

Preface

Where there is life there is poetry.¹

The essence of Frost's life consists in his poetry. The above quotation by the poet himself, shows the importance of verse in his life. His poetry and his life has been a subject of analysis for researchers and poetry lovers for decades. But he has been often rendered as a regional poet, whose inspiration primarily rested upon New England. There is however no denying the fact that Frost loved writing about his surroundings, and New England inspired him in all its variety and sameness. But the themes in his poems transcended the barriers of regionalism. They were universal manifestations of emotions. In his poems, the people of New England become the residents of the world, whose problems, sorrows and happiness are mutually shared by the reader too. There is a binary view of Frost, when it comes to critics. For some he is a "homespun philosopher" and for others he is a "terrific poet", who always mystifies his poems thus making them difficult to analyse. I too had similar dilemmas while analysing his poetry in the light of binary opposition. At one level he seemed to write simply about birch trees, snow, blueberries, flowers, ants, birds, trees and, most importantly, woods. But at the very next time, he would take us deeper into questions of existence, death and faith. His poems are a reflection of his life which too, like his poetry was divided between affirmation and negation, between his view of human sufferings and the possibility of salvation, between nature's omnipotence and man's constant struggle to live, despite dissatisfaction. In the present study I have tried to analyse his poems in the light of these binaries.

The first chapter gives a historical background to Robert Frost. His childhood, his years in England and his final acclaim to fame till his death are discussed here. The chapter begins with the history of American poetry which dates back to American independence in 1776. It was after the Transcendentalist movement that poetry coming from this part of the world was strongly realised and marked with distinction. The chapter also traces the journey of Frost as a poet, his dislike for being termed as a "regional poet" and reasons why there is universality in his regionalism. The chapter ends with the loss suffered by the world in general and America in particular because of his death.

In the second chapter Frost is viewed in relation to other nature poets. It traces the origins of nature poems from the oldest surviving epic poem, *Beowulf*. From the Anglo-Saxon age it moves towards the Medieval ages describing the contribution of Chaucer, Spenser, Milton and Shakespeare. Coming towards the transition period, the poetry of Gray, Cowper, Thompson and Burns, is discussed. The pre-Romantic and Romantic age has been explained at length because it was during this time when nature poetry as a popular genre emerged on the literary scene. Poets like William Wordsworth, S.T. Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Byron were some prominent poets of the time. A similar movement also began in America called Transcendentalism. It was also known as the American form of Romanticism. Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson were the forerunners of the movement. Frost did not associate himself with any of the movements or schools of poetry. But his poems are replete with images taken from nature. The chapter ends with a comparison between Frost and some other nature poets before him. His similarity to Robert Burns has been pointed out in particular.

The third chapter discusses the use of binaries by poets other than Robert Frost. Poets like John Donne, Andrew Marvel, and Herbert, used metaphysical conceits to highlight the binaries in their poems. William Blake is the only poet to have used this device at length in his *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. Poets like Keats and Shelley also made use of contrary images in their verse. Victorian poets like Arnold and Tennyson also employed contrasting symbols in their poems. Yeats, Eliot and Whitman too, used binaries to enhance meanings of their verse.

The Fourth and Fifth chapters are an analysis of Frost's early and later poetry in the light of binary opposition. In total I have critically analysed ninety poems and highlighted the binaries used by the poet, either in the form of symbols or themes. From *A Boy's Will* to *In the Clearing*, the poems make a full circle. Beginning with the fearless escape of the poet into the trees, and ending with a confirmation that life has to end one day, the poet wavers between confusion and confirmation to reach a conclusion.

Chapter six is a compendium of all the binary opposite words that I came across while analysing Frost's poems. There are about 322 pair of binaries which I have included in

the compendium along with an explanation as to why the pair is a binary and why the poet used them as a binary pair.

In conclusion, a final analysis of Frost's life and poetry is given in the light of binaries. In his early poems, clear images of binaries occur in the form of two roads, or summer against winter and the like, whereas in his later poems images become more philosophical and complex. I have also given the views of other critics who too have felt that Frost was obsessed with dualism. Critics like Peter.J.Stanlis, have underscored the importance of dualism in his verse and exhorted scholars to probe deeper into the area.

My association with Frost's poetry began some fifteen years ago, when I read his "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening" as a student of class sixth. The poem left lasting impressions on my mind. Time and again, I would try analysing it. But each time, I found that there was something strange about the way it was written. I read a number of critical views on the poem and found that each critic had analysed it in their own unique ways. Finally while writing my thesis, when I analysed the poem, I found the answer. The poem had binaries which are otherwise not visible to an ordinary reader. The dark woods and the white snow, stand as binaries. The mysterious pull of the woods is counter balanced by the poet's urge to move on. He knew that woods were lovely, dark and deep. But at the same time he could not respond to the life of pleasure because his journey was long, and full of promises.

After analysing the poetry of Frost, it becomes very clear that he had an extraordinary eye for details. He viewed everything in terms of the contrary forces which govern them. The world of Frost is a dual world of belief and make-belief, full of dualities. The reader might fear getting lost in this mysterious world of 'fire and ice.', 'desert places' and 'Hyla Brook'. But Frost gives them assurance that they will find their way back home. Like a light, he guides them home, from where they had begun this journey.

¹ Edward Connery Lathem and Lawrence Thompson .ed. *The Robert Frost Reader*, Holt, New York,1972, p.333.