



## **The existence of man and nature in the poetry William Wordsworth and Robert frost**

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### **Abstract**

William Wordsworth is universally recognized as a great poet of Nature. But he was not content to be thought as poet of Nature only, singing the sensuous bliss of a life lived in natural surroundings, like Cowper in *The Task*:

“God made the country, and Man Made the town”.

Wordsworth is an outstanding philosophical poet, whose ultimate theme was not Nature only, but the heart of Man also. And the poetry of man took in his hands a rapid development as the poetry of Nature.

Whereas Robert Frost is also a great poet of Nature but he is even greater as a poet of man. His landscapes are all landscape with human figures. Frost himself once remarked that he had hardly written two poems without a human being in them. He has written on almost every subject. He has illuminated things as common as a woodpile and as common as a Prehistoric pebble, as natural as a bird singing in its sleep and as ‘mechanistic’ as a revolt of a factory worker.

On the other hand, Wordsworth’s poetry shows how human beings fit into the midst the interplaying forces of Nature. He believes that there is a pre-existing harmony between the mind of Man and Nature.

Both the poets Wordsworth as a Romantic and Frost as a Modern, have different attitudes towards Nature and its relation to human beings.

**Keywords:** nature, romanticism, modernism, philosophy, humanism, regionalism

### **Introduction**

William Wordsworth is a prolific writer who has given a new dimension to English poetry. His poetic career covers a period of more than sixty years; and so far as the bulk of his poetry is concerned, few poets can challenge comparison with him. On the other hand, Robert Frost, a great poet of America is renowned as a leading spirit in the field of American poetry who shows his tremendous talent and strong passion in flourishing of American Modern poetry. It is said that most men begin with primary affection; and the love of Nature is an after-thought, if it comes to all. But in case of Wordsworth the love of Nature came first, and even when the love of man came, it was interwoven with Nature’s influences. For Frost, his love of Nature is more comprehensive, many-sided, and all inclusive than that of Wordsworth. Wordsworth loved to paint only the spring-time beauty of Nature, or what Coleridge called, “Nature in the grove” but Frost has an equally keen eye for the sensuous and the beautiful in nature, as well as for the harsher and the unpleasant. Whereas Wordsworth occupies a different place as compare to other poets. What distinguishes Wordsworth from other poets of Nature is that for him Nature is living entity. The indwelling spirit in Nature imparts its own consciousness to all object of Nature:

To every natural form, rock, fruit and flower,  
Even the loose stones that cover the highway  
I gave a moral life: I saw them feel

Frost’s “A Boundless Moment”, gives us one of those fresh glimpses of natural beauty which have made Frost’s nature-poetry so popular:

“Oh that is the Paradise-in-bloom, I said,  
And truly it was fair enough for flower.”

According to Wordsworth, “Man and Nature, Mind and the external world bonded together with the Principle motive of universal ideology. They act and react upon other to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure.” The exquisite functioning of this interlocked universe of ‘Mind and Nature’ is for Wordsworth the highest theme of poetry. On the other hand, frost’s central subject of his poetry is humanity. His poetry lives with a particular aliveness because it expresses living people. Other poets have written about people. But Robert Frost’s poems are the people; they work and walk about and converse and tale their tales with the freedom of common speech.

### **Discussion**

In the note to a very early poem of Wordsworth tell us of some natural aspect that struck him in boyhood: “It was in the way between Hawshead and Ambleside, and gave me extreme Pleasure. The moment was important in any poetical history, for I date from it my consciousness of the variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country, so far as I was acquainted with them; and I made a resolution to supply, in some degree, the deficiency.” It was only gradually that human beings came into the landscape, and at first as no more than a completion to the picture. He sees the Cumberland shepherd like one in his own domain among the rocks, and outlined against the sky:

Thus was man  
Ennobled outwardly before my sight,  
And thus my heart was early introduced  
To an unconscious love and reverence

Of human nature:

A passion, she,  
A rapture often, and immediate love  
Ever at hand; he, only a delight  
Occasional and accidental grace,  
His hour being not yet come.

The hour came with a consciousness, henceforward deeply but not passionately, felt with a moved grave, pitying and respectful, but not passionate, sympathy with passion, of

“Man suffering among awful Powers and forms”.

As a poet of Man, Frost confines himself to a study of the New Englanders. He makes no mention of the Poles and the French Canadians who form a considerable section of the population of the region. Similarly, shop-girls, truck-drivers, mechanics, etc, which inhabit this region are rigidly among the Yankees to those who dwell in the country-side and carry on their humble rural occupations. Sophisticated and complex characters, such as intellectuals, are also beyond his range. Frost is a modern poet who depicts the central facts of modern experience, the uncertainty and painful sense of loss, the disintegration and confusion of values, the frustration and disillusionment are all there, and they seem more bleak and terrifying because they are presented in their nakedness, stripped of all their social, political and economic manifestation. And his mode of expression is symbolic and indirect. All this is the mark of genuinely modern Poetry Frost's attitude towards Nature is unique and distinctive in many ways. He does not take any theory of Nature for granted. Rather, he writes from his own personal experience and observation. His approach is Pragmatic and realistic. The impact of The French Revolution can be seen in Wordsworth's life as well as his poetry The French Revolution taught Wordsworth that every human being was intrinsically great and capable of infinite development. It promised to translate the idea into fact, and the even disastrously believed its promise. But the poet set himself to examine the facts for himself. He would not give up his hopes for man till he had tested human nature in its elements. How was this to be done? “By stripping our own hearts naked, and by looking out of ourselves towards men who led the simplest lives, and those most according to Nature, men who have never known false refinements, waywards and artificial desires, effeminate ways of thinking and feeling. “In his wanderings on the country roads he came in contact with the humblest human beings. Their strength and energy surprised him. He saw into the depths of human souls,

Soul that appears to have no depth at all  
To careless eyes.

He bent in reverence

To Nature and the power of human minds,  
To men as they are men within themselves.

On the other hand, Robert Frost deals with the simple, rural New Englanders. The intellectuals and other complex characters do not come within the preview of his art. He deals exclusively with people living in a particular region.

He depicts realistically their peculiar, regional characteristics, but he also reveals their basic humanity. From the particular and the individual, he rises to the Permanent and the universal. He uses his regionalism to look at life beyond and depicts the universal traits of human nature. According to Brown and Falnagan, “his rural Yankees face the problems of farmers everywhere: adverse weather, shifting prices, loneliness and isolation. They may wear American-made overalls and speak with a low accents, but they are fundamentally ordinary men and women, confronted with the need to make a living and to adjust to conditions which sometimes seem intolerable. Frost captures their Peculiar idiom and their folklore. On occasion he also dramatizes his characters but primarily he keeps them human. His rural New Englanders are a study in miniature of the fundamental traits of human nature, which is basically the same everywhere, which lies the greatness of Frost as a poet of man.

As Wordsworth's feelings about human beings have been discussed in the Preface to the 1809 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, He explains why he was interested in rustic life: “Humble and rustic life was generally chosen because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, and are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and consequently, may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated; because the matters of rural life germinate from these elementary feelings, and from the elementary character of rural occupations, they are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and lastly because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with beautiful and Permanent forms of Nature. We may apply to Wordsworth's general attitude towards the human comedy what he says in *The Prelude* of his attitude towards a play on the stage:

For thought I was most passionately moved  
And yielded to all changes of the scene  
With an obsequious Promptness, yet the storm  
Passed not beyond the suburbs of the mind.

According to Untermeyer, Frost's characters as diverse as can be imagined and portrayed in *The Gum-Gatherer*, *The Investment*, *The figure in the Doorway* and *To a Young Wretch*. The method of presenting them is as various as the characters themselves. Sometimes they walk leisurely into our consciousness like the gum-gatherer, or trip lightly into our hearts like the youngster in *To a Young Wretch* or enter pathetically like the young couple in the *Investment*, or flesh suddenly into our vision like the figure in the doorway glimpsed by the poet from the window of a dining car, while the train sped through. These people live, with increasing vividness: in the poet's lines and in the reader's memory. They are drawn with affection, but not with a blurring sentimentality. They loss neither their vigour, for they are Portrayed with an unpitying sympathy, a tender exactitude. The people Frost writes about every possible aspect of their lives and doings.

On contrary, Wordsworth believed in Rousseau's theory of the essential dignity of the peasant is transformed into his poetry which emphasized on the simplicity of the rustic. Wordsworth took his heroes tramps, beggars, pedlars,

waggoners and leech-gatherers. These rustics are always under the direct influence of Nature. They came to us with some of the immobility of natural object, set among rocks and stones like a part of them, scarcely more sentient, or scarcely less interpenetrated with the unconscious lesson of Nature. They are a growth of the soil, and when they speak, with the emphatic slowness of the peasant, we are almost surprised that beings so rudimentary can become articulate.

The main theme of Wordsworth's poems of incidents in human life is love, the working of love, its power to inflict the deepest wounds and to heal the most irreparable. Love is the theme of poems such *Goody Blake and Harry Gill*, *Simon Lee*, *The Thorn*, *The Last of the Flock*, *The Mad Mother*, *The Idiot Boy* and *The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman*. Love not as passion in the narrow sense of the word but passionate affection, its 'wily subtleties and reflexes', this is what Wordsworth is in quest of in later and finer poems *Michael*, *The Brothers*, *Margaret*, *The Affliction of Margaret*, *Ruth*, *The Happy Warrior*, *The White Doe of Rylstone*, and to these should be added the stories narrated by the Parson in *The Excursion*, and yet more the Patriotic sonnets. In a prophetic intuition he apprehended the law of Nature as ultimately the law of loves.

As Matthew Arnold says that Wordsworth 'put by' the cloud of human destiny. But we find many passages in Wordsworth's poems which show that he saw this cloud and looked at it steadily. In this connection particular mention may be made of such famous lines as

The still sad music of humanity.  
The fierce confederate storm  
Of sorrow, barricaded evermore  
Within the walks of cities.

On the other hand, Frost says, Nature lives mechanically; awareness of life is the distinctive privilege of man. Man, no doubt causes much misery through war and bloodshed but then he is also capable of doing much heroism. Nature's world is disordered, it is human labour alone which can turn it into a well-organized and beautiful garden. Frost writes from personal experience of those activities in nature which he himself has observed and experienced. His realism, his authenticity and veracity, has been admired and confirmed by numerous dwellers in the countryside. Indeed realism is a marked feature of Frost's nature Poetry. The woods are, no doubt 'lovely; but their beauty cannot detain the poet for long as he has promises to keep and miles to go. Frost is not concerned with nature as such he is more concerned with the common activity that goes in her lap as mowing, apple-picking, birch swinging, etc. By noticing such every day activity he seeks to study man in relation to his physical environment, and to the lower creatures that live within her. Frost does not attribute a soul of personality of Nature as Wordsworth did. His natural world is impersonal, unfeeling, and at best animal creation. Says Marion Montgomery in this connection "It is not spirit of Nature which sends Frost's rain or wind; he never sees in the natural world the pervading spirit which Wordsworth saw. It may be that a mountain "had the slant As of a book held up before his eyes." But the mountain is not personality as it is for Wordsworth in "The Prelude and in other poems." Frost makes his attitude towards nature clear when he says in New Hampshire that "I wouldn't be a prude afraid of Nature," and again rather flatly, "nothing not built with

hands, of course, is scared." Man must constantly struggle to conquer nature's wilderness and subdue them to his use. In *The Mountain* the mountain takes up all the space and prevents the village from growing.

### Conclusion

Thus we can say that both the poets English Wordsworth and American Robert Frost have equally treated as the poets of Man and as well as the poets of Nature. In Frost's view man is a solitary, a stranger in this world, and so he remains upto the end. However, he can improve his lot, and make his life worth living, by recognizing the otherness of other individuals. He should try to understand his own nature, and with self-understanding then there would come greater and greater understanding of his environment and of his fellow men. Whereas, Wordsworth, it is not the mere fact of his being a poet of Nature that makes him unique. What gives him his uniqueness is the fact that he is, of all English poets, the one who has given the most impressive and the most emotionally satisfying account of man's relation to Nature. He thinks of all created things, human or inanimate, as parts of one great whole, filling their appointed place, moving in their established order. He is the greatest Nature poet of England because he is the poet of more than external Nature; he is in a higher degree, the poet of man.

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