

ISSN : 2395-4132

# THE EXPRESSION

An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

**Bimonthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal**



Impact Factor 6.4

**Vol. 9 Issue 1 February 2023**

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[www.expressionjournal.com](http://www.expressionjournal.com)

# The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 6.4)

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## **ROBERT FROST'S LOVE OF NATURE AS SO INGRAINED IN HIS BLOOD RUNNING DEEP INTO EVERY VEIN AND LEAF OF HIS WORK**

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### **Abstract**

Among the pool of poetry in American Literature, it is Robert Lee Frost is one of the established poets whose poetry got instantly famous worldwide. He got published in England first and later it reached to America. He was a great poet who focused on the rural landscape, nature and issues related to the common people. He depicted the rural life as it was at that time using the native American English due to which he was liked the most. He can be called the poet of the common man also. This paper is an appraisal of Robert Frost's love of nature which is so ingrained in his blood running deep into every vein and leaf of his works. Frost was a simple poet who could be understood by everyone but he reveals the fantastic realms and unknown vistas of meaning, implication, connotation to the adventurous and probing mind. Frost did not deal with philosophical, religious or political themes in his works; he focused accurately on the study of rural people and their problems because of his closeness with nature. Thus, this paper picturizes Frost's extraordinary intimacy with nature and his hyper sensitive lyrical presentation of nature, which is presented by him in a sweet rhythmic and artistic manner which serves as a pleasant treat for the readers.

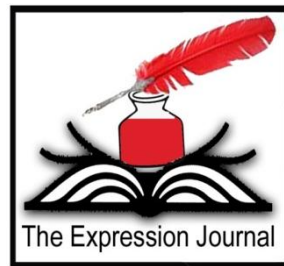
### **Keywords**

American Poetry, Robert Frost, Nature, Folk, Rustic, Ordinary, Experience, Humanity, Rural Depiction, Poverty, Politics, Corruption.

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Robert Frost emerged as a poet in the America of transition, when the country was emerging from the old into the new order. He won fame in his life time and was admired by the old as well as the new school. He has been undoubtedly the most distinguished American poet of the Twentieth century. He is said to have found his poetry out of doors, either in the face of fields or the men who are in daily contact with the elemental realities of Earth and Sky. He describes a scene or incident in a way that makes you see what he sees. His style, conversational, dramatic, terse, is the repressed style of the outdoor man, accustomed to silence, who never wastes a word. But he is all the same a poet, one who sees something more where an ordinary man would see only wood or stubble.

Frost is a poet who appeals to the ordinary reader because his poetry can be enjoyed without great exercise of the mental faculties. But if that were all, Frost would hardly be the great poet that he is. The fact is that his poetry has layers of meaning – appearing simple to those that do not want to see below the superficial, verbal meaning, but revealing fantastic realms and unknown vistas of meaning, implication and connotation to the adventurous and probing mind. Frost's poetry exhibits his concern for mankind and represents the isolation, the boredom, the horror and ugliness of existence. He is no pessimist or misanthrope, for he upholds the dignity and integrity of humanity. His modernity does not chain him to contemporaneity; his poetry is laden with universal elements, providing what he called "a momentary stay against confusion". No doubt, Frost is an emphatic defender of humanism. He asserts the worth and nobility of the individual. As Radcliffe James Squires puts it, "Frost is a poet not because he is affected by nature or because he has lived on a farm, but because he speaks to men about men" (Sen 28).

Robert Frost was born in San Francisco on 26<sup>th</sup> March, 1874. His mother was a poetess herself and wanted to name her son after Robert Burns, the great Scot poet. His father wanted to name him after General Lee, hence Frost's full name is Robert Lee Frost. As early as his schooling in Lawrence High School, Frost displayed an intense pleasure in scholarship. Since 1892 onwards, Frost tried to supplement his mother's meagre income with whatever he could

earn. For this, he did any kind of job from working in mills to newspaper reporting. However, he wrote poetry wherever he found time. The year 1894 saw the publication of his first poem "My Butterfly" in *New York Independent* and published six of his poems in a booklet entitled *Twilight*. In 1895, he married his school-fellow Elinor White and tried to settle down as a school-teacher. He spent two years as a student at Harvard College, preparing himself for college-teaching. Then he felt that the academic atmosphere was not congenial to him and so he turned to writing of poetry. In 1912, Frost made the crucial decision of his life. He chose poetry for his vocation. He published his first volume of poems under the title *A Boy's Will*. He has to his credit publication of such volumes of poetry as *North of Boston* (1914), *Mountain Interval* (1916), *New Hampshire* (1923), *A Further Range* (1936), *A Witness Tree* (1942), *In the Clearing* (1962), in which are included some of the following notable poems like "Mourning and Reluctance", "The Mountain", "Home Burial", "The Code", "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", "The Need of Being Versed in Country Things", "West-Running Book", "The Gift Outright", "The Subverted Flower", "A Masque of Reason", "The Pasture", "Why Wait for Science", "After Apple-Picking", "Birches", "Two Tramps in Mud Time", "Come in," etc.

Generally speaking, Robert Frost had no rigid definition of poetry. He considered poetry as "Words that have become deeds". He felt that originality and initiative should be embodied in poetry to give it an everlasting freshness. A poem's freshness and originality lie in its flow from delight to wisdom. He did compare the course of a poem to the course of true love. Each begins in an impulse to which the individual surrenders himself. He considered poetry to be serious art from requiring conscious craftsmanship. The poet's pleasure lies in discovering words, images, metaphors, phrases native to the emotion, thought and situation. His poems are supposed to be the projection of the mind which is constantly gazing at the natural world and trying to deal with various themes under the disguise of nature. Many of his poems carry a moral to be responded with. He treats the pastoral mode as a vehicle to ask queries into nature and meaning of life. It is philosophically one of pessimistic determinism that had a strong foothold in American Literature.

That Frost is a serious artist is proved by his virtual dedication of his life to poetry. However, he is not the kind of poet to examine his talent to write poetry or to probe deeply into the source of his poetic gift. "Every poem is an epitome of the great predicament a figure of the will braving alien entanglements" (Gerber III). His poems attest to the fact that they are simple and straightforward. Beneath that surface level, they have layers of meanings which can be perceived by a careful reader after his repeated readings for years together. Above all, there is a continuous undercurrent of deep feeling which evokes an emotional response. So, Frost becomes the poet of both the layman and the learned few. It is the outer lightness that hides the inner gravity and there lies the greatest poetic achievement of Robert Frost.

No doubt, Robert Frost is a great nature poet. Neither philosophical nor religious themes are in his dealings. He does not take much interest in politics. His approach and methods are purely Georgian. But a closer study of his poems reveals the fact that he is different from the Georgian poets. Mostly the Georgian poets depicted nature and village folk in a superficial manner because they did not have personal contact or personal experience with them. On the other hand, Robert Frost is very accurate in his observation and in his study of the rural people and their problems. He holds the mirror up to nature in his poems. Though he is a contemporary of T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Ezra Pound and W. B. Yeats who are considered to be modern poets, much in his thought he is similar to the modern transcendentalist Emerson. His

use of pastoral elements in his poetry is not an escape from reality but a method of studying man in relation to nature and natural laws.

Frost's love of nature is so ingrained in his blood, running deep into every vein and leaf of his work that it cannot be so easily separated from his work. Dealing mainly with the personal interests of the poet himself, his relation to living things in nature and the needs of society from nature are given explicit expressions. Nature in the poetry of Frost is symbolic. In the words of Gerber, "It serves man for Commodity, for Beauty, for Language, and for Discipline" (56). Nature means a good deal to him. He turns to mankind when he is tired of trees and when he is weary of man, he turns to nature. In his poems, nature and man comfort with each other in one way or other. Nature, to him is like a holy book with many good things to be read out. The mind is the tongue to express the ideas that nature connotes. The moral influence that it exerts is the amount of truth that nature tries to convey to every individual. The basic concept of Frost is that man differs essentially from other creatures and objects. For example in "Tree at my Window" out of comparison he comes to the conclusion that the essential difference is,

"That day she put out heads together,  
Fate had her imagination about her,  
Your head so much concerned with outer,  
Mine with inner weather" (13-16).

His trees do not put on a grave expression though he speaks to them. The weather that hits them is outer. In "Birches" just as the girls are drying their hair in the sun, the trees are also trailing their leaves before them:

"You may see their trunks arching in the woods  
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground  
Like girls on lands and knees that throw their hair  
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun." (17-20)

Robert Frost pictures man as a solitary figure isolated and alienated from nature, from God and from his fellowmen. To him, the land remains lonely to those who do not recognize its friendliness. He advises them to

"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" (Two Tramps in Mud Time 37-40).

His rural world consists not only of the objects, the incidents but also the events and characters. "After Apple Picking" shows an interesting picture of a farmer being tired, going home for rest after the day's labour of picking apples. In "After Apple-Picking", the experience of harvest turns out into "a lovely punishment with the synaptic echoing and re-echoing of the experience" (Squires 93) as "magnified apples appear and disappear" (18).

Leading a life of simplicity, he changes himself as a man of farms and woods of the Earth of New England who likes to be in the company of nature. His love for the place is evident by his naming of his collection of poems under the name of different places: *North of Boston*, *Mountain Interval*, *New Hampshire*, *A Further Range* and *West-Running Brook*. In "West Running Brooks", he identifies himself with the people in terms of their place and profession. It is obvious that his poetry is concerned more with man and nature. He has the intension of bringing these two extremes of self and society together until the barriers merged into a whole being. He considers his poems a means to mark the effort. He is a naturalist and accepts



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everything which is present in nature. Like Wordsworth, Frost feels one with the natural objects as the inmates. The jubilant note of Cowper is similar to that of Frost. "The Pasture" is a poem of such mood, a representative one inviting all and sundry to share the joys of nature with him,

"I'm going out to clean the pasture spring  
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away  
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):  
I sha'n't be gone long-yon come too." (1-4)

It is down to Earth realism in his treatment of rural life that brings fame to him. Instead of idealising the rustics and the life lived by the people there, he gives a realistic picture of human nature as a bundle of instincts, impulses, jealousies, loves and hatreds. From early boyhood down to his ripe old age, Frost himself is a farmer except for a brief period in England. He has a sense of vocation about writing poetry and farming is his avocation. By combining these two, he gets an intimate knowledge of the life of a farmer and thus arises the truthfulness of his depiction of rural life.

The greatness of Frost lies mainly in his sympathetic understanding of the psychology of the village folk. For example, in "Birches", he describes the pastime of a village boy. The village boy being devoid of playing base ball, considers birch swinging as a relishing game. He climbs the birches over and over again so much so that not a single tree is left out unconquered and unbent. Even when he reaches the top, he is able to maintain perfect balance. In the words of W. H. Auden, "his poems on natural objects... are always concerned with them not as foci for mystical meditation or starving points for fantasy, but as things with which and on which men acts in the course of his daily work of gaining a livelihood. Nor is he; like Wordsworth, a poet who has had vision in youth which he can spend the rest his life interpreting" (218). Frost considers water as a symbol of fertility and vigour. In "Hyla Brook", he pictures it as the water flows down very slowly,

"It's bed is left a faded paper sheet  
Of dead leaves struck together by the heart." (10-11)

It is so common that nature has been a charming theme for poets of all times and climes. The things attracted them all as a whole are its grand majesty, its loveliness and serenity. "In nature, poets have discovered sometimes indifference and cruelty, sometimes sympathy and companionship, sometimes simple delight and sensuous beauty, sometimes an enveloping medium of human passions... and sometimes spiritual significance" (Dubey 65). Frost lays emphasis upon the need of being versed in country things. According to him, nature serves for man as an open book having lessons on every page. This idea came to him as a result of his close identification of nature as an instructor. In the natural objects, Frost can always find out a symbol of man's relation to the world. As his real subject is humanity, he portrays man in man. He is concerned very much with man's relation to nature. Though man seems to be malevolent and harsh, insensible and brutish, cruel or indifferent, it is lovable to me. It teaches him many good lessons which are necessary for his survival. In "After Apple-Picking", Frost reminds us of the fact that human life is similar to the seasons. For example, spring, summer, autumn and winter represent the various stages in man's life. His poem "The Pasture" shows the moral dimensions of Frost's poetry. His moral dimensions mature into religious consciousness. His consciousness is based on every-day living as a balance between his restlessness and his attachment with the immediate world around him. One side pulls him down while the other side backs to him. When he is determined to go, he feels restrained. He feels to be bound up

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while moving. The poet repeatedly expresses his religious consciousness as his experiences tie him tightly. His life is tied up with the people and with the places around him. he attaches himself to the natural world. Harris rightly observes:

“His love and sense of kinship with nature mature his mind into religious consciousness. The courage attempting for a trial in a new surrounding is the living spirit which redeems himself from the inevitable flux” (45).

The theme of mutability is present in most of his poems. His poem “Two Tramps in Mud Time” begins just like other poems with an observation of the transient aspect of nature. Everything shimmers for a time being. Everything is on the knife edge and this is the condition of mutability. So he gives his poems an “elegiac expression” (Squires 71) to bring in the tears of things as well as the great joy of amazement comprehensively. Mutability is that aspect which appeals to Frost more in nature and this most reality releases his vision.

To conclude, throughout his nature poems, one gets the feel of Frost’s extraordinary intimacy with nature and his hyper sensitive lyrical presentation of nature is often a treat to the senses. The moral feeds the intellect while delectable landscapes and sweet pranks of nature, presented in a rhythmical artistic manner, nourish one’s senses.

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