ECOCRITICAL VIEW IN THE SELECT POEMS OF ROBERT FROST

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Abstract

Robert Frost a poet of nature represents nature in a different way from other Naturalists or Romantics. His works like ‘After Apple Picking’, ‘The Pasture’, ‘Mowing’, ‘Stopping By Woods on A Snowy Evening’ which attribute to the rural landscape can hardly avoid one thinking of him as a nature poet. His approach to poetry is unique. Robert Frost draws inspiration and boundless joy from the rural setting.

In the following select poems he discusses the subject of co-existence of man and nature.

Nature is the mother and teacher of mankind. It is a bounteous treasure of emotions and feelings. Nature and environment is part and parcel of all living beings in this world.

Ecocriticism explores the relationship between literature and the natural world. It analyses the role that the natural environment plays in the imagination in the minds of the poet.

Pastoral art a theory in ecocriticism has remained a key concern of the ecocritics. Pastoral art got its shape from the Romantic movement’s poetic response to the industrial revolution. The pastoral art as a literary genre finds its source in the country writing dating back the Theocritus in the 3rd century B.C followed by Virgil of 70 B.C. Pastoral art is still prevalent in relatively modern literature from the poetry of William Wordsworth and Robert Frost to C.S.Lewis’s  “Alice’s adventure in wonderland” and this genre might continue into the new works of 21st century.

This paper attempts to examine the concept of co-existence of man and nature in select poems of Robert Frost like “After Apple-picking’, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”, and “Mowing”, it also attempts to illustrate the pastoral art underlying his poems and his affection for nature which has led him to observe in nature a symbol of man’s relation to the world.

Frost has so often focused his themes on rural landscape and wildlife that one can hardly deny him to be a nature poet. His nature poetry connects the world of the nature and that of human beings.

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, pasture, even scythe to transfer human feelings on to them.

Frost in his poem “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” creates an atmosphere of wonder and enchantment by describing the Woods as deep, dark and lovely. The speaker stops by some woods on snowy evening to gaze at them. He enjoys the lovely scene in near-silence and is tempted to stay a little longer but acknowledging the call of duty and

considerable distance he decides to proceed without tarrying.

“The woods are lovely dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
Miles to go before I sleep
Miles to go before I sleep”.

The word Woods is repeated throughout the poem, The Woods here mean more than mere Woods and they are irrationality and temptation. This poem illustrates many of the qualities most characteristic of Frost himself including the attention to the natural detail-like ‘the woods’, ‘snow’ and ‘downy’ flake. He projects his thoughts through the horse who doesn’t understand why they have stopped there without any practical reason. Frost has dexterously coined the words ‘dark’ and ‘lovely’ to describe the Woods which is a rare combination, symbolic of death, which like the dark deep unknown woods remain an undiscovered world till date by great critics. Frost has associated dark with lovely because the woods appear restful and sleepy which once again strike relevance with death. The last two lines “Miles to go before I sleep” state two different meanings, the first line which stays within the boundaries of literalness set forth by the rest of the poem and the second line though soft yet penetrating reminds one of his responsibility before the last sleep i.e death. Though the poet speaker is fascinated by death, he decides to make a move in order to fulfill his responsibility and to him it can be the writing of poetry for the welfare of mankind.

Both the key elements of his motivation in his writing of poetry are present in this poem “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” i.e. he starts with an observation in nature, contemplates it and relates it with life. His description of the woods, associating it with death and the call of responsibility reveals the poet’s response to the pastoral setting behind him.

Frost is capable of transferring any ordinary experience into contemplation of life. In this poem “After Apple-picking” an interesting picture of a tired farmer after the day’s labour is sketched by Robert Frost very skillfully.

“Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples, I am drowsing of”.

Frost’s sensuous enjoyment of the scenes and sights, sounds and scents of nature is carefully drawn in this poem. The apple picker has been picking apples for quite a long time and he grows tired.

“And there’s a barred that I didn’t fill”

Frost has breathed human feelings into the natural things like trees, leaves, apple and seasons, In this poem apple is employed as a metaphor for life. The empty barrel yet to be filled with apples is symbolized as the unfinished task in the speaker’s life for which he regrets. The unfinished task analysed in these lines can be interpreted as Frost’s wasted time instead of writing poetry and thus he regrets. The line “stem end and the blossom end” is a reflection of the cycle of life in nature, so the speaker has looked at all his life experience from top to bottom and regrets over the undone tasks in his life.

Frost explores a deeper concept about the bruises.
“No matter if not bruised or spiked
went sure to cider heap as of no worth,
the apples that have stuck the earth”

A careful examination of these lines will explicate that the speaker is associated with the bruised apple which goes to the cider heap. Although every day is the same there is at least a slight difference between each day and each day brings new opportunities and challenges. One should always treasure each moment in his life but once the opportunity is lost, one cannot travel back to take it. Terry Gifford rightly points out that “Nature is the name under which we use the non-human to validate the human to interpose a mediation able to make humanity more easy than itself”

This paper has thus made an attempt to show how all these poems discussed above are illustrative of Frost’s simple yet meaningful theme on pastoral art and all the three poems convey a deeper meaning to the reader than is apparent at the first reading.

References