of nature he plunders it.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Frost is not a pantheist like Wordsworth or Bryant to whom God is inherent in every aspect of the landscape in every aspect of the landscape, in trees, soil, rock and bush. "New Hampshire" record Frost's explicit break with the pantheists. The persons are out for a walk in the forest. He comes upon charcoal and blackened stones, remnants of a fire. In his imagination the ashes seem to be an altar which purports" to say the groves were God's first temple". But remembering the sin of Ahaz, which was worship of nature, he dissociates himself from pantheism:

Altars the woods are full of nowadays, Again as
in the days when Ahaz sinned By worship under
green trees in the open. Scarcely a mile but that I



come on open,

A black-cheeked stone and stick of rain – washed charcoal.

Even to say the groves were God's first temples Comes too near to Ahaz's sin for

safety.

Frost makes the point clear when he says, "I'm not one to play off seeing/God in nature. I'm Pantheist".

Frost is not a transcendentalist either. Nature, for Frost is scarcely what it was for Emerson and other worshippers of the woods of the nineteenth century. Generally speaking, in Frost the landscape is no panacea to soothe the ills and cares of society; the natural features do not invariably solace man with warm companionship or bring a flush of hope in moments of despair. Nature does not exist to work continual miracles of revelation. Nor will it impart transcendental truths to any man that wanders by a brook. For nature is hard as she is soft. She can destroy and thwart, disappoint, frustrate and batter. Occasionally Frost appears to be mystic in his poems. Even then he does not believe in the "over soul" theory of transcendentalists.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Frost and the American view of nature (1968) by Clark Griffith. Frost tends to center upon man and nature as the two prime realities.

Robert frosts: The individual and Society (1973) by peter J Stanlis. Frost believed that there was a naturalness of self-interest and social benevolence in both individuals and society which kept men together in society.

Frost and Cyclicism (1957) by Richard D lord.

The world of nature and human experience in the poetry of Robert frost (2003) by Pramod Sharma Dahal. International journal of English and literature (IJEL), 6(6), 99 108

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Some poems show man to be the preserver of nature. In "The exposed nest" a young couple comes across a nest of fled lings, unroofed by a cutter bar. They construct a new roof and "restore them to their right". In "Christmas Trees" a pasture appears to its owner to be holy place" where houses are all churches and have spires" and where young balsam fire into the hands of a Christmas-tree seller" "..... Thirty dollars seemed so small beside/the extent of pasture I should strip / and leave the slop... all bare". In "Good-bye and keep Cold" the farmer is worried by the danger of his trees being prematurely warmed by a February sun masquerading as April. If the trees are induced to bud out of season, they will freeze in the first subzero gale. He commits the trees to the snow and to providence, saying "Good-by and keep cold". In "The pasture" the farmer is "going out to clean the pasture spring... to rake to leaves away" and "to watch the water clear".

But the destructive instincts in man surface in many a poem. "Range-Finding" conveys the ominous upheaval of the entire ecology. It is an account of the brute force of the bullet. It describes the havoc wrought in nature by shells long before "a single human breast is



pierced". The bullets cut" a flower beside a ground bird's nest" and snap the stalks of flowers which hang "beng double". They deprive butterflies of their flowers. They rend the "diamond-strung" cobwebs of spiders. If the birds, butterflies and spiders resume normal life after moment of fright, it is because they are ignorant of the ominous threat to their environment. All the same, the poem brings out man's destructive madness.

In "A Brook in the City" man callously disposes of a brook's immortal force" by running roughshod over it with his houses, curbs and streets, throwing the brook.

Deep in a sewer dungeon under stone

In fetid darkness still to live and run
And all for nothing it had ever done
Except forget to go in fear perhaps.

For his amusement or creating a lighted cleaning in the dark, man builds a bonfire on the hills. Then "something of someone" blows a gale that spreads the torch well beyond the limit, destroying everything on its way. "The place it reached to blackened instantly". And "the black spread like Black Death on the ground, /..... The sky darkened with a cloud / like winter and evening coming on together".

Frost is ambivalent on the question whether man and nature exist close together, some poems stress the closeness between them. Some other poems emphasizes their remoteness.

"Tree at My window" establishes the Kinship between and nature. The blending of human head and tree head, of inner weather and outer weather, draws man and nature so close as to fit them together like twin hemispheres. Speaking never be curtain drawn/ between you and me. "Both of them are "taken and tossed". The tree's head is buffeted by "outer" weather, by storms and winds. The poet's head is tormented by "inner" weather, by conflicts, fears and doubts. Fate has put their heads together:

That day she put our heads together, Fats had
her imagination about her, Your head so much
concerned with out, Mine with inner, weather.

Frost often brings out the close relationship between man and nature by revealing man's love for its company. His poetry shows an avid interest in the plants and animals for the sake of the immediate sensuous and emotional pleasure they afford. In "to the Thawing wind" the person appeals to the "loud Southwester" to "Run the ratting pages o'er / Scatter poems on the floor; Turn the poet out of door". They poem is very much like Wordsworth's "The tables Turned" where he says, "up! Up! My friends, and quit your books". The vitality of the flowers, birds and wind make them superior in their own right to the realm of books and the indoors. The man in "The valley's singing day" praises someone-perhaps his wife-for having awakened the birds and started them singing. The husband and the wife in "West-Running Brook" express their wish to be united to the brook: "As you and I are married to each other, we'll both be married to the brook".

But there are also poems which suggest the remoteness of nature, there is an unbridgeable



gap between man and nature. Two look at “illustrates that though man and nature appear to be close together, they are essentially apart. A young couple out for an evening walk has climbed up a wooded hillside, when darkness closes in and they can go no further. They feel a wistful disappointment. It would be fine to go on, to penetrate deeper into nature, but it is too dark and the “failing path” would be treacherous. “This is all, “they sigh, bidding “Good Night to woods”. But there is more. A doe and after her a buck appear on the other side of a wall to stare at them in blank puzzlement and then pass on unscarred. To the doe and the buck the human beings appear as mysterious as the animals seem to the humans. “Two had seen two.../ ‘This must be all’. Still they stood, / As if the earth in one unlooked – for favor / had made them certain earth returned their love”. It is the very distance between humanity and nature that makes the recognition so poignant. The man and the woman cannot enter nature or identify themselves with it. Although they are brought closer and closer to real contact with the buck and the doe, a wall still separates them. The “As if” in the last line is the keynote in the poem” “as if earth... returned their love”. The poem is especially pathetic because man and nature are “so near yet so far”.

“The most of it” shows a momentary insight into the vast remoteness of nature. The persona in the poem longs for a personal reply from nature to his voice, but all he hears is only the echo of his own voice. This is not the reply he has desired. What he wants is not an echo, a “copy speech”, “but counter-love, original response”. Then he hears a “splash” in the “far- distant water”. For a moment he believes that this may be the “original response” he expects. But it is only a buck swimming and stumbling “through the rocks”. “and that was all”. Thus man’s search for a sign of love fails. The persona realizes that there is a gulf separating man and nature.

That the human world and the world of nature exist apart in different spheres is the theme of “Come In”. It is “dust outside” and dark “inside” the woods. It is “too dark” for a bird to find a better perch for the night “by sleight of wings”. But the darkness does not prevent the thrust from singing “one song more”. The song of the bird appears as though the bird invited the man in the poem to enter the woods. But he does not mean to enter it even “if he were asked” to by the bird. The poem concludes, “And I hadn’t been asked”. That the song of the thrush is not an invitation to the man is proof that nature does not care of the company of man. The man’s rejecting the apparent invitation projects his view that his realm exists apart from nature.

Frost is ambivalent as to whether nature is a benefactor or a malefactor to man. Some poems portray nature as being beneficent. Other poems depict it as being indifferent and maleficent.

At times frost displays nature as being man’s benefactor. Nature provides the seasons and fashions the earth amenable to man’s pursuits. It is because of the beneficence of nature that man is able to live amidst profusion. Nature’s kindness to man is overwhelming. The harvest in “After Apple picking” is so plentiful that man cannot handle it. From the cellar bin, he keeps hearing “the rumbling sound / of load of apples coming in”. Having had “too much” of the great harvest he himself desired, the man is “overtired” of it. Even in his dream, “Magnified apples appear and disappear, stem end and blossom end, / and every fleck of russet showing clear”.



When man becomes old, too old in the eyes of his fellow men to be employed, it is nature that proffers a helping hand. The gum-gatherer. In the poem so named, is an old man living in a simple shack up in the mountains. He draws on nature for his livelihood. He earns money by gathering spruce gum and selling it in a market town on the plains. The speaker of the poem testifies to his vitality at the beginning of the poem. Though old, he overtakes the speaker in his “early-morning stride”, “swinging a bagful of spruce gum” like uncut jewels, dull and rough” like Word worth’s leech-gatherer, he is resolute and independent. This independence is made possible only by nature. The resin he sells and lives by comes from “the barks of trees”. As the narrator remarks “this is a pleasant life”, gathering resin and

bringing it to market “when you please”.

3. CONCLUSION

Frost views on the relationship between man and nature are ambivalent too. Some poems present man as the preserver of nature, aware of the fact that his own welfare depends on the conservation of nature, man assumes the stewardship of nature. He seeks its company. Filled with a feeling of kinship. Nature is beneficent to man and caters for his material and emotional needs. He looks on nature as a source of revelation. There poems reveal the closeness between man and nature. In other poems, frost point out that man is a callous destroyer of nature. Though man and nature appear to be close together, really they exist apart in different spheres. Man is intelligent whereas nature is not.

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