Chapter – I

Introduction

I’m what is called a sensibilist,
Or otherwise an environmentalist.

(Robert Frost “New Hampshire”)

Robert Frost (1874-1963) was a dominant presence in the American literary scene for close to half a century and that too at a time when it was dominated by prose writers. He could leave people spellbound with his “rich and ripe philosophy / That had the body and tang of good draught cider / And poured as clean as a stream” (Gibson qtd. in Morton). Philip L. Gerber doubted in 1965 whether “a decade will be time enough for the flood of Frostiana to subside” (Preface). Frost, however, continues to occupy the mind of his readers and critics alike with his poetry even decades later. What better example would suffice than the fact that in 1999, the third conference of Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), an important organization of ecocriticism, had as its theme — What to Make of a Diminished Thing — which, not coincidentally, forms the final line of Frost’s poem “The Oven Bird” (119) in Mountain Interval. Does this make Robert Frost an obvious choice for ecocritical study?

Frost is, no doubt, a suitable candidate for ecocritical study as his poetic text foregrounds the natural world, the first and foremost requisite that might endear him to the ecocritics who take up for study “the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Goltfelty, Introduction xiii). In Frost’s poetry the physical
world abounds. There is an “overwhelming presence of nature” in Frost’s poetry so much so that

His people prosper amid profusion. When they contain themselves in a room, nature presses against the window panes until she is strongly felt. Mountains rear high above man’s head; valleys curve to his inquiring eye; roads, open or leaf-strewn, invite his curious foot. Everywhere crowd the trees, singly or in dense dark woods. Brooks race downhill with silver-singing waters. Besides them, or against outcropping rocks in fields where the mower has recently passed, bloom tufts of flowers. (Gerber 153)

The natural world of Frost is characterized by changing seasons and with it the changing face of the landscape; his natural world extends from the earth to the sky which “roof[s] the entire cylorama in solid bands or in fragmentary blue” and this “memorable world of Robert Frost,” according to Gerber, “is pervasive, constant; it touches men’s lives at all points and is never too much with him” (153).

Frost’s relationship with nature was established early on in his poetry and has remained constant focal point up to the present, though revised and elaborated upon from time to time. Frost began as a nature poet and his interest in nature persisted throughout his career. John F. Lynen has found the nature poetry of Frost “so excellent and so characteristic” that he asserts that “it must be given a prominent place in any account of his art” (Ch. 5). And Frost’s nature poetry has undoubtedly garnered the kind of attention it deserved.

Sheldon W. Liebman, in “Robert Frost, romantic-poet,” has called Frost a romantic poet claiming that, “if the word romantic can be taken to refer to literary
works in which a moment of communion or transcendence is recounted, the experience is spiritually uplifting, and, most important, it is so emotionally powerful as to compel belief in a ‘higher’ reality,” then “the term can be used to distinguish ... one aspect of Frost’s poetry from another” (4). In his book The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost, John F. Lynen finds many reminiscences of Wordsworth, Keats, and other Romantics in Frost’s poetry. Jay Parini in his essay, “Emerson and Frost: The Present Act of Vision,” has called Frost “especially an American romantic — one whose primary source can be traced back to Emerson” (207). Roberts French, in “Robert Frost and the Darkness of Nature,” sees Frost as a “dark romantic” who has written “poems that express a certain joy in nature... [still] he is far from being a lover of nature; reading through his works, one finds that a major tone involves feelings of profound uneasiness, even of fear toward nature” (qtd. in Link 184). Carl M. Lindner also, in his essay, “Robert Frost: Dark Romantic,” places Frost in the tradition of America’s “dark” Romantic writers.

Many of Frost’s critics, however, believe that Frost was not a romantic. Amelia Klein, in “The Counterlove of Robert Frost,” finds that “the claim for Frost’s antiromantic stance...often staked on his supposedly antagonistic view of nature.” Liebman also observes that the main reasons which makes Frost an anti-romantic in the eyes of critics are that he is “a skeptic who regarded nature as an antagonist, stoicism as a moral ideal, and visionary experience as an illusion” (1). Frost, as Gerber finds, specifically dissociated himself from the pantheistic tradition of all sorts and “New Hampshire,” according to him, contains “Frost’s most explicit break with the pantheists” (Gerber 157-58). Nature, for Frost, if seen from romantic perspective, “is scarcely what it was for Bryant and other worshippers of the woods of the nineteenth century;” according to Gerber, because in Frost’s poetry, “Nature does not
exist to work continual miracles of revelation. Nor will it impart transcendental truths
to any poor, bare, forked creature who straggles near a brook or tuft of flowers” (154).
Lynen’s attitude towards Frost as a romantic poet is ambivalent; he observes that
“One may hear the Romantic harmonies in his work, but they reverberate within a
world quite changed” (Ch. 5).

Frost is known as a regional poet. “The focus of Frost’s vision of place is New
England” and his poems are “rooted in the particularities of place and expressed in a
common language,” according to Renigald Cook (17, 22). However, “Exulting in a
self-imposed limitation of subject matter,” Cook further contends, “Frost does start
with place but this is not where he leaves us” rather, “He makes the region a
microcosm for ideas and feelings that, in transcending the local, share the spectrum of
universal emotion and thought” (23, 24, 25). In the introduction to Readings on Robert
Frost, editor Andrea DeFusco calls Frost “the consummate New England poet... who
most consistently chose the region’s rural landscapes and characters to populate his
poems.” Frost’s poems, according to DeFusco, “far transcend any physical or poetic
geography, earning universal acclaim” (11). “Frost’s New England,” to Jamey Hecht
also, “was like a lens through which he focused a vision of the universe” (69). Morris
Dickstein, too, finds that “Frost set his poems in rural New England at a time when
the city was becoming the center of modern life” (3).

Corollary to the acceptance of Frost as a regional poet is the perception of
Frost as a pastoral poet, which many critics feel had been fuelled by Frost himself. By
“perching serenely on his New England hill while the rest of the world races by,” and
by “confining himself by choice largely to things ‘rustic’,” Frost deliberately fed the
misinterpretation that gave the critics the opportunity to criticize him for avoiding
“the overwhelming subjects of the twentieth century” (Gerber 138). Shortly after his *Collected Poems* were published in 1930, Frost, in Robert Faggen’s opinion, “himself affirmed the relationship of his poetry to a fundamental pastoral idea, the praise of rustic over urban life: ‘Poetry is more often of the country than the city... Poetry is very, very rural — rustic’” (49). Andrew J. Angyal also finds that by the Thirties, “Frost had made a conscious decision to remain a pastoral poet, a spokesman for rural American values, and deliberately to exclude from his poetry, although not from his awareness, the problems of modern urban and industrial America” and this he feels is suggested by the editorial choices in *Collected Poems* and *A Further Range* (49).

In *The Poetry of Robert Frost: Constellations of Intention*, Reuben A. Brower identifies Frost as a pastoral poet whose relation to pastoral, especially Virgilian pastoral, “is so deep and pervasive that it is nearly impossible to describe” (156). Both in form and style, as Lynen also agrees in *The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost*, the pastoral mode provides the characteristic design of Frost’s poems, but at the same time, he points out that only a few of them are actually written in this genre. Ezra Pound called Frost’s poems “modern georgics,” which Faggen describes as “poems about farm work that stand, as a tradition, in contrast to pastoral; it is a type of didactic poetry extolling hard labor and a scientific approach to nature” (49).

Frost’s poetry has also been approached from the ecocritical perspective in the recent times. In 2010, the pastoral art of Frost has been approached from the ecocritical perspective by Manel Msalmi in her book *The Pastoral in Robert Frost’s Poetry: An Ecocritical Reading of Frost’s Poems*. She identifies the pastoral features in Frost’s poems with the aim, as she herself puts it, to “see to what extent the conversational idiom, the medium of most modern poetry, carries the Pastoral
experience in its different manifestations” as also to reveal “the ideas suggested by his verse departing from a Pastoral milieu to reach existential issues” (Introduction 3). In the conclusion, Msalmi acknowledges Frost’s “skills in transforming Virgil’s Eclogues into a new version of pastoral poetry.” Frost, according to her, “brings novelty to this tradition by allowing himself to tackle issues having to do with equality, differences, democracy and especially faith” (120).

Two of the essays collected in Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism also take ecocritical approaches to Frost’s depiction of New England scenes and activities. In his essay “Robert Frost, the New England Environment, and the Discourses of Objects,” Kent C. Ryden makes a significant argument to incorporate material culture studies into ecocritical analysis. He shows in his essay how certain “vernacular artifacts,” studied in light of the New England culture milieu and natural settings, reveal the “environmental attitudes” of the inhabitants and the knowledge about nature that is “encoded in the landscape itself.”

John Elder’s “The Poetry of Experience” reveals the role that natural experience plays in the study of literature and, to attest it, he shows how, in his own case, the experience of scything in a field produced a new understanding of the poem “Mowing.”

It would be unjustified to claim that Frost’s preoccupation with the natural world in his poetry is the only thing because of which his poetry has been taken up for ecocritical perusal in the present thesis. Place, in the present time, has begun to occupy a large amount of environmental imagination and this is evident from Buell’s insistence on giving “pride of place to place” in his book of environmental writing, The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of...
American Culture (252, henceforth referred to as The Environmental Imagination).

An increasing number of scholars in the area of ecocriticism have been engaged in the pursuit of finding out the meaning of identifying with a place and being critically aware of its landscape or nature. O’Neill, Holland, and Light write, “An individual’s identity, their sense of who they are, is partly constituted by their sense of belonging to particular places. Particular places... embody the history of their lives and those of the communities to which they belong” (39). Berry Lopez has also laid stress on the importance of place in the life of a person: “The interior landscape responds to the character and subtlety of an exterior landscape, the shape of the individual is affected by land as it is by genes” (qtd. in Buell, The Environmental Imagination 83).

In Frost’s case, there had been not one or two but many exterior landscapes. In a December 2nd, 1917 letter to Amy Lowell, Frost had written: “... consider the jumble I am? Mother, Scotch immigrant. Father [sic] oldest New England stock unmixed. Ten years in West. Thirty years in East. Three years in England. Not less than six months in any of these: San Francisco, New York, Boston, Cambridge, Lawrence, London. Lived in Maine, N.H., Vt., Mass. Twenty five years in cities, nine in villages, nine on farms. Saw the South on foot. Dartmouth, Harvard two years” (qtd. in 7). He related to all these places. So, before we take up his poetry for ecocritical perusal, it is necessary to know the influence of the several places on his life and imagination because “the environmental conditions of an author’s life – the influence of place on the imagination – demonstrating that where an author grew up, travelled, and wrote is pertinent to an understanding of his or her work” (Glotfelty Introduction xxiii).
“I know San Francisco like my own face. It’s where I came from, the first place I really knew,” said Frost, while addressing an audience in that city, late in his life (qtd. in Parini 3). Robert Frost knew this place because he was born there in 1874. According to Gerber, Frost does not seem to have gained much of San Francisco, California, the place he was born in, which he could later put to literary use and it is only sometimes that the reader realizes that he was “western born”, as when in “A Peck of Gold” (249), Frost includes himself as “one of the children told / Some of the blowing dust was gold” (21-22). Richard J. Calhoun, who has recorded and edited Frost’s talk delivered at the University of North Carolinas in 1957, found Frost admitting in the course of his talk that he had one or two poems that remember the time he spent in California. One of the poems Frost remembered was “Once by the Pacific,” which is many a time mistaken to be written after the wars but Frost says, “You might call it prophetic.” The truth, however, is that it was written before the two wars when, as Frost says, “it was a stormy night out at the Cliff House Beach while that was still a beach ... seventy five years ago!” (qtd. in Calhoun 10). So, “Once by the Pacific” was inspired by his stay in California.

Elizabeth Isaacs finds that Frost’s “California interval,” though it spanned only a decade, had its later influence on his life and poetry. She refers to A Further Range, which Frost has called as his “secretly published book about California” and “Neither Out Far Nor in Deep,” which Frost refers to as “one of my California poems.” Isaacs also accords great importance of this place in Frost’s life as a poet because according to her, a dramatic symbol that occasionally reappeared in his later poetry — “a lost forgotten tribe, safe in its withdrawal, living in a ravine somewhere unknown to the rest of the world” — had its root in his first story that he had written in California and which later continued in New England in a kind of serial (14). The
influence of this place on the psyche of the poet can be gauged from the fact that he admitted that, while putting himself to sleep, he dreamt of “this inaccessible, happy tribe defending itself against all disturbances and confusion” (qtd, in Isaacs 14).

It was in the year 1885 that, as an eleven-year-old, Frost came to Massachusetts fulfilling his father’s last wish. Dana Gioia finds, that it was a new experience for Frost who

...saw the region with fresh and foreign eyes. This Western city-boy had never seen a New England autumn or snowfall. Unlike a native, he took nothing in this new landscape for granted. The flora, fauna, weather, and folkways of the Northeast were new to him... Frost’s position was, therefore, half-in and half-outside the region.... The newcomer has to make conscious sense of a place in ways a native never bothers. Frost was an elective New Englander, and a convert is always more passionate about the new faith than someone born to a religion.

Frost spent fifteen years of his life in the mill town of Lawrence after his dislocation from California and his relocation in Derry. “Every bit of my career in or outside of school began in Lawrence,” admitted Frost in an interview in 1925 (qtd. in Sheehy 12). James A. Batal, while justifying the city’s claim over Frost, wrote in Lawrence Telegram, “Although not a native born son, Mr Frost belongs to Lawrence for it was in this city that he spent his youth and received the education that influenced the poetry of his early career” (qtd. in Sheehy 27-28). He finds that the industrial environment in Lawrence affected Frost’s poetic creations, however, indirectly. The life that Frost led in this mill town gave him the first hand experience
of the town life which helped him draw a contrast between the town and country life in his pastorals.

Frost detested the mill life of Lawrence, according to Sheehy, because in the history of this “Immigrant City,” it was “a period of untrammelled industrial expansion, unprecedented waves of immigration, and ethnic and labor strife” (13). In a 1913 letter to F. S. Flint, Frost wrote about Lawrence that “When the life of the streets perplexed me a long time ago and I attempted to find an answer for myself by going literally into the wilderness, where I was so lost to friends and everyone that not five people crossed my threshold in as many years” (qtd. in Angyal 50). The place he means by wilderness was the farm at Derry, the place from which he gained much in his life and for his poetry. Frost “certainly learned enough about both the idylls and the dark side of country life to earn his reputation as a rustic figure” from his life at the Derry farm (DeFusco 18). Frost’s life on the Derry farm in New Hampshire for ten years starting from 1900 to 1910, “stimulated his creative faculties” and the “hills, valleys, farms, cabins, open sky, woods, fields, west-running brook and rose pogonias,” according to Gerber, “became grist for his mill,” and the landscape in his poetry included “the people, the lonely, introspective, self-reliant or self-destructive natives — the rural men and women whose tragedies, primarily, fill his poems” (25).

At Derry, Frost took to farming to support his family. “Though to be both, a farmer and a poet, on the edge of conservative Derry,” according to Isaacs, “was hard for Frost in those first years, these Derry years seem to have been poetically productive, for they provided backgrounds and germs of many of the Complete Poems” (17). Frost’s identity as “a farmer poet,” according to Kemp, was established with the publication of A Boy’s Will and there is nothing condescending in calling him
a poet-farmer. DeFusco has referred how Frost took pride in accepting that “scythe and the pen were his favourite tools” (18). As Gerber has also pointed out, most of the Americans relate Frost to the Cook’s portrait that shows “the wise old farmer with workman’s hands” (40). In the beginning it was necessity that made him do farming but he lived his farmer’s part to the end. In 1962, his old friend Daniel Smythe visited him at Ripton and he recalls, as Gerber has written about this meeting, “that Frost interrupted the conversation to scratch in his garden for potatoes with the same hands that had just autographed a thousand copies of his books” (41).

Monteiro observes that, one of the reasons why Frost took to farming was that he wanted to follow Emerson’s advice:

> The first care of a man settling in the country should be to open the face of the earth himself by a little knowledge of Nature, or a great deal, if he can, of birds, plants, rocks, astronomy; in short the art of taking a walk. This will draw the sting out of the frost, dreariness out of November and March, and the drowsiness out of August. (qtd. in Monteiro Preface ix)

Being an outsider, Frost made every effort on his part to know the place closely. He tried to learn about the flora and fauna of the place with the help of his friend Carl Burrell. He made mistakes, which, as Monteiro observes, Frost himself confessed as his “masquerade as a Vermonter” (Preface x). However, the first hand knowledge of the New England landscape, as also the farms and the life of the farmers in that place, which Frost acquired while working in the farms in Derry, helped him present it very realistically in his poetry. Alan Sanders had doubts about whether “the Derry years made Frost either a farmer or a living,” but he too asserts that:
They shaped the poet he had determined to become, immersing him not only in the seasonal cycles and ‘country things’ that would saturate his verse, but in the New England speech which he would make his poetic tongue. In doing so, the Derry years also made vivid and real the lives of the neighbors who would people North of Boston and, in wresting a living from hard climate and stony soil, would define a moral center for Frost’s poetic. (“Frost’s North of Boston” 70-71)

So, the life at Derry was valuable to Frost: “No bit of natural life or change in the landscape was too trivial to escape Frost’s scrutiny. So taken was he by the land that he felt he needed to write about it” (DeFusco 18). And Frost’s poetry, as is very explicit, talks about this place.

England, it can be said undoubtedly, also played an important role in his career. Though his stint in England was very short, even shorter than that in California, here, according to Mark Richardson, “he first declared himself” (Introduction 7). It was in England that Frost was literally launched as a poet. He got here the recognition that he didn’t get initially in his own country. Even before he moved to England, he had described his decision to move to England as his “forward movement” (Sergeant 86) and it indeed was, as far as his career was concerned, but when the War started, he had to return to America. Untermyer found that Frost was sensitive to the remarks of the critics on the influence of those brief years abroad on him and his work (88-89). Some thought that Frost’s three-year stay in England made some difference on his poetry “triggering latent powers” but Gerber finds out that the “metamorphosis” was not due to “the change of climate and landscape” because Frost was quite literally “stuffed with the materials of future books” when he crossed the
Atlantic (25). Frost himself mentioned to Thomas Bird Mosher at this time that he had enough poems for three books which show that most of his work was already completed before his voyage to England (Gerber 27). By the time *Mountain Interval* appeared in late 1916, Frost had severed all his ties with England and returned to New England, the place with which he is identified till date (Gerber 30). So, the soil of England did not provide any nutrients to his poetic self; it only garnered the fruits which had already blossomed in New England.

Frost once declared that he “belonged longest, nearly twenty-five of the last thirty-five” to Amherst College (qtd. in Gerber 43). Peter Gilbert, while speaking at Robert Frost Stone House Museum Dedication on September 29, 2002, has stressed the importance of Frost’s connections to Vermont: “It was here that he returned repeatedly from being in residence at the University of Michigan and Amherst College, here that he refreshed and renewed himself after hectic travel or stress, here that he ‘built soil’ so that he could continue to go about his more public work.” He asserts that “the human voices in Frost’s poetry are the human voices of the twin states, and Frost’s life is part of Vermont’s heritage.”

So, there has been disagreement among critics regarding the influence of different places, which Frost lived in or visited, on his life but, regarding the influence of New England on the life and poetry of Frost, they are almost unanimous. It is only New England that holds importance in the life of Frost as a place that nourished him as a poet and provided him with the subject of his poetry. Frost, as Gerber has pointed out, “had great fear of going down to posterity eventually as a minor figure because of his dedication to the New England scene” (61). But, it is perhaps this aspect of his poetry — the regional aspect — that makes him relevant today for ecocritical perusal.
One might seek justification in “lingering on this somewhat unfashionable subject” (Buell, “Frost as a New England Poet” 101). The answer is with Paul Shepard who says, “Knowing who you are is impossible without knowing where you are from” (qtd. in Evernden 101). Frost identified himself with the region of New England and therefore, in the study of Frost, a special honour is reserved for New England. But it was his place “not by birth but by adoption – or rather readoption” as Buell calls it because Frost was “the first canonical writer to return from the New England diaspora to his parental region and claim it as his literary home” (101). Frost made every effort to become a part of New England. Looking through the whole of the poetic career of Frost, Buell traces in his essay, “Frost as a New England Poet,” Frost’s “exfoliation as a regional bard” in several stages (104).

The process of Frost’s regional identification, in Buell’s opinion, starts with *A Boy’s Will*, a collection which is “hardly place-specific” but it shows “Frost starting to bond to more recognizably New England subjects” and it also established his image as “the Yankee farmer-poet” among his reviewers (105-106). Then next came, *North of Boston*, which was seen as a product of “a regional imagination” because it provided “a kind of anthology of familiar upcountry New England workways, landforms, and psychographs. Wall-building, blueberrying, apple-picking, hay-making, Reclusive bottled up neurotic cottagers, rural poverty, strange bumpy contours” (106). After a decade full of efforts to plant himself within the New England world, the transition of Frost from the persona who was “less embedded in its premises” to that of “the naturalized villager” could be seen in *Mountain Interval* (Buell 108). Frost, as Buell finds, had become one with New England. However, *New Hampshire* marks the finale of his process of regional identification and this, Buell finds, is accepted by Kemp also who calls *New Hampshire* “an excruciatingly,
ostentatious and affected attempt on Frost’s part to come to terms with his adopted regional personality” (108). So, New Hampshire, according to Buell, marks Frost’s “reinhabitation” of New England.

In his bid for “reinhabitation,” Frost even adopted the rhythms and inflections of the New England vernacular in his own speech as well as in his verse. According to Thompson, Frost’s “habit of careful pronunciation, encouraged by his well-educated father and mother,” remained with him through the school days, but “During the Derry years, particularly after he had formed a brief friendship with John Hall, … Frost had gradually modified his way of talking. He deliberately imitated the manner in which his neighbours unconsciously slurred words, dropped endings, and clipped their sentences” and “By the time he reached Plymouth [1911], glad to be rid of the farm, he was still perfecting the art of talking like a farmer” (qtd. in Sanders 73, endnote 13).

So, eventually, through his concerted efforts, Frost developed “a kind of transplanted love for the locale of his ancestors” (Isaacs 14). In “Poetry and Place,” Wendell Berry has emphasized, “In the moral (the ecological) sense you cannot know what until you have learned where” (qtd. in Buell, The Environmental Imagination 252). Frost, according to Angela M. Senst, emphasized that “his sense of personal identity is deeply rooted in his sense of belonging to a particular region and nation” and she seconds Hagenbuchle’s view that “without such roots there can be no sense of personal identity and self-respect, and without self-respect there can be no sense of respect for and commitment to others” (Para 14). By establishing a firm bond with a particular place, Frost gained a vision, which can be called “ecological”.

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Now the writer may know a place well but how he uses it in his work is important. Buell finds that it is hard for writers “to do justice to place, even when they respect it” and “no one will ever be able to bring it to full consciousness in all its nuanced complexity (255, 256). The attempt in the thesis will be to find out what form Frost’s sense of place takes in his poetry. Has Frost used the New England landscape in his poetry only as a setting? Is the landscape ancillary to the human story in his poetry or does it play some important active role? Are the landscape items only reduced to symbols or reflectors in his poetry? These are some of the questions that the present study will try to seek answers to.

Place definitely played a very important role in Frost’s life. But, “What any poet has to say about man’s status in nature, for example, depends in part upon the landscape and climate he happens to live in and in part upon the reactions to it of his personal temperament. A poet brought up in the tropics cannot have the same vision as a poet brought up in Hertfordshire and, if they inhabit the same landscape,” then, according to W. H. Auden, “the chirpy social endomorph will give a different picture of it from that of the melancholic withdrawn ectomorph” (61). So, the temperament of the poet decides what picture he gives of nature. Therefore, it is important to know the various factors that determined the temperament of Frost and contributed to his formation of the vision of the world, especially the natural world. Lawrence Buell, in his book, *The Environmental Imagination, sees Frost as a youth who “seem[is] to have begun adulthood ... with relatively modest degrees of eco-precociousness” but “became caught up in the quest for environmental literacy”* (108). So, the eco-precociousness of Frost, however modest it may have been in Buell’s opinion, certainly had something to do with the important influences on his life, which formed his vision of the natural world.
One of the greatest influences in Frost’s life, through his mother Isabelle Moodie Frost, who had emigrated from Sweden, had been of the scientist and theologian Emanuel Swedenborg. Frost was not just baptized into the Swedenborgian Church of the New Jerusalem, his mother relied heavily on the Swedenborgian philosophy for the education of her children at home (Harris 13). Swedenborg exercised an important influence in Frost’s life as is exemplified in his acknowledgement of the fact, later in his life, that Swedenborg had been important in his early education: “What’s my philosophy? That’s hard to say. I was brought up a Swedenborgian. I am not a Swedenborgian now. But there’s a good deal of it left in me” (qtd.in Harris 14).

Swedenborg’s teachings, according to Harris, were important in two ways for Frost’s thinking: “First of all, Swedenborg constantly reiterated the distinction between opposites, and at the same time stressed a necessary unity between opposites. There were always ‘two’s’ of everything – the divine and the physical, or the spiritual and the material – and always an ultimate harmony between them” (13). Second and even more influential in Frost’s poetry and life was the insistence in Swedenborg’s writing that “all things are constantly in motion” (Harris 14). As regards Frost’s outlook towards nature, at least in his early poetic career, it seems to have been influenced by the Swedenborgian faith, which, according to Harris, stated that “the divine must manifest itself only in the physical world, and the knowledge of the physical world was the knowledge of God” (14). Bagby also finds “deep-rooted in Frost” the theory of correspondences, which, was evident in many other American nature writers, and for all of them, “natural phenomena are almost never purely physical or random, they seem to have been ‘put there’ as signs or messages for the human observer” (7).
Frost had Emerson and Thoreau as his “immediate forbears”. They were “the principal champions of nature and interpreters of things natural” in the nineteenth century and both, according to Gerber, were “discernible influences upon Frost ... through the tradition they dominated” (54). Frost inherited at least four vital attributes from them: “a strong realization of the necessity for ‘an original relation to the universe’; “a glad acceptance of intuition and a forthright reliance upon it”; “an ineradicable sense of his own national identity in literature” and “steady confirmation of his own integrity as a self reliant individual” (Gerber 58). He also inherited from them “his acute response to the analogies which nature strews so abundantly to enrich the poetic inclination” (Gerber 57).

Emerson, according to Jay Parini, has always been “a central figure in Frost’s imagination” (Robert Frost: A Life 4). Frost had great admiration for Emerson as “a poet whose unique skill captured the tones of voice in actual colloquial speech, and whose ideas inspired in Frost “troubled thoughts about freedom” (Stanlis 87). “In keeping with his legacy from Emerson,” in Gerber’s opinion, “Frost visualizes man always cradled within nature, totally immersed in environment. Nature is first of all the open book with lessons on every page awaiting the sensible reader.... The lesson of mutability is taught by repetition of days, seasons, years” (Gerber 155).

However, Frost did not approve of Emerson’s moral philosophy. He identified Emerson as “a cheerful Monist, for whom evil does not exist, or if it does exist, needn’t last forever” (qtd. in Stanlis 87). Frost strongly criticised Emerson’s idealistic monism; he criticised “both the spiritual form of monism, which denies the reality of matter, and the materialistic form, which denies the reality of the spirit” and he, according to Stanlis, endorsed a dualism that recognized that “both spirit and matter
are implicated in the perception of all reality” (87). He found that “A melancholy dualism is the only soundness” and he writes in his essay, “On Emerson”: “In practice, in nature, the circle becomes an oval. As a circle it has one center — Good. As an oval it has two centers — Good and Evil. Thence Monism verses Dualism” (qtd. in Link 183). Dualism, in Frost’s opinion, was the only practical philosophy for man in society: “in practice, in the daily life of man in society, good and evil were both present, and often mixed together. To disregard or minimize evil in human nature, to underestimate its power, could result in allowing it to be triumphant” (Stanlis 88).

Henry David Thoreau was also an important influence on Frost. In a 1915 letter, Frost remarks that Walden “must have had a good deal to do with the making of me,” and in a 1922 letter, Frost praises Walden in high terms: “Walden surpasses everything we have had in America” (qtd. in Link 182). If “Emerson was the theorizer, Thoreau the practitioner,” the “echoes of [Emerson’s] principles resounding everywhere in his [Thoreau’s] books” can be found “ringing loud and clear” in Frost’s poetry (Gerber 56). Both were also “dark romantics,” according to Eric Carl Link, for “they both question at times the optimistic and comparatively monistic vision of Emerson, and they both express a certain scepticism concerning the ability of the poet to reconcile man and Nature, or the subject and the object” (183).

Frost’s views on science, according to Stanlis, can also be best understood in the light of his philosophical dualism (91). Science was an important influence on Frost. It was, according to Harris, “the result of the literature read to him by his mother, when he was a child, especially the poetry of nature and the writings of the scientist and theologian Emanuel Swedenborg” (13). Frost’s interest in science,
acquired early in life, remained with him throughout his life but it underwent many transitions from time to time.

Frost saw science as “man’s greatest enterprise” which “is the charge of the ethereal into the material...our substantiation of our meaning” (qtd. in Stanlis 90-91). He even relied on science many a time to understand the real nature of the universe. However he was afraid too, that “... in taking us deeper and deeper into matter science has left all of us with this great misgiving, this fear that we won’t be able to substantiate the spirit” (qtd. in Stanlis 108). Although Frost, as Stanlis has observed, adopted a favorable view of science late in life, for the most part of his life Frost remained anxious about the abuses of science, especially during the war: “It comes into our lives as domestic science for our hold on the planet, into our deaths with its deadly weapons, bombs, and airplanes, for war, and into our souls as pure science for nothing but glory” (qtd. in Stanlis 108). Frost, according to Stanlis, always made a distinction between “science and scientism, between the valid uses of science and its abuses” (108) and it was the monism of science Frost believed that gave birth to “a wholly mechanistic conception of human nature and the physical universe” (109).

Frost had a background in physics and astronomy, which, according to Kathryn Gibbs Harris, helped him in the study of nature and came to his aid in writing his poems also (24). John F.Bagby, however, finds that “The influence of sciences on Frost’s view of nature is affected relatively little by physics (or by chemistry)” because “the atomistic, mechanistic, and therefore deadened view of the natural world which the findings of these microsciences must suggest is not Frost’s view to any great extent.” Bagby finds that “it is instead the macrosiences – geology, archaeology, and above all astronomy – that constantly fascinate Frost and by the very
breadth of their perspectives, lead him to a distinctly less anthropocentric view of the natural world and its accessibility than he might otherwise have” (15). “In the course of expanding his view,” archaeology and geology, Bagby finds, “seldom ennoble his sentiments,” rather, “by demonstrating the eccentric place of humans in the order of nature, these sciences tend to make time and natural process seem impersonal, indifferent, even chilling” and Frost’s “familiarity with contemporary astronomy, by making the natural world far less ‘sublime’ and far less involved in human ‘destiny’... inevitably lessens the case with which the natural text may be read” (15, 17-18). Frost had interest in astronomy. He was, indeed, influenced by Richard Anthony Proctor, a noted English astronomer and writer on many science subjects. Frost had read Proctor’s book, *Our Place among Infinities*, and in his poem “The Star-Splitter” he talks about man’s “place among the infinities” (Harris 16-17). There are some very interesting poems by Frost where he refers to stars and constellations and “Sirius,” according to Harris, is “a favourite star of Frost” (17).

So, in Frost’s case, the various influences in his life point towards the fact that various factors contributed in determining his vision of the world and the same vision of the world is visible in his poetry. The present thesis would like to find out how much of Frost’s vision of the world, which he acquired early in his life, help him in his poetry to arrive at the vision of the world that may also be called “ecological.

**Ecocriticism, Nature Writing and Moving Beyond**

In *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, which is considered the most influential work in American ecocriticism to date, Lawrence Buell, through his thorough critique, leads ecocritics to “a reconsideration of the role and significance of nature writing in the
literary canon” (Garrard 52). Nature writing enjoyed considerable popularity in the United States of America in the early years of the inception of ecocriticism. But, due to nature writing, Scott Slovic feels, people held “a rather narrow and dismissive attitude” toward ecocriticism because, for them, the ecocritics represented “merely a nostalgic, millennialist fad, a yearning to resurrect and re-explain a limited tradition of hackneyed pastoral or wilderness texts” (ASLE News 6). And it is true too, according to Glotfelty, because ecocriticism, in its initial stage, tried “to recuperate the hitherto neglected genre of nature writing, a tradition of nature-oriented nonfiction that originates in England with Gilbert White’s *A Natural History of Selbourne* (1789) and extends to America through Henry Thoreau, John Burrough, John Muir, Mary Austin, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Edward Abbey, Annie Dillard, Barry Lopez, Terry Tempest Williams, and many others” (Introduction xxiii).

Nature writing, as defined by Michael P. Branch in his essay “Before Nature Writing: Discourses of Colonial American Natural History,” is a term which is usually “reserved for a brand of nature representation that is deemed literary, written in the speculative personal voice, and presented in the form of the nonfiction essay. Such nature writing is frequently pastoral or romantic in its philosophical assumptions, tends to be modern or even ecological in its sensibility, and is often in service to an explicit or implicit preservationist agenda” (91, emphasis added). Winkler has also observed that traditionally, nature writing was taken as “the nonfiction essay popularized by Thoreau, a blend of scientific observation and self-analysis” (emphasis added).

So, nature writing was usually deemed to be authentically expressed in nonfiction essays, and, as delineated by Branch, it was frequently pastoral or romantic in
its philosophical assumptions (91). Michael Bennett also finds that the first wave of ecocriticism, as he likes to call ecocriticism in its initial stage, “embraced those environments at furthest remove from human habitation — the pastoral and the wild — as represented by a narrowly defined genre of nature writing” (208). Lawrence Buell has warned that it is the “occupational hazard” of nature writing that “it deletes the traces of human interest and presence from its landscapes” (The Environmental Imagination 260).

Ecocriticism’s “concentration on this form of writing [nature writing] made perfect sense as a starting point for a critical school that takes the natural environment and human relations to that environment as its special focus,” Armbuster and Wallace write in the introduction to their book, Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism, but they became apprehensive that “If ecocriticism limits itself to the study of one genre i.e. nature writing or to one physical landscape i.e. the ostensibly untrammelled American wilderness,” it runs the risk of being confined within “literary and cultural studies” (7). So, they deduced that “one of ecocriticism’s most important tasks at this time is expanding its boundaries beyond these topics to address a wider spectrum of texts” (2).

A number of scholars, according to Winkler, are calling for a broadened definition of nature writing, one that includes poetry and fiction. Poems, according to Platz, are still “a relatively untapped source in the current discussion about the environment” and it is his opinion that “a great many poetic texts lend themselves to supplying relevant arguments that could be used in various fields of action such as environmental ethics, environmental education and, last but not least, conservation” (5). Octavio Paz, the Mexican Nobel Laureate, according to George Handley, relies
on poetry “to prevent the end of history.” Paz is optimistic of “the metaphorical work of poetry” which he explains thus: “the operative mode of poetic thought is imagining, and imagination consists, essentially, of the ability to place contrary or divergent realities in relationship. All poetic forms and all linguistic figures have one thing in common: they seek and often find, hidden relationships. In most extreme cases, they unite opposites” (qtd. in Handley 201).

Francis Ponge also finds poetry to be the only hope in the present times because its function, according to him, is “to nourish the spirit of man by giving him the cosmos to suckle” but the condition is

We have only to lower our standard of dominating nature and to raise our standard of participating in it in order to make the reconciliation take place. When man becomes proud to be not just the site where ideas and feelings are produced, but also the crossroad where they divide and mingle, he will be ready to be saved. Hope therefore lies in a poetry through which the world so invades the spirit of man that he becomes almost speechless, and later reinvents language. (qtd. in Rueckert 105)

William Rueckert pins high hopes on the poets to formulate “an ecological poetics” and promoting “an ecological vision” (114).

The genre of nature writing, according to Raglon and Scholtmeijer, has tended “to show nature eluding human control by minimizing the human presence and focusing attention on the nonhuman world,” however, “works of fiction that successfully integrate nature and natural phenomena into human stories ... are of greater interest to contemporary readers because they allow nature to change the
shape, direction, and outcome of the narrative” (254). In the present times, when people are living in an environment largely altered by human beings, Wallace and Armbruster feel that the “texts set in an environment profoundly and clearly altered by humans and calling attention to the interactions of culture and nature represented in those texts” is more acceptable than “texts describing more exotic or wild landscapes” (Introduction 6).

Ecocritics have realized the ecological necessity to broaden their attention “beyond the narrow, if fertile, edge of nature writing” and they feel the time has arrived when

We need to gain a more balanced perspective on both natural phenomena and their potential meanings for human beings – both as individuals and in community. And paying attention to the diverse niches, and the changing seasons, within the literature of earth may bring its own evolutionary possibility, as well. Beyond the basic understanding that literature and nature are richly interwoven, we may come to recognize more clearly that sensitivity to nature grows out of, as well as opposes certain aspects of, the western tradition. (John Elder, Foreword to Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism vii-viii)

If history is traced, it will be found that man has been misled in his perception of himself and the nonhuman world by factors that vary from religious to philosophical to literary traditions within Western culture. At the roots of the ecologic crisis, Lynn White Jr. finds, is Christianity, which, with its axiom that “nature has no reason for existence save to serve man” (14), gave strength to man’s belief that he has
the right to dominate over all the other forms of life and this removed from man’s mind “the old inhibitions to the exploitation of nature” (10). The Bible is the text that has been used frequently to bring out anti-ecological attitudes and practices. However, some ecocritics, in their interpretation of the same religious text recently, have found that its message is one of social and environmental responsibility (see Hilbert). The most destructive attitude towards nature, as many philosophical and literary chroniclers of Western attitudes toward nature agree, began in the Renaissance and then flourished with the Scientific Revolution and the Industrial Revolution which totally altered the equation that man shared with the nonhuman world. They nourished man’s exploitative tendencies. The empiricism of Bacon did not have to meet the challenge that nature was too sacred to be touched because the Great Chain of Being had already designated nature place lower than the human in the hierarchical order. Then came the rationalism of Descartes, which according to Passmore, “separated consciousness from nature so absolutely that the two [man and nature] could no longer be brought into any relationship with one another” and the Post-Cartesian metaphysicians, in trying “to maintain that nature is man-centred” and in denying existence to nature “when man is not perceiving it [nature]” marked the demise of nature altogether (135). Since then nature has been relegated to the background and what we now know nature as, is in fact “the literary and artistic construction of it” and ecocriticism, as Ursula, K. Heise has claimed in “Science and Ecocriticism,” tries “to assess how certain historically conditioned concepts of nature and the natural ... have come to shape current perceptions of the environment.”

One such literary and artistic conception of nature, which, according to Garrard, is “deeply entrenched in Western culture” and is “problematic for environmentalism,” is the pastoral trope. Since its inception in the classical period,
pastoral has been used for different political purposes, and has proved “potentially harmful in its tensions and evasions”. But despite this, Garrard asserts that “its long history and cultural ubiquity mean that the pastoral trope must and will remain a key concern for ecocritics” (33). Buell has expressed the same sentiments in his book *The Environmental Imagination*: “Pastoralism is a species of cultural equipment that Western thought has for more than two millennia been unable to do without” and “some form of pastoralism is part of the conceptual apparatus of all persons with western educations interested in leading more nature-sensitive lives,” therefore, it cannot be avoided. At the same time, he raises a few questions: “How pressing an issue will pastoral continue to be? Given our present degree of industrialization, isn’t it likely to become increasingly obsolete?” And he is hopeful that, as predicted by Marx, the “wholly new conception of the precariousness of our relations with nature is bound to bring forth new versions of pastoral” (Buell, *The Environmental Imagination* 51).

“The British Romantics’ more sublime versions of pastoral,” which “were sharpened into a distinctively New World obsession with wilderness,” according to Garrard, has become “the most potent construction of nature available to New World environmentalism” (49, 59). Though they both share the “motif of escape and return,” Garrard asserts that the fundamental difference between the pastoral and the wilderness is in their “construction of nature”.

If pastoral is the distinctive Old World construction of nature, suited to long-settled and domesticated landscapes, wilderness fits the settler experience in the New Worlds – particularly the United States, Canada
and Australia - with their untamed landscapes and the sharp distinction between the forces of culture and nature. (59-60)

However, there is a problem with wilderness. According to Cronon, wilderness is seen as “the natural, unfallen antithesis of an unnatural civilization that has lost its soul” and as “a place of freedom in which we can recover our true selves we have lost to the corrupting influences of our artificial lives” and most importantly as “the ultimate landscape of authenticity” (qtd. in Garrard 70). In the ecocritical formulation, “persecuted wilderness has come to stand in for all of nature” (Frensoke 135), and Hallock looks forward to the time when we might “move beyond a mournful rhetoric of loss” (18).

Cronon’s myth of “wilderness purity”, according to Garrard, “has pernicious consequences for our conceptions of nature since it suggests that nature is only authentic if we [human] are entirely absent from it” and his fear, that “such ‘purity’ is often achieved at the cost of an elimination of human history every bit as thorough as that undertaken by pastoral literature” (70), does not portend well for the field of ecocriticism which looks forward to do away with all types of dualism, first and foremost the dualistic construct of nature and culture. “Thinking about the environmental crisis can be reframed,” according to Allen Thompson, “not in terms of human artifice versus pristine nature but rather as a dichotomy to be resolved between human domination and that which is wild and free” (86). In studying Frost’s poetry, an effort would be made to find out what sort of relationship between man and nature does he portray in his poetry. Is it one of domination and control or does Frost foresee the possibility of communion between nature and man?
It is the opinion of many ecocritics, as it is of Christopher Cokinos, that ecocriticism should “seriously call into question the various canons we have received as ‘given’ and which continue to be taught as though nonhuman nature and the human place within it didn’t matter.” Platz too feels that “in adjusting to the present environmental challenges, we would urgently need an exploration of the concepts of nature we harbour. These mental images of nature would have to be seen in relation to our own self-image, the image of the 21st century human being. Such a revision of our mental images of both nature and ourselves could be conducive to a new ecological civilization” (6).

Branch in his general introduction of Reading the Roots: American Nature Writing before Walden demands us to “imagine [American nature] without the benefit of any of the ideas, insights, information, achievements, methodologies, technologies, institutions, or assumptions” of the past five centuries (xxvii). This is what the study in hand intends to do. It will try to find out what image of nature Frost holds and how far it is conducive in the present time. The study would also like to find out if the tropes of nature which have been used by Frost in his poetry can still be of use in reading nature or do they need revisioning or remodelling to keep pace with the present time. Finally, the aim of taking up the ecocritical study of Frost’s poetry is to find out if his poetry can fulfil the hope of formulating for the readers “an ecological poetics” and promote amongst them “an ecological vision.”

The effort in this thesis is to study Frost’s poetry from the ecocritical perspective which is characterized by the second wave. However, it is necessary to make it clear, as Buell has emphasised in The Future of Environmental Criticism, that “the first-second distinction should not, however, be taken as implying a tidy, distinct
succession. Most currents set in motion by early ecocriticism continue to run strong, and most forms of second-wave revisionism involve building as well as quarreling with precursors” (17).

There are a few debates in the ecocritical circles which need to be settled beforehand, in order to keep at bay the confusion arising from them in the present study. First of all, there is the debate surrounding the real meaning of “Nature” or “nature,” that needs to be addressed. There is a difference between the two which has been very well charted out by Jhan Hochman. He differentiates “Nature,” which has been associated with “the highly suspect realms of the otherworldly or transcendental,” from “nature,” which is more “wordly” and is the collective name for “individual plants, nonhuman animals, and elements” (qtd. in Coupe General Introduction 2-3).

Though the distinction drawn by Jhan Hochman is very apt yet the meaning of “Nature” or “nature” is very difficult to arrive at. Raymond Williams had observed that “Nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language” (219) and this is true also. The ambiguity of the word “nature,” as Passmore finds, “faithfully reflects the hesitancies, the doubts, and the uncertainties, with which men have confronted the world around them.” He himself uses the word “nature” in one of its narrower senses that excludes “both the human and the artificial” (129). The study in this thesis, however would refer to both “Nature” and “nature” because Frost, in his poetry, tries to arrive at the truths about “Nature” through his interactions with “nature.” However, because it is an ecocritical study, the main concern would be “nature.”

Then, there is “crucial terminological confusion” among the ecocritics regarding the use of the terms “nature” and “environment” which have become nearly
synonymous because of the way they have often been used interchangeably (Birkerts). But both the terms are distinct. “Environment,” as Sven Birkerts elaborates, “is a capacious term and refers to the whole of the surrounding scape, whether natural, urban, or something mixed” whereas “‘Nature’ is the original given; it is the environment before the transformations wrought by technology.”

Since ecocriticism came up as a literary and critical theory, the ecocritics have focused only on “nature” which is the original given. The issue at the top of the ecocritics’s mind is nature and its preservation which Birkerts feels has imposed “a kind of programmatic simplicity upon the whole movement” and given it a “crunchiness” that hinders the progress of the movement. So, instead of focusing only on nature, the ecocritics like Birkerts are now calling for a “more inclusive idea of ‘environment’.” Wallace and Armbruster, while elaborating the inclusive idea of environment, say

Environment need not only refer to “natural” or “wilderness” areas... environment also includes cultivated and built landscapes, the natural elements and aspects of those landscapes, and cultural interactions with those natural elements. One way ecocriticism can and should widen its range of topics is to pay more consistent attention to texts that revolve around these less obviously “natural” landscapes and human attempts to record, order, and ultimately understand their own relationships to those environments. (Introduction 4)

This “expanded sense of environment” will help in the present study. Frost’s poetry, when approached from the ecocritical perspective would take up for study both “nature” and “environment.” In his poetry we come across his relationship with
two diverse forms of natural world – one which is “natural,” as defined by Elliot and
the other which is “non-natural” which includes humans also in its ambit (89-90). As
a matter of convenience, with regards to Frost’s poetry when we refer to “nature”, it
would be the nonhuman world, the “worldly” nature of Jhan Hochman and when we
refer to “environment,” it would imply the world in which humans and nonhumans
interact, i.e. the expanded notion of environment given by Birkerts. The chapters have
also been divided keeping this distinction in mind. In the chapter that follows
Introduction, “An Ecological Affirmation: Nature’s Resistance to Narrative,” the
imaginative interaction of the poet with the natural nature, as revealed in his poetry,
would be brought out whereas the next main chapter, “Nature and Culture:
Intermingling of Soil and Water,” would deal with the non-natural environment which
would, as the title suggests, bring out the mingling of nature and culture. The third
main chapter, “Moving Towards a New Ecological Vision,” would be an effort to
trace in Frost’s poetry the values which guide man’s interaction with both “nature”
and “environment” in his poetry. Its aim is to arrive at a new ecological vision which
is in compliance with the present times.

Jhan Hochman in “Green Cultural Studies,” traces the English literary
tradition since the Industrial Revolution and it shows “nature as a spiritual-
imaginative object in the Romantic climes, as a religious or scientific object in the
Victorian domain, and as a symbolic/formal object in the Modern realm” (187). What
about the place of nature in postmodernism? The recent postmodernist critical
theories, according to Michael J. Mcdowell, have “become so caught up in analyses of
language that the physical world, if not denied outright, often is ignored or dismissed
as entirely unimportant” (“The Bakhtian Road to Ecological Insight” 371-72).
Mcdowell is not the only one to believe so. For Christopher Manes, the natural world
has been compressed into such a “narrow vocabulary of epistemology” in Modern literature and criticism that it has become “a societal category” (15). Laurence Coupe too writes in the General Introduction to Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism that “in various schools – formalist, psycho-analytic, new historicist, deconstructionist, even Marxist – the common assumption has been that what we call ‘nature’ exists primarily as a term within a cultural discourse apart from which it has no being or meaning” (2).

One of the founding aims of what Coupe calls “green studies,” and which is, in fact ecocriticism, is to “resist the disastrous error” that nature is only “a sign within a signifying system” and the objects of nature have “no intrinsic merit, no value and no rights.” This error, he further elaborates, belongs to “the arrogance of humanism.” However, he makes it clear that “[t]o counter this arrogance does not mean reducing complex linguistic performance to the level of merely pointing at things” (2). At the same time, “if we emphasise signification to the exclusion of reference,” according to Coupe, “we may be as guilty of treating the non-human environment with the same contempt as are those destructive forces which we might wish to condemn.” So, he clarifies that “green studies does not challenge the notion that human beings make sense of the world through language, but rather the self-serving inference that nature is nothing more than a linguistic construct” (3).

“An Ecological Affirmation: Nature’s Resistance to Narrative,” is the chapter following the introduction. In this chapter, an effort would be made to find out Frost’s perception of the natural world, as it emerges in his poetry, and also how he represents nature in his poetry. It is very important to find this out because, as Buell puts it, “How we image a thing, true of false, affects our conduct toward it
(Introduction, The Environmental Imagination 3). It is also important to know the sort of relationship that Frost shared with nature in his poetry. We take this up in the present study with the hope that the imaginative interaction of Frost with nature in his poetry might help in the better understanding of the reason behind the present ecological crisis.

In the present time a few questions have become quite pertinent in the ecocritical circle and they are regarding language being guilty participants in the destruction of the world. Christopher Manes in his essay “Nature and Silence,” has tried to find out if the language, that one uses to describe nature, has any bearing on the way one treats it because he believes that “The language that we speak today, the idiom of Renaissance and Enlightenment Humanism, veils the processes of nature with its own cultural obsessions, directionalties, and motifs that have no analogues in the natural world” (15). There are ecocritics like Jack Goody who feel that literacy itself has affected humankind’s relationship to the natural world. The argument forwarded by Goody is that alphabetic writing “changes the nature of the representation of the world,” because “it allows humans to lay out discourse and examine it in a more abstract, generalised and rational way” (qtd. in Manes 18). There is still another set of ecocritics, from the camp of Deep ecology who are vociferous about nature being silenced by anthropocentrism. Laurence Coupe finds that “Most of the times we try to impose upon nature "the arbitrary constraints which result from our belief in our own importance” (General Introduction 1). However, if language and literature are seen as culprits by some ecocritics, there are a few others, like Raglon and Scholtmeijer, who, quite contrarily, see language and literature as “a flexible and vibrant agent of change.” So, an effort would be made in the present chapter to find out how much importance Frost accords to language in determining
man’s relationship with nature. In his poetry, does language come out as a culprit of
nature or it acts as an agent of change?

“An ecocriticism that sees humans as fundamentally part of nature” according
to Wallace and Armbruster, “will attend to the representations of human cultures in all
their diverse interactions with nature rather than focusing only on texts that show
humans observing or experiencing nature in wild or rural settings” (Introduction 4).
So, in the next chapter, “Nature & Culture: Intermingling of Soil and Water,”
attention would be focused on human culture’s “diverse interactions with nature”, as
in the previous chapter the concentration was on human observation of and
imaginative interaction with “nature in wild setting.”

In the ecocritical circle, the relationship between nature and culture is an issue
of great concern. Ecocriticism, from the very start, has been faced with the problem of
dualism and it has been the constant endeavour of the ecocritics to work towards “a
viable ecocriticism” that would

Challenge dualistic thinking by exploring the role of nature in texts
more concerned with human cultures, by looking at the role of culture
in nature, and by attending to the nature focused text as also a cultural-
literary text. Understanding how nature and culture constantly
influence and construct each other is essential to an informed
ecocriticism. (Wallace and Armbruster, Introduction 4)

This chapter will take up for study the dualistic thinking prevalent in the
literary world in the form of pastoral trope which sees nature and culture as sworn
enemies. This dualistic thinking in the convention of pastoral has hampered the
progress of ecocriticism because nature in such thinking was anointed a high place
and there was always a threat to it from culture. This has widened the gulf between nature and culture. The pastoral trope will be taken up with regards to Frost’s poetry in order to find out how relevant it is today from the ecocritical perspective.

The chapter also aims to find out if there a possibility of intermingling of nature and culture in the poetry of Frost. With that purpose, this chapter will try to explore the role that natural environment plays in the poetry of Frost. In the interaction that ensues between the two, how do the natural environment and man both change or modify each other. Passmore puts it, “we see through the artefacts (like buildings, etc) to their human makers” (130). So, by taking cue from the study done by Kent C.Ryden in “Robert Frost, the New England Environment, and the Discourse of Objects”, an effort would be made to explore the relationship that the people in Frost’s poetic world shared with their environment and also to find out if the artifacts really tell an environmental story about the relationship of man with his environment.

This chapter deals with the non natural world. So, this chapter would assess the attitude of characters in Frost’s poetry towards that part of nature “which it lies within man’s power to modify” and “a life we can by our actions destroy” (Passmore 129). The natural world which will be studied in this chapter is not the “natural world” of Elliot but the “non-natural” world that is the world modified by humans, which, with an aim to differentiate it from “nature” and as a matter of convenience, would be called “environment”.

The chapter, “Towards a New Ecological Vision,” approaches Frost’s poetry with the intention to find out the “coherence and usefulness” of Frost’s poetry as a response to environmental crisis because, as Richard Kerridge observes,
“Ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis” (5). Scott Slovic in his essay, “Nature Writing and Environmental Psychology,” has pointed out that nature writers have political leanings and “their advocacy of heightened attentiveness [to environment] is difficult to miss” (368). The “awareness” that these writers advocate, according to Slovic, might possibly lead to political action. Frost would have detested it if his poetry were used for political ends but as far as creating an awareness among the people is concerned, he would have approved because “Frost scorns the poem that has no message; though he is equally scornful of the poem that has only that” (Isaacs 61). He wanted his poetry to make an impact on people. So, in this chapter, an effort would be made to find out whether Frost’s poetry reveals the right kind of relationship with nature or environment that the people can live by, and also, whether his poetry can act as a model towards a new ecological vision.
Notes: