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UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE I  
HIGHER TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGE  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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## **DEISM AND ECOTHEOLOGY: A STUDY OF SELECTED POEMS OF ROBERT LEE FROST**

Présentée en vue de l'obtention du Diplôme de Professeur de l'Enseignement  
Secondaire deuxième grade  
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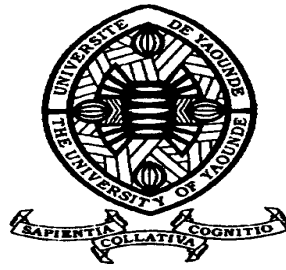
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## **ABSTRACT**

This study, entitled “Deism and Ecotheology: A Study of Selected Poems of Robert Lee Frost” is concerned with Frost’s controversial stance as a modernist poet who embraces the traditional transcendentalist deification of nature. It looks at how the poet’s transcendentalist tendencies somehow lead to ecosalvation. Modernism and Ecocriticism are the theoretical lenses through which some selected poems of Frost’s collection have been examined. The former has made it possible for the study to unveil frostian apostasy towards religion as a traditional narrative. Meanwhile, the latter has enabled the research endeavour to highlight the deification of nature as an avenue for the attainment of eco-salvation and to portray the poet’s creation of a new theology and religion respectively labelled ecotheology and ecoreligion. The study has elucidated the fact that the poet, in the midst of religious chaos in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, breaks from conventional religious practices and posits that there is the need for eco-salvation. This research work has attempted to break through the problem of religious ambivalence by showing how the poet’s skepticism of religion as a traditional narrative and the deification of nature have led to a new form of worship. The work, at the level of pedagogic relevance, portrays how ecological consciousness can be attained through poetry in a Form Three Class. It also suggests activities that can be used in creating learners’ autonomy in the learning of poetry.

## RESUME

Ce travail intitulé « Déisme et l'éco théologie: une étude des poèmes sélectionnés de Robert Lee Frost » a pour préoccupation d'examiner la position controversable de Frost comme poète moderne qui adhère à la déification transcendentaliste de la nature typique des poètes traditionnels. Il s'intéresse à la manière dont ces tendances transcendentalistes du poète plus ou moins conduisent à l'éco salut. Le modernisme et l'éco critique sont les deux théories fondamentales utilisées pour analyser certains poèmes de la collection de Frost. La première a permis à cette étude de dévoiler l'apostasie Frostienne envers la religion comme une narrative traditionnelle. Par contre, la deuxième a permis à cette recherche de souligner la déification de la nature comme un seuil de la réussite de l'éco salut, et de démontrer la création d'une nouvelle théologie et une nouvelle religion respectivement appelées écothéologie et écoreligion. Cette étude a élucidé que, le poète, dans un contexte de chamboulement religieux du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle se détache des pratiques religieuses conventionnelles et énonce le besoin de l'éco salut. Cette recherche a résolu le problème d'ambivalence religieuse en montrant comment le scepticisme du poète pour la religion comme une narrative traditionnelle ainsi que la divinisation de la nature ont conduit à l'émergence d'un nouveau culte d'adoration. En ce qui concerne son importance pédagogique, ce travail illustre comment la conscience écologique est atteinte à travers la poésie dans une classe de Form III. De même, il propose des exercices qui pourraient permettre de créer l'autonomie chez l'apprenant dans l'apprentissage de la poésie.

## **DEDICATION**

To my parents, Nkwenti Joseph and late mami Esther Ngum

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I have not forgotten all those whose names could not be mentioned here, you all contributed in one way or the other.

## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled “Deism and Ecotheology in Selected Poems of Robert Lee Frost” was carried out by Ndeh Jacob Nkwenty and submitted to the Department of English of the Higher Teacher Training College (ENS) Yaounde in view of obtaining a Postgraduate Teacher’s Diploma (DIPES II) in English.

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

A large cultural wave of modernism, which gradually emerged in Europe and the United States in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, expressed a sense of modern life through art as a sharp break from the past, as well as from Western civilization's classical traditions. Modern life seemed radically different from traditional life—more scientific, more technological and more mechanized. This era ushered in objectivity, identity, unity, certainty and authority brought about by the scientific mentality of enlightenment. Religious ideals have been ignored as a result of material progress, propagated by the advent of the industrial revolution. By the close of the century, events were beginning to take a sharp twist. The industrial revolution (which had created much optimism in the minds of people) had failed to provide man with the glory he greatly anticipated. Instead, the world was getting steadily uglier—especially with the drama of political struggle which plunged man into a catastrophic world war and consequent disillusionment in the first three decades of the twentieth century.

The same ugliness has been reflected in man's massive destruction of nature as Lynn White in "The Historical Roots to Present-Day Ecological Crisis" points out. White notes that the Bible asserts man's dominion over nature and establishes a trend of anthropocentrism. According to him, the book of Genesis 1:28 accounts for man's dominion over nature (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*). The Christian theology is seen as that which encourages manipulation and even exploitation of nature for human purposes. White suggests that man should abandon his superiority over other creatures by adopting saint Francis of Assisi's model of "democracy of creation" where all creatures are respected and man's rule over creation is delimited (Glotfelty and Fromm, 13).

This critic's ideas set off an extended debate about the role of religion in creating and sustaining the West's destructive attitude towards the exploitation of the natural world. He further suggests that God created nature; nature also must reveal the divine mentality. In the early Church, and always in the Greek East, nature was conceived primarily as a symbolic system through which God speaks to men. White claims here that western Christianity is a human-centered religion. His argument accrues from the Book of Genesis which suggests that creation is mainly for the benefit of man. According to him, therefore, the present-day environmental crisis can be traced to the interpretation of the Bible.

Robert Lee Frost wrote his poetry during this modernist period; that is, the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century—at the height of these ecological debates. In spite of this, most of his poems are about pastoral life in rural environment in which he portrays man’s interaction with nature in three categories: man as the centre of nature, nature as the source of human wisdom, and nature as a means through which man’s spiritual and psychological needs are satisfied. Frost does not only present the close relationship between man and nature, but also teaches his readers to achieve a harmonious coexistence with it. The poet’s perception of poetry differs from that of other modern poets like Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, and Thomas Stearns Eliot who were urban-pastoralists—they condemned the idealized version of the pastoral.

In effect, through his bleakness in landscape poetry, Frost uses nature as his scene just like any rural-pastoralist does. His depiction of the relationship between man and nature is pictured by many critics as the poet’s ecological consciousness which is a reaction against the prevalence of man’s ecological crisis (man’s physical survival is threatened). The far-reaching dangers of the ecological crisis worldwide have contributed enormously to a new awareness of environmental sustainability. Even though Frost wrote in the modernist era, his poems elucidate the transcendentalist sublimation towards the deification of nature. This view is captured by the observation that “Although Frost’s ruralism affirmed the modernist distaste of cities, he was writing the kind of traditional, accessible poetry that modernists argued could no longer be written” (Baym, 1878). It is this controversial stance of the poet that constitutes the research problem of this academic endeavour.

This study therefore aims at examining Frost’s controversial stance. Though a modernist poet, he embraces the traditional transcendentalist perception of nature in the domain of religion. It further seeks to establish the fact that the poet deifies nature to the extent of carving out what could be termed a new theology and a new religion. In order to achieve these aims, the work therefore strives to answer the following questions:

- To what extent does Frost deconstruct conventional religion in his poetry?
- In what ways does the poet deify nature in the selected poems?
- How does Frost’s double deconstruction of conventional religion and deification of nature result into ecoreligion?

- What is the pedagogic relevance of Frost's poetry to Cameroonian Secondary School Students?

Thus, the study is based on the hypothetical premise that Frost's controversial stance as a modernist poet who opts for the traditional transcendentalist deification of nature could result into a new theology and a new religion. The poet somehow debunks traditional religion (especially the Judeo-Christian conception of God) and elevates nature to the status of God in his poems.

The work is limited to selected poems in the poet's early, middle and later collections published between 1913-1947: *A Boy's Will*, *North of Boston*, *Mountain Interval*, *New Hampshire*, *West-Running Brooks*, *A Futher Range*, and *A Witness Tree* respectively. In these collections, Frost examines subject matters that engage him in different spheres of life, namely: the rural people and cultures of New England, the lives of working people in Frost's early twentieth century England, mythology and folklore as alternatives to creation, religion, and man and nature as complementary entities. In this vein, the subject matter of the poems chosen, fit within the scope of this research endeavour. Twenty-five poems from seven collections have been analysed. Their choices have been equally motivated by the fact that they dwell on contemporary issues that are primordial to man and even to the society nowadays. It is important that the collections chosen cover a span of thirty-four years. This is suggestive of the fact that the findings proceed from facts about Frost's poetry spread over several decades.

In such an ecological-crisis-ridden era, it is important to analyse the poet's ecological consciousness in the selected poems which will create awareness in an era when people disregard nature and its virtues. Furthermore, the Christian religion presents a blissful life but has failed to provide man with the solutions that he needs. Man is faced with terrorist attacks here and there, wars and economic crisis which have made him to quest for a new arena where he can gain true salvation in the world today. In Cameroon, the quest for man's redemption has resulted into a plethora of Christian churches which put man in a delimma as to where true salvation lies. As a result, Frost is providing man with an avenue where he can freely worship God at the altar of nature.

The arguments raised in this dissertation revolve around certain concepts that need to be defined. These terms are “deism” and “ecothology.” The word “deism” was derived from the Latin word ‘*deus*’ which means god. In this work, the term “deism” is a concept whose meaning is derived both from its etymological definition and the contentions of the Deist Movement. As a movement, Deism emerged in Europe in the seventeenth century and came to exert a powerful influence during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. The movement holds that God does not interfere with how things happen in the natural world as he allows them to function according to the law of nature. The propounders rejected miracles and prophecies but still considered themselves Christians because they believed in what they felt to be the pure, original form of Christianity— that is, Christianity as it existed before it was corrupted by additions of such superstitions like miracles, prophecies, and the doctrine of the Trinity (Stephen, 229).

Stated otherwise, Deists rejected every form of revealed religion. Both *The Anthology of American Literature and A Glossary of Literary Terms* (7th edition) define Deism as religion that proceeds from reason. In this light, the first source refers to it as “an 18th century Enlightenment religion emphasizing reason, not miracle, partly a reaction against Calvinism and Religious superstition” (Baym, 114). The second replaces the term “superstition” by “revelation” and refers to Deism as “religion without revelation” (Abrams, 62). Deists denounced all particular religions, including Christianity, which are based on faith in the truths revealed in special Scriptures at a certain time and place, available only to a particular individual or group. The Deists proved their claims with reasoning that these truths can be found in all religions everywhere and at all times. They propose basic tenets like the belief in a deity who is only discoverable by reasoning from the creation to the Creator, who deserves our worship and sanctions all moral values.

According to Peter Gay, all Deists were both critical and constructive. All sought to destroy in order to build. They all reasoned either from the absurdity of Christianity to the need for a new philosophy or from their desire for a new philosophy to the absurdity of Christianity. Each of them had some special competence. While some specialized in abusing priests, others specialized in rhapsodies to nature, and a third specialized in the skeptical reading of sacred documents. Yet whatever strength the movement had—and it was at times formidable—it derived that strength from a peculiar combination of critical and constructive element (Gay, 13). In effect, deism is a theological theory concerning the relationship

between "the Creator" and the natural world. For Deists, human beings can know God only through reason and the observation of nature and not by revelation or supernatural manifestations (such as miracles). In this light, it may also include a spiritual element, involving experiences of God and nature. As a poet, Frost can be classified as a deist because of the deification of nature that is recurrent in his poems.

Another term that is pivotal to this research work is "ecothology". The term came into prominence in the late twentieth century, mainly in Christian circles, in association with the emergent scientific field of ecology. The term describes theological discourse that highlights the whole "household" of God's creation, especially the world of nature, as an interrelated system (*eco* is from the Greek word for household, *oikos*). Ecotheology arose in response to the widespread acknowledgment that an environmental crisis of immense proportions was threatening the future of human life on earth. It is a response to what has been called "the ecological complaint" against Christianity (Huyssteen, 247). Cecilia Deane Drummond thinks that Ecotheology is the reflection on different facets of theology in as much as they take their bearings from cultural concerns about the environment and humanity's relationship with the natural world (Deane-Drummond, x).

Knowledge of the poet's life experiences is necessary to foster the understanding of his poems hence the need for this brief biographical account. First of all, though a descendant of a long line of New Englanders who had been rooted in New England since 1632, Frost was born in California. Although he is most typical of American poets, he received his first recognition in England. Consequently, his first two books were published abroad. He has never been of a competitive spirit and does not believe in prize contests, yet he has been awarded the Pulitzer Prize four times for the best book of poetry of the year. He has chosen to write his blank verse monologues in the flat, homely, rough and conversational tones of everyday speech, yet his lyrics are noted for their delicate and precise music. The titles of his books, *North of Boston*, *Mountain Interval*, *New Hampshire* and *A Further Range* seem local, yet this seemingly regional poetry has universal appeal. His father was of a restless, and sometimes rebellious, nature. It had been the hope of the family that William Prescott Frost would be a lawyer, instead he became a teacher, then an editor and, finally, a politician. He revolted against Republican New England and moved to California to work on the San Francisco *Bulletin*, a Democratic newspaper. During the Civil War, he was sympathetic toward the Southern cause and was an avid supporter of states' rights.

It would have been quite appropriate for his son (born on March 26, 1874) to have been christened Robert Burns Frost in honour of the great English bard, since he chose to write poetry. This was not the case, however. He was named after the great southern soldier, Robert E. Lee. During the days of Frost's youth, San Francisco was a rough town. The elder Frost could not adjust to the strain and stress of an editor-politician in a boisterous community and succumbed to tuberculosis in his early thirties. The fatherless boy was taken back to the New England of his ancestors by his mother. His mother began teaching in school and reading to him. Nevertheless, he was fourteen before he read his first book, *Scottish Chiefs*, and he later read *Tom Brown's School Days*. He discovered poetry through his readings of Edgar Allan Poe and Ralph Waldo Emerson. He admired the beautiful music of Poe equally as much as the meaningfulness of Emerson.

It was during this stage of his life that he began to compose his own verse. His first poem was a long ballad about Cortez and the night he was driven out of Mexico City. It appeared in the Lawrence *High School Bulletin*. At the age of nineteen, his first professional poem was printed in *The Independent*, a magazine of national circulation. He was paid fifteen dollars for this poetic endeavor. His mother was pleased, but his grandfather was disturbed. His grandfather said, "No one can make a living at poetry. But I tell you what," he added shrewdly, "we'll give you a year to make a go of it. And you'll have to promise to quit writing if you can't make a success of it in a year. What do you say?" "Give me twenty-give me twenty," replied the nineteen year old Robert Frost (Fagan, 151).

Without a doubt, his muse overheard the youthful joking auctioneer and decided to punish him; for it was a full twenty years later that Frost's first book, *A Boy's Will*, was published in 1934. The book was a tremendous success, and Frost was proved an accurate prophet. He has always been more practical than academic. At the insistence of his grandfather, he matriculated in both Dartmouth College and Harvard without taking a degree from either institution. Within two months of study at Dartmouth, he returned home. After two years of his marriage, his grandfather gave him a farm near Derry, New Hampshire. He farmed for five or six years but, in the end, he turned to teaching as a part-time vocation. At thirty-five, he sold his Derry farm and, with that money plus the little he had saved by teaching at Pinkerton Academy in Derry Village, he sailed for England with his family. It was in England that his first book of poetry, *A Boy's Will*, was published. He returned to America in 1915 and found himself suddenly and quite unexpectedly famous.

Honours were heaped upon him. Within six months of his stay in America, he delivered the Phi Beta Kappa poem at Tufts College—and immediately afterward—he was invited to join the advisory board of the short-lived monthly, *The Seven Arts*. He was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters; he became Harvard's Phi Beta Kappa poet. Harvard is one of the institutions from which he became a renegade alumnus. His first book, *A Boy's Will*, was a stepping stone to continual success. Frost is the only poet to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for the best book of poetry four times—in 1924, for *New Hampshire*; in 1931, for *Collected Poems*; in 1937, for *A Further Range*; and in 1945 for *A Witness Tree*. As time passed, he accumulated more honours. He was co-founder of a summer institution in the mountains of Vermont—the now famous Bread Loaf School of the English. He was awarded honorary degrees by Columbia, Dartmouth, Yale, Harvard and other colleges and universities. He has the distinction of being one of the few authors to receive the Gold Medal from the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

In 1961 he recited his patriotic poem, “The Gift Outright,” at the inauguration of the late President John F. Kennedy. All this confirms his stature and status as a poet and public figure. No other poet in the history of the United States has ever been so honoured. Most of his poems are set in New England. Frost was a farmer who believed that the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantics had exploited most of the country-side images. He intended to complete their elision and take a new look at the situation. The poet defines poetry in his collection, *West-Running Brook*, as “Words that have become deed” (Monteiro, 142).

Ecocriticism and Modernism are used to analyze the poems under study. The term “ecocriticism” was coined by William Rueckert in 1978 in his essay, “Literature and Ecology: An experiment in Ecocriticism,” in which he remarks that ecocriticism is the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature (107). Here, Rueckert's definition was only confined to the science of ecology which, as he pointed out, has a bearing on literature. William Horwarth, in *Some Principles of Ecocriticism*, holds that the clips “Eco” and “Critic” both derive from the Greek, “oikos” and “kritis,” and in tandem they mean “house judge.” The Ecocritic is therefore a person who judges the merits and faults of writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature with a view of celebrating nature (Glotfelty and Fromm, 69).

Meanwhile, in *The Comedy of Survival*, Joseph W Meeker supplies the definition of the term “ecology.” He observes that ecology refers to “the study of biological themes and relationships which exist in literary works” (Glotfelty and Fromm, xix). It further attempts to discover the roles literature plays in the ecology of human species. Even though ecology has its biological implications, literature demystifies the ecological hazards and puts nature as man’s spiritual arena.

As a discipline, ecocriticism became necessary after ecocritics outlined an existing hierarchical and anthropocentric vision of the universe in which plants exist for the sake of animals, animals for the sake of man, and man for the sake of worshipping God. Edwards Sally in “A History of the U.S. Environmental Movement” quotes the forward to *A Sand County Almanac* where Aldo Leopold gruffly puts the hierarchy of things in the universe in these words “wild things...had little human value until mechanization assure us of a good breakfast” (Clifford, 35).

This implies that nature is useless except when used by man to satisfy his needs. Ecocriticism is a theory in literary criticism which, according to critics, is as old as the story of Creation found in the book of Genesis. As a tenet of ecocriticism, ecotheology emanates from the need of a solution to the ecological crisis that man has created as a result of his dominion over nature. The Judeo-Christian Scripture apparently sanctions human lordship over the planet. According to Cheryll Glotfelty, in “Introduction” of *The Ecocriticism Reader*, it is “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (xviii). Ecocriticism exalts the correlation that exists between man, nature and culture. Glotfelty observes that, in the increasing urban society, nature writing plays a vital role in teaching us to value our natural environment.

*The Green Studies Reader* purports that this critical approach is the study that searches the implicit and explicit presence of nature in literary texts:

Ecocriticism is the study of explicitly environmental texts from any scholarly approach or, conversely, the scrutiny of ecological implications and human-nature relationships in any literary text [or other artistic text], even texts that seem, at first glance, oblivious of the non human world. (Coupe, 160)



Writings that combine both the human and non-human ecosystems are appreciated. Though the natural environment stands as an important part of man's settlement, and culture, it is subjugated by self interested persons who aggressively exploit the biosphere without any consideration of its importance.

Frost constantly elevates nature to the spectrum of God in his poems. In "Fire and Ice," he wonders how the world will end; considering fire and ice as the alternative ways. These elements of nature are thus used as God's means of achieving his purpose on earth. Ecocriticism, as a theory, shows the relationship between man and nature which is the base for this research work. Ecotheology, as an emanation from Ecocriticism, sanctifies nature as an arena where man can worship God. From this perspective, nature is seen as spiritually superior to man contrary to what obtains in the Judeo-Christian Scripture ( The Holy Bible, Genesis 1 :28) which asserts man's dominion over nature and establishes a trend of anthropocentrism. This actually sets the underground work for this academic work.

Another critical perspective from which the poems shall be approached is Modernism. Modernism is "the deliberate departure from tradition and the use of innovative forms of expression that distinguish many styles in the arts and literature in the 20th century" (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4675) In this light, Modernism can simply be defined as a break from traditional writing conventions or patterns of writing. The need to break free from the shackles of the past literary norms caused writers like Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, and James Joyce to write works that did not have the traditional prescribed form but that rather emphasized the working of the human mind through the use of the stream of consciousness technique in prose fiction.

Modernism is equally a philosophical movement that, along with cultural trends and rapid changes, arose from wide-scale and far-reaching transformation in western societies in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries. The development of modern industrial societies with sophisticated weapons subjected man to the horrors of the First World War. The catastrophe of the war had shaken faith in moral codes and Western civilization. This also raised doubts on the appropriateness of using traditional literary modes to represent the harsh realities of the post-world-war. Modernists question the certainty that supported the traditional modes of social organisation,

religion, morality and the traditional way of conceiving human life. Ezra Pound holds that modernism necessitates “Presenting an image or enough images of concrete things arranged to stir the reader” (Perkins, 50). Some critics see it as a socially progressive trend of thought that affirms the power of human beings to create, improve and re-shape their environment with the aid of practical experimentation, scientific knowledge, or technology. From this perspective, modernism encourages the re-examination of every aspect of existence with the aim of finding that which was ‘holding back’ progress and replaces it with new ways of reaching the same end. These new literary modes of expression were in line with Ezra Pound’s Maxim “Make it New” (Abrams, 168). It relies on and employs myth as a reaction against scientific rationalism, uses sensuality, intuition and a search for “Truth” through arts as a unique and original medium that employs the human subconsciousness. While Pound was making his famous call to ‘Make it New’, his contemporary (T.S Eliot) was stressing the indispensable nature of tradition in arts, insisting on the artist’s responsibility to engage with tradition. The modern era is closely associated with the development of individualism, capitalism, urbanization and a belief in the optimistic possibilities of technological and political progress.

*The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* holds that “In poetry, Ezra Pound and T.S Eliot replaced the logical exposition of thoughts with a collage of fragmentary images and complex allusion” (160). Pound at the helm of high modernism, in his Imagist Movement, introduced a new form of poetry that uses free verse, precision of imagery, and brevity of expression. Modern poetry, though influenced by technological advancement involved an increased awareness of psychological phenomena which enlarge the writer’s franchise (liberty) and the readers’ tolerance in the selection of material that might once have been rejected as too commonplace or as actually sordid. The modernist theory with its free verse, simple diction, and form, propelled Robert Frost’s use of New England accent, which portrays him as a regional poet like Edgar Lee Master. The research endeavour is equally motivated by the modernist disbelief in religion—Judeo-Christianity. This has greatly brought out Frost’s agnostic view of religious creeds in some of his poems.

The poetic innovation and critical claims of Robert Lee Frost has attracted commentary from many critics. This section surveys some of the works that have been written on the poems of the poet in focus. It reviews these works in order to show how the present

study deviates from/or relates to previous critical works. Considering that this is the review of literature related to the concern of this work, the section is not an exhaustive appraisal of every word written or published on the subject or the author. Rather; it is an examination of works that are connected to the focus of this study.

Ronald Martin is one of the prominent critics who undertook a critique of Frost's poetry. In *American Literature and the Destruction of Knowledge*, he acknowledges Frost's sense of "the reflexive quality of the human mind, the primacy of experience and the indeterminacy of any ultimate structure beneath it" (Martin, 7). Frost had a great interest in theoretical physics, but the idea of biology and botany had a formative influence on his thought. That may explain why many of his poems depict man in self-contemplation or represent pastoral life hence Martin's remark. The critic's allusion to the poet's inclination for "indeterminacy of any ultimate structure" suggests the modernist scepticism for absolutes which happens to be one of the concerns of the study. However, this dissertation further shows how the poet defies nature thereby ushering in a new belief system and order.

According to Deirdre Fagan in *Critical Companion to Robert Frost*, the poet once said in an interview that "I guess I am not a nature poet, I have only written two poems without a human being in them" (Fagan,339). The fact that Frost's relationship with nature stems from his preoccupation with chaos. Fagan suggests that nature, for Frost, is often either something to be feared or something with which to contend, or both. This certainly shows the poet's view of nature as an entity that is endowed with supernatural powers over man as it reprimands or blesses the latter. Better still, nature becomes an avenue through which man can freely worship God. This is one of the preoccupations of this work.

In *Human Values in the Poetry of Robert Lee Frost*, George Nitchie discusses Frost's appeal to simplistic and natural life. He attempts to compare him with poets like Oliver Goldsmith and William Wordsworth. Nitchie argues that Frost shows concern for the day-to-day life of the country folk. The poet's concern for the life of country folk portrays his attachment to country-side life and culture which are pivotal to his poetry.

Another critical view of Frost's work is Louis Untermeyer's in *Modern American Poetry*. In this work, Untermeyer extols the virtues of *North of Boston* and *Mountain Interval*. The critic writes that *North of Boston* is a "book of people" in its dramatic presentation of

country life and the natural objects that symbolize the vital aspects of country people's daily existence. He notes that *North of Boston*, like its successor, contains much of the finest poetry of our time. Rich in its actualities, richer in its spiritual values, every line moves with the double force of observation and implication (175). It is evident here that Frost wrote his poems in a simple and unique style as noted by critics. His poems can be understood by people of various ages. The writer presents a unique setting in most poems that captures daily life in the country-side in most of his poems.

Meanwhile, in *The Dimensions of Robert Frost*, Reginald L. Cook holds that Frost demonstrates an ability to observe humankind and nature with a keen eye and to infuse his observations with beauty, thereby raising human consciousness. This is a talent that, according to Cook, marks Frost as an organic poet. By organic poet, Cook implies that Frost's art is one that is aligned with and is sympathetic toward nature. It is one which exhibits a reverence for natural forms and colours and is opposed to the geometrical. It is an art which is symbolic, unrealistic, and unnatural like in the poetry of T.S Eliot or Ezra Pound. Among the poems Cook references is "My November Guest" which can be read as a self-reflexive poem in which the persona tries to accommodate himself to the sorrow of autumn (Qtd in Dickstein, 50). Hence, Frost is represented by Cook as an adept of organic writing. This work agrees with this view but adds that the poet is a disciple of this art because he makes a religion out of it.

The analyses above reveal that critics have written elaborately about Frost's inclination for nature writing. They all present Frost as an American transcendentalist poet whose works depart from modernist convention. They have all shown that nature and man's attachment to his natural environment are most prized by the poet. While this work agrees with this view, it also examines some of Frost's poems as fora through which he lambastes existing structures and belief systems. It further deconstructs the notion of modernist urbanisation which portrays man's superiority over nature. It highlights the central place of nature in Frost's poetry proving that the poet deifies it. As such, it proposes eco-salvation as a means by which people can seek redemption by worshipping at the altar of nature.

The work is made up of an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion. The introduction consists of a brief background to the study, the research problem, the research question that the work seeks to answer, the hypothesis, the scope of the work, the definition of

key terms, the author's biography, the theoretical framework, the review of literature and the structure of the work.

Chapter One, titled "Conventional Religion and Frostian Apostasy", examines the origin of religion (Christianity) in America and Frost's deconstruction of established religious creeds. Meanwhile, Chapter Two has as title "The Deification of Nature". It focuses on the poet's elevation of nature to the rank of a deity. Chapter Three looks at how a new theology and, consequently, a new religion emerge from the poet's double action of subverting conventional religion and deifying nature. This Chapter is titled "From Ecotheology to Ecoreligion." Finally, Chapter Four is captioned "The Pedagogic Relevance of Frost's Poetry" centres on the pedagogic relevance of frost's ecological poems in the teaching of poetry to secondary school students in G.B.H.S. Etoug-Ebe. The chapter further proposes some activities which can develop learners' autonomy in a poetry classroom. It also presents a lesson plan for the teaching of poetry in Form Three, after surveying how it is presently done in the same school. The conclusion of the work re-examines what the research set out to investigate and the critical approaches to literature used for the analysis of the poems. It also summarizes the outcome of the research and makes valid suggestions for further research.

## CHAPTER ONE

### CONVENTIONAL RELIGION AND FROSTIAN APOSTASY

The compendious introduction to this research endeavour overviews the universal span of mankind's quest for a blissful life. This chapter probes into the case of America. From the Modernist perspective, the chapter examines Frost's disbelief in religious creeds (especially creeds of Christianity) as means of worshipping God. The chapter starts off by evoking some Christian dogmas that determine worship. It further surveys (through the analysis of some of Frost's poems) how the poet's stance deviates from the practice of these conventional ways of worship. Pitted against the backdrop of Christianity as one of the founding religions of America, this portion of the work emphasizes Robert Frost's modernist stance. It shows how, like his counterparts, the poet challenges Christianity as a traditional narrative.

The history of religion in America is complex. This chapter's interest in Frost's digression from conventional Christianity necessitates a brief inquiry into the institution of Christianity and Christian practices in America. Religious belief became renowned in the United States of America with the first Pilgrims settlers who came aboard the *May Flower* in 1620. They did not draw lines of distinction between the secular and the religious sphere. They adhered to the fact that all of life was an expression of divine will. Kathryn Van Spanckeren, in *Outline of American Literature*, holds that "The Pilgrims interpreted all things and events as symbols with deeper spiritual meanings..." (6). Like most Protestants, they interpreted the Bible literally. For instance, they read and acted on the text of II Corinthians 6:16 that say: "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord." (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*)

Despairing of Purifying the Church of England from within, the "Separatists" formed underground "covenanted" churches that swore loyalty to the group instead of the king. Seen as traitors to the king as well as heretics damned to hell, they were often persecuted. Their separation took them ultimately to the New World (Van Spanckeren, 6). They found the new country as an asylum for civil and religious freedom. The Puritans left England and came to America because of religious persecution, but they, too, were intolerant. In Massachusetts, they established laws derived from the Bible and they punished or expelled those who did not

share their beliefs through the creation of the judiciary system. In *From Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson says:

If a person brought up in a Christian religion denies the being of a God, or the Trinity, or asserts they are more God than one, or denies the Christian religion to be true, or the Scripture to be of divine authority, he is punishable on the first offense by incapacity to hold any office or employment ecclesiastical, civil or military; on the second by disability to sue, to take any gift or legacy, to be guardian, executor, or administrator, and by three years' imprisonment, without bail. (Baym, 343)

The puritans were against religious protestants and other forms of worship that were contrary to their beliefs. They meted punishment on those who do not share their beliefs like excommunication from the church and ineligibility in holding administrative, civil or military functions. This to Jefferson was a form of religious enslavement. According to the common law, heresy was punishable by burning. Jefferson sees this as religious slavery, under which a people have been willing to remain. The Puritans' laws helped to keep believers spell-bound to their belief system. They felt the need to have total freedom to follow their own religious beliefs which, they trusted, would lead them to the attainment of eternity. As a result, changes were made in the religious sphere which contributed enormously to the new democratic character of the Republic. It therefore becomes quite imperative for the prevalence of Frostian apostasy towards the Judeo-Christian beliefs, in order to create a new circle for worship.

The modern era, which is closely associated with the development of individualism, capitalism, urbanisation and a belief in the positive possibilities of technological and political progress turn out to be a mirage to many people. The brutal wars and other problems of this era, many of which come from the effects of rapid change and the connected loss of strength of traditional religious and ethical norms (found in Christianity) have led to many reactions against modern development. Much of the modern world has replaced the Biblical-oriented

value system. The Existentialists (theist and hardcore determinists) show the double views about God held by man after the horrors of the wars. Friederich Nietzsche, in his allegory of religion, sees the 'death of God'. That is, with the increase irrelevance of the idea of the Judeo-Christian God, the free spirits are challenged to assume divine prerogatives, that is, creating life-affirming moral and life enhancing aesthetic values.

Jean Paul Sartre 's essay 'Cartesian Freedom' he developed the Nietzschean view that in the absence of belief in God, we should assume the absolute freedom that Decartes had ascribed to the Divinity which is the creation of moral values. Man is placed at the centre of his own affairs. In a similar manner, Flynn states that "Nietzsche's thesis about the death of God leads him to advocate a heroic atheism by which one forges ahead like Sisyphus despite the presume indifference of the Universe" (Flynn, 54). This idea of the dead God in the Universe is held by many critics as Frost's agnostic view of God in his poetry. In the same light, Harihar Rath holds that the American poetry freed itself time and again, from the bondage of traditional puritan idea of poetry, expressive of God's way with man, and went onto project a poetry expressive of man's way with himself and with the God which his sense of himself reveals (Rath,5). This means that the death of God puts man at the centre of his life and destiny in the universe governed by chaos.

The search for new order of things made man to live a life of skepticism about what the future holds for him. Man began to look for new ways to worship God and everything in the universe becomes questionable even religion. The poet struggled all his life with a traditional faith-based view of the world and the rise of science. Curiously, people of opposing beliefs can find justifications of their views in Frost because of his contradictions in religious belief. However, he beliefs in an ever changing open-ended universe, which could not be explained with systematic thought be it in science, religion or philosophy. According to Huyssteen, in most religion, the world is believed to be an embodiment of divine wisdom.

Paradoxically, the divine is both present (immanent) and absent (transcendent). Many of Frost's poems are about darkness, chaos, isolation, and loneliness revealing the poet's feeling about a God who is often far away from man and the created order of the universe. John Calvin holds that the created order required constant divine support to protect it from collapse into disorder. Chaos becomes the price God paid for granting freedom and independence to the created order (Huyssteen, 633). This explains why the nature of God is



inexplicable in the life of man because of his contradictory stance of being present and absent at the same time. This view is contradictory to the Christian claim of an omnipresent, ever-present God.

The poet portrays a mystical belief in the Old Testament God in his *A Boy's will*, which he inherited from his swedenborgian mother as a child. In "A Prayer in Spring", which is a conventional prayer to God made by a farmer for an enormous harvest during the uncertainty of spring which is a season of rejuvenation. The speaker prays to an absolute creator, who controls the universe but has abandoned it. His absence has created uncertainties in the universe. Deirdre Fagan holds that "The presence of doubt is precisely what raises the need for prayers." The speaker believes that prayer is the point of connect to the god of fertility. Therefore, the speaker claims that prayers are the only reliable things that sustain man in the universe of chaos, fashioned by an uncaring god who has abandoned man to his fate.

In the same light, Huyssholds that "In what one may term the *supernatural* route, faith or prayer comes directly from a divine source and does not depend solely upon processes that science can measure or understand"( Huyssteen, 678). Prayer is the means through which man's physical and psychological needs are satisfied in the universe. It helps man to over power his inner uncertainty and fear of what awaits him. The persona keeps alive the possibility that something greater than man sustains order and purpose in the universe and may sometimes break through man's isolation to reveal itself. This actually alleviates man's inner uncertainty and the fear about his destiny.

Juhnke in *Religion in Robert Frost Poetry* holds that "Frosts play with religious matters is a deliberate enactment of doubtful searching, hopes and fears in poetic forms that control and distance them, often with humour" (*American Literature*,153). The fear of the unknown as a religious preoccupation is further witnessed in "The Demiurge's Laugh." It is an illustration of Frost's concept of nature as a grim and uncaring goddess. The poet has an enduring belief in God, but he often wrote of how it felt to live in a world bereft of God's presence. The "sameness of the wood" portrays the uniform nature of the woods which makes it difficult for man to find his way. This is symbolic of the difficulties one encounters in trailing God.

The demi god's mockery of man's predicament in the universe (characterized by chaos) makes the poet to realize that what man has been trailing as God is just a mirage. This has made the persona to come into the conclusion that God is just a sadistic force that takes delight in seeing man suffering in the universe. From this perspective, Frost holds that nature is the only authentic source that man can trust with his religious belief. The persona says "Thereafter I sat me against a tree" (Rinehart and Winston, 35). Nature provides religious security to man, as a result, man has an obligation to worship God in nature. The next chapter dwells on this.

The same Christian ideologies are reflected in "The Trial by Existence." It shows the world and everything in it as trials that man can not escape. A parallel line is drawn between Heaven and Earth. Heaven is described as the home of the dead souls who are slain during the wars. These souls live in paradise with the beautiful field of daffodils. Angels, who are heavenly creatures, are sent to a mystical land "where the light from heaven falls whole and white" (Rinehart and Winston, 28). These souls make their choices to either live in paradise or to live on earth. According to the poet, the bravest souls come to earth by choosing "the trial by existence". God, as a supreme and benevolent Creator, places man between choices on earth. The souls from heaven choose their fate and become responsible for the choices they made. The persona sees God as a Creator who chooses those he will save and put man at the centre of his existence before birth. In giving man the option to choose between good and bad before birth, man is bound to choose the wrong option which God with his ultimate all-knowing ability is unable to help man. This makes the benevolence of God to remain questionable. Also, the poet has made it clear that there is no final resting for the souls in heaven contrary to the Judeo-Christian belief. He emphasizes on a sense of responsibility for one's own predicament no matter how fated. This is because man is responsible for his fate in life.

From this perspective, Herbert Marks holds in "The Serpent Tale" that the theologian needs a fall from paradise to sustain a doctrine of incarnation (Bloom, 53) As a result of this bargain made in heaven, man has no memory that tells him that he chose the woe of the world. God says, "There's no connection man can reason out/Between his just deserts and what he gets." Frost argues in this allegorical poem, "Trial by Existence," that there is no possibility that man will be able to be content with himself in a world in which God seems indifferent toward man.

In his later years, however, Frost has spoken more freely on his views of God and his relation to man and the physical world. God is not held responsible for man's predicaments on earth as man's life on earth depends on the choice he makes. Frost deliberately enacts doubtful searching, hopes, and fears in his poems, refusing either to reject religion or to give himself to it. In this way he, in a sense, works out his own salvation which will be the preoccupation of Chapter Three. The idea of a supreme being who is aloof from man's activities on earth is made palpable in the poem. This made Marks to say that Frost is not agnostic for he is willing to embrace his predicament. He even takes pleasure in the opportunity for self-exertion this predicament provides (Bloom, 53-54).

Another salient religious debates brought out in Frost's poetry are found in "Fire and Ice" where the poet presents two opposite views on how the world would possibly end. This is a view held by Christians of all denominations in the world today. Man's fear of end-time makes him to doubt the omnipotent God who can not change things in the universe by overthrowing evil in a less destructive manner. The poet thus reflects on the assumption:

Some say the world will end in fire  
Some say in ice from what I've  
tasted of desire I hold with  
those who favor fire. (Rinehart and Winston, 268)

This shows that Frost as a Christian thinks about the third destruction of the world which is envisaged after the destruction of the world through water and fire in the days of Noah and Lots. The persona suggests (from the views of others) that the end may come in the form of fire which is what he desires. William York Tyndal in "Fire and Ice" sees Frost's poetry as comprising an avalanche of images, suggestiveness, rhythm, and metaphors which all aim as revealing thought and meaning.

In his criticism, Tyndal grapples with the meaning of "Fire and Ice" as agents of destruction. He points out that Frost may probably be suggesting that since God had used water to destroy the world in the days of Noah, fire in destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, the only option left is ice. He presents a Christian God who is cruel and is ready to inflict suffering and destruction upon the human race. He admits the force of human passion and accepts ultimate and tragic circumstances which nature imposes on man. The poet questions the merciful tendencies of God who cannot forgive the human race. The third destruction of the world which is eminent will really uncover the uncaring nature of God.

This view of the end of the world is held by many modernist writers at this time. Hence Frost's view here derives from the modernist theory indeed. In "The Waste land," Thomas Stearns Eliot describes the world as a place where spiritual and physical draughts are evoked and that needs the redemptive element, "water," that brings renewal. Meanwhile, in William Butler Yeats "The Second Coming," there is the evidence of a god-like violence and the Second Coming of Christ takes a beast-like form. All of these epitomize destruction and uncertainty that preoccupy human at this epoch. Frost apparently shares the religious skepticism of other modernists.

The Judeo-Christian dogma of an after-life is visible in "Misgiving". The poem presents the continuing search for things unknown. The personified leaves cry to follow the wind. "We will go with you, O! Wind" but when the time comes they give only ". . . a little reluctant whirl/That drops them no further than where they were". He ends by saying wistfully:

I only hope that when I am free  
As they are free to go in quest Of  
the knowledge beyond the bounds  
of life. It may not seem better to me to rest.

(Rinehart and Winston, 292)

This shows that the poet did not hesitate to satirize science as well as adamant orthodox religion. Faggen holds that the death of the leaves becomes an inquiry into human attitudes towards death and into the possibilities of an afterlife (Faggen, 224). When the persona says that "it may not seem better for [him] to rest" The use of "may" shows his skepticism. Though the speaker believes in an afterlife, he wonders if it is the right thing to do. He asks himself if he could derive satisfaction in the deep sleep of death. The phenomenon of life after death becomes a metaphysical ideology which is not proven scientifically. The persona's hope is his expectation of an afterlife as a fortress of freedom and knowledge in things beyond the physical universe. The persona uses "free" as a symbol of death. The fact that he is not sure if believing in the afterlife is the right thing, expresses his skepticism for one of the most central Judeo-Christian doctrines.

Perhaps the most strikingly balanced and rounded expression of Frost's faith (tainted with doubt) may be found in the progress metaphors of "A Star in a Stone-Boat"

with its constant allusions to evolutionary astronomy. The speaker uses a simile to illustrate the star as holy. The sacred nature of the star which is describe as having a large wings and a tail like the long bird of paradise. This description of the star – stone is compared as angels on earth but this is short lived as the star when not in use to fly, draws back it body like a snail. The star in this poem is a symbol of fate. The fallen stars make the soil hot and yield flowers instead of grain thereby deviating the farmers’ prayer of a bountuous harvest. The fallen star to the farmer is that which will reduce the world into manageable sizes. Religious notions like death and sin are identified by the persona as the quality of the stars.

Similarly, “Lost in Heaven” captures the idea that the world is simply a porch to the world beyond. As Fagan holds “It dismisses heaven as some other worldly place and affirms this place as one of great value. The persona realising that he is lost for his guided star is clouded ironically feels happy although he does not know where he is. He finds that he is a heaven on earth. “Seeing myself well lost once more, I sighed, /Where, where in heaven am I?” (Rinehart and Winston, 385). The feeling of skepticism of being lost, does not bring fear into the persona but rather overwhelms and gives him hope for the unknown which could be beyond the vestibule “Let’s let my heavenly lostness overwhelm me”. This shows Frost’s belief in the world beyond—heaven, in confirmity with what the Holy Scripture holds. However, he revisits the Christian teaching that says the damned/ lost will go to hell and the saved to heaven. In this poem, he is lost but finds himself in heaven.

In “A Masque of Reason” Frost attempts to justify the ways of God to man through reason. As Fagan says’ more, “Both [Masques] satirically address modern skeptical concerns with christian theology. In *A Masque of Reason*, the poet addresses the book of Job and the problem of evil” (Fagan, 214). In this work, God is represented as a rather familiar being. The play opens as Job and his wife (Thyatira —the name Thyatira is identified in the book of Revelation 2:18-29 as the ancient city of Lydia). Thyatira is one of the seven churches that receive messages prophesying the final judgement in Revelation 1-3 and God’s victory through Christ over evil in the world. As the couple awake, they see God stepping out of the burning bush. This too is an allusion to the book of Exodus 3:2 “There the angel of the lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that the bush was on fire but it did not burn up” (The *Holy Bible: New International Version*). This shows the divine power of God in the universe.

“A Masque of Reason” does not show the lack of reason or justice in God, but man’s stubbornness and lack of understanding.’ Only man like Job’s wife, would exclaim, “It’s God. I’d know him by Blake’s picture anywhere.” (Rinehart and Winston, 588). The allusion to the romantic poet, William Blake, expresses the way that man has made the error of reading man into nature, so it has been his error of reading man into God. And Frost’s poem, though satirical in its shrewd observation on this human fallibility, concerns itself with this problem. It further highlights the way man uses reasoning as the bases for the interpretation of things in the universe. Frost demystifies some of the Bible principles for easy comprehension by all its readers. Through the person of Job and his wife, religious myths are demystified through the interrogation of God by the couple. They seek a rational explanation of man’s condition which would clarify everything and bridge the wide gap between the finite mind and the infinite.

The poem expresses the idea that understanding is dependent upon reason as well as faith—a faith that is strong enough to help the finite mind accept the mystery that reason cannot adequately explain. Job is unsatisfied when God attempts to help him by establishing the principle, “There is no connection man can reason out/Between his just deserts and what he gets.” (Rinehart and Winston, 589). According to John Timmerman, human reason is altogether insufficient to understand God; indeed to understand humanity itself (Timmer, 84). Moreover, Job and his wife (the ardent feminist) refuse to accept God’s statement that “My forte is truth.” (Rinehart and Winston, 595) They insist on reason so that they can make progress in the world. God leaves them to ponder this statement, “I was just showing off to the Devil, Job.” (Rinehart and Winston, 600).

This statement causes doubt about the soundness of divine justice. It represents the disquieting doubt of no motivation for the misfortune God sends to Job, a man who has always been distinguished for his integrity and honesty to God. According to Frost, Man can not use his reasoning to free himself from trials and tribulations that overwhelm him thereby making evident the fact that human reasoning is insufficient to unravel the moral mysteries of life. Job becomes a vessel through which God proclaims his superiority over the devil. Religious symbols like the Christmas tree, myrrh, the star of Bethlehem over the traditional birth place of Christ and Biblical actors like God, the devil, Job and his wife simply portray Frost adherence to the Judeo-Christian belief system which he thinks could be modified to suit the Modern Age which is governed by rationality. The questioning of divine justice and

the attempt to rationalize some Christian dogma traditional and deferential views upheld by a devout worshipper. Frost's apostasy is evident in this work.

Another aspect which is a direct corroboration of Frost's apostasy is *A Masque of Reason* where the poet, through the tone of the poem, satirically addresses the book of Job and the problem of evil. The persona presents God more like a human with weaknesses and not like the perfect figure of God that the Bible preaches. Frost presents a God that admits that there is no logical connection between what a person deserves and how that person suffers thereby failing to be moral just as claimed. "There's is no connection man can reason out/Between his just desert and what he gets/ Virtue may fail and wickedness succeed" (Rinehart and Winston, 589). According to Fagan, "God is made weak, not only in his admission that there is no connection, but also in his admission that he waits for words like anyone else. God is made human as a means for Frost to sail through his satirical twist on his omnipotence" (Rinehart and Winston, 214)

In a like manner, Rath holds that in "Robert Frost's two masques, we also find a some what similar approach in the portrayal of the character of God. God is denuded of the closed aura of myth and is presented as a humanised figure pondering over deeper metaphysical problems humanely" (Rath, 27). Job's wife makes palpable Frost's ideas about the Old Testament dogma which is questionable in the eyes of man. God, on this occasion, shows his lack of knowledge on some of the Christian myths like the burning of prophets (the witch of Endor in 1 Samuel 28) which Frost claims he does not have in his note book. Meanwhile, Fagan says that Thyatira questions the sexism found in the Bible as women are burned as witches for their prophecy while men are honoured. Frost seems to mock the sexism found in the Holy Bible. This Frostian disbelief in Judeo-Christian dogma is a salient reason for his creation of a new theology and religion. These new theology and religion are examined in Chapter Three.

In Frost's later poem, "A masque of Mercy," he clearly shows the relationship that exists between man and God. The Fugitive, who later became known as Jonah, runs to the book store of Jessebel for security because he believes God is planning making him a prophet. The gift from God that man needs not necessarily is given extended treatment by Frost in "A Masque of Mercy." In this poem, the answering voice to the queries sounded in "A Masque of Reason" can be heard. The quixotic, teasing God of the earlier masque, revealing a side of

his nature that warns man of the futility of his search for comprehensible reasons for all that confounds him in life, is here placed in apposition to the possibility of a God of benevolence. Frost announces his subject directly.

The modern Jonah, paradoxically, is losing his faith because his Old Testament God seems to be losing his major attribute, his capacity for righteous indignation. Jonah can no longer trust God to be unmerciful and, further, he cannot see that it can be to God's advantage "to take the punishment out of all failure/To be...anything we once thought we had to be" (Fagan, 211). Job questioned the justice of so much undeserved punishment, while Jonah questions the justice of so little deserved punishment. Both, essentially, are asking the same question. Paul, the soul-doctor, guides Jonah to the heart of the matter that Jonah's greatest fear is no God but God's mercy-justice contradiction.

You are the universal fugitive,  
Escapist as we say, though you are not  
Running away from Him you think you are  
But from His mercy-justice contradiction.  
Mercy and justice are a contradiction.  
But here's where your evasion has an end.  
I have to tell you something that will spoil  
Indulgence in your form of melancholy  
Once and for all. I'm going to make you see  
How relatively little justice matters

(Rinehart and Winston, 615)

Paul has made evident the lack of belief in God whose mercy-justice contradicts. The persona's tone unveil the choice of words in the poem. Words like: "melancholy," "fugitive", "contradiction", and "Escapist" reveal Paul's ambivalence in God's supremacy. The persona through the use of metaphor "You are the universal fugitive" shows the extent to which man has become a prisoner trying to run away from God's mercy-justice paradox.

Keeper, the secular realist, agrees with the logic of Paul's statement, though for different reasons. The expectation of justice in life, he asserts, is childish:

There's some such thing and no one will deny it —  
Enough to bait the trap of the ideal  
From which there can be no escape for us



But by our biting off adolescence,  
And leaving It behind us in the trap. (Rinehart and Winston, 630)

But Paul finds evidence for optimism in the realization that "Christ came to introduce a break with logic"; that is, his example changed the expectation of justice to the hope for mercy: "Strange no one ever thought of it before Him. /It was lovely and its origin was love" (Rinehart and Winston, 630).

He is forced to the conclusion that because the sermon on the mount is impossible to live, up to, "an end you can't by any means achieve/ And yet can't turn your back on or ignore," no one, therefore, is deserving of mercy, but everyone needs it. Keeper cannot accept the orthodoxy, and in any case he has always feared that it would be irreligious to claim that he has been fighting on the side of the angels, but he agrees with Paul that the possibility of God's mercy can assuage the pain of injustice. Paul, in turn, stakes his faith on a modest hope. Man to him is constantly in fear of whether his sacrifices in the world would grant him a passage to heaven. The persona compares man's life to that of Jonah. Despite the best man offers in both war-like and peaceful times, he may not be accepted in heaven. The shows the doubtfulness of God's justice if man's sacrifices may not lead him to heaven.

Paul and Keeper may be said to speak for the believing and doubting sides of Frost's ambivalence, to be speaking two possible responses to the mercy-justice contradiction, the emergent blend suggests Frost's conviction that man needs the courage to act, and that it is his attempt at right action, not his theology, that is important. Beyond that, "nothing can make injustice just but mercy." If God cannot promise justice, he can offer the hope of his mercy as an extenuation and as an example for man's life on earth. Clearly, Frost presents this answer as a hopeful possibility, not as a certainty. The strong says nothing until they know, but in the meantime, they know enough to act. These serio-comic dramas contain as explicit theological speculations as Frost could make, and even in these he was careful to provide the balance needed to keep him from being pushed into a religious niche from which he would have difficulty extricating himself. Here, as elsewhere, he would not be pinned down, preferring to tolerate the ambiguities of life without demanding more answers than his own intellectual honesty would permit.

Frost believes that the greatest fear of God comes from one's own self-doubt. This doubt in an arbitrary God who is omnipotent and chooses those he will elevate from "Nowhere up to Somewhere" is presented in "The fear of God". The persona holds that those chosen should not be proud, for they owe it to an arbitrary God who has chosen them rather than others "You owe it to an arbitrary god/ Whose mercy to you rather than to others / Won't bear too critical examination" This according to the speaker is the reason why man should not act superior to others after being chosen randomly by God through divine mercy. The arbitrariness of God is highlighted with the lowercase in which it is written "arbitrary god." This is symbolic of the fact that since God has hidden himself from the world, other forces have replaced him in the universe. The person holds that man needs to pay allegiance to these spirits.

In *A Masque of Mercy*, the keeper expresses his fear for God who makes him to live a life of uncertainty. Fagan says "Keeper is revealed as a reluctant and frustrated agnostic about the role of God and His relationship to fear" (Fagan, 213). Man today has become a logical heir to this state of affairs. Keeper, in describing this state of affairs, remarks that:

And I can see that the uncertainty  
In which we act is a severity  
A cruelty, amounting to injustice  
That nothing but God's mercy can assuage  
(Rinehart and Winston, 642).

To add to this, there is also the possibility of our ultimate rejection by heaven. The persona adds that for "our very best, our lives laid down like Jonah's/Our lives laid down in war and peace, may not/ Be found acceptable in Heaven's sights"( Rinehart and Winston, 642). The poem therefore as Rath says is an invitation to recognise that no manner of salvation or grace as defined in the Roman Catholic or the more conservative protestant churches can in fact help man to be fruitfully (Rath, 290). The holds that man is left alone in the universe and the best he can do is to show off his best efforts in the face of life's uncertainty. This makes the Keeper to opt that he would rather be lost in wood than found in church (Rinehart and Winston, 632). Fagan, in describing "A Masque of Mercy" says that "the poem gives a fore taste of Frost's later work as it invokes not only Frost's usual skepticism about religion but also much of his criticism of the modern world that he articulated more as he aged" (Fagan, 215).

Frost is a poet who has a huge inclination towards religious faith as a “natural uplifter” In “Innate Helium,” the persona uses a metaphor to compare faith to a filling vapour “Religious faith is a most filling vapor”(Rinehart and Winston, 541). The poet satirises boastful Christians. Frost in calling faith a “vapour,” suggests that those who feel that they are full with faith are rather full of nothing but vapor. This means that the Christian faith is as empty as a vapor. In calling faith innate, Frost suggests that man comes about it naturally. In this regard, faith becomes something produced by the mind rather than learned through the Scripture.

Stated otherwise, Huyssteen, “Faith or prayer comes directly from the divine source and does not depend solely upon processes that science can measure or understand” (Huyssteen, 678). Frost contradicts the biblical stance that faith is acquired through experience. According to the poet, faith is innately acquired rather than developed through experience. The poet describes faith in physical terms, using words like “weight,” “boyant” and “compression.” It shows faith’s lack of physical attributes. The poet digresses and uses simile to express faith in material terms. “As in those boyant birds bones thin as paper” (Rinehart and Winston, 541). The speaker reduces faith to a psychological effects and properties of the world. This shows that there is no divine connection to the source of faith as the Bible purported. At this juncture, the poet debunks the Biblical claims in order to show that faith is merely something produced by the mind and man comes about it naturally.

In “Astrometaphysical,” Frost overtly expresses his love for God’s creation in order to access a blissful life in heaven where the lord reigns.

Lord, I have loved your sky,  
.....  
Have loved it clear and high,  
Or low and stormy;  
Till I have reeled and stumbled  
From looking up too much,  
And fallen and been humbled  
To wear a crutch.  
My low for every Heaven  
.....  
Should be rewarded.  
.....  
At least it ought to send.

Me up, not down. (Rinehart and Winston, 548).

It is evident from the lines above that the persona's belief in God and his earthly creatures is that which build his faith. And he thinks that this faith, in addition to his love for heaven, can give him visa into heaven. Once more this pits the poet against the Christian belief on how salvation is had. Faith in the finished work of Christ and no amount of love for heaven can do. As such, Frost strays away from the Christian path by believing this. Robert Faggen makes a salient point in *The Fact Is Sweetest Dream* that "Believing in God, you believe the future in, believe it into existence" (Bloom, 238).

It ought to be noted also that, when Frost suffered the loss of his wife, the words he used expressed an urgent need of God, his utter dependence on God then and his utter destitution in this life: "Word I was in the house alone ...in my life alone ...no one left but God (Fagan,183). The poet indicates the need for God in man's everyday life in his introduction to Edwin Arllington Robinson's King Jasper. This is because God has abandoned him to his fate in a universe full of horrors. Be says that man should live in fear, not of God, but of not proving his life worthy in God's eyes. "There is the fear that we shall not prove worthy in the eyes of ...God" (ibid). The fear seems to be a motive for man to struggle for his dignity. In otherwords, God is not as dependable and faithful as claimed by Christian teachings.

A quiet tone of skepticism is found in most of Frost's poetry. His ideas of religion vary from poem to poem; some reveal a potentially strong religious faith, while others show his admitted agnosticism. But even those in which he expresses faith, he does so without conforming to Christian belief. Moreover, his skepticism restrains him from giving final and absolute answers in his poetry. Nowhere in his poetry does he purport to be a spokesman for God. The rationalist critics hold the claims that Frost's presentation of a God who is self-contradictory only helps to uncover the poet's disbelief in God. Fagan supports this view in *Critical Companion of Robert Frost*, where he says "Frost's writing is often critical of religion. He is skeptical about God, frequently presenting agnostic views because he is uncertain and untrusting, and is slightly more apt to embrace scientific approaches to existence" (Fagan, 369).

In "The Demiurge's Laugh", the persona expresses his disbelief in a demi-god who ironically sits and laughs at man's misfortune. This saddistic god (who is dorsal and adamant

to the plight of man) only takes pleasure in seeing man suffer. This makes the persona to denounce his faith in God who has become an absentee land lord. The speaker feels that he may be chasing the wind as when the "light... fails" he will be mocked. Frost satirises the Christian orthodox religion by presenting God as an uncaring spirit contrary to what is contained in the Holy Bible.

In the same manner, Man must struggle with other men's philosophy, religion, science, and politics in so far as any one of them encroaches on individual dignity. The poet holds that religion belittles humans, making them feel microscopic. In "The Lesson for Today" the poet likewise captures the debased nature of man as a result of science and religion in the words "We both are the belittled human race." (Rinehart and Winston, 473). It is evident here that religion has brain-washed mankind not to reason for himself. The poet believes that man's redemption can only come through his relationship with his fellow man and not through his believe in some religious dogma that holds him spell-bound.

The quest for meaning that gives impetus to serious art took the form in Frost's work which attempts to reconcile his skepticism and his natural proclivity for pluralism with the orthodox religious concepts and ideals that were so strongly a part of his early environment. Though the attempt at reconciliation remains apparent in his poetry, it is also apparent that it was never completely successful. Eventually, as he suffered through periods of serious doubt, Frost seemed to arrive at a cautious, limited faith bounded, on the one hand, by his uncertainties, but ever unbounded in its response to truth. Frost's ambivalence served his poetry, for they are recorded therein, providing his meaning and his metaphor.

His poetry, on the other hand, served the attainment of that conflicting harmony that was his unique solution. Though he remained wary of being too positive about the answers to the big questions, no one ever became more sure of the one thing a man can affirm for himself—the demands of his own nature. In effect, Frost deliberately enacts doubtful searching, hopes, and fears in his poems, refusing either to reject religion or to give himself to it. Robert Frost is unmistakably a Protestant Christian who believes in a personal God whom only pray could reach to him. In this way, he (in a sense) works out his own salvation which is palpable through the deification of nature which is the preoccupation of Chapter Two of this work.

This has sought to briefly examine the origin of religion and further observes Frost's view on conventional religion which is made visible in some of his poems. The Chapter has also shown that America in the 1620s was a breeding ground for many religious creeds of extremist Protestants who had separated themselves from the Church of England and other churches in the world in search for an arena where they could freely practise their belief. It has made a survey of Frost's ambiguous stance in religion in the selected poems which has led many to consider him as being a disciple of Emersonian philosophy that holds that "every man makes his own religion, his own God" (Wayne,6). Frost struggled all his life with a traditional faith-based view of the world and the rise of science. The claims of the absence of God in a universe governed by chaos, doubts about the soundness of divine justice in the Judeo-Christian religion, and man's uncertainties in what life holds, propel Frost to break from the traditional religious narratives, in the quest for the existence of God in nature. The poet does this by deifying nature to the status of God. This will serve as the focus for Chapter Two of this work.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE DEIFICATION OF NATURE

This chapter seeks to examine Frost's elevation of nature to the rank of a deity. First, it sheds light on the concept of Deism in the 17th century and its relevance in the 20th century. Next, it contravenes the Judeo-Christian arrogance and domination towards nature by presenting nature as man's spiritual arena. The Chapter further shows that there is the need to deify nature in an ecological-crisis-ridden era when people disregard nature and its virtues. This has made palpable the poet's ecological consciousness. It also shows Frost as a nature poet and as a disciple of Emerson's transcendentalist view. Lastly, it presents nature as a temple at whose altar man can freely worship God thereby debunking traditional religion (especially the Judeo-Christian conception of God and perception of the status of nature).

Reacting against the Age of Enlightenment which lays emphasis on reason, many writers turned to nature during the latter part of the 19th century and early 20th century. At this time, two literary movements—the Romantic Movement in Europe and the Transcendentalist Movement in America had strongly paved the way for the swerve by showing the interconnectedness amongst human, nature and God. They presented the aesthetic entanglement that existed between humans and nature, in contrast to other scientific approaches.

The poet's greatest problem was to make both poetry and nature vital in the post-Darwinian era. He did not choose to evade this problem like William Butler Yeats by building a private poetic world in arts, or like Thomas Stearns Eliot by finding shelter in a religious system. Nietzsche observed that Eliot and Yeats achieved fame in their line of poetry because of their method of approach, whereas Frost was only a good second-rate poet to them (Nietzsche, 43). Nietzsche's view of Frost does not do him justice at all.

Meanwhile, the poet's greatness is his head-on encounter with the problem of man and nature in the post-Darwinian epoch. This is because Frost does not create a system of symbols or does he flee to a religion. From a pantheistic perspective, he believes that God is in the world, present not only in human hearts but also in things found in the natural environment: stars, woods, moon, sun, mountains and fire. In "After Apple-Picking" the persona uses the

image of a ladder through a tree to show the interconnectedness between God and man. He states that “My long two-pointed ladder’s sticking through a tree/ Toward heaven still” The speaker believes that through the ladder on the apple tree, he can have access to the gates of heaven. The apple tree and the ladder are biblical symbols in the book of Genesis. The picking of the forbidden fruits in the Garden of Eden by Adam and Eve and to the dream of Jacob ascending the rungs of the ladder to heaven respectively. This biblical overtone highlights the need for the glorification of nature. The guarantee of heavenly bliss (through nature) enables the speaker not to worry about the long sleep that awaits him. Fagan in explaining this view holds that:

Frost uses of the long sleep seems  
Metaphorically suggestive of the long  
sleep death or of the shift into the afterlife,  
as it differs from a human sleep.

(Fagan, 25)

The long sleep as a metaphor for the inevitability of death pushes man towards the worship of nature in order to secure an eternal bliss in heaven. Frost’s depiction of nature as man’s spiritual arena is a cry for abusals of nature to recognize the spiritual values that nature brings to mankind as a pathway to God. The presence of God in nature makes nature to be treated with some degree of care, obedience, and love. According to the Deists, and as earlier stated, human beings can only know God through reason and the observation of nature and not by supernatural manifestations like miracles and revelations. The natural universe is pervaded with divinity and nature becomes as mysterious as God. In this light, nature is regarded as a sanctuary where God dwells and it must be treated as the body of God.

In his poetry, Frost presents a personal God found in nature whom only prayer can reach; nature seems quite promising with its divine plan. The poet depicts a God who sanctifies love in nature in “A Prayer in Spring”. The persona prays for God to provide him with a better harvest in the time of uncertainties as in spring. God’s divine power is manifested through the bounteous harvest of nature as captured in the line, “Oh, give us pleasure in the flowers today” (Rinehart and Winston 17). God through nature can be supplicated in times of chaos for man’s needs to be met. Instead of man to destroy the natural environment in order to satisfy his desire, the poet is creating an environmental consciousness where nature becomes the dwelling place of God.



Man could only pray to God in times of affinities but the supreme Creator in his mercy provides solution to man's distress at the canopy of nature which becomes an altar where man can communicate with God and be rewarded, for nature (like God), works in the favour of man. "A Prayer in Spring," seems to be the pure, uncomplicated expression of a joyful mood of thanksgiving that is performed at the arena of nature. Rajendra Nath Mishra, in *Search for Belief in the Poetry of Robert Frost*, purports that Frost discovers in "A Prayer in Spring" that "...the greatness of love does not lie in the forward-looking thoughts. It lies amidst the beautiful natural scenery which is sanctified with God's blessing" (Mishra, 26).

Mishra means that nature is endowed with divinity from the hands of God. In this regard, Frost is not just an observer of nature but also one who has experienced what he writes about. The persona offers his personal prayer in spring time as if to say that the best way to love God is to love his natural objects. The persona's choice of words like "orchard white," "perfect trees" "uncertain harvest" shows his love for nature which is at its perfect stage. The "orchard white" and "perfect trees" show nature as an arena of purity. "White" as a symbol of holiness is attributed to the beautiful Orchard to show how the poet has sanctified nature to the status of God. The perfection of God is given to the trees thereby making the trees an epitome of God.

In the same light, "The Demiurge's Laugh" presents nature with divine endowments. The sameness of the woods symbolizes something frightening and magical that serves as the dwelling place of the demi-god. Man can only seek the face of this god through his encounter with the forest. This representation captures the Frostian claim of the belief in a personal god who creates the universe but exists independently of it. The poem can also be said to be illustrative of Frost's concept of nature as a grim and uncaring goddess. It begins with the scenic-experimental assuredness characteristic of Frost's poetry. The ordinary characters of the woods such as that with different trees are substituted for extraordinary ones like the sameness of the wood. In the persona's quest for an answer to his unexpressed questions, the god rises from his wallow in the mysterious forest and laughs.

The poet quickly abandons the search for salvation in the wood because he feels that the god is without any feeling toward him. In *Critical Companion to Robert Frost*, Fagan

holds that “the Demiurge presented in the poem is a platonic deity who fashioned the world out of chaos....The Demiurge is a half god that opposes the desire of God the creator.”

(Fagan, 80) According to Fagan, the Demiurge is a half god that exists in the forest. This insinuates that the demi-god dwells in the mysterious woods and is the opposite of God, the Creator, in the Holy Scripture. It is clear in the poem that the presence of the demi-god’s laughter in the forest resounds only in the speaker’s mind. Frost, like a deist, believes that reason is the avenue through which man can perceive God in the universe.

In a similar manner, nature in “Ice and Fire” is presented with some degree of supernatural endowments. It is a destructive instrument that is used to bring divine justice in the universe as, in it, the persona expresses perplexity on the way the world will end. Nature is elevated above the natural (including man) as it possesses the divine power to bring the universe to an end. The poem exposes the idea of end time which, according to Frost, may be brought about by either ice or fire. The poet’s allusion to the biblical end time encapsulates the omnipotence of nature whose power is displayed through its destructive tendencies. The poet, in this regard, views nature as something to be feared and respected.

Robert Frost expresses well-defined views of nature. The poet observes the relationship that exists between God and the natural world. Of the writer’s poems expressing this seeming benignity, one of the loveliest is “Rose Pogonias” which describes the sense of peace and pleasure felt by a couple who happen upon a small meadow smothered with spring flowers. A portion of the poem reads:

A saturated meadow.  
Sun-shaped and jewel-small,  
A circle scarcely wider  
Than the trees around were tall;  
Where winds were quite excluded,  
And the air was stifling sweet  
With the breath of many flowers,  
A temple of the heat. (Rinehart and Winston, 19)

As a whole, the poem conveys a sense of nature’s genial warmth. The meadow itself is “sun-shaped,” a “temple in the heat,” and the sun casts its rays directly on the backs of the flower pickers. But the sun’s heat does not sear and hurt. Rather it is like the heaviness

felt when one walks from the shade of trees into bright sunlight. The fragrance of the flowers in the spring sunlight is a heady perfume to the people stepping into the scene. Their senses are overwhelmed with the bloom of the small meadow. They feel the sun, inhale the “stifling sweetness,” and see the loveliness of a sun-drenched meadow filled with flowers. The small patch is a “temple,” a protected place where nothing disturbs the peacefulness, the quiet of beauty.

Frost, in the poem, heightens the atmosphere of peace, holiness, and serenity through the use of such images as a “temple of the heat,” where the humans “bowed” as if in “worship” of the sun and “raised a simple prayer.” The object of their prayer is the “grace of hours” that the loveliness might be missed by the blades of the mowers. The subjective imagery of the sun-lit meadow in terms of temple, prayer, worship and grace re-emphasize the fact that Frost describes nature through the eyes and senses of his characters. The persona describes the meadow as the temple of the heat. Temples are usually holy places reserved for the worship of God. This is done through prayers. The worship of the sun is a common phenomenon in some parts of the world. The ancient Greeks identified Apollo as their sun god. The persona’s admission of raising a simple prayer for the field not to be forgotten in the future captures the sacredness of the field. It becomes an altar where prayers are made for an “hour of grace.”

The speaker, recollecting the experience and describing the scene, has a religious faith so deeply ingrained that he feels a spiritual relationship with nature, because—in his mind—it is associated with God and is expressive of his worship. As a result of this inner response, the natural world is a place of peace. But as a man familiar with the facts of farm life, he realizes that the mowers must soon come to this spot and destroy the present scene. The human response to the loveliness of the flower-filled meadow is the desire that it be spared by the mowers until the blooms fade. It has been a source of peace and a symbol of the benevolence of its creator, and the speaker is reluctant to see it destroyed. The poet expresses a sense of peacefulness in the divinity of the woods.

In the same vein, the poet in his poems clearly shows the interwoven nature of God and the natural world. This harmonious coexistence is evident in “The Literate Farmer and the Planet Venus.” The stranger is overtaken in the poem by the brightness of the star which is metaphorically compared to the sun and is alluded to as the Divine star of Bethlehem. The star

becomes a symbol of religion and piety which guides and protects the stranger in the darkness of the night and leads him to the house of the Farmer. Fagan holds “that they are a way of interrupting the night, but are still more divine” (Fagan, 201). In this light, the star and night are symbols of light and darkness. The brightness of the star is an inference with the darkness of the night, as darkness can not comprehend light.

The extraordinary power of the star is perceivable in the brightness that the star brings to the universe which is divine to man. This natural light (as that in Bethlehem) is seen as being governed by the Holy Spirit to the birth place of the lord “Will tell you it’s the star of Bethlehem/ Above some more religion in the manger” (Rinehart and Winston, 510). The star, from the light that it brings, is endowed with divinity. Light becomes a platform where the power of God is manifested as in the Book of Genesis 1:3 “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*) “Light” becomes the sacred symbol of God’s supernatural power thereby exhibiting its supremacy over man.

In the same way, Frost receives help from a natural medium to showcase his belief of God through nature. The poet would like to sing with Lord Tennyson that the whole creation rotates around God. He holds that the transient and temporary world moved around God and not machines. He contravenes the modernist disbelief in God who has been replaced by machines. The telephone is an instrument that helps us to listen to the voices of someone else. The poet in “The Telephone” shows the existence of God through nature. He takes up a natural medium, a flower, to show the interconnectedness between the poet and God. The speaker says “When leaning with my head against a flower/ I heard you talk.../ You spoke from that flower on the window sill—” (Rinehart and Winston, 147). The flower replaces the telephone as a medium for man’s communication with God.

Mishra, in view of this, holds that “As in the case of ‘The Telephone,’ the poet happens to hear the voice of God while leaning against a flower” (Mishra, 22). According to Mishra, the persona’s encounter with the flower connects him to God. Nature at this juncture becomes the link between God and man. In view of Frost’s perception of nature, the same source quotes Amy Lowell statement “... Mr. Frost writes down exactly what he sees. But being a true poet, he sees it vividly a Fagan nd within a charm which translates itself into a beautiful simplicity of expression” (Mishra, 26). Lowell pointed out that Frost is not a mere observer of nature but one who has experienced all the things he writes about from his natural

environment. Nature is for the benefit of man. It is therefore a place where man can seek solace in life and renew his salvation in God (become born again). According to Frost, it is the place where God can be found. The poet's intimate tone reveals his faith and intimacy with God.

Nature as a citadel of hope and belief in God is captured in "Sitting by a Bush in Broad Sunlight" which speaks of the poet's faith outrightly. The message in the poem is made visible through the poet's use of symbols and metaphors. Words like "ray" and "sun" speak a lot for themselves. The "ray" becomes a symbol of hope. The "sun" stands for a visible representation of God as God's sun offers mankind warmth:

God once spoke to people by name.  
The Sun once imparted its flame.  
One impulse persists as our breath;  
The other persists as our faith. (Rinehart and Winston, 147)

The intimacy between man and God has been concretized in nature. The poet juxtaposes God and the sun. Even though, they perform similar functions. God once spoke to people by calling their names thereby establishing his all-knowing ability. In some pantheistic societies with several gods, the sun god plays an active role in protecting the people. Even though, the worship of the sun is considered pagan by the Judeo-Christian faith. In the poem, the poet expresses his belief in God and the god in nature (the god of the sun).

The ability to reflect on any atmosphere, to merge the inner feeling with the outer, is quite obvious in the poet's lyrics. In "Love and a Question," Christ himself comes in search of shelter. Almost like an ordinary human being he comes with "a green-white stick in his hand/ And, for all burden care". In the guise of a stranger, the creator comes to transfigure the relationship between the husband and the wife whose solitary honeymoon is interrupted. Interestingly, Christ's biblical symbol of power—the scepter that represents his kingship has been replaced by a "Greenwich stick". The stick here is a metonymy that indicates the Lord's divine royalty. Through it, Frost once more elevates the natural to the divine.

Fagan postulated that "The poem simply concerns a young husband who is uncertain about his relationship with his new bride and wonders whether the stranger seeking shelter is

a threat” (Fagan, 206). Stated otherwise, the newly-wedded couples’ relationship is full of uncertainties about life but the interruption of the stranger interferes the isolation of the couple and establishes an atmosphere of purity, peace and integrity. The green-white stick can equally suggest the purity of nature which is used for the attainability of God’s purpose on earth. The Lord, in the garment of the stranger, uses nature as an instrument of purification of the union in marital life. This salient aspect palpably presents nature with its divine action on the natural world.

In “A Star in a Stone-Boat,” with its constant allusions to evolutionary astronomy, the poet uses religious symbols to illustrate the piety of nature. The speaker uses a simile to illustrate the star as holy “He did not see how like a flying thing/ It brooded ant-egg and had one large wings, / One not so large for flying in a ring/ And a long bird of paradise’s tail” (Rinehart and Winston, 213). The sacred nature of the star is described: it is said to have large wings and a tail like the long bird of paradise. This simile of the star-stone compared to angels on earth is short-lived: “When not in use to fly and trail it drew back in its body like a snail.” The star in this poem is a symbol of fate. The fallen stars make the soil hot and yield flowers instead of grain thereby deviating the farmers’ prayer for a bounteous harvest.

As Fagan asserts, the fallen star (to the farmer) is that which will reduce the world into manageable sizes. He just needs to find and hold one fallen star and let it “run off in strange tangents with [his] arms”. The star will be “the prize / of the world complete in any size” (Fagan, 315). According to Fagan, the speaker needs to get hold of a star as it runs and complete the world in any size. The speaker believes that the shooting star helps to demarcate the world in a well-defined spectrum and creates order which is universally appealing to everyone in the world. The star, from this perspective, is given divine power as it possesses the power of controlling the universe. The power of the star can be compared to that of the Creator.

The poet’s life was one of grief because of the death of his loved ones— wife, children and friends. This made him to constantly write epiphany in honour of these dear ones who have been snatched by the cold hands of death. In “Iris by Night” the persona historically alludes to Iris who is the messenger of the gods in Greek mythology. The rainbow, with its unflinching beauty captured by its “confusing lights,” protects the speaker and his friend from every form of harm. This poem is dedicated to Frost’s friend, Edward Thomas, who died

during World War I. Fagan purports that “The vision Frost presents is filled with love for his dear friend, as the ring protects them meaningfully” (Fagan, 187). The colourful rings of the rain bow protect man from any form of harm. Nature occupies a unique position in man’s life and also bears the mark of God. As a result, man is obliged to treat nature with some degree of respect. In this light, Wentzel quotes Calvin in his ecotheological observation of nature as purporting that:

God has written and as it were engraven the glory of his power,  
goodness, wisdom, eternity... For the little singing birds sang of God,  
the animals acclaimed him the elements feared and the mountains resounded  
with him, the river and the spring threw glances toward him, the grasses  
and the flowers smiled (Huyssteen, 248).

Put otherwise, the author affirmed the immediacy of God in nature which clearly shows that God has not detached himself from the world to stay far above man in some spiritualized heaven. In effect, God is in, with, and under the whole created universe. Nature, at this point, must be viewed as divinely created and man’s role is that of stewardship not dominion. Frost portrays the divine power that is embedded in nature. Man must, therefore, respect and regard nature as the abode of the gods, as well as a form through which God manifests himself.

In “Astrometaphysical,” he facetiously addresses God about his hope of going up rather than down; but some concern about his end is evident and renders the laughter hollow. The speaker professes his love for God’s creation in a prayer which is placed above mankind. The persona’s love for the sky attests to the fact that it is the abode of God.

My love for every Heaven  
O’er which you, Lord, have, lorded,  
From number one to seven  
Should be rewarded (Rinehart and Winston, 548)

Stated otherwise, the speaker believes that his love for nature is enough reason to enjoy eternity by being sent “up” not “down”. Frost uses dualism of heaven and Earth to show the spiritual empowerment of one over the other. The speaker pledges his humility to all the seven heavens. Fagan holds that, according to Muslim and cabalist doctrines, there are seven heavens with the seventh being the greatest (Fagan, 31). The persona’s love for nature

portrays a rational ecological understanding of the universe's order where nature is put before humans in the hierarchical ranking of God, nature and man. The latter becomes dependent on nature to be spiritually uplifted.

Frost is a non-conformist who does not accept orthodox Christianity. His ideas about God and religion are quite convincing. The personas in his selected poems demonstrate the readiness to act in all circumstances and life is lived against all odds. The poet has learnt how to read eternity from the small things of nature from Emerson. The problem of belief has always been very important to the poet: although he expresses doubt for many Christian doctrines, it is evident that he knows that no one can live without belief. This accounts for the reason why many critics see the poet as one who reshapes and maps out his own theology and religion.

Chapter Two focused on Frostian deification of nature and the arousal of ecological consciousness in an ecological crisis-ridden era. The chapter has shown how Frost elevates nature to the status of God. The supremacy of natural objects in the universe makes it necessary for them to be deified. It has equally examined the various avenues through which this deification of nature is achieved. The poet's skepticism for the claims of conventional religion, on the one hand, and his faith in the deification of nature (on the other hand), set the stage for the creation of a new theology and a new religion. Chapter Three examines the strands of both this theology and religion.



## CHAPTER THREE

### FROM ECOTHEOLOGY TO ECORELIGION

This Chapter investigates the birth of a new theology and a new religion that stem from Frost's skepticism for conventional religion and the poet's deification of nature. To shed light on these new ecclesiastical creations, the chapter highlights Frostian ecological consciousness that have engendered their creation. The poet's ecological consciousness is probed into from the point of view of the preservation and conservation of nature. Then, the several foci through which the writer quests for a new salvation—eco-salvation—are shown. These new theology and religion are presented as a break from Judeo-Christianity as a traditional religious form of worship.

The concept of “old centres” that have given way to “new centres” is contemporary in the Modernist and Postmodernist Ages. The law of substitution enables man to successfully substitute one thing for another—the transcendental spirit for the deistic, Judeo-Christian principles of God to the ecological supremacy of nature. The modern era—because of the political, socio-cultural and psychological upheavals that have engulfed the world since the 20<sup>th</sup> century—has caused man to be lost and everything about him has become absurd. This view is backed by Eugene Ionesco who notes that “devoid of purpose... cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, and useless” (Abrams, 1). This claim that human life has become purposeless, irrational, and out of harmony with the natural environment has resulted into a chronic state of uncertainty, anguish, and depression.

Universal paradigms became questionable especially with the collapse of institutions like religion whose creeds and codes of morality had failed to foster the genuine worship of God. The rapport that once existed among God, man, and nature started diminishing as scholars began to point out the hostility of religious practices towards the natural environment. As stated before, White, in “The Historical Roots of Ecologic Crisis,” purports that the book of Genesis, which mandates humans to “subdue the earth” and to “be fruitful and multiply”, laid the theological foundations for environmental destruction in the west. Nature becomes a necessary tool in combating man's ecological crisis in the universe. In *The*

*Right of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics*, Roderich Nash quotes John Ray as maintaining that animals and plants exist for the glorification of God and this way of thinking neatly dethroned humans from the dominant status accorded to them by traditional Christianity (Nash, 21). Ray makes it clear that man's position on earth as superior to other creations should be annulled because such creatures exist to glorify God. Mobilisation and writings like Ray's is a sort of ecological consciousness that have caused aims at eradicating man's destructive tendencies towards nature.

Frost can be viewed as a writer who militates for this cause. The poet rekindles the traditional perception of God in nature in an era when men have long departed from religious practices in search for new forms of expression in science. Though the poet overtly does not adhere to any religious creed, he was initiated to Presbyterianism by his Swedenborgian mother who was piously religious. James Barszcz in an article "*Frost and the provocation of Religion*," shows how the pious nature of the poet's mother impacts on him. In a conversation with Louis Mertins, the poet says "Religion I suppose, played quite a major role in my upbringing." The poet further explains to Mertins:

My mother was a very religious woman. She took Church-going quite seriously. Born a Covenanting Presbyterian, she had me baptized first in the faith when I was very small. Then she switched to the Unitarians. Whether I was again baptized then I have no way of knowing, though probably not. Finally she evolved in the Swedenborgian Church, and I was again baptized, maybe twice in the new Jerusalem Faith.

(Faggen, 142)

The poet's religious nature therefore springs from this background. Even though he was baptized in several Churches at a tender age as a result of his mother's continuous search for a true religion, the poet is of the opinion that these Churches are not the foundation of true salvation. In his letter to Amy Lowell in December 2, 1917 he says "I have been a Presbyterian, an Emersonian, a Swedenborgian, nothing" (Faggen, 12). The poet's knowledge of the Bible made him to rationally resist some of the teachings of the institutional Christianity of the Modern Age. His comprehension of the limits of theology drove him to make sense of the world through poetry. The demise of his family members as many critics hold, made him to be skeptical about the Judeo-Christian God who is silent and does nothing to remedy man's status-quo in the universe. The poet, therefore— through poetry— expresses

his belief in a personal God who is only known through reasoning. Although, on several occasions, he did not consider himself a “nature poet,” but he still expresses his connection to nature in his poems. He considers nature as the abode of the almighty God which must not be destroyed by modern man.

As a natural theologian, the writer expresses the belief that God is revealed more in the book of nature than in any book of Scripture in his poetry. It is in a bid shows a break from the Judeo-Christian religion to Eco-religion. This has been described as the poet’s creation of his own kind of religion through nature. Frost fostered the belief that nature is a church where God is praised and the protection of nature becomes a Holy War to safeguard the natural environment. The theology of nature therefore deplores the abuse of nature which has become sacrilegious and has greatly endangered human existence. The elevation of nature is necessary for the environment to gain the respect and protection that should be given to it.

Roderick Nash quotes Lowdermilk’s speech on Jerusalem radio titled “*The eleventh Commandment*” in “The Greening of Religion.” In this speech, Lowdermilk reasoned that if God had foreseen the ravage that centuries of thoughtless forestry and agriculture would bring to his creation, he would have been moved to add the Eleventh Commandment which, according to Lowdermilk, “would complete the trinity of man’s responsibility— to his creator, to his fellow man, and to mother earth” (Nash, 202). According to this critic, the conservation of the natural environment becomes an ethical and moral matter as responsible land use is not just an instrument for physical progress but also for a higher form of spiritual development. Religion, to him, becomes the bedrock to environmental ethic. Therefore, the Frost in the quest for eco-salvation decries the rampant destruction of the ecosystem. He rather celebrates the beauty with which the ecology that has not been rampaged either by technological or human activities is endowed.

Frost’s knowledge of theology enables him to constructively and rationally provide solutions to some metaphysical problems about the Holy Scripture and man’s environment through poetry. The poet recognizes the power of the Biblical stories and constantly reinterprets it for the purpose of enriching human understanding of the universe. In “A Prayer in Spring,” he repeatedly reminds us that the mystery of God and his love for mankind are expressed in the beauty of nature and the poetic truth. From its very title the poem showcases the spiritual exuberance for natural beauty which it celebrates in order to praise God. In other

words, the poet constantly urges us to appreciate God’s gift and to be grateful in the present, just as we can be confident in a future which we cannot perceive, control, or comprehend, because that future rests with God whose love for us is limitless as portrayed by his natural creation. The uncertainty of the harvest epitomizes the future which is undetermined by man but through hope and assurance of a bounteous harvest for mankind, man remains hopeful for brighter days ahead of him. The persona solicits such a harvest as he prays:

Oh, give us pleasure in the flowers today;  
And give us not to think so far away  
As the uncertain harvest; keep us here  
All simply in the springing of the year  
(Rinehart and Winston, 17)

Frost asks us here to recognize constant the beauty of the world by witnessing the pleasure of spring and of nature given to man by God. The gift symbolizes God’s love for mankind. The poet creates a new forum through which people can be informed of the unearthly bliss that can be derived from the natural environment. Nature, in the form of the “white orchard,” “the bees”, “the darting hummingbird,” should thus be protected and sustained. The priority given to the flowers over the “uncertain harvest” is a proof that nature is not just valued because of its utility—producing food. It can also offer salvation.

In a similar manner, the poet shows his religious expertise in “After Apple-picking” by using a religious tale to foster his philosophical ideas about the universe. The poet uses the book of Genesis to showcase his religious know-how through the avenue of poetry. The poem expresses the hope to master and ascend the helm of nature. In the poem, Frost plays with the tale of Genesis from the picking of the forbidden fruit at the Garden of Eden by the forefathers of humanity to the dream of Jacob ascending to Heaven through the medium of a ladder. The speaker says:

My long two-pointed ladder’s sticking through a tree  
Toward heaven still,  
.....  
Apples I didn’t pick upon some bough.  
But I am done with apple-picking now.  
(Rinehart and Winston, 88)

The poet suggests that nature should be protected and sustained by mankind because it is the ultimate source of man's spiritual fulfillment. According to the poet, man's salvation depends on his relationship with his natural environment. The poet, through his mastering of religious myths, can easily read theology through nature; nature becomes the bedrock from which theology originates. As a result, it must be respected and protected for man's survival on earth (be it physical or spiritual) depends on his connection with nature. From this perspective, the poet makes religious myths to become physically perceptible and understandable to all of humanity. According to him, nature ecotheology could be the best practical means through which one can interpret the Bible. The ladder set against the apple tree in the garden symbolizes man's eternal reward as a result of his inclination with nature. The tree becomes the portal to heaven to all believers of the divinity in nature.

Another salient poem with theological overtones is "The Demiurge's Laugh." The "sameness of the Wood" in the beginning of the poem depicts solidarity that exists between man and the uniqueness of nature. The calmness and serenity of the wood shows the peaceful nature of the woods which is endowed with God's divine quality of peace and humility thereby making it a favorable ground for the abode of God. Ecotheology otherwise known as the theology of nature therefore stipulates that the environment must reflect the divine mentality of God which is captured in the poem. The laughter of the Demiurge vividly confirms the fact that God (who is Spirit) dwells in nature. The poet says:

It was just as the light was beginning to fail  
That I suddenly heard—all I needed to hear:  
It has lasted me many and many a year.  
The sound was behind me instead of before,  
A sleepy sound, but mocking half,  
(Rinehart and Winston, 35)

This shows that men can only Know God when they come in contact with nature. The tranquility that reigns in the natural environment makes way for man to actively meditate in the presence of God in nature. Frostian theology depicts God in nature hence ecotheology. To him, the superior creator is the god of Emerson and the Transcendentalists. In this light, man can only be redeemed when he goes back to nature to worship. These beliefs advocate the preservation and conservation of the natural environment for the personal salvation of man.

Nature becomes the place where man can find peace and freedom which the world has taken away from him. Just like Emerson, Frost calls on the men of his generation to turn to nature where all their needs (spiritual, physical, and socio-economic) will be met. He blends the past with the present in order to provide salvation that is free from objection.

It is equally significant that, thanks to his knowledge of religion, the poet expresses his worry on how the world would end. The book of Genesis becomes a powerful instrument for the justification of the religious claims of what is described as the end of the world. In “Fire and Ice,” he ponders on the double destruction of the universe. The story of the Ark of Noah is alluded to in this poem. The persona presents a theological debate on the view of different parties on how the world will end. This increases knowledge on religion and clarifies doubts. This debate is made obvious when the poet repeatedly uses “some” to express the view of the different camps. The speaker holds that “Some say the world will end in fire/ Some say in ice”.

In this poem, Frost makes light of a great biblical concept that bothers many people today. By trivializing one of the pivotal beliefs of Judeo-Christianity, the poet shows that his belief and concern are elsewhere. Fagan holds that he is not just imagining an end to the world in the general sense but is rather seeing a broader scope of endings. This end will not come through the extinction of the human race per se and all that is in nature, but through our own various endings on other levels—for example, in things closer to the human heart such as relationships or love affairs (Fagan, 115-116). Thus, the destruction of nature spells doom as it will usher in the end of all that is human. This, to Frost, is the real end of the world.

The theological perception of end times is an alarming aspect in the poem. The poet’s knowledge and wisdom of the Bible enables him to “break and build” on Biblical verses in order to reshape man’s understanding of the verses through the perception of nature. When the speaker says:

From what I’ve tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favor fire.  
.....  
I think I know enough of hate  
To say that for destruction ice  
Is also great (Rinehart and Winston, 268)

The poet believes that the world will end because of Man's desire and hatred that have made him to constantly strive for excesses. This craving has eradicated his awareness of the dangers of his action and has grossly affected the natural environment. The human race does not know the consequences of its actions when its hatred and desire overshadow its reasoning and love for the natural environment. In this light, Frost states that "Fire and Ice" are not just tools for the destruction of the world (according to the biblical dictates) but also stand as man's hatred and desire to exploit the natural world. Fagan says "fire is equated with desire; ice is equated with hate" (*Robert Frost in Context*, 116). The poet therefore decries man's excessive desire and hatred that are destructive to fellow man and to the natural environment. The poem clearly shows that Frost is not satisfied with the traditional Christian explanation of life as found in the Bible. He is rather convinced that the existence of things in the universe can provide answers to man's problems in life. The theological preoccupation of the idea of end-time is scrupulously observed in this poem as it ear-marks the modification of religious myths in favour of man's solidarity with his natural environment.

Frost's poetic modification of religious facts suggests the creation of a new theology. As a theologian, Frost shows his zeal for religious teaching as seen in "Masques." The poet manifests his passion for theology in "A Masque of Reason". His dramatic twists and turns of religious myths in the Book of Job have made many critics to consider the dramatic poem as the "43rd Chapter of the Book of Job." The poet presents God with human attributes which makes him accountable for his flaws. In the same light, Robert Fagan, in "*Frost and the Bible*," explains "In a Masque of reason, a dramatic modern conclusion to the book of Job, God is very much a character with human traits and motives" (*Robert Frost in Context*, 152). The poet's invention of this style of Biblical interpretation of the Bible is meant to provide solution to the insoluble problems in the Book of Job. This solution could only be arrived at through reasoning: in his dialogue with God, Job demands explanation for his predicaments in the universe. God's first appearance in "A Masque of Reason" is in a burning bush. This is captured in the conversational lines:

Man: I said the incense tree's is no fire again

Wife: You mean the burning bush?

.....

Man: Someone's caught in the branches

Wife: So there is.

He can get out

Man: He's loose! He's out!

Wife: It's God.

I'd know Him by Blake's picture anywhere. (Rinehart and Winston, 587-588)

God in the burning bush is symbolic of nature as the abode of the almighty God. Frost's presentation of God in nature shows the interconnectedness that exists between God and nature. The bush in flame epitomizes the manifestation of God's power through nature. The poet's literary allusion to the romantic poet, William Blake, highlights the romantic era as that of the glorification of the landscape and protection of the natural environment in which the supreme Creator dwells. The recognition of God comes through reasoning rather than divine revelation. Faggan holds that "Before Frost, they had been much writing in both English and American romanticism that attempted to read nature spiritually" (*Robert Frost in Context*, 157). This ecotheology seeks to awaken people's environmental consciousness will encourage the respect of the purity of nature and its protection as a sacred altar of God.

Frost modernized the Old Testament classic drama of evil through the suffering of Job. He engages in a theological debate through colloquial blank verse between God, Job and Job's wife, Thyatira. The explanation of God concerning the seeming predicament of Job makes Him to serve as the spokesperson for Frost's theological standpoint. The poet shows the supremacy of God's reasoning over other creatures:

Job: ...why did you hurt me so? I am reduced

To asking flatly for the reason — outright

God: ... I will answer Job first.

I'm going to tell Job why I tortured him

I was just showing off to the Devil, Job, (Rinehart and Winston, 598-600)

The use of the personal pronoun "I" in the speech of God captures the supremacy of God's reason over man. In the same manner, in quoting Peter Stanlis, John Timmerman in *Robert Frost: The Ethics of Ambiguity* explains that the modern man believes in reasoning that is backed by facts whereas, Frost satirises such reasoning by exalting the omnipotence of God and makes man's reason appear peevish (Timmerman, 82).

According to Stanlis, the modern man becomes the architect of his destiny in the universe and God is eliminated to the background. He is made to have no influence over man's reason. This is the view held by many modernist intellectuals, Frost, on the contrary, dismisses human reasoning as inadequate to understanding the mysteries of divine justice. At this juncture, the God in Frost's "masque" plays has a greater role in man's attainment of



spiritual salvation. He provides reasons for the justification of His actions to man's life in the universe in order to explicitly and adequately widen man's understanding of the metaphysical occurrence of events in that universe. Frost's God rebukes Job with humour to demonstrate the crucial role both evil (that is Satan) and faith play in taking man's true measure and defining the relation between God and man in terms of divine and not human justice.

The poet, in his quest for a new theology, reconciles the irreconcilable in the poem discussed above. He makes a *mélange* of science and religion in an era when religious beliefs were fast losing their grip on the universe. This has made a handful of critics to ponder about the poet's modernist stance. Through "A masque of reason," Frost blends of science and religion which he thinks should go hand in gloves as religion cannot be isolated from the scientific world of invention. Likewise, Thyatira uses her Kodak Camera to capture the trio—God, Satan and man. Satan should not only be remembered as a tyrant but also as one who was once a faithful servant of the Most High God. Job's wife says:

Wait still I get my Kodak.  
Would you please draw in a little closer?  
No—no, that's not a smile there [.] That's a grin  
Satan, what ails you? Where's the famous tongue  
.....  
This is polite society you're in  
Where good and bad are mingled every which way  
(Rinehart and Winston, 604)

The union among the trio is captured through a Kodak Camera. The Camera as a scientific symbol of technology is used to capture the relationship that exists among God, Satan and man for posterity to witness. The poet presents a society where good and evil are intertwined. The meeting of the trio is simply to showcase the reality of this society. Man is constantly faced with good and evil in the world. Good and evil are symbolic of God and Satan respectively. Frostian theology is that which allows man the freewill to choice in the universe between good and evil. The poet shows a fascinating tendency by accepting religion in an era that rejects religious beliefs and privileges the scientific discovery of things in the universe. But this does not make him a non-conformist of the modernist period. It portrays his inventive and creative skills envisage evident in his poetry which becomes a melting pot for the convergence of science and religion.

Frost uses metaphor and irony this time around to modify Scripture. The poet ironically presents the attitude of Job's Wife as caring. She constantly works in synergy with Job to question God about Job's affliction in the world in order to bridge the wide gap between the finite mind and the infinite. This is contrary to what obtains in *The Holy Bible* in which, at the height of Job's affliction, she is the one who incites Job to curse God and put an end to his misery. She says: "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9). This clearly shows that Frost's theological implication is that which is hardly the orthodox Christian view.

After surveying the poet's apostasy and deification of nature in its first two chapters, the study dedicated Chapter Three to the portrayal of how these have resulted to the emanation of a new theology and a new religion. The chapter has proven that the poet posits that salvation can be achieved by attaining bliss through the glorification of nature and harmony with it. Also, the chapter has revealed that the poet, through his modification of Scripture in his "Masque" plays has recreated biblical verses in the book of Job. Finally, it has stressed the poet's reinstitution of theology and religion in the modernist era and shows how this new religion complements science. Both this theology and religions are ecological.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE PEDAGOGIC RELEVANCE OF FROST'S POETRY

The Chapter highlights the importance of teaching Frost's poems for the sustainability of nature. It surveys how poetry is presently taught in our schools, specifically in Government Bilingual High School Etoug-Ebe (Yaoune). Considering the fact that Competence-based approach (C B A) will go operational in Form Three next year, the chapter dwells on how the new pedagogic approach to teaching can be applied to the teaching of Frost's ecological poems to the younger generation. It further examines features to be considered for the effective teaching of poetry using the CBA approach. Next, it presents a CBA lesson plan for the teaching of one of these poems in a Form Three Class.

It has been the preoccupation of teachers of English and literature in English. Determining how learners can best learn the English language, acquire skills in literature and effectively use them in various contexts. The eclectic approach to teaching has broken loose from the restrictions of the traditional classroom situation which fostered the memorization of rules. Classroom teaching was basically teacher-centered as a teacher was projected as the sole possessor of knowledge while learners were considered tabula-rasa and were forced to memorize the structures, lines and meaning of poems for the purpose of succeeding in examinations. The teaching and learning of poetry was a myth too complex for many people to comprehend. This was because many found the genre (poetry) opaque. H.LB.Moody in *The Teaching of Literature* explains

There seem to be two kinds of obstacle to the enjoyment of poetry. The first is the thought that it is 'useless'...The second kind of obstacle consists not so much of prejudice as of memories of 'unfortunate experience'. It is possible that with the best will in the world students have done their best to make sense of famous poems by famous writers only to find themselves baffled by such language. (Moody, 27-28)

According to Moody, the two kinds of obstacles encountered in the teaching and learning of poetry is the "cold" spirit of learners who discouraged by the fact that scientific and technological advancements have made the study of poetry "useless." They are also are

discouraged by the density of the poetic language used by poet. The implication of this is that learners have little interest in the seeming extraordinary complexity of the poetic genre—in terms of its facets like imagery, its concern with meter, and its use of poetic devices. To rekindle learners' interest in the reading of poetry, it has been necessary to use multiple activities in various contexts for the interpretation of poems. This has greatly helped to demystify the myth of poetry and has made it less dreaded ground to tread on by both teachers and students.

The Ministry of Secondary Education, and also with the help of modern technology, has suggested new platforms to foster learning and uplift the great burden off the shoulders of the teachers whose role has been redefined in the classroom. The teacher's role in the competence-based approach is not simply to give information to learners but to enable them take active part in their learning process. Teachers are expected to facilitate learning by creating a conducive and collaborative atmosphere for learners in the classroom. Learners are empowered to use the target language, are made to work in groups, and are freed from the fear of making mistakes. The facilitator introduces most activities and projects in the classroom to facilitate the learning of poetry and transforms the learning process into an interactive and students'-centered one. Nowadays, students do not learn for learning sake but rather use what skills they have learnt in solving their immediate problems in the society. This transformation of the learning process is expected to make students active learners and responsible citizens in their society.

There are no two identical learners in the teaching and learning process, therefore, learners' differences must be taken into account. The teacher becomes a reflective individual in the classroom. The modern classroom is one characterized by variety in the use of activities and approaches. This is in a bid to avoid monotony in the use of particular activities which may end up causing boredom in the classroom. Truong Thi My Van, in "The Relevance of Literary Analysis to Teaching Literature in the EFL Classroom," explains that "Most importantly, the activities that one can apply with literature lessons easily conform to the student-centered and interactive tenets of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)" (*English Teaching Forum*, 2). According to Van, the modern Classroom is that of interaction and elicitation of information from students in order to make the Class student-centered. This is only possible if the instructor brings enticing and captivating activities in class, that activities will keep the students glow in the lesson.

In the poetry classroom, before teaching any lesson, the teacher needs to do thorough planning. The instructor has to assemble all the resources that is needed for the teaching of the lesson. These resources include visual materials, classroom management and the projected response of the learners. The reason for this thorough plan of action is that the teacher sets his/her outcomes and strives to attain these objectives at the evaluation stage of the lesson; the students' talk is prioritized; time is effectively managed, and the activities of the classroom are varied to avoid boredom in the class. The teacher must avoid breaks/gaps in the lesson by mastering its every stage. Above all, students are more confident if a lesson is well planned. In connection with planning a good lesson, Ann Malamah Thomas postulates in *Classroom Interaction* that

To have no plan at all is to risk a muddled lesson. For a lesson plan  
Is a plan of action, and shows that the teacher knows what he or she  
Wants to do in the lesson. If the teacher does not have a clear idea  
of the aim of the lesson, and if the students cannot help to determine  
a line of action, then nothing useful or meaningful may be achieved at all (Thomas, 3)

Thomas holds that, for every successful lesson, there must be a succinct plan of action that guides both the teacher and the students. In view of this, if one imagines the lesson as a journey, the plan of action serves as the road map for any successful journey. It shows where you start, finish, and the route to be taken to get there. They are the product of the teacher's thought about their classes: on what they hope to achieve and on how they plan to achieve it.

The activities for any successful lesson must follow systematic stages. In this light, a standard CBA lesson plan is divided into five stages: the introduction, presentation, practice (Controlled and free), evaluation, home work and project. Each of these has a role to play in the general success of the lesson. Learner's role at this juncture is to be actively involved in all aspects of the lesson. Students are to integrate the skills of speaking, reading, writing, and listening in communicative situations, in order to exchange ideas in both formal and informal learning processes while acquiring knowledge. The introduction usually involves: warm up/ ice breaker, brainstorming on new lesson, or review of previous lesson. These activities will bring the learners' background and personal experiences into play. It serves as a point of contact between the contributing previous competence and the new knowledge to be acquired. The presentation stage deals with activities that present the focus of the lesson.

Next, the practice stage is an embodiment of free and guided practice. It engages learners to activities that acquaint them with the subject matter and gives them an opportunity to work in pairs and orally discuss on the subject matter. In the same vein, the evaluation stage is made up of production activities that aimed at verifying the attainment of the set outcomes. Home work gives students a forum to revise the lesson at home and seek assistance from stakeholders. Finally, projects are necessary for the creation of a new product. Students, at this stage, are given projects to do at home or in groups and present in front of their peers after a period of five days.

The new pedagogic approach, which has empowered learners and made them autonomous in a large classroom, should introduce a module on Form Three poetry for the protection of the natural environment. Poetry should serve as a forum through which learners are educated on ways to safeguard their natural environment in this ecological-crisis ridden era. The present literature syllable in Form Three has not explicitly made the treatment of nature as a major preoccupation. In this light, the Ministry of Secondary Education should encourage Cameroonian poets to engage themselves in the writing of nature poems. The government's relentless fight against climate change has become a reality in the country today and raising consciousness in young Cameroonians by incorporating lesson that foster ecological consciousness could be a good strategy in the fight.

The creation of awareness should be a collective endeavour. The sensitization of people on the protection of the ecosphere is not limited to debates and discussions in academic seminars and symposia reserved only for the academia and special academic disciplines with specialists like Geographers, Biologists and Geologists. Rather, teachers from every academic discipline should as well be invited to attend such seminars in order to be informed. As a consequence, they will be able to incorporate the information they have acquired in their lessons. Poetry, as written by Frost, can be used as an avenue to sensitize people on the need for environmental consciousness. Teachers of literature in English can as well use poetry to talk about global warming and other issues related to environmental awareness and stewardship.

The representation of nature in literature shows a clear picture of the role of literature in the ecology of the human species. Glotfelty explains that "nature writing plays a vital role

in teaching us to value the natural world” (Glotfelty and Fromm, xxiii). Therefore, according to Glotfelty, nature education enables people to valorize natural world. In this vein, the education of the younger generation (prospective leaders and teachers) on environmental protection is vital. Writers and teachers of poetry who are descendants of Frost, Emerson, and Wordsworth are motivated to use poetry as a platform for the sensitization of people on environmental issues. This will serve as the primary step towards the attainment of environmental consciousness which must start in the classroom.

Though poetry is considered by learners and some teachers as being a myth, it can be demystified if teachers use aspects of the environment that will take students out to real-life situations. Poets and teachers are regarded as environmental activists. This should enormously help to promote ecological literacy in future learners. Puk Tom and Adam Stibbards, in quoting St. Clair in “Ecological Concept Development of Preservice Teacher Candidate: Opaque Empty Shells” purport that “environmental literacy...means developing and participating in the social practices likely to change the way our societies think about and act upon ecological issues” (Tom and Stibbards, 461).

The authors above, view environmental literacy as the means through which one can change the social situation of how people perceive their environment. Hence, it can be observed that the authors’ view of the relationship between man and nature conflicts with that propagated by the Judeo-Christian faith. The belief in the supremacy of man over other creatures is revisited. Man is proclaimed as only being a stewardship of nature. Environmental literacy could be transmitted to a people through performances like theatre for development which entails taking the theatre to the people for sensitization and moralization. The activists are active participants in such performances with the sole aim of changing the peoples’ mentality towards ecological issues.

As far as poetry in the classroom situation (which mostly makes use of reading aloud) is concerned, attention is tilted towards pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities. In effect, these activities reflect the standard layout of the lesson. Teachers need to involve and motivate learners with the aim of creating a forum for interaction. In this situation, they play the role of initiators in order to bring students to the centre of classroom learning. Gillian Lazar, in *Literature and language teaching: A Guide for Teachers and Trainers* proposes activities that could possibly be practiced under the three stages.

During pre-reading activities, in presenting the importance of pastoral life in Frost's "Mowing" the teacher could present lead-in tasks like a picture or a chart with pictures of various farm tools. The teacher should use guided questions to direct the learners towards the correct response.

-Which tools are those and what are they used for?

-Look at this picture. It is a scythe. What is it used for?

-Place the tools under the following captions: harvesting, clearing, tilling, and planting.

In "Christmas Tree" the teacher may guide students as following:

-The teacher presents the picture of two Christmas Trees; one standing and the other cut down.

-In groups, think of reasons that could make a tree cut down. What impact would it have on the environment if all trees were cut down?

The teacher could also print and distribute a passage related to the subject matter of the poem and ask lead-in questions about it.

-Read the following passage on the degradation of the environment and provide answers to the following questions.

The activities above will give learners insight into the importance of planting trees and the effect the environment will suffer if trees are constantly cut down to satisfy man's needs. This shows that visual aids are very useful in guiding students towards talking about agriculture. Here, it is obvious that visual aids enormously help teachers to elicit information from students about the subject matter. This practice help develops learners' autonomy as there is more of students' talk than the teacher's. The pre-reading activities are not tied down to any particular poem. The teacher, as a reflective individual, uses a variety of activities pertaining to the subject matter of the poem.

The while-reading stage of the lesson is important because of the multiplicity of meanings that a poem can have. The meaning could be surface or implied. The teacher needs to elicit the meaning of the poem from the students. As facilitator, he/she is not expected to impose the meaning of the poem to learners. In this light, the activities at this stage of the lesson must evoke vivid pictures and images in the readers' minds' eye of the readers. The students are presented with words which they can use to express the projected meanings of the poem to



provide appropriate definition of the diction used. These words could be presented through the use of flashcards.

-Look at the following words I shall flash on cards to you and provide an appropriate definition for them. The words are: Scythe, fay or elf, swale, and orchises.

In order to know the poet's attitude towards the subject matter, the tutor may ask students to look at the predominant use of the linguistic category in the poem. This is of great advantage in the literary appreciation of the poet's tone. John Nkemngong Nkengasong explains that the author's tone is the attitude taken by the writer towards his readers and towards the subject matter. The poet may be sober, harsh or stern in his tone and this is revealed by his choice of words (Nkengasong, 31) Therefore, according to Nkengasong, the lexical and grammatical feature are important tools for the appreciation of poetry. The interpretation of poetic words in a poem are as important as getting an overall meaning of the poem. Another similar activity that could unveil the interpretation of the poet's diction is the act of putting words that are connected to different ideas or images in each poem.

-In the poem, there are a number of words connected with different ideas or images. Read the poem and write down words pertaining to:

- ✓ "Mowing": Hard work, satisfaction, stewardship, technology.
- ✓ "Mending Wall": conservation of nature, boundaries, peaceful co-habitation.
- ✓ "After Apple-Picking": Hard work, religion, work left undone.

The post-reading activities will foster the creation of learners' autonomy since there is no single interpretation of a poetic line and meaning depends on what students and teachers make of words in poems. The teacher as a model to learners could read a number of interpretations of poems to get students' opinions. This is possible through the initiation of several classroom activities like selected response test (true or false).

-Identify which of these statements is true or false about "Mowing"

Next, poetry dramatization is another necessary tool for interaction in a poetry classroom. It should be given as projects for students to perform in front of their peers.

-In groups, study the poem “Mowing” or “After Apple-Picking” which you will dramatize in front of your peers, after three days, during our next lesson. The best performers will be selected to recite their chosen poem during World Environment Day.

This activity will pave the way for students to sell their talents to the rest of their schoolmates.  
Moody holds:

Poetry is predominantly an oral art form: its true effect comes from being read or recited aloud by an individual to a group. Only in this way can its dramatic and rhythmic qualities be satisfactorily demonstrated and appreciated. (Moody, 31)

Moody thinks that poetry, as an oral performance, is easily assimilated and appreciated when students perform it in front of their peers. In this regard, the mystery of poetry will be demystified. This activity encourages classroom participation, reduces teacher’s talk, motivates slow learners and makes the lesson learner-centered.

Another motivating factor in the domain of poetry that should be encouraged is creative writing. Learners could be asked to write an additional stanza of a poem or to write their own poem. This will stem from their understanding of the meaning of the said poem.

-Having understood the meaning of “Mowing,” write an additional stanza on environmental protection that you can propose to the poet.

-From your knowledge of the poem “A Girl’s Garden,” write a poem on what she would have done to improve on the situation of her farm. The best poem will be published in the school ecological magazine.

In this light, positive reinforcement and motivation in the form of publication of learners’ writing in schools is a vital ingredient for learners to freely use their imaginative and interactive talents to put across their diverse interpretations and evaluations of poems. It is very efficient in that students will not only rekindle their lost interest in poetry, but will also gain knowledge on the conservation of nature around them.

The valorization of nature is a mouth-wetting phenomenon that has been addressed by many nations nowadays. The President of Cameroon on his February 11<sup>th</sup> 2016 speech to the Youths of the Republic of Cameroon told them over the national media (CRTV) that they need to go back to agriculture. In this situation, the unity between man and his natural environment is rekindled. There exists a dual responsibility between man and nature —man's role to nature is that of guardianship whereas nature is to provide man with his daily necessities. Environmental education is necessary in all educational domains. The younger generation needs to be informed about the current ecological crisis and should be sensitized on ways of protecting the environment. Frost has made it possible for ecological consciousness to be created through the avenue of poetry. The poet's presentation of man's harmonious co-existence with nature in the country-side is a cry for people to conserve nature for a peaceful existence. The protection of nature is a collective endeavour. In this regards, environmental education should not be limited to particular disciplines as earlier stated. Learners of all educational spheres should be taught how to safeguard their environment. The CBA approach will tremendously assist learners acquire the right skills they need to help keep their surrounding safe. The study presently proposes a lesson plan for the teaching of a sample of Frost's poem in a Form Three Class as earlier announced.

**AREA OF LIFE:** ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

**NAME OF TEACHER:** NDEH JACOB NKWENTY

**SCHOOL:** GBHS ETOUG-EBE

**CLASS:** 3C

**ENROLMENT:** 150

**AVERAGE AGE:** 12

**SEX:** MIXED

**SUBJECT:** LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE:** POETRY

**CATEGORY OF ACTION:** LISTENING, SPEAKING, READING, AND WRITING

**ACTION:** ECOLOGICAL READING OF ROBERT FROST'S "MOWING" WITH FOCUS ON SURFACE MEANING AND DICTION.

**TIME:** 10:30-11:20 A.M.

**DURATION:** 50 MINUTES

**DATE:** 22<sup>nd</sup> JUNE, 2016.

**TEACHING AIDS:** FLASH CARDS, PICTURES OF FARMING ACTIVITIES, HAND OUTS, CHARTS CONTAINING EXERCISES ON PRESENTATION, PRACTICE, AND EVALUATION

**CONTRIBUTING PREVIOUS COMPETENCE:** STUDENTS HAVE BEEN READING AND INTERPRETING DIFFERENT POEMS.

**EXPECTED OUTCOMES:** BY THE END OF THE LESSON STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO:

- TALK ABOUT THE PREVALENT ECOLOGICAL CRISIS USING THE APPROPRIATE TERMS AND, AS SUCH, CONSCIENTIZE THEIR PEERS ABOUT IT.
- WRITE CREATIVE LITERARY PIECES (POEMS/ PARTS OF POEMS) THAT CLAMOUR FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT.

- PROTECT AND PRESERVE THEIR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AS A RESULT OF THE AWARENESS CREATED IN THEM.

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STAGE	Interaction	SUBJECT MATTER	PROCEDURE		RATIONALE	TIME
			TEACHER'S ACTIVITIES	STUDENTS' ACTIVITIES		
I N T R O D U C T I O N	T-S S-T	<p><b>LEAD-IN TASK</b></p> <p><b>INSTRUCTIONS</b></p> <p>Keenly observe the pictures on the chalk board and say what you can see.</p> <p>Student: The cutting down of trees and burning down of bushes.</p> <p>Teacher: What are the effects of cutting down trees and burning down of bushes?</p> <p>Student: Drought, air pollution and a change in climate.</p> <p>Teacher: What is the name given to such a situation?</p> <p>Student: Global warming or Ecological degradation.</p> <p>Teacher: Our lesson for today is on the protection of nature in Frost's "Mowing".</p>	<p>-Teacher puts up pictures on the chalkboard and asks students to say what is happening in the pictures.</p> <p>-Teacher asks students the effect(s) of such a situation.</p> <p>-Teacher asks the name given to such a situation.</p>	<p>-Students observe the pictures on the chalkboard keenly, put up their hands and say what is happening in the pictures.</p> <p>-Students put up their hands and provide answers to the teacher's question.</p> <p>-Students provide different ways in which the situation is referred to.</p>	<p>-To draw students' attention to the lesson of the day.</p> <p>-To get students to focus on the subject matter of the lesson to be introduced.</p>	5mins

P R E S E N T A T I O N	T-S  T-S  S-S	<p>Frost's "<b>Mowing</b>"</p> <p>There was never a sound beside the wood but one,          And that was my long scythe whispering to the ground.          What was it whispered? I knew not well myself;          Perhaps it was something about the lack of sound-          And that was why it whispered and did not speak.          It was no dream of the gift of idle hours,          Or easy gold at the hand of fay or elf:          Anything more than the truth would have seemed too weak          To the earnest love that laid the swale in rows,          Not without feeble-pointed spikes of flowers</p>	<p>-Teacher writes the title of the poem on the blackboard and asks students to copy in their books.</p> <p>-The teacher gives students hand outs containing the poem.</p>	<p>-Students copy the title of the poem in their exercise books.</p> <p>-Students take handout from teacher and carefully skim over it.</p>	<p>-To create chances for students to interact.</p> <p>-To enable students have the poem.</p>	20mins
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	<p>(Pale orchises), and scared a bright green snake.</p> <p>The fact is the sweetest dream that labour knows.</p> <p>My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Model reading of the poem</li> <li>➤ A reader from the class reads the poem</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">❖ <b>Vocabulary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What is diction?</b> Ans: It refers to a writer's choice of words. He uses simple words to show his admiration for the scythe.</li> <li>• <b>Flashes words on cards</b> Scythe: tool for mowing(clearing) Fay or elf: fairy, small</li> </ul>	<p>-The teacher reads the poem aloud in class.</p> <p>-Tutor asks a reader from the class to read the poem.</p> <p>-Teacher asks learners to define diction.</p> <p>-Teacher flashes</p>	<p>-Students listen attentively.</p> <p>-Student volunteers and reads out the poem to the hearing of his/her classmates.</p> <p>-Learners put up their hands and define diction.</p> <p>-Learners give the</p>	<p>-To give students appropriate pronunciation of words and emphasis.</p> <p>-To enable peer correction.</p> <p>-This is meant to elicit learners' view on diction.</p>	
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		<p>supernatural being.</p> <p>Swale: Wet stretch of land.</p> <p>Orchises: flowering plants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What is peculiar about the words?</b></li> </ul> <p>Ans: They are simple daily words, an indication that Frost praises a popular working tool.</p> <p>➤ Dramatization of the poem</p> <p>- <b>What is the surface meaning of the poem?</b></p> <p><b>Model answer</b></p> <p>The poem highlights the relationship between man and nature. The rural setting of the poem shows the forest as a peaceful place where the scythe is the only working tool that produces noise.</p>	<p>cards with words and asks students for their meanings.</p> <p>-Teacher asks students what is peculiar about the words in the poem.</p> <p>-Teacher calls up students for dramatization of poem.</p> <p>-The instructor asks students to give possible meanings of the poem.</p>	<p>meaning of the words guided by the teacher.</p> <p>-Students raise their hands and provide answers to the question.</p> <p>-Students come to the front of the class and dramatise the poem.</p> <p>-The learners orally give the meaning of the poem.</p>	<p>-To acquaint students with words in the poem.</p> <p>-To enable students derive the poet's attitude towards the main idea of the poem.</p> <p>-To render the lesson learner-centered.</p> <p>-To widen the range of student interaction and participation.</p>	
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		<p>The speaker, through the personification of the whispering scythe highlights the total silence of the forest. The persona thinks that the scythe may be whispering about the heat of the sun. Next, the persona turns to the performance of the scythe. Its ability to cut down grass in rows is a result of the love for work and is not as a gift from imaginary creatures like fairies. The speaker states that the grass which the scythe has cut includes grass with soft flowers. It has equally scared away the bright green snake that the sound has scared away. This, to an extent, shows the benignant nature of the natural environment and man's role of stewardship towards it.</p> <p><b>-What are some poetic devices found in the poem?</b></p> <p>Answer: <b>Personification</b> "...my long</p>	<p>-The Facilitator writes a model meaning on the Chalkboard and asks students to copy in their exercise books.</p>	<p>-Students copy the meaning on the blackboard in their exercise books.</p>	<p>-It is meant for students to have notes to read.</p>	
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		<p>scythe whispering to the ground” The human attribute to whisper is given to the scythe. This emphasis the speaker’s love and admiration for the scythe which is used to carter for nature.</p> <p><b>Symbolism</b> “... and scared a bright green snake” The green snake (as a representation of nature) is scared by the scythe (scientific tool). Frost believes in the complementary of science and nature. One should not devastate the other but they should rather keep each other in check.</p>	-Teacher asks students to bring out poetic devices in the poem.	-Students orally bring out poetic device with the help of the teacher.	-To reinforce students’ knowledge of poetic devices.	
P R A C T I C	T-S S-T S-S	<p><b><u>GUIDED PRACTICE</u></b></p> <p><b><u>EXERCISE:</u></b></p> <p>-Name some of the working tools that can be compared to the scythe? Ans: Machete, Hoe, spade etc.</p> <p>-What are the tools use for the</p>	- Teacher asks students to orally present the synonyms of the vocabulary items -The teacher	-Students work in group and present the importance of nature to man.	-To assess students know-how on the relationship between man and nature.	6mins

E		<p>destruction of nature?          Ans: A Tractor, Chain saw.</p> <p><b><u>FREE PRACTICE</u></b></p> <p><b><u>EXERCISE:</u></b></p> <p>Rewrite the poem in Eight lines, with the synonyms of the following words:          Scythe, orchises,, swale mowing etc.          Show how you can protect the environment.</p>	<p>asks students to write names of tools that are destructive to the environment.</p> <p>-The teacher instructs students to rewrite the poem using the synonyms of the working tools.</p> <p>-Teacher moves round the class to make sure students are writing.</p>	<p>-Students provide answers to the teacher's questions in their exercise books.</p> <p>-Students exchange exercise books for peer</p>	<p>-For learners to practice and internalize what they have learnt.</p> <p>-To let students peer correct one</p>	6mins
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		Peer-Correction	<p>-The tutor asks students to exchange their exercise books for peer correction.</p> <p>Teacher asks students to write the correction in their exercise books .</p>	<p>-Students exchange books for peer-correction</p> <p>-Students write down the correction in their exercise books.</p>	<p>-To let students peer-correct one another.</p> <p>-For learners to read and know the correct response.</p>	
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<p>E V A L U A T I O N</p>	<p>T-S S-T</p>	<p><b>EXERCISE</b></p> <p>Keenly observe the pictures (A, B, and C) on the chart and answer the following questions.</p> <p>Picture A : A portrait of smoke oozing from industrial chimneys</p> <p>Picture B: Cutting down of trees(Deforestation)</p> <p>Picture C: Extermination of animals by hunters.</p> <p><b>Questions:</b></p> <p>Imagine that you are an environmentalist and the pictures represent what is happening in your society. Write five things you would do and say in order to sensitize people about environmental protection.</p> <p>Correction of exercise.</p>	<p>-The teacher puts up a chart on the chalkboard and asks learners to carefully observe the pictures.</p> <p>Teacher gives students an imaginary role and asks them to sensitize people on environmental protection.</p> <p>-Teacher moves round the class</p>	<p>-Students carefully observe the pictures on the chart.</p> <p>-Students, as environmentalists, write five things they would do and say in order to sensitize people about the need for environmental protection.</p>	<p>-To draw students' attention on the causes of global warming.</p> <p>-To verify if the lesson objectives have been met.</p>	<p>10mins</p>
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H O M E W O R K	T-S T-S	<b>Exercise: Creative writing</b> Imagine that you are a poet; Write a poem on any of the following words: Garden, Snake, Leaves, Sky, and Stars. The best poems will be hung in the classroom.	and corrects students' books.  -Teacher writes exercise on the chalkboard and asks students to copy in their exercise books.	-Students copy exercise in their books.	-To give students an opportunity to revise the lesson at home.	3mins
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## GENERAL CONCLUSION

This work has examined Deism, Ecotheology and the creation of ecoreligion in Robert Lee Frost's selected poems. It has argued that, like his modernist counterparts, Frost questions the traditional Christian theology and forms of worship. It has also portrayed the new form of worship, theology and religion that the poet proposes. Two critical approaches to literary criticism were used in the analysis of these poems: Modernism and Ecocriticism. The former has made it possible for the study to show Frostian apostasy as he debunks religion as a traditional narrative. Meanwhile, the latter has facilitated the demonstration of the fact that Frost deifies nature.

Chapter One, entitled "Conventional Religion and Frostian Apostasy," has surveyed the Frostian apostasy and has established the fact that the poet deviates from the Christian religion as a traditional narrative. This has implied examination of the modernist disbelief in religious creeds (especially creeds of Christianity) as means of worshipping God. Hence, Christian claims of God's omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, have been challenged. However, worship through organized religion has been portrayed as absurd and futile.

Chapter Two, which has as title "The Deification of Nature" has looked at the various ways the poet has presented nature as a sacred arena conducive for proper worship. Such a presentation contradicts Judeo-Christian domination and destruction of nature. It has examined the poet's ecological consciousness through the deification of nature in an ecological-crisis-ridden era. Apart from being presented as a sacred altar, nature has been shown as being the abode of God and as having divine qualities.

Chapter Three, "From Ecotheology to Ecoreligion", has shed light on how Frost's skepticism towards traditional religion and the deification of nature have led to the birth of a new theology and a new religion. It has also revealed the fact that Frostian ecological consciousness has led to a new ecclesiastical creation—ecoreligion. To arrive at both this nature theology and religion, the poet satirises conventional Christian practices which he replaces with nature-oriented forms of worship. He also rewrites biblical narratives thus creating some ecological doctrines about who God is or should be.



Chapter Four, entitled “The Pedagogic Relevance of Frost’s poetry” has focused on the pedagogic relevance of Frost’s ecological poems in the poetry of secondary school students in GBHS Etoug-Ebe and Cameroon as a whole. The chapter has further portrayed some proposed activities which can develop learners’ autonomy in a poetry classroom. It has contended that these activities will increase their imaginative, communicative interactive skills in and out of school and, as a result, can empower them to sensitize their peers in and out of school about environmental protection. Lastly, the chapter has provided a sample lesson plan for the teaching of a sample poem to Form Three students.

The analysis has highlighted the fact that Robert Lee Frost’s stance is controversial because, though a modernist, he indulges in the traditional transcendentalist celebration of nature in his poems. The poet debunks traditional religious narratives and opts for the deification of nature. This results into the creation of a new theology and religion through which salvation can be attained. These avenues are outlets for the attainment of salvation for himself, Americans, and man in general. This thus validates the hypothesis that Frost’s controversial stance as a modernist poet has resulted into a new theology and a new religion.

The study has contributed to knowledge in that, unlike other critics who have critically observed different aspects of Frost’s poetry, this work has analysed the quest for salvation in nature. The search for how to best worship, who/what to worship and where to worship has become a major preoccupation in the world today. The study has therefore probed into contemporary concerns and incites one to critically seek answers to some fundamental questions. These questions include: “Where can one worship God?” “What is salvation?”; “How can it be attained?” This study encourages one to ponder on these major concerns. Another issue of contemporary interest is the likelihood between the plight of women and the plight of nature. These two concerns could be brought together in a research undertaking. Thus, further research could investigate the eco-feminist’s view of nature in Robert Lee Frost’s poetry.

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