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Humanities

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A Deconstructive View of Robert Frost's Poetry

One of the most cherished American poets was born on March 26, 1874, in San Francisco, California, Robert Frost, contradictorily called, the New England poet, who was “[the] most eminent [and the] most distinguished . . . Anglo-American poet.”—T.S. Eliot. He identified himself with the rustic scenes and rural farms of New England; the trees, cows, rivers, brooks, woods and birches of New England were the main themes and subject matters for his simple-complex poetry (Kimmelman 171). Frost’s individuality and uniqueness partly stems from being not an advocate or follower of any of the conventional poetic dictions, and partly from his rejection of the free verse movement of Walt Whitman (Bloom intro: I). In lieu of the conventional poetic diction and versification, he preferred to abide himself with “meter and rhyme” a thing which contributed to his widely spread fame through the world. Frost, from the very beginning of his career as a poet, wanted his voice to be heard and understood by the majority, and not merely to achieve “a success with the critical few who are supposed to know . . . [he] want[ed] to be a poet for all sorts and kinds” (qtd. in Kimmelman 173). And perhaps for this reason, all of his writings bear a courtesy call for humanity to go back to Mother Nature where all people are equal. Therefore he gave birth to a revolutionary, mixed methodology in order to convey the depth and sophistication of his highly philosophical notions of man, God, nature and the relationship between them through simple, plain and everyday English.

Darkness, pessimism and gloomy chills are sent from the breezes of his simple-form poems. Such thrilled and melancholy themes occupy a big space in his world as a poet (Montashery 24). He is a depressed, rustic painter who has only the dark and green brushes that he uses to portray the secluded nature and God by human beings; “He was

revealing something wonderful about human life, or, if you wish, about his sense of what it was” (Bloom 9). With the advent of the industrial revolution, the factories, machines and emotionless humans who indulged themselves in the world of materialism, forgetting about the green fields and rolling hills of the countryside, Robert Frost voiced concerns about a future free of green birches and golden wheat and in turn free of the emotional and sensitive human.

According to Frost a poet’s task is to figure out a special vehicle through which he can afford a peaceful union for the spiritual and material planes of existence and in this respect Frost announces in one of his articles the characteristics of poetry:

Greatest of all attempts to say one thing in terms of another is the philosophical attempt to say matter in terms of spirit, and spirit in terms of matter, to make the final unity. That is the greatest attempt that ever failed. We stop just short there. But it is the height of poetry, the height of all thinking, the poetic thinking that attempt to say matter in terms of spirit and spirit in terms of matter The only materialist – be he poet, teacher, scientist, politician, or statesman – is the man who gets lost in his material without a gathering metaphor to throw it into shape and order. He is the lost soul (qtd. In Coles 20).

The spirit he is talking about is abandoned by the 20th-century materialists who see not this marvelous relationship between these essential poles and the only reason for the poet’s failure (I think) is the limitless number of people who recognizes not this hallowed relation and therefore they are the “lost soul[s].” The poet alone of all people is able to reconstruct the destroyed, spiritual-materialist bridge through a solitary confinement with nature, but he has to make a strong bond with nature away from lifeless life which only he is aware of.

The mysterious poet, the poet of rural settings and green birches, the philosopher poet and the New England poet, all these names indicate to Robert Frost. How many names still do we have to call Robert Frost? Is it a compulsive habit that critics cannot dispense with to invent glib and shallow terminology to size a POET up. Frost the poet, in my perspective, who refused to be a conventional replica of his poetic ancestors, is to be offended by calling him such inane, critical terms, and unquestionably the word POET is enough to establish an iron link between the poet and his poems.

One of the ways, some critics declare, to approach meaning in the enigmatical, pessimistic and green-like poems of Frost is “through analysis of several of the prose essays in which he discusses the nature and techniques of poetry in general and his in particular” (Coles 12). It is possible in one or another to analysis the poet’s articles, essays and notes in order for you to increase your literary competence with the rules and style the poet follows in writing poems. But Frost himself, even though he wanted his poems to be sung by the common people, he, in one of his poems, voices concerns about being interpreted wrongly by most critics and reminds both readers and critics that although his style is simple, but his philosophy is complex and “that conventional education alone will not prepare readers to understand it fully” (Kimmelman 173). He is simple but complex, he wanted all people to understand his poetry, yet it is very complex and even an intellectual brain would not fully understand it.

Beyond any shadow of doubt, with deconstruction at work, woods, trees and fields mentioned in Frost’s poetry have several connotations besides their being some rural scenes of New England celebrated by a mere farmer. Frost says that he is “always saying something that is just at the edge of something more” (Lababidi 93). Nevertheless, let us find out how the golden wheat, the farmer sows, turns into corn, beans or even vegetables,’ and how the one-branched birch near his farm becomes the huge multi-branched birch.

Since the dawn of creation and human beings are born with freewill to act and to choose, without any Godly-interference, what they want to become and do in life, and, of course, each one of them is utterly responsible for the choices he makes. In a poem like “The Road Not Taking,” the importance of choice in crucial issues and cases in life that require decisiveness and decision making is conspicuous. Because of the many interpretations put by readers and critics on the poem Frost reiterated that “The Road Not Taking” “had been intended as sly jest at the expense of his friend and fellow poet” Edward Thomas (Montiero). Whether the intention of the poet is to twit his friend or to draw an enigmatical, philosophical sketch of life is not that valuable, and regardless of the inspirational factors behind this poem, uncertainty and indeterminacy govern the whole mood of the poem, beginning from the title toward the last line of the poem.

Just imagine a traveler in one of the amazon's woods, seeking his path through the forest with careless steps until he encounters two "diverged" forks and he, then, needs to reflect seriously about the road he chooses because it will definitely determine his destiny. The traveler is forced to choose only one fork "sorry I could not travel both," and hence he is facing a serious dilemma; what one to choose and why? He begins to examine both roads and finally chooses one of them on the ground that "it was grassy and wanted wear," and because "it was less traveled by" other people. The comparison of the "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood" to the real life is very possible. Indeed, the stage of life is the same of that of the wood. The "journey through life is compared to a journey on a road," where in both cases we have to make choices and be responsible for the consequences that follow (Lababidi 94). What do you expect from a place such that of "a yellow wood" to allocate its leaf-walker? On the one hand, a wood is a place full of perils and dangerous animals that one might encounter through his path, which is the same thing that exists in life and might encounter one's journey. Yet, on the other hand a "yellow wood" might be full of gold, treasures and yellow things which life might afford the same thing to its passengers (Lababidi 94). It all hinges upon the decision you make in both cases and therefore we need to rush it not and ponder about our choices because, in a sense, they lead us to the inevitable destiny.

"Two roads" it means "two paths," which in turn means "The Road of Reason and the Road of Sensuality." Do you choose to be a priest in a church and follow the ten commandments of the bible "and so you[r pure soul ascends] the Heavenly city where an angel stands proffering a crown" for those who obeyed god and trod in the road of chapel and spirit, or you choose to indulge yourself in a worldly pleasures of the body with not considering the spirit's nourishment and be lost in the woods forever where at the end of the road there stands the mouth of hell gaping its mouth, and waiting for you to arrive its gate (Montiero). So is it, religiously speaking, the primrose that leads to hellish trouble or the straight road the leads to heavenly pleasure and everlasting bless?

The speaker at the end of the day makes a choice and he, after a careful scrutiny of the two paths, chooses “the less traveled by,” thinking he has “the better claim.” So “The Road Not Taken” is the road that the speaker does not take, or is it the road not taken by other people who choose, assumingly, the road that is more “traveled by,” fearing the unknown future of the “less traveled” (Richardson). The speaker is very proud of and not regretting his choices, and even will tell his grandsons about the amazing and uniqueness experience he went through in a life that he led by his own freewill. Yet, there is a “sigh,” it might be out of happiness or out of remorse, because the speaker is “sorry [he] could not travel both.” He would not have the chance to try the other road and therefore he would never know which one was the best to choose, all he can do is to be consent with his choices, no matter what happens, for the road he chose “made all the difference.” At the end, we should not regret anything we do in our life because our decisions make us who we are. The things that we have done previously in a certain period of time reflect our inner self.

The poem “is an ironic commentary,” Robert Faggen states, “on the autonomy of choice in a world governed by instincts, unpredictable contingencies, and limited possibilities.” Indeed, it is an ironic poem about the choices that we think we are making, and about our being pretentious people who pretend to take the “less traveled” road and hence “made all the difference.” Using the wood as a symbol for real life is like saying we are mere animals driven by our instincts and desires, and the choices we make are controlled by the “fittest” that makes the decisions for us. Every things in a wood is controlled by Darwinism or “survival for the fittest,” and hence there is no choice to be made in such cases; for example, if God created a rabbit then the rabbit is obliged to eat only vegetables and not meat whereas a cheetah is obliged to eat meat and not vegetables; similarly, in the human world we are not choice makers, but we are conceited by thinking that we are responsible for the choices that we do not make (Faggen). Why we have only two identical options, “equally lay,” to choose one of them? After all, they lead to the same way and hence they are, initially, one road to walk upon and one obligatory choice to be made:

Our paths unfold themselves to us as we go. We realize our destination only when we arrive at it, though all along we were driven toward it by purposes rightly claim, in retrospect, as our won (Richardson).

At a time we think that we are tiring ourselves to death, working 24/7 and no satisfying results, while at another we feel the numbness of our lethargic limbs, unable to move and we swim in indolent and shiftlessness, yet our tomorrows are as bright as the circular sun. So is the future a motionless, sculptured statue that we meet on the road of our journey or, as we proceed walking on the road, we collect the scattered limbs of the statue and with glue we reconstruct it?

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