

Review Article

An Inquiry into the Major Themes Loomed Large in Robert Frost's Poems

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Abstract: An attempt has been made to glimpse at the major themes of Robert Frost's poems. Frost is a modern American poet of the twentieth century whose poems are furnished with variegated themes. He is a poet who typifies the country's traditional cultural inheritance. He has absorbed the essence what constitutes America. He is also called the 'voice of America'; so to say, he has represented the faith, doubt, joys, sorrows, emotions, thoughts and ideas of the people of America. He is a poet of man whose poems deal with Man in relation with the universe crossing the border of America. Frost sees that man's environment is quite indifferent to man. To him, nature is neither absolutely benevolent to man nor hostile always. He regards nature as a beautiful but dangerous force, worthy of admiration, nonetheless fraught with peril. Thus man is essentially alone. A barrier is made between man and his immediate environment, between man and the universe, between man and man. His work shows strong sympathy for the values of the early American society. He employs themes from the early 1900's rural life in New England. He uses the pastoral setting to examine the complex social and philosophical themes. Frost concentrates on ordinary subject matters but his emotional range is wide and deep, and his poems shift dramatically from a tone of humorous banter to the passionate expression of tragic experience. He also uses language considering his subject matters. His poetry is structured within traditional metrical and rhythmical schemes, and vernacular speeches. **Daniel Hoffman** regards Frost as the founder of "a new aesthetic of poetry as speeches." This article aims at discussing Frost's major themes highlighting his poetic mastery.

Keywords: Local, Universal, Tradition, Autobiography, Modern, Man, Nature, American Ideals, Reality, Loneliness.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Robert Lee Frost (1874-1963) is a famous American poet. He is one of the most influential poets of the twentieth century. Frost's poetry has layers of meanings. An initial study of his poetry leaves an impression that he is a poet who depicts local issues related to his experiences as a New Englander but an analytical reading of his poems gives detailed information. His poetry deals with multifarious themes which are both local and universal. The autobiographical depictions like rural life, everyday activities representing the primary ideal of the New Englanders towards duty and responsibilities, are the sources by which Frost was greatly influenced. He left New England with his four children and wife and went to England in 1912. He got acquainted there with the literary luminaries like Edward Thomas and Ezra Pound. He was profusely influenced and encouraged by these literary stars. He published his first collection of poems "A boy's Will" (1913) in England. This collection was well-received and for the first time, he started to gain reputation. Then he gradually published

his other collections of poems like "North of Boston" (1914), "Mountain Interval" (1916), "New Hampshire" (1923), "West Running Brook" (1928), "A Further Range" (1936), "A Witness Tree" (1942), "Two Masques" (1945); A Masque of Reason, A Masque of Mercy", "A Steeple Bush" (1947), and "In the Clearing" (1962).

Frost uses languages considering the suitability of subjects and themes. He coins the 'sound of sense' theory as an effective means of his poetic diction that touches the readers. Frost's poems are very popular for their simplicity and straightforwardness in meaning. Despite this simplicity on surface level, his poems contain connotative meanings that can be interpreted in multiple ways. Frost's personal life was full of depressions and sadness. The death of his children, hardships and other anxiety burden his life. But these oddities cannot stop him. His fondness for New England topography leads him close to nature and he starts writing his poetry describing the elements of nature but his treatment of nature is unlike the romantic

poets. Apart from nature, American ideal, rationality, reality, patriotism, pastoralism, loneliness, man's alienation and barrier, communication, duty, rural life, urban life, everyday life touching his autobiographical elements find an eloquent expression in his poetry. In order to illustrate these themes, some poems from the above mentioned popular collections are selected and critically examined them in the respective areas in this present paper.

2. ANALYSIS OF THEMES

This article endeavors to detect Frost's major themes reflected in his poems. Frost's poems depict man's relation with the universe. The canvass of his poems is thronged by the men who are the inhabitants in the midst of Nature. The rural New England also finds eloquence in his poems epitomizing the entire globe. This paper is a literary journal, and is primarily concerned with Frost's major themes reflected in his poems. Data are collected from different sources like books, journals, magazines, online and other authentic sources where Frost's poems are analyzed, criticized, appreciated and studied from variegated perspectives. With this end in view, some outstanding poems and his biography are scanned on analytic basis to delineate fifteen major themes prevailing in his poetry.

2.1 Autobiographical elements

Robert Frost was born in San Francisco on 26 March in 1874. This sickly and ill- healthy boy, after the death of his father, moved to New England with his mother and settled there at Salem, New Hampshire. His father's death and his mother little income forced him to supplement his family by doing whatever he could, even working in the mill to newspaper reporting. Later, he took school teaching as profession and became a student of Harvard College hoping to be a college teacher but failed. Then he tried to raise poultry farming to maintain his family. But he did not like all these because poetry beckons him to be flourished in him. After fatal attack of pneumonia and his luckily recovery from it, he stated writing poems in full swing for consolation and could sell some pieces. In 1912 he left for England with his wife and four children and settled there, and published his first volume of poems, "A Boys Will" in 1913. But his New England peeped through his mind. Finally, he returned to America in 1915 and bought a small farm at Franconia in New England thinking that he would continue farming. But his poetic inspiration and creative zeal did not release him from writing poems. This literary giant, with the passage of time, became a prominent poet and got the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for literature. A glimpse at his biography and a close study of his poems show that majority of Frost's poems abound with autobiographical elements. His poems reveal that he is subjective in approach. He draws out many events from his own life and experiences and presents them adding a little more poetic color to compose his poetry. Vidhushi Sharma (2011) comments "A critical peep into the life and

environment of Frost reveals that Frost's poet is born out of his personal tensions and tragic jolts which he had experienced in his personal life" (p.55.58). Frost's life was not a very blessed one. Firstly, it took a long time for him to get recognition as a prominent poet of the period. Secondly, in his family side, he experienced the death of his own children and the other family members which made him sad and lonely. This pensive mood is expressed through many characters in his poems. But all these heart breaking incidents in his life could not stop him composing poems.

Frost's famous poem, "Home Burial" (1914) is considered to be one of his autobiographical poems in which he, in disguise, recounts the demise of his own children. The traveler in "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening" is the poet himself who wants to get rid of his melancholic situation in the midst of nature. Two neighbors in "Mending Wall" are his personal creations out of which one is he. The mower in "Mowing" reflects Frost's farming experience and the lone person who comes out to explore the night in "Acquainted with the Night," embodies poet's physical appearance. "Two Tramps in Mud Time", is also a poem with autobiographical elements. The poem is in the first person and the poet himself is the pivotal point of actions and thoughts. The poet, in this poem, has no peace of mind because he is controlled and self-retrained. He expounds the tramp to be meant that work is inevitable for living. Throughout the poem, the poet interprets his personal observations on the sudden changes of nature and pranks of New England climate. The two tamps, somehow, make the poet feel that he has no right to do more work for pleasure. The poem encircles poet's avocation and vocation:

"But yet who will to their separation
My object in living is to unite
My avocation and vocation
As my two eyes make one in sit
Only where love and need are one," (L.65-69)

Here, it is reasonable to mention that poet's personal experiences find ample scope in the poem. **Charles Kaplain** rightly comments about the poem, "A personal experience has been used to highlight universal truths. The idea that the best work is that which combines need with pleasure has been beautifully conveyed." The same notion expresses in **Reginald L. Cook's** remark regarding the poem "It is at one more specific in its personal psychological approach to the problem of living one's life, and more general in its advocacy, like Emerson and Thoreau, of the higher, more conscientious individualism." Thus, blending of personal observations and experiences from personal life colors the canvass of Frost's poems.

2.2 Man and Nature

Frost places a great deal of importance on Nature in all of his collections. He is also a poet of Man. His poems deal with the drama of man's life in

the lap of nature exploring the identity of the both entities. He spent much time in New England, and the majority of pastoral scenes that he describes are inspired by specific locations in New England. But Frost does not limit himself to stereotypical pastoral themes like sheep and shepherds. Rather, he focuses on the dramatic struggles that happen within the natural world. For instance, the conflict of the changing of seasons is expressed in "After Apple-Picking" and the destructive side of nature is revealed in "Once by the Pacific". He also depicts the natural world as an inspiring one that stirs deep metaphysical thought in the individuals who are exposed to nature. Such type of theme is reflected in the poems, "Birches" and "The Sound of Trees". For Frost, Nature is not simply a background for poetry, but rather a central character in his works. Nature, in Frost's poems, is seen not only as a background tool to add beauty and charm but also a more inspiring element both in constructive and destructive ways. The pastoral scenes, which he depicts in his poetry, are his experiences during his life time in New England.

Some critics are in different opinions to consider him to be a nature poet. For example, Alvarez says, "He [Frost] is not a nature poet; his work has none of that personal interpretative weight. He is a country poet whose business is to live with nature rather than through it." But **Robert Langbaum** admires Frost's power to render the objects of nature in poetry in a vivid manner. He comments, "In the sheer power to render nature, Frost may well be our best nature poet since Wordsworth". But, nature in Frost's poetry is unlike the one in the poetry of the Romantic poets. Frost's view is to face the music in the real world instead of taking a temporary shelter in an imaginary world. Jarrell (1980) rightly points out "the recognition of the essential limitations of man is usual in Frost's best poetry" (p. 3g). Here **W.H.Auden** can be cited who says that "his poems on natural objects are always concerned with them not as foci for mystical meditation or starting points for fantasy, but as things with which, and on which man acts in the course of his daily work of gaining a livelihood . Nor is he, like Wordsworth, a poet who has had vision in youth which he can spend the rest of life interpreting." Throughout his nature poems, Frost has extraordinary intimacy with nature and his hypersensitive lyrical presentation of nature touches the senses of the readers.

"Tree at My Window"(1928) is a well-known nature poem in which Frost describes the feelings of companionship between him and an old, dependable tree outside his window. He develops intimacy with the tree and he does not want to be separated from the tree ever. The window may go up or down, but he will never leave. He appeals the tree thus:

"Tree at my window, window tree,
My sash is lowered when night comes on;
But let there never be curtain drawn

Between you and me."(L.1-4)

He personifies the tree and finds affinity between them. The tree suffers from bad storms and long nights which are visible or in other word, it is 'taken and tossed' by outer rough weather. In the same way, the poet suffers from the invisible pains and agony of life. So, both are sufferers:

"Your head so much concerned with outer,
Mine with inner, weather."(L.15-16)

As a poet of nature, Frost identifies the similar destiny of his own in the destiny of the window tree in case of suffering. But he is not blind to nature like the Romantics. His attitude to nature is realistic. Regarding the treatment of nature of Frost, an American poet, novelist, educator, critic and a professor of English at the University of Georgia, **Marion Montgomery** says, "What is high seriousness to Wordsworth is fancy or humor in Frost" we should never suppose "that Frost feels the kind of brotherhood for natural objects that Wordsworth expresses through much of his poetry." Therefore, the pastoral world in Frost's poetry is not only limited to describe beauty but to stress the harsh conflicts of the natural world.

2.3 American ideals

Robert Frost as an American poet mirrors American ideals and traditions in his poems. He successfully incorporates these ideals by representing the rural communities of New England in his poetry. Hard work for survival, interest and dedication to duty and responsibilities are seen as the major ideals in most of his poems. The characters that crowd the following poems "The Gift Outright", "After Apple Picking", "Mowing", "Out, Out", "The Grind-Stone", "Paul's Wife", "Putting in the Seed", "The Death of the Hired Man" are typical American characters. They undergo physical labor and they characterize American ideals. Indeed, Frost, in toto, is an American and that's why **Bernard De Voto** regards him as a great American poet. He says, "It is quite true that Frost does not write like Eliot, Pound, Auden, or Spender. Fools may conclude that he is therefore a bad or unimportant poet, but intelligent people look at the poetry he has written. When you do that, unless your nerves are sealed with wax, you immediately and overwhelmingly perceive that it is the work of an individual and integrated poet—a poet, who is like no one else, a major poet, not only in regard to this age but in regard to our whole literature, a great American poet."

The poem, "Provide, Provide" depicts the ideals of the Americans. The poem is remarkable for some most valued things of American life like materialism, pragmatism, and belief regarding success. The poem shows that expediency does not always work and worldly wisdom is not always sufficient. The aphoristic quality of the poem about the mostly worthless earthly treasure reaches its height as an immortal masterpiece of Frost's creation. **Elizabeth**

Jennings calls it a spell or an incantation, a riddle, an admonition and a conjuration. The poem is full of moral wisdom—the wisdom of this world and that wisdom which comes from some unknown sources.

“The Death of the Hired Man” is a dramatic lyrical poem where Silas, the hired man is the central character, and his death in the house of Warren and Mary is the central event. Here, Warren typifies American ideals. He is a practical and materialistic one. Silas sometimes fails to fulfill his duty as per the contract with his owner, Warren. He remains away mysteriously at hay time when Warren needs him most. In the last stage of his life, Silas returns and approaches his old owner to keep him stay at home. Mary as a feminine character accepts him and requests her husband to give him shelter. But Warren as a realistic modern man denies Mary’s request of adopting him again:

“What good is he? Who else will harbor him
At his age for the little he can do?
What help he is there’s no depending on.
Off he goes away when I need him most”.(L.15-18)

Because of his wife’s repeated coaxing, Warren is finally convinced and he accepts her proposal, and here Warren possesses every inch of an American man embodying American ideals.

2.4 Everyday life

Robert Frost is a poet of man. So, most of his poems depict the activities of day to day life of men. Human interest highlighting the everyday aspects of human life is minutely mirrored in his poems. Frost uses human life as one of the themes of his poetry in order to send his message to his readers very clearly. His poems represent the real situations of the real people. The readers feel that the characters whom they are introduced while going through the poems of Frost are their own models and at times, they can be aware of the ways to challenge their respective struggles while considering the characters as their own models. For example “The Pasture”, “Mowing”, “After Apple Picking,” “ Mending Wall,” “The Black Cottage”, “A Servant to Servants”, “Putting in the Seed”, “Out, Out”, “The Vindictives”, “A Hundred Collars” are the poems which portray the activities of everyday life. Frost deals with simple themes of everyday activities, and his poetry is highly remarkable for its commutative quality. In other words, Frost’s poetry has multiple meaning. His poetry mirrors the every life of the individuals which he comes across in his everyday life.

“The Pasture” depicts the chores of a farmer who cleans the pasture spring and clears off the leaves with the rake. **Reuben A. Brower** praises the poem in which, “the love of things and persons is pure and complete, though characteristically pragmatic.” The mower in “Mowing” and the apple picker in “After Apple Picking” are typical characters who undergo their

routine work. The picker has picked a lot of apples and got tired. The smell of the picked apples has induced sleep into him. The poem is a symbolic one with the reality of day to day life. A famous critic, **Cleath Brooks** sees into the symbolic meaning, “The complete experience of apple-picking is communicated firmly and realistically, but the poem invites a metaphorical extension. The task of apple-picking, it is suggested, is any task, it is life. The drowsiness which the speaker feels after the completion of the task is associated with the cycle of seasons.....”. Two neighbors in “Mending Wall” who represent two generations of American life are seen to remain busy doing their routine work of repairing the wall between them when spring approaches. “Out, Out”, sounds the adverse effects of the World War I. The boy who has lost his life is none but a victim to child labor for survival. The saw that crushes his life is an implied weapon of war that plunges him to work at an early age when he is supposed to attend school. The old lady in “The Black Cottage” nourishes the views of the New Englanders. She lost her husband in World War. She is an orthodox Christian who believes that all men are created free and equal:

“Her giving somehow touched the principle
That all men are created free and equal.”(L.60-61)

Her attitude to her religion is conventional, almost Puritan, and she is not so much concerned with sin or suffering. The lady embodies the everyday life of the New Englanders.

“A Hundred Collars” depicts man’s disbelief in man. The poem is about a travelling newspaperman, Lafe and a distinguished professor, Dr. Magoon who are bound to stay a night sharing a room at a dingy hotel. Lafe is a simple, garrulous, broad-minded, triple loving person who shows everything to the professor he has with him and offers him a drink, but the professor suspects him to a thief or a cut-throat and “He was afraid of being robbed or murdered”. (L.34)

Frost’s keen eyes do not even lapse the activities of servants. The farmer’s wife in the poem, “A Servant to Servants” has been a servant to the servants by feeding up with cooking meals and by doing chores over and over. Simultaneously, the heroism of American life is reflected in “The Vindictives”. The poem contains heroic action dealing with the looting of the Inca Empire by Spaniard. Thus Frost’s pen pens the every detail of everyday life.

2.5 Duty and Responsibility

The sense of duty is a very important value in the rural communities of New England. Duty is embedded in American ideal. So it is reasonable that Frost employs it as one of the primary themes of his poetry. He describes conflicts between desire and duty as if the two were always mutually exclusive. To support his family, a farmer must acknowledge his

responsibilities rather than indulge in his personal desires. "Two Tramps in Mud Time", is also a poem in which the poet expounds the tramp to be meant that work is inevitable for living. The two tramps, somehow, make the poet feel that he has no right to do more work for pleasure but he has to undergo working:

"As that I had no right to play
With what was another man's work for gain.
My right might be love but theirs was need.
And where the two exist in twain
Theirs was the better right –agreed." (L.60-64)

Duty is emphasized here. This conflict between desire and duty is particularly evident in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," when the narrator expresses his wish to stay in the woods and watch the snow continue to fall. However, he is unable to deny his obligation to his family and his community; he cannot remain in the woods though "the woods are lovely, lovely, and deep" (L.13). He has an earnest desire to enjoy the company of nature but he has duty and responsibility to render:

"But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep." (L.14-16)

Duty is superimposed here. Similarly, in "The Sound of Trees," Frost describes a character who wants to follow the advice of the trees and make the "reckless" decision to leave his community. At the end of the poem, the character does not choose to leave because his sense of duty to those around him serves as the roots that keep him firmly grounded.

So the theme of duty and responsibility occupies much space in Frost's poetry.

2.6 Communication

Communication appears as a significant theme in Frost's poems. In reality, no worldly activity comes to a successful end without proper communication. Communication is a real life phenomenon in every life. So as a painter of man's life Frost depicts the need of communication in his poems. He shows that the presence of communication is essential and at the same time, the absence of communication brings tragedy. The poems, "Home Burial", "Mending Wall", "Acquainted with the Night", "A Hundred Collars", "The Telephone", "The Subverted Flower", "Tree at My Window" are the poems which are more or less connected to the theme of communication.

Lack of communication brings misfortune and tragedy to life which is vividly revealed in "The Home Burial" (1914). Here, the failure of effective communication between a wife and husband leads to the destruction of their bondage. Lack of empathy of each other's feelings results in the total dismay. In other word, the failure of understanding results from the lack of proper communication and empathy between the

couple. Effective communication is necessary to understand more clearly about the emotional side of the individuals. But the failure of maintaining this communication skill between the wife and husband regarding the sad demise of their beloved child leads them to the total collapse of their relation. Frost also highlights the inability of the characters of his poems to communicate one another. He explores the similar theme in "Acquainted with the Night" (1928) in which an isolated character is unable to pull him out of depression because he finds none around him to communicate. He has none to whom he can express his motto of being acquainted with the night:

"But not to call me back or say good-by;
And further still at an unearthly height
One luminary clock against the sky" (L.10-12)

"Mending Wall"(1914) attempts to develop effective communication either by mending the wall or by removing the boundary. "A Hundred Collars" (1914) depicts man's disbelief in man due to lack of communication between a travelling newspaperman, Lafe and a professor, Dr. Magoon who are forced to stay at a dingy hotel for a night. Simple minded, broad-minded Lafe is suspected by prudent Dr. Magoon to be a thief or a cut-throat.

The love poem, "The Telephone"(1916) , in the form a dialogue, stands for a telepathic communication between lovers through a flower that grows by side of the beloved, and thus they send messages of love to each other.

"The Subverted Flower" (1942) depicts a lover's quarrel due to the absence of proper communication. The girl fails to read the pulse of the boy's physical desire. The girl misunderstands the underlying significance of the flower.

Frost's poems not only deal with man's communication with men but also man's communication with nature. "The Sound of the Tree" resounds the speech of trees with men and "Tree at My Window" presents man's close relationship with nature incorporating the suffering fate of the both entities with inner and outer weather. Here man's communication with nature is vividly implied.

2.7 Loneliness of the individual

The theme of loneliness is remarkable in Frost poems. This theme is closely related to the theme of communication and barrier. Majority of the characters in Frost's poems are isolated in one or another way. Even the characters who show no sign of depression or isolation are presented detached from the society because of their unique perspective. The narrators of the poems, "The Sound of Trees", "Fire and Ice" are lone persons who are detached from the rest of the society. In some cases, isolation is far more a destructive force. The narrator of "The Lockless Door" is in a 'cage' of

isolation for many years and he is terrified when he hears a knock at the door. This isolation keeps him from fulfilling his potential as an individual and makes him a prisoner of his own making. But Frost suggests that this isolation can be avoided by interacting with the other members of the society; if the character of "The Lockless Door" could have brought himself to open the door of the case and face an encounter with isolation, he could have obtained greater level of personal happiness.

The characters or narrators who throng the canvas of the poems, "The Star-Splitter", "The Fear", "A Servants to Servants", "The Hill Wife", "Generations of Men", "Mending wall", "Home Burial", "Bereft" "An Old Man's Winter Night", "Desert Places", "Provide, Provide" "The Death of the Hired Man", "Design", are alienated and isolated in their respective forms. Frost paints loneliness not only through characters but also situation and description. For instance, "Desert Places" is a fine poem which is concerned with loneliness. Falling snow, night, weeds visible above the snow on the ground and animals having withdrawn into their lairs present the feeling loneliness oppressing the poet. Falling snow and darkening woods stand for the desolation of lifeless stars. The poet expresses his ultimate loneliness that enraps him unknowingly:

"I am too absent-spirited to count
The loneliness includes me unawares."(L.7-8)

Then, poet's isolated situation becomes more and more intensive in the following lines:

"And lonely as it is, that loneliness
Will be more lonely ere it will be less-
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow
With no expression, nothing to express." (L.9-12)

The natural setting of the poem presents desolation which lies within the poet himself. Indeed, a glimpse at Frost's poems reveals that loneliness is an all-pervading theme in his poetry. His poems depict man's isolation from man, man's alienation from society, man's isolation from nature and man's isolation from God.

2.8 Realism

Frost is mostly a realist. He is seen as a rationalist and his rational views are easily comprehensible in his poems. Frost's success as a realist lies in the selection of his subjects which are mostly the real struggles of the real people. The description of the objects of nature in his poetry successfully depicts the basic ideals and traditions of the New England country side. His realism is in his description and what he depicts in his poetry, is relevant to life. Frost's main focus never deviates from the path of 'truth' and he concentrates on the subjects like every day activities, duty, hard work and responsibilities of the individuals which are the universally accepted realism in his poetry.

A survey of his poems reveals that he is a sane realist. For an instance, "The Road Not Taken" published in the volume, "Mountain Interval" (1916) is a superb poem that exhibits grim reality of life. The 'road' used by the poet is nothing but the way of life of a man and the 'diverge' (L-1) denotes a particular stage in life where an individual needs to choose one of the two choices and choosing one he goes ahead because life is an ongoing process. **G. Monteiro** regards the poem as the traditional theme of "a choice of two paths". The real problem comes to the scene only when a man fails to take two ways in life and it is the reality of man's life that the way of life is single and every individual is a single identity. That's why the poet expresses his inability to travel the both ways:
"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood" (L.1-3)

The similar tone is echoed by **G.W Nitchie** who points out that this poem has for its theme, one of the major themes in frost's poetry—the problem of having to make a choice. Symbolically the poem is ultimate reality and very fate of man's real life. Realization of **Untermeyer** regarding the poem is also a matter of choice who says that Frost has gone his own way. It was not he that chose his destiny. He was inevitably guided towards his destination by some spirits, some unseen forces, that keep working on man. This inevitability, which apparently has an element of choice, is brought in this oft-quoted and oft-misunderstood poem, "The Road Not Taken". Choice in life is a common dilemma in man's life and this reality of life is reflected in this poem.

"The Sound of the Trees", published in the volume of "Mountain Interval (1916)" is a short poem which deals with a reality of life, a desire to depart. The sound of the tree is like a man who talks of making a move but he does not do so. Men should be dynamic. Formative decisions are not matters of clear-cut choices, but they are much more complex- this is what Frost wants to imply in the poem. But **Yvor Winters** thinks that the poem highlights the "whimsical, accidental, and incomprehensible nature of the formative decisions. The poem deals with a desire to depart 'which has never quite been realized.'" The reality is that Frost attempts to say that nature has a temporary healing. The trees in this poem deliver a message of going away by swaying but they never go:
"They are that that talks of going
But never gets away."(L,10-11)
In other word, the sheer reality in the poem is that trees cannot leave rather they stay:
"That now it means to stay" [L.14]

The men in troubles get inspired to leave, but they cannot leave because they have duty and responsibilities. Similarly the trees are unable to leave because they have their roots tied with earth. Often,

men get relieved of their burdens through imagination under the influence of the trees, but it is temporary. Thus, the poet depicts the reality of man's life by a figurative use of trees.

Another famous poem, "Out, Out" published in New Hampshire, (1916) depicts the hard reality of modern American society where a boy is bound to undergo child labor. This poem reveals the timely reality of the world. Frost returned to America from England due to the World War 1 and witnessed the miserable plight of men. Even a boy is not free from the adversity of the war. The saw is a tool that victimized the boy is personified to refer to the powerful weapons used in the World War:

"The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard
And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of
wood".[L.1-2]

The same tone echoes again:

"And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and
rattled". [L.7]

To find out Frost's realism, this poem can be read as critique of the world events. The damage caused by the war with weapons results in the total destruction and causes a severe threat to all walks of life. As a result, as one of the many crippling events, the young boys, who are supposed to attend school for learning, are forced to attend hard work for their survival and struggle for existence. Though he is a young boy, he has to do a grownup man's work:

"Since he was old enough to know, a big boy
Doing the man's work, though a child at heart—"
(L.23-24).

The poem excels in realistic thinking. The boy is sincere who wants to save time and thinks that he will be benefited and praised. This factor lies in the society. This sense of sincerity reveals in the following lines:

"Call it a day, I wish they might have said
To please the boy by giving him the half hour
That a boy counts so much when saved from work".
(L.10-12).

The poet wants to indicate that the elders should guide the younger generation with proper care and the elders should be more rationalistic and realistic in case of dealing with different routine work. Thus, the poem is an appeal of rational thinking that the elders should require to conduct the younger in a realistic way. Therefore, realism is an all-pervading theme in Frost's poetry.

His poems seem to capture those common places of country life such as hay-making, cleaning of a pasture spring, apple-picking., mending, In the depiction of these scenes and people, Frost is undoubtedly a realist, for he knows what he is talking about. Moreover, his realism does not consist of giving a minutely detailed, full picture; he often suggests the

whole through presenting a part. His poems are pieces of life- offering various facets of the whole. He is most of the time using restraint and understatement, but contrives to suggest more than he says, for instance in "The Witch of Coos".

2.9 Rural Life versus Urban Life

This theme relates to Frost's interest in Nature and everyday life. Frost's experience growing up in New England made him well-acquainted with the rural life and exposed him to a particular way of life that seemed less complicated. The pastoral setting with rural details enriches the stock of his poetry. That's why Frost is regarded as a New Englander. Regarding his fondness for rural interest, Williard Thrope says, "It (Frost's regionalism) gave him a place to stand where he could see what was close by in field or cellar hole, and, as well, a clear view above his hills to the 'further range' beyond". The farmers whom Frost describes in his poetry have a unique perspective on the world as well as a certain sense of honor and duty in terms of their work and their community. On the other hand, the city dwellers he represents in his poetry have their distinctive features and respective ways of life. For example, the narrator in "Acquainted with the Night," is described as a lone one who lives in a large city. The narrator suffers from loneliness that enwraps him while walking in up to the farthest limits of a strange city at dead of night. Regarding this poem, Randall Jarrell says that this poem links up Frost with Dante. Brower says that like all seers of modern city-life, the poem inks up Frost with Baudelaire, too. Brower further says about the poem, "It is Frost's Westminster Bridge, his special transformation of a city scene....."

In this regard, the poem, "The Code" (1914) can be referred which is set in a meadow at hay time encircling three men; one is hired in the city and the other two are hired Yankee men. The story of the poem is simply the story of a worker who wants to kill his employer by burying him in a pile of hay because the employer does not appreciate his work and insults him. This situation is created because of misunderstanding among the workers who are born in two contrasted places- one in a city and two in a rural area. Frost draws poignant differences between rural life and urban life through the characters of these farmers. Here **Lynen's** comment regarding the poem is appropriate who points out, "This misunderstanding establishes the pastoral contrast. The farmer, for his entire city upbringing, turns out to be less sophisticated than his hired man in that his words have no special significance beneath their outward and obvious meanings. He has just said what he thought in a simple and direct way. By contrast the Yankee has a far more complicated mind. For him even the most casual remarks are the medium for hinting at attitudes and judgments. He weighs and interprets every word."

In fine, Frost sees into everyday tasks and explores the relationship between mankind and nature through the glimpses of rural life and farming communities that he expresses in his poetry. He also photosynthesizes and microscopes the urban life minutely.

2.10 Adherence to tradition versus patriotism

Frost has a close relation to his New England world. He has used its climate and topography, its locally agreed-upon virtues and attitudes. He adheres to his tradition surrounded by New England. He always stays close to New Hampshire. His poems ooze essence from the observation of a field, a farmhouse, hills and brooks and the country folk of a particular region of New England, namely, New Hampshire. The setting is a natural dramatic medium for him which gives him all the stories, attitudes and characters that he needs for his poetic purpose. That's why he is called a regional poet. He uses the material of rural New England and follows the pastoral tradition. **Malcolm Cowley** rightly says, "In spite of an earlier age of his achievement as a narrative and lyric poet, there is a cause against Robert Frost as a social philosopher in verse and as a representative of the New England tradition. He is too much walled by the past. Unlike the great Yankees of an earlier age, he is opposed to innovations in art, ethics, science, industry or politics."

Frost's poems seem to capture those common places of country life such as hay-making, cleaning of a pasture spring, apple-picking and mending. In the depiction of these scenes and people, Frost is proved to be a regional poet attached to his tradition. His Americanism is vividly reflected in his famous poem, "The Gift Outright" (1942). He says:
"The land was ours before we were the land's
She was our land more than a hundred years
Before we were her people. She was ours
In Massachusetts, in Virginia
But we were England's, still colonials," (L.1-5)

The poem is a patriotic poem. The love of the motherland, the feeling of patriotism, the sense of possession, and the sense of belonging are the core of the poem. **Untermeyer** feels that the poem is thoughtfully patriotic. The love of country is not expressed in screaming hysterically flag waving but in a salvation of faith, in surrender to the land. The poems conceive the sense of America, and because of its outstanding appeal, the former president of the United States of America, **John F. Kennedy** recognized its worth and called upon Frost to recite the poem at his inaugural ceremony at White House. His adherence to New England, New Hampshire, America, in other words, tradition blended with patriotism regarding the poem reveals in his own words. Frost himself feels the poem to be a nice piece of blank verse "a history of the United States in sixteen lines." And he added that "It is

all my politics, my national history." Thus Frost's root is deeply delved in his surroundings and tradition.

2.11 Rationality versus Imagination

Imagination is a vehicle through which the poets fly in the poetic world. Fancy and imagination add color to the creation of the poets. But mere imagination is not always sufficient for the poets. So they blend imagination with rationality and reality. There is no exception in case of Robert Frost. Frost handles this theme in his poetry. He shows that rationality and imagination cannot exist simultaneously for long. The characters in Frost's poetry generally maintain their rationality as a burden of duty, but there are certain cases when the hint of imagination is almost too seductive to bear. For example, in "Birches," 1916, the narrator wishes that he could climb a birch tree as he did in his childhood and leave the rational world behind, if only for a moment. He expresses:
"So was I once myself a swinger of birches.
And so I dream of going back to be.
It's when I'm weary of considerations, (L.41-43)

This ability to escape rationality and indulge in the liberation of imagination is limited to the years of childhood. After reaching adulthood, life requires strict rationality and an acceptance of responsibility. Imagination can transport one to childhood, but reality is opposite to what is imagined. So the narrator wants to leave the earth for a while through imagination. Later on, with the force of rationality, he has to come back:
"I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over." (L.48-49)

However, as a rationalistic realist, Frost does not fly on the viewless wings of imagination like the Romantics. He superimposes rationality though imagination adds flavor to his creation.

2. 12 Humanism versus Moral

Frost is a poet of man. He values man over everything. The panorama of his poems becomes colorful with men from variegated areas. So, humanism is a core message in his poetry. He is an emphatic defender of humanism and he establishes worth and nobility of every individual irrespective of profession and status. His poetry is the record of human thoughts and expediencies. His poetry is poetry of man, philosophy of men and encyclopedia of human characters. Moreover, he always sings of humanity. **Radcliffe James Squares** observes, "Frost is a poet not because he is affected by nature or because he has lived on a farm, but because he speaks to men about men." Really his poetry describes man, speaks of man and as a whole speaks of the cosmos. As a poet of humanity and human life, he pens the life and love, talks and tales, feeling and emotions of the New Englanders. But his poetry not only seeks pain and pleasures but also moral truths. For example, "The Road Not Taken" has moral truth in the surface where the traveler has chosen the

path "less traveled by". In the same way "Two Look at Two" presents the relation between man and nature, but the moral truth is that human being can reach nature in thought and they cannot penetrate too deep to nature. C. Day Lewis observes that all his best poems "have this hard core of moral truth, a value giving character to their outward features". Frost's poems are polished with moral truth, and humanism reaches a greater height. His noted poem, "The Death of the Hired Man" is remarkable for exhibiting humanism and morality. Mary is an embodiment of humanism who convinces her husband, Warren to let Silas stay at their home. Here humanity wins. "Out, Out" is striking for exhibiting inhumanity of the employer. The poet is aggrieved to see child labor and the tragic death of the boy with the mechanical saw spoiling the boy's existence. Here the poet is moved with sympathy and moral. Therefore, Frost is a humanist and a moralist in practical sense.

2.13. Modernism versus conservatism

Much has been discussed by the critics to determine whether Frost is a modern poet or not. Some critics opine that he is a modern poet, on the other hand, some critics say that he is a traditionalist more than a modernist. The clarity of diction, the colloquial rhythms, the simplicity of images, the use of simple everyday matters and folksy speakers are the key elements in Frost's poetry. The use of these simple elements makes his poems natural, unplanned and traditional. Modernism refers to modern approach in writing. Fondness for obscurity and difficulty are the fundamental traits of modernism. A close study of his poems reveals that Frost is a modern poet and zeal of modernism in literature is dominant in his poetry.

2.14 Sound of Sense Theory

The phrase 'Sound of Sense Theory' is applicable to Frost. He is said to be the founder of a new literary theory 'Sound of Sense Theory, (1913). This theory of Frost is like an essence that adds as an additional flavor to his poetic diction. According to Frost, the visual appearance of the words, while reading may not be always successful in providing the reader with the exact meaning it tries to convey. To achieve this, the diction must have some additional quality of sounding sense in the mind of the readers through one of the sense organs [Letter to John Bartlet, (1973)]. In order to remind the responsibilities of the narrator in the poem 'stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' the horse makes his harness bells ring with which the narrator comes back to the reality from his imaginative impulse.

"He gives his harness bell a shake
To ask if there is some mistake".(L.9-10)

This is an evident of a sort of telepathy between the poet and his horse which has been possible through an effective understanding between the two. The horse shakes his harness bell and asks if there is

anything wrong. This is nothing but sensory communication between a man and a beast. John Ciardi, regarding the lines, feels that by now, quite obviously, the horse has become a symbol, too, without losing his identity as a horse.

The Sound of Sense Theory 'is applicable to the poem, "The Sound of the Tree". The poet is used to listening to the sound of the trees. He asks why men wish to endure the sound of the tree. The sound of the tree is like a man who talks of making a move but he does not move. The trees in this poem deliver a message of going away by swaying but they never go, rather they stay where they are:

"They are that that talks of going
But never gets away."(L, 10-11)

Here, the sound of the trees is perceived by Frost and his sense to communicate to the trees is poignant in the following lines:

"From the window or the door,
I shall set forth for somewhere,
I shall make the reckless choice
Some day when they are in voice."(L18-21)

Frost is a sensible poet who succeeds in engineering the syllables, stress, intonation, rhyme and rhythm to reveal his views clearly to his readers befitting with the theme. He manages sound and sense modulating tones. He writes "with his ear to the voice".

2.15 Poetic form versus theme

The phrase 'poetic form' denotes the style of writing and the use of rhetoric and prosody in writing. As a great poet Frost uses his own style according to his themes of poetry. Frost's poetic style is often criticized because he deviates from the set classical rules. As a poet of Man, he always thinks of the common interests of common people. So, he always puts emphasis on the meaning in order to convey it to his readers. That's why Frost chooses a suitable style according to the subjects. He never uses the same measures for any of his two poems so that he can keep his readers more conscious of the theme rather than the poetic form. He shows liberal attitude to form. Thematic importance is given more than formative style.

Frost himself says "All poetry is a reproduction of the tunes of actual speech' (Robert Frost: The Man and His works (1923). Here Frost's view is somewhat alike to William Wordsworth who chooses subjects from common men's life and uses common language so that common men can understand the poems. Richard Wilbur (1900) regards Frost's language as "a beautifully refined and charged colloquial language".

Frost employs multiple forms ranging from long narratives to dramatic lyrics. His poems are remarkable for ironical, metaphorical meanings. He

uses epigrams, analogy, simile, metaphor, aphorisms symbols, iambic pentameter with irregular line lengths, blank verse with numerous variations on the prevailing iambic foot, enjambment, conversational style etc. Epigrammatic and aphoristic use of language makes his poems rich. For instance, "Earth is the right place for love." (Birches), "The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows" (Mowing), "Good fences make good neighbors" (Mending Wall), "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in." (The Death of the Hired Man), "We love the things we love for what they are." (Hyla Brook) are the epigrammatic usage of language which are befitting to the themes and titles of the poems. His stylistic features are thus textured with theme, rather than form so that his readers can reach his poems conveniently.

3. CONCLUSION

A rapid survey of the themes of Frost's poems discussed above shows that his poetic caliber as a poet lies in the selection of his themes. His poetry mirrors the picture of the society and explores the panorama of man's life prevailing in the society. Frost focuses on the depiction of the path of 'truth' and concentrate on the subjects like man, man and nature, and man's relationship with nature, man's communication to man, man's communication to nature, his barrier and alienation from man and others, hard reality of man's life, man's rationality, humanism and morality, and adherence to tradition, idealism, belief, disbelief, pains and pleasures, every day activities, hard work, duty, and responsibilities. The characteristic that makes Frost great is his realistic description of the New England rural life. The voices and visions of the New England countryside are his primary subjects. Many different things to be heard, seen and experienced in his rich and rustic landscape are his subject matters and themes. He portrays the fields and farms of his surroundings, observing the details of rural life which have universal meaning. The images which he uses are woods, stars, houses and brooks, are taken from everyday life. Thus, it can be undoubtedly acclaimed that Frost's poems are pregnant with multifarious themes that have enriched his poems upholding his artistic caliber as a modern poet.

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