

Robert Frost's Nature Poetry

Suksham Ahluwalia

Associate Professor
Department of English,
Arya College Ludhiana

Abstract :

The Romantic association of nature and spirit expressed itself in one of two ways. The landscape was, on one hand regarded as an extension of the human personality, capable of sympathy with man's emotional state. On the other hand, nature was regarded as a vehicle for spirit just as man; the breath of God fills both man and the earth. Delight in unspoiled scenery and in the (presumably) innocent life of rural dwellers was a popular literary theme. Frost's attitude towards nature in comparison with Wordsworth's can be explained in terms of the impact that Transcendentalism had on his views. Although Frost enjoyed nature and employed it in his poetry it was a means of meditation and religious inspiration for him to reach a higher level of spirituality and philosophy towards the life.

Keywords : Landscape Beauty, Romantic Melancholy, Humanity and Rural Scenes.

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. Through his close observations of nature Frost shows his deep love for it but never comes right out and sings its praises. His youthful intentions, Thompson suggests, were to explore the nexus between hope and despair and in so doing to embark on a metaphysical journey which would 'extend his spiritual and intellectual horizons.¹ 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.

Nature provided Frost an objective background against which he could measure the validity of human experience and gain a fuller understanding of it. Frost writes often about external nature—the mountains, lakes, woods, and fields, and the animals and plants found there. He appreciates nature and feels it is important. This point is expressed in many of his poem through images. From Frost's biography we know that he was a farmer-poet throughout his life; though in the latter half of his life, he did less farm work and more writing and lecturing. The original form of the table of contents for A Boy's Will includes a gloss for each of the poem.

The gloss for “mowing” says “he takes up life simply with the small tasks”³. It is obvious that Frost likes this kind of life—farming while writing and lecturing. Through the description of mowing in field, the speaker tells us farm work is the only spiritual comfort. This experience is presented in past tense, but the scene seems to live in the speaker’s mind as he remembers its quiet intensity in terms of overheard conversation between his scythe and its task—a conversation really his own. The scythe’s whispering voice dominates the scene. He feels the sun’s heat on his body and jokes that perhaps the scythe whispered in awe at the silence.

It was no dream of the gift of idle hours,

Or easy gold at the hand of fay or elf:

Anything more than the truth would have seemed too weak

The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.

My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make. (Frost, 1995)

With “It was no dream”, the tone modulates into deep seriousness as he senses that anything expressed by such labor cannot be about easy achievements or mythical fancies. The next-to-last line, set off as a whole sentence, is one of Frost’s knotty didactic statements. Fact stands in opposition to dream in the contrast between fancied rewards and real ones already mentioned, but fact as “sweetest dream” paradoxically gives fact the rich satisfactions of dream that hover over the whole entranced scene. Thus “fact” seems to be the act of labor itself, the specific harvest, and the reality confirmed by scene, labor and harvest. In “A Passing Glimpse”, the flowers briefly seen along a railroad track serve as the central symbol. The passing glimpse of the flowers is into a world of spiritual beauty, which can be seen only dimly in earthly things. The identity of the flowers can never quite be grasped. Had the speaker known just what he had seen, the vision might have been completed, though the flowers he names suggest this vision through their special qualities. I name all the flowers I am sure they weren’t: Not Fireweed loving where woods have burnt.

Stopping By Woods On a Snowy Evening” provides another example. Here the speaker struggles against and overcomes the temptation to yield to the seductive woods. He turns a resolute back on the loveliness of dark woods and cold snow, with a certain weariness and yet with quiet determination, to face the needs and demands of life.³ Frost loves nature and turns to nature from human society. But he has a less optimistic view of nature. He conceives of the universe as a dichotomy between good and evil, and is much more conscious of the violence and evil at least potential in nature. In “Once by the Pacific”, the stormy Pacific is a massive symbol of dangers to civilization—the end of the world, with the same God who began the

creation by saying: “Let There Be Light” now sending down the “opposite and imperative” (Warren & Lewis, 1973, p.1871). The speaker, watching as if from a great distance, laconically issues a warning to humanity about terrible threats that seem more their concern than his.

The clouds were low and hairy in the skies,

Like locks blown forward in the gleam of eyes.

You could not tell, and yet it looked as if

The shore was lucky in being backed by cliff,

The cliff in being backed by continent;

It looked as if a night of dark intent

Was coming, and not only a night, an age.

Someone had better be prepared for rage.

There would be more than ocean-water broken

Before God’s last Put Out the Light was spoken. (Frost, 1995)

The image of clouds “like locks blown forward in the gleam of eyes” reflects the aggression in the waves’ stares. The sardonic understatement of the “something” the waves thought of doing implies unspeakably awful acts. Yet the speaker draws back as he says “You could not tell,” pretending uncertainty about his apprehension but possibly vindictive in his thoughts about punishments deserved by humanity⁴. Some mock casualness continues with another “it looked as if,” this one broadening the threat from “a night” to “an age” and thus changing the merely geographical to the historical—that is, to the coming of another dark age. Nature serves explicitly as a symbol for evil forces in the poem “Lodged”.

They so smote the garden bed

That the flowers actually knelt,

And lay lodged-though not dead. (Frost, 1995)

The speaker sees rain and wind as personified conspirators against the garden flowers. “Smote” suggests murderousness, and “the flowers actually knelt” suggests the speaker’s and the flowers’ surprise at an assault from usually kind forces. They “knelt/And lay lodged” to protect themselves from what seemed to be injustice, like innocents nursing their wounds. The snow-white swamps add more terror and depression to the situation in “The Rabbit-Hunter.” Destruction remains a central theme in this poem. The speaker seems painfully

both outside and inside the situation, empathizing with the hated hunter as well as the miserable rabbit.

Conclusion :

Though Frost's poetry belongs to the Wordsworthian type which is plain, he lacks no creativity in his artistic technique. On the surface level, his poetry is simple and plain. Through the analysis of imagery in his poetry, a world of profound implication is manifested. The employment of imagery contributes a lot to the superficial simplicity of his poetry. But Frost hides behind a simple front, and he has proven more difficult of access in practical terms.

References :

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