



## AN ECOCRITICAL READING OF ROBERT FROST'S SELECT POEMS

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### ABSTRACT

*Robert Frost is an American poet who writes about nature and his poetry deals with the rural life. But Frost is not a nature poet in the tradition of William Wordsworth and other romantics. To him, nature is never an impulse of creation, but it always remains the background of his writing. The description of nature in poetry is accurate and lively. He seeks inspiration and enjoyment from the rural setting. His attitude towards nature as one armed truce, still manages to maintain the mutual respect between individual man and the forces of the nature.*

Ecocriticism is nothing but the study of relationship between literary works and physical environment. Just like the feminist criticism discusses the gender consciousness reflected in literature or Marxist criticism deals with the modes of production, ecocriticism takes earth-centred approach to the literary studies. Nature is the best teacher of mankind and environment remains an integral part of all living beings of this world. Ecocriticism is the study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view where literature scholars analyze the environment and brainstorm possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary environmental situation and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature. This definition makes of Ecocriticism an intentionally broad approach that may be designated in other ways such as "green (cultural) studies", "ecopoetics", and "environmental literary criticism". The interest that the definition raises in literary studies owes much to the fact that Ecocritics investigate such things as the fundamental ecological values meant by the word nature, and whether the examination of place should be a distinctive category, much like class, gender or race. Also, they examine human perception of wilderness, and how it has changed throughout history and whether or not current environmental issues are accurately represented or even mentioned in popular culture and modern literature. Other disciplines, such as history, economics, philosophy, ethics, and psychology, are also considered by ecocritics to be possible contributors to ecocriticism. William Rueckert may have been the first person to use the term ecocriticism (Barry 240). In 1978, Rueckert published an essay titled Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism. His intent was to focus on "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature."

Literary ecocriticism principally focuses on the representations of physical environment. Moreover, the notion of the 'world' of the ecocriticism includes the entire ecosphere not just the social sphere which is generally conceived as the 'world' by other literary theorists. For ecocritic, nature really exists as an entity which affects human beings; hence nature couldn't be a reduced concept which we generally conceive as a part of our



cultural practice. All environmental problems are the gift of human beings to the whole ecosystem as they became more *ego-centric* than *eco-centric*. It is an attempt to explore *eco-centric* approach in Robert Frost's select poems.

Robert Frost is one of America's most outstanding poets in the 20th century. Most of his poems use nature as the theme, mainly describing New England rural pastoral scenery and wildlife. His poetry is full of local flavor and pastoral sentiment. Nature is the source of Frost's creation. The characteristics of his nature poems are simple language, beautiful artistic conception and profound meanings. In addition to simple language, beautiful artistic conception, profound meanings, Frost's natural poetry also contains the ecological consciousness, having more important practical significance. In such an ecological-crisis-ridden time, it is very significant to analyze Frost's ecological consciousness, because his poetry is still widely read even today. First, in Frost's poems, human beings have no privilege over other creatures and they are only a part of nature. "At Wood's Garden" is a good example. Secondly, humankind depends on nature. Nature satisfies man's spiritual and psychological needs and it is the source of human wisdom. And "Birches" is a wonderful example of Frost's mode that poetry should "begin in delight and end in wisdom".

Being a pastoral poet, Frost writes about natural scenes and sounds. His poems create a memorable impression due to the presence of nature. His poems are often focused the themes of rural landscape and wildlife. He has a firsthand experience of nature as he led his life as a farmer. One cannot deny that farmers remain very close to the nature. The use of nature as the setting of the poems is one of the finest features of his writing. His way to look at the pastoral things is unique. Along with various seasons, he aptly uses the images of fog, trees, stones, pasture, snow, leaves and various animals etc. to create pathetic fallacy.

Robert Frost in his poem "*Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*" successfully creates the mesmerizing atmosphere of wonder and wilderness. The traveler is enchanted by the natural beauty of the deep and dark woods. He stops by the woods on snowy evening to gaze the wood. He enjoys the beauty and serenity of the nature. Modern man is going away from nature; moreover, the concept of wilderness is also changing. Due to his encroachment on the nature, the entire ecosystem is deteriorating. Then the traveler in the poem enjoys the lovely scenery and tempted to remain there for more time. But it is the internal will and force that keeps the speaker unsettled in a few moments that he stops to watch the woods fill up with the snow. The very first instance is found in the separation of civilization and nature, the 'village' in opposite to the 'woods'. This separation sets up a barrier that preoccupies the speaker's thoughts. In the mindset of the speaker nature is demarcated by the limits of the ownership "whose woods these are I think I know". The notion of separation and ownership is later strengthened when the speaker stops and notices that there is not a 'farmhouse near'. Even though the speaker is enchanted and wanted to stop there but his internal will is made evident as he consciously strives after the 'promises' that of tomorrow- which he has to keep. So the call of duty makes to move further, so he does.

*"The woods are lovely dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
Miles to go before I sleep  
Miles to go before I sleep".*



From the view of ecocriticism, this pastoral poem throws light on the indifference and detachment of modern man from nature. The traveler, horse and owner of the woods are described in personal terms, everything else, such as the ‘woods’, ‘snow’, ‘the frozen lake’ etc. described in impersonal and inanimate terms. The ‘woods’ in the poems are more than just woods, they are temptation and irrationality. The poet projects his thoughts through the horse. The horse is confused and doesn’t know why they have stopped there without any practical reason so he wants to keep going. He associated dark with lovely may be because the woods appear restful and sleepy which strikes the resemblance with death. The last two lines are repeated intentionally. It reveals the responsibilities to be met before the final sleep i.e. death. It may be said that though the traveler is fascinated by the death, still he decides to move further in order to fulfill his responsibility.

Frost believes that man is indifferent towards nature. He wants that the man should accept his position as given by nature. Frost is capable of transferring any ordinary experience into contemplation of human life. In his poem “*Mending Wall*” he creates an interesting picture of farmers repairing stone wall in the field. Here once again we find a varied description of rural landscape. Mending a wall has become a ritual for the two farmers. The speaker of the poem feels that there is no need of separation between them. Even the last year repaired wall has collapsed. The poet creates an interesting picture of the neighbour who brings big boulders for the repairing of the wall. He thinks that it is nature which does not like have separation. The speaker tries to convince his neighbour regarding uselessness of mending a wall as he is not going to encroach. But the neighbor is firm and he wants the wall to be repaired. He continues an age old dictum:

*“Good fences make good neighbours”*

As mentioned above, Frost is successful in transferring an ordinary event of mending wall into contemplating life experience. He reiterates that for maintaining good relations one has to keep proper distance; at the same time, they need to meet again after some interval. The mention of spring stands for the new beginning of life.

In the poem “*After Apple-picking*” he draws a very interesting picture of a tired farmer after the day’s labour. He has sensed human feelings into the inanimate things like trees, leaves, apple, winter etc. He used the image of apple metaphorically. The empty baskets are yet to be filled with apples employ the notion of life which is still unfinished task. Like other poems here also Frost becomes philosophical. The line

*“stem end and the blossom end”*

reflects the cycle of human life in the nature. He still feels that there are much responsibilities to done before the ultimate sleep i.e. death.

In the poem

*“The Gift Outright”, the poet directly says that  
The land was ours before we were of lands  
She was our land more than a hundred years.*

Here land i.e. nature is personified but why human beings are not naturified yet. Land is considered as a commodity by the human beings, which is given, taken, bought, sold and even won.



“*The Road Not Taken*” is his most celebrated poem. Being a nature poet Frost gives a beautiful description of the landscape. The traveler is just passing through a yellow wood when he faces the problem of choice of the road as the one road is diverged into two. The speaker says that both roads are appealing but he takes the road which is less travelled by the others. The poet here comments on the tendency of the modern man who usually chose the normal road which is taken by many others. The second road has much grass on it which means that it is less travelled and it is close to the nature. He does not want to take *the wanted wear*. He prefers to be safer than anything new.

## CONCLUSION

His method of description is very simple and deceptive. His poetry is concerned with the drama of the man in nature. His words and poetic descriptions work to impose a unique image and feeling among the readers. The poems are full of dichotomies that create tensions, which at the end of the poems prompt the unnamed speaker to go on, and give the reader a sense of conclusion. Frost’s poetry is a factual poetry which never pretends. It is mixture of light and serious i.e. philosophical elements. As the journey of life goes on, the question is how should man *progresses* and at the same time *maintains* the ecological balance. The reader of his poetry should realize that his poetry is courageous and assert his hope of dignified future. In his all poems we have slight pauses which reflect the necessary connection between man and nature. It becomes a part of ecosystem and move forwards ‘*keeping promises*’ of ecology and man.

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