



## ROBERT FROST AS A HUMANIST POET

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### :Abstract:

*As a poet of great insight and vision, Robert frost deviated from the British Romantic tradition of William Wordsworth, John Keats and Percy B. Shelly by shifting his attention and focus from nature to Man. His poetry great and powerful, seeks to present man as the central figure in the universal scheme of things. His pre-occupation with the fate of man gives Robert Frost the image of a humanist. His Primary concern is for the fate of Man in this existential world. As a matter of fact, in his attitude towards Nature and Man, Robert Frost assumes a golden mean. Many critics are of the opinion that Man is the main concern in Robert frost's poetry and to some others, Nature is the main concern. His outlook on life is neither optimistic nor pessimistic but represents both bright and the dark sides. According to him, life is tragic and hilariously comic, beautiful and ugly, chaotic and unified. He urges modern man to find a source of spiritual strength. His approach to Nature, the world and man is informed with the spirit of humanism.*

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**Keywords:** humanism, industrialization, optimistic, pessimistic, escapism, romantic tradition.

## INTRODUCTION

Robert Frost declared that every poem is an epitome of the great predicament, a figure of the will braving alien entanglements. As A complex poet he evoked literary traditions and conventions frequently to set himself in tension with them. As a poet of great insight and vision, Robert Frost deviated from the British Romantic tradition of William Wordsworth. John Keats and Percy. B. Shelly by shifting his attention and focus from Nature to Man. He even rejected the attempt of the romantic poets to bring Nature and Man together. His poetry. great and powerful, seeks to present man as the central figure in the universal scheme of things. His pre-occupation with the fate of man gives Robert Frost the image of a humanist. Robert Frost's primary concern is for the fate of Man in this existential world.

Robert Frost viewed Nature differently from the British Romantics and considered Man to be the central figure. Man's relation to Nature has been perspective differently at different times from Horace to the Romantics. Poets have projected the theme of return to Nature or retreat to the country – side to suggest its importance to the refreshing of mind or relieving of the tensions marking urban life. All their views assert that Nature represents an ideal order which man strives to realize in his own life. Man's miseries are a consequence of the civilization that has alienated him from Nature since the Fall of Man. It was considered necessary to revive man's living with Nature by assuming an attitude of humility to Nature after industrialization. The return to Nature came to be viewed as a return to simplicity, innocence, purity and joy. thus Robert Frost re-ordered the romantic perception of nature which has the effect of making man central to the universal scheme of things.

As a matter of fact, in his attitude towards Nature and Man, Robert Frost assumes a golden mean. By insisting on the gulf between Man and Nature, he has turned down the attempt of the Romantics to bring Nature and Man together. For Robert Frost Nature is not an end but it is a means to illustrate human relationships and to highlight man's feelings for himself and for his fellow man; it formed the setting for a scene with human foreground. Many critics are of the opinion that Man is the main concern in Robert Frost's



poetry and to some others Nature is the main concern. There are also those who find in Robert Frost's poetry love for man and Nature alike. Robert Frost projects that man must be at war with Nature in order to secure for himself a place in the scheme of things or process. Again and again he stresses the mutability and asserts that the world is not friendly to man. Man must show some resistance.

Robert Frost's outlook on life is neither optimistic nor pessimistic but represents both the bright and the dark sides. However, the emphasis is on the dark side. He exhorts man to face the ironies of life with courage and confidence. He wanted human beings to avoid escapism and advocated taking risks. Though his universe was mostly "terrifying" he did not want to see it changed. In this regard his objective seems to be to show life as worth-living. This attitude is in tune with the philosophy of humanism.

Robert Frost, in fact, had a firsthand knowledge of the ironies of life. He looked at life steadily and contemplated on it, as a result of which he discovered certain truths, namely, isolation, extinction and the final limitations of man, Robert Frost experienced these philosophical aspects through the journey of life and adopted them as themes in his poetry. Of course, he dealt with more pleasant themes also such as love –true that never alters though it causes isolation.

In fact, love and loneliness seem to be complementary. Loneliness could be borne by men but not by women, and evil could come upon lonely people Robert Frost was also concerned about atmospheric isolation caused by industrialization and the uncaring impersonal nature of the universe as revealed by science. Man lives in a psychic alienation from the world. In his isolation, man is left to his own emptiness of life as the only source for him. Thus man is subjected to excruciating – environmental, cosmic and psychic.

Robert Frost also expresses his ideas on the theme of birth, death and the process of life. He shows that the birth of a person is meant to be a resistance against the flow of the current towards its source. It is in the resistance that Robert Frost visualizes the importance of life. Man is seen as a part of a system of perpetual waste and decay since he is also a part of the natural order. Out of this system of waste he has to create his own order and for this he has been given a mind. Thus Robert Frost recognizes the power and glory of human mind but he believes more in his observations and experiences than in pessimistic doubts and romantic hopes. But some people like the New Englanders would prefer to be alone displaying self-respect, courage and pride in the face of misfortunes. However, nothing is more pathetic than a lonely life in a broken state.

The barriers must be pulled down to restore a life of normalcy and mitigate inward sufferings of stray and overlooked people. But they are certain barriers whose existence is necessary for human life, for instance, a respectable distance between neighbors, between man and his immediate natural world and between man and space. In this huge impersonal universe, man must display reason, courage and humility, and maintain psychic and emotional poise, which may enable him to find joy in living. Using his mind man must create order out of disorder and make both life and death meaningful. In fact, Robert Frost's positive themes get the better of his dark themes and instill in the reader a feeling of joy, and love for life which are consistent with the philosophy of humanism.

As a poet, Robert Frost had varied and complex experiences in relation to Nature as well as life. At times he responds to Nature's call to visit the woods, but makes a strategic retreat confronted by the threat that Nature, seems to meet out to him. Obviously, he appears to be afraid of darkness and loneliness. Even in his younger days Robert frost had many grueling experiences, but his faith in the beneficent providence that he had inherited from his mother, helped him out. According to his mother the fortunes and misfortunes of life were extended to man by a highly just and beneficent providence. It is not in man's power to question that authority. But deeper the afflictions in this world, the higher would be the rewards waiting in the next world. Robert Frost's implicit belief in his mother's teaching's carried him over many of the grueling experiences of childhood and boyhood. But the suppressed agonies found vent somehow and helped him to concretize his resolutions to retaliate through his poetry. He found pleasure in wounding the less- fortunate ones through his



powerful poems. Themes of betrayal, of fear, of loss of love, of being 'bereft' are strong in Robert Frost's poetry. The highly sensitive mind of the poet stored up the numerous grievances of his early life and dramatized them in his later work.

Robert frost also retaliated against his offenders and detractors in matters of betrayal and loss of love. However, he cannot avoid either society or solitude. Both advance and retreat seem to be the woof and wrap of Robert Frost's philosophy. He is neighborly at times and introspective alternately. The woods seem to be his symbol for the uncharted country within ourselves. They stand for the alien entanglements that Robert Frost is pitted against. The contrast between man and nature seems to be the central theme of Robert Frost's poetry. Interestingly, whereas Wordsworth sees in Nature a mystical kinship with the human mind, Robert Frost Views Nature as essentially alien. In many of Robert Frost's poems, we find the struggle between the human imagination and the meaningless void that man confronts. It is not within man's power to range beyond his physical limits. This has created in Robert frost a tragic vision as to the fate of man. But in his own case, Robert Frost continuously fought against his weaknesses. The Frosting man also seeks to master his fears, weaknesses and even fate through courage and resolution. This courageous resolve to face the challenges of life is in tune with the tenets of humanism.

Robert Frost uses Metaphor as an effective tool to articulate his ideas, views and experiences which are varied and complex. The modernity of a poet has to be judged from his thought and his approach to current themes in his poetry, though his method may be oblique or indirect. His approach to life and its problems, his attitude towards Nature and his concern for man's struggle project the hard realities of life. Robert Frost did not give any explicit formulations deliberately. He refuses to commit himself to take sides because of his realization of the complexity of life. Life is tragic and hilariously comic, beautiful and ugly, chaotic and unified. Like Eliot, Robert Frost shows a keen awareness of the lack of spiritual values in the present day. He urges modern man to find a source of spiritual strength.

Robert Frost believes that Metaphor gives direction in arresting chaos and confusion in modern life. He thinks that all inner form is Metaphor and all thinking is Metaphor. He also uses symbol and image as a part of metaphor to clarify his views. Perfect in form and tint, a symbol has built-in power to speak in multiple ways. Its strength lies in its obscurity. In fact, Robert Frost creates a kind of second reality in poems, such as "Birches" in order to portray a world of values and beliefs that are exclusively his own. Yet, he is not in an ideal world. To him the earth is the right place for love, which observation is consistent with humanism.

In short, Robert Frost much against the English Romantic tradition made man central to the universal scheme of things. Since life is tragic and the world is beset with ironies, he exhorts man to face the challenges of life with courage and confidence, and instills in the reader a feeling of joy and love for life. Though man is pitted against alien entanglements, the earth is the right place for love. Thus, Robert Frost's approach to Nature, the World and Man is informed with the spirit of humanism.

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