

A Comparative Study of the Nature Poetry of Wordsworth and Robert Frost

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Abstract

Frost is a great lover of nature, and his love, too, like that of Wordsworth, is local and regional. It is the region that lies to the north of Boston, which forms the background to his poetry. Frost's love of nature is more comprehensive, many-sided, and all-inclusive than that of Wordsworth. Frost writes from personal experience of those activities in nature which he himself has observed and experienced. His realism, his authenticity and veracity, has been admired and confirmed by numerous dwellers in the countryside.

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Frost is a great lover of nature, and his love, too, like that of Wordsworth, is local and regional. It is the region that lies to the north of Boston, which forms the background to his poetry. It is the hills and dales, rivers and forests, trees, flowers and plants, animals, birds, animals, birds and insects, season and seasonal changes, of this particular region, which have been described in one poem after another, and his descriptions are characterized by accuracy and minuteness. As Isidor Schneider says, "the descriptive power of Mr. Frost is to me the most wonderful thing in his poetry. A snowfall, a spring thaw, a bending tree, a valley mist, a brook, these are brought not to, but into, the experience of the reader." The method is simple and can be analysed. What he describes is never a spectacle only, but an entire adventure. In *Our Singing Strength* we follow him disputing with birds a bit of roadway; in *A Hillside* That we almost see him on his knees trying to feel with his hands the process of snow turning into water. Numerous poems of Frost, Written at

different periods of his life, are devoted to the description of the various objects of nature, and his descriptions always reveal minuteness of observation and fidelity of description. Thus in the *Birches* we get a concrete and faithful description of the 'habit' of birches and how they react to a storm:

When I see birches bend to left and
right
Across the lines of straighter, darker
trees.
I like to think some boy's been
swinging them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down
to stay
Ice-storms do that. Often you must
have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter
morning
After a rain They
click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-
coloured

As the stir crack and crazes their
enamel.

Frost's love of nature is more comprehensive, many-sided, and all-inclusive than that of Wordsworth. Wordsworth loved to paint only the spring-time beauty of nature, or what Coleridge called, "Nature in the grove", but Frost has an equally keen eye for the sensuous and the beautiful in nature, as well as for the harsher and the unpleasant. A Boundless Moment, gives us one of those fresh glimpses of beauty which have made Frost's nature-poetry so popular:

Oh, that is the Paradise-in-bloom, I
said,

And truly it was fair enough for
flowers.

Frost can appreciate that, "Nature: first green is gold", and he can enjoy the beauty of nature's 'green' and 'gold', but it would be a mistake to suppose that Frost is a mere painter of pleasant landscapes. Rather; the bleak, the barren, and the sinister is more characteristic of his nature-painting. Even when reveling in the sensuous charms of nature, Frost is no long unaware of the sinister and the ugly that may lie hidden beneath the surface. Says John F. Lynen in this connection, "Even in Frost's most cheerful nature sketches there is always a bitter" sweet quality. Admittedly he can and does enjoy nature. His flowers, trees and animals are all described with affection, yet none of the nature poems is free from hints of possible danger; under the placid surface there is always the unseen presence of something hostile." Spring Pools, for example, begins innocently enough with a

description of the pools and flowers which
one sees in the woodlands in early spring.
Then suddenly the tone becomes grave:

The tree that have it ill their pent-lip
buds

To darken nature and be summer
woods

"There is something sinister about the way the poem turns out. Spring, traditionally the season of birth, innocence, and joy, ushers in darkness, and the optimistic ending of Shelley's Ode to the West Wind is grimly inverted."

Treacherous forces are forever breaking through the pleasant surface of the landscape in this manner. Frost on his nature rambles has the air of someone picking his way through no man's land during an uneasy truce. The weather is bracing, his spirits are high; but he must tread lightly for fear of hidden dangers, and there is always the chance that he may stumble upon a bullet-pierced helmet or something worse. At the most unexpected times, he gives glimpses of horror. In Two Tramps in Mud Time he interrupts his genial chat about the April weather to advice:

Be glad of water, but don't forget

The lurking frost in the earth beneath

That will steal forth after the sun is set

And show on the water its crystal teeth

These vistas opening upon fearful realities do not in the least negate the beauty. Frost also sees ivy nature; rather, it gives his song birds, wild flowers, brooks, and trees their poignant appeal. The charm of many of the nature- lyrics results from the vividness with

which sweet, delicate things stand out against the somber back-ground. “You cannot have the one without the other: love of natural beauty and horror at the remoteness and indifference of the physical world, are not opposite but different aspects of the same view.”

In other words, as W.H. Auden emphasizes, Frost does not idealise or romanticize nature, he gives us the truth about her. His poem natural objects, such as Birches, Mending Wall or The Grindstone, “Are always concerned with them not as foci for mystical meditation or starting points for fantasy, but as things with which, and on which, man acts in the course of the daily work of gaining a livelihood.” Nor is he, like Wordsworth, a poet who has had a vision in your which he can spent the rest of his life in interpreting. These poems tell us, not so much of rare, exalted, chosen moments, of fleeting inexplicable intuitions, but of his daily and, one might say, common experience. His realism is also seen in the fact that he does not picture the natural world as better than man’s. “Nature lives mechanically; awareness of life is the distinctive privilege of man. Man, no doubt, causes much misery through war and bloodshed, but then he is also capable of much heroism. Nature’s world is disordered, it is human labour alone which can turn it into a well-organised and beautiful garden.

Frost writes from personal experience of those activities in nature which he himself has observed and experienced. His realism, his authenticity and veracity, has been admired and confirmed by numerous dwellers in the countryside. Indeed, realism is a marked feature of Frost’s nature poetry.

The woods are, no doubt, ‘lovely’, but their beauty cannot detain the poet for long as he has promises to keep and miles to go. “The fact is the sweetest dream that labour knows”; fact, ‘reality’ is never long absent from Frost’s nature-poetry. Frost is not concerned with nature as such, he is more concerned with the common human activity that goes in her lap as mowing, apple picking, birth swinging, etc. By noting such everyday activity he seeks to study man in relation to his physical environment, and to the lover creatures that live within her.

Frost does not attribute a soul or personality of Nature. His natural world is impersonal, unfeeling, and at best animal creation. Says Marion Montgomery in this connection, “It is not spirit of nature which sends Frost’s rain or wind; he never sees in the natural world the pervading spirit which Wordsworth saw. It may be that a mountain “had the slant As of a book held up before his eyes (“Time out”). But the mountain is not a personality as it is for Wordsworth in “The Prelude and in Other Poems.” Frost makes his attitude towards nature clear when he says in New Hampshire that “I wouldn’t be a prude afraid of nature” and again rather flatly, “Nothing not built with hands, of course, is sacred.” Man must constantly struggle to conquer nature’s wilderness and subdue them to his use. In The Mountain the mountain takes up all the space and prevents the village from growing.

Frost at times speaks directly to objects of nature, as Wordsworth did. But what is high seriousness in Wordsworth is fancy or humoring Frost. Frost humorously addresses his orchard, which he is leaving for the winter “Watch out for the rabbits and deer;

they will eat you. And if the sun gets too hot before proper season, you won't be bearing next summer." In another poem and in a more serious vein, he speaks to The Tree at My Window, which he watches tossed about by the winds, and compares its state to his own, deciding that,

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

Robert Frost has written on almost every subject, but alienation and isolation, both emotional and physical, are the major themes' of his poetry. His, 'book of people', North of Boston, is full of solitaries who are lonely and isolated for one reason or the other. Frost is a great poet of boundaries and barriers which divide men from men and come in the way of communication, and so result in lack of understanding and friction. Man is not only isolated from other man, but Frost pictures his as also alone and solitary in an impersonal and unfeeling environment.

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Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening has an equally rich texture and admits of several interpretations. On the surface, it is no more than a simple anecdote relating how the poet pauses one evening along a country road to watch the snowfall in the woods: "The woods are lovely, darn and deep", and as he gazes into the soft, silent whiteness, he is tempted to stay on and on, allowing his mind to lose itself in the enchanted grove. "His consciousness seems on the verge of freeing itself from ordinary life. As if it were about to dissolve in the shadowy blank, but his mind holds back from this." He remembers that his journey has a purpose. He has promises to keep and many miles to go before he can yield to the dream-like release which the woods seem to offer.

Says Lynen "this is the core of the poem, a moving personal experience exquisitely rendered. Yet in reconsidering it one cannot quite shake off the feeling that a good deal more is intended. The poem is not just a record of something that once happened to the poet; it points outward from the moment described towards far broader areas of experience.