

## Traumatic Healing Responsiveness in Frost's "Birches"

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### Abstract

Robert Frost's poem "Birches" raises the issue of nature conservation to disengage mankind from the humdrum of the mundane world, advocating a symbiotic world that encompasses trivial and sublime things of the world. Frost's concern for wildlife conservation aims at providing a sanctuary for all people who are struggling against the onslaught of socio-economic challenges, family predicaments, and the inescapable effects of social media. This article argues that the turbulent mind does not work for the supportable advancement of humanity; Frost's poem is a plea for a return to the pristine glory of nature as a healing agent for the miseries and dismays perpetrated on human beings by modern civilization. The poet appeals to the public apprehension for the benefit of the human race through verse. Using the ecocritical lens, this paper engages the qualitative research methodology to analyze the poem. The interpretation is based on the data pooled from secondary sources by reviewing the literature existing in the paradigm of eco-critical theory. Critical readings are based on the concept that nature is tantamount to spiritual therapy providing emotional alliance with it. This study incorporates critics' versions, text, and reference books as the sources to justify the argument. It contributes to the development of ecological cognizance for nature preservation that in turn provisions for reducing the psychological trauma among the modern people. The findings support the policy designers to take effective steps to reduce the damaging facets and provision to plan for sustainable development.

### Keywords

Conservation, healing, human psychology, nature, traumatic life

### Introduction

Robert Frost creates rustic life, a nature-loving environment, a charming landscape, and the Rocky Mountains imaginatively to disengage people from a world that is steeped in miseries and agonies. A modern man is beset by many predicaments like financial crises, family dissatisfaction, and business crash. These failures lead to demoralizing and pernicious effects on him. It has a direct impact on long-term effect on human psychology and emotion. Helgeson relates the causes for trauma with "[t]raumatic life events (sexual assault, disaster) and stressful life events (job loss, divorce, relationship problems, financial difficulties)" (508). The gender-biased bullying and natural catastrophes are the traumatic life events whereas sudden demise of the near and dear, quarrels among the family members are the traumatic life events that lead to suicidal mania among the public. Helgeson points out that traumatic events, "substance abuse, depression, and impaired social relations play a role in suicidal behavior" (539).

Against the backdrop of these deadening modern forces working against the general happiness of human beings, the poet creates an idyllic retreat to enable them to get rid of such social maladies as suicidal tendencies and other psychological issues. For Frost, the environment as an agent of healing power, is a conduit of unadulterated joy and offers an escape from the pernicious experiences of the modern world.

Filipova maintains that for Wordsworth and Thoreau, nature is the supporting mechanism for the minimization of the fright of the mundane world and they “began to foreground the importance of place in their figurations of nature as the remedy to and an escape from the vicissitudes of modernity” (1). Literature during the nineteenth century served as a life-affirming mechanism. He notes that romantic writers “played an important role in the formation of ecocriticism” (4). Vakoch and Mickey define ecology as “the study of the relationship between organisms and environmental conditions” (xvii). The interrelation among the creatures and their circumstances forms the basis of ecological balance. Any imbalance in a single element in this ecosystem threatens the coherence of the whole cyclic system.

Ecological study deals with the implications of the human-environment nexus. The brilliance in the environment provides mental freshness among people. Psychology is affected by intrinsic and extrinsic conditions. In the materialistically directed world, a peripheral state of affairs distresses internal psychology and people carry the traumatic mind wherever they go. Frost supports healing the inner state through a peripheral nature metaphor. The mesmerizing natural landscape reduces stress because nature has healing power. The dramatic presentation prevalent throughout his poems is relevant to work on ecological issues.

The socio-political and scientific activities concentrate on the causes of the problem and the probable solution of the local and global. Misiaszek appeals to act globally, “Environmental problem-solving must include deconstructing the local to global politics of environmental violence to understand its root causes and local to planetary effects better” (23). Realizing the importance of the environment from one domain is one-sided and does not support “planetary sustainability” (24). Therefore, literary critics and earth lovers have “to better understand Earth holistically” (24) because fragmented activities are botched to assure the sustainability of the universe. There has to be righteousness for the universe which is possible only through “socio-environmental justice” (35). The political pronouncements are influenced by the power structure of the universe. He further states that “our decision-making is political, influenced by histories of local to global power dynamics” (35). Therefore, political decisions should address environment-responsive activities.

Critics differ from one another on the idea of the poetic theme, art, and technique of the poet. Conn asserts that Frost foregrounds mythological and rustic issues, “It seemed to invoke a familiar regional mythology, in which upright New Englanders are moral outcroppings of their rocky soil, a landscape whose flinty poverty demonstrates its value” (336). However, Perkins and Perkins value Frost’s poetry

from a stylistic viewpoint, “His art is an act of clarification an act which without simplifying the truth ... accessible to everyone” (1309). The style of writing poetry for Perkins is truly noteworthy for him.

Critics highlight Frost from symbolic and modern standpoints for the usage of metaphors and themes in the poems. Austin considered the use of the arch symbol in Frost’s poetry as the central aspect of poetry, “Frost did consider one shape, the arch, especially appropriate as a symbol for a poem and the concept of metaphor” (67). The metaphorical exhibition arc acts as an effective symbolic point. Taking the reference to “Birches,” he reasons that “Birches” moves around the arch symbol. “In ‘Birches,’ the completed figure the boy and the birch tree make when he rides the tree ‘toward heaven and dismounts to the ground in the arch-like shape’” (73).

The modern essentials and common social practices are the prime issues of limited critics. Hart explored the modern elements in his poems, “We have one aspect of Frost’s modernism, his use of the vernacular” (258). The stylistic handling of the diction, for Hart, turned him out to be the modern poet. Winters celebrated Frost for his common social theme, “The poet deals with human experience in words” (566). The day-to-day life proceedings engrossed him as the focus of the poems. Kelley described the simplicity and down-to-earth reality, “Simple and timeless lessons on how to lead one’s life; make good choices, think for yourself, do what you have to do” (36). The teachings about the regular life in Frost’s poetry appeal to Kelley.

The use of symbols, images, metaphors, vernacular style, human understanding, and traditional teachings of life have been the major concerns of the critics. However, Frost's poems speak the voice of the public about common trauma-responsive concerns. The poem “Birches” deals with the consequences of the ecological balance and imbalance to be internalized by the political power undercurrents. Frost provisions to make the power structure aware of the significance of nature through the verse “Birches.” Robert Frost contracts with the significance of nature conservation to infuse freshness in the public. He fundamentally occupies the space in literature because of his incessant effort to conserve nature and place humans into an ecologically sound milieu to lead a blissful life. How do people develop awareness of ecological balance? Is there traumatic healing responsive in nature? How does Robert Frost articulate the worth of nature to make people aware of the healing power of nature to the mainstream policy designers? These are the scorching issues that this study seeks to answer. This study infers the untouched side of the poet that Frost’s contribution to literature supports to heal psychological issues. The researcher employs nature theory as a tool to interpret and justify the poet’s concern to conserve the countryside.

### **Hypothesis**

Robert Frost’s “Birches” probes into human psychology and proposes to heal the apprehension, frustration, and despair of the human mind of the mundane world through landscape imagery, symbols, and nature bathing. The poem implements the flashback technique to go back to the idyllic childhood days and exposes snowy scenes, a post-rain setting of a winter morning, a dense jungle, leaves on the ground, and cobwebs to heal the traumatized mind of the people of the town who are infringed within the concrete walls of the lofty buildings. Forest bath has a healing influence on the physically encroached and psychologically dissatisfied people of the modern world.

### **Research Methodology**

“Birches” is an ecological poem that highlights the importance of nature and natural scenery. Drawing on a qualitative approach, this paper carries out the content analysis and interpretation of the poem using nature theory. The paper argues that landscape revitalizes the traumatic psychology of general people. To justify the argument, the principal document is the verse. The images, symbols, and scenes of the poem are the illustrations to justify the argument. The secondary sources are books related to nature theory and environmental literature. Due to the encroachment of the people in the concrete walls of the town, they are mentally distressed. The alienated cognizance due to the urban ethos longed for the forest bath that is possible through the landscape. The researcher used eco-criticism as the theoretical tool to analyze and interpret the poem “Birches.” The snow-covered places, bending birches, ice storms, and scenic beauty bestow the symbolic tool kit for the mentally distracted people of the modern world. These words, phrases, lines, and stanzas of the poems are the signposts for the validation of the dispute that landscape-associated words and symbols afford solace to the shocking mindset of the public.

### **Traumatic Healing Responsiveness in “Birches”**

The natural scene provides a soothing effect on the traumatic mind of human beings as Robert Frost presents metaphorically in the poem “Birches.” He maintains that memory and massive involvement with wildlife lend consolation to the mind. The poet takes the locations of birches to create the images of the countryside showing the trees around it partaking lofty and straight figures. The trees that are bending down comfort the writer more than the conventional plants. He does so because, during his youthful days, he used to climb up the trees to curvature them downcast and swing with them. This is the reason why he finds them more exhilarating and stimulating than the straight trees. This is the exposure of the enigmatic facet of nature. The flakes of the snow convert them into bowed structures. The snow directly leads to the Himalayan white regional image which entices the viewers.

Observation of the landscape mesmerizes the viewer and leads him to the bygone days that in turn makes him associate with the innocence of the child. Once individuals are involved in worldly reality, they have the stress of life that dismisses the gorgeousness of life. To escape from the dreariness of the mundane world, wilderness is the only liberating retreat. The poem does exactly so, aiming at disengaging those who are languishing miserably in this chaotic and inhuman world. There are two-fold ways to escape the mundane world, first with the aid of imagination retreating to childhood memory and the next by being immersed in nature. For the poet, imagination and being a part of nature are the two infallible methods to remedy the agonies born of the chaotic and materialistic world. The poem's nostalgic tone functioning as a “survival toolkit” (Wolfelt 10) sends readers into reveries because the process of swinging lets the speaker feel free and be a part of the flora and fauna. Escaping from the ennui of modern civilization gives joy to him because physical activities such as swinging, jumping, and climbing up the trees partially support psychological satisfaction. Jago et.al assert that Frost gives importance to “idyllic beauty” to erase the impact of the industrialized world and protect “the unspoiled beauty of nature” (16) and give idyllic joy to human beings.

The persona commences the poem by showing the way the countryside leads to psychological satisfaction. The line “I see birches bend to left and right” highlights longing for the past along with the power of imagination. The “ice storm” and “loaded with ice” (*Norton Anthology of Poetry* 1227) designate the beauty of nature where the wholeness of life functions as the panacea for discharging trauma.

According to Filipova, Wordsworth and Thoreau found medication in the ecosphere is “the remedy for what they say so as the evils of modernity” (8). Frost followed the same footsteps to free people substantially and mentally from the alarm of society through the use of psychological geography

to take a leap into the imagination and dive into the wilderness. In the words of Wolfelt, a forest bath purifies the psychological stress for which people enjoy, “Simply sitting or resting in a natural setting activity, these positive charges” (16). He coins the term “forest bath,” which refers to a few minutes’ walk in the forest simply listening to the sounds of the birds, insects, sound of tree leaves and branches to release from the tediousness, strain, and frustration of life. Frost energizes the positive care to the world via place metaphor (16). The poet searches for the reason for bending down the trees and finds it a part of the natural aspect. He appeals to enjoy the beauty without any effort or cost. The phrase “winter morning after a rain’ (*Norton Anthology of Poetry* 1227) makes the readers feel afresh in a natural setting.

Conservation of nature supports every natural object. Living as well as non-living beings are connected for mutual sustainability. From Frost’s viewpoint, living and non-living beings are complementary to each other, one reinforcing the other. The presence of the breeze after rain turns the normal setting into a mosaic of color, “As the breeze rises, and turn many colored’. Mosaic natural color after the rain in nature emphasizes mental freshness. The line of the verse, “Sun’s warmth makes them shed crystal shell” is the power projected by the sun to work as the trauma-releasing dose. In the words of Wolfelt, “Spending time in nature has been proven to improve our mood, reduce feelings of anger, increase resilience, and even boost self-esteem” (18). Human beings have to increase sitting in the natural location to advance their assurance because nature has a healing influence. He positions that nature “erases depression and anxiety” (18). The avalanching of the snow crust leads the speaker to compare nature with the “inner dome of heaven.” The reciprocation heightens the freshness and hence releases shock. This is the signpost that nature has spiritual power. Lenka Filipova infers that the ecological presentation through writing “produces a citizen who is ecologically aware” (6). Along with the food crisis, biosphere pollution, and mining blemish human life, “Global warming, air, water, and soil pollution, and even growing resources extraction are global problems” (7). These global problems affect physical health and increase anxiety among people. Nature is an invariable instrument to redress the woes.

Deterioration of the earth mars the human psychology directly for which nature gives solace. Wolfelt points out “Green spaces in neighborhoods and communities provide places for people to interact in healthy ways” (19). The comparison of nature with the “girls” who “throw their hair... to dry in the air” shows his ability to associate female beauty with natural freshness. Immediately after that, the poet feels sorry for the town boys who fail to relish nature as the country boys do, “Some boys too far from town to learn baseball’ and the constraint they have is to “play alone” (*Norton Anthology of Poetry* 1227). Urbanization and commercialization hinder natural joy. Therefore, one has to be close to nature. Playing with nature is more joyous than playing with baseball. The former heals psychologically but the latter involves a mere physical participation. One has to discover new games while plunging into the groove of the jungle. He gives the picture of the “brim of the cup” to specify the extreme point for human actions that are satisfactory. He envisions beauty even in an otherwise artificial terrain because of the supremacy of imagination. The poet becomes nostalgic and calls back to the past, “I once myself a swinger of birches” (*Norton Anthology of Poetry* 1227) to escape from the existing traumatic situation.

“Birches” provokes him to go back to the delightful days and involved in the blissful time. A nostalgic tone develops an intrinsic incentive for the speaker to become involved in the wildlife that disengages him from the psychological trauma of the world. Filipova highlights the value of literature for nature conservation, “On the role of literature and the cultural imaginary as a way of addressing the very real environmental problems” (154). Frost is efficacious in generating consciousness among the public for the implication of nature to heal the ordeal of the world. The reason he further points out that “literature is

shown to have the potential to create communities based on the sharing of effective experiences” (155). The world he finds is mundane with duties and responsibilities due to which he confesses that “I am weary of considerations.” He is dismayed because of the ecological devastation. The pleasant scene always invigorates human beings. One who is exhausted needs a departure from the daily rush of the world. Uncertainty in life is similar to the “pathless wood”. The present-day reality stretches disturbance to him from which it is conceivable to escape only with the help of charming scenes and fancy. He compares life with “pathless wood,” and “cobwebs,” and consequently people spend time “weeping” (*Norton Anthology of Poetry* 1227). This is the reason that he likes to take refuge in the world of imagination for a temporary period to escape from the current unfriendly activities: “I’d like to get away from the earth.” He is unwilling to return to the earth because the world is steeped in miseries and anguishes.

Frost retreats to the pristine glory of nature to make life stress-free, “And half grant what I wish and snatch me away.” For him “Earth’s the right place to live” as it is responsive to all living and non-living beings. Birch tree functions as the vehicle to depart from worldly inertia. Climbing is the mounting movement that injects joy for him, “I’d like to go by climbing a birch tree” and “climb back in “a snow-white trunk” (*Norton Anthology of Poetry* 1227). Filipova supports Frost’s value of literature that “ideas of nature impart on the world around us and thus reproduce the world” (155), then moves towards heaven. He rejoices in swinging in the tree. He has the keen wish to live in the earth. Douglas A. Vakoch and Sam Mickey advocate for the “interconnections and network of coexistence” (xvii). Frost critically urges for the idea of coexistence through this poem.

People regularly strive to lessen their pain by resorting to social media, social gatherings, and alcohol. They are still weighed down by the feeling of the burden. They are befriended to the grief. The regular presence of the grief generates other emotions. However, they forget the point that “human beings are genetically and evolutionarily programmed to connect with nature” (Wolfelt 13). Therefore, the healing power resides in nature. The ultimate point of the poet is to make people internalize the significance of nature.

Human feelings and nature are embedded as humans are a part of nature. Memory and nostalgia function to heal us. The pleasure we get from nature is more significant than the artificial aspect of life. Aging forces people to slowly distance themselves from nature and consequently life becomes miserable and stressful, resulting in trauma. This leads the speaker to take a temporary shelter in the imaginative world to generate a fun fun-looking outlook. Ignoring the tedious specifics of life, he leaps the past. Human beings and nature are interconnected and the artificial effort to separate them is impossible. Several experiences are hidden in the lap of nature which is exposed as time appears. However hard we try to maintain distance from the natural objects, we fail to do so because we are in love with nature inherently.

To sum up, innately, people have a deep-rooted love for wildlife and natural scenery. However, due to social and personal compulsion, they are bound to migrate to the city centers and encroached areas in the town. Impinged area binds them physically and psychologically. Consequently, they feel deviated away from nature and rustic life and deprived of the setting which in turn leads to a traumatic mindset. The suicidal obsession, depression, and anxiety are the results of the traumatic psychology. Intrinsically they are to be with nature but they feel that they botched to get that location which is the call of their physiology and biology. The result is psychological dissatisfaction that in turn causes trauma. The poem responds to the traumatic people to return to nature as it has a therapeutic influence. Therefore, modern human beings should associate them with trees, rivers, insects, wildlife, and forest visits for a healthy and pleasant life. Maximization of wildlife conservation, minimization of global warming through eco-

friendly activities, and mass involvement in making the city and urban areas equally greenery provide for the freshness of human psychology in the contemporary world.

### **Conclusion**

Robert Frost leads people to the rustic life-giving poetic treatment of the subject matter of the poem. “Birches” deals with the physical presentation of nature along with psychological healing. The characters and natural things leave the lubricant of psychologically motivating impression that nature pleases humans to disengage them from the mundane world. Environmental-related problems cannot be solved through days or weeks of effort but need sustainable effort for the long-term solution. For the solution, there has to be the internalization of the healing power of nature, nature as the toolkit, and the importance of the forest bath. The human trauma caused by personal, social, and financial reasons needs to be treated. This process is complete in the support of nature. The poet appeals to all the people for the conservation of nature to make the world a healthy place to live in. The poem fuses natural reality and imagination to cure the shock of the present among human beings owing to the chaos in the modern world. He creates a psychological landscape imaginatively as an escape for the people suffering agonies in the mundane world. Ecological activities and environmental consciousness have to move simultaneously to make the earth a healthy place for habitation. This robust and hearty place releases people from the distressing world. Robert Frost values nature as a treasure trove to relieve the grief-stricken human beings from the daily onslaught of pain.

This study transports the memorandum that people have the intrinsic impetus to be in the lap of nature. However, the internal and external movement from rural areas to urban areas leads them to encroach involuntarily. This nonconformity disturbed them psychologically. The get-rich-quick mindset also made them traumatic and needed to be healed. Medicinal curing is supported physically for the time being but they need it psychologically. The psychological backing is possible only through the forest bath, residing in the peaceful jungle listening to the fauna, the twittering sound of birds, rustling through of leaves and the natural call of the river, and watching the snow-covered area, grassland, and the vegetation. They have to be with insects, birds, animals, flowers, and trees to release from the spiritual ailment. Natural beings have the healing power for the distressed minds of modern people. Therefore, people should go back to the lap of nature or make the town areas open and greenery to cure the traumatic psychology.

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