

Robert Frost's Vision of Life

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ABSTRACT

Human life has always been out of joint, and it will remain so in the future as well. In *The Lesson for Today*, Frost says, "We can't appraise the time in which we act", but history tells us that something is always wrong and man always suffers frustration and some form of indignity. The Frost views are expressed repeatedly in one poem after another, one may be excused for taking them as expressive of his considered view of life. From a study of Frost's poetry we know much about his views on Man, God and Nature, and his views are a measure of his sanity and profundity. Frost's view of life, and in his, 'book of people' North of Boston, he paints, "the bleakest picture of life to be found in his collected poetry", and the theme of alienation and isolation looms large. Robert Frost pictures man as a solitary, lonely figure, isolated and alienated from Nature, from God, and from his fellowmen. He conceives of Nature as soul-less, mechanical and impersonal. Man and Nature are two different principles separated from each other by insurmountable barriers. Nature may, on some special occasions, show some love or concern for Man, but such occasions are in the nature of a 'favour', and not the general rule.

Keywords: Frustration, Impersonal Environment, Human, Struggle, Reflection, Humanity

Introduction:

Robert Frost has been called the interpreter of New England, but he might also be called the interpreter of nature and humanity as a whole, for his poetry shows that he is a close observer of both nature and people, and that he portrays their fundamental elements. Possibly it is because his poetry is so basic that the critics can't accept it as such and continue to seek some dark and hidden meaning, and as a result sometimes distort the real meaning. Frost writes lyrics, fantasies, and character portrayals and always uses meter. But it is a very flexible meter, conversational in tone. He uses colloquialisms rather than dialects to portray the New Englander. Most criticisms of Frost result in general commentaries on his classic poems like "Mending Wall" and "The Death of the Hired Man." Untermeyer and Lowell emphasize his pastoralism; Sidney Cox has his "original ordinary man" theory; J. S. Wilson thinks that he is the only true American poet; Kremborg calls him definitely Yankee; and Munson calls him a pure classical poet. Thus since there isn't much detailed critical material

on Frost it is better for purposes of study to look at Frost's poetry itself. Frost uses Nature to a great extent in his poetry, and of course it is the nature of New England. Through his close observations of nature Frost shows his deep love for it but never comes right out and sings its praises. He always portrays nature in a friendly light, never seeing it in anything cruel. His descriptions tend to be earthy and of the soil and yet he sometimes reaches high aesthetic peaks particularly in the "Death of the Hired Man." In his lyrics and fantasies Frost shows his interest in Nature throughout his poems on the seasons, flowers, fruit, the moon, the stars, the sky, animals, and particularly in rural scenes. In his character portrayals he uses nature to set off his characters. His characters are usually rural anyway, their background being that of rural New England. His descriptions are not just pretty pictures but tanged of the soil. He shows what he has observed of farm life, almost a glorification of the common place, for he would rather be just a plain New Hampshire farmer, not afraid of nature nor a runaway from it

either, and it is the setting of the New Hampshire farmer in particular and the New England farmer in general that he portrays with so much realism.

Frost was a poet for all people in that, as a mature poet, he used plain English, and he wrote about the everyday things in his surroundings, often as metaphors for the day-to-day cares of life. He was a farmer by choice for much of his life, and wrote about nature and the seasons, especially favoring Winter. His life was not extraordinary in any important way, though he did have more than the usual share of sorrow. However, he never quite fit in anywhere, as evidenced in his poem: *Two Roads Diverged in a Yellow Wood*: "I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." It was not Robert Frost's life being different which made him and his poetry, but rather, his reaction to life which was different, and his insight and ability to see things and communicate that to the reader that made him a distinctive voice in the wilderness. Poets make connections, and so every poet's work is intimately connected with who he or she is. What they write is their interaction with life.

One place that Frost did not fit in was at school as a student. His father died when he was eleven and he and his mother moved back to Massachusetts from San Francisco to live with relatives. "In 1897 he enrolled at Harvard, hoping to prepare for a career in college teaching, but he left after two years without a degree." His grandfather despaired that he would ever succeed at anything and gave him a farm in Derry to help him out. Frost worked the farm, but could not make enough to support him and his wife. He was obligated to work the farm for ten years, and he wrote all this time. One interesting facet of poetry is that the actual writing of a poem may not be representative of its incarnation. That is, a poem may begin in the subconscious long before it finally rolls off the pen. So we have no way to know when any particular work of Frost's began forming in his mind. We only know when it was published. Therefore we can only guess by the content when any particular poem had its genesis. Frost and his wife went to England in 1912, where he made the acquaintance of Ezra Pound, a prime influence in his life. It was in England in 1913 that his first volume, *A Boy's Will*, was published. He wrote "his second letter to Miss Ward. He gave her

information about how *A Boy's Will* came to be published, not omitting to mention that he believed she would know the poems in it were the natural result of his life." So we see, even from his own words, that his poetry was very connected to his life. By this time he had lost both parents and this was not the last of his trials. It is no wonder that death figures in many of his poems. In fact, from his biography one wonders how he wrote so much of joy, as in *The Road Not Taken* (1916). By 1915 Frost had bought yet another farm in New England and began teaching at Amherst College. Robert Faggen argues that in Frost's natural world one does not find Arcadia. Instead, Frost's nature "creates hierarchies and stability only for a moment before its relentless warfare cancels and levels inequalities insect and human life." However, nature seems to have drawn him to itself in both his writing and his life. He simply could not live in the city. We see this in *Acquainted with the Night*, which alludes to all the evils in the city and the need to "outwalk every city light" By 1920 it was obvious that mental illness would plague his sister until she died ten years later. As time passed, Frost's poetry dealt with the strangeness and thoughts of death in *Fire and Ice* and *Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening*. *Fire and Ice* is a very subtle touch on opposing forces and sanity as he talks about an insane choice. In the second poem, we know that he is thinking about how "lovely, dark and deep: the snowy woods are, and reminds himself that he has "promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep." Those miles were years, many of them spent alone after his wife died in 1938. Frost lost a daughter, a son, and his wife all within 12 years from his sister's death. It is extremely hard for parents losing one child. Frost lost two children, his sister, and his wife at a very young age.

Many with whom I have discussed Frost and the meaning of his poems say they think he was merely literal, that I read too much into him. I cannot believe this. It is simply too convenient to be a mere coincidence that there seems always to be some double meaning in his poems. I think that too many people have been touched by the feelings conjured up by his poetry for it to be that simple. He saw things from a different angle, not like a child who creeps along and looks from the ground and then climbs a tree, but more like a cat who walks quietly a few steps,

then stops to observe his footprints. In *Gathering Leaves* he calls an arm full of soggy, dead, and colorless leaves a crop, as if he felt that this was all he had done for his life: planted trees only to harvest dead leaves.

Frost did not have an easy life by far, but I cannot think of any great poet who did. So maybe the two go hand in hand: tragedy and literary talent. I seem to remember hearing once that one cannot wring blood from a stone. Now I know that this was an expression meaning one cannot get money where there is no way to squeeze it out. However, the expression fits here also, meaning that one must be vulnerable to bleed. Bleeding is a rite of passage in many cultures, so it has significance here since poetry requires that one lives and experiences before one can write it. It seems, though, that Robert Frost had more than his share of sorrow, and he bled golden words. As alone as he may have felt many times in his life, he had an intimate understanding of people, so he never shut them out.

Man: Isolated and Solitary

Robert Frost pictures man as a solitary, lonely figure, isolated and alienated from Nature, from God, and from his fellowmen. He conceives of Nature as soul-less, mechanical and impersonal. Man and Nature are two different principles separated from each other by insurmountable barriers. Nature may, on some special occasions, show some love or concern for Man, but such occasions are in the nature of a 'favour', and not the general rule. In *Two Look at Two*, a deer and a buck 'stare' at a man and woman from behind a man-made fence, and that is all. In *The Most of It*, the magnificent buck that swims across the lake towards man is the most of it that nature can give. It is a terrifying poem, as terrifying as W.B. Yeats' *The Second Coming*, and it brings out the completeness of man's isolation in his vast and impersonal environment. Such poems make critics like Trilling declare that Frost's view of the human predicament is a terrifying one.

His Hostile Environment

Nature is not only separate and impersonal, it is actually hostile. Man must wage a constant struggle for survival. Nothing in nature seems to be made for man. He is separated from the stars by immense voids, and the contemplation of the starry heavens only brings

out his own littleness and insignificance in the scheme of things. The *Star-Splitter* tells of a farmer who buys a telescope because he believes that the best thing for which we have been placed on this planet is "to see". But the telescope is imperfect, and it splits every star into two or three. The farmer thereupon exclaims: "We have looked and looked, but after all where are we?" The universe in this poem is depicted as incomprehensible. There are nature's wilderness, the vast desert places, which he must tame and cultivate. Nature is imperfect and chaotic and man must impose order and completeness on it through his "gardening".

Imperfection of Human Life

Human life has always been out of joint, and it will remain so in the future as well. In *The Lesson for Today*, Frost says, "We can't appraise the time in which we act", but history tells us that something is always wrong and man always suffers frustration and some form of indignity:

Ways of Ameliorating Human Lot

No, Frost is not a pessimist. He is a realist, and an ameliorist. He studies the human predicament, examines its different facets, and then suggests ways and means by which human lot can be improved and bettered. First, he suggests that we must respect the 'otherness' of other individuals, and not try to impose ourselves upon anybody. Distances must be maintained. In *Mending Wall*, he teaches us that "Good fences make good neighbours", and the moral of the *Build Soil* is, "keep off each other and keep each other off". Amicable human relationship is possible only in this way. Loneliness and alienation may be the subject of his inquiry in many a poem, but this does not mean that he admires isolation, and dislikes democracy and brotherhood. Rather, he advocates the Aristotelian golden mean between self-centredness and self-love, and society and companionship. A man must try to understand his fellow men and love and sympathy would follow upon such understanding. Healthy social life is possible only in this way. In a way his pre-occupation with the theme of alienation may be taken as a psychological expression of his intensely felt need for human society. Lawrence Thompson agrees with this view and says, "His poems closely represent the confrontation of fear, lostness, alienation, not so much for purposes of shuddering as for purposes of

overcoming fright, first through individual, and then through social, ingenuity, courage, daring and action.”

Secondly, he advocates devotion to work which in his view is necessary to make life bearable. Nature is imperfect and chaotic, and man must seek to perfect and order it through a constant process of ‘gardening’. “Fact is the sweetest dream that labour knows”, and one must do one’s duty under all circumstances.

True virtue is in the doing, not in what is done. In the Trail by Existence, he suggests, that, “the greatest reward of daring the struggle is still to dare”. The true purpose of life is to test the heroism of the human soul. Therefore, one must struggle and dare and suffer the uttermost on earth, for only in this way can man deserve the bliss of heaven, and the mercy of God.

Thirdly, he advocates that Man must have faith in God. The mystery of life and the ways of God cannot be understood through reason. His salvation lies in absolute Faith. While on earth do your duty with sincerity and devotion and with Faith in the divine, and then most certainly God would assuage the cruelty and injustice of man’s lot on this earth.

Man can be saved only by God’s mercy, which man receives for having laboured under grave injustice, and despite the many ‘barriers’, and limitations which have been imposed upon him, and which he must struggle all his life to overthrow. This is the only way to man’s salvation, for if he does not labour thus his limitations would not admit of any salvation. To Frost, God is still one who cares for man, “and will save him, no matter how many times or how completely he has failed.”

Fourthly, it should be remembered that in postulating a soulless and mechanistic universe, he is merely echoing the teaching of modern science. Nature is pure matter and man has a soul or spirit. Frost repeatedly asserts the superiority of man over nature. Man can impose his will over the chaotic world of nature and order and complete it. Man is superior to the lower creatures and other objects of nature. In the Tree at My Window, he tells us that the tree is concerned only with, ‘outer whether’ and a concern for ‘inner whether’ is possible only for man. In the White Tailed Hornet, he deplores our habit of instituting downward comparisons as a result of which “our worship, honour, consciousness”, have long since

gone to the dogs under the table. In the Accidently on Purpose, he writes:

Grant me intention, purpose and design

That is near enough for me to the divine.

A Reflection On The Life And Works Of Robert Frost’s Poetry

Robert Frost, born in San Francisco, California on March 26, 1874 died of complications resulting from a prostate surgery on January 29, 1963 in Boston, Massachusetts. Frost attended Harvard University, Dartmouth University and Lawrence High School. Frost received many awards during his lifetime including the America’s highest literary award, Pulitzer Prize four times. He was invited as a special guest during the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy in 1961 and he recited The Gift Outright. In the mid-20th Century, he became United States ‘unofficial poet laureate. He was also an educator in esteemed universities including Oxford and Cambridge Universities (Hart). This paper aims at shedding a reflection on the life and works of Robert Frost as a worldwide renowned educator and poet.

To lovers of literature and more so poetry, Robert Frost delivers his art to the readers in an intimate yet pleasant manner. His first poem was published in 1890 in the high school’s newspaper at the age of sixteen and he continued with poetry during his University and post-university years. He was a jack of many trades, for example, he worked as a factory worker, newspaper reporter, schoolteacher, farmer, and poet.

The Psychology of Robert Frost’s Nature Poetry

Frost usually starts with an observation in nature, contemplates it and then connects it to some psychological concern. According to Thompson, “His poetic impulse starts with some psychological concern and finds its way to a material embodiment which usually includes a natural scene” (quoted in Thompson). According to John F. Lynen, “Frost sees in nature a symbol of man’s relation to the world. Though he writes about a forest or a wildflower, his real subject is humanity his concept of nature... is a paradox and it points toward the greater paradox in man himself”. Lynen also states that “the struggle between the human imagination and the meaningless void man confronts is the subject of poem after poem”.

Robert Frost and His Tragic Life

He wrote, “...”The utmost reward of daring should be still to dare.” Frost received many honors and awards,

among them the Pulitzer Prize in poetry in 1924, 1931, 1937, and 1943; he was elected to membership in the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1916, and to membership in the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1930. On the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday the U.S. Senate adopted a resolution extending him felicitations. In 1955 Vermont named a mountain after him in the town of his legal residence, Ripton. More than thirty colleges and universities gave him honorary degrees, and in the spring of 1957 he returned to Great Britain to receive honorary degrees from Oxford, Cambridge, and the National University of Ireland.

Frost's Life as a Poet

Robert Frost's Life as a Poet Robert Lee Frost was born in San Francisco, California on March 26 of 1894 and died in Boston, Massachusetts on January 29 of 1963. Though he did not truly start publishing poems until age thirty-nine, Frost obtained four Pulitzer prizes in his writing career and was deemed one of the greatest twentieth century poets. His pastoral writing and skilled use of meter and rhythm has captured the attention of reader's and critics for decades. Frost was very fond of nature and the beauty of things around him and illustrated this in many of his poems.

Analysis of Three Poems Written by Robert Frost

Robert Frost, a poet was born in 1874 in San Francisco, California and died in 1963. Many world changing events happened in his lifetime such as the stock market crash and World War II to name a few. He began seriously writing poetry in high school and continued to write all his life. He was starting to gain publicity in 1915 and in 1961 read his poem "The Gift Outright" during President John F Kennedy's inauguration. There are three of his poems that I will be writing about in this essay: "The Mending Wall", "The Road Not Taken" and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Day".

Conclusion:

A poet needs to have a facility with language and an eye to see (not necessarily the actual eye, but discernment) truth. Poets make connections, and so every poet's work is intimately connected with who he or she is. What they write is their interaction with life. Frost also shows his keen human interest, for he is sad to find deserted houses and any lessening of the population. He wants life to go on, and he is

perfectly content just to be an interested spectator watching life drift by. We have now seen Frost's use of nature and humanity in general but there is also a suggestion of a friendly rivalry between nature and man in his poetry. Nature is never portrayed as being vicious against man, or working against man at all times, but there is an interplay between man and nature, which more or less amounts to the reaction of people to nature's processes. Robert Frost's poetry is a blend of realistic portrayals of New England nature and humanity with more emphasis on external nature which in the last analysis is more permanent and can still interfere with man's highly mechanized world. Robert Frost through symbols in nature tells us about the importance of letting people in. He shows us in beautiful analogies the difficulty of turning your back on something that you want, because it is a mistake that will follow you the rest of your life. Finally he shows in his wonderful way that in life the easy road is not always the better road.

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