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ROBERT FROST'S SINISTER AND HORRIBLE TREATMENT OF NATURE IN THE  
SELECTED POEMS

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ABSTRACT

The present paper proposes to highlight his sinister and horrible treatment of nature in the selected poems: *Two Tramps in Mud Time*, *A Boundless Moment*, *Two looks at Two*, *Neither out for nor in deep*. It is an attempt to reveal his sinister and horrible treatment of nature. So many different moods in his poems like frightening, caring, loving, horrifying, reflecting, moralizing and philosophizing. In this paper our focus on sinister and horrible treatment. Robert Frost can enjoy the beauty of nature's 'green' and 'gold'. He is a mere painter of pleasant landscape. Rather the bleak, the barren, and the sinister are more characteristic of his nature painting.

**Key words:** Poems, horrible, sinister, nature

Discussion

Nature in poetry has been used from the time of Homer to the present days. Writers have used as theme and subject matter of their works from the time to Chaucer, Shakespeare, Edmond Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney to the nineteenth century of English Romantic poets. Robert Frost is one of the most popular poets of America. Frost's identity as a nature poet of America is like that of Wordsworth in England. Robert Frost has been called the finest American poet of the 20th century. Robert Lee Frost was born on March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1874 in San Francisco. His father came from New England and the mother from Edinburgh. Poetry was in his blood as his mother poetess.

Nature speaks to Frost at all times and all places because he is a receptive man with keen sensibility and sensitiveness. Frost, the poet is always surrounded by birches, birds, stars, walls and West-Running Brooks. His reaction to nature is neither Epicurean, nor Renaissance, Romantic, Victorian nor Georgian. But he does not find in nature an intimate kinship like Wordsworth. This is why he deliberately dissociates himself from the pantheistic traditions of Wordsworth. Frost's view of nature is so pervasive that it cannot be separated from his work.

In Robert Frost's most cheerful nature sketches there is always a bittersweet quality. Admittedly he can and does enjoy nature. His Flowers, trees, and animals are all described with affection. Yet none of the nature poems is free from hints of possible danger.' under the placid surface there is always the unseen presence of something hostile. "spring pool", for example beings innocently enough with a description of the pools and flowers which one sees in the woodlands in early springs. Then suddenly the tone becomes grave. :

“The trees that have it in their pent -up buds  
 To darken nature and be summer woods \_\_\_\_\_  
 Let them think twice before they use their powers  
 To blot out and drink up and sweep away  
 These flowery waters and these watery flowers  
 From snow that melted only yesterday”.

There is something sinister about the way the poem turns out. Spring, traditionally the season of birth, innocence and joy, ushers in darkness, and the optimistic ending of Shelley’s ‘ode to the west wind’. Is grimly inverted. Treacherous forces are forever breaking through the pleasant surface of the landscape in this manner. Frost on his nature rambles has the air of someone picking his way through no man’s land during an uneasy truce. The weather is bracing, his spirits are high; but he must tread lightly for fear of mines. And there is always the chance that they may stumble upon a bullet- pierced helmet or something worse. At the most unexpected times he gives glimpses of horror. In ‘Two Tramps in Mud Time’ he interrupts his genial chat about the April weather to advice:

“Be glad of water, but don’t forget  
 The lurking frost in the earth beneath  
 That will steal forth after the sun is set  
 And show on the water its crystal teeth.”

These vistas opening upon fearful realities do not in the least negate the beauty frost also seen in nature; rather, it is they, which give his songbirds, wild flowers, brooks, and trees, their poignant appeal. The charm of many of the nature lyrics results from the vividness with which sweet, delicate things stand out against the somber background. You cannot have the one without the other: Love of natural beauty and horror at the remoteness and indifference of the physical world are not opposites but different aspects of the same view.

‘A Boundless Moment’ gives us fresh glimpses of beauty, which have made frost’s nature poetry so popular.

“We stood a moment so in a strange world,  
 Myself as one his own pretence deceives;  
 And then I said the truth (and we moved on )  
 A young beech clinging to its last year’s leaves.”

‘The boundless moment’ gives a vision of beauty but this vision is merely an illusion \_\_\_ the flower the two men thought they saw are only dead leaves clinging to a beech. The reader responds to the gorgeous sight of the “Paradise - in bloom, in much the same way as the characters in the poem. But nature itself is barren. When the walkers recognize the leaves for what they are, they can only turn again to the routine of life. The incident show’s man’s tragic limitations. His imagination cannot sustain the ideal vision long \_\_ for a “boundless moment” it can mould nature to its desires, then the “paradise - in - bloom” again becomes the dead tree of reality. But there is more to the poem than this hard lesson. The fading of a vision may be sad, but the truthfulness which will not take it to seriously has something noble about it. The speaker’s refusal to accept anything but the truth, even when the truth is disappointing, demonstrates the courage of man’s intellect.

Unflinching honest in the face of facts is a recurrent theme in Frost’s nature poetry. For it is in this that he sees the basis of man’s power and indeed of his spiritual being. Man can never find a home in nature, nor can he live outside of it. But he can assert the reality of his spirit and thus can exist independently of the physical world in the act of looking squarely at the facts of nature.

‘A boundless moment’, describes a trivial incident and gives us a pleasant picture with only the slightest hint of sorrow, it is very much like “Bereft” where a scene symbolic of intense sorrow serves to express the same view of man’s relation to nature.

“Where had I heard this wind before  
 Change like this to a deeper roar?  
 What would it take me standing there for,

Holding open a restive door,  
 Looking downhill to a frothy shore?  
 Summer was past and day was past  
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Word I had no one left but God.”

The speaker of this poem has just suffered some terrible bereavement, and his utter loneliness is embodied in the bleakness of the landscape. There is something ominous in the darkening sky and a blind hostility in the dead leaves which swirl about his legs. He is overwhelmed by the sense of complete isolation. He has “no one left but God” and it does not seem that he will find any comfort there, for God, as he mentions him, is merely the last resort of the desperate. Yet for all its gloom, “Bereft” is not a poem of despair. The very fact that the speaker can recognize in the landscape the full extent of his loneliness shows the mind’s capacity for courage.

In both his nature poems and his pastoral the poet portrays average human experience by projecting it into a world remote and distinct. Nature, as Frost conceives it, is really a kind of wild- life. Arcadia, and in writing of scenery and animals he uses it in much the same way as he uses the mythical rural New England in his pastorals. Like his rural New England, nature evokes paradoxical attitudes: on the one hand it is a realm of ideals where the essential realities are found in their pristine forms; on the other it is an inferior plane where life is crude, insensate and mechanical. Most important, however, nature is separate, independent, off by itself away from man, just as the country of modern America.

Frost’s nature poems deal the contrast between man and nature. The contrast reveals beauty as well as horror, love as well as loneliness. Frost’s affection for nature, like his fear of it, is based on a sense of analogy. ‘Two Look at Two’, is a perfect example. A young couple out for an evening walk has climbed part way up a wooded hillside when darkness comes and they can go no further. They feel a wistful disappointment. It would be nice to go on, to penetrate deeper into nature, but it is too dark and the “failing path” would be treacherous:

“They stood facing this,  
 Spending what onward impulse they still had  
 In one last look the way they must not go...  
 ‘This is all’, they sighed,  
 ‘Goodnight to woods’. But no so; there was more.

A doe and after her “an antlered buck of lusty nostril” appear on the other side of the wall to stare at them in blank puzzlement and then pass on unscarred. To the deer they appear as mysterious as the deer seem to them:

“Two had seen two, whichever side you spoke from,  
 ‘This must be all’. It was all. Still they stood,  
 A great wave from it going over them,  
 As if the earth in one unlooked for favour.  
 Had made them certain earth returned their love”.

It is very distance between humanity and nature that makes the recognition so poignant. The man and woman cannot enter nature or identify themselves with it. Symbolically, they must of at a wall \_\_\_ beyond this the path is too dangerous. They do not dare “To stretch a proffering hand \_\_\_ and a spell - breaking”. The deer would merely run away. They can only reach nature in thought through the recognition of analogy: The words “This must be all.” It was all” echo the grim conclusion of ‘The most of it’ \_\_\_ “and that was all”. There is great buck represented the remoteness of nature; in this poem the deer are a sign of something parallel in nature and man. But there is still the impassable gulf \_\_\_ the horror at man’s isolation and the delight in finding resemblances are aspect of a single view.

In ‘Neither out For Nor In Deep’ Frost describes people along the shore of a beach staring endlessly out to sea. Their intent gaze is subtly identified with man’s half- exploratory, half- defensive watch on the universe:

“They cannot look out for.  
 They cannot look in deep.

But when was that ever a bar  
To any watch they keep?"

At other times the contrast is not made explicit but is merely suggested by certain dark undertones. Even in Frost's most cheerful nature sketches there is always a bittersweet quality. Admittedly he can and does enjoy nature. His flowers, trees, and animals are all described with affection, yet none of the nature poems is free from hints of possible danger', under the placid surface there is always the unseen presence of something hostile.

Robert Frost can enjoy the beauty of nature's 'green' and 'gold', but it would be a mistake to suppose that Frost is a mere painter of pleasant landscapes. Rather, the bleak, the barren, and the sinister are more characteristic of his nature - painting. Even when reveling in the sensuous charms of nature, Frost is not unaware of the sinister and the ugly that may lie hidden beneath the surface. Says John F. Lynen in this connection; "Even in Frost's most cheerful nature sketches there is always a bitter- sweet quality."

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