

A Reading of Robert Frost's Poetry from the Buddhist Perspective*

การวิเคราะห์กวีนิพนธ์ของโรเบิร์ต ฟรอสต์ด้วยมุมมองทางศาสนาพุทธ

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Abstract

When Frost's poetry deals with decision making or judgement, it is most telling because it not only reminisces about our own moments, but it is very much didactic. Even though seeming commonplace, dilemmas in the poems are depicted on a deep philosophical level. Principal moral lessons include decisiveness, prudence, tolerance as well as neutrality, the last of which in particular accords to some degree with the Buddhist teaching of non-bias. In fact, these qualities do not usually coincide since while there is strong determination to choose one thing, one is declined to be biased towards the other difference. But, Frost proves otherwise. He juxtaposes them even on a delicate balance. His poetic form functions as a transparent mirror of such philosophy. The two choices in question receive attention and weight on an equal basis by means of his careful deployment of certain elements that help maintain the balance.

Keywords: 1. Robert Frost 2. Dilemma 3. Decisiveness 4. Buddhist Teaching 5. Bias

* บทความวิจัยนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อนำเสนอการวิเคราะห์กวีนิพนธ์ของโรเบิร์ต ฟรอสต์แนวใหม่โดยใช้มุมมองทางศาสนาพุทธ
This research paper aims to offer a new insight into Robert Frost's poetry by adopting the Buddhist perspective.

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บทคัดย่อ

การนำเสนอเรื่องการตัดสินใจในกวีนิพนธ์ของโรเบิร์ต ฟรอสต์มีความน่าสนใจอย่างมากเพราะไม่เพียงแต่จะทำให้ผู้อ่านได้ตระหนักถึงประสบการณ์ส่วนตัวของตนเองแต่ยังแฝงคติสอนใจอีกด้วย ปรัชญาและคุณธรรมที่สำคัญที่กวีได้นำเสนอได้แก่ความเฉียบขาดในการตัดสินใจ ความรอบคอบ การยอมรับความแตกต่าง และความเป็นกลางซึ่งสองประเด็นหลังนี้มีความสอดคล้องกับหลักคำสอนของศาสนาพุทธเรื่องอคติเป็นอย่างยิ่ง กล่าวคือโดยทั่วไปแล้วเมื่อมีการตัดสินใจ อาจเกิดการลำเอียงหรือการไม่ยอมรับความแตกต่าง แต่กวีนิพนธ์ของฟรอสต์กับเสนอแง่มุมเกี่ยวกับการตัดสินใจอย่างเป็นกลาง รอบคอบ ปราศจากอคติ โดยอาศัยทั้งฉันทลักษณ์ และกลวิธีต่างๆในการนำเสนอปรัชญานี้ออกมาเป็นรูปธรรมยิ่งขึ้น

คำสำคัญ: 1. โรเบิร์ต ฟรอสต์ 2. สถานการณ์ที่ต้องตัดสินใจ 3. ความเฉียบขาดในการตัดสินใจ 4. คำสอนศาสนาพุทธ 5. อคติ

Introduction

Robert Frost's poetry is regarded for certain distinctive values, for instance, its universal philosophical accessibility (Perkins & Perkins, 2002: 1386), its palpable exquisiteness and his primal vision (Bloom, 1999: 10-11), and his unique manipulation of American colloquial speech (Montashery, 2012: 24). Among these prominent topics, decision making is a recurrent motif that not only revives the life of the poet himself, but proves to be didactic to a large degree. His numerous works are autobiographical, or strictly speaking, the poet-speaker (Faggen, 2001: 10), and they are often anthologized for students and general readership. I agree with most critics, notably Robert Pack, who maintains in his book *Belief and Uncertainty in the Poetry of Robert Frost* (2003) that his poetry is replete with belief and uncertainty regarding the poet's decision. Throughout the book, Pack argues that 'the poetry ends in uncertainty' with which 'the reader is unable to distinguish between illusion and revelation' (2003: 31). My direction begins to depart from him just there in that the poet, I believe, holds firm to his decision within such uncertainty. This study then opted to make a meticulous examination of how that paradox reflects Frost's unique philosophy and how that uncertainty finds its way to resolution, together with how he portrays it in poetic form. At a glance, my observation has revealed a certain philosophy and a certain technique very unique to this poet. In his poetry, the persona recalls the critical moment of decision, the choice *made* together with the choice *unmade*, justification of choosing, consequences, and self-reflection over the two choices. The specific interest lies in the perfect balance on which the dichotomy is placed. The two choices, as it were, receive equal attention and importance, which in turn bears witness to Frost's concept of no-bias towards people and the world different from him.

There is still an indication of his definite decision, however. Additionally, based on his biographical information, the poet wished to whisper his own harsh lesson to his reader directly. He once declared that his writing was ‘the soul of a talk [that] consists of action [and] the unvoiced expression of the thought’ (Lathem, 2009: xvii). Frost always urged ‘a momentary stay against confusion’ in order that, when difficulty arises, we will be able to ‘be whole again beyond confusion’ (Tuten & Zubizarreta, 2001: 79). Consequently, from the Buddhist perspective, Frost can be considered a *practical* Buddhist owing to his development of a stable, clear mind and his practice of no-bias. In Buddhism, the mind is, in fact, ‘the most important thing to understand’ (Sherab, 2010: 9), and no-bias constitutes the principal Buddhist teachings (Brahmagunaborhn, 2016: 149).

This study has two foci. To be precise, it aims to investigate how Frost's philosophy of no-bias is embodied in his poetry as exemplified by three representative poems, and how such an embodiment is reflected through the poet's use of poetic form and devices. Regarding the philosophical dimension, since his practice of no-bias is found in much resemblance to that of Buddhism, the relevant Buddhist teaching will be employed as a lens for reading the poems. As far as poetic form is more concerned, an in-depth analysis will focus primarily on versification, symbolization, and titles of the poems. In a few words over here, while Frost's message is clear and direct, all of the tropes are used to help him achieve didactic aims and increase aesthetic effects at the same time. Just to begin with, the background of the poet proves essential as it shall provide us with a profound influence on his life and work.

Frost's life

Robert Frost is a rarity in American literature especially owing to his practically unique philosophy which he keeps promulgating in his oeuvres. Indeed, he is a prolific writer who has a strong determination to ‘create a body of work of lasting significance’ (Parini, 2015: xi).

Robert Lee Frost was born on March 26, 1874, in San Francisco to a journalist father William Prescott Frost, Jr. and a Scottish immigrant mother Isabelle Moodie. At the age of 11 years, Frost and his mother and sister Jeanie had to move to Lawrence, Massachusetts after his father's passing. At this new place as well as the other neighboring areas, he became intimate with nature, and ‘it provided Frost with his first taste of rural imagery’ (Parini, 2015: 22). He also began to develop a passion for reading, for example, works by Shakespeare, Poe, Emerson, Wordsworth, among others (Bloom, 1999: 12). His writing skills developed during his high school years, and the first poem “My Butterfly” was published in the New York newspaper *The Independent* in 1894. Frost continued to study at Harvard University, but did not finish. He

then decided to work at odds from a teacher, cobbler and farmer to editor. In fact, Frost had a variety of interests, including 'botany, astronomy, natural science, and thousands of lines of poetry, modern and ancient,' thus probably rendering him a well-rounded and non-biased life which had favorable impacts on his philosophy and career later (Faggen, 2001: 3). For example, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," "The Road Not Taken," "Birches," "After Apple-Picking," and "The Wood-Pile" bear witness to his sound knowledge of botany and zoology; and "Fire and Ice" and "Directive" announce his scientific and politic enthusiasm. Another source of his inspiration is his wife Elinor Frost, with whom he moved to England in 1912 where he had a relationship with prominent writers such as Edward Thomas, Rupert Brooke, Robert Graves, and Ezra Pound, who inspired and helped promote his works in one way or another. His fame grew because of two collections of poetry *A Boy's Will* (1913) and *North of Boston* (1914) while he was in England. In 1915 Frost decided to go back to his motherland, producing many more works, including *New Hampshire* (1923), *Further Range* (1936), *Steeple Bush* (1947), *Hard Not to Be King* (1951), and *In the Clearing* (1962). In the United States, he also gave lectures at various institutions, including Harvard. Frost received the Pulitzer Prize four times and undeniably becomes the American celebrity until today. President John F. Kennedy said about him at his inauguration: 'He has bequeathed his nation a body of imperishable verse from which Americans will forever gain joy and understanding' (Lathem 2009, p. vii). Frost died in Massachusetts on January 29, 1963.

Three poems in question

In Frost's canon, there are three poems that seemed to tell us the most about his philosophy of non-bias. These are "The Road Not Taken," "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," and "Fire and Ice," all of which are popular and often anthologized. "The Road" is one of Frost's epic poems 'in its ambiguity and seeming simplicity' (Fagen, 2007: 295). It was first published in *Mountain Interval* in 1916. Wiśniewski (2009: 296) says that this poem is the poet's satirical reminiscence of his English friend Edward Thomas who had indecision of which route to take when they both walked in the country together and regretted after the decision that the road not taken would offer more pleasure. In the poem, the speaker recalls a moment when he came to the fork in a yellow wood, and he was somewhat hesitant because, he says, 'I could not travel both/and be one traveler' (Lathem, 1979: 105). Wishing to make the right decision, the man pondered seriously. He then 'looked down one as far as I could' and 'Then took the other, as just as fair' (Lathem, 1979: 105). At last, the speaker 'took

the one less traveled by' and stated that 'that has made all the difference' (Lathem, 1979: 105). Caution, however, needs to be taken when interpreting this final line. Such a difference does not conclusively point to a success or failure. As the poem also implies, the speaker tells this story 'with a sigh' (Lathem, 1979: 105). In this regard, David Orr also maintains that this message is simply 'a kind of claim we make when we want to comfort or blame ourselves by assuming that our current position is the product of our own choices' (2015: 8).

"Fire and Ice," published in 1920, clearly exhibits Frost's eclectic interests in science, philosophy and politics. O'Brien considers this poem as the signature poem in Frost's canon due to his 'expression of authorial anxiety about identity' (2010: 29). It is a very succinct poem of only nine lines in a regular iambic meter and a consistent rhyme. The topic is familiar to twentieth-century readership—the end of the world. In the poem, Frost has two open symbols, fire referring to desire and ice to hatred. The poem begins by stating two opponent ideas: "Some say the world will end in fire,/Some say in ice" (Lathem, 1979: 220). The poet's intertwining of scientific knowledge with philosophy is very effective because it is immediately understandable to general audience, and his opinion about the incident stands clear. According to Tuten and Zubizarretta (2001: 113), this poem reflects Frost's own feelings about the world which suffered just after the First World War.

"Stopping by Woods" is another controversial and famous poem of Frost, published in 1923. The last two identical lines, "And miles to go before I sleep" (Lathem, 1979: 224), are most memorable among Frost readers. At the beginning, a man riding on a horse suddenly pauses in a beautiful place in which only a frozen lake, downy flake and easy wind comfort him. However, not long after he is immersed in this ethereal moment does the horse disturb him. The man ruminates harder, and after a while, makes the final decision. The present dichotomy lies between his personal enjoyment and his responsibility of 'promises to keep' (Lathem, 1979: 225). Reading this poem on a deeper philosophical level, this dilemma involves, to borrow Kim's phrasing (2016: 152), 'an important moral choice,' the circumstance in which the speaker is confronting an inner battle between surrendering himself to the temptation and pushing himself to complete the duty. Likewise, Kumar maintains that the poem presents an intricate dilemma between fact and fancy in which the persona is confronting; that is, his self-indulgence in staying in an alluring, buoyant place and his suppression of such desire in order to continue mundane duties (2015: 30-31). Nevertheless, the poem seems to be much more complicated than their words denote. As the critic Robert Warren (cited in Beck, 2006: 76) cautions, this poem is most misinterpreted, especially when there have been attempts to over-relate it to the poet's life.

Analysis

A thorough analysis of the three poems reveals that in times of critical decisions, Frost remains very decisive and also non-biased to the other choice and the people making it. The dilemmas usually come from our daily life as exemplified earlier. This may suggest Frost's considering them as commonplace and unavoidable. Then his poetry immediately enters on a philosophical plane by contexts they are symbolically set in. Natural elements make up of such contexts. To illustrate, the decision that the persona in "The Road" has to make is difficult due to the fact that the two roads in 'both that morning equally lay' and that he does not know at all what future this decision might bring. He muses solemnly to himself "Yet knowing how way leads on to way." In like fashion, it is a spiritual predicament of the speaker in "Stopping by Woods" when he has to fight against himself over his longing. The temptation of the ethereal moments, although temporary, is so strong that he feels reluctant to proceed out of the woods. "Fire and Ice" also suggests that exceeding desire and indifference derived from hate can both lead to devastation. These dark powers are quietly lurking in oneself and without moral suppression, they can explode to do harm anytime.

However, no matter how complicated the dilemma is and how difficult the decision making may seem, every speaker of Frost's poems takes a definite stand at one point eventually. The conclusive lines "But I have promises to keep" of "Stopping by Woods," "I took the one less traveled by" of "The Road," and "I hold with those who favor fire" of "Fire and Ice" already serve as their final decisions or stances de facto. To be more precise, the speaker chooses not to indulge himself this time; another took the less popular road; and the other believes that desire is more devastating than hatred, respectively. At this point, decisiveness is quite obvious due to such affirmations. According to Kelly (2012: 116), the definite decision in "The Road" can be regarded as 'self-assertion of individualism or self-hood,' which the speaker seeks in his life and from others. Therefore, he implicitly tells us this story to recognize his decision. In my view, this sort of self-revelation is even shown in a deeper philosophical sense in "Stopping by Woods" when the persona decides to preserve his unwavering morality even though the temptation of the fancy world he is immersed in is so powerful. Symbolically, this specific poetic moment duplicates 'how man stands baffled in the woods of life' (Mishra, 1992: 42). In "Fire and Ice" as well, the speaker tries to 'locate a self,' to employ O'Brien's words (2010: 30), in order to voice his anxiety about human destruction before he identifies which culprit between lust and hate is more vicious.

The Buddha's teaching of (non-) bias

As discussed above, critics have noted that Frost's philosophy, especially concerning self-assertion and natural transcendence, is Emersonian (Bloom, 1999: 9-11; Kelly, 2012: 116). He is also seen to be influenced or resemble to Henry David Thoreau and Emily Dickinson when Frost depicts his poem as a spiritual journey in which he, like Thoreau, can 'walk back' to discern its original fact (Monteiro, 1988: 2). The recurrent theme of life and death in Dickinson is replied and extended in Frost's poetry 'in a more naturalistic note' (Ibid: 14). In addition, it can be said that Frost's philosophy is more or less Kantian, since one's duty and obligation must come first and it is their responsibility to follow that moral law.

If we agree that Frost's poems are centered on a conscious and non-biased mind, then he can also be seen an adherent to the Buddha's teaching. In this regard, Yamamoto explains that the essence of Buddhism lies in the development of careful consciousness of the mind (2003, p. 247). This practice actually requires the constant observation of the mind, which controls our thought and action. In other words, one's thinking and deeds are determined by one's mind. In this regard, just as Descartes announces "I think; therefore, I am," Thich Nhat Hanh concludes that 'our minds create everything' (McLeod, 2012: 5-6). Above all, we first need to understand that Buddhism is not strictly a religion, since it is not 'a system of faith and worship, owing to any allegiance to a supernatural god' (Nārada, 1973: 282). It is in fact a way of life (Johnston & Kleinhenz, 2000: 203). Therefore anyone, like Frost, following the Buddha's path can be a Buddhist. The Buddha himself said: "Those who see the *dharma* [universal truths] will see me" (Park, 1983: 25).

As far as Frost's decision making is concerned, it even appears that Frost is non-biased and tolerant from the Buddhist perspective. At this point, a succinct explanation of the relevant teaching is necessary. Back to more than two thousand years ago, the Buddha had already bestowed a teaching related to *Agati* or bias. He instructed that one should abstain from wrong thinking is the primary source of wrong thinking. *Agati* is developed by four main biases, namely one towards love or desire termed as *chandāgati*, one towards hatred termed as *dosāgati*, one towards delusion or stupidity termed as *mohāgati*, and one towards fear termed as *bhayāgati* (Brahmagunabhorn, 2016: 149). Usually, people cannot manage to avoid being afflicted by these defilements, so their action and treatment with others is biased, despising and even devastating. In times of making decisions or judgements in particular, the loved one, a sense of belonging, greed and a lack of knowledge naturally interfere, so people

are inclined to biased decisions, abuse, and conflicts. Many other problems are also attributable to biased decisions.

Viewed from this Buddhist perspective, Frost is an exception since he has no bias or *agati*. He is seen to be respectful, neutral, and non-critical of the other side. Without a doubt, the non-biased mind cannot be developed without mindfulness. Tse-fu Kuan (quoted in Harvey, 2013: 323) maintains that 'when the mind is clear, one can recollect the truth or qualities'. In order to acquire a full clear mind, the mind must undergo different stages, starting from a mind that is aware of sensations, a stable mind that senses feelings or thoughts, and a clear mind that abandons confusing thoughts, to a pure mind with which wisdom appears naturally (Ibid: 322).

As the three poems illustrate, each of the speakers possesses a clear, wise mind. At first, he is fully conscious of the circumstance he is in. His mindful observation of both external and internal realms is always present and this inner activity is always depicted. Whilst the physical realm changes, the speaker's visual, auditory, touching and kinesthetic senses stay alert at all times, suggesting a continual awareness. For example, in "Stopping by Woods" the fanciful landscape together with its atmosphere that is filled up with "snow," a "frozen lake," and "easy wind and downy flake" are minutely perceived by the acute observer, who after immersion in the place for a while, is able to discern its mystery. As the speaker remarks, "The woods are lovely, dark and deep," the last two words of which are particularly indicative of a deep, sudden epiphany. For him even though the woods are ethereal, they are also lonesome and fathomless. As Bloom puts it philosophically (1999: 8), the poem 'teases us with a near-nihilism, and then reaccepts the world of continuities and obligations'. In more simple terms, the speaker remains calm and prudent enough not to be overwhelmed by the detrimental illusionary enjoyment. This suggests the speaker's stable, clear mind that is able to abandon misgivings. By the same token, the persona in "The Road" ponders fairly long before he reaches a decision. With his still mind, he 'looked down one as far as [he] could' and 'took the other, as just as fair'. Even though the two roads do not look remarkably different, he manages to discern that they are differently trodden on. This meticulous observation helps him make up his mind at last.

Prior to the analysis of transcendental truths, especially related to non-bias, I find that the poet's acceptance and reverence of nature plays a pivotal role. As aforementioned, Frost has a close intimacy with nature. He is even regarded as nature poet (Tuten & Zubizaretta, 2001: 221-222). In effect indeed, such relationship paved the way for his attaining

natural insights and became an integral part of his poetic elements. The three poems indicate that Frost with a conscious mind can penetrate into the subtle truths that nature always reveals. "Stopping by Woods" depicts a mysterious paradox of the woods as they are both pleasant and hazardous. Frost realizes that resemblance to the truths of the mind. That is, the mind can be either good or evil, as Ajahn Chah warns that 'without wisdom to deal with these feelings, however, the mind will be troubled' (1982: 20). Therefore, stopping in the woods is both enchanting and dangerous. Frost's use of natural elements helps enrich this meaning and the tone. Whilst easy wind and downy flake give a sense of fanciful pleasure, the darkest evening and the frozen lake signal fear and insecurity. The poet accepts both conditions of the woods.

In like fashion, "The Road" has an abundant supply of nature and its truths. The scene of a forked road mirrors the truth of the mind that it always faces dilemmas. According to Buddhism, the mind always attaches itself to something, and without being trained, it cannot stay independent of thoughts (Chah, 1982: 20). Therefore, the decision of the confusing mind is usually ineffective. Sometimes, the decision is detrimental. In the poem, the description of "grassy road" not only reflects the poet's internal continued awareness, but it also translates the confusing mind into the poem in the most vivid manner. When the speaker says that 'I took the one less traveled by [that is, less grassy],' this decision suggests a less attaching and confusing mind. Again, Frost acknowledges the conditions of both the mind and the nature. This time, he chooses to be free from the attachments.

Frost's acceptance of natural power is also evident in "Fire and Ice" when he tells us that both substances can be destructive if they become extreme. More arrestingly, his recognition of the truth is derived solely from his acquisition of the wise mind. He writes 'From what I've tasted of desire'. This revelation is parallel to the Buddhist ideology that no one can ever develop others' mind, either good or evil, pure or stained, or wise or illusioned. The Buddha even said that he was merely a teacher (Nārada, 1973: ix). In my view, the use of fire and ice closely reflects the truth of the perpetually conditioned mind. The mind can go wild easily. Symbolically, whereas ice suggests a cold mind, fire refers to a greedy mind. Frost recognizes this truth very well and appropriates the power of fire and ice to represent that of the mind.

Regarding the wise mind in particular, there are significant moments that illustrate the personas' deep insight. Notably in "Fire and Ice," the speaker has recalled his firsthand experience and he acquires a deep understanding. From that revelation, he concludes that 'I hold with those who favor fire.' In other cases, Frost is deemed even much more discretionary

when his speakers pay attention to the consequences of the decision, and exhibit serious forethought and deep recollection. The evocative lines 'But I have promises to keep' of "Stopping by Woods" and 'I doubted if I should ever come back' of "The Road" reveal a careful, concerned and responsible mind. While one speaker cannot abandon his duty, the other cares about the other choice. In the setting of the natural world, Frost juxtaposes the external sphere with the internal one, that is, the state of the mind. Therefore, the dilemma presented appears more palpable to the reader. In conclusion, the scenario is described in a complete cycle starting from the speaker's sensing the surrounding and recognizing the dichotomy, to his transferring the problem into the mind, and employing insight to cope with the problem. Bloom also notes this transcendental insight of being whole and unity (2005: 253). In a sense, Frost's speakers attain a mindful and wise mind and use it to deal with their decisions. Even though it is hard to detect how clear and stable the mind is, one definite conclusion is that, for Frost, consciousness and mindfulness are necessary since these qualities permit us to fully understand ourselves and the external world in order to be prepared for any predicament. It is indeed 'a momentary against confusion,' as Frost always suggests.

Specifically speaking, Frost's wise mind adopts no-bias when making a decision. To illustrate further, "The Road" at its best recalls the persona's decision without boasts about the consequences it gives to his life and criticism of the other way. The speaker demonstrates no bias for any of the two routes, not even mentioning any apparent advantages or disadvantages of either of them. In fact, like the other two poems, Frost has his persona make a solemn monologue which is open to various interpretations. No definite conclusions can be made, save the sure fact that he has made a definite decision and it has impact on him. Whether it is good or bad is unclarified:

I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

This poem exhibits a higher level of no-bias when the speaker says that he 'shall be telling this with a sigh'—a sign of either relief or regret, which again has no definite answers. The deniable fact is that there is no one to blame or look down on, according to the poem. Frost always manages to remain neutral not only to him but also to the other who might take the other road which might be the same, worse or better than his choice. In Buddhist terms, the speaker has no *bhayāḡati* and *dosāḡati*, for his decision is made without fear or hatred.

Similarly, "Fire and Ice" achieves a wise balance without *chandāgati* and *mohāgati*, since he has recourse to knowledge and his firsthand experience of the mind before making a judgement. Also even though the speaker believes that the destructive power of greed is greater than that of hatred, the speaker cares about the other side. He even supports those who fear that coldness can also do harm to the humankind. Thus, Frost is seen to be very humble and respectful of individuals. Timmerman (2002: 67) supports that Frost pays 'close heed to a common people's voice.' In the beginning of the poem, the speaker introduces:

Some say the world in end in fire,
Some say in ice.

The tone is rather casual and the general attitude is non-biased. Even though he later indicates his agreement with those supporting fire, the ice people are not at all despised. Instead, Frost chooses to justify their belief in a greater proportion. He opines that 'destruction ice/Is also great/And would suffice.' Likewise, the persona in "Stopping by Woods" abstains from *mohāgati* when he plucks up his courage to continue his mundane duty although he wishes to stay in the irresistible ethereal bliss. He realizes that he will not get what he desires in the near future. In other words, his mind is morally non-biased between what is longed for and what is supposed to be done.

Poetic presentation

As Coleridge said of yesteryear, a poem 'is innate; it shapes as it develops within' (Abrams, 1988: 223). Frost's poetry, too, is evolved directly from his thinking. There are certain suggestive poetic elements that reflect his subtle philosophy in poetic form.

Versification

Generally speaking, the three poems are crafted in metrical verse, though free and extempore at most times, which is akin to most of his other poems. Each of the poems deploys approximately the same form, meter and sometimes even rhyme pattern from the beginning to the end, reflecting the poet's intention to present the dichotomy in question on an equal basis, even when the speaker's choice is already made definite. To illustrate, "Stopping by Woods" has four quatrains of the approximate word length. Diction is common, and most words are monosyllabic. The overall iambic meter has no stumbles. However, when the poem suggests a serious contemplation, it renders itself most discernible to point out the speaker's decisiveness. The final stanza is filled with the use of punctuation between the lines in order to allow the reader with more time to think deeper, which is in stark contrast to the

first three stanzas which are much less punctuated. The rhyme scheme of this stanza AAAA also differentiates it from the others which sound in AABA.

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Given Frost's philosophy of no-bias, the proportion of the message is also equal, the first stanza narrating the topical scene of the woods, the second establishing a conflict between the speaker's desire and duty, the third focusing on his decision, and the last announcing it eventually. As it were, the poem does not contain any remarkable visual or aural differences that indicate the speaker's biased preference, except that the rhyme of the final stanza shown above. Still, this part maintains a fine balance with the last two identical lines that emphasize his obligation on the one hand, and underscore his wish for that eternal bliss on the other hand.

By the same token, "The Road" is a metrical verse of four five-line stanzas. Regarding the sound, the iamb of this poem is less smooth than that of the first one, with each line containing extensive caesura, suggestive of a more difficult decision and more serious consideration involved. As aforesaid, the two roads in the woods have their own characteristics, and it is much harder for the man to choose since he has no external influence, like moral obligation in "Stopping by Woods," to help him decide. The rhyme scheme of the entire poem is ABAAB. Each of the two roads is described in equally fair amounts with the neutral tone for both. Even though the speaker is determinate to his decision in the final stanza, the neutrality is suggestively incorporated in the penultimate stanza when the tone is abruptly changed to signal uncertainty. The speaker expresses a wish for the other road not taken:

Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

Thus, the dichotomy between the road taken and the road not taken achieves a neutral balance. Indeed, non-biased tone helps decrease the override of the speaker's decision in the final stanza that it "has made all the difference."

“Fire and Ice” has a different form from the other two. It is only a one-stanza poem of nine lines in a smooth iamb. The number of words in each line is different ranging from three to eight. The rhyme is, however, kept well, mostly sounding in the /ai/ sound which in effect reverberates the two eponyms of this poem in the reader’s ear all the time. Arrestingly, the speaker’s firm belief that human greed can do more harm than hate should collapse the balance, but Frost tries his best to *counterbalance* it. First, the ice or human hatred side receives much more coverage to talk about; that is, six out of nine lines. Besides, these lines are more remarkable because of their brevity in contrast to those to the fire side which are longer. Of course, the different form should attract more attention. Lastly, the only different rhyming sounds other than /ai/ are given to the ice:

I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

Note that all the four lines are enjambments or run-ons with which a smooth flow of thinking is also suggested. Nevertheless, in order to achieve no-bias and decisiveness at the same time, diction is much helpful. The verb *think* and the condition *would* re-counterbalance the idea. The speaker still remains very much firm to his belief when he supports it with his own experience: “I’ve tasted of desire.”

Symbolization

I totally agree with Abrams’s explanation that in interpreting symbols in a literary text requires both of their conventional and specific concepts created by the author (1988, p. 184). This notion is especially true to Frost’s poetry which seemingly contains conventional symbols, yet they are complicated and innovative at times. To reiterate, a large number of natural elements as well as familiar objects, such as birches, cherries, eagles, spiders, lakes, swamps, axes and enamel, are described in his work. However, these simple and conventional images not only reveal his practical familiarity with nature and insight derived from it, but they symbolically also ‘create a well-rounded, little world,’ in which different sorts of physiques, ideas, beliefs and actions co-inhabit (Stackhouse, 2016: 45). Strictly speaking, dual, binary and even opposing images work in a cooperative fashion in Frost’s poetry, which in effect affirms his practice of no-bias especially when making decisions.

To illustrate in more detail, two roads in “The Road,” for example, make up a simple and familiar dilemma for uninitiated readership. Imagine if we reach this fork, we will be most likely to pause for a while to think before we choose one way, just as the speaker in this

poem has done. And, if we read the poem with more care, then we should discern an indication of Frost's notion of harmony and tolerance. As the persona mentions that "two roads diverged in a yellow wood," he already tells us from the very beginning that these roads derive from the same origin prior to their departure. Philosophically speaking, the poem alludes to the basic needs of all humans regardless of their age, sex, status and belief. We all need belonging, recognition, and self-actualization, among other needs, according to Maslow (Salkind, 2008: 634-637). The symbol of the *diverged* roads suggests that we are inherently the same in that we claim to do a certain thing at our own liberty, and request that our different decision be recognized. In other words, Frost urges us to attain self-assertion as long as we are as non-biased and tolerant as his persona is. There is no point of hating each other.

The woods and the village in "Stopping by Woods" are the wise symbols that help convey the poet's notion of tolerance and neutrality more vividly. The woods is both appealing and frightening, for it is lovely but also dark and deep. The characteristic of this nature is paradoxically true inasmuch as we experience it deeply enough. On the one hand, it offers a nice atmosphere, ethereal pleasure and serenity, but it is inevitably afflicted with mystery, detriment and anarchy as well. Likewise, even though the village appears to be a place full of turmoil and travail, it possesses civilization and collectivity. Thus, we can see from these opposing symbols that they both contain pros and cons. They are then presented in a hand-in-hand, rather than one-or-another, manner. Besides, the agitating horse in the poem that "gives his harness bell a shake/To ask if there is some mistake" can symbolize a restraint or at least a reminder for the speaker. The horse could be the prudent, responsible mind in ourselves. When we are tempted, we have to stay calm and thoughtful in order to deal with any difficulty; otherwise, *mohāgati* or bias derived from delusion will interfere and illusion us.

Fire and ice symbolize the conditions of the mind in the most vivid and concrete way. As all humans have firsthand experience, we can feel certain amounts of heat while we are angry or overwhelmingly lustful, thus English sayings, fire of passion, of desire, of greed, of lust, etc. On the contrary, when we deeply hate someone, we choose to be indifferent to them. We automatically become cold people. These symbols may look commonplace and simple, but they can produce palpable effects. Frost recognizes these natural dark feelings too, and realizes that they lurk even in the same person. In his poem then, these two types of the mind are juxtaposed. They are both deadly, and if we consider their devastating power on a large scale, they can destroy humankind. The First and Second World Wars are good examples. Based on this interpretation, Frost is especially laudable for relating the inner mind

into the scientific and politic matters. Just as the symbols already imply, exceeding desire or hate can kill not only individuals but the entire world.

Title

The purpose of the poem titles is twofold at least. First, they evoke both the poet's and readers' important moments in specific regard to their making decisions. To begin with, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" and "The Road Not Taken" set notable, classic examples of the man who are able to restrain from both the external temptation and his own longing, and of the man who is first overwhelmed by uncertainty of which way to go, but manages to be decisive at last. A closer look at the first poem's title reveals a more dramatic effect. The present progressive *stopping* underscores how challenging it is when the speaker is already put into a trance amidst the fanciful environment. However, as the latter part of the title implies, this time of the year is not perhaps the best moment for him to indulge himself because it is 'dark and deep.' Similarly, the persona in "The Road Not Taken" finds it very difficult to decide since there is little information for him, and no one is around to help him out. The negative *not* is particularly a good reminder of his past decisions.

Second, strictly speaking, the title of each of the poems plays an incredibly essential role in maintaining the balance of its dichotomy and that of the poet's philosophy of decisiveness and no-bias. Again, "The Road Not Taken" is meaningfully dubious. As the poem vaguely describes the two different roads, the speaker's decision on 'the one less traveled by' does not pinpoint which road he has taken. Either does the title. In the most literal and fair interpretation, the road not taken can refer to either his choice since it is not taken by the majority of people, or the other road which is not taken by him. This vagueness turns out to effectively maintain the moral balance between what is chosen and what is not chosen. Metaphorically, Frost's being tolerant and neutral to both choices is working hard now, whilst his decisiveness needs to be demonstrated strongly as well. In a similar fashion, "Fire and Ice" also makes itself a good balance from the outset. Even though the juxtaposition of the two operative words with the conjunction *and* seem to treat them on an equal basis, the specific placement of the first word before the second word already indicates the poet's decision in a very modest manner. In fact, this title counterbalances the dichotomy of the poem given the fact that the ice side has much more coverage than the fire side. It is very wise and prudent of Frost to present as such.

Above all, however we interpret Frost's poems and their working titles, he would hope that his writing should call his readers to deeply contemplate what has been done and how it has contributed to our life at present and also in the future. He said once in a rather

serious tone: ‘when all is over, when the mind is swift with keen regret, in the long after-thought [,] [t]he after-thought of one action is the forethought of the next’ (Parini, 2015: 30).

Conclusion

For me, Robert Frost triumphantly succeeds in achieving and maintaining the balance of his didactic aim and his poetic presentation. This ability is in fact not easily acquired mainly because each side of the balance already contains its own discrepancy, let alone happen together. Just to reiterate, when one becomes very decisive in one particular belief or action of any dilemma, the tendency to be biased against the other way is very high. Some may even express misgivings about it just to justify their decision. They then become too arrogant or biased to others, consciously or unconsciously. On the contrary, Frost has gone too far to fall victim like them. He manages to stay conscious and non-biased, being fully aware that each person or entity has its advantages and disadvantages. Indeed, no two persons see all the same thing, and as such they decide and act according to their rationalization. Even though there are sometimes definite, good or correct answers, Frost still considers that no wrong doers are to blame. His poetry is depicted as such. The speakers remain decisive but not unsympathetic.

Translating such a delicate philosophy into poetic form is even harder. But, Frost has a natural flair for doing it. The dichotomy *looks* and *sounds* incredibly balanced. The titles, amounts of the message, and diction create and sometimes redress the balance when the preferred choice is indicated, and the other choice suddenly gains attention. No remarkable different rhymes, meter and rhythm interfere while reading the poems, except the change in tone which calls for a closer look and a deeper thinking at that moment. In conclusion, Frost is an exceptional philosopher, poet, preacher, and intimate friend who sets an example of being decisive and non-biased at the same time. He urges his world fellows to do so in order to live with carefulness, resourcefulness and peace, hoping that they can make a better informed decision next time. To quote it again, Frost always recommends ‘a momentary stay against confusion’ in order that we can make ‘all the difference.’

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