

An Eco-critical View of the Green Poems of Robert Frost

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Abstract

Our planet, Earth is surrounded by grave ecological issues such as pollution of the air, water, acidic rain, global warming, deforestation and the problem of biodiversity. In the last few decades there has been a major focus upon the preservation of our natural surroundings by educating the masses on the issues of environmental concerns. In contemporary world several poets, novelists and writers have shown their keen interest in description of the relation of environment and human beings. Most of the poems written by Robert Frost have acute sense of consciousness towards nature and her elements.

Keywords- Deforestation, Ecocriticism, Global Warming, Landscape, Materialism

After the emergence of feminism and post colonialism, Ecocriticism as a literary theory has started gaining ground. Ecocriticism talks of the mutual dependence of nature and humankind. Emerson spoke of Ecocriticism for the first time in his essay 'Nature'. The ecocritic Lawrence Buell, suggests that "human beings are ecologically or environmentally embedded". Most of the other eco critics also believe that the concept of humanity being embedded in the natural world holds good for many writers in the history of literature. Ecocriticism as a literary theory explores the relationship between literature and the natural world. It also analyses the role the natural environment plays in the thinking of the poet. Ecocriticism is applicable to the study of any form of literary work and in so doing it absorbs from literary works the ideas and thoughts that are helpful in dealing with the relationship between man and nature, and even contributes as much as possible to the cause of environmental preservation. Nature is the mother and teacher of mankind and is a bounteous treasure of emotions and feelings. Ecocriticism explores the relationship between literature and the natural world. It analyses the role that the natural environment plays in the imagination of the poet.

Amongst the panorama of poets in English Literature, one name stands out not only because of the beauty of the poems, their closeness to the ideals of life but also because of their close association with the divine acceptance of the values of nature. The American poet Robert Frost is an ideal candidate to be read and understood in the context of Ecocriticism.

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The poet arose in the literary circles in the decades immediately preceding the birth of Ecocriticism, and the natural world was a large component of his writing. One of the finest qualities in most of Frost's poems is the liberal use of nature for setting. His way of viewing pastoral art is unique because he not only uses seasons for virtual background but also utilizes trees, leaves, snow, pastures to transfer human feelings on to them.

Robert Frost is a famous American poet of the 20th century. Most of his poems have a distinct flavor of the countryside with enchanting descriptions of the landscape, the rivers, the mountains and the valleys. Along with the pictorial scenic description his poems seriously cater to the growing ecological concerns which have serious implications for the modern generation.

In his poem 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening', Frost creates an atmosphere which at once fills up the mind of the reader with wonder and enchantment. The woods are lovely, dark and deep and the speaker stops by them on a snowy evening in order to gaze at them and enjoy the beauty. The speaker is totally immersed and enchanted by the scene around him and is tempted to stay a little more long but the call of duty cannot be ignored and he leaves the place. Frost repeats the word 'woods' throughout the poem which not only symbolize the dictionary meaning but also connote the irrationality of human life and the temptations humankind is yielded to. Frost meticulously brings about very minute details like the woods, the snow, downy flake, frozen lake and easy wind. He very beautifully uses his horse to elaborate upon his consciousness, the horse does not understand why the poet has stopped at a place without any logical reason. For Frost the woods are both lovely and dark, the woods for him symbolize the loveliness that life holds for us and also the darkness in the form of negativity that surrounds us at frequent junctures in life. Life is also dark in the sense that it holds an unknown future for all of us which like the woods has been explored but the depth is unfathomable. The last two lines which are a repetition convey two different meanings- the first tells the reader about the distance that the traveller has to ride in order to reach his destination and the second tells us about the distance in terms of years which have to be traversed in order to meet the final end i.e 'death'. The poet though is fascinated with death but decides to move on in life so that he can fulfill his responsibilities that he owes to others. His inspiration here is naturally Nature which is all persevering and bounteous.

In another poem 'The Girl's Garden', Frost yet again proves the giving quality which is inherent in Nature. The poem is a perfect example of the saying 'what you sow, is what you reap'. Nature and humankind are mutually dependent on each other and human beings are actually a part of Nature. The poem details the story of a small girl who once asked her father for a plot of land which could be cultivated. The father agreed and showed her a small stretch which was an idle corner with a shop on it. In childlike manner the girl put in all her strength and will. She had to beg for seeds and only got a handful of weed to sow. The child showered all the love and affection that she had and Nature reciprocated with the same

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intensity. A land which was given only weed and water rewarded the child with 'A hill each of potatoes, /Radishes, lettuce, peas, /Tomatoes, beets, beans, pumpkins, corn, /And even fruit trees.' The poem shows Frost's full appreciation of nature's values, his deep respect for nature, his peaceful and harmonious return to nature when in doubt. The poem passes a subtle message to humankind that Nature has its own ways of loving and nurturing. There is no significance of materialism, importance is given to inner peace and harmonious relationship between the giver and the receiver.

In yet another poem 'Tree at my Window' Frost creates a striking analogy between the tree and himself. There is a tree just next to the window of the poet's bedroom. The poet draws the window panes at night so that he can be warm inside. But he never draws the curtains because he does not want to isolate himself from the tree. The tree for Frost is a stretch of his own consciousness for he believes that both of them have suffered the onslaughts of life and have borne it courageously. Frost also deflects a little when he says that he has seen the tree wither and has understood its pain, he questions on the fact that whether the tree has paid any attention upon the poet when he was distressed and was in sheer need of a companion. In the third stanza, the speaker mentions that he has seen the tree "taken and tossed" just as the tree (personified) has seen him "taken and swept/ And all but lost" in dreams. The poet considers the tree to be a friend in that they both have similar problems in life. The tree deals with the wind, the storms and all forms of good and bad weather. The speaker deals with inner storms and the turmoil caused by bad emotions and experiences. As the tree experiences episodes of storm, calm, cold and warmth, in the same manner the poet experiences bouts of happiness, anger, grief, love and peace. The experiences are the same, the only difference is that one is external and the other is internal. The poet finds solace in the lap of nature and experiences a connection and an odd brotherhood between himself and the tree.

In his poem 'Nothing Gold can Stay', Frost uses Nature as the main symbol for his theme. The cycle of life and death can be very well illustrated through the cycle of the four seasons. According to Frost Nature symbolizes the idea that all good and beautiful things in life will eventually fade away. He tries to explain that nothing in this world has permanence, everything around us is perishable and he cites various examples for it. The most important message that Frost wants to pass on to humankind is that once we recognize and accept this impermanence and the fleeting nature of precious moments, we will be able to appreciate them better. Even though flowers may wither and men may die but this cycle of birth and rebirth will continue. The poet expects the readers to appreciate and love the beauty that is there in their lives and also in their surroundings, care for people and things that are around them. The poet tries to express in a subtle manner that if you love, you get love in return.

In the poem 'Dust of Snow' Frost uses another striking comparison between the cause of happiness and the elements of Nature. He has spent a day which he assumes has not been

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well spent. We can assume from the title that it is winter and it is snowing. The day has been a gloomy one for him, but his moment of peace and solace comes from an object that is considered an ominous one in mostly all cultures. When the crow flutters its wings some snow that has collected on the hemlock tree falls down on the poet under which he is standing. The poet's heart is filled with pleasure and he feels that his day which had been gloomy has become more cheerful and composed. Frost finds beauty in all the elements of Nature. Even the most bizarre objects in Nature like the dust of snow on a winter day and the black ominous crow can provide happiness and a reason for rejoicing. The message is clear that nature is inherently beautiful, humankind has to develop the vision to appreciate and sustain the beauty so that it may become a cause of eternal happiness for them.

Most of his poetry employs New England as a backdrop, with the accompaniment of full-bodied country flavor and enticing pastoral sentiment. His work is not only poetically meaningful and philosophically rich, but more importantly, it bears realistic significance with implied deep ecological consciousness

In the poem 'Now Close the Windows', Robert Frost takes the reader for a ride into the winter season which is about to come. Winter which is symbolic of death brings with it a sense of silence and nothingness. He refers to trees that are tossing silently with the blowing wind and the atmosphere which is absolutely silent because no birds are singing. He equates the winter season with the winters of human life. Just as Nature accepts change in a positive way, humankind should also choose to remain happy, calm and composed in times of despair and dejection. Sometimes in life we need to be silent and just watch life around in order to truly appreciate things.

The poem 'A Prayer in Spring', takes as its subject the beauty of Nature. The poem operates as a simple evocation of the beauty of God's creation in spring and expresses a sense of gratitude for the wonders that surround the speaker. It encourages humankind to enjoy the present rather than focusing on the worries of the future. The phrase 'Oh give us pleasure' is repeated often throughout the poem as the poet wants to be satisfied with his surroundings rather than lamenting upon the past or the 'uncertain harvest' of the future.

The title of the poem 'A Minor Bird', reflects upon humankind's inability to appreciate Nature and preserve their surroundings. Frost uses the word 'Minor' in the title just in order to highlight the insignificance that people pay to Nature. The speaker wants the bird to fly away so that he is not able to hear its sound any longer since he has been bothered a lot by it. He even tries to drive the bird away with the sound of clapping hands. He later on realizes that the song of the bird is actually his fault and not that of the bird. The problem lies with him and not in Nature's desire to do what it was supposed to do on Earth. Frost wrote this poem to increase the awareness of the readers regarding their lack of appreciation of Nature and their surroundings.

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Robert Frost's poetry can be analysed on the backdrop of 'Ecocriticism' which has emerged as a growing field in the literary sphere because of the worsening global ecological crisis. The relation between literature, nature and culture is reciprocal and ecocriticism explores the insight and wisdom embodied in the works of Frost which could arouse the ecological consciousness of the people so that they may understand that nature and humankind are mutually dependent. Frost's poetry has a full appreciation of the deep values inherent in nature, his respect for nature and his surroundings and his peaceful and harmonious return to nature in times of despair and dejection.

With the progress of Science and Technology and the increase in standards of living humankind has forgotten that our environment is worsening day by day. An ecological crisis has emerged which needs to change and transform the outlook of the modern world which in the need and hurry to progress forgot that they have to walk hand in hand along with nature in order to sustain and develop. What else can teach and sensitize better than literature. Frost's poetry uses nature as a recurrent theme and also provides profound meanings. It also contains the ecological consciousness which have practical significance in the modern world. This ecological consciousness works at three levels- the importance of the ecological system, humankind's dependence upon nature and their harmonious co-existence. The source of his poetry is nature and very well expresses his ecological consciousness. Through his poems the readers should realize that only when humans and nature coexist harmoniously they can benefit and progress on the ecological civilized road of development.

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