

## **The treatment of Nature in the poetry of William Wordsworth and Robert Frost In Relation to Wordsworth's Romanticism and Frost's Modernism.**

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**Abstract:** Wordsworth's passion for Nature is well known as De Quincey puts it: "Wordsworth had his passion of Nature fixed in his blood. It was a necessity of his being, like that of a mulberry leaf to the silk-worm and through his commerce with Nature did he live and breathe" Wordsworth loves all objects of Nature; but he is concerned for less with the sensuous manifestation that delight most of the poets of Nature, then with the spiritual that he finds underlying these manifestations.

On the other hand, Frost is a great lover of nature and his love, too, like, animals, birds 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 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.

In relation to Wordsworth's Romanticism signifies a movement which is characterized by its emphasis on emotion and individualism as well as the glorification of all the past and nature, preferring the medieval rather than classical. For William Wordsworth, poetry should begin as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", which the poet then "recollect [s] in tranquility", evoking a new but corresponding emotion the poet can then mold into art.

According to Cleanth Brooks, John Lynen, Trilling and a host of other competent critics claimed that Frost is essential a modern poet, and that the surface simplicity of his poetry is deceptive and misleading. There is no doubt that he withdraws into rural England and writes of New Englanders, of their simple occupations carried on in their Primitive setting away from the haunts of human civilization, and the concerns of modern life.

**Keywords:-** Nature, Romanticism, Modernism, Regionalism, Mysticism

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) is universally recognized as a great poet of Nature. But he was not content to be thought, or to be a poet of Nature only, singing the sensuous joy of a life lived in natural surroundings, like Cowper in *The Task*:

God made the country, and Man-made the town.

Wordsworth to become a philosophical poet, whose ultimate theme was not Nature but the heart of man. And the poetry of man took in his hands as great a development as the poetry of nature. On the other hand, 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 one of those fresh glimpses of beauty which have made Frost's nature-poetry so popular. For Wordsworth, 'Nature' deals with 'inner joy' of life. In his poem, *To The Daisy* speaks of the 'cheerful flower' as alert and gay. *I wandered Lonely* as a cloud depicts the jocund daffodils that outdo the sparkling waves in glee. In *Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower* the poet represents Nature as imparting to Lucy its own vital 'feelings of delight'. Frost can appreciate that, "Nature's 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 characteristics of his nature-painting.

## II. DISCUSSION

Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats, Shelley, were all the poets of Nature, but in what different ways." Coleridge, sympathizing as he does intellectually with his friend's transcendentalism, is far more readily influenced by multifold sensuous appeal of nature; while Byron and Keats delight with frankly pagan joy in landscape, waterscape, and, cloudscape, and are content to worship the goddess, not to consult the oracle. "The poet whose attitude towards Nature approaches nearest to Wordsworth's is Shelley.

In poems like Tintern Abbey and The Prelude Wordsworth has shown how his love of Nature was developed and the various stages through which it passed.

Wordsworth's childhood days were spent in the midst of beautiful sights and sounds of nature. The child Wordsworth looked upon nature as a source of and scene for animal pleasure like skating, riding, fishing and walking. Wordsworth's first love Nature was a healthy boy's delight in outdoor life.

In Tintern Abbey he refers to the glad animal movements of his childhood days, in The prelude he says that in this early stage Nature was

But secondary to my own pursuits  
And animal activities, and all  
Their trivial pleasures.

In the second stage, Wordsworth developed a passion for the sensuous beauty of Nature. As he grew up, his coarser pleasures' last their charm for him and Nature was loved with an unreflecting passion altogether untouched by intellectual interests or associations.

A careful study of Wordsworth's Nature-description shows that this eye and ear were very sensitive. In this connection Arthur Compton-Ricketts observer. "As the poet of the eye he has many peers, and in richness of effect and subtlety of appeal must yield the palm to a crowd of singers less great than himself; but it comes to the symbolism of sound, Wordsworth is supreme"

No other poet could have written.  
A voice so thrilling never was heard  
In spring time from the cuckoo-bird,  
Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides,

However, it should be noted that there are very few passages in Wordsworth's poetry which would justify us in claiming that his sense of touch, taste, and smell were equally acute, smooth, 'luscious', warm, 'fragrant' - these are no epithets for Wordsworth's poetry. His world is austere and bleak.

Frost, on the other hand, is a great and original natural poet. His nature-treatment is unique and distinctive in many ways. He does not take any theory of nature for granted, Rather, he writes from his own personal experience and observation. His approach is pragmatic and realistic. Frost's love of nature is more comprehensive, many-sided, and all-inclusive than that of Wordsworth.

According to W.H. Auden, Frost does not idealize or romanticize nature, he gives her truth about her. His poems on 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, the poet who has had a vision in youth which he can spend the rest of his life in interpreting. To Frost, "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" world is disordered, it is human labour alone which can turn into a well-organized and beautiful garden. From a love of nature to a love of the lower creatures is only a short way, and Frost was a great lover of birds, insects and animals. Especially Keen and sympathetic was his interest in birds, and he observed their way and habits, minutely and painstakingly. Birds appear and reappear in a large number of poems. A Minor Bird Never Again Would Bird's Song Be the same, A Blue Ribbon at Amesbury, looking for a sunset Bird in Winter, The Oven Bird, etc., are all devoted to affectionate and sympathetic study of the ways and habits of birds. As Wordsworth stressed the harmony that exists between the soul of man and the soul of nature; Frost constantly harps on the difference or separateness of man and nature. Frost is a great poet of boundaries and there are boundaries which separate man from nature. Frost does not attribute a soul or personality of Nature. His nature world is impersonal, unfeeling and at best animal creation says Marion Montgomery in this connection" It is not spirit of nature which sends Frost" rain or wind, he never sees in the natural world that pervading spirit which Wordsworth saw.

Frost at times speaks directly to objects of nature, as Wordsworth did. But what is high seriousness in Wordsworth is fancy or humour in Frost. Frost humorously addresses his orchard, which he is leaving for the winter "Watch out for the rabbits and deer and grouse; they will eat you. And if the sun gets too hot before proper season, you won't be hearing 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 her imagination about her,  
your head so much concerned with outer,  
Mine with inner, weather.

In those instances of direct address, however, we never suppose that Frost feels the kind of brotherhood for natural objects that Wordsworth expresses through much of his poetry.

#### Romanticism in Wordsworth

Romanticism in English literature started in the late eighteenth century, with the poets William Blake, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. It continued into the nineteenth century with the second generation Romantic poets, most notably Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats and Lord Byron. In contrast to the reasoned detachment of the Enlightenment, the poetic works of Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge were characterized by their emotional sensitivity and reverence for nature.

Though the second generation of Romantic poets, especially Shelley and Byron, became notorious for their subversive and salacious works, later Romantic poetry also retained many characteristics established by Blake and Wordsworth. Keats' odes, much like the poetry of Wordsworth, took inspiration from nature, and Byron's poetry had a strong introspective character. Shelly, Byron and Keats also acquired a posthumous reputation as 'Romantic' because many aspects of their lives including their travels around Europe and the fact they died young conformed to the emerging nineteenth century ideal type of a Romantic hero. Other defining features of romantic poetry are as follows:

- . an emphasis on the common place
- . language resembling natural speech
- . elements of the mysterious, exotic, and supernatural

When I read Wordsworth's innovative works, always observing for details that are characteristics of romantic poetry.

#### **READING SKILL: ANALYZE STYLISTIC ELEMENTS**

Wordsworth's poems contain distinctive stylistic elements such as the following:

- . long, free-flowing sentences, often with phrases that interrupt main ideas
- . inverted syntax, where the expected order of words is reversed
- . unusual punctuation, such as dashes combined with other punctuation or exclamation points appearing within a sentence rather than at the end, and unusual capitalization

As I read each poem, be aware of these stylistic elements and note how they affect my impression of the speaker's thoughts.

In many of his poems, Wordsworth describes a specific setting and conveys his thoughts and feelings about it. In "Tintern Abbey", he captures an outdoor scene in the Wye River Valley, near the ruins of Gothic abbey. "Composed upon Westminster Bridge", expresses his feeling on seeing the city of London early one morning from a bridge spanning the river Thames. In "I wandered lonely as a cloud" Wordsworth describes the scenery of England's picturesque lake District, near his home in Grasmere. One of the many delights of Wordsworth's style is his use of repetition and exclamation points to emphasize different thoughts and emotions. In "Tintern Abbey", for instance, he repeats phrases, such as "lofty cliffs" and "blessed mood", to underscore the feeling of joy that nature arouses in him. Notice how, in the excerpt below, Wordsworth repeats the adjective "dear" and uses exclamation points to express his affection for his sister Dorothy.

My dear, dear Friend: and in thy voice I catch  
The language of my former heart, and read  
My former pleasures in the shooting lights  
Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while  
May I beloved in thee what I was once,  
My dear, dear sister! .....(lines 116-121)

Sometimes Wordsworth's imagination prompts him to felicitous descriptive metaphors, as in the snake-like convolutions of the yew tree's trunk (Yew Trees, 16-18), the green mass-grown stones that lie scattered under the shady trees like a flock of sheep (Nutting 35-37); the flocks 'gilded' by the sunset, or the 'hazy ridges' rising in aerial perspective like a ladder where on angels may ascend to heaven (An Evening of Extraordinary Splendour, 32 and 43, 52); the weight of dead custom which binds us down like 'Frost' (Immortality Ode, 128-29), or the two succeeding lines of that Ode where the faculties that still retain traces of their pre-natal spiritual power are compared to the smouldering embers on hearth which may at any moment be fanned into a flame.

Wordsworth has many claims to greatness. The cause of the greatness of Wordsworth's poetry is simple, and may be told quite simply. "Wordsworth's Poetry is great because of the extra-ordinary power with which Wordsworth feels the joy offered to us in nature. By his theory as well as his practice Wordsworth effected a revolution in English poetry. But the revolution was not primarily a back-to-Nature movement. I was rather a

movement which called for a fresh and mutually fructifying reunion of reality and ideality.

Wordsworth's unique virtue as a poet comes from his preoccupation with the indestructible in Nature and in human mind. His method is to combine the instruments and insights of the poet with the ideals of the Philosopher whose bias is strongly humanistic. His continuing belief in the dignity of the common man brings his work into spiritual alignment with the democratic revolutions of his age. Near the end of his days he declared, "As far as the people are capable of governing themselves, I am a democrat."

"He demolished the eighteenth century convention of poetic diction; but this service, great as it was, was only incidental to his main purpose, which was to proclaim the true nature, ends, and best themes of poetry, and the true function of the poet in society. By his exaltation of the poet's office, and the noble consistency with which he himself exercised it, he established in England a tradition of serious poetry which remained unchallenged until twenty years ago. Wordsworth is the most massive mountain in that lofty range which we call Romantic Revival. The loftiness of his poetic thought and the fire of his poetic zeal transcend anything in his contemporaries.

Modernism in Frost's Poetry

Modernism is both a philosophical and an art movement that, along with cultural trends and changes, arose from wide-scale and far-reaching transformation in Western society during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Among the factors that shaped modernism were the development of modern industrial societies and the rapid growth of cities, followed then by reaction of horror to war. Modernism also rejected the certainty of Enlightenment thinking and many modernists rejected religious belief.

Modernism, in general, includes the activities and creation of those who felt the traditional forms of art, architecture, literature, religious faith, Philosophy, social organization, activity of daily life, and science, were becoming ill-fitted to their task and outdated in the new economic, social and Political environment of an emerging fully industrialized world. The poet Ezra Pound's 1934 injunction to "Make it new" was the touchstone of the movement's approach towards what it saw as the now obsolete culture of the past. In this spirit its innovations, like the stream-of-consciousness novel, atonal and twelve-tone music, divisionist painting and abstract art, all had precursors in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A notable characteristic of modernism is self-consciousness and irony concerning literary and social traditions, which often led to experiments with form, along with the use of techniques that drew attention to the process and materials used in creating a painting, poem, building etc.

Frost's first volume of poetry was published in 1913, and his last in 1947 and he died in 1963. Thus in point of time, he is the contemporary of such 20<sup>th</sup> century poets as T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, Auden and Ezra Pound. But critics after critics have regarded Frost as a traditional 19<sup>th</sup> century poet, and have emphatically denied his modernity. For one thing, it has been pointed out that his poetry has a disarming simplicity while modern poetry is characterized by complexity and intricacy. In his poetry, we do not find irregular verse-forms, fragmentary sentences, learned allusions and references, ironic contrasts, and erudite abstruse symbolism, to all of which we are used and which he regards as the hall-mark of modernity.

Despite all charges against Frost as a modern poet, Cleanth Brooks, John Lyden, Trilling and a host of other component critics have now conclusively shown that Frost is essentially a modern poet and that the surface simplicity of his poetry is deceptive and misleading. There is no doubt that he withdraws into rural New England and writes of New Englanders, of their simple occupation carried on in their primitive setting, away from the haunts of modern civilization, and the concern of modern life. But, John Lyden rightly points out, "his retreat into country-side is not a romantic escape from the harsh, unpleasant realities of modern life, rather it provides him with a point of view, a frame of reference, for studying and commenting on the facts of modern life. "He studies life reduced to its elemental simplicity, and this elemental life is his norm with reference to which he judges urban life, and even life in general, life as it has been all ages and countries. It is the same method of indirection as is used by such modern poets as T.S. Eliot. Just as Eliot in his poem, for example, *The Waste Land*, juxtaposes the present and the past to reveal and interpret the present, so also in his poetry Frost juxtaposes rural and the urban, the rural serving as a comment on the urban. And, as in T.S. Eliot, the comment is implicit rather than explicit. A simple everyday situation from rural life is presented, and the situation is such that it serves to illuminate and clarify some aspect or problem peculiar to the modern age. Thus in *The Mending Wall*, the necessity of fences is emphasized – "Good fences make good neighbors" – and thus we get an implicit comment on the modern craze for pulling down barriers.

Frost is a modern in his attitude towards nature. The 19<sup>th</sup> century poets picture nature as benevolent and kindly with a "holy Plan" and emphasized the harmony, the oneness of man and nature. Modern science, on the other hand, conceives of nature as merely matter, soul-less and mechanical, and so entirely different from and alien to man. Frost, too, is constantly emphasizing this 'otherness' of nature. He is a great poet of boundaries, and he shows at every step that some fence or boundary ever separates man from nature. Lionel Trilling stresses, the world which Frost depicts is a terrifying one, more terrifying than the urban world, depicted by poets who are generally regarded as modern. Frost represents, "the terrible actualities of the life in a new way. I think of Robert Frost as a terrifying poet..... The universe that he conceives is a terrifying universe. After reading his poems called "Design" and "Neither Out Far Nor in Deep" which often seem to be the most perfect poems of modern times, and see if we are warned by anything in it except the energy with which emptiness is perceived."

One of the great virtue of Trilling's speech is that in it he has made clear the essential way in which Frost's poetry reflects modern life. Frost does not depict the outward events and scenery of urban life, but the central facts of twentieth century experience, the uncertainty and painful sense of loss. "More important, Trilling shows us that the terror Frost expresses in the terror which comes and must come with the birth of something new. It is the mark of genuinely modern poetry

The poem *The Road Not Taken* depicts the confusion which prevails in modern life. The modern man does not know which way to go, and it is difficult for him to make a choice of the means he should adopt in order to come out of the present in impasse. He is confused, and his life does not have a clear purpose. The protagonist in the poem (the poet himself) represents the modern man, who habitually wasted energy in regretting any choice made, but belatedly and wistfully sighs over the attractive alternative which he rejected:

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Some ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

In short, Frost is a modern poet in more ways than one. He may not depict the outward condition and events of modern life, but the central facts of modern experience, the uncertainty and painful sense of loss, the disintegration and confusion of values, the frustration and disillusionment, are all there and they seem more bleak and terrifying because they are presented in their nakedness, stripped of their all social, political and economical manifestations. And his mode of expression is symbolic and indirect. All this is the mark of a genuinely modern poetry.

### III. CONCLUSION

Finally, the use of 'nature' in poetry that reflects meditation under the influence of the Bible, should be explored specially that were composed by early colonial poets. It has been well said that 'nature' is the Bible in which man may read all things. Nature serves man for commodity for beauty for language and for discipline. The points of divergence between the two nature poets who belong to two different countries and of course they have treated 'nature' in different manner. It is very important and should not escape the worry reader's mind that is alert and receptive to subtleties. There are many points of similarity despite certain very prominent differences regarding their attitude towards nature. Today, Frost is considered by a number of literary critics as the William Wordsworth of America due to his importance which he shown in the field of poetry. On the other hand, Wordsworth is the greatest poet of 19<sup>th</sup> century. He has left abundance of pure poetry, heart-searching and beautiful, enough for a Wordsworthian anthology that will remain among the most enduring treasures of romanticism

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