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## **THEME OF ALIENATION IN ROBERT FROST'S POETRY**

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### **Abstract**

Present paper is an attempt to explore the themes of isolation, loneliness, emptiness and alienation in Robert Frost's poetry. Robert Frost was an American poet who has received four Pulitzer Prizes for his poetry in his life. He is the recipient of the Congressional Gold Medal in 1960 for his poetry. He was made Poet laureate of Vermont in 1961. His well known poems are Mending Wall, home burial, After Apple Picking, Acquainted with the Night, The Gift Outright, The Birches, Bear, Two Tramps in Mud Time etc. He has written on almost every subject but alienation and emptiness are the recurring themes in his poetry. His 'book of people', *North of Boston*, is a fine example of these themes. Frost directly attacks on the issues related to human degradation, selfishness, hatred and jealousy which make human alone and dejected. Frost talks about the barriers which lead to alienation and loneliness. Man has become so selfish and lonely that walls and fences; may these be physical or emotional, come between two men.

### **Key-Words**

Robert Frost, Alienation, Isolation, Isolation, Identity.

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Robert Frost's poetry emphatically shows how walls and fences, physical as well as emotional are coming up between man and man. The industrial revolution has produced a crop of hollow and isolated men. Frost takes up this theme of alienation of man from man very seriously in some of his important poems.

The rural New England that Frost knew was of course, not the same as was known and understood by Thoreau and Emerson. The decline of agriculture with rapid industrialization was noted by the poet and this caused him to cry out:

“There is a house that is no more a house  
Upon a farm that is no more a farm.  
And in a town that is no more a town.”

These circumstances led Frost to paint a gloomy picture of modern life when man is separated from man and each human being suffers in isolation .In most poems included in the collection of 'North of Boston' , we find a strong sense of estrangement of the individual from his fellow beings. Fritz Pappenheim in his book 'The Alienation of Modern Man' says:

There is something uncanny in the condition of man when he has become a stranger to himself; but it is a fate which shapes the life of many of us. We seem to be caught

in a frightening condition. In order to assert ourselves as individual we relate only to those phases of reality which seems to promote the attainment of our objectives and remain divorced from the rest of it. But the further we drive this separation, the deeper grows the rift within ourselves.

There is a perpetual conflict within the individual today, between the head and the heart, or between reason and emotions. That this dichotomy leads to self alienation can be seen in a poem like Eliot's "Prufrock" where the protagonist is divided into two selves, 'you' and 'I', the public self and the private self.

"The Road Not Taken" presents the image of a lonely man caught up in spiritual dilemmas. His problem is to make a choice that would not involve sacrifice of any part of his being:

"Two roads diverged in yellow wood  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler long I stood."

Man is a divided self; his one self is alienated from the other. He is in a confusion about which road he should take. George W. Nitchie has observed in 'The Road Not Taken', "the problem of choice is in a way more elementary, since neither self interest, nor moral obligation nor even curiosity provides a real basis for preparing one road to another."

The poet's choice is an image of choice of life. The protagonist of "The Road Not Taken" is forced to travel one of the two roads. He examines both of them thoroughly. One is "just as fair as the other"; "And both that morning equally lay. In leaves no steps had trodden black."

Finally, he chose one road because it seemed less frequented. Actually there was not much difference between the two for "passing there had warn them really about the same" But the one he chooses, seemed to have the better claim because it is slightly less worn, the difference, though very slight, makes 'all the difference' years later:

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

In modern times, every man has to face such crucial moments in life, when one part of his personality can be realized only by sacrificing another part which is equally important. This inevitably generates a sense of self- alienation. Reuben A. Brower says:

'The Road Not Taken' lends itself like some of Shakespeare's Sonnets to over easy identification with the youthful self of the poet or reader; it is still a powerful image of the choice of life. The power comes in part from the strange experience when Frost almost met his 'own image' in the woods near dusk, at a place where, 'two lonely cross- roads' intersected each other.

Most of the critics feel that the 'sigh' at the end of the poem indicates 'regret'. But it is not a sigh of regret for a wrong choice; it is in fact a sigh of regret that both the choices were not possible at the same time. We are compelled to make a choice every moment of our life from the limited possibilities available to us at the time. And this impossibility of making a satisfactory choice has alienated man from himself. According to Lawrence Thompson: " He speaks of the person who habitually wastes energy in regretting any choice made belatedly but wistfully he sighs over the attractive alternative rejected."

Frost writes in the "Bear."

Man acts more like the bear in cage  
That all day fights a nervous inward rage  
His mood rejecting all his mind suggest.

The Bear which unknown to itself, is confined to a limited area of woods set aside by man, feels free; but man who knows too well the limitations of his existence, feels as much confined as a caged bear even though the choice permitted to him may be larger than that which the wild bear has.

"Two Tramps in Mud Time" begins by giving us a delightful picture of Frost, the farmer, working in his dooryard and talking to passersby. Since the work he is doing is not forced upon him as a brute necessity, he takes it as a pleasurable activity. Only a person who works under compulsion will experience a sense of alienation. This can be illustrated from the following line:

"Out of the mud two strangers came  
And caught me splitting wood in the yard  
And one of them put me off my aim.  
By hailing cheerily ' Hit them hard'  
I knew pretty well why he dropped behind

And let the other go on a way.  
I knew pretty well what he had in mind:  
He wanted to take my job for pay.”

Frost has put before us two contrasting attitudes towards work – one of the stranger who wanted to work to earn his livelihood and the other of the poet who had an aesthetic attitude towards work & is chopping wood just for the sake of love he is doing this type of work . The ‘work’ of ‘hulking tramps’ was alienated labor because they had no love for the work. They were called upon to do it for the sake of wages. But they just want to turn the attention of the poet away from his work because they want him to realize that their need is greater than his:

“As that I had no right to play  
With what was another man’s work for gain  
My right might be love but theirs was need  
And where the two exist in twain.  
Theirs was the better right agreed.”

So their claim was apparently better. But the whole trend of the poem is to strip of all meaning & significance of that type of work which is under taken for ‘pay’.

Frost gives his views regarding the solution of the problem of alienation. When he says in this poem that both vocation & avocation should go hand in hand. Only this type of work can provide satisfaction & fulfillment. If need & love both are united, the work becomes a pleasurable human activity, otherwise it is alienated drudgery. The poet concludes by saying:

“My avocation & my vocation  
As my two eyes make one in sight  
Only when love & need are one  
And the work is play for mortal stakes  
Is the deed ever really done?”

Unfortunately, most of the work undertaken by most of the people in a modern industrialized society is not “really for mortal stakes.” Here avocation & vocation have been separated from each other completely. This is what produces in us a deep sense of alienation from the works we are required to do.

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