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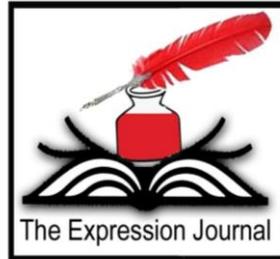
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## **NATURE OF HUMAN PREDICAMENT IN ROBERT FROST'S POETRY**

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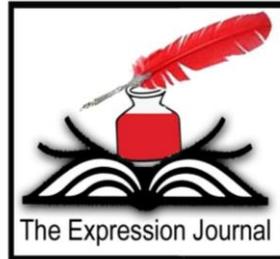
### **Abstract**

Robert Lee Frost was an American poet who was born in 1874 and died in 1963. He has been the most popular poet of the 20<sup>th</sup> century especially for this strong portrayal on different aspects. He has mastery over many subjects and that's why his poetry touches a varied variety of themes. He has won the Pulitzer Prize four times in his lifetime and many other awards. He is a writer of human predicaments and he has tried to explore many issues regarding human-beings. Robert frost's poetry is a better example of human predicaments. He touches the natural aspects and correlates them with nature and thus, presents the very true pictures of human predicaments. Some of his famous poems are Dust of Snow, Fire and Ice, The Birches, Mending Wall, After Apple Picking, Home Burial, The Gift Outright, Bear, Two Tramps in Mud Time, Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Morning and many more.

### **Key-Words**

Robert Frost, Poetry, Human Predicament, Nature, Alienation.

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In some of Frost's poems nature plays a vital role in constituting the human predicament. Nature here means the whole of the external universe- woods, clouds, rivers, flowers, cliffs, rocks etc. In a letter to Robert Coffin, Frost writes, "Life sways perilously at the confluence of opposing forces. Poetry in general plays perilously in the same wild place." The barriers between man & nature are revealed in poem after poem: Frost once remarked in a television interview in 1952, "I am not a nature poet. I have written only two poems without a human being in them".

In his approach towards nature, Frost is quite different from the romantic poets like William Wordsworth who found "mystical panthiesm" in nature. But Frost felt that nature too had become indifferent, impersonal & hostile to man. Nature in Frost's view is neither the kind mother of William Wordsworth nor the agent of immanent will of Hardy. It is lovely, but beneath the loveliness is the "design of darkness to appal". Frost's poetry seems to partake of the attitudes of Thoreau, Emerson and Robinson. Rad Cliffe Squires writes in his book *The Major themes of Robert Frost*, "Like Thoreau he begins with the consciousness of a rich spiritual life in nature which is difficult to share. Seeking like Emerson for an abstract basis in his communion with nature he seems almost able to posit what Emerson wrote in "Humble Bee" that:

"Nature never faithful is  
To such as trust her faithfulness"

Squires further speaks: "Like Robinson, Frost is appreciative of New England disease of in-communication. Unlike Robinson, however, he tends to leave the inner loneliness pure, unresolved by dramatic art."

Frost does not find the affectionate kinship between nature and man which was insisted upon by William Wordsworth who believed that "nature never betrays the heart that loves her." But Frost will go to the extent of saying in the poem "Our Hold on Planet":

We may doubt the just proportions of good & ill  
There is much in nature against us: But we forget  
Take nature altogether since time began  
Including human nature, in peace & war  
And it must be a little more in favour of man.

"Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", one of the best nature lyrics of Frost, presents the theme of alienation in a forceful manner. First the poet indicates why man wants to go away from nature. It is because nature wants to deviate the one-willed traveler from his quest & may lead him towards the darker region of death. The poem is built up on the basis of contrary tones & this fact points to Frost's awareness of the temptingly mysterious view of the natural world and his hesitancy in being committed to a sterner view of life.

The lovely voice of 'I' in the poem who is attracted by the quest at once reminds us of William Wordsworth's visionary. But Frost's traveller has to strike a bleak note of alienation. The scene of nature is quite alluring & causes in him perilous enchantment. Accordingly, the traveler stops between the 'woods and downy flake' to enjoy the natural scenery. An icy wind is blowing and Frost has ironically used the words 'easy wind'. The chilly wind is true to benumb the physical self of the traveler. But he is so much engrossed in enjoying the aesthetic beauty of the woods that he is not able to see the dark design of nature under the white, snowy beauty that is tempting him towards the darker regions of death. The time is of twilight and it is one of the darkest evenings of the year. Moreover, the softness of the flakes of snow which are falling is treacherous. Frost's speaker actually confronts the neutralized nature of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and should feel much more alienated than William Wordsworth's visionary had even any reason to do. But the horse, the animal self in man gives his harness bell a shake & tries to disturb the spell nature has cast on the traveler, and suggest to him that nature is beguiling him.

'Woods' in the poem stand for perilous enchantment though they have aesthetic beauty too. But alienated man awakens from his dreamy world:

The woods are lovely dark & deep.  
But I have promises to keep.  
And miles to go before I sleep.  
And miles to go before I sleep.

The description of woods is almost like that in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*: "the great black forest stern as it showed itself to those who brought the guilt & troubles of world into its bosom."

The reason why the traveler wants to go away from these woods & why he feels alienated is that the woods are attractive enough to allure him towards the darker regions of death. Frost has deliberately made use of alliteration 'dark & deep' to emphasize that nature is very cunning. And sleep according to some may be the day's reward after day's labour. But actually, sleep here is the sleep of death. So, man alienates himself from nature because he has some other aims to fulfill before going to that final goal. Darkness is not absence of light; it is rather the numbness of death.

"Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" presents a man who struggles in himself, whether he should enjoy the mysterious beauty of nature or fulfill his duties first. On the surface level, the man has halted in the midst of snowy woods to enjoy the beauty of the woods when snow is falling.

"The woods are lovely, dark & deep" and as he sits in his horse driven carriage gazing into the soft, salient whiteness, one self within him is tempted to stay on here on this spot allowing himself to be impressed by the charming woods. His consciousness seems on the verge of freezing itself from ordinary life as if it were to dissolve in the shadowy blank. But his mind hold him back. The poem expresses the conflict which almost everyone feels today between the demands of practical life with its obligations to others and the poignant desire to escape into a land of reverie where consciousness is dimmed and one has become almost an icicle self in the darkest evening of the winter. Reuben A. Brower says, "Stopping by woods On a Snowy Evening" is built on a contrariety of tones, a fact points to frost's awareness of the temptingly that mysterious view of the natural world and his reluctant commitment to a sterner, more realistic view.

The horse who shakes his bell, is nothing but the "animal self" in man who cannot tolerate the snowy flakes and breeze. Another self wants to be awakened from the deep sleep towards which he is being drawn:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep  
But I have promises to keep  
And miles to go before I sleep  
And miles to go before I sleep.

So, we can see how man gets alienated from himself, One self ask him to enjoy the natural beauty & the other reminds him of his obligations and promises. Regardless of the dark & cold we are prone to worry quite irrationally because of this paradoxically sombre excitement & recompense. The reluctance to leave becomes an expression of endless hunger for holding and making permanent a dark moment of pleasurable discovery in a transient discovery. But we are impelled forward by the aesthetic self because there are promises which he has made to himself & others. And there are 'miles' he must travel through other kinds of experiences before he yields to that final & inevitable commitment-sleep in death.

"A Minor Bird" also points to the presence of active barriers between man & nature. Frost says in the poem:

I have wished a bird would fly away,  
And not sing by my house all day.  
Have clapped my hands at him from the  
When it seemed as if I could bear no more.

Here Shelley's skylark that sings like a poet, William Wordsworth's Cuckoo, "the blithe spirit" or Keats Nightingale; "The immortal bird" are not to be thought of. The words in the last line of the poem, "In wanting to silence any song" give some indication of the irritation felt by the man alienated from nature, the irritation which stands in the way of his enjoying the music of the bird's song.

Another poem "Stars" describes how man gets attracted by nature only to be disillusioned by it. Here the stars of midnight do not possess any glory for the gazer; rather they evoke a note of dis-enchantment:

And yet with neither love nor hate,  
Those stars like some snow white  
Minerva's snow white marble eyes  
Without the gift of sight.

Snow and whiteness are always deceptive in Frost's poetry. That's why man feels

apprehensive and turns away so that he may not be harmed in any way by a close contact with the treacherous forces working in nature. There are a couple of poems in which Frost sees in nature a means of going towards heaven and establishing a relationship with God. In the poem "Birches", Frost like Keats enters into the imaginative realm. He says:

I would like to go by climbing a birch tree,  
And climb black branches up a snow white trunk  
Towards heaven.

Frost has started the poem by giving a simple concrete description of the birches and changes wrought upon them by wind and ice storms. But soon the poem becomes a parable of human aspirations. Birch trees provide a lovely sight of nature in New England but this lovely sight also evokes profound feelings and thoughts regarding life and death. The boy who swings birches carefully suggests that when man is "weary of consideration." "Wishes to go away from earth a while", he can take refuge under the birch trees. Birches will provide him an escape from this world and he will be able to reach heaven or at least have that kind of feeling for a while. But the poet cannot live for a long time away from the earth, because:

Earth is the right place for love:  
I don't know where it is likely to go better:

As Radcliffe Squires says, "Through nature, he dallies with heavenly wisdom and then returns to earth to discover through 'love' which has itself been polished and sharpened in the heavenly temptation." A similar situation is evoked in After Apple Picking:

My long two pointed ladder's sticking through a tree  
Towards heaven still.

We find that fallen Adam's son wants to regain paradise through nature. The opening lines of this nature lyric tell us about this attitude.

Thus, some of the simplest and most eloquent poems of Robert Frost are those which record his disturbed awareness of the treacherous forces which are lurking in nature. These forces will just lure man into a companionship with nature and then suddenly show their real destructive character. Because Frost wants to love nature so much, he is terrified whenever he imagines these treacherous possibilities which can become actualities quite suddenly and unexpectedly.

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