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Robert Frost: A Poetic Odyssey through Nature and Human Experience

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Abstract

Robert Frost, one of America's most beloved poets, is celebrated for his keen observations of rural life and his profound reflections on the human condition. His work often explores complex themes such as nature, human existence, and the choices individuals make in their lives. His poetry, regularly set against the backdrop of New England landscapes, navigates the complexities of existence, choices, and the inexorable journey of life. Frost, a poet whose words resonate across generations, carved a niche for himself in the realm of literature with his profound observations of nature and insightful echoes on the human life. His poetic journey took him through the rustic landscapes, where he found inspiration for his timeless verses. The poet not only captured the beauty of nature and the intricacies of human relationships in his verses but also delved into profound philosophical inquiries. Robert Frost's engagement with nature in his poetry is multifaceted. Nature serves as a setting, a symbol, a teacher, and a source of inspiration. His nuanced and often contemplative approach to the natural world contributes to the enduring appeal and depth of his poetry. Embedded within the simplicity of his language and rural landscapes lies a rich exploration of existential themes that invite readers to contemplate the essence of life, choices, and the human circumstance. This paper is an attempt to explore Robert Frost's ability to blend the external landscape with internal emotions and philosophical inquiries that make his poetry a rich and enduring exploration of nature and human experiences.

Keywords: Nature, philosophical, rustic, human, isolation

Introduction

Robert Lee Frost (1874–1963) was an American poet known for his realistic depictions of rural life and his mastery of everyday speech. Frost received numerous awards and honours during his lifetime, contributing to his legacy and recognition as one of the most celebrated and beloved American poets (Hart). His early life was marked by personal challenges and tragedy. Despite facing the untimely deaths of his father, mother, and wife, Frost drew from these experiences to infuse depth and authenticity into his poetry. His connection with rural life, shaped by his time as a farmer and teacher, laid the foundation for the vivid imagery that would characterize his work. Robert Frost's poetic odyssey through nature and the human experience continues to captivate readers worldwide. His timeless verses serve as both a reflection and a guide, inviting contemplation on the choices we make, the paths we traverse, and the intricate dance between humanity and the natural world. As we journey through Frost's verses, we embark on an exploration of life's profound questions, finding solace, wisdom, and enduring beauty in the simplicity of his words.

Legacy and Recognition

Robert Frost's contributions to American literature garnered widespread acclaim during his lifetime. He won the Pulitzer Prize four times, a testament to the enduring impact of his verses. He received this prestigious award for his collections "New Hampshire" (1924), "Collected Poems" (1931), "A Further Range" (1937), and "A Witness Tree" (1943). Winning the Pulitzer Prize multiple times solidified his reputation as a distinguished poet. Frost was chosen as the inaugural poet for President John F. Kennedy's swearing-in ceremony in 1961. He recited his poem "The Gift Outright" at the event, marking a significant moment in his career and contributing to his cultural impact, further solidifying his status as a literary luminary (Frost, Kennedy, *et al.*). Frost held various academic positions during his career, including a long tenure at Amherst College in Massachusetts. His association with academic institutions and his influence on students and scholars contributed to his lasting impact on American literature. While some poets are appreciated primarily within academic circles, Frost's poetry appealed to a broader audience. His use of simple language and his focus on rural life resonated with many readers, making his work accessible and widely read. Several of Frost's poems have become iconic and are frequently

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anthologized. Poems like "The Road Not Taken", "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" and "Birches" are particularly well-known and have been studied and appreciated by generations of readers (Frost and Mondschein). Frost's influence extends beyond his own work. Many poets and writers have been inspired by his style and themes. His impact on American poetry is profound, and his legacy lives on through the writers he has influenced. Frost received positive reviews from literary critics throughout his career. His ability to capture the nuances of everyday life, combined with his skillful use of language and form, earned him praise and contributed to his enduring reputation. Robert Frost's legacy endures not only through his own poetry but also through the ways in which he shaped American literature and left a lasting impact on the poetic tradition. His ability to convey deep insights through seemingly simple language and his exploration of universal themes continue to resonate with readers and scholars alike. Some key aspects of nature and human experiences addressed by Frost in his poetry are:

Insight into Human Relationships

Frost's poetry is not limited to the solace found in nature; it also delves into the complexities of human relationships. His exploration of human relationships is evident in poems like "Mending Wall" and "Home Burial." In "Mending Wall," two neighbours repair a wall that separates their properties, raising questions about the necessity of barriers and the shared responsibilities of connection (Frost, Hellmann, *et al.*). The poem delves into the dynamics of neighbours and the fences that both connect and separate. He criticizes the human beings, who separate themselves from each other through a stone wall. The poet is against the concept that fences create good neighbours. To him wall is the symbol of destruction of relationships. As a poet he treats the whole earth as a home for all living beings. So, he wants to break the wall that exists between him and his neighbour to develop a fellow feeling in between them:

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was wailing in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence,
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.

The fence here symbolizes a division of relations on the basis of race, religion, politics and economic status which hampers the mutual understandings and harmonious relationships among human beings. The dispute between two neighbours shows a sort of clash between tradition and modernity. The poem is an example of loss of traditional values in the face of modernity. The poem "Home Burial" explores the grieving process and the strain it places on a marital relationship. These works delve into the complexities of connections between neighbours, family members, and spouses, emphasizing the challenges and nuances of communication (Gale, *A Study Guide for Robert Frost's "Home Burial"*). Frost's keen observations of interpersonal dynamics render his poetry universally relatable.

Nature and Human Life

Robert Frost's relationship with nature is a central and defining aspect of his poetry. His works often explore the

intricate connection between humans and the natural world, particularly the rural landscapes of New England (Sholes). Many of Frost's poems are set against the backdrop of nature, and they often explore the profound impact of natural elements on the human experience. Frost's affinity for nature serves as a canvas for existential reflections. The natural world becomes a metaphor for the existential journey, mirroring the highs and lows, choices and consequences that define human existence. His poems often transport readers to the tranquil woods, snowy landscapes, and apple orchards of New England. In poems such as "Birches", "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" and "The Road Not Taken" nature serves as a metaphor for life's challenges, choices, and opportunities. Thus Frost's depiction of his landscape is very much realistic. The beauty of Nature and obligations of human life are treated by Frost as two aspects of poet's one whole experience. In the following lines the poet describes the helplessness of the poet who has no time because of his social commitments, though he has been almost spell-bound by the beauty and the mystery of the snow which has filled woods:

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.

The woods and landscapes embody the complexities of life, prompting readers to ponder the transient nature of existence against the backdrop of enduring nature (Frost, Lynch, *et al.*). In "Birches," he contemplates life's challenges through the image of bending birch trees, while "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" captures the allure of a serene winter night. The apple orchard in "After Apple-Picking," nature becomes a canvas for exploring the nuances of life. Frost's nature-inspired verses invite readers to reflect on the symbiotic relationship between the natural world and human existence. In his poem, "Dust of Snow" the poet narrates how the beauty of nature vicissitudes his mood and makes him tension free:

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree
Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued.

In the poem, Frost discloses the healing and mysterious powers of Nature and expounds how the magical touch enlightens his soul and mind (Frost and Van Cleave).

Choices and Decision-Making

Frost's study of choices and paths defines much of his poetic legacy. At the heart of his philosophy, lies the exploration of choices and their impact on the individual's journey. In "The Road Not Taken," Frost reflects on the significance of choices made in life and the diverging paths that shape individual destinies (Frost, *The Road Not Taken and Other Selected Poems*). The poem stands as a quintessential expression of existential thought. The iconic lines have become emblematic of the human experience.

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.

The diverging paths symbolize the myriad choices individuals face, and Frost contemplates the significance of taking the less travelled road—a metaphor for embracing uniqueness and individuality in the face of life's uncertainties. Frost prompts readers to contemplate the consequences of choices, the unpredictable nature of life's journey, and the unique paths each person treads (Frost and Mineker). This theme is recurrent, underscoring the idea that decisions influence the course of one's journey.

Isolation and Solitude

Many of Frost's poem confronts the theme of isolation, and delve into the solitary aspects of the human experience. In "The Death of the Hired Man" he defines the emotional stress and strain, isolation and alienation, pain and suffering of a servant. He recites the helplessness of a man with an unusual attitude (Gould and Frost). He wrote:

At his age for the little he can do?
What help he is there's no depending on.
Off he goes always when I need him most.
He thinks he ought to earn a little pay,
Enough at least to buy tobacco with,
So he won't have to beg and be beholden.

Characters in poems like "Acquainted with the Night" and "Desert Places" grapple with a sense of solitude, reflecting universal experiences of alienation and the search for connection. In "Acquainted with the Night," the speaker wanders through the quiet streets, exploring the isolation that often accompanies self-reflection. The night becomes a metaphor for the existential journey into the depths of one's own consciousness (Gale, *A Study Guide for Robert Frost's "Acquainted with the Night"*).

Individualism and Authenticity

Existential philosophy often emphasizes the importance of individualism and authenticity, and Frost's poetry echoes these sentiments. His characters grapple with the authenticity of their choices, seeking to carve out their unique paths. In "Birches," the act of swinging on birch trees becomes a symbol of escaping societal constraints and returning to a more primal, authentic state. Frost comprehends the swinging of birch trees as an escape from the bitter realities and hardships of human life (Frost, Young, *et al.*). It is momentary condolence where real-life seems hard and harsh. In the poem, he endeavours to express his ideas to nature,

And life is too much like a pathless wood
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
From a twig's having my lashed opened.

The poet seems escapist in one sense as he finds peace in swinging birch trees. From a different perspective, it is noticed that he is a realist too. Because he loves life and it

indicates his duties and responsibilities towards life. In poem he expresses his view saying,

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

Here his expression reflects that he would like to go 'toward' heaven by climbing up a birch tree but at the same time, he wants to come back again on earth. Frost does not want to die and to go to heaven. Rather he wants to live in this uncertain world where both earth and heaven might meet. He says,

I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over.

Frost believes that life is beautiful and desirable than heaven. At the age of forty, he writes this poem to reveal the feelings of a middle-aged man who looks both ahead toward death and throwback to childhood. "Birches" ultimately indicates the exploration of the poet's relationship to the truth.

The Absurdity of Life's Dilemmas

Frost's characters often face dilemmas that mirror the absurdity inherent in human existence. In "Home Burial," the couple confronts the absurdity of grief and communication breakdowns. The inability to understand each other reflects the existential struggle of navigating a world fraught with paradoxes and challenges (Gale, *A Study Guide for Robert Frost's "Home Burial"*).

Time, Transience, and Mortality

Existential thinkers often grapple with the concepts of time and mortality, and Frost's poetry reflects this existential concern. "Nothing Gold Can Stay" encapsulates the inevitability of change and the fleeting nature of beauty (Frost, *Nothing Gold Can Stay by Robert Frost: The Poem : Guide*). The ephemeral quality of life's experiences, captured in the symbolism of gold turning to green leaves, prompts contemplation on the impermanence of all things. "The Death of the Hired Man" in this narrative poem, Frost explores themes of loyalty, responsibility, and the transient nature of life. The death of the hired man, Silas, prompts the characters to reflect on their own values and relationships (Frost and LePan).

Life's Cycles and Seasons

Frost often portrays life as a cyclical journey, marked by seasons and repetitive patterns. He frequently employs the imagery of seasons and cycles in his poems. This cyclical perspective is evident in poems like "Birches," where the bending of birch trees becomes a metaphor for life's fluctuations and the possibility of renewal. "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" and "After Apple-Picking" showcase his fascination with the cyclical nature of life.

Spiritual and Mystical Elements

While grounded in the tangible world, Frost's poetry sometimes takes on spiritual and mystical dimensions. Nature becomes a conduit for exploring metaphysical questions and the mysteries of existence, as seen in poems like "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." Frost's poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay" reflects on the fleeting

nature of beauty and innocence. Using vivid imagery from the natural world, he explores the idea that all things, no matter how beautiful, are subject to change and decay (Gale, *A Study Guide for Robert Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay"*).

Symbolism in Nature

Nature in Frost's poetry is not merely a backdrop but a powerful symbol. The changing seasons, weather, and natural elements often symbolize the various stages of human life, emotions, and experiences. Such as in "Birches," the bending of birch trees becomes a metaphor for the hardships and challenges of life. In the poem, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", Frost describes a solitary traveller who is captivated by the beauty of a snowy forest. The woods become a metaphor for the mysteries and challenges of life, prompting the traveller to pause and contemplate before continuing his journey (Frost, Lynch, *et al.*). The poem touches on themes of temptation, duty, and the pull of the natural world. In the poem "Fire and Ice", fire symbolizes the heat of passion and ice represents the cold of hate. Together they symbolize the destructive passions of mankind. Too much of either may destroy the entire world. It is also possible to interpret fire as desire and ice as reason. Desire and reason are inimical to each other and each by itself can produce adverse results if carried too far.

Nature as a Source of Wisdom

Frost often presents nature as a source of wisdom and insight. The natural world, in his poems, becomes a teacher and a guide. His poems suggest that by observing and understanding nature, individuals can gain a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them. Frost's active interaction or encounter between a human speaker and a natural subject or phenomenon culminates in profound realizations or revelations have a variety of results, including self-knowledge, deeper understanding of the human condition, and increased insight into the metaphysical world (Frost and Mondschein). For instance, a day of harvesting fruit leads to a new understanding of life's final sleep, or death, in "After Apple-Picking" (1915).

The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.

Rural Life and Agriculture

Many of Frost's poems depict rural life, including the daily activities of farmers and the challenges of agricultural work. Through these depictions, Frost not only captures the authenticity of rural life but also explores broader themes of labour, perseverance, and the cycles of nature.

Conclusion

Robert Frost's poetic odyssey through nature and the human experience continues to captivate readers worldwide. In his poetry, nature is not just a backdrop; it is a dynamic force that interacts with and shapes human experiences. His exploration of rural life and the natural world often serves as a metaphorical lens through which he examines universal truths about the human condition. His poems provide a rich tapestry of reflections on life's journey, timeless exploration of the beauty of nature, and the intricate dance of choices

and consequences. Through his exploration of universal themes and mastery of poetic techniques, Frost offers readers to embark on a profound and introspective journey, resonating with the enduring aspects of the human condition. In Robert Frost's poetry, the rural landscapes and seemingly simple narratives serve as gateways to profound existential explorations. Frost's profound opinions of nature, choices, and the human experience, enable his readers to confront the complexities and uncertainties that define existence. His verses resonate with the essence of existential philosophy, urging individuals to grapple with their own authenticity, face the isolating aspects of self-awareness, and navigate the often absurd dilemmas of life. In the simplicity of Frost's words, a deep and resonant philosophy emerges, providing a poetic lens through which to examine the existential dimensions of the human journey. Through his keen observations and mastery of rhythmical skills, Frost invites readers on a profound journey of self-reflection, resonating with the universal aspects of the human condition.

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