

**T.C.
ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**



***ROBERT FROST'S REFLECTION ON MAN'S ISOLATION
AND
ITS CONNECTION TO SOMETHING IN NATURE***

M.A Thesis

TÜLAY DAĞOĞLU

İstanbul, 2012

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Supervisor

Prof. Dr. KEMALETTİN YİĞİTER

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T.C.
İSTANBUL AYDIN ÜNİVERSİTESİ

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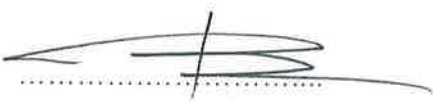

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ABSTRACT

Robert Frost's popularity was accepted with his simplistic style, his particular sensitivity and a clever use of imagery in his poetry in the twentieth century. Frost's poetry includes his life experiences, his work and family, which effectively portrays the New England lifestyle with his simple language. Man's relation with universe is his main concern in his poems. The vastness of universe is beyond compare to man with his loneliness and frailty with it. Man's indifference and his confrontation of the universe have a connection with certain themes in his poetry. His great admiration of nature made his poems portraying one of the great themes in his poetry: *nature*. As a prevalent subject, nature brought great optimism and complexity upon to his writings. His respect for nature is stated in the poem *Trees at My Window*: "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." My particular focus in this study is Frost's certain joy about nature and even a fear towards it on which results in man's isolation in society and despite his struggle to connect himself to it in regards to his longing. This isolation and longing come from human psychology. Therefore the rural scenes, landscapes, farmers and natural world are illustrated with the man's struggle with life and personal psychology. This study begins by placing Frost's works in the context of Romantic poetry. Frost gives his readers the observation of something in nature and its connection to human isolation. The best way to understand Frost's key themes- his affection for nature, man's reasons for keeping away from nature, man's loneliness in the face of nature, the power of nature to act as a remedy for man's ills- is to examine the poems "Birches," "Mending Wall," "After Apple-Picking" and "Two Look at Two".

ÖZET

Yirminci yüzyıl şairi Robert Frost'un popülaritesi; şiirlerinde kullandığı akıllıca betimlemesi, kendine has duyguları ve anlaşılması kolay tarzından gelmektedir. Frost'un, basit diliyle anlattığı Yeni İngiltere'nin yaşam tarzını etkili bir biçimde işleyen şiir sanatı, hayat tecrübelerini, yaptığı işleri ve ailesini anlatır. İnsanın evrenle olan ilişkisi onun şiirlerinde ki başlıca ilgi alanıdır. Evrenin enginliği, insanın yalnızlığı ve zayıflığıyla kıyaslanamaz. İnsanoğlunun evrene meydan okuması ve ona duyduğu kayıtsızlığıyla, şairimizin şiirlerinde kullandığı belli başlı temaların yakın bir ilişkisi vardır. Tabiata beslediği büyük hayranlığı şiirlerinde en önemli temalardan birini yansıtır: *doğa*. Genel olarak yansıttığı konulardan biri olan, doğa onun yazılarında müthiş bir iyimserlik ve karmaşa yaratmıştır. Tabiata olan saygısı *Penceremdeki Ağaçlar* adlı şiirinde işlenmiştir: "*Penceremde ki ağaç / Ağaçtan pencere / Gece geldiğinde sürgüsü indirilir; / Ama sakın izin verme aramıza perdelerin çekilmesine.*" Bu çalışmada ki asıl amacım, Frost'un doğaya sevgisi ve insanın ona duyduğu özlemi nedeniyle tabiatla yakın ilişki yaratma çabalarına rağmen toplumda kendisini yalnız hissetmesi, ve bu çabalar sonucunda da içindeki tabiat korkusudur. Aslında insanın psikolojisi bu yalnızlığı ve özlemi yaratmıştır. Bu sebeple de kırsal sahneler, tabiat manzaraları, çiftçiler ve doğal dünya, insanoğlunun hayatla ve kişisel psikolojisiyle olan mücadelesi beraber anlatılmıştır. Çalışmamın giriş kısmı Frost'un eserlerini Romantik şiirin çerçevesinde ele almak yer almıştır. Şairimiz okuyucularına tabiatla bir şeyi ve onun insanın bir başıncılığıyla olan ilişkisini gözlemlene şansını verir. Frost'un tabiat sevgisini, insanın yaşadığı büyük yalnızlığa rağmen kendisini doğadan uzak tutma nedenlerini, ve onu bu soyutlamadan kurtaracak devanın zenginliğinin tabiatla olduğunu anlamanın en etkili yolu "Birches," "Mending Wall," "After Apple-Picking" ve "Two Look at Two" şiirlerini incelemektir.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
ÖZET.....	v
I.INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. PART I - ROBERT FROST'S USE OF NATURE.....	8
III. PART II - POEMS BY FROST	
1. ON MENDING WALL	
1.1 THE BARRIERS BETWEEN PEOPLE.....	25
1.2 NATURE DOES NOT LOVE A WALL.....	30
2. ON AFTER APPLE PICKING	
2.1 SELF-KNOWLEDGE THROUGH NATURE.....	33
2.2 INTERACTION WITH NATURE THROUGH APPLES.....	41
3. ON TWO LOOK AT TWO	
3.1 INDIFFERENT NATURE TO MAN.....	44
4. ON BIRCHES	
4.1 BOY'S PLAYFUL SWINGING?.....	47
VI. CONCLUSION	58
V. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	61

I.

INTRODUCTION

There have always been valuable critics in the scope of theories and judgments of good poets despite the fact that they do not completely reflect the truth. The poets examined such as Dryden, Coleridge, Arnold and Eliot have been examined the best critics. What has extended the value of Robert Frost and changed the perception of him is the publication of primary material since 1963. Some of his lectures, interviews and prose prefaces that have been collected and edited and present us a complete picture of this great poet, but much remains undiscovered to get the new dimensions of his achievement. Frost's stature lying in his role as a literary figure and a critic is one of these dimensions particularly valuable for a poet.

I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):
I shan't be gone long.—You come too.

I'm going out to fetch the little calf
That's standing by the mother. It's so young,
It totters when she licks it with her tongue.
I shan't be gone long.—You come too. (qtd. in Untermeyer)

One no doubt feels confused after reading this charming poem and it is something interesting to see such a promising diversion and companionship. In reality, this is the attraction of a speaker who knows both what his work is and what our limits to understand his purpose while doing it. Frost attained his reputation of being a farmer poet on the basis of a great many of them. His remarkable poems are like the records of his rural life and the readers of his poems never complain or tire of reading such poems as: "Mending Wall," "After Apple-Picking," "Mowing," "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," "Birches," and "Home Burial".

Frost's pastoral world enables us to think is full of risk like a field of fragile calf that must be rescued from the upcoming winter blizzard and blast. When compared to that of Eliot and Pound, Frost's pastoral verse simple at first glance. . . This simple surface takes us into unsuspected and unexpected depths. A great deal of

work becomes an occupation to get to the bottom of Frost's as Lionel Trilling remarked about this hardly benign figure.

As a contemporary of Wordsworth and Emerson Robert Frost was brought up on the verse of the Romantic and Victorian and New England writers. Nature is a symbol of spirit, a manifestation of the divine for the conventional Romantic view. Just as Goethe defined nature as "the living garment of God", Emerson and Whitman were among those who were convinced that man's soul has its counterpart and nature is the source of this benignant spiritual energy. The Romantics' main concern was to find the relationship between the facts of nature and the spiritual world.

In nature's benevolence, Frost seems to portray this Romantic faith. A branch load of snow is shaken down when the speaker's depression is suddenly touched through the verse of "Dust of Snow". It is beyond doubt that such absurd events present us the unexpected therapeutic role with the help of nature's performance. What we recognize through "For Once, Then, Something" is something of a just phenomenal appearance, we see "a something white, uncertain, / Something more of the depths." The poet is not sure about this "whiteness", it remains a matter of ambiguity. A man and a woman who are about to end their nature walk, a couple of deer look back at them over a stone wall in "Two Look at Two." The intense gaze of the deer matches their dawning understanding. The man and woman and the deer are separated by the wall but this separation can not prevent the couple feel "As if the earth in one unlooked-for favor/ Had made them certain the earth returned their love.

In American culture, Frost has been always influential with his memorable and descriptive which is the reason why he is called America's poet. Love, nature, and the dream world of possibility are the themes he focuses upon in his poetry (Cramer 39). Many of his surroundings inspired him while living on a New England farm and staying him away from the industrial world. "The Road Not Taken" has a unique style and displays an important message like his other poems and enables the reader to deeply understand who he is and what his poetry is about.

Frost started to put his feelings into words at very early age of 11 in New England (Burnshaw 13). "La Noche Triste" which means "The Sad Night", was his

first published poem and depicts the invasion of the Aztecs by the Spanish Conquistador Cortes and focuses on bravery and heroism. Even though he transferred to Harvard it did not take long for him to drop out of the college. He kept teaching and writing on his farm in the country where he moved to with his wife Elinor Miriam White who has a huge influence on his poetic life.

Ezra Pound, Lascelles Abercrombie, Rubert Brooke and T.E. Hulme influenced Frost after encountering many of their writings in regards to the theme of nature. However beauty and love of nature as well as its control over humanity are the obsessions of his poems. Because of their similar style when we consider and talk about nature, Frost is most alike to John Greenleaf Whittier. Why Frost is considered as “America’s Poet” is due to his mastery and diversity of the poetic language besides the categorization of his poems as traditional, experimental, regional, and universal. He is a leading literary figure in the interplay of rhythm and meter with his inflection of everyday speech use of diverse vocabulary.

In 1913, Frost’s first book, entitled “A Boy’s Will” was published. Henry Wordsworth’s poems called “My Cost Youth” inspired him to give that name to his book. Wordsworth’s poems discuss a boy’s will and thoughts of youth that are long. The major themes depicted in this poem are science, love, death and nature. This book gave a place for the poems called “Ghost House”, “Storm Fear”, “October”, “My Butterfly” and “The Trial by Existence”. Frost had many great memories and he focused on one of his memory in “Ghost House” written about his old house that burned. During huge snow storms, his fear inspired him to write “Storm Fear” which was said to have been written on a stormy day.

To make them more meaningful Frost would read his poems out loud when he was called to parties and gatherings to share his poems. However, due to their personal nature, he would not read all of his poems at a party. “Waiting Afield at Dusk” was an example talking about his dreams and wishes. “The Tuft of Flowers” which was one of his favorite poems and as an answer to not reading a poem aloud, was written to “come back to people” (Lathem 45).

Frost's second book of poems was "North of Boston". The title was influenced by a Boston newspaper. This book is one of his greatest complications of poems despite the fact that it was not as lengthy as his first book. New companies being formed and the feeling of homesickness was the reason why he wrote it. 8 poems focus on the themes of comedy, tragedy, description of nature, elegy as well as a monologue. Each poem provokes deep thought and an awe-inspiring series of events but Frost says that the main theme of his book is "forgiving people for being people". (Cramer 28)

Frost had a different style while writing his poems. It took days or even weeks until he felt that a work was perfect. He preferred to sit and write until he stopped, then he picked the best ones to correct that usually needed no correction at all. "The Death of a Hired Man" is an example of these poems taking him two hours to finish it even though it is one of his longest poems. In this poem the poet is talking about how a man wants to die peacefully in his farm house. Another of Frost's long poems is "Home Burial". This poem portrays the personal life of the poet whose wife's sister's is in unbelievable pain due to the loss of her baby. Frost was inspired by the death of his first born baby and the subsequent funeral arranged for him at home. This is mentioned as an example in Frost's poems; he used many real events in his life.

The world continued to read Frost's poems which were continuing to be published in various books and news papers. "The Road Not Taken" brought him a great fame and he got certain recognition. This poem is highly agreed as his greatest work by far. The wonder for Frost's inspiration for writing these poems continued for a while till reading and diving into the sea of the words. He was walking in the woods with his best friend and they arrived at a fork in the road described as in the poem. "The road less traveled" was their decision to go down and is full of the most beautiful flowers that Frost had ever seen. As a result, this poem came to the scene naturally (Cramer, 44).

Frost lived a life as a humble farmer, he received many awards and his poems were highly viewed by the public. His works brought him Pulitzer Prize four

times, for his book *New Hampshire* in 1923, for his *Collected Poems* in 1930, for his poems in *A Further Range* in 1936. Finally, for his work *A Witness Tree* he took the prize for the fourth and last time (Winnick). Many awards such as the “Robert Frost Memorial Award” have been given in his honor (Winnick). Robert Frost created and left influential works that are timeless and are still thought of as highly inspirational and influential by many other poets and common people. His poetry will likely carry into the future as an example of an influential poet of the 20th century. With his description of nature, his expressions of love and his great ideas flow his mind he influenced so many people and has been dubbed “America’s Poet”. Without the influence of his wife and the nature surroundings of his farm in rural New England, these great ideas would not be possible. However, it was through the success of Frost to combine many things with the help of the status of a true American Poet and the poem “The Road Not Taken” which shaped a life he lived in.

When we come to a conclusion and state the purpose of this study, the first thing to say is the themes such as human limitations, love, extinction or death, process of self-discovery Frost used in his poetry. All these major themes are expressed through various devices. The recurring objects like the stars, the snow, the woods have a role of bringing to the reader all vividly the position of Man in the Universe and man’s relation with the nature. Although he rejected and avoided thinking of himself as a nature poet; he used nature in his works as a scene and stage that the life of his poems was created. His nature poetry is generally thought to be closely related to his pastoralism. “The Onset”, “Unharvested”, and “Evening in a Sugar Orchard” portray the vivid pictures of landscape but nature is accepted as significant theme when these things are presented through his poems. Through other influential works such as “Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening”, “Once by the Pacific”, “The Road Not Taken”, “Desert Places”, “Birches” natural objects hold the center of interest and creates a pastoral scene when the poet’s eyes are directed to rural life and determines his vision of nature.

Frost has seen man’s environment quite indifferent to man, he is lonely and frail when compared to the power of nature and universe. All the other themes mentioned above are closely related to the theme of nature and its power over

humans. Man is on earth and confronting the total universe. Man's isolation and alienation from nature keeps himself alone despite the fruitful remedy of nature which can save man from this isolation is recognized through the analyzing specific poems.

Frost is aware of the cultural ethos of New England people who struggle with the elementary problem of existence but is not concerned with depicting and presenting them. In his poems, man is alone in the countryside or in the city in "Acquainted with the Night". He reflects his consciousness of a society isolated within an urbanized world. All these themes are presented through his poems but some of them such as "After Apple-Picking", "Two Look at Two", "Mending Wall", "Birches" help us to understand Frost's reflection on man's isolation and its connection to something in nature and I try to decipher Frost's reflection on man's isolation in society and his connection to nature that is full of remedy for this isolation and powerful over human through some of his poems.

II.

PART I - ROBERT FROST'S USE OF NATURE:

Rural landscape and wildlife is so often depicted in Frost's poetry that it is hard not to think of him as a nature poet. He began as a nature poet with his "To a Moth Seen in Winter," "Rose Pogonias," "Going for Water" poems and his interest in nature was felt throughout his career. It is beyond doubt that his poems on nature are so excellent and influential that they must have a prominent place in American literature. We need the idea of pastoral for our attempt to understand this aspect of Frost. The nature poems are not to be considered as pastorals, as these two kinds of poetry differ in some aspects. The pastoral poetry portrays a special society and a way of life but we see in nature poetry the setting within which this society is depicted. Nature is not the topic of a pastoralist; it is the tool as a scene. However Frost's nature poetry has a close connection with pastoralism. In his "The Onset," and "Unharvested" poems we see the combination of both genres. These genres seem to grow from the way of looking at reality that presents pastorals when Frost's attention is on the rural life determining his view of nature.

Most people have found similarities between Frost's nature poetry and Wordsworth's. They wrote poems full of ordinary language and life of ordinary people. Both poets avoided creating poems embellished with rhetorical extravaganza of Shakespeare. The other similarity is their optimism in their attitude of life towards nature. When it comes to differences, Frost's poetry "begins with delight and ends in wisdom", whereas Wordsworth's poetry "begins with delight and ends in delight." (Muslim) And Frost's wisdom can be best exemplified in Mending Wall: "Good fences make good neighbours." The other difference when compared to Wordsworth is that he does not involve himself in the subject matter of his poetry. As reader, we are captured with the natural tone of human conversation and plainness of expressions. This is the style of Frost; putting away all the complex expressions and serving an ordinary speech in his poems. Wordsworth has simple words and thoughts which makes him plain in matter and manner, whereas Frost's poems are plain in style but complex in thoughts. Frost's interest is in locating the relations of

human and nature and what supreme is the rural people. However for Wordsworth nature is supreme where human improves an intimate communion with nature. (Muslim). The existence in nature makes Wordsworth feel joy with elevated thoughts as the nature is a nurse, teacher and has moral strength. For Frost nature is menace and discomfort that's why human can not stay long there as he has other duties to fulfill. There is still difference when we take into account his landscape and sharpness of outline in the imagery that is not presented in Wordsworth's Cumberland. Frost's "The Oven Bird" is different from Wordsworth's "To a Skylark"; the bird is American in one poem and in the other English (Lynen). Another difference is Frost's poems do not have the same variety of emotional response. His popularity comes from his achievement in writing of nature without exploiting the emotional effects different from Wordsworth's and the other Romantics.

It is difficult for the modern poets to keep themselves away from the effect of the Romantic way of treating nature and we, as readers, can find many echoes of Wordsworth, Keats and other poets in Frost's poetry. He did not totally reflect this influence in his poetry; he created his own style and adapted the style of the Romantics to his purposes. You may taste the Romantic harmonies in his poetry but they are quite different. The lines "Vague dream-head lifted out of the ground, / And thing next most diffuse to cloud," portray a different Romantic vision with the help of a different landscape- "Not all your light tongues talking aloud/ Could be profound."¹ Frost has a different perspective of nature and looks at it through his own window. His farmer background goes beyond brute facts, but critics failed to see this, as well as the essential difference between his nature poetry and that of the nineteenth century's which shaped it.

The spirit immanent in nature and man is the theme Wordsworth depicted through his poetry of the great period. This concept of spirit is combined in a variety of ways with diversity and changes from one poem to another. Although Wordsworth has a complex intellectual nature background his poetic idea remains constant; that

¹ "Tree At My Window."

is, the union of mind and external reality. We are introduced to this union through the subtle similarities between the natural scene and the moral sentiments portrayed and it suggests a blending of thought and landscape. In the poetic form this theme is also portrayed. The intellectual reflections can be found in Wordsworth language which suggests both things and thoughts.

A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things... (qtd in Lynen, 142)²

The meaning of “things” undergoes a peculiar shift and the terms like “motion”, “impels”, “rolls” create a place where Newtonian physics and the sublimities of philosophical idealism can interact. Thought and object merge in the medium that is the vague suggestiveness of Wordsworth. The same blending is presented in the nature imagery that is a preference of Wordsworth’s and other Romantic poets’ preference. There are streams, breezes, odors, mists, tangled undergrowth and twilight and their distinct quality puts them into the area of subjective experience (Lynen, 142).

“The Wood Pile” poem will be familiar to many readers who are used to these nature poems. And in “Resolution and Independence” Wordsworth’s style is similar to Frost’s approach to nature, although Wordsworth’s style is more didactic than Frost’s anecdotal style. He takes into consideration his travels through the countryside as the means of discovering the mystery of the soul. And this shows us the typical Wordsworthian attitude. It is obvious that while reading Frost’s poems we assume that a spontaneous revelation touches him coming from nature as in Wordsworth’s. However this assumption comes out from an unawareness of what his goal is. The first lines hint at the effect of Wordsworth’s “wise passiveness” on Frost:

Out walking in the frozen swamp one gray day,
I paused and said, 'I will turn back from here.
No, I will go farther - and we shall see.' (qtd. in Lynen, 142)³

² Lines Composed A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey

³ "Wood Pile"

In both poems, the significance of the natural scene comes to the fore as if emerging from the writer's subconscious and it is recognized suddenly, like Frost finding the wood pile by the same accident but happily. Here the similarity between Frost and Wordsworth comes to an end. As mentioned above, unlike Wordsworth, who regards nature as the image of the spirit immanent in man and nature, Frost finds at the center of the forest a symbol of the strictly human spirit and its ability. The Wood pile itself has no meaning but when it leads to a revelation of human nature, it gains meaning.

.....I thought that only
Someone who lived in turning to fresh tasks
Could so forget his handiwork on which
He spent himself, the labor of his ax,
And leave it there far from a useful fireplace
To warm the frozen swamp as best it could
With the slow smokeless burning of decay (qtd. in Lynen, 142).

The human cut the firewood and put aside its value hence it will never be used again. Here, the world of physical need is transcended by humanity because they use their creativity for the fulfillment of him on account of living “in turning to fresh tasks”. The huge difference between man and nature sheds light on the whole meaning of the poem. The vast tract of cedar swamp is far from meaning or design:

.....The view was all in lines
Straight up and down of tall slim trees
Too much alike to mark or name a place by
So as to say for certain I was here
Or somewhere else: I was just far from home (qtd. in Lynen, 142).

Frost attracts our attention to the search of humans for something in the endless spaces. This comes from the search for meaning, revealed in the lines “far from home”. The woodpile itself is a metaphor showing that nature by itself is not enough to get and reach this meaning which humans are searching for. Only the human mind can give the meaning to the nature and here the use woodpile represents

man's creativity. It might decay in the heart of nature and its annihilation in reality reminds us that there is no connection between man and nature but the bond between nature and human purposes. A simple woodpile has been abandoned and rotted away in nature, but Frost meant with the lines "To warm the frozen swamp as best it could", that the woodpile is burning on a hearth like firewood.

Frost depicted the theme of nature and its connection to man in his poetry. Unlike Wordsworth who sees in nature a close relation with human mind, Frost views it as alien. It is a place where all emotions and appearances are blended, as well as its hard realities being regarded as impersonal. Frost presented nature as an impassable bridge even if humanity has a chance of exploring and being close to it. Frost created a simple outline of life beginning with the indifference and inaccessibility of the wild world in which man must live. Because of being in this physical universe man has certain needs coming from birth to the death. He has to face dangers and the limits of his capacity waiting before him.

Frost's central theme in his poetry is humanity. Even when he talks about a forest or a wildflower in nature, he uses it to portray man's relation to the world. Man stands in place a far from nature instead of his relation to it and this remoteness sheds light on man's isolation and his weakness in the face of external forces in the universe. Despite this remoteness, nature has a role of showing the superiority of the human mind and consciousness over brute facts. Thus we can say that nature is a means of presenting the heroic side of humankind. The ambiguity in Frost's view of nature is that man's power of being manager and cruel is to be feared and brutish; on the other hand, it is also to be loved - "One had to be versed in country things/ Not to believe the phoebes wept"⁴ – but rather because it puts man to the test and thus brings out his true greatness (Lynen, 143-4):

When stiff and sore and scarred
I take away my hand
From leaning on it hard
In grass and sand,

⁴ "The Need of Being Versed in Country Things."

The hurt is not enough:
I long for weight and strength
To feel the earth as rough
To all my length. (qtd. in Lynen, 144)⁵

This ambiguity is a tool to understand how Frost uses his poetic potential. In the poem "Birches" is a kind of poem Frost has an intention of showing us the balance between the desires to be away from the world and love of the earth the boy, in the poem, has.

One can understand that, through the game of swinging, Frost's concept of nature does not present the sublimity which one can find in Wordsworth, yet Frost's concept has a richness of its own. It is named as a paradox which indicates the greater one in man himself.

Frost's poem "The Most of It" is a sample for the readers who might think of him as a sketcher of pleasant landscapes. In this poem we are shown a gulf which is separating humankind from nature. The picture presented is far from being cheerful, less pretty and impressive. The exalted idea of the human mind, the awesome view of reality and the existing contrast between man and nature are expressed:

He thought he kept the universe alone;
For all the voice in answer he could wake
Was but the mocking echo of his own
From some tree-hidden cliff across the lake.
Some morning from the boulder-broken beach
He would cry out on life, that what it wants
Is not its own love back in copy speech,
But counter-love, original response.
And nothing ever came of what he cried
Unless it was the embodiment that crashed
In the cliff's talus on the other side,
And then in the far distant water splashed,
But after a time allowed for it to swim,
Instead of proving human when it neared
And someone else additional to him,
As a great buck it powerfully appeared,
Pushing the crumpled water up ahead,
And landed pouring like a waterfall,
And stumbled through the rocks with horny tread,

⁵ "Earthward"

And forced the underbrush - and that was all (qtd. in Lynen, 144-5) ⁶

The poem starts with a nameless man, a mysterious individual in an unidentified location. We are not informed much about him except for his isolation. The pathos in this poem, which is close to tragedy, is given through the search of man, because of his isolation, for a sign of love from nature. He is aware of his desire of a counter- love, an original response rather than the reflection of his own love and voice. The feeling of being alone in this universe, he longs to be wrong and often calls out across the lake, but his voice is met by “the mocking echo of his own”. This nameless individual represents a universal emotion; every human being needs to contact with others- “not his own love back in copy speech, / but counter-love, original response”.

Not long after he hears something, a frustrating echo of his own voice, “in far distant water splashed”, something swimming to shore. Has someone heard his voice and come at last to help him to be recovered from his solitude? But the visitor is just a deer, “as a great buck it powerfully appeared”. All that nature can give is a magnificent buck swimming across the lake and this is “the most of it”. This is the sign of man’s complete isolation and the sense of despair in this poem. On the other hand, it symbolizes man’s blindness to the impersonal force of matter yet his spiritual strength. He realizes the meaning of the buck; he sees that “that was all” nature could give. Nature’s magnificent strength and its remoteness and inhumanity are the grim realities which enabled man to see through this poem.

The poem begins with the inactivity of human. Crying out is the only action he performs, he has no choice other than thinking, waiting and hoping would be the actions he spends time with. However the buck has superiority with the dynamic actions of swimming, pushing, stumbling and forcing when he appears. Man has a power of mental activity rather than physical strength, symbolized by the buck’s physical strength. The buck’s physical superiority reveals not only nature’s strength

⁶ “The Most of It”

but also the superiority of the human mind which can see it what it is and no more, just *isolation* and *solitude*.

Frost's main concern in his poems is the struggle between the human imagination and the meaningless of the individual. This struggle is obvious in many ways in a variety of poems such as "Desert Places," "Sand Dunes," and "There Are Roughly Zones." From poem to poem his tone changes as he depicts the landscapes of intense agony, but the basic contrast is still the same throughout his nature poetry. In "Neither Out Far nor In Deep", Frost depicts people who are along the shore of a beach staring to sea for along time. He identifies this with man's half -exploratory and half- defensive watch on the earth (Lynen, 145):

They cannot look out far .
They cannot look in deep.
But when was that ever a bar
To any watch they keep?(qtd. in Lynen,145)⁷

Lynen stated in his book "*The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost*"(146) that Frost has certain dark undertones which represent the contrast between the nature itself full of beauties and the nature full of dark sketches. It is not acceptable for Frost to create poems just depicting a single tone; even his most cheerful nature poems have a bittersweet side. He has affection towards nature; animals, trees and flowers are all described with love. But there is no nature poem which does not hint at some possible danger. In the poem "Spring Pools" the tone starts with the description of pools and flowers of early spring in an innocent way but then turns into grave:

The trees that have it in their pent-up buds
To darken nature and be summer woods -
Let them think twice before they use their powers
To blot out and drink up and sweep away
These flowery waters and these watery flowers
From snow that melted only yesterday. (qtd. in Lynen, 146)⁸

Spring is seen as a season of birth, innocence and joy but turns into darkness. Frost has the intention of showing us the beauties of spring covered with a pleasant

⁷ "Neither Out Far Nor In Deep"

⁸ "Spring Pools"

surface before directing the reader to Frost's nature which is entertaining a guest who has no land and is trying to find his way. The flowers and the weather are bracing the guest whose spirit is high; but he has fear as there is always the chance that he may come across a bullet-pierced helmet or something worse. As Lynen mentioned, In "Two Tramps in Mud Time" he has a posture of horror that comes unexpectedly and his lovely chat about April weather is interrupted to advise us to (146):

Be glad of water, but don't forget
The lurking frost in the earth beneath
That will steal forth after the sun is set
And show on the water its crystal teeth. (qtd. in Lynen, 146)⁹

The poem commences with the views harboring fearful realities of nature. These do not have the role of defeating nature's beauty, illustrated by songbirds, rivers, flowers and trees. On the contrary, Frost shows us their sorrowful appeal. The vividness of delicate things which encounter a dark background in nature results in the charm of the nature lyrics. Frost reflected the view of impossibility of the one without the other: the love of natural beauty and the horror of the remoteness, vastness and indifference of the physical world, they are not the opposing parts but different aspects of the same view.

As mentioned in Lynen's *The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost* (146-7) Frost's one of poems "Bereft" can be seen as the poet's the saddest and the most terrifying poem in contrast to the lyric "A Boundless Moment" which is a poem of prettiness. The latter one, which is famous for its naturalistic views, gives us the soft touches of beauty. Yet both of them deal with the same view of reality. The former one has a different place in the aspect of its wistfulness and charm:

He halted in the wind, and - what was that
Far in the maples, pale, but not a ghost?
He stood there bringing March against his thought,
And yet too ready to believe the most.
'Oh, that's the Paradise-in-bloom,' I said;
And truly it was fair enough for flowers

⁹ "Two Tramps in Mud Time"

Had we but in us to assume in March
Such white luxuriance of May for ours.
We stood a moment so in a strange world,
Myself as one his own pretense deceives;
And then I said the truth (and we moved on).
A young beech clinging to its last year's leaves. (qtd. in Lynen, 147)¹⁰

The line “A young beech clinging to its last year’s leaves” tells us that this is just an illusion the two men thought. They saw the dead leaves, which give a vision of beauty presented through this poem. The marvelous sight of the “Paradise- in-bloom” is the response of the reader seeing through the eyes of the two characters in the poem. When we analyze the poem by focusing on the nature theme, it is possible to say that nature is itself unfruitful. The walkers' realisation that the leaves are fading leads them directly towards the routine of life. And the picture depicts human’s limitations in life. Human being’s imagination is beyond our powers of control and can hold an idealised view of reality for a long time; in other words, for a boundless moment, man’s power can shape nature according to his desires. But there is more to say about the poem: the leaves are fading, the fading of vision, sadly, but the reality which can not be denied is the nobility of nature. The truth about nature is disappointing, but man accepts it except for anything as a sign of his intellectuality.

Frost’s nature poetry shelters a basic theme which is man’s reckless honesty when he faces the facts. Man has a power and spiritual existence in the face of the reality of the nature. Despite his existence and power it is difficult for him to find a shelter in nature or to be away from it. However his acceptance of the facts concerning the nature allows him to assert a right for his spirit and being independently of the physical world. Therefore, “A Boundless Moment” is a poem of describing trivial things such as a nice view and a soft sorrowful picture. It is time to have a look at the other poem “Bereft” which is very much like the former one in terms of intense sorrow and the same intellectual relation of man to nature:

¹⁰ “A Boundless Moment”

Where had I heard this wind before
Change like this to a deeper roar?
What would it take my standing there for,
Holding open a restive door,
Looking down hill to a frothy shore?
Summer was past and day was past.
Somber clouds in the west were massed.
Out in the porch's sagging floor,
Leaves got up in a coil and hissed,
Blindly struck at my knee and missed.
Something sinister in the tone
Told me my secret must be known:
Word I was in the house alone
Somehow must have gotten abroad,
Word I was in my life alone,
Word I had no one left but God. (qtd. in Lynen, 147-8)¹¹

The tone of this poem is revealed by a speaker who has suffered a great loss and he tries to find a remedy in the bleakness of nature for his loneliness. While he is standing close to the tree which is saying good bye to its leaves swirling about his legs, he recognizes something hostile and malign in the sky. This is exactly the pure isolation overwhelming him. Nobody but God is with him in the heart of this isolation. Yet, despite the gloomy atmosphere in the poem, this poem is not an example of pathetic and hopeless. The reality and the feeling in this poem are that the speaker is aware of his alienation, loneliness and courage in nature.

According to Lynen human being and their isolation are portrayed in a remote world in Frost's nature and pastoral poems. Frost reflected upon nature which is a kind of wild life and rural New England in the same way. Nature, like New England, has a standing of paradoxical attitudes: a world full of ideals where the facts are intact and a place where life is simple and oblivious. And the last but not the least nature is independent, keeps itself away from man like the north of Boston which is separate from modern parts of America (148).

Frost has a basic method for the structure of the nature poems. Human life and the remoteness of nature have parallels shown us with the help of Frost's ability to focus on different and vast areas of experience. The poem "Nothing Gold Can

¹¹ "Bereft"

Stay” draws our attention to the basic method and paths in nature which is equal to human experience with Frost’s insistence on the vastness of nature:

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay. (qtd. in Lynen, 149)¹²

Natural beauty is flying regretfully like time, which is expressed through the first five descriptive lines. As we know, the loss of innocence is best related to Eden, which is similar to the modified image in the following sixth line presenting us with the loss of beauty in the leaf. It is inevitable for someone to feel the sadness in the change of the color of a leaf, from green to gold. We can compare human beings' maturity stage to the leaf losing its innocence. The fading of the leaf illustrates not only a loss of beauty but also the corruption which comes with maturity.

The line “So dawn goes down to day” is the next image for the reader to understand that human nature follows the same process as nature. Human’s life span is identified with the period from dawn to sunset, developing from childhood to maturity which portrays the same loss in nature. Frost’s method of comparing human life with a process in nature is important here. It is obvious in Frost’s poetry and it is impossible to separate the leaves from humans and their life because they hold so much meaning for man. Actually it is sign of the characteristic irony of the pastoral style if we feel the emotional tone of the poem. The leaves of a tree are so simple themselves, but significant for man’s destiny to recover from his problems.

The poem we discussed is a sample for Frost’s explicit spelling out of the analogies between humans and nature. But not all Frost poems state the meanings obviously - often they are implied rather than stated explicitly. By putting emphasis on the vastness of nature, Frost has an ability of suggesting broad circles of

¹² “Nothing Gold Can Stay”

alignment in the human sphere. A good illustration of this description is “Range Finding”:

The battle rent a cobweb diamond-strung
And cut a flower beside a ground bird's nest
Before it stained a single human breast.
The stricken flower bent double and so hung.
And still the bird revisited her young.
A butterfly its fall had dispossessed
A moment sought in air his flower of rest,
Then lightly stooped to it and fluttering clung.
On the bare upland pasture there had spread
O'ernight 'twixt mullein stalks a wheel of thread
And straining cables wet with silver dew.
A sudden passing bullet shook it dry.
The indwelling spider ran to greet the fly,
But finding nothing, sullenly withdrew. (qtd. in Lynen,149)¹³

Frost shows us two distinct worlds; in one, which is a battlefield, human struggle is performed, in another, the reality of spider, butterfly, and the bird stand for beauty and innocence. Man battles against man, destroying his own kind in his world; but he feels distant from it. Furthermore he, during the course of the battle, burns out the grass and its inhabitants, bends double a flower, but the creatures of that world lead their life undisturbed. Even if the battle were to wipe out the bird and the butterfly, the fact is that man can not truly break into this world and claim victory over them. Battle, victory, suffering, greed, eagerness have no meaning in nature.

The contrast in this poem is subtle, far from the realization of reader, depicting the world of nature which has been given the role of serving as a tutor on human life. The spider's response to the range-finding bullet supports this role in a way. Man is in search of a target with an evil intention, and this intention has been put into practice with the firing of the bullet. From the perspective of man, it is just a false alarm and he turns back to his world with a sulky face. The feeling man has when he attacks the world of nature is nonchalance, but when it comes to his world and his kind, and he is attacked by thousands, his nonchalance turns into shock. It

¹³ “Range Finding”

matters little to a spider what happens to his web or how the flower bends if it is not any other member of nature. The bullet might be a portent for him, or he might have no way to escape from it. In the spider's world, his natural wisdom allows him to escape from this bullet; the vibration sends him an alarm to escape this brute force. Like the spider, a bird hovering over her young or a butterfly delicately poised in their closed and small world are perfectly efficient.

So far we have been discussing the view of nature which has the same irony in Frost's pastoral depictions. Frost's art tells us that the natural world, with its purity, simplicity and innocence, has more kindness than man's. The fact that the natural world is below man's world does not give him the right to forget that he can harm this other world. Man has the suffering of struggle in this life, unlike the spider, the bird and the butterfly living without knowing the bullet's significance.

We are given more than a picture of nature with Frost's help. The poem portrays an outbreak of a battle. The role of the poem is evaluating the battle and the comparison of nature and man's world. Whereas nature goes on its path blindly, man's path and acts are chosen by his determination. One day the bullet might be off target and a man might die. What makes man's life meaningful is the absolute death for him. If the bullet is off target, it will not be an accident. On the contrary, human beings are constantly reminded of the issue of survival. Nature has a narrow area when compared with man's plenitude of experiences, indicated by his consciousness of death. The existence of battle stems from man's awareness of life while nature just exists. Battles also exist despite the fact that man is capable of thinking, feeling and suffering. Real death is possible in the human world which is different from the world other species live in. The spider, the bird may be killed yet they do not live a real life. Nature never dies. The big difference between humans and the inhabitants of nature is the meaning of life; for the spider life is feeding himself as a hunter, for the bird caring for her young, and these are instincts not intentions. Except for humans, other species are not aware of the bullet and its malice. Cruelty- related to

the bullet- and heroism- after the bullet has reached its target- have a place only in human battle.

Frost's discussion of suffering in his nature poems has inspired me to have a closer look his poems which display clearly the contrast between man and nature and enabled Frost to show us the major issues of human life. He has affection towards nature, which portrays beauty and love, as well as horror and loneliness. Lynen has expressed the concern that the poem in which a young couple has a walk in nature, "Two Look at Two", confirms our understanding revealed above. Darkness falls after they have climbed up a hillside and they feel disappointment because they can not carry on their walk. The reason for the disappointment is the desire to go into nature. The darkness falling in nature would be dangerous (151) :

.....
With barbed-wire binding. They stood facing this,
Spending what onward impulse they still had
In one last look the way they must not go ...

On up the failing path, where, if a stone
Or earth slide moved at night, it moved itself;
No footstep moved it. 'This is all,' they sighed,
Good-night to woods.' But not so; there was more.

.....
Two had seen two, whichever side you spoke from.
'This must be all.' It was all. Still they stood,
A great wave from it going over them,
As if the earth in one unlooked-for favor
Had made them certain earth returned their love. (qtd. in Lynen, 151)¹⁴

The couple comes across a couple of deer looking at them from the other side of the wall. They stare at them in astonishment, and then the mysterious doe and buck go on their way and move away from this couple which seems as mysterious to them as they do to the couple.

¹⁴ "Two Look at Two"

This poem is an evidence for the distance between human life and nature. The couple stops at a wall where they see the deer and can not go further, just look at them with surprise. The other side of the wall is unknown and treacherous for the couple. They can not reach each part of nature like the deer do and the words “This must be all” are signs of an impassable path.

As always discussed above Frost’s affection and horror towards nature are best discovered in his analogies. He creates a view in which a songbird, butterfly and wood are described and it has a parallelism with human life. Human beings look back in regret with the discontent of their everyday life and “The Oven Bird” sings for him in a bitter tone remembering summer and spring sadly.

If we come to a final aspect of Frost’s nature poetry, he has a deep tendency to deal with personification that is common in nature poems. As mentioned and compared at the very beginning of this section, Frost’s personification is different from those that literary figures of Romantic period depicted. The Romantics’ personification takes the form of brief metaphors while Frost uses extended analogies. The “Ode to Autumn”, written by Keats, supports this point well; the poet depicts a woman, and instead of comparing her with the season he prefers to suggest their similarities through his effective descriptive images for that lady and her presence in the autumn. Unlike Frost’s explicit mode of personification, Romantics blended humans and nature rather than comparing them. Frost, on the other hand, not only compares things in nature with man but also reveals their similarities. His comparison is like a shedding of light on the nature which he explores, and his personification is the analogy between man and nature, therefore it is the primary way to see them all. How Frost conceives nature is foregrounded through his mode of personification which is a leading manner in his contemporary. His sustained comparison is possible within a framework in which nature and human are conceived different and separate; yet in a way under the shadow of parallelism.

In his discussion Lynen touched upon the contrast which makes the human qualities of Frost’s animals so vivid. We can state that Frost’s personification is pretty close to the absurd which has a tone and can be easily slip out of the control of

the poet. In “The Runaway” the illustrations made by its tone display an almost weird approach and the poet himself is aware of the jeopardy but his depiction of animals is also humorous (152). Have a look at the poem “Waspish” and consider the epigram:

On glossy wires artistically bent,
He draws himself up to his full extent.
His natty wings with self-assurance perk.
His stinging quarters menacingly work.
Poor egotist, he has no way of knowing
But he's as good as anybody going (qtd. in Lynen, 153).¹⁵

Frost’s personification has a serious aim, and his humor might be a way of safeguarding against absurdity. Some poems, at first reading, might be taken as comic but in their humor we are shown serious matters, for example in the poem “Departmental”. This poem, which depicts the uncaring attitude of the group towards the individual can be exemplified as a great illustration of Frost’s pastoral technique. The ant colony is a reflection of human society in a different small world of animals and the ant hive is compared to human life:

Ants are a curious race;
One crossing with hurried tread
The body of one of their dead
Isn't given a moment's arrest -
Seems not even impressed.
But he no doubt reports to any
With whom he crosses antennae,
And they no doubt report
To the higher up at court.
Then word goes forth in Formic:
'Death's come to Jerry McCormic.'(qtd. in Lynen,1960)¹⁶

Animal life is different from human life with its blindly mechanical processes. Frost draws a picture by showing this difference in this small ant life as a miniature human society. The poet depicted this comparison in the very essence of the poem. As we discussed before the poem is full of humor and funny because it

¹⁵ “Waspish”

¹⁶ “Departmental”

looks around in the life of ants and humans to find the similarities. This technique is only possible for a poet who explores and introduces us to the boundary between man and nature which is separated by an inalterable wall.

III.

PART II- POEMS BY FROST

1. ON "MENDING WALL":

1.1 The Barriers Between People:

The mass of men lead lives of quiet deperation.... There is no play in them, for this comes after work. (Thoreau) (qtd. in Lentricchia).

Thoreau had a sole purpose when he asked “Who are bad neighbors?” and with the purpose of answering this question he said: “They who suffer their neighbors’ cattle to go at large because they don’t want their ill will,- are afraid of to anger them. They are abettors of the ill doers” (qtd. in Montiero). Another question comes to our mind and Thoreau could have asked,” Who are good neighbors?” and the answer might have been “Those who build and maintain walls which keep out their neighbors’ cattle.” (qtd. in Montiero).

The central question included by Frost, who is Thoreau’s latter disciple, in “Mending Wall” is “Do walls make effective tools to keep human relationships fresh?”. However, as the reader, we cannot easily decipher the answer from the poem. Frost presented us with a poem which left out important information and the key for that lies in the final lines of the poem:

Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."(qtd. in Montiero).

Before discussing the human relationships and building walls in their own world and own area to keep others away, we first have to talk about the themes of this poem. Holland points out that this poem is the most often anthologized and analyzed poem of Frost. If we start to look deeply into this poem we see that several

phrases particularly are used in a repetitive way: “spring mending-time,” “frozen ground-swell,” “once again”, “spring is the mischief in me.” As these phrases make clear, one of the major themes is the cycle of the seasons or, more precisely, the cycle of human relations related to the seasons. (Holland).

Particular lines and images portrayed in the poem are brought together by Frost with the one of the major theme of parallelism. This is not just a physical wall which is associated with the parallelism, like the two men walking on the same path but also a mental wall created in our minds and attitudes: “We meet to walk the line,” “ We keep the wall between us as we go,” “One on a side.” Mending this wall means closing the passage of others to their own area where they might meet physically and mentally. This wall makes the two men and the two minds remain parallel on opposite sides of that wall (Holland).

If we go back to our central theme of human relations, we should start with and point out the last line of the poem. “Mending Wall” is always remembered with for its marvelous line “Good fences make good neighbors” (27.45). These fences, used as a metaphor by the poet are not only real but also symbolic in Frost’s world of poetry. According to our poet, the fences are an unnecessary barrier between the narrator’s property and his good neighbor’s. But the lines “My apple trees will never get across/And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him” show that the stone separates the narrator’s orchard from his neighbor’s pine trees (25/26, Curtis).

Frost uses the image of the fences symbolically, they are what separates us from each other. Frost repeats the word “something” in his very first lines and in line 35. He says “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall”. What is that “something” and what does it stand for? There might be different answers for these questions, but one of them is very simple - actually the poet intentionally makes his readers give this answer - nature. This “something” could be nature and we are given hints pointing us in this direction with the phrases “sends the frozen-ground-swell under it/ And spills the upper boulder in the sun” (2/3). The other answer might be “Elves” (36), when the poet states that his neighbor doesn’t get it and continues believing in

what his father said (“He will not go behind his father’s saying” (43)) proving the disconnected human relations (Curtis).

The poet speaks but the neighbor is unconvinced:

Before I built a wall I’d ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense,” he says (32-34). Again,
Something there is that doesn’t love a wall
That wants it down...”(35-36 qtd. in Curtis).

Each spring our poet lets his neighbor know that it is time to build a wall and resigns himself to the process of “mending fences” with his neighbor: “Set the wall between us once again”. However our neighbor doesn’t get it and states that “Good fences make good neighbors” (27). The fences and walls are built for no reasons (in line 31 “Where are the cows? But here there are no cows”). If only the poet tries to convince his neighbor and readers that the barriers between him and his neighbor are not necessary because there are no cows (Curtis).

Frost’s intention with the lines “Not of woods only and the shade of trees/ He will not go behind his father's saying/ And he likes having thought of it so well (42-44 gtd. in Curtis)” coming out of his neighbor inner world, is showing us that his neighbor is living in a state of oblivious ignorance and has the comfort of believing his father’s thought is better. The bitter-sweet irony created by Frost conjures up the reality which keeps us apart from other people and outer life. This reality through this poem is the walls we set between us with the hope of being “good neighbors”.

Wrenne discussed about this poem and he suggests in his article that Frost’s poem is a story of two neighbors who are setting and repairing the stone wall which is a line between their worlds. Frost has a great ability of describing the view of New England postcard which enables reader to conjure up and feel the components of this view vividly. However Robert Frost’s aim is not only to invite his readers to see the challenged traditional views by youthful reasoning, and but also to sound a wake up call.

As the title of this section makes clear that the division between people comes out from different and opposing viewpoints, which results in walls being set between

them. The speakers of the poem have different thoughts about the wall they are mending. The former speaker, who is the poet himself, is younger than the latter one and voices “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall” (1). When the second speaker’s turn comes he runs counter to the first speaker and says “Good fences make good neighbors” (27) with the thought of keeping others away from his life. One of them has the role of displaying the futility of a wall and the other one holds the idea of its necessity as a life-long belief (Wrenne).

The final aspect of Frost’s reflection on human relationships in this poem discusses the free loving with those around us. “Mending Wall” is a great example of the magic that can be found in this love. Through the yearly mending struggle people who walk the wall throw magic spoken spells. The influence on the broken parts comes from the ritually repeated tasks, carried out in their hope of being able to mend the wall. In the same way, man’s yearly attempt to mend his relationships becomes a repeated ritual, resulting in expressions such as “It has been a long time since I called you, I couldn’t call you, thought of you all the time” (Nickerson).

We should ask if we are walling our lives in or walling others out, what doesn’t love the wall we built in our lives. When people are protected by keeping their walls mended around them, they do not presumably consider this mending of walls to be a futile action. They prefer talking to people via “Myspace”, “Facebook”, and “emails” and might as well have the line “Good fences make good neighbors” tattooed on their palms. It is beyond their desire to embrace the relationships with the magic of this world as experienced without walls and barriers (Nickerson).

Burnshaw shares his ideas from a different perspective to shed a different light on the open-ended conclusion part of the poem, which draws attention to the day of Frost’s flight to Israel and interview with reporters. It was the day when Frost talked about the boundary that troubled him, which runs right through the middle of Jerusalem. That wall which was taken down long after marked the division between Jordan and Israel. This is just a great and real example for the barriers between people and nationalities. Another explanation made by Frost is that “these fences are always being built up and falling down throughout history”. During this interview Frost paused for a moment to help readers to catch on and throw the question marks

off and then added, "It's the other fellow in the poem who says that. I don't know. Maybe I was both fellows in the poem" for the line "good fences make good neighbors" (qtd. in Burnshaw).

He said "maybe?" Just as he was both husband and wife in "The Death of the Hired Man," in "Home Burial," and in "West Running Brook," he was both the speaker and neighbor in "Mending Wall." Frost's absolute mastery of the rhythms of actual speech, it is necessary to note that two other poems of contrarities, of opposing truths,, opposing point of views are given a place. They are beyond neat and certain conclusions which provide no one way answer and leave the reader at rest and witness both sides of a troubling encounter.

1.2 Nature doesn't love a wall

In this poem 'something' is personified and it causes holes in the wall and forces the neighbors to reset it each year. It stands for nature which has a fundamental objection to the existence of walls and barriers between people and takes down the stones:

“Something there is that doesn't love a wall
That sends the frozen ground-swell under it
And spills the upper boulder in the sun
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast”(1-4 qtd. in Wrenne).

Not only nature but also its members (named as rabbits and hunters) help to bring down the walls and Wrenne suggests that Frost contrasts the gaps with the activities of hunters:

The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.(5-11 qtd. in Wrenne).

We have been introduced to the true meaning of the poem in a way. So far, we have been discussing Frost's reflection on man's isolation and its connection to something in nature. According to these explanations and analysis of Frost's poetry, nature has plenty of remedy for humans' isolation and for the barriers set by them. Therefore we might ask that question: Doesn't nature really love walls and isolation? The answer is almost certainly positive.

Frost's "Mending Wall" triggers its readers to consider the differences between people that are mostly reflected in their daily work, relationships with each other and even with nature. The neighbors' intention of mending this wall as a yearly task which divides their properties in other word their world for a period till it is ruined by nature is analyzed by Frost. This analysis sheds light the holes appeared

and the first speaker blames nature for not wanting a wall. When we think about a wall which is made from natural materials the fact is that it is not natural being just manmade. Frost seems to point out that this wall is something performed in nature but does not a part of it.

As we discussed above the two neighbors have different point of views suggesting different ideas for the crumbling wall. One of them blames elves but admits that they are not to blame which presents a different view. For the poet it is hard to see the other's perspective because they differ from each other even in their philosophy of the work. The lines below which portray the neighbor who finds wall mending amusing exemplify the suggestion above (Wrenne):

"And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each."(13-16 qtd. in Wrenne)

With his jovial mind the speaker sees this mending task like a game:

One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard (21-23 qtd. in Wrenne).

These lines display that the neighbor make tries to joke with the other speaker playing the game according to the rules: "My apple trees will never get across/ And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him" (24-25 qtd. in Wrenne). However the other speaker is aware of his disagreement about this play and mischievous attitude by carrying on mending the wall and saying "Good fences make good neighbors."

"Something" is an unknown and is emphasized by Frost suggesting that it is a mystery but the line "frozen ground swell under it" is a hint for us to say that it is nature scientifically moving in waves. The poet makes us think that the mystery of this wall has a destroying force with "no one has seen them made or heard them made" and puts spell on the wall to make the stones stay in their places "Stay where you are until our backs are turned" (19). This line appears to mean that not long after the neighbors turn their back and disappear the walls are bound to fall.

The cooperation of the two men is for rebuilding the barrier between them and the purpose is to reinforce the sense of property of their gardens. Frost shows that the effort of mending and preventing the wall being destroyed by nature is not plausible rather pointless. As they have their own tress on their sides not animals to pass other side, a wall is unnecessary there. The negative stance about walls is that its side is close to the nature and this fact is in his dislikes:

“What I was walling in or walling out
And to whom I was likely to give offence.” (32-3 Frost 97)

The attitude Frost seems to create that wall building may offense both human and nature on account of man-made barriers and divisions’ existence against nature which takes a wider and deeper place in his poems. He repeats and put an end that first sentence:

“Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,
That wants it down.” (34-5 Frost 97)

Frost has an intention of suggesting a different kind of explanation mischievously (“Spring is the mischief in me”) with the word “elves” but in the end unquestioning neighbor seems pretty contented with his father’s saying. Even though the lines “like an old stone savage armed” creates a vivid image of him with a stone grasping in each hand and making him seem a cruel part of nature he tries to tame, the relationship with nature is stems from unthinking tradition and the necessity of controlling nature.

As a last reflection on human’s connection with nature, man made boundaries created to keep others away from his life can not face the natural forces which has a far greater influence on them. The walls around us even if mended yearly will be destroyed more effectively than man will.

2. ON "AFTER- APPLE PICKING"

2.1 Self-Knowledge through Nature

Several of Frost's finest poems portray prominently nature. "After Apple-Picking" is seen, upon first reading, a vivid poem regarding a rural farmer picking apples at the end of harvest. However when people look more in depth at Frost poems, they will find much more than their eyes see. What is conveyed through this poem is the ending of life with the help of symbolism of the apple picker. Like the end of the harvest of apples which is related to the diverse people in different periods of life, our speaker as a person comes to the end of his life.

The poet describes his concern regarding the arrival of sleep that will put an end his labor. Conder suggested that the opening lines of the conclusion part which harbors the ambiguous words and images "trouble" and "sleep" presents an understanding for the poem:

One can see what will trouble
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.(36-42 Frost 225)

The best way is to keep the words "trouble" and "sleep" separately to meet the purpose despite they are closely connected to each other. The speaker is apparently aware of his sleep and what will trouble his sleep, but he lacks in something that is the kind of sleep which is uncertain and overtaking him. "After Apple Picking" answers the questions which emerge in our mind while reading this poem: What is the nature of the sleep? What is the nature of trouble? (Conder).

One of the possible death forms is sleep according to several familiar references. The very situation of the poem might be explained through the myth of Adam and Eve which is Frost's fascination and preoccupation with the human consequences of their fall. After the apple was picked in the Garden of Eden, man was expelled into a world full of sin and death. Life is a process ending in death and

Frost suggests the possibility of the speaker's journey to an immortal sleep. A human speaker seizes the opportunity of a moment of interaction or encounter with nature, any kind of natural subject or experience which is usually included in his poems. What happens after these encounters? The speaker explicitly responds this question in this poem; the interaction takes the man to a profound realization and significant consequences which is nature's death emphasized by the season of the year and a pattern of death, in other word resurrection suggested by the woodchuck's hibernation (Conder).

The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep. (40-42 Frost 225).

Frost's admire of nature leads him to create literary products hosting the engagement of man with nature both manual labor and self-exploration. This exploration results in a few existence, self- knowledge and significant understanding of human stance on earth. The focus on the act of discovery and realizations are expressed to display how human being occupied with nature and its leading to development and knowledge through this poem.

"After- Apple Picking" is one of the poems which dwells upon the realizations mentioned above. Harvesting fruit through a day results in the speaker's new understanding; if life is final sleep or death. As we suggested above, the central issue and a constant mention of the poem is sleep related to hard work of picking apple. However this sleep is not given explicitly and no say of what kind of sleep; usual rest or eternal one. The job of picking apple is during winter shedding light over deeper meaning that is the tiredness of the speaker, and winter makes him aware of his physical and mental state. The time of winter leans toward the meaning of how his time to sleep or death is pretty close.

Conder discusses that the attitude of the speaker toward his sleep is complicated due to the possible forms of sleep which overtakes him. This may be a night's sleep from which the speaker awakes, feels refreshed and ready to deal with the daily tasks; apple picking. The word "night" is used in the poem to support this

possibility; at “night” he is “drowsing off” and we see that the speaker is ready to go to bed after he has completed his labors doing his best. But Conder adds that “night” and “essence of winter sleep” are associated giving a metaphoric frame and presenting different meanings. One of them is a sleep similar to nature’s that his sleepy state may be related to the “essence of winter sleep.” The poem has enough correspondences to help us understand the connection between human and natural worlds showing one probable kind of sleep. The year is close to conclusion as the speaker’s apple- picking stops, and “essence of winter sleep” is closely related to his “drowsing off”:

Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off (7-8 Frost 224).

The question comes to our mind; what is the reason of the reference to the woodchuck as his sleep is associated with nature’s:

The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep (40-2 Frost 225).

Surely the woodchuck could not say these lines; the speaker’s acceptance of whimsy conclusion reduces the possibility of sweet sleep of human. The analogy between a man and an animal foregrounds the realities of woodchuck’s incapability of dreaming and desiring great harvest, but capability of physical hibernation for months unlike man. This comparison does not only create a simple contrast but also presents an implied analogy between human’s sleep and nature’s. The point is that the woodchuck is able to emerge in the spring after its hibernation which takes months in winter. This is the cycle of nature and if only man has the capacity of desiring great harvests, he may follow this cycle with his desires like woodchuck does (Conder).

Frost asks a question in the end of the poem which is making the speaker uncertain about the comparison: “Long sleep, as I describe coming on/ Or just some human sleep”. The speaker puts forward the contraries by describing that sleep is coming. But it is obvious that the comparison with nature and human’s connection

create his speaking damaged by the suggestions about the sleep of nature that is different from human's (Conder).

From the very beginning of the poem it seems that nature's state is alien to the speaker. The poet concludes the first part of the poem with the comment of the speaker who has no longer interest in picking apples as he associates nature to his own uses: "But I am done with apple- picking now." It is high time for nature to sleep as winter arrives which is parallel between his drowsiness and the "essence of winter sleep":

Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off (7-8 Frost 224).

The suggestions above create a different point of view that the speaker's sleep is not associated with "the scent of apples". "The scent of apples" is more related to the "essence". Through a sheet of ice a strange sight of the winter world is described. Frost makes his speaker see "the world of hoary grass" through this "glass". Apart from this glass in other word any other object in the external world the speaker views is not presented in the poem. As Conder stated the pane of ice falls and breaks like the apples falling from tree which create great pains in the speaker. This is the poet's deliberate description of the details significantly suggesting his alienation from nature.

So immediately the question comes to our mind: what would "some human sleep" be if the speaker has alienation from nature? The speaker's physical and mental tiredness may result in his enter the world of renewal. But it is not certain the his sleep is the renewal one. To argue about this sleep of renewal, we, as readers, should compare man's cycle with nature's that is beyond to answer according to this poem. Presumably Frost differentiates man from nature sharply because this is Frost's habit of speaking contrasts and his reflection on nature is greater than the view of sleep.

Nature which has the power of revival can renew itself automatically but man is beyond from this renewal. Man has no creative revival but has source of creativity that his harvest has value and his harvesting task is worthwhile. His activity and its purpose are questioned by the speaker therefore it is probable to say that man's sleep may be for his creative powers will last until man puts aside his doubts. It is significant to note that the poet makes it strongly clear that once he valued his harvesting: "desired" a "great harvest," and the extraordinary discipline and control are justified thanks to huge desire of the speaker (Conder):

There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall (30-1 Frost 225).

The phrase "cherish in hand" is the sign of manual contact that is associated with the sense of value and the following lines confirm this suggestion:

For all
That struck the earth,
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,
Went surely to the cider-apple heap
As of no worth (32-6 Frost 225).

As we said before the speaker's talking the contraries is reflected through the line "As of no worth" that is significant phrase. Actually the fallen apples even if it is said that they have no values, possess great value for the speaker. Since the speaker says that "I am overtired/ Of the great harvest I myself desired" he makes his past activity clear and has a sense of relative value. The ambiguity is here that the speaker is in a mood of describing the contraries of the harvest itself, the fallen apples have no worth but he harvested the apples and this harvest task has a great worth. It is necessary to note again that the speaker has doubts (Conder).

The speaker has doubts regarding the values and its questioning that stems from his mentioning of apple-picking, and his confusion is reflected through his dreams. However it is difficult to say that if the "dreaming" is within a frame of visual description of the apples or consists of the aftereffects of harvesting apples.

When he is awaked this dreaming has probably been experienced and more than a simple night's sleep. It is possibly like the experience of someone who feels the rocking of a boat when he foots on land. Varied sensations are observed by the reader that is the eminent contrast between visual and other sensory elements. The "ache, the "pressure," and grumbling of the apples are less intense than the task of harvest as the apples are "magnified." For the apples have a stance in mind's eye, this exaggeration makes the apples enlarged than anything in life and has its own independence, beyond he speaker's control.

When one experiences of staring at an object for a long time, the impression is kept after the eyes are closed. Like one feels when wakes up nature of this dream is associated with the inconstancy of the apples' movement. When eyes are closed, the vivid picture the speaker sees is the apples. But apples disappear when the eyes are opened. The image that is kept possibly in mind is magnified. However Frost's poetry makes his readers interested in the reality and this explanation falls behind in sufficiency. The poet has an intention of showing the form of the result of the inspirational activity which is the speaker's dreaming. The speaker puts an end the dream with the statement; "I have had too much / Of apple-picking: I am overtired."

As mentioned above, the speaker's interest about the nature of sleep is related to his concern about his values which brings immediately the contrast between himself and the woodchuck. The renewal is automatically occurs for woodchuck as it is part of nature. Frost's poem presents the idea of some certain knowledge of human values and doziness which is probably needed by the speaker to renew him. And Conder asks the question of where is such knowledge come from which reminds us that this is a poem about the happenings following apple- picking. As touched upon the Garden of Eden above expands the meaning of the poem. Man's expel from Eden stems from the first picked apple by man and man commences to labor with the knowledge of good and evil. The speaker who lives in fallen world has no certain knowledge unlike Adam. The very beginning of the poem talks about the speaker's leader:

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,
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 (1-5 Frost 224).

The ladder is sticking through a tree toward heaven that he has been supposed to descend it. After climbing and returning from certainty the single thing that he discovers is how little he has learnt and knows. He does not even have knowledge about the nature of his sleep despite the explicit possibilities.

If we go back to compare man's sleep with woodchuck's, it might be possible to say that his creative powers are related to the same kind of cyclical movement in nature. Physical and mental tiredness results in such a sleep which might be like nature's in its duration and renewal.

In this poem the analogy between man and nature in terms of the meaning of "sleep" is possible. Through woodchuck referents, Frost makes such a sleep probable in this poem, but from his larger view of man and nature, this kind of sleep is inconsistent with it. The second point of view concerning the sleep is not very different from the first one. The speaker's physical and mental powers are sufficient to confuse the speaker's perception of values. He is full of certain that he will awaken from this sleep and the complexities about values. After a good night or month rest, it will help the speaker to remove from the matter. Following the settlement of the matter, the speaker will awaken in a morning to turn to fresh tasks and he will see no need to try to understand his values. Putting aside all the discussion and giving Frost's poetic world, this meaning is the most probable.

Frost's mastery of association makes recovery improbable in the world of "After Apple – Picking." A third kind of sleep might be discussed thanks to the poet's mastery in hinting that is the speaker encounter with the apples which has triggered him to consider the nature also has led him to question where his values stem from. Therefore his sleep is not beyond of permanence. His fatigue caused him lose his values that is the situation he is to recover. If "I myself" is accepted the only

source, the speaker is to return that. The ladder enables the speaker to climb heaven in “After Apple-Picking”, and what other source do we have to restore desire as it fails and fade away.

Without knowing which sleep he will be in, the speaker is just falling asleep which foregrounds the questions; what will trouble his sleep and whatever sleep it is? (Conder) How long it takes will determine its nature. Only when he awakens he will answer these questions; what sleep it is or was.

2.2 Interaction with Nature through Apples

Frost spent most of his time in New England where he witnessed and inspired effectively by the pastoral scenes and places the majority of specific locations in his collections. Presumably he voices a great importance of nature in his poetry. His poems are not limited with stereotypical pastoral themes such as tree, bird. He believes that man has a dramatic struggle in the natural world such as conflict of alteration of seasons in “After Apple-Picking” in which, like other poems such as “Once by The Pacific,” and “Birches”, nature is portrayed as a central character in his works rather simply a background for poems (Vincent).

From the collection of North of Boston, “After Apple- Picking” sheds light for the reader to decipher something crucial in the life of the poet who strongly desires to do in his life. The harsh change of season and full of sure the nature bay by day presents the beauty and serenity. As many of his poems identify him a great admirer of nature, he wants voice that the big destruction and change in nature is substantially caused by humans. His desire is make people aware of nature’s life-saver potential for man people when it is being destroyed. As a symbolic poem After Apple Picking portrays Frost’s desire to save nature depicts his remorseful state to do that (“Critical Response towards Apple-Picking”):

“I’m overtired.
Of the great harvest I myself desired (28-9 Frost 225).

The speaker of the poem is close to a kind of sleep which might be infinite as discussed above and the commencing lines of the poem mentions about that:

My long two-pointed ladder’s sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,
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 (1-5 Frost 224).

Through the third line he wants his desire continue by gaining some power and using his potential to fill the barrel with apples. Not only desire but also regret covers his heart that his time is over. The power and routines of nature will continue

but his not. The apples are waiting to be picked and filled in barrel but if not picked they will be there next season unlike human being whose life span is limited and impossible to be retracted. The last part is concluded with “One can see what will trouble” motivating reader to wake up from their normal sleep to be aware of the nature’s indifference to man’s death and concerns about the destruction caused by humans which will affect them one day.

According to Montgomery, Frost places the drama of man in nature defining his attitude towards nature as “one of armed and amicable truce and mutual respect interspersed with crossings of the boundaries separating the two principles” (341). The characters in his poems must maintain his life and guide strongly knowing that nature has the potential of destroying them. It is necessary to add that in Montgomery’ essay responds the questions of what is Frost’s ideal of the natural world and what is man’s relation to it? The natural world is impersonal and away from feelings, kinship and willing creating barriers between man and nature (339-53).

To draw a conclusion for this poem, Frost’s use of apple which represents nature as a whole discusses the man’s interaction with the nature. The negative effects are fore grounded that come the scene when nature is disturbed and controlled by man for their own benefits. The speaker might be at his end of his life span and faces with the results of his disturbance on nature but he is aware of the severity of his mistakes:

I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight
I got from looking through a pane of glass
I skimmed from the drinking trough (9-11 Frost 224).

After the apples are picked but unnaturally, the cold of sleep or season arrives harshly and quickly. Frost portrays the way the Earth is disturbed, ruined and not allowed to strip away its apples. The interaction between man and nature is damaged when the apples or the resources of the nature are picked without considering the probability of animals’ ability to use them. Frost demonstrates the disrespectful and

intolerant attitude toward nature that is irrevocable damage making winter move painfully.

The narrator of the poem feels the weight of his actions on him and reflects the message of his resignation with these lines:

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 (4-6 Frost 224).

With a strong enmity nature makes him muse, surrender and feel beaten by the knowledge that there is no one to blame but himself. This is the poem created to reflect the poet's ideas that are man's realization of earth's ruin will not repair the nature. The style of Frost represents nature in a big context- in After Apple- Picking- to illustrate a respect for nature which has a powerful relationship with man. Frost successfully accomplishes to display readers the description of nature and his own strong feelings toward it in this poem.

3. ON "TWO LOOK AT TWO"

3.1. Indifferent Nature to Man

Through "Two Look at Two" Frost introduces the readers to a short walk of a pair of lovers in a wooded mountain. A doe staring at them across a fence prevents them from turning back when the night approaches. The staring of two at two that is called a spell is broken when she walks off. But they are stopped once more by the appearance in the same place of "an antlered buck of lusty nostril" who "viewed them quizzically with jerks of head." The lovers stand enthralled as if the nature is in one unlooked for favor (Hart and Leininger).

In this poem Frost's main concern is man's love of nature but depicted sympathetically and honestly. Frost avoids using any symbolism of the unconscious mind making the lines not as profound in meaning as "After Apple-Picking." The young lovers are portrayed as lovers of nature as well as of each other. Regretfully realizing that they must turn back and leave the woods, they are having a walk in a mountainside at the approach of night. They are rewarded with a face-to-face meeting with two deer, one is doe and the other is a buck thanks to their adventurous spirit. The pair has no fear and stand absolutely still like the deer looking in turn at them. Looking at the romantic couple the buck is attributed thoughts by them (Tien 38):

As if to ask, 'Why don't you make some motion?
Or give some sign of life? Because you can't.
I doubt if you're as living as you look (33-5 qtd. in Tien).

What the young man and woman feel is thrill and a union love strongly which makes them stretch out a hand. However their ecstasy triggers them to move toward the deer which is likely a reason to break the spell and cause a fear into the deer. Therefore any human trigger will ruin the momentary illusion of union:

Two had seen two, whichever side you spoke from.
'This must be all.' It was all. Still they stood,
A great wave from it going over them,
As if the earth in one unlooked-for favour
Had made them certain earth returned their love (39-43 qtd. in Tien).

“Two had seen two” is the preceding line that the statement “it was all” refers to. The young couple have just seen and looked at the two without touching or communing with them. Doe’s clouded eye and inability to see well, whereas the duck’s quizzical look directing them to stroll on their way. The indestructible barriers between man and nature symbolize the wall between young couple and deer. The union young people feel is only in their mind. The man is in the realm of illusion which is created by their feelings and hinted for the reader with the *as if*. The reader is not given any sign regarding nature’s return to man’s love. The encounter is full of sure a coincidence making it clear that as if nature were talking to them. However the fact is that the man has an imaginary and transient union which is experienced by human being (Tien 38-9).

According to Tien the poem consists of a number of elements which remind the reader that nature is belittled image and the setting of the poem is not described as Eden by its poet. What makes the reader think is that the young people is climbing on a path which is not smoothed-over trail and immediately consider their insecurity or in other word they are not guided safely home by a large round moon. Without insurance of safety, the couple is aware of the harsh realities of the way back (39):

With thoughts of a path back, how rough it was
With rock and washout, and unsafe in darkness (5-6 qtd. in Tien).

The barrier between the man and the deer is a wall which prevents the young people from upward climbing and separates them from the members of nature is a “barbed-wire.” This is described as an unhappy moment of prevention not a innocent bliss. On the contrary they have been already taught the uncertainty of nature’s return their love. Yet they do not turn their back with the strong feeling of yearning toward nature and expecting for any natural happening to influence them. Frost creates these young couple and their struggle in this poem intentionally to demonstrate his own suffering from the barrier between man and nature and furthermore its indifference to human who feels the great aloneness in the universe. Simply because of that the couple looks for any signs in the nature. This is Frost’s poetry technique stemming

from the recognition of the validity and reality impulses in man. It is obvious that nature is away from giving any sign to man if man can not admit the reality of nature's being which the clearest sign is (Tien 39).

Frost who doesn't avoid creating such a poem and the young couple who insists on climbing up despite darkness are not halted by the nature's indifference and responds to it in a romantic way. The poem is a story reflecting the poet's inner conflicts presenting a poem to the reader which neither criticizes nor satirizes the responses of man's impulses toward nature. There is not a sympathetic commune between man and nature due to Frost's acceptance of the prominent elements of nature which are indifferent to man and but destructive to both. Frost deeply feels the manifestation and nature's creativity which results in his conflict to accept the realities of nature. This is the style of the poet to reflect the feelings of conflict, fear and mainly alienation of man in his poems. Man's isolation is portrayed through the images of moon, woods, stars, storms, night and sea which are the stated in the expressions of nature and caused Frost feel alienated. This conflict makes him experience his identification with nature and he explores a truth out of conflict (Tien 40).

4. ON "BIRCHES"

4.1. Boy's playful swinging?

Robert Frost said: *"I never go down the shoreline [from Boston] to New York without watching the birches to see if they live up to what I say about them in the poem"* (qtd. in Grimes).

"Birches", which is a bridge between poetic passion and physical love begins with the fantastic picture of a boy swinging on and bending birches. The commencing lines take the reader to a brilliant description of ice-laden branches of a tree blown by the wind. These branches are covered and adorned with cracked glazes "cracks and crazes their enamel/ the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells." According to Meyers, Frost is inspired by medieval cosmology and an effective well-known passage: "Adonais", written by Shelly, which is a requiem for Keats, whose life was cut short when he was at the height of his poetic powers. Frost reflects the influence of broken ice-glass into his poem: "You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen." Then the poet changes direction, to the theme of a boy swinging the birches. Keeping his poise, the boy climbs carefully and swings himself onto the branches "Toward heaven," he'd

...like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over.
May no fate willfully misunderstand me
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better (49-54 qtd. in Meyers)

And Meyers continues to elaborate that Frost believes that earth which is the right place for love and ought to be physical against the grim facts of life.

"Birches", a poem which contains disjointed descriptions, does not focus constantly on nature scenes; rather it shapes the thoughts from the pieces of memory and fantasy of a boy. Not always admired and receiving much critical discussion, the poem's vividness and the bittersweet speculation and varying interpretation made possible by its shifts of metaphors and tone makes it one of Frost's most popular

poems. The poet reflects upon the visual perspectives and makes his poem move back and forth between these perspectives: the boy's playful swinging and the ice storms bending the birch tree. This thematic interpenetration can make the poem seem baffling. The theme of imagination and will contradicting darker facts is introduced by the birches bent "across the lines of straighter darker trees." The action of the boy is not enough to bend the trees permanently but the ice storm, which is described for almost a third of the poem, is able to do this. This description creates a scene which synthesizes beauty and distortion. When the trees are bowed to the level of the bracken, the ice shell reveals a light and color that might be named suffering. The strange image of girls leaning their hair toward the sun as if in happy display sheds light on this suffering (Marcus).

A self-conscious speaker in the poem turns from his realistic and fantasized irrelevancy and states his preference for a boy's bending the birches. This action symbolizes the controlled experience opposing the genial fatality of ice storms. A thoughtful connection to nature, which allows him to acquire this wisdom, is made by the boy's playfulness, taking the place of an unavailable fellowship. The difference between the ice storm's permanent damage to the birches and a boy's temporary one does not prevent the boy from holding down the trees. Life's difficulty and changeable balances are described through the practice of his swinging (Marcus).

In the third part of the poem, a more personal and philosophical tone comes to the fore. Being a swinger of birches is a youthful activity that we can go back to just by dreaming. Marcus notes that birch trees portray the order and control that is lacking in ordinary experience. Being a birch swinger who displays a desire for the ideal or imaginative isolation helps the boy to get away from earth for a while. The lines "I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree.../ Toward heaven" backs up this suggestion. The boy wants to leave earth, but an immediate apologetic claim is thrown in by the speaker that he does not mean that. His real desire is to be dipped

down toward earth in pursuit of the ideal in life which sounds like death. However, Frost's main concern and pursuit in this poem is the balance between reality and ideal, rather than yielding to death, as he suggests in "After Apple-Picking.

Reginald L. Cook, a living voice, quotes Frost's remarks on "Birches" at the Bread Loaf School of English; Cook gives place for Frost's words:

"In spite of his deprecatory view of explication, Frost revealed a good deal about his art. When he disclosed his feeling about certain words in "Birches," he gave a searching insight into what makes a poet's use of descriptive words stand up. And how cavalierly he did it! He offered "this little note on 'Birches' before I begin to read it. See. The kind of explication I forbid," he said self-consciously. Then with disarming slyness, he said: "I never go down the shoreline [from Boston] to New York without watching the birches to see if they live up to what I say about them in the poem." Invariably the listener laughed, but on the double take he realized that Frost, the careful craftsman, was confirming his assertion that birches bend to left and right by verification. Getting details right was a telling responsibility. His birches, he insisted, were not the white mountain or paper birch of northern New England (*Betula papyrifera*); they were the gray birch (*Betula populifolia*)" (qtd. in Montiero).

Montiero quotes Thoreau's description of a day of rain and ice in Concorde, on December 31, 1852 in his journals:

"It is a sort of frozen rain this afternoon, which does not wet one, but makes the still bare ground slippery with a coating of ice, and stiffens your umbrella so that it cannot be shut. Will not the trees look finely in the morning?" For the next few days Thoreau described the storm's "fine" effects upon the landscape. On the first day of the new year he observed: "This morning we have something between ice and frost on the trees. . . . What a crash of jewels as you walk! . . . The drooping birches along the edges of woods are the most feathery; fairy-like ostrich plumes of the trees, and the color of their trunks increases the delusion" (436-38 qtd. in Montiero).

Thoreau continues his report the next day with these words:

"In this clear air and bright sunlight, the ice-covered trees have a new beauty, especially the birches . . . , bent quite to the ground in every kind of curve. At a distance, as you are approaching them endwise, they look like white tents of Indians under the edge of the wood. The birch is thus remarkable, perhaps, because from the feathery form of the tree, whose numerous small branches sustain so great a weight, bending it to the ground, and moreover because, from the color of the bark, the core is less observable. The oaks not only are less pliant in the trunk, but have fewer and

stiffer twigs and branches. The birches droop over in all directions, like ostrich-feathers". (440 qtd. in Montiero).

Frost's dealing with imagery is anticipated by Thoreau's description of birches. However, Thoreau's entry on the following day offers an interesting variation on Frost's poem. The observable beauty of nature, stemming from its creative powers, is recorded as the day's response to nature by Thoreau. He elaborates on the comparative virtues of man and nature. And the first paragraph recorded by him effectively describes this "finest show of ice" (444 qtd in Montiero):

"Nothing dark met the eye, but a silvery sheen, precisely as if the whole tree—trunk, boughs, and twigs—were converted into burnished silver. You exclaimed at every hedgerow. Sometimes a clump of birches fell over every way in graceful ostrich-plumes, all raying from one centre. . . . Suddenly all is converted to crystal. The world is a crystal palace" (445 qtd. in Montiero).

The description of ice-laden birches is his last attempt and a new key in his consideration of birch trees:

"I love Nature partly because she is not man, but a retreat from him. None of his institutions control or pervade her. There a different kind of right prevails. In her midst I can be glad with an entire gladness. If this world were all man, I could not stretch myself, I should lose all hope. He is constraint, she is freedom to me. He makes me wish for another world. She makes me content with this. . . .

Man, man is the devil,
The source of evil

I have a room all to myself; it is nature. It is a place beyond the jurisdiction of human governments. . . . There are two worlds, the post-office and nature. I know them both. I continually forget mankind and their institutions, as I do a bank. (445-46 qtd in Montiero).

The point which foregrounds the comparison between Thoreau and Frost is that Thoreau's greeting of winter birches and his homily upon human's inferiority in the face of nature and Frost's similar reflections on these themes in "Birches." Whereas man makes Thoreau "wish another world", nature makes him content with this life; but from Frost's point of view it becomes a wish for him when life resembles nature and "life is too much pathless wood, so the poet would "like to get away from earth awhile."

Frost's wish to "climb black braches up snow-white trunk / Toward heaven" turns to come back and changes his mind and continues with the line "Earth's the right place for love." Frost's aphorism is obviously supported by Thoreau despite the fact that their initial agreement fades away. Because Thoreau's main concern is love of nature whereas Frost's is man's fundamental love for man that is remarkable (Montiero).

And Montiero continues with his reflections upon the lines quoted above: the role of Thoreau always seems to be that of an observer who perceives man's existence in nature. Man's existence is stopped for a period in nature's pure world and with this pause, Thoreau is warning mankind about what they are doing and what they have done. In the same entry Thoreau touches on the ringing bells: "'The bells are particularly sweet this morning. I hear more, methinks, than ever before. How much more religion in their sound, than they ever call men together to! Men obey their call and go to the stove-warmed church, though God exhibits himself to the walker in a frosted bush today as much as in a burning one to Moses of old" (443 qtd. in Montiero). Even if man has noble aims and his own messages, he has the capability of misinterpreting these messages despite the fact that the bells themselves are man-made. The birch and the frosted bush, not man, shelter the real beauty and divinity from Thoreau's point of view. The creation's focus consists of nature and nature's workings. For Thoreau, just a few men break into the realm of nature for a moment.

If we want to discuss the differences in values revealed in Thoreau's musings and Frost's poem, we need to first have a look the first twenty lines of the poem , which contain a description of the effect of an ice-storms on birches:

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay.
Ice-storms do that. Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves

As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust--
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed
So low for long, they never right themselves:
You may see their trunks arching in the woods
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun (1-20 Frost 90-1).

None of these lines suggest in any way that nature is superior or inferior to humanity nor that the two are equal. This is the “matter-of-fact” coming from what Frost sees as the 'truth'. However Frost does not suggest that the birches being bent “down to stay” is the result of ice storms. Instead, man’s effect on nature has its own meaning and, if given a choice, it would be a boy bending the birches. The boys’ role is that of a collaborator with nature rather than just an observer. By swinging the trees he has taken some of the tension out of their branches, making it easier for the ice storm to bend them. Frost’s poem signifies that nature’s beauty is improved if there is man’s effect on it. It is notable that this is just a response to Thoreau’s endless nature worship (Montiero).

After comparing Thoreau’s and Frost’s perception of birches, the main discussion of the poem in terms of its description of nature helps the reader to understand Frost’s poem. At the beginning of the poem the poet creates a character in the forest which is a place of mysterious life. The branches of the birches are close to the ground even if it is really difficult to bend them. The poet’s intention here is to make the reader question the truth and question who might be the swinger of the birches. Sümer points out that Frost wishes a boy to bend the branches down but it doesn’t take long to understand the impossibility of this action because of his innocence and naivete. To tame nature is possible for ice storms which, while themselves members of nature, are yet strong enough to hold the birches down (424) :

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay.
Ice-storms do that.....(1-5 qtd. in Sümer 424).

Harold Bloom, a professor of humanities, who reflects on the first part of the poem in *Modern Critical Views* on Robert Frost states:

Birches begins by evoking its core image against the background of a darkly wooded landscape. The pliable, malleable quality of the birch tree captures the poet's attention and kick off his mediation. Perhaps young boys don't bend them momentarily. Those "straighter, darker trees" stand ominously free from human manipulation, menacing in their irresponsiveness to acts of the will. The malleability of the birches is not total, however, and the poet is forced to admit this fact into the presence of his desire, like it or not. The ultimate shape of mature birch trees is the work of objective natural force, not human activity. Yet after conceding the boundaries of imagination's subjective world, the poet sees not to have constricted himself but to have been released (29-30).

The struggle between nature and nature is emphasized by Frost. The rain, snow and frozen ice are loads on the branches and bend them due to their weight. But the wind does not hesitate to blow these branches and make them touch each other, causing their surface to break. The sun shines and softens the ice with its warmth. The point is that the branches are subdued by the heavy ice but do not break. They are dragged to the ground, bent for so long and gain a new shape. The following lines are the illustration of the natural process and how nature encounters nature. And only nature can defeat nature - not man, not a naïve boy (Sümer 426).

Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust--
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed
So low for long, they never right themselves:
You may see their trunks arching in the woods

Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair (5-20 Frost 90-1).

Frost discusses man's state against nature after he has touched upon the depiction of nature versus nature. The boy's instinctive life, his passion and subconscious are portrayed in the ice storm. Humans have their own struggles and ice storms in their inner world, and the boy's ice-storm is his conflict, which is nature. When he becomes an adult aware of his existence and has the ability to control his passions, he will be able to bend the birches. No one will be near the boy to help him be aware of them, he is alone to manage them and when he gains experience, he will be mature enough and have enough control to defeat himself. Frost's intention in the following lines is to demonstrate to the reader the boy's transitional period from boyhood to manhood, which is the period of becoming as strong as nature (Sümer 428).

Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.
But I was going to say when Truth broke in
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm
(Now am I free to be poetical?)
I should prefer to have some boy bend them
As he went out and in to fetch the cows--
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,
Whose only play was what he found himself,
Summer or winter, and could play alone.
One by one he subdued his father's trees
By riding them down over and over again
Until he took the stiffness out of them,
And not one but hung limp, not one was left
For him to conquer. He learned all there was
To learn about not launching out too soon
And so not carrying the tree away
Clear to the ground.....(20-36 qtd. in Whicher and Ahnerbik)

As the poem continues with the boy's becoming a real man, according to Frost, it is time to control and maintain that control and passions which are a significant balance in life. He swings and reaches to the sky, which is the imaginary life of the boy, and he comes back to the ground, which signifies real life. The obligation of becoming rational means that the boy has a crucial duty, which is to

connect the ideal life with the real one, in other words deconstruction and reconstruction:

He always kept his poise
To the top branches, climbing carefully
With the same pains you use to fill a cup
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground (36-41 Frost 91-2).

According to Frank Lentriccia, in *The Redemptive Imagination*, these lines depict a man's dream of being a swinger on birch branches like he used to be once. In the middle of his life, he is struggling with the chaos of life which he would like to leave for a while as a way of finding relief:

One figure seems to imply another-the image of the farm youth swinging up, out, and down to earth again recalls the boyhood of the poet. For anyone but Frost the "pathless wood" is trite. But for him it carries a complex of meaning fashioned elsewhere. The upward swinging of the boy becomes an emblem for imagination's swing away from the tangled, dark wood; a swing into the absolute freedom of isolation, the severing of all "considerations". This is the transcendental phase of redemptive consciousness, a game that one plays alone. The downward movement of redemptive imagination to earth, contrarily, is a movement into community, engagement- love the games that two play together (qtd. in Bloom 32-3).

And the lines below tell the story of a man and his desire to be away from earth for a while as discussed above:

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,
And life is too much like a pathless wood
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
From a twig's having lashed across it open (42-8 qtd. in Bloom).

Sema Zafer Sümer notes, in *The Meaning of Being a Swinger of Birches*, the desire of getting out of the cultural structures which are full of chaos and changing them to reconstruct the cultural values from a broadened scope, from the ideal life in

the sky. This is the character's struggle. He does not avoid praying to God to come back to earth while swinging constantly. His swinging of birches is a symbol of endurance and patience. The real life is different from the ideal one due to its suitability for love (433).

I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over.
May no fate willfully misunderstand me
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better.
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
But dipped its top and set me down again.
That would be good both going and coming back.
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches (40-60 qtd. in Sümer).

The poem ends with the line "One could do worse than be a swinger of birches", which emphasizes the significance of modesty and humility. Love tags along behind the humility which is the highest virtue. A kind of philosophy of life is depicted here by Robert Lee Frost: humanity has the ability to be creative for the future and the reader is shown how and when humanity can blend the past with this creative future.

To conclude the discussion, the thing we most need to note in *Birches*, from the first line to the last one, is the level of Frost's clarity and understanding of life. To Frost, love is the one big factor to enable human beings to know how to control their passions, which will take them to a higher ethical level in the pursuit of truth. Man has the capacity of integrating the ideal life into the real one through balance and the feeling of humility. Not only reflecting the poet's life but also touching on every man, *Birches* gives life to the persona who looks into the heart of a memory, being a swinger of birches once more, to decipher what is to be seen and felt.

IV.

CONCLUSION

In modern American poetry, Robert Frost (1874-1963) is highly respected as the only great nature poet since the beginning of twentieth century. In his work *The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century* Joseph Warren Beach argues that in “the most typical of contemporary poetry, English and American, the philosophical concept of nature has virtually disappeared.” (547) Warren discusses “a great weariness has come over the literary mind, making it loath to grapple with cosmic problems, including the problem of man’s place in nature.”(547) Beach believes that Frost is not a nature poet because his opinion is “none of our poets has more steadily declined to formulate his thought in philosophical terms.” (551-53) Twenty years later another kind of opinion about nature poetry is offered by Langbaum and in Frost’s *The New Nature Poetry*. The belief Langbaum has is that the nature poetry has not disappeared from modern American Poetry. It is still alive, however, it has been radically changed since the nineteenth century poetry. Modern poetry consists of “the mindless of nature, its nonhuman otherness, a concept having nothing to do with pessimism and optimism.” Frost’s nature poems are benign and always consoling. (Langbaum 324)

A few more examples are needed to display Frost’s intriguing and profound style even though Beach and Langbaum’s debate on the reflection of Robert Frost upon nature and his connection to romantics has continued to the present. Frost’s poems are as important as any other twentieth century poems and require to be investigated deeper. W. H. Auden is an example to help us to see the influence of his life in the farm on his poetry. Auden points out the reality of Frost who has the role of tilling his own land. (Auden 293-98) However, Carlos Baker disagrees with Auden because he notes that for Frost man and God are completely separate entities. Despite his admiration of Wordsworth and Emerson, Frost does not completely agree with their belief in natural facts which are the emblems of supernatural truth. What Baker means is that although Frost is a lover of nature and portrays natural objects in his poetry, he is not thought of as a nature poet. (125)

Montgomery has his place in this debate and states that Frost and Wordsworth have different opinions about nature; whereas Wordsworth is good at demonstrating the image of nature, Frost moves around the truth of man's drama in nature. In this debate of Robert Frost and his poetry, they seem to ignore the poet's life experiences and the age in which he lives. His life extends from the late nineteenth century to the second half of the twentieth century. His life span shows that it is impossible to be away from having the inheritance of the Romantics and absorbing the modern thoughts which are incorporated in his nature poems (339-53).

Brought up by a romantic poetess, he loved nature and introduced to the poems of Wordsworth and Emerson. The reason why he tries to identify nature is his love of it. Like the Romantics, Frost conceives man and nature as separate prime realities but a dramatic encounter cause their joint. For the former and Frost, there is often a climax which occurs when human encounters nature in isolation, this confrontation makes him discover meanings about himself and the world he lives in. That's the most impressive individuality of him as a modern poet. Through his poems he faces this problem and explores ways that human is substantially related to nature. Frost focus on this relation and notes that man has the capacity to co- exist well with nature. However, this can be accomplished through accepting the realities of nature and learning to use it inventively. Both sides have needs; natural objects, man himself. Man is supposed to recognize what is the need of natural objects and what is man's need to know him. Society in which man lives distracts him from understanding meaning of his existence. But nature is a way to discover his state and makes him aware of himself in this world (Tien 34-5)

Through this recognition, man tries to survive with his mind-intelligence on which Frost fastens his hopes. Nature has a role of guidance for man to recover from his conflict and become aware of his mind's limitations. With his hopes Frost delivers a positive response to nature as indifferent power and inexorable process. It is not certain that nature is aware of its benign and diminished side but man's mind and imagination can be estimated by nature, which is the most important of these things. What makes Frost distinctive is his personal struggle with the common problem of twentieth century. His success and ability are great enough to present his

struggle in his poems without sentimentality. "Mending Wall," "After Apple-Picking," "Two Look at Two", and "Birches" are record of his fight for survival, enable them to mirror man's universal problems. Each poem involves an interaction with nature. This interaction mainly focuses on man's isolation in this universe and his connection to nature is dealt with in an unparalleled honesty of Frost. Without the help of social and cultural traditions he is capable of making something positive out of this complex relationship, which makes him truly a unique poet of our modern world.

V.

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