

Treatment of Nature in Poetry
A comparative study of Willam Wordsworth and Robert Frost

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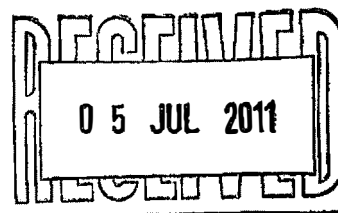
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Preface

I have prepared this dissertation in partial requirements for the degree on M.A in English.

I decided to work on this topic because one of my literary interests is the treatment of nature in the nineteenth and twentieth century literary works.

I have chosen the treatment of nature used in the poetry of William Wordsworth and Robert Frost as they ~~later~~ are two of the most influential literary figures who have extensively written about nature. My teacher Mr. Asit Roy Chowdhury has indeed contributed a lot in choosing my area of dissertation. So, I am really grateful to him.

Introduction

William Wordsworth and Robert Frost are two of the most influential figures of two great ages – 19th century and 20th century respectively. Wordsworth is a great leader of the nineteenth century romanticism. His great contribution to romanticism has led him to being called the romantic vanguard. He was so enamored of nature and natural beauty that he proved himself throughout the literary history as a romantic pantheist. On the other hand, Robert Frost most, one of the most influential poets of the twentieth century, is also in the same way influenced by nature and its beauty. Frost's association with nature has given him the recognition of a true poet of nature.

Though Wordsworth and Frost are the products of two different eras, both of them are, for the most part, identical ^{wit} to each other in their approach towards nature. Nature has become a great source of their poetic inspiration. They found a close association with nature. While nature to Wordsworth is a guiding principle, it is to Frost is more assuredly a beauty. Nature to Frost is what it is, but nature to Wordsworth is the whole of his life force and poetic vitality.

Wordsworth found in nature spiritual peace, a friend, a guide, a nurse, and more emphatically a philosophy that governs humans whereas Frost found in nature the beauty and delight that nature afford. However, though both Wordsworth and Frost used nature in their poetry, their treatment of nature in poetry has some sort of varying characteristics. The purpose of this study is to examine the role of nature in two great poets from Britain and America (William Wordsworth and Robert Frost). Both the poets happened to have

deep relationship with nature and natural objectives. Before making a comparative study of their treatment of nature, it would perhaps not be out of place to introduce these two poets in some details.

Introducing William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth was born on April 7, 1770, in Cockermouth, Cumbria, England. Wordsworth's mother died when he was eight. This experience shapes much of his later work. Wordsworth attended Hawkshead Grammar School, where his love of poetry was firmly established and, it is believed that he made his first attempts at verse. While he was at Hawkshead, Wordsworth's father died leaving him and his four siblings orphans. After Hawkshead, Wordsworth studied at St. John's College in Cambridge and before his final semester, he set out on a walking tour of Europe, an experience that influenced both his poetry and his political sensibilities.

While touring Europe, Wordsworth came into contact with the French Revolution. This experience as well as a subsequent period living in France, brought about Wordsworth's interest and sympathy for the life, troubles and speech of the "common man". These issues proved to be of the utmost importance to Wordsworth's work. Wordsworth's earliest poetry was published in 1793 in the collections *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*. While living in France, Wordsworth conceived a daughter, Caroline, out of wedlock; he left France, however, before she was born. In 1802, he returned to France with his sister on a four-week visit to meet Caroline. Later that year, he married Mary

Hutchinson, a childhood friend, and they had five children together. In 1812, while living in Grasmere, they grieved the loss of two of their children, Catherine and John, who both died that year.

Equally important in the poetic life of Wordsworth was his 1795 meeting with the poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. It was with Coleridge that Wordsworth published the famous *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. While the poems themselves are some of the most influential in Western literature, it is the preface to the second edition that remains one of the most important testaments to a poet's views on both his craft and his place in the world. In the preface Wordsworth writes on the need for "common speech" within poems and argues against the hierarchy of the period which valued epic poetry above the lyric.

Wordsworth's most famous work, *The Prelude* (1850), is considered by many to be the crowning achievement of English romanticism. The poem, revised numerous times, chronicles the spiritual life of the poet and marks the birth of a new genre of poetry. Although Wordsworth worked on *The Prelude* throughout his life, the poem was published posthumously. Wordsworth spent his final years settled at Rydal Mount in England, traveling and continuing his outdoor excursions. Devastated by the death of his daughter Dora in 1847, Wordsworth seemingly lost his will to compose poems. William Wordsworth died at Rydal Mount on April 23, 1850, leaving his wife Mary to publish *The Prelude* three months later.



Works

Among Wordsworth's famous works are *An Evening Walk* (1793), *Descriptive Sketches* (1793), *The Borders* (1795-96), *Lyrical Ballads* (1798, with Coleridge), *Lines Composed A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey* (1798), *Upon Westminster Bridge* (1801), *On Poetic Diction* (1802), *Ode: Intimations Of Immortality* (1803-06), *Resolution and Independence*, *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud/ Daffodils*, *My Heart Leaps Up*, *Ode to Duty*, *The Solitary Reaper*, London, 1802, *The world is too much with us*, *Miscellaneous Sonnets* (1807), *Essay Upon Epitaphs* (1810), *The Excursion* (1814), *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (1822)

Introducing Robert Frost

Robert Lee Frost (named after Southern General Robert E. Lee) was born on 26 March 1874 in San Francisco, California to Isabelle Moodie (1844-1900) teacher, and William Prescott Frost Jr. (1850-1885), teacher and journalist. San Francisco was a lively city full of citizens of Pioneering spirit, including Will who had ventured there from New Hampshire to seek his fortune as a journalist. He also started gambling and drinking, habits which left his family in dire financial straits when he died in 1885 after contracting tuberculosis. Honoring his last wishes to be buried in Lawrence, Massachusetts where he was born, Isabelle, Robert and his sister Jeanie Florence (1876-1929) made the long train journey across the country to the New England town. Isabelle took up teaching again to support her children.

With both parents as teachers, young Robert was early on exposed to the world of books and reading, studying such works as those by William Shakespeare and poets Robert Burns and William Wordsworth. He also formed a life-long love of nature, the great outdoors and rural countryside. After enrolling in Lawrence High School he was soon writing his own poems including "La Noche Triste" (1890) which was published in the school's paper. He excelled in many subjects including history, botany, Latin and Greek, and played football, graduating at the head of his class. In 1892 he entered Dartmouth, the Ivy League College in Hanover, New Hampshire, but soon became disenchanted with the atmosphere of campus life. He then took on a series of jobs including teaching and working in a mill, all the while continuing to write poetry.

Frost got his first break as a poet in 1894 when the New York magazine *Independent* published "My Butterfly: An Elegy" for a stipend of \$15. A year later a wish he had had for some time came true; on 19 December 1895 he married Elinor Miriam White (1872-1938), his co-valedictorian and sweetheart from school. They had gone separate ways upon graduation to attend college, and while Frost had left early, Elinor wanted to wait until she was finished before getting married. They would have six children together; sons Elliott (b.1896-1900) and Carol (1902-1940) and daughters Lesley (b.1899), Irma (b.1903), Marjorie (b.1905-1934), and Elinor Bettina (1907-1907).

The newlyweds continued to teach, which Frost always enjoyed, but the demanding schedule interfered with his writing. In 1897 he entered Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, though illness caused him to leave in 1899 before finishing his degree. Despite that, it was one of many institutions that would award him an honorary degree later on. The next ten years, the 'Derry years', were trying times for Frost with a growing family to support. In 1900 they moved to a farm bought by his paternal grandfather in Derry, New Hampshire to try poultry farming. The same year his son Elliot died of cholera. Frost suffered greatly from grief and guilt, and compounding this was the loss of his mother to cancer the same year. In 1907 Elinor Bettina died just one day after birth. But the farm was a peaceful and secluded setting and Frost enjoyed farming, tending to his orchard trees, chickens and various other chores. This period inspired such poems as "The Mending Wall" (written in England in 1913) and "Hyla Brook" (1906). The house built in the typical New England clapboard style is now a restored State Historical Landmark.

But it was soon time for a change. In 1911 he sold the farm and the Frosts set sail for England. Elinor was enthusiastic about traveling, even with four children, and they moved into a cottage in Beaconsfield, just outside of London. Then finally it happened; after writing poetry and trying to get noticed by publishers for over twenty years, Frost's first collection of poetry *A Boy's Will* was published in England in 1913 by a small London printer, David Nutt. American publisher Henry Holt printed it in 1915. Frost's work was well-received and fellow poets Edward Thomas and Ezra Pound became friends, supporters, and helped promote his work. *North of Boston* (1914) followed.

When World War I started the Frosts were back in New Hampshire, settling at their newly bought farm in Franconia in 1915. A year later Robert began teaching English at Amherst College. Mountain Interval was published in 1916 which contained many poems written at Franconia. He was also starting lecture tours for his ever-growing audience of avid readers.

In 1920, Frost bought 'Stone House' (now a museum) in South Shaftsbury, Vermont. There he wrote many of the poems contained in his fourth collection of poetry New Hampshire (1923) which won him the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1923. It includes "Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening";

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.

Robert Frost died on the 29th of January 1963 in Boston, Massachusetts. 'Safe!, Now let the night be dark for all of me. Let the night be too dark for me to see, Into the future. Let what will be, be.' ("Acceptance") He lies buried in the family plot in the Old Bennington Cemetery behind the Old First Congregational Church near Shaftsbury, Vermont. His gravestone reads 'I Had A Lover's Quarrel With The World'.

Robert Frost's personal life was plagued with grief and loss. His father died of tuberculosis in 1885, when Frost was 11, leaving the family with just \$8. Frost's mother died of cancer in 1900. In 1920, Frost had to commit his younger sister, Jeanie, to a mental hospital, where she died nine years later. Mental illness apparently ran in Frost's family, as both he and his mother suffered from depression, and his daughter Irma was committed to a mental hospital in 1947. Frost's wife, Elinor, also experienced bouts of depression.

Just nine months after Frost's death, Kennedy gave a speech at Amherst College, singing Frosts' praises and speaking on the importance of the Arts in America. Later he said:

“The death of Robert Frost leaves a vacancy in the American spirit...His death impoverishes us all; but he has bequeathed his Nation a body of imperishable verse from which Americans will forever gain joy and understanding.”

Works

Among Frost's major poetic works are *North of Boston* (David Nutt, 1914; Holt, 1914), *Mending Wall* , *Mountain Interval* (Holt, 1916), *The Road Not Taken*, *The Runaway* , *New Hampshire* (Holt, 1923; Grant Richards, 1924), *Several Short Poems* (Holt, 1924), *Selected Poems* (Holt, 1928), *West-Running Brook* (Holt, 1928? 1929), *The Lovely Shall Be Choosers* (Random House, 1929), *Collected Poems of Robert Frost* (Holt, 1930;

Longmans, Green, 1930), *The Lone Striker* (Knopf, 1933), *The Gold Hesperidee* (Bibliophile Press, 1935), *From Snow to Snow* (Holt, 1936), *A Further Range* (Holt, 1936; Cape, 1937), *A Witness Tree* (Holt, 1942; Cape, 1943), *Steeple Bush* (Holt, 1947), *Hard Not To Be King* (House of Books, 1951), *Aforesaid* (Holt, 1954), *You Come Too* (Holt, 1959; Bodley Head, 1964), *Nothing Gold Can Stay: What Fifty Said, Fire And Ice, A Drumlin Woodchuck, Plays: A Way Out: A One Act Play* (Harbor Press, 1929), *The Cow's in the Corn: A One Act Irish Play in Rhyme* (Slide Mountain Press, 1929), *A Masque of Reason* (Holt, 1945), *A Masque of Mercy* (Holt, 1947), etc.

Nature in Poetry

Nature has always played a leading role in comprising the theme and aspects of the cosmic phenomenon in the poetry of all ages. Nature is sometimes shown harsh and sometimes it is represented as something having soothing, healing and hypnotic effects on human minds. Nature has, for the time immemorial, become one of the most important subject matters of authors and poets of different ages and periods. For instance, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Frost, and so on have written about nature, for nature has always become a great source of writing - no matter what genres it belongs to. More importantly, the treatment of nature in poetry goes to the poetic works of even more past ages; old English poetry like "The Illiad", "The Odyssey", "The Seafarer", "Bewolf", etc. all deal with nature.

Nature has different appeals to different writers and poets; so, the treatment of nature in poetry has also undergone a varying change with a varying impact on the minds of the readers. Wordsworth's treatment of nature may be distinct from that of Coleridge's or Frost's. Wordsworth who sought solace in nature looked at the latter as a living force whereas nature to Coleridge is something inanimate. Frost blends her beloved in with nature: 'see if that small sailing cloud/ will hit or miss the moon' (The Death of the Hired Man: 167-68). However, the invariant core of the treatment of nature in poetry remains almost all the same with all poets that all of them have resorted to nature as a source of inspiration for the best poetic creation. And finally nature has indeed helped them enormously to produce the best literary works, which is time worth for times and all times to come.

Wordsworth's descriptions of the natural world often interrupt the flow of the novels narrative. The peacefulness of the river, the eeriness of the dog, the awesome power of a storm, the deep loneliness of a country morning are all tellingly revealed in Wordsworth's sensitive account. No matter what horror he witnesses, the river and its surrounding land seem to restore his faith-but his faith in what? In his travels on the river, Wordsworth witnesses several murmurs. He sees petty thievery and grand larceny.

Frost's nature poetry is so excellent and so characteristic that it must be given a prominent place in any account of his art. In our attempt to understand this aspect of Frost, the idea of pastoral proves useful.

Frost has so often written about the rural landscape and wildlife that one can hardly avoid thinking of him as a nature poet. One can easily cite his 'Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening', 'Tree At My Widow', 'To the Thawing Wind', 'Hyla Brook', 'The Oven Bird', 'Birches', 'A Drumlin Woodchuck' amongst his best creations where nature has played a leading role. Frost indeed began his poetic career as a nature poet with his early works like 'Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening', 'To a Moth Seen in Winter', 'Rose Pogonias' and 'Going for Water' before 1913. His interest in nature persisted throughout his career.



Similarity: Soothing/ Revitalizing Power

One striking similarity between Wordsworth and Frost is that both of their nature merges at one point; play the same consolatory role. While Wordsworth's nature is extremely revitalizing, Frost's is pleasing and instilling:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

(Wordsworth: I wandered lonely as a cloud)

As I sit here, and oftentimes, I wish
I could be monarch of a desert land
I could devote and dedicate forever
To the truths we keep coming back and back to.
So desert it would have to be, so walled
By mountain ranges half in summer snow,
No one would covet it or think it worth
The pains of conquering to force change on.

(Frost: The Black Cottage)

Wordsworth's imagery revitalizes his mind and the minds of his readers with a plain mental solace. His nature has a healing power. Wordsworth's nature regenerates feelings

and imagination in both him and his readers. Similarly, Frost's nature enkindles his hopes and aspiration in him. While nature imagery like valley, brooks, river, lake, hill, countryside, landscape, sheep, cloud, etc. dominates in Wordsworth's poems, imagery like roads, towns, city, desert, etc. have become part of Frost's imagery.

Frost's nature poetry goes against and sometimes hand in hand with that of Wordsworth's in most part of his attitude to nature; there is a sharpness of both bleakness and similarity in his landscape and the imagery and that of Wordsworth's:

There is a singer everyone has heard,
Loud, a mid-summer and a mid-wood bird,
Who makes the solid tree trunks sound again.

(Frost: The Oven Bird)

Though most of Frost's poems deal with nature and the natural objects, what predominates in such of his nature poems is *human interest*. He uses imagery which refers to different aspects of nature, but in his treatment of nature man gets the dominating magnitude. Frost himself, however, puts due emphasis on his treatment of nature and the human interest in his poetry, "I guess I'm not a nature poet. I have written no poems without a human being in them". (Saradhi: 48). Even if, in poems like "Blueberries", "The Wood-Pile", "Birches", etc. which describe nature in a direct and objective manner humans interests play the significant role; references to nature are simply the marginal functions:

'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
But dipped its top and set me down again.

(Birches)

In "Birches" (Mountain Interval, 1916) Frost begins to probe the power of his redemptive imagination as it moves from its playful phase toward the brink of dangerous transcendence. The movement into transcendence is a movement into a realm of radical imaginative freedom where (because redemption has succeeded too well) all possibilities of engagement with the common realities of experience are dissolved. In its moderation, a redemptive consciousness motivates union between selves as we have seen in "The Generations of Men," or in any number of Frost's love poems. But in its extreme forms, redemptive consciousness can become self-defeating as it presses the imaginative man into deepest isolation.

"Birches" begins by evoking its core image against the background of a darkly wooded landscape:

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 pliable, malleable quality of the birch tree captures the poet's attention and kicks off his meditation. Perhaps young boys don't bend birches down to stay, but swing them they do and thus bend them momentarily. Those "straighter, darker trees," like the trees of "Into My Own" that "scarcely show the breeze," stand ominously free from human

manipulation, menacing in their irresponsiveness to acts of the will. The malleability of the birches is not total, however, and the poet is forced to admit this fact into the presence of his desire, like it or not. The ultimate shape of mature birch trees is the work of objective natural force, not human activity. Yet after conceding the boundaries of imagination's subjective world, the poet seems not to have constricted himself but to have been released.

Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow crust--
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.

Fascinated as he is by the show of loveliness before him, and admiring as he is of nature as it performs the potter's art, cracking and crazing the enamel of ice coating on the birch trees, it is not finally the thing itself (the ice-coated trees) that interests the poet but the strange association he is tempted to make: "You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen." Certainly there is no question of belief involved here. The linkage of the scientifically discredited medieval sphere with the heaps of cracked ice suggests rather the poet's need to break beyond the rigid standard of empirical truth, that he himself has already allowed into the poem, and faintly suggests as well the kind of apocalyptic

destruction that the imagination seeks when unleashed (the idea that the inner dome has been smashed clearly pleases the speaker). Eventually Frost in "Birches" comes round to exploring in much more sophisticated ways the complex problem broached by this statement from a later poem, "On Looking Up By Chance At the Constellations":

The sun and moon get crossed, but they never touch,
Nor strike out fire from each other, nor crash out loud.
The planets seem to interfere in their curves,
But nothing ever happens, no harm is done.
We may as well go patiently on with our life,
And look elsewhere than to stars and moon and sun
For the shocks and changes we need to keep us sane.

In "Birches" Frost looks not to natural catastrophe for those "shocks and changes" that "keep us sane" but to his resources as a poet:

You may see their trunks arching in the woods
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.

Manipulating the simile, the overt figure of comparison, is a dangerous ploy for the poet, implying often that he does not have the courage of his vision and does not believe that his mode of language can generate a distinctive perspective on experience. For Frost, however, and for any poet who is rooted in what I call the aesthetics of the fiction., the simile is the perfect figure of comparison, subtler even than metaphor. Its covertness

becomes its virtue: in its insistence on the disparateness of the things compared (as well as their likeness) it can sustain a divided vision; can at once transmute the birches--for a brief moment nature stands humanized and the poet has transcended the scientific universe--and, at the same time, can allow the fictive world to be penetrated by the impurities of experience that resist the Tran mutative process of imagination. It is at such moments as this in Frost's work that the strategies and motives of a poetry of play are revealed. There is never any intention of competing with science, and therefore, there is no problem at all (as we generally sense with many modern poets and critics) of claiming a special cognitive value for poetry.

In his playful and redemptive mode, Frost's motive for poetry is not cognitive but psychological in the sense that he is willfully seeking to bathe his consciousness and, if the reader consents, his reader's as well, in a free-floating, epistemologically unsanctioned vision of the world which, even as it is undermined by the very language in which it is anchored, brings a satisfaction of relief when contemplated. It may be argued that the satisfaction is greatest when it is autonomous: the more firmly the poet insists upon the severance of his vision from the order of things as they are and the more clearly that he makes no claim for knowledge, the emotive power of the poem may emerge uncontaminated by the morass of philosophical problems that are bound to dog him should he make claims for knowledge. Both poet and reader may submerge themselves without regret (because without epistemological pretension) in aesthetic illusion.

But I was going to say when Truth broke in

With all her matter of fact about the ice storm,

I should prefer to have some boy bend them
As he went out and in to fetch the cows--
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,
Whose only play was what he found himself,
Summer or winter, and could play alone.



The shrewdness in Frost's strategy now surfaces. While claiming to have paid homage to the rigid standards of empirical truth in his digression on the ice-loaded branches, what he has actually done is to digress into the language of fictions. When he turns to the desired vision of the young boy swinging birches, he is not, as he says, turning from truth to fiction, but from one kind of fiction to another kind of fiction: from the fiction of cosmic change and humanized nature to the fiction of the human will riding roughshod over a pliable external world.

As he evokes the image of the boy, playing in isolation, too far from the community to engage in a team kind of sport, he evokes, as well, his cherished theme of the imaginative man who, essentially alone in the world, either makes it or doesn't on the strength of his creative resources. And now he indulges to the full the desired vision that he could not allow himself in the poem's opening lines:

One by one he subdued his father's trees
By riding them down over and over again
Until he took the stiffness out of them,
And not one but hung limp, not one was left

For him to conquer. He learned all there was
To learn about not launching out too soon
And so not carrying the tree away
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise
To the top branches, climbing carefully
With the same pains you use to fill a cup
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.

One figure seems to imply another--the image of the farm youth swinging up, out, and down to earth again recalls the boyhood of the poet:

So was I once myself a swinger of birches.
And so I dream of going back to be.
It's when I'm weary of considerations,
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 lashed across it open.

For anyone but Frost the "pathless wood" is trite. But for him it carries a complex of meaning fashioned elsewhere. The upward swinging of the boy becomes an emblem for imagination's swing away from the tangled, dark wood; a swing away from the "straighter, darker trees"; a swing into the absolute freedom of isolation, the severing of all "considerations." This is the transcendental phase of redemptive consciousness, a

game that one plays alone. The downward movement of redemptive imagination to earth, contrarily, is a movement into community, engagement, love--the games that two play together:

I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over.
May no fate willfully misunderstand me
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better.
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk,
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
But dipped its top and set me down again.
That would be good both going and coming back.
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

One really has no choice but to be a swinger of birches. In the moment when, catapulting upward, the poet is half-granted his wish, when transcendence is about to be complete and the self, in its disdain for earth, has lofted itself into absolute autonomy, nothing having any claim upon it, and no return possible, then, at that moment,, the blessed pull of the earth is felt again, and the apocalypse desired by a transcending imagination, which seemed so imminent, is repressed. At the end of "Birches" a precious balance has been restored between the claims of a redeeming imagination in its extreme, transcendent form, and the claims of common sense reality. To put it in another way, the psychic needs

of change--supplied best by redemptive imagination--are balanced by the equally deep psychic need--supplied by skeptical ironic awareness--for the therapy of dull realities and everyday considerations.

Frost has in fact strengthened his power of underscoring human interests through his skilful use of nature in poetry. He did not aim to find any spiritual or philosophical meaning hidden in nature. His intention is to present nature as it is, but not to transcend its meaning. Wordsworth, on the other hand, has made his imagery of natural objects even more noticeable. His description in the following lines includes visual and auditory details of the natural environment:

The showers of the spring
Rouse the birds, and they sing;
If the wind do but stir for his proper delight,
Each leaf, that and this, his neighbor will kiss:
Each wave, one and't other speeds after his brother:
They are happy, for that is their right!

(Stray Pleasures)

Wordsworth is preoccupied with his philosophical interest in nature. His treatment of nature in his poetry has always borne a philosophical doctrine that there is always a living presence of a single divine mind underneath all the natural objects.

Oh there is blessing in the gentle breeze,
A visitant that while it fans my cheek
Doth seem half-conscious of the joy it brings

From the green fields, and from yon azure sky.

(The Prelude: Book I)

Wordsworth's intellectual penetration into nature has implanted in him his pantheism which Frost lacks in every single pore of his poetry:

I wonder about the trees.

Why do we wish to bear

Forever the noise of these

More than another noise

So close to our dwelling place?

(The Sound of Trees)

Frost's treatment of nature in his poetry is unadorned, and has no mystical implications in it. He sees nature as simply nature. He did not over mystify nature. Neither did he idealize or glorify nature as was done by Wordsworth and the other romantics. Frost's attitude towards nature is realistic whereas Wordsworth's philosophical and mystical which his pantheism relies on:

... And I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy

Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime

Of something far more deeply interfused,

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,

And the round ocean and the living air,

And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;

(Tintern Abbey)

Wordsworth has personified nature with objects like valley, moon, landscape, birds, night, mountains, daffodils, rivers, murmurs, chirping, etc. all of which have meant for him something we can resort to in our ailing moments:

My dear, dear sister! And th's prayer I make,
Knowing that nature never did betray
The heart that loved her

(Tintern Abbey)

Again, it is surprisingly thought provoking that Robert Frost, like Wordsworth, has also connected the two human worlds – the inner and the outer. He has exquisitely given a vivid picture of these two worlds in a plain natural setting:

But tree, I have seen you taken and tossed,
And if you have seen me when I slept,
You have seen me when I was taken and swept
And all but lost.
That day she put our heads together,
Fate had her imagination about her,
Your head so much concerned with outer,
Mine with inner, weather.

(Tree At My Window)

“New Hampshire was to Frost what the Lake District was to Wordsworth” (K. P. Saradhi: 49). Frost looked at nature from a realistic point of view with his plain description of woods, leaves, woods, pastures, grass, trees, mountains, hills, valleys, birds, flowers, etc. He never kept nature aloof from nature. Fusing nature with the natural fashion is another striking feature of Frost:

I went to turn the grass once after one

Who mowed it in the dew before the sun.

(The Tuft of Flowers)

These pools that, though in forests, still reflect

The total sky almost without defect,

And like the flowers beside them, chill and shiver,

Will like the flowers beside them soon be gone,

And yet not out by any brook or river,

But up by roots to bring dark foliage on.

(Spring Pools)



Wordsworth looked at nature from a philosophic perspective with his lucid description of valleys, hills, cuckoo, birds, flowers, daffodils, suns, the moon, cloud, rivers, etc.

Wordsworth has regarded nature as a constant companion, a philosophy, a guide and a guiding principle of his life:

The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,

The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul.

Of all my moral being

(Tintern Abbey)

Like Wordsworth Frost has also merged morality with the beauty of nature. Wordsworth has found moral principles in all living objects of nature. On the other hand, to Frost, morality in nature is what it's simply association with nature or what it simply means:

Lord I have loved your sky,
Be it said against or for me,
Have loved it clear and high,
Or low and stormy.

(Astrometaphysical)

However, Frost does not lack Wordsworthian fashion and simplicity of nature description in his poetry. Isidor Schneider says, "The descriptive power of Mr. Frost is to me the most wonderful thing in his poetry. A snowfall, a spring thaw, a bending tree, a valley mist, a brook, these are brought into the experience of the reader" (Saradhi: 49).

The distinction in treating nature in poetry between Wordsworth and Frost cannot be explained by the difference between localities. The differences in treating nature in their poetry are not between their art of nature description or presentational skills, but it is heavily based on their approach to nature. One finds in nature the presence of a living principle that governs the universe while nature to the other is simply a pastoral object of delight. 'The Oven Bird' is an entirely different kind of poem from Wordsworth's 'To a Skylark'. Frost's use of imagery in "The Oven Bird" contrasts that of Wordsworth's used in "To a Skylark":

There is a singer everyone has heard,
Loud, a mid-summer and a mid-wood bird,
Who makes the solid tree trunks sound again.
He says that leaves are old and that for flowers
Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten.

(Frost: The Oven Bird)

Ethereal minstrel! Pilgrim of the sky!
Dost thou despise the earth where cares abound?
Or, while the wings aspire, are heart and eye
Both with thy nest upon the dewy ground?
Thy nest which thou canst drop into at will,
Those quivering wings composed, that music still!

(Wordsworth: To a Skylark)

Wordsworth says that the skylark affiliates himself with both celestial and terrestrial realms. The poet associates different parts of the skylark with different realms - the wings bring the skylark up in the sky, but the heart and eye are with the nest on the ground. Wordsworth claims that the skylark is surrounded by so much blinding light that we do not see him (referred to God) and so he can enjoy the same privacy as the shadowy nightingale. He goes on to say that from this high point the skylark pours upon the world a "flood of harmony". He attaches religious significance to the song, just as he found wider meaning in the plaintive song of the solitary reaper. This religious significance echoes the first line of the poem, where Wordsworth says that the skylark is a minstrel of the heavens and a "pilgrim of the sky"

Theme of Loneliness

Loneliness is another important poetic aspect. All great poets and writers could not escape themselves from the inevitable clutches of loneliness, be it painful or pleasing. Wordsworth and Frost have also converged in this connection that their attitude to nature regarding loneliness is all the same. Both of them have quite skillfully interwoven the theme of loneliness in their poetry:

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

(I Wandered Lonely as a

Cloud)

It is quite notable that this very loneliness theme has become so immensely concerned with Wordsworth that the title of one of his poems has already got it "I wandered lonely as a cloud": "I wandered lonely as a cloud/ That floats on high o'er vales and hills,". Nature has become a mirror to Wordsworth that it reflects his childhood memories. In the same way, Frost's loneliness, as it were, has become double in him. His repetitive method of revealing his ideas and thoughts has made the theme of loneliness even more emphatic in his poetry:

And lonely as it is that loneliness
Will be more lonely ere it will be less --

A blanker whiteness of benighted snow

With no expression, nothing to express.

(Desert Places)

That Frost's view of nature is unique may not at first be apparent, for the modern reader's attitude toward nature poetry is pretty well determined by the Lake Poets and their English successors. The very act of writing about nature seems to mean a commitment to treat it as poets in England have done since 1800, with the result that most people take



Dissimilarity

One way how Wordsworth and Frost are different from each other is their use of different imagery. There is a certain type of imageries too used in their poetry, which make a vivid distinction between Wordsworth and Frost. Frost, a modern American poet of the twentieth century, sometimes gives description of modern societal advancements while describing nature in some of his poems – town, city, etc. whereas Wordsworth through the whole gamut of his poetry talks about nature, countryside, landscape, clouds, valleys, animals, lakes, etc. Frost’s “The Fear”, which deals with paranoia, well presents some of his imagery that contrasts Wordsworth:

A lantern light from deeper in the barn
Shone on a man and woman in the door
And threw their lurching shadows on a house
Nearby, all dark in every glass window.

(Frost: The Fear)

Lights and camera, wall of a house, glass, window, door, lurching, etc. are quite remarkably used to show one of Frost’s contrasting features and themes. This dissimilarity, however, has little to do with the fact that the bird in one poem is American and in the other English. However, one more unique sign of Frost is that his nature poems do not evoke the same variety of emotional response as with Wordsworth.

Nature, having a wielding influence on both Wordsworth and Frost in their poetic endeavors, has enabled Frost to a great extent to adapt his attitude to nature with that of Wordsworth’s. To make the connection of their treatment of nature more obvious, John F. Leynen’s remark is noteworthy:

Of course no modern nature poet will be able to free himself completely from the Romantic way of treating nature, and in Frost there are many reminiscences of Wordsworth, Keats, and others. But what Frost has derived from tradition is adapted to his own quite different purposes. One may hear the Romantic harmonies in his work, but they reverberate within a world quite changed. When he describes a tree as “Vague dream-head lifted out of the ground, /And thing next most diffuse to cloud,” the Romantic vision is immediately dispelled by the facts of a different landscape – “Not all your light tongues talking aloud/ Could be profound.” This is not an ironic rejection of the Romantic attitude; Frost simply does not look at nature through the same eyes. (W. K. Wimsatt: 1993)

The complex intellectual background of Wordsworth's Nature is his essential poetic idea -- the union of mind and external reality. He expresses this union most often through suggesting a blending of thought and landscape and portraying the subtle affinities between the natural scene and the moral sentiments. This central theme is reflected in the poetic form:

A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things....

(Tintern Abbey)

According to John F. Leynen (1989) Wordsworth's poetry is the medium in which thought and object merge. The same blending is manifested in the kind of vaguely

outlined nature imagery which Wordsworth and most other Romantics prefer. Their streams, breezes, odors, mists, tangled undergrowth, and twilight have the indistinct quality which allows them to drift into the area of subjective experience.

A reader accustomed to this kind of nature poetry will find much that is familiar in a poem like "The Wood-Pile." Here Frost's approach to nature seems not unlike Wordsworth's in "Resolution and Independence." True, the manner is more casual; Frost is anecdotal where Wordsworth tends to be didactic. But the poet of "The Wood-Pile" strikes a typically Wordsworthian attitude: he regards his rambles through the countryside as the means of a natural and somewhat mysterious instruction of the soul. There is the same high seriousness and air of ethical purpose. The poet sets out without a plan, unaware of what his goal will be, waiting for a spontaneous revelation to come to him from nature. The opening lines express an attitude reminiscent of Wordsworth's "wise passiveness":

Out walking in the frozen swamp one gray day,
I paused and said, 'I will turn back from here.
No, I will go farther – and we shall see.'

(The Wood-pile)

Pastoral & Nature Poems

The nature poems and the pastoral poems are not to be considered the same in any strict sense; obviously the two kinds of poetry differ. In pastorals the subject is a special society, or, more generally, a way of life, and nature is merely the setting within which we see the pastorals. The pastoral poets do not write about nature; they use nature as their scene. Nevertheless, Frost's nature poetry is closely related to his pastoral poetry. One might demonstrate the connection by pointing out how many poems combine both genres. Such pieces as 'The Onset,' 'Unharvested,' and 'Evening in a Sugar Orchard' present vivid pictures of landscape, but in them the Yankee point of view through which nature is seen is as vital to the meaning as the things portrayed. This is not so in all the nature poems. In many others, natural objects hold the center of interest. The lines below clearly demonstrate Frost's attitude toward nature, particularly as seen in "Unharvested":

A scent of ripeness from over a wall.
And come to leave the routine road
And look for what has made me stall,
There sure enough was an apple tree
That had eased itself of its summer load,
And of all but its trivial foliage free,
Now breathed as light as a lady's fan.
For there had been an apple fall
As complete as the apple had given man.
The ground was one circle of solid red.

(Unharvested)

Frost's depiction of natural objects like apple tree, foliage, etc. holds the central concentration of his treatment of nature in a quite neatly manner. His use of natural objects and phenomena in the poem shows that nature is a part of our ecosystem that makes our life very fruitful. There's no denying that such fruit as depicted by Frost is an essential part of our ecosystem.

Frost's treatment of nature in his poetry has widened his poetic identity that some critics like Alvarez (1995) regarded him as essentially a pastoral poet. He is, according to Alvarez (1995), a poet of pastures and plains, mountains and rivers, fruits and flowers, seeds and birds:

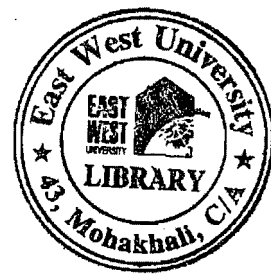
"The woods are lovely, dark and deep"

(Stopping By Woods On A Snowing

Evening)

Similarly, William Wordsworth's "Michael" is a narrative, pastoral poem the speaker's purpose is to praise the rural life, lived close to nature. The opening of the poem describes the landscape on which the family of three lived and struggled. Their land was situated in a valley, and the speaker has made the trip on foot and reports the difficulty of accessing such a lonely and desolate terrain:

■ From the public way you turn your steps
Up the tumultuous brook of Greenhead Ghyll,
You will suppose that with an upright path
Your feet must struggle; in such bold ascent
The pastoral mountains front you, face to face.
But, courage! for around that boisterous brook
The mountains have all opened out themselves,



And made a hidden valley of their own.

...

Sometimes when he could find a leisure hour

He to that valley took his way, and there

Wrought at the Sheepfold.

...

Near the tumultuous brook of Greenhead Ghyll,

In that deep valley, Michael had designed

To build a Sheepfold;

...

And grossly that man errs, who should suppose

That the green valleys, and the streams and rocks,

Were things indifferent to the Shepherd's thoughts.

(Michael)

The narrative's plot is quite simple: the family living close to nature is happy and content for many years, but when their son turned eighteen, a financial burden is laid on them from Michael's having signed a document that made Michael liable for his brother's son's debts. Michael determines that instead giving up part of his land, he will send Luke to work for some rich merchant until Luke can make enough money to pay off the debt:

So lived he till his eightieth year was past.

...

Surviving comrade of uncounted hours,

Which, going by from year to year, had found,

And left, the couple neither gay perhaps
Nor cheerful, yet with objects and with hopes,
Living a life of eager industry.
And now, when Luke had reached his eighteenth year,

(Michael)

Wordsworth's obvious purpose in this poem is to support his notion that a pastoral life is pure, moral, and happy. He believed that living close to nature, living an uncomplicated, spiritual life devoted to honest labor was the ideal. His narrative suggests that if Luke had remained in the natural valley with his parents and continued to live the pastoral life, he would have retained his moral character and saved his parents' later years from grief.

While words worth in his treatment of nature has merged morality and pastorality in 'Michael', he has explicitly made a connection between the innocence and the understanding of the child in "We Are Seven":

We Are Seven
----- A simple child,
That lightly draws its breath,
And feels its life in every limb,
What should it know of death?

Wordsworth's treatment of nature in the poetry, even in his pastorals as well, has opened a new door to the readers' understanding of nature; he uses nature as a means of conveying his message that nature is always pure, happy and an usher in spiritual solace:

I met a little cottage girl—
She was eight years old, she said;

Her hair was thick with many a curl

That clustered round her head

She had a rustic, woodland hair,

And she was wildly clad;

Her yes were fair, and very fair—

Her beauty made me glad.

(We Are Seven)

The shift in subject is not surprising, for a poet of rural life would find it natural to write about the countryside, but the connection between the two poetic types is more fundamental than this. It consists in a similarity of thought. Both kinds of poetry seem to grow from a single way of looking at reality - the same perspective which creates pastorals when the poet's eyes are directed to rural life determines his vision of nature.

The following extract from Wordsworth's "We Are Seven" better makes the idea of shift in poetic subject:

We Are Seven

----- A simple child,

That lightly draws its breath,

And feels its life in every limb,

What should it know of death?

(We Are Seven)

This contrast between man and nature is the central theme of Frost's nature poetry. Whereas Wordsworth sees in nature a mystical kinship with the human mind, Frost views nature as essentially alien. Instead of exploring the margin where emotions and

appearances blend, he looks at nature across an impassable gulf. What he sees on the other side is an image of a hard, impersonal reality. Man's physical needs, the dangers facing him, the realities of birth and death, the limits of his ability to know and to act are shown in stark outline by the indifference and inaccessibility of the physical world in which he must live.

Thus Frost sees in nature a symbol of man's relation to the world. Though he writes about a forest or a wildflower, his real subject is humanity. The remoteness of nature reveals the tragedy of man's isolation and his weakness in the face of vast, impersonal forces. But nature also serves to glorify man by showing the superiority of the human consciousness to brute matter. In this respect, nature becomes a means of portraying the heroic. There is a fundamental ambiguity of feeling in Frost's view of nature. It is to be feared as man's cruel taskmaster, scorned as insensible, brutish, unthinking matter; yet it is to be loved, not because it has any secret sympathy for man -- "One had to be versed in country things/ Not to believe the phoebes wept" -- but rather because it puts man to the test and thus brings out his true greatness:

When stiff and sore and scarred

I take away my hand

From leaning on it hard

In grass and sand,

The hurt is not enough:

I long for weight and strength

To feel the earth as rough

To all my length.

(Frost: To Earthward)

Such ambiguity indicates the poetic potential of Frost's nature. One sees it in "Birches," where the delicate balance between the desire to withdraw from the world and love of the earth is symbolized in the boy's game of swinging birch trees; in "The Onset" in the contrast between Frost's dismay at the descent of winter and his assurance of spring; in the April day of "Two Tramps in Mud Time," which gives pleasure and yet is pervaded with the lingering threat of winter. Though his concept of nature does not allow for the sublimity one finds in Wordsworth, it has a richness of its own. It is a paradox, and it points toward the greater paradox in man himself.

Theme of Animal

Wordsworth's animal in his poetry is, for the most part, like the innocent lamb of William Blake. On the other hand, Frost's bees, birds or animals have sometimes exceeded that tranquilizing quality to some sort of ferocity which Blake's Tiger possesses:

'There are bees in this wall'. He struck the clapboards,
Fierce heads looked out; small bodies pivoted.
We rose to go. Sunset blazed on the windows.

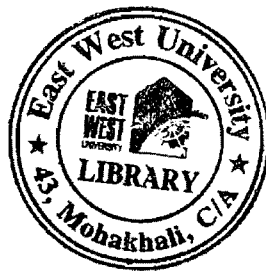
(The Black Cottage)

Alex Calder (2001:371) says that bees live in where honey is. He further says that "they may suggest a more natural or original mode of habitation in contrast to the minister's arid and solipsistic ideal". "Yet because those 'fierce' decolonizing bees have made themselves a home where they will not be wanted, Frost's natural image also catches on the ferocity of human patterns of settlement" (Neil Roberts: 2001)

This contrast makes the human qualities of Frost's animals stand out with startling boldness. The effect is a quaintness and extravagance which seem more akin to the medieval beast fable than to Romantic nature poetry. Often his personifications approach the absurd, as in "The Runaway," where the folksy and almost lugubrious tone illustrates how easily the device may get out of hand. Frost seems to be aware of the danger, however, for generally his treatment of animals is humorous. Consider the fine irony of the epigram entitled "Waspish":

On glossy wires artistically bent,
He draws himself up to his full extent.
His natty wings with self-assurance perk.
His stinging quarters menacingly work.
Poor egotist, he has no way of knowing
But he's as good as anybody going.

(Frost: Waspish)



Conclusion

Literature is aesthetic that gives pleasure. All elements and subject matters of literature contribute to the pleasure that literature gives. And that is what William Wordsworth and Robert Frost have found in nature. They sought some sort of physical and spiritual pleasure and delight in nature, and they have clearly presented their penetrative experience with nature through their approach towards nature from a diverse perspective of their association with nature.

Wordsworth talks about natural laws that govern the real world. We see him drawing upon real life observations and experience in his treatment of nature in his poetry. For instance, in his poem 'Tintern Abbey', he gives a visual picture of his penetration into the natural objects:

"A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things...."

(Tintern Abbey)

Wordsworth's "The Prelude" which he published in 1814 as the second part of the three-part *The Recluse* is deeply concerned with nature. He had not completed the first and third parts, and never would complete them. However, he did write a poetic Prospectus to "The Recluse" in which he lays out the structure and intent of the poem. The Prospectus contains some of Wordsworth's most famous lines on the relation between the human mind and nature:

My voice proclaims

How exquisitely the individual Mind

(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted:--and how exquisitely, too,
Theme this but little heard of among Men,
The external World is fitted to the Mind . . .

On the other hand, Robert Frost, unlike Wordsworth who, apart from the plain beauty of nature, finds a philosophical doctrine in nature, is more concerned with the plain beauty of natural objects than finding any hypothetical meaning in nature. The lines below well describe Frost's simplicity in his treatment of nature:

I wonder about the trees.
Why do we wish to bear
Forever the noise of these
More than another noise
So close to our dwelling place?

(The Sound of Trees)

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