

Nature in the Eyes of Robert Frost and William Wordsworth

Abstract

Robert Frost is often designated by students and critics as the American poetical parallel of William Wordsworth, the forerunner of the Romantic Movement in England. It is widely believed that Wordsworth exerted profound influence on Frost in writing his poems, especially those on nature. In philosophy and style, Frost and Wordsworth appear both similar and dissimilar. Both poets see Nature in different ways although there are some aspects of the subject which are clearly the same. This view is such a vast subject which is an always changing thing. From the changing seasons to the day- to- day weather Nature never ceases to amaze. For both poets Nature brings the same thing, yet in very different ways. For Robert Frost, the simple scene of a wood (forest) filling slowly up with snow. As for Wordsworth the scene is very much a more vibrant picture as he describes the daffodils in their 'sprightly dance'.

Keywords: Pantheism, Deceptively Plain, Genuinely Simple, Monosyllabic.

Introduction

Robert Frost's central themes are men and women, humanity, loneliness, isolation and nature. Like Wordsworth, he chose incidents and situations from common life as the subjects of his poems. He fought against the existing traditions of poetry; he wanted poetry to be as free and natural as love. He illuminated things as common as a woodpile and as uncommon as a prehistoric pebble, as natural as a bird singing in its leap and as mechanistic as a revolt of factory worker. His poetry touches as the heart of his countrymen and his readers because of the strength of his lyricism, his impulsive utterance, his simple poetic diction, his clarity, his patriotism, his art, his symbolism, his modernity and the importance he gave to man. He is as great poet of nature in America as Wordsworth in England.

To Wordsworth, the influence of Nature on human mind is something more than what human mind gives: we receive more than what we give. Nature created something, and man in his turn also creates something. Without this active principle of creation, along with this principle of give and take, no development is possible. The result of this communication is the transfusion into one whole of man's soul with that of Nature, and it is in such moments of communication that the external, phenomenal world would become unsubstantial to Wordsworth and he would become a spiritual entity living a purely spiritual life.

Such a communication, if done philosophically by diving deep into the spirit of nature, by constant brooding and meditation, would give rise to pantheism; if in an emotional way, by throwing the whole personality of the poet into the personality of Nature, it would give rise to mysticism as in Shelley, and if with devotion and religious feeling, it would produce mystical adoration of Nature, as we find in 'The Excursion' Book 1:

.....he beheld the sun
Rise up, and bathe the world in light.....
.....Far and wide the clouds were touched,
And in their silent faces could he read
Unutterable love. Sound needed none,
Nor any voice of joy: his spirit drank
The spec table; sensation, soul and form,
All melted into him: they swallowed up
His animal being: in them did he live,
And by them did he: they were his life.

Frost is deceptively plain whereas Wordsworth is genuinely simple. Frost's poetry contains plain words but complex thoughts whereas Wordsworth's poetry has plain words and plain thoughts. Wordsworth is plain both in manner and matter. He is never pretentious, covert and deceptive. Both Wordsworth and Frost are democratic in style as they peak

Sheetal Yadav

Lecturer,
Deptt.of English
N.K.B.M.G.P.G.College,
Chandausi

"to men in the tongue all men know because they are men." In Frost, plainness is present but it is a deceptive plainness. In deceptive simplicity, Frost reveals the complexities of rural life in the garb of plain words. Many of his monosyllabic words were difficult to comprehend as these were charged with symbolic meanings. The body of his poetry wears an ordinary garment but beneath it remain messages that need one to introspect for clear understanding. Frost uses symbols taken from nature to express the intended meanings or messages. His poems bear deep messages.

In Wordsworth's poetry, nature is supreme, where humans and nature forge an intimate communion; humans and nature are never found hostile to each other. In Frost, rural people are supreme and nature has been made subordinate to humans. He is interested in locating the relations between nature and humans. It is true that both poets sought to find solace and delight in nature. The poem *Birches* offers the best example of how the poet blends observation and imagination, fact and fancy, feeling and wisdom.

The subjects of Frost's poetry are local or regional like the poetry of Thomas Hardy. Their poetry springs from specific areas. The subjects of Wordsworth's poetry are universal, and are true of all people of the world. Frost wrote about ordinary people --- farmers and workers were the subjects of his poems. Woods, flowers, birches, weeds, birds and trees showed up frequently in his poems. The rural landscape and wildlife form the content of his poetry. Because of his unfeigned interest and love for rural people, he does not want to escape in some other world or in the world of nature. He is more real.

Both Wordsworth and Frost are optimistic in their attitude to life. As Jonathan Swift had all complaints against humankind, Frost had all the complaints against nature. But still he would seek recourse to nature, when he becomes weary of urban life. In *Birches*, he says:

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

Poetry, to Frost, was a record of personal experience. To Wordsworth, it was "the image of man and nature. To Wordsworth, nature was the source of learning, ideas, power and values; nature was the fountain of inspiration and solace in times of mental agony. Nature appears to him as his 'guardian, nurse' and teacher. And Nature become for him:

The anchor of my purest thoughts,
the nurse the guide, the guardian of my
heart, and soul Of all my moral being.

In times of despair and suffering, nature acts as the spring of moral strength and confidence for psychic survival. In nature Wordsworth feels "a presence that disturbs" him with "the joys of elevated thoughts." To Frost, nature is unfriendly, malevolent and malignant; it creates barriers to the smooth fulfilment of human and social obligations. He describes the scene (woods) as 'lovely, dark and deep' this isn't as vibrant or 'in your face' as Wordsworth. Frost in some senses seems to be a lot more laid back and relaxed in his environment; he almost gives this wonderful sight a solemn feel. We

know that Frost sees his time in the woods as a piece of heaven, and he feels when he dies he could escape to peaceful tranquillity similar what he is seeing in front of him, but he also realises that he has responsibilities to maintain and doesn't want to let people down To Frost, there are barriers between humans and nature, between humans and humans, and between the Creator and Creation. Yet he does not cease to work; he rather tries to adjust himself with the barriers created by nature. Like Wordsworth, Frost could not feel in nature

". . . A sense of something far more deeply
interfused."

Amid nature and even with a human companion, Wordsworth was ever solitary; he could create solitude in the midst of a multitude.

Frost looks very deep into Nature as does Wordsworth. Frost sees an escape from life, and Wordsworth sees an escape from feeling down and 'pensive'. For Wordsworth his encounter with nature gives him a constant thought to relax on. As for Frost his encounter with Nature really makes him think about where his life is going. The unfortunate problem for Frost is that he cannot just think about the woods to make him happy, he actually has to be there. Wordsworth is the poet of thought and meditation whereas Frost is one of activity, work, obligation and duty. Frost was pragmatic, worldly and anti-Romantic.. Wordsworth was a transcendentalist, romantic and mystic. Unlike Wordsworth, Frost keeps himself confined within earthly region, with mundane phenomena; he is not willing to transcend the boundary of this earth. Frost goes to rural areas to drink of the delight of nature and also withdraws from nature to respond to the call of duty-- social, familial, official. As he says: "*But it was no reason I had to go because they had to go*". He is rather more real. He does not want to shrink his eyes from reality. Wordsworth is deeply in love with nature, he rather hates this materialistic world. In fact he wants to escape in the world of nature. Wordsworth has taught us how to be friendly to nature and how to obtain solace from it in times of psychic crisis, and Frost has taught us how to engage in ceaseless work and also to seek transitory relief by being away into wildlife and communicating with the innocent unacknowledged rural people.

References

1. "The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost" By John Lynen, published by Yale University Press.
2. Robert Frost Selected Poems, Mansukhnant, G. S. Unique Publishers New Delhi.
3. "Wordsworth and The Great System: A Study of Wordsworth's Poetic Universe", Durrant G- (1970).
4. William Wordsworth Selected Poems, Mundra S. C. (1996).
5. The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, London, Macmillan (1888).