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### SYMBOLIC ANALYSIS IN POETRY OF ROBERT FROST AND THOMAS DYLAN

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This study has its focus on the investigations of symbolic perspectives in the selected poems of a well-known American poet Robert Frost and a modern Welsh poet Thomas Dylan. It also aims at the comparison of symbols used by these poets keeping in view "The Theory of Symbolic Interactionism" by Blumer. Both the poets are related to the modern era and their works enlighten the dark spots under the veil of consumerism and blind competition of people with one another. The relation of man with nature is described vehemently by both the poets. In the present study, the researcher has tried to investigate the role of natural symbols employed by the poets on the thinking and psychological state of common people. This study also highlights how modern man is stuck with unending responsibilities. A modern man is actually suffering from alienated and sordid atmosphere. There is a communication gap between human beings which can be fulfilled by nature and its proximity with individuals and their groups. An optimistic view of life is presented for the modern readers through the use of symbolic tools. Death is presented to be an eternal reality and about to bridge the gulf and connect man with life. So, death must be welcomed in an unusual manner. In almost all the poems there is a single narrator who is either enjoying the overwhelming charm of nature or raging violently against death. All these perspectives depict the social background and relative states of the characters. The readers deduce the message veiled behind the universal and personal symbols according to their peculiar symbolic approach and status in the modern mechanically controlled society.

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

Robert Frost (1874-1963) is an American poet of 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is highly regarded for his realistic depiction of rural life and command on colloquial speech. Robert Lee Frost was born on March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1874. At the age of 88, he died on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 1963 in Boston, Massachusetts, U.S. He was a poet and playwright. He was not having any professional degree. His notable works are 'A Boy's Will' (1913) and 'North of Boston' (1914). He got Pulitzer Prize for Poetry and Congressional Gold Medal. A critic opines: "Robert Frost was a poet

who combined profundity and sublimity paired with uniqueness and universality. In Frost, a poet of external themes can be seen. Frost was not aloof from American anxiety and her spiritual and artistic striving of the twentieth century." Thomas Dylan was a Welsh poet and writer. Thomas style of verse includes free association of words with musicality. This feature of simplicity and directness of style makes him akin to Robert Frost. Thomas Dylan is recognized as a major lyric poet and a craftsman who opened new avenues of potential uses of words. Simplicity of diction is a considerable mark of Thomas' most successful poems, even the complex symbolism of the early poems remained a useful tool for his interpretation of bitter realities of modern world. Dylan Thomas was a brilliant poet, essayist, journalist and novelist. Musicality of the language, visionary approach and sensual touches are evident in his poetry. He is considered as one of the 20th century's most effective and finest creator of verses. His is world famous due to the force and verbal strength of his symbols and celebration of natural beauty in his poetry.

The use of symbols to convey hidden meanings is often employed as an impressive and appealing figure of speech. Symbols are used in literature to specify the thinking processes by which the poets construct verbal and intellectual images in verbal sequences. They specify the sensory and motor perceptions used in everyday life either through literal descriptions or using allusions, simile or metaphors. Symbols are not only expressed through visual imagery but also through auditory (sound), tactile (touch) thermal (heat and cold), olfactory (smell), gustatory (taste) and kinesthetic sensation (movement). Symbolic images engage the reader's attention by over whelming productions or attractive verbal demonstrations that realistically paint the nature of a specific interval. Creations in literature having impressive symbolic use provides the readers with the picture of what is going on in the modern world and support what the writer or poet is striving to pass on to the receivers.

Natural potential, for example, equates with man-made energy in the symbolism of "the force that through the green fuse drives the flower"; both machines and people function mechanically in "My world is pyramid," and "I, in my intricate image"; art forms are coupled with life-forms to heighten the effect between them. The root of these comparisons is nature versus man. In a sense this basic theme is a paradox in Thomas, who is regarded as celebrating unity between the creation of man and nature. The whole phenomena, though, nurtured him what he could and could not do with words used iconically. Elder Olson extended Trice's observations in his book, "The Poetry of Dylan Thomas" (Olson, Poetry of Dylan Thomas, 1954). He analyzes Dylan's motives, stanza form, rhythm patterns and his unique use of language. Olson argues that Thomas' symbolism was manipulated by himself. For instance, Olson narrates that Thomas uses caves to signify the inner most aspects of self. Olson divides Thomas' poetry in three periods, one of darkness, the second of concern for others and the last of reconciliation. The symbols used in negotiated meanings and reconstructed through sociological interactions provide the basis of symbolism and also relates how different people play different role in their expressions, (Griffin, 1997). Blumer (1986) stated that people interpret and construct communicative actions. Their response is ascribed to the situations and environment. So, humanistic interactions are facilitated by the application of symbols and

assigning meaning to these symbols as the output of interaction. According to Blumer's, 'Perspective and Method', Symbolic interactionism rests on three simple premises. Firstly, humans act towards things on the basis of meanings ascribed to them. Secondly, the meanings are derived as a result of interaction with one another. According to third premise, the meanings are modified through interpretations and social interactions. (Blumer, 1969). The present study aims at the symbolic connection in between interacting people through the use of poetry as a medium of depiction of motives, expressions, inner states of minds and outer conflicts.

#### ***Selected Poems of Robert Frost:***

1. An Apple Picking
2. Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening
3. An Old Man's Winter Night
4. The Tuft of Flowers

#### ***Selected poems of Thomas Dylan:***

1. Fern Hill
2. Poem in October
3. Do not Go Gentle into that Good Night
4. The Force through the green fuse drives

#### ***Statement of the Problem***

The aim of researcher in this study is to compare the symbols in selected poems of Robert Frost and Thomas Dylan. Keeping in view the premise of theory of Symbolic interpretation by Blumer. The researcher tries to analyze how symbols contribute to the main themes of the poems of both the poets and how these symbols reflect the reader's comprehension and intellect. The importance of symbols used in the poetry of the above mentioned poets throws light upon their use as a figurative tool to highlight effective interactional scheme between different members of the society.

#### ***Research Questions:***

**Q 1:** How do Frost and Dylan employ symbols to convey special meaning in their poetry and what kind of symbols do both poets use in the Poetry?

**Q 2:** What kind of effects do the symbols used by the poets put on the minds of the reader?

#### ***Research Objectives:***

- To analyze the symbolic significance of poetry used in Frost and Thomas Dylan poems.
- To investigate the meaning of symbols keeping in the premise "Theory of Symbolic Interactionism" by Blumer.
- To find out special meanings that are conveyed through the use of symbols by the poets.

- To find out the effects of symbols on the minds of the readers.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

Symbolism is a literary movement concerning the use of different modes of language for transferring ideas. The metaphor for symbolism is provided by language showing relation between ideal and objective world. .

T.S. Eliot uses ‘fog’ to symbolize the spiritual degeneration of modern man due to alcoholism and sexism. Similarly, Yeasts used ‘Birds’ to materialize his ideas.

It is also known as post-impressionist movement as it started with impressionism. In Symbolism, symbolic meaning overlap with literal meaning depending upon perception.

Shamisa (2004) classifies symbols as Arbitrary and Personal. Arbitrary symbols are temporary and change from one person to another whereas Personal symbols are self-creations or personality created. Robert Frost and Thomas Dylan is master in both types of symbols.

According to Perinne (1974) a reader should keep in mind that in a story or poem a phenomenon is positioned and stressed in a way that it can be identified as a symbol. Inside the text, identification of symbols is appreciated and suggested. Any item or word can be called a symbol if it is used other than its literal meanings.

According to Griffin (1997), Symbolic interpretations have taken origin from two theorists Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead. George H. Mead is known as true founder of Symbolic interactions traditions. He used to train people in the field of best mental interpretations and taught in the department of Philosophy.

Herbert Blumer has further modified this term Symbolism, by effective, enhanced and descriptive details of reactions towards symbols and their meanings. According to Blumer, in Symbolic Interaction main focus is on meanings which are explained in terms of outcomes and happenings.

This process of Symbolic interpretations is taken in terms of communication. It studies, explains, defines and explores the social world. Symbolic meanings are modified and handled through an interpretative process which is used by people while interpreting different objects. English literature is loaded with variety of symbols in different genres. Novel, drama and poetry are repleted with symbols to ensure the awareness of their deep meanings.

In “Long Days Journey into Night” Eugene O’ Neil used rich variety of symbols. The most important symbol is the thick ‘fog’ blurring everything on the stage which symbolizes obscured perceptions of the world. ‘Fog’ is used to hide the reality into the world of illusions. The ultimate title is also symbolic, “Long Day’s Journey into Night” ‘Long Day’ symbolizes the life span of human

beings and 'Night' symbolizes the ultimate destiny of a human being from life to death.

In a short story "The Necklace" by Maupassant, the symbol of 'Necklace' is employed so beautifully and deeply to depict the alluring nature of worldly pursuits. Mathilde is deceived by the glitter of utopian mode of life but she has to suffer at the cost of her life and happiness.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:**

This study is based on Herbert Blumer's "Theory of Symbolic Interactionism". Blumer coined this term of "symbolic interactionism", to investigate the nature of symbols interacting with human behavior, the social process and human perception. The connection of symbols reflects the different patterns of behavior and perceptive abilities of people living in a particular socio cultural stance and acting according to creative capabilities. The effective use of symbols according to particular backgrounds is also desirable to direct the mind in the direction of achieving particular objective. So keeping in view the "Theory of Symbolic Interactionism" by Blumer, the researcher has made the theoretical framework of this study. It also highlights the importance of symbols in the interpretation of deeper meanings associated with realities of life. The relationship of Symbolism with imagery is also be a focus of this study. Different types of imagery are used by Robert Frost and Thomas Dylan to convey their feelings and emotions through the use of symbols.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The research will observe the different aspects of Symbolism as presented in Frost and Dylan's poems. The original poems will be the primary source of collecting data for the research. The mode of research will be qualitative and descriptive in nature. Along with the analysis of selected poems and biographies of authors, clarity will be attained regarding the use of symbols.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

Robert Frost use of symbols is amazing and his style of writing is marvelous. The way in which Frost used symbols in his poetry is nevertheless an extraordinary style. Apparently these symbols appear to be very common, general and ordinary but actually these symbols have deeper and thought provoking meanings particularly if these symbols are seen through the lens of theory of Interactionism. Frost has a perfect skill in using symbols. He uses them in such a way that makes his poetry even more appealing, charming and suggestive. His symbols convey a complete idea or a concept in a comprehensible form. This is a specialty of Frost to use symbols so beautifully and tactfully to attract the reader towards his poetry and welcome them to ponder upon it.

Thomas Dylan was a great Welsh, modernist and symbolist poet. He employed various unusual verbal techniques in the use of symbols. His symbols convey his ideology of modern sordid world in a better and attractive manner. He is a true reflector of his age showing the problems and issues of Modern Welsh society. Thomas Dylan has used a large variety of symbols to show the real nature of creation and ultimate life cycle of humans leading towards death which is a universal truth and leads man to eternal life. For comparison, the

researcher has used all the possible sources in order to fulfill this endeavor successfully.

The present study comprises of the comparative analysis of symbolism in the poetry of Robert Frost and Thomas Dylan providing deep insight into the relation of verbal symbolism with modern socio-economic states. Generally, with comparative literature as a discipline, comparisons are useful. It helps to provide a glance into different aspects of thematic ideologies by comparing and analyzing a work of art. In the poem, "After Apple Picking" by Frost, the poet says that after a long day's work, the speaker is tired of apple picking. He has been feeling drowsy and sleepy since morning. He looks through a sheet of ice lifted from the surface of the water trough. But after some time he feels tired but wonders whether it is a normal end-of-the-day sleep or something deeper. *"Long sleep, as I describe its coming on or just some human sleep"*

According to Frost it made his vision seem strange, as if he was looking through a distorted lens and he is not able to get rid of his strangeness. He has tried to rub his eyes to rub the sleep out of his eyes in the morning. But it has not worked yet as the whole world continues to look odd and he feels himself approaching death.

A touch of mystery is added by the poet. Two types of apples are discussed by the poet. These are accepted apples and rejected apples. The rejected apples finally go to the cider press and accepted apples become the part of nature. The whole poem is symbolic and nature poem where the speaker drifts into oblivion keeping the reader in an awoken state.

*"But I am done with apple-picking now  
Essence of winter sleep is on the night  
The scent of apples I am drowsing off  
I cannot shake the shimmer from my sight"*

In the poem, "After Apple Picking" by Frost, the poet says that after a long day's work, the speaker is tired of apple picking. He has been feeling drowsy and sleepy since morning. He looks through a sheet of ice lifted from the surface of the water trough. But after some time he feels tired but wonders whether it is a normal end-of-the-day sleep or something deeper.

The second poem of Thomas Dylan which is analyzed here is his "Poem in October" which presents a panorama of natural beauty. "Poem in October" is an autobiographical poem of Dylan Thomas written to celebrate his thirtieth birthday. Dylan at this point wanted to absorb the eternal depth of beautiful nature. He talks about the carefree walk towards the hills from the dock. This unhurried walk in the beautiful landscape gives him enough time to think, observe and articulate sensational beauty in the symbolic journey leading towards life. Finally, when the climax arrives he reaches at the top of the hill which shows his culmination of youth to maturity and wonderful achievement of wisdom.

*“It was my thirtieth year to heaven  
Woke to my hearing from harbor  
And the mussel pooled and the heron  
Priested shore the morning beckon”*

Dylan wants the beauty of nature to sweep into the care of his being. The beautiful natural landscape overwhelms him and he articulates that the surrounding beauty depicts the journey of life and its pleasures which are short lived. Through the use of poetic art, Dylan is trying to emphasize upon the temporary temptations experienced during the journey of youthful delight. The first two stanzas of the poem express the delight of youthfulness and nature as implied in the lines:

*“A spring full of larks in a rolling  
Cloud and the roadside bushes brimming with whistling”*

The praise of the Almighty and the love of man is the main subject matter in the poetry of Dylan. “Poem in October” is about the poetic art. In this poem, the poet while going on a morning walk visualizes the true joys of youth which is being recycled into poetry. It was his thirtieth year to heaven. Here heaven may signify God. He salutes God for his existence as he commemorates his birthday in this poem.

*“O may my heart’s truth  
Still be sung  
On this high hill in a year’s turning”*

Nature is the symbol of holiness of thoughts. It appears as if the morning is inviting him as he was cherished on his birthday. This poem reflects so many colors which show that Thomas is an artist using words as his paint box. The theme of “Poem in October” is the joy of childhood which is symbolic of the poet’s creative power and the recapturing of that joy, symbolic of the renewing of his creative power. The child is used as a symbol of innocence.

The third poem of Robert being analyzed in this study is “An Old Man’s Winter Night”. It’s a sort of an autobiographical poem when Frost approaches old age. The depiction of old age and philosophy of death both are expressed. Old age leads to isolation, disturbance, physical and mental alienation. One can’t realize his identity which leads towards the fright of unknown, pathos of old age and horrors of old age.

*“All out of doors looked darkly in at him  
Through the thin frost, almost in separate stars  
That gathers on the pane in empty rooms”*

An old man is shown to be alone in a wintery night behind the mirror of the door in an empty room. The old man is having a lamp in his hand which is throwing light outside the room. The light is flashing upon his eyes so that he can’t observe his surroundings. He is actually unable to see his past and future. Just a blurring picture of present is in his mind. Autobiographical element is

evident as Frost has also grown old like the character of old man in the wintry night.

*“The log that shifted with a jolt  
Once in the stove, disturbed him and he shifted  
And eased his heavy breathing, but still slept”*

At the end of the poem the poet asserts that at this stage of life when one is getting old or approaching death and when no one is there to give him company, he can't keep a farm or manage a house properly. So, he is unable to bear the coldness of a frosty winter night. It is a universal truth that man is a social animal. So, we cannot survive alone especially when night representing old age is going on during the span of alienated life.

The third masterpiece of Thomas Dylan discussed here is “Do not Go Gentle into That Good Night”. In this poem the poet requests his father not to be gentle on death. He asks his father to fight against death with force and passion and not to accept it quietly. The word “night” symbolizes death and in the first line, the word “Good Night” refers to a ‘good death’. The poet motivates his father to defy death in a gentle way. “Burn and Rave” are often related with the passion of youth here the poet wants the old people to sing passionately. In the second line, “close of day” symbolizes a life which is approaching death.

*“Do not go gentle into that good night  
Old age should burn and rave at close of Day”*

“Do not Go Gentle into that Goodnight” is a masterpiece of contrasts in all its aspects. The simplicity of language and romantic subject matter with a grave tone of death is jumbled into a complicated structure shaped by Dylan to perfection. The contradiction is highlighted by the structure of the poem, a gentle rhythm with a gloomy topic. The passion and theme are powerfully communicated by recurring use of refrain and repetition. The use of poetic device of symbolism appeals to our senses.

*“Rage rage against the dying of the light  
Though wise men at their end know dark is right”*

In this poem, Thomas has painted a somber illusion of never ending childhood, death was not something to be feared but instead something to accept happily, life is a wondrous platform for hide and seek and death liberates from crippling age. This poem is the epitome of Thomas' rejection of the conventional means of responding to death and his attitude towards life.

Thomas's verses are actually forceful as he makes a strident request to his father to affirm life till the end approaches rather than to submit passively to death. In the second part, Thomas explains that the good deeds that he and others have done might give better advantage if more men were to rage.

*“And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way  
Do not go gentle into that good night”*



The request made by the son to his dear father to react against upcoming death confirms Thomas's main theme of the ever-going processes of life and death and joining of a new phase of life connecting the eternal universe with newly breeding generations.

Due to such an old and tender age the old man is in a creaking room and frightened state. He was visible to no one like the light of a lamp. He considered himself as a valueless commodity. The old man has confined his life in the moon light which is presented to be better than sun light because it gives him courage to spend the night of winter alone. The word "broken moon" represents poet's broken heart, broken mind and a broken mood. One alone man in a frosty island gets disturbed by the movement of a shifting log of wood. But manages himself and gathers his courage in order to join the journey of sleep which is actually taking him to death.

*"The log that shifted with a jolt  
Once in the stove, disturbed him and he shifted  
And eased his heavy breathing, but still slept".*

Thomas has painted a somber illusion that death was not something to be feared but instead something to accept happily. Life is a wonderful platform for hide and seek and death liberates from crippling age. This poem is the epitome of Thomas' rejection of the conventional means of responding to death and his attitude towards life.

All the selected poems of Frost have humanistic and social representations in the nature poetry presenting human characters and their relationship with passing time to eternity. Quite similarly Thomas Dylan's all selected poems have human characters socially interacting with each other and with nature that make Dylan's poetry realistic and keeps the reader in his own realistic world. Both the poets are optimistic and remain aloof from the world of pessimism.

## CONCLUSION

The comparison of the symbols in the selected works of these two poets is done in the light of "Theory of Symbolic Interactionism" by Blumer (1986). According to this theory all communication is symbolic and is based upon interactions and meanings. This theory consists of three core principles which are Meaning, Language and Thought. These three core principles lead to the conclusions about the socialization of humans into community and creation of a person's self. For Blumer "Meaning" states that human act towards other people and things according to those meanings which are given to them by others through the process of social interaction for example the meaning of grass is food to cow but shelter to fox etc. About "Language" Blumer says that it is a medium for humans to negotiate meanings through symbols. Humans identify meanings in speech act with others." Thought according to Blumer modifies individual's interpretation of symbols so it is a mental conversation that requires different point of views. To understand the poetry of Frost and Dylan it is customary to comprehend the application of symbols. The use of vibrant imagery, fractured syntax, word play and personal symbolism takes the literary pieces to an extra ordinary height. Like ingenious linguists, both Frost and

Dylan have given new directions to symbolic use of language. They opulently created a blend of imagery, rhythm and literary allusions. From the above discussion, it can be elicited that both Robert Frost and Thomas Dylan have beautifully crafted symbols in their poetry to project the social issues and problems of their societies. They have used symbols in a very tactful manner that it not only conveyed their ideology but also contributed to the major themes of the selected masterpieces. Their love for their work really deserves a great acknowledgement and applause from the critics and the readers because they are highly commendable and provide a role model for all of us to follow.

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