Ecological Conciousness in Robert Frost's the Pasture, Going for Water and After Apple Picking

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ABSTRACT:

The present paper attempts to explore ecological consciousness in Robert Frost's select poems entitled The Pasture, Going for Water and after Apple Picking. Ecological consciousness encompasses the importance of adopting human behaviours that minimize harm to the environment, promoting environmental stewardship, sustainable living practices, and a sense of responsibility towards preserving and protecting the planet for future generation. Robert Frost's poetry is enriched with realistic and fantastic depiction of Nature, rural life, farming, ecological consciousness, ecological concerns, and ecological values. The select poems depict routine activities of rural life. Activities such as grazing animals, fetching water from different sources and apple picking have been explicitly portrayed by Robert Frost, suggesting ecological consciousness scattered in his poems. So the attempt has been made to study environmental consciousness in Frost's select poems.

KEYWORDS:

ecological, consciousness, environment, natural resources.

Introduction:

Robert Frost is a suitable poet for ecocritical study, as his poems foreground the natural world. He is a distinguished Nature poet of America. At 39, he was literally launched as a poet in England with the publication of A Boy's Will (1913), the volume that was inspired by his ten years' stay on a thirty acres farm in Derry, a small town in southern New Hampshire. The volume is

enriched with realistic and fantastic depiction of nature, rural life and farming. Philip Gerber says that there is an "overwhelming presence of nature," (153)

Frost's poetry is full of deep ecology and the physical nature where the natural world of Frost is marked by changing seasons with changing face of the landscape. His natural world is full of symbols extending from the earth to the sky that signify 'there is plenty of nature' in Frost's poetry.

Ecological Consciousness in The Pasture:

The Pasture is a beautiful and very lucid composition of Robert Frost in which place has occupied a large amount of importance in environmental imagination. 'Pasture' is usually a landscape or place in the physical nature used for grazing animals. Edward Casey asserts that a placeless world is as unthinkable as a bodiless self,

> **"I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;**
> **I'll only stop to rake the leaves away." (1–2)**

It appears that the speaker going to clean the pasture for grazing animals by removing leaves as it is surrounded by dense trees that highlight the speaker's close kinship with the natural world, signalling a sense of stewardship and care for the environment. In this connection, Donald Worster, in Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas (1994), asserts that "Frost's The Pasture illustrates a harmonious interaction with nature, emblematic of a sustainable relationship that modern ecocriticism often advocates." (129)

Not only human beings but also animals feel happy in the company of nature as she provides basic needs of everyone on this planet, showing that unlike human beings, animals also have equal importance as far as ecological balance is concerned. Every species including animals and human beings too are responsible for completion of natural food chain and moreover, they are the important elements of the natural cycle. In 1940, Frost recalled that he had a greater pleasure that coming on a neglected spring in a

pasture in the woods.

Adoration of rural life of New England has been a prominent feature of Robert Frost's poetry. The rustics of this area are depicted by Frost in all details. The farmers have to undertake all the big and small tasks at their farms. It seems that the speaker cum farmer in this poem tells us that he is going towards the spring which is close by his farm to clear it of the dead leaves that have fallen into it and that have polluted the spring water. Though nature provides us with clean and pure water but she also pollutes the things in nature which is quite natural process. Leonard M. Scigaj in Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets (1999) states that "The Pasture exemplifies Frost's ecological consciousness, portraying the speaker's intimate care for the natural environment and highlighting the symbolic relationship between man and nature." (72) It seems that Robert Frost is very conscious about nature and the rustic life; hence, he has depicted the daily activities and routine of farmers and agriculture.

Frost's love for animals can be seen when he says,

> **"I'm going out to fetch the little calf**
> **That is standing by the mother. It's so young**
> **It totters when she licks it with her tongue" (5–7).**

It states that he has to go and bring the young calf which is standing by the side of the mother. Then he tells about the physical condition of the calf which is so young that when the mother licks it, it totters. It shows that how love and sympathy in animals have been presented by Frost. Man's love for animals is also a part of ecological consciousness which is the need of ecocritical theory. As man is careful, sensitive and loving towards his baby, animals also possess the same qualities. Besides, animals play vital role, for instance, cow, buffalo, and goat for milking, oxen for farming, horse for traveling, in the progress of human being. In the poetry of Frost, Wilson Clough in The Necessary Earth: Nature and Solitude in American Literature (1964) opines, "man is dependent on the

silent machinery of nature and woods as holding in their darkness secrets which man quite never possesses." (34) It is true that man is completely relied on nature and natural sources, for he cannot possess what he desires every time. It also seems that Robert Frost loves the simplicity, genuineness, and serenity of village life that symbolize ecological consciousness.

Ecological Consciousness in After Apple Picking:

The poem After Apple Picking portrays the intricate relationship between humans and nature, describing the speaker's experience of apple picking, a task that requires a deep connection with the natural world, emphasizing environmental consciousness and concerns. Apple picking from trees is a regular activity during harvest and the labour involved in it is both physically demanding and deeply satisfying, replicating the dependence of humans on nature for livelihood and sustenance. The speaker in the poem states,

"And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.
But I am done with apple-picking now." (1-4)

It seems that Robert Frost reflects on a consciousness of the natural world's processes and the impact of human activities on these processes. The mention of apples left unpicked suggests an awareness of waste and the implications of overexertion on both the individual and the environment. The farmer's activity of picking apples signals it is a physical task that needs strength and power that nature provides. The speaker's unfinished task and exhaustion point out the limits of human intervention and control over nature. After exertion, the farmer is exhausted and he feels intoxicated,

"Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent off apples: I am drowsing off." (5-6)

It is clear that Nature has power to enthral human being by her different hues and fragrance. In, The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems (1996), Fritjlof Capra argues,

"Human beings have always depended on nature for their survival and well–being. The intricate balance of ecosystems provides the resources necessary for life, from clean air and water to food and raw materials." (22) It clearly shows that man is completely depended on nature and every ecological aspect is correlated with each other. The poem underlines the cyclical nature of life and seasons, with apple–picking embodying cycles, where harvest, growth, renewal and decay are continuous process.

Ecological Consciousness in Going for Water:

The activity of fetching water has been depicted by Robert Frost in Going for Water that represents country life in the lap of Nature and seasonal changes in the environment. The poem is a fine piece of ecocritical study as it represents the depiction of nature and the activity of human being. The opening stanza of the poem describes the state in the autumn,

"The well was dry beside the door,
And so we went with pail and can
Across the fields behind the house
To seek the brook if still it ran;" (1–4)

It is quite clear that after the well has gone dry, humans go in search of another source of water. Here, brook is another source of water that the children go to see whether it still runs. In her epoch making book, Silent Spring (1962), Rachel Carson asserts that "the plenty of nature, its unending resources, is something that humanity has often taken granted, with dire consequences" (32) It seems that Robert Frost knows that there was a rapid growth of urbanization and industrialization in the nineteenth century and due to this, the pure water is contaminated. Man is to be held blameable for contamination of the natural source like water by adding solid waste, chemicals and sewage. Brooks, streams, rivers, lakes, and trickles are the real sources of water on the Mother earth. Further the speaker says,

"We ran as if to meet the moon

That slowly dawned behind the trees,
The barren boughs without the leaves,
Without the birds, without the breeze." **(9–12)**

It seems that Robert Frost is very accurate in representing the Nature and ecological consciousness during the fall of autumn, as trees barely have leaves, no birds can be seen and no breeze can be observed. Talking about the importance of water, Alice Outwater, in her book, Water: A Natural History (1996), argues that "Water is the most critical resource issue of our lifetime and our children's lifetime. The health of our water is the principal measure of how we live on the land" (2). It is obviously true that water is life and in present scenario, it has a valuable place in the ecological world. Brook is, further, depicted by Robert Frost in the poem as,

"**A note as from a single place,**
A slender tinkling fall that made
Now drops that floated on the pool
Like pearls, and now a silver blade." **(21–24)**

The drops of water in the brook are looking like wearing pearls on a 'silver blade' as the moonlight encompasses the stream. Robert Frost represents the beauty of the nature by incorporating natural imageries in the poem. In Robert Frost and the New England Renaissance (1988), George Monteiro asserts that "Frost's depiction of brooks reflects his deep connection to the New England landscape, where streams and brooks are a common, yet profoundly symbolic presence." (89)

Conclusion:

Ecological consciousness is widely scattered in the selected poems of Robert Frost. Ecological aspects such as water, pasture, apples and animals have been depicted in the poems. The poems exhibit the simple, natural and easy life in rural regions. Frost uses Nature as theme in his poems, mainly delineating New England rural scenery, country life and wildlife. The presence of birds and animals in the selected poems gives a sense of connection to the natural world. It displays Frost's minute observation and deep

knowledge of the ecological world. It is the ecological world that finds the complete demonstration through his poetry which has been inscribed against the setting of biodiversity and ecosystem.

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