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Dr. Seema Rani
Associate Professor,
Department of English,
S.G.H.S.P.G. College, Jiwan
Nagar, Sirsa, Haryana, India

Nature as Metaphor: A Journey through Robert Frost's Poetry

Dr. Seema Rani

Abstract

Robert Frost's poetry continues to resonate with readers due to its universal themes, accessible language, and profound insights into the human experience. His ability to blend nature's beauty with life's complexities has left an enduring legacy. The significance of natural imagery and symbolism in the poetry of Robert Frost is deep and multifaceted. His masterly use of the natural world as a backdrop and a source of metaphor adds depth and complexity to his works, making it a hallmark of his poetic style. His poems often describe the natural world in intricate detail, reflecting his belief that nature is a mirror for human life and its struggles. Frost's poetry is known for its ambiguity and layered meanings. His poems often have multiple interpretations, and he enjoys exploring the complexities of human thought and emotion. His poetry reminds us that beneath the surface simplicity of his poems lies a depth of meaning that invites readers to contemplate their own choices, the passage of time, and the world around them. He subtly reminds readers of the delicate balance between humans and the natural world, a theme that has become increasingly significant in contemporary literature. This paper highlights how Robert Frost's use of natural imagery and symbolism enriches his work by providing layers of meaning, connecting the human experience to the natural world, and allowing readers to engage with his themes on a personal and universal level.

Keywords: Imagery, symbolism, inspiration, poetic sensibilities, contemplation

Introduction

Robert Frost, one of America's most celebrated poets, left an indelible mark on the world of literature through his profound and introspective poetry. Born in San Francisco in 1874, Frost's life and work were deeply intertwined with the rural landscapes of New England, which became both his muse and canvas. Throughout his lifetime, he received four Pulitzer Prizes for Poetry, leaving behind a legacy that continues to inspire readers and writers worldwide. Robert Frost's upbringing played a pivotal role in shaping his poetic sensibilities. Born into a family of teachers, he developed a love for literature at an early age. However, his father's passing when Frost was just eleven led to significant financial challenges. The family relocated to New England, where Frost's connection with rural life and nature profoundly influenced his poetry. This period of his life instilled in him a deep appreciation for the natural world and the people who lived close to it. Frost is often associated with traditional forms of poetry, particularly blank verse and rhymed quatrains. His poems often appear deceptively simple on the surface, but beneath their straightforward language lie complex themes and layered meanings. He masterfully employed colloquial language, making his poems accessible to a wide range of readers while conveying profound ideas. One of Frost's signature techniques is the use of vivid imagery drawn from nature.

Objectives of the Study

- To explore the significance of natural imagery and symbolism in the poetry of Robert Frost.
- The profound influence of Robert Frost on modern poetry and literature.

Research Methodology

This study is based on secondary sources of data such as anthologies of Robert Frost, articles, books, journals, research papers, websites, and other sources.

Themes in Frost's Poetry: Nature is a central theme in Frost's poetry. He uses it to reflect on the cycle of life, the passage of time, and the impermanence of human existence. Apart from that, Frost's poems frequently explore the complexities of decision-making. "The Road Not Taken" exemplifies this theme, as it grapples with the choices people make and their far-

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Seema Rani
Associate Professor,
Department of English,
S.G.H.S.P.G. College, Jiwan
Nagar, Sirsa, Haryana, India

reaching consequences. The speaker contemplates two diverging paths, using the woods and the road as metaphors for choices in life. Many of Frost's poems touch upon the theme of isolation and solitude. His characters often find themselves in desolate landscapes or facing difficult decisions alone. "Acquainted with the Night" poignantly captures the feeling of isolation in an urban setting. Another important theme in some of his poems is the struggle and challenges faced by individuals in their daily lives. "Mending Wall" reflects on the human inclination to build barriers between one another. Frost frequently employs the changing seasons as symbols in his poems. For example, winter can symbolize death, dormancy, or solitude, while spring can represent rebirth, renewal, and hope. "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is a famous example where the winter landscape symbolizes the speaker's contemplation of life and death. Frost's use of natural imagery sometimes underscores conflicts and contradictions within his poems. For example, a beautiful snowy scene can coexist with feelings of loneliness or existential uncertainty. This interplay between the serene and the disquieting adds depth and complexity to his work. Frost grappled with the tension between traditional values and modern life. He often depicted rural settings and traditional lifestyles in his poetry, but his themes also resonate with the challenges and changes of the modern world. He examines the tension between opposing forces, such as duty and desire, individualism and community, and life and death. He observed and celebrated the beauty of rural landscapes, changing seasons, and the interactions between humans and nature. The natural imagery and symbolism in his poetry make his themes universal and relatable. Readers can connect with the emotions and dilemmas expressed in his poems through their own experiences with the natural world.

The Significance of Natural Imagery and Symbolism:

Frost's masterful use of the natural world as a backdrop and a source of metaphor adds depth and complexity to his work, making it a hallmark of his poetic style. His use of natural imagery reflects his deep connection with the environment, emphasizing the importance of a harmonious relationship between humanity and the natural world. Nature is a universal theme that transcends time and culture. Frost's use of natural imagery makes his poetry accessible and relatable to readers across generations and backgrounds. The beauty of a snow-covered forest or the changing of seasons is something people from all walks of life can understand and appreciate. Frost often uses elements of nature, such as trees, woods, snow, and seasons, as metaphors for human emotions, choices, and challenges. This allows readers to relate personal experiences to the natural world, making his poetry deeply resonant. Frost's natural imagery and symbolism often serve as a mirror of the human condition. He uses the natural world to contemplate life's complexities, including choices, regrets, mortality, and the passage of time. Frost frequently uses paths, roads, and forks in the road as symbols of choices and decisions in life. "The Road Not Taken" is perhaps his most famous poem that explores the consequences of choosing one path over another. The diverging roads symbolize life choices and their outcomes. In some of his poems, trees are a common natural symbol in Frost's poetry. They can represent endurance, strength, and rootedness. The falling of

leaves or the bending of branches under snow can symbolize change, aging, or the passage of time. He employs natural imagery to explore spiritual and transcendent themes. For instance, his poem "Birches" uses the image of birch trees to suggest a yearning for transcendence and renewal. Woods and forests are recurring settings in Frost's poetry. They often symbolize the unknown, the mysterious, or the unconscious mind. The choice to enter the woods or stay on the well-trodden path can represent choices in life, and these settings are places of reflection and decision. Frost's poetry also contains hints of environmental awareness and ecological consciousness. The significance of natural imagery and symbolism in Robert Frost's poetry lies in its ability to evoke a deep emotional response, convey universal themes, and provide a rich, multilayered canvas for exploring the human experience. Frost's poems remind us of the enduring and essential connection between humanity and the natural world, making his work a timeless and essential part of the literary canon.

"Birches" is one of Robert Frost's most famous poems, and it explores various themes, including the symbolism of trees, the act of swinging on birches, and the idea of escape and renewal. The swinging of birches is used as a metaphor for escape and temporary relief from the challenges and complexities of life. The act of swinging on the flexible birch trees allows one to temporarily leave behind the burdens and responsibilities of adulthood and return to a state of childlike freedom and simplicity.

I'd like to get away from earth awhile/And then come back to it and begin over / May no fate wilfully misunderstand me/And half grant what I wish and snatch me away/Not to return.

The swinging of birches is used as a metaphor for escape and temporary relief from the challenges and complexities of life. The act of swinging on the flexible birch trees allows one to temporarily leave behind the burdens and responsibilities of adulthood and return to a state of childlike freedom and simplicity. The poem ultimately conveys the idea that it's important to find moments of escape and renewal in life.

When I see birches bend to left and right/ Across the lines of straighter darker trees/I like to think some boy's been swinging them/But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay/As ice storms do.

The speaker reminisces about his own youth when he used to swing on birch trees, highlighting the value of maintaining a connection with one's inner child. The desire to "get away from earth awhile" signifies a longing for transcendence and a break from the mundane. Despite the desire for escape, the poem also emphasizes the importance of returning to earthly life. The speaker wishes to "begin over" and return to the challenges and joys of human existence. This suggests a balanced perspective on life, recognizing that both escape and engagement with the world are valuable. In "Birches," Robert Frost uses vivid natural imagery and symbolism to explore the tension between the demands of adulthood and the longing for the simplicity and freedom of youth. The swinging of birches becomes a powerful metaphor for the human experience, with the poem ultimately celebrating the idea that one can find solace and renewal by connecting with nature and embracing moments of escape.

"Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost vividly portrays nature as a central element in the poem.

Nature, in this context, serves as both a backdrop and a source of symbolism, contributing to the poem's overall themes and atmosphere. The themes of seasons, time, the enchanting winter landscape, the symbolism of the woods and snow, the temptation of death, and the call of duty have been wonderfully presented in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening". The poem takes place on a snowy evening, which represents the winter season. The speaker is drawn to the serene beauty of the winter scene but is aware of the obligations and responsibilities that await him. The idea of time passing and the seasons changing is subtly woven throughout the poem.

"Whose woods these are I think I know./His house is in the village though;/He will not see me stopping here/To watch his woods fill up with snow."

The winter landscape is depicted as both beautiful and serene, creating a sense of enchantment. The woods themselves are a prominent feature of nature in the poem. They represent a place of solitude, mystery, and contemplation. They serve as a contrast to the outside world with its societal obligations and responsibilities.

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

These lines capture the enchantment of the woods on a snowy evening, emphasizing their loveliness and the captivating allure of the winter scene. Ultimately, the call of duty and responsibility prevails, and the speaker decides to move on from the woods. He is captivated by the peacefulness of the scene but is also aware of the inexorable march of time.

"But I have promises to keep/And miles to go before I sleep,
/ And miles to go before I sleep."

The phrase "And miles to go before I sleep" suggests that the speaker is tempted to give in to the peacefulness of death and stay in the woods forever. Death is personified as a seductive force that lures the speaker with its tranquillity and promises of rest. In "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," nature is not just a passive background but a dynamic and vital element that influences the speaker's thoughts and emotions. The winter landscape, the woods, and the horse all contribute to the poem's portrayal of the serene yet tempting qualities of the natural world.

"The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost is another famous poem that explores the theme of nature, which is used metaphorically to symbolize choices and the paths we take in life. The two paths that the traveler must choose between are described in natural terms. One path is described as "grassy and wanted wear," while the other is "just as fair" and covered with leaves.

And sorry I could not travel both/And be one traveler, long I stood/And looked down one as far as I could/To where it bent in the undergrowth."

These descriptions use natural elements to differentiate between the choices, with one path appearing well-traveled and the other more pristine. The traveler reflects on how the choice he made has made all the difference in his life, suggesting that our choices, like the paths in nature, shape our destinies.

"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 traveled by/And that has made all the difference."

In "The Road Not Taken," nature serves as a metaphor for the choices and decisions we make in life. The poem uses natural imagery and the idea of diverging paths to explore

themes of individuality, choice, and the consequences of one's decisions.

"Mending Wall" by Robert Frost explores the relationship between humans and nature and how it affects human relationships. In the poem, the act of mending a stone wall becomes a metaphor for the barriers that people create in their interactions with each other and with the natural world. The wall is repeatedly damaged by natural forces such as freezing and thawing, as well as the activities of animals like hunters and rabbits. These natural processes challenge the necessity of the wall and highlight its temporary nature.

"He is all pine and I am apple orchard. My apple trees will never get across/And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him."

In this line, the speaker suggests that the natural world doesn't recognize the boundaries created by the wall, symbolizing the futility of dividing the land. In "Mending Wall," nature serves as a backdrop and a force that challenges the division created by the wall. The poem raises questions about the need for barriers and the impact of tradition on human relationships. It highlights the tension between the desire for connection and the tendency to maintain boundaries, reflecting the complexities of human interactions in the context of the natural world.

"The Pasture" is a short and pastoral poem by Robert Frost that celebrates the beauty and simplicity of rural life and nature. It's a tranquil and inviting piece that reflects the speaker's connection to the natural world. The poem is set in springtime, and the changing of the seasons is evident in the mention of tasks like cleaning the pasture and raking leaves. Spring is a season of renewal and growth, and it represents nature's vitality.

"I'm going out to fetch the little calf / That's standing by the mother. It's so young, / It totters when she licks it with her tongue."

Here, the speaker describes the birth of a calf, an event closely tied to the natural world. The presence of animals, including the calf and the cow, emphasizes the rural and natural setting of the poem. Throughout the poem, the speaker's actions and intentions reflect a deep connection to the natural world, emphasizing the beauty and serenity found in rural life.

"You come too. / I'm sure you will be interested. / It's when I'm gone, / I'll be gone. / You come too."

In "The Pasture," nature is presented as a tranquil and inviting setting where the speaker finds solace and purpose in simple, natural tasks. The poem reflects a sense of harmony between humanity and the natural world, celebrating the beauty and serenity of rural life.

"Fire and Ice" is a short but thought-provoking poem by Robert Frost that explores the destructive potential of human emotions and actions. The poem uses the natural elements of fire and ice as metaphors for desire and hatred, highlighting the power of these forces. In the poem, "fire" symbolizes intense desire, passion, and the consuming force of human emotions. Fire represents the power of love and lust, which can be all-consuming and destructive.

"Some say the world will end in fire, / Some say in ice. / From what I've tasted of desire / I hold with those who favor fire."

In these lines, the speaker acknowledges the compelling and consuming nature of desire, suggesting that it could be a potent force in bringing about destruction. On the other hand, "ice" is a metaphor for hatred, coldness, and

emotional detachment. It represents the power of hatred to freeze and extinguish warmth and compassion.

"But if it had to perish twice, / I think I know enough of hate / To say that for destruction ice / Is also great / And would suffice."

Here, the speaker suggests that hatred can be just as powerful in destroying desire, emphasizing the chilling and numbing effect of icy emotions. Frost employs the natural elements of fire and ice as powerful symbols to convey complex human emotions and their consequences. By using these elements, he underscores the idea that nature itself can be a reflection of the human condition. "Fire and Ice" suggests a connection between human nature and the natural world. It implies that human emotions and actions are mirrored in the natural elements, emphasizing the idea that human beings are not separate from nature but intricately linked to it.

"After Apple-Picking" by Robert Frost is a reflective poem that explores the weariness of a speaker who has been picking apples in an orchard. While the poem doesn't overtly emphasize the power of the natural world in the same way as some of Frost's other works, it does convey the natural world's influence in subtler ways. The poem reflects the changing of seasons, which is a recurring theme in Frost's poetry. The changing seasons symbolize the passage of time and the relentless cycle of life.

"I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend. And I keep hearing from the cellar bin/The rumbling sound/Of load on load of apples coming in."

These lines suggest the end of the apple-picking season and the approaching winter, which is a natural transition and a reminder of the cyclical nature of life. In "After Apple-Picking," the natural world is not explicitly a source of power or agency, but it is an integral part of the poem's atmosphere and symbolism. The changing seasons, the orchard's imagery, and the natural metaphors all contribute to the overall theme of weariness and the passage of time. Frost's skill lies in using the natural world to evoke complex emotions and ideas.

Conclusion

Robert Frost's poetry is a testament to the enduring power of nature as a metaphor. His skillful use of the natural world in his works allows readers to connect with the themes of his poems on a deeply personal level. Frost's poetry goes beyond mere descriptions of the natural world. It often mirrors human experiences, emotions, and dilemmas. His use of nature as a metaphor invites readers to contemplate deeper truths about existence and the human condition. Robert Frost's poetic engagement with the natural world is a multifaceted exploration that spans his entire body of work. Throughout his career, Frost demonstrated a profound connection to nature, drawing inspiration from the New England landscape to craft poems that transcend mere descriptions of the environment. Instead, his verses serve as windows into the human experience, using nature as a backdrop, a metaphor, and a source of profound meaning. Frost's poetry showcases the beauty and complexity of the natural world, capturing the changing seasons, the tranquility of rural life, and the power of natural elements. He skillfully employs the environment as a mirror for human emotions, dilemmas, and relationships, allowing readers to see themselves reflected in the landscapes he describes. His poetry invites contemplation on themes such

as choice, desire, conflict, and the inexorable passage of time. Frost's work underscores the interdependence between humanity and the natural world. His poems often reveal that our relationship with nature is not one of mere observation but one of profound connection and mutual influence. The rural settings he portrays serve as stages upon which human dramas unfold, and the elements of the natural world become symbols and metaphors that resonate with universal themes.

In unraveling Robert Frost's poetic engagement with the natural world, we have witnessed how his verses are not confined to the superficial beauty of landscapes but delve deeper, exploring the human condition through the lens of nature. His poems encourage us to reflect on our choices, responsibilities, and the timeless truths that bind us to the environment. In doing so, Frost's poetry remains as relevant and resonant today as it was when first penned, offering readers a profound and enduring connection to the natural world and the human experience.

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