

# Ecocriticism Concepts in Robert Frost's "Out, Out-" and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"

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## Abstract

The research aims to discuss the concepts of ecocriticism in Robert Frost's poems. There are two poems that will be discussed, namely "Out, Out-" and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." The two poems are chosen as the primary data of the research because both poems depicts human and nature interaction. Ecocriticism itself is a literary theory that examines the relationship between literature and the natural world. It focuses on the setting of the two poems and human and nature relation. Descriptive research is chosen as the method of research because this research aims accurately describes a phenomenon of human and natural world in Robert Forst's poems. In terms of literary study, there are three literary approaches that are relevant in the research. Structural and formalist approaches are the general ones when the research takes data from a poem, while the specific literary approach is ecocriticism approach. "Out, Out-" and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" are two of Robert Frost's poem that portray the relation between human and natural world. They can be analyzed through ecocritical lens to explore the complex interplay between humans and nature, ecological consequences of human actions, and the intersection of human existence and the natural world.

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, Ecocriticism Concepts, Human and Nature

## INTRODUCTION

Ecocriticism is a literary theory that looks at how literature and the natural world interact, with an emphasis on how the environment is portrayed in literature, how people interact with nature, and the ecological issues that are brought up in it. With the emergence of the environmental movement in the 1960s, it gained prominence in the 1980s. Environmental issues, cultural environmental issues, and attitudes toward nature are all covered under ecocriticism. By examining the relationship between literature, culture, and the physical

environment, it provides a comprehensive avenue for literary and cultural researchers to explore the global ecological catastrophe. Scholarship frequently integrates science, ethics, politics, philosophy, economics, and aesthetics beyond institutional and national barriers, demonstrating that ecocriticism is not limited to literature and culture. There are various forms of ecocriticism, such as postcolonialism, feminist, pastoral, and wilderness ecofeminism. The research focuses on ecocriticism concepts in the poems written by an American poet, Robert Frost. Robert Frost is a

well-known poet. This American poet is well known for his realistic portrayals of rural life. Frost received numerous honors during his lifetime. He turns into one of the uncommon public literary figures in America. His literary creations straddle the modernist and American poetry traditions of the 19th century. Being a realist, he frequently uses nature in his works to illustrate life's metaphors. He uses everyday American vernacular in his writings, and many of his poems have several interpretations.

One prominent concept of ecocriticism in Robert Frost's poems is his keen observation and depiction of the natural world (Ambika, 2011). Many of his poems are set in rural landscapes, featuring descriptions of trees, plants, animals and seasons. He also portrays nature as a powerful and transformative force, highlighting the beauty and harshness of the natural environment (Zapf, 2004). Through an ecocritical lens, Robert Frost's poetry has been examined, highlighting his awareness of the need for eco-friendly attitudes and the impact that humans have on the environment. Frost's art frequently conveys a strong bond with nature as well as the effects of human activity on the environment. Shahnawaz (2022) has stated that a framework for comprehending how Frost's writing addresses environmental issues and the relationship between nature and human existence is provided by ecocriticism.

The research focuses on two poems written by Robert Frost, entitled "Out, Out—" and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening". Frost's art frequently conveys a strong bond with nature as well as the effects of human activity on the environment. In his melancholy poem "Out, Out—," which describes a boy's buzz saw incident, Frost captures the harshness of the environment and the ignorance of nature. This interpretation of Frost's poems demonstrates his knowledge of how humans affect the environment and the importance of implementing eco-friendly practices. A framework for understanding how Frost's writing discusses environmental issues and the relationship between nature and human existence is provided by ecocriticism. While in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", it tells the story of a traveler who, on a snowy evening, stops beside a

forest and takes in the breathtaking scenery. The woods seems to be a serene place of rest, and the poem is frequently read as a meditation on death. The research examines the concepts of ecocriticism in Robert Frost's two poems, entitled *Out, Out—* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*.

From Wordsworth and Thoreau to Disney and BBC nature broadcasts, ecocriticism examines how we see and represent the relationship between humans and the environment in all spheres of cultural production.

What then is ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary study (Glotfelty, 1996, as cited in Garrard, 2004).

Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary field that examines the connections between literature and the environment. It draws on contributions from natural scientists, writers, literary critics, anthropologists, and historians to analyze the relationship between nature and culture. It encompasses various types, including pastoral, wilderness, and ecofeminism, each focusing on different aspects of the relationship between humans and the environment.

In studying a work of art that deals with ecocriticism, the researcher may answer some questions such as how nature is represented in the novel/poem/play, what role the physical-geographical setting plays in the structure of the novel/poem/play, how our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it.

Ecocriticism concepts deal with nature's allure, human-nature interaction, environment imagination and sense of place. To begin with, the concepts of ecocriticism are related to the notion of anthropocene. The word "Anthropocene" refers to a new geological epoch in which human activity has taken center stage in determining the course of Earth's environment. It is defined by the overwhelming body of evidence showing human activity is now having a major impact on a number

of earth system processes (Waters, 2016). Moreover, the idea that humans are the primary or most important entities in the universe, seeing or perceiving the world through the lens of human values and experiences, is known as anthropocentrism (Bergthaller et al., 2014). This philosophical stance views humans as superior to and apart from the natural world, which frequently results in the idea that other living things—like plants, animals, and minerals—are only resources for human use. As “ecocriticism” is a bit of a freely floating signifier at this time, it is difficult to know what works of criticism fit under the rubric. It is certainly the case that some works touch on environmental issues without primarily being works of ecocriticism. Although it may sound simplistic, perhaps the most important question to ask of a possible ecocritical work is whether it is primarily concerned with environmental issues as they principally appear in texts. Robert Frost's poetry has been analyzed from an ecocritical perspective, focusing on the representation of nature and the relationship between humans and the environment. Some key concepts in ecocriticism, such as nature and culture, ecological concepts, and interdisciplinarity, are applied to Frost's poems.

In regard with the topic of research, the concepts of ecocriticism are the following:

1. **Nature as Text:** Ecocriticism views the environment as a text that can be analyzed and interpreted. It explores how nature is represented in literary works, examining the language, metaphors, and symbols used to describe the natural world. Abdurrahmani (2014) claimed that ecocritical attention has primarily focused on the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century British and American texts, predominantly non-fiction nature writing, and also nature-conscious fiction and poetry.
2. **Human-Nature Relationship:** A central concept in ecocriticism is the exploration of the relationship between humans and the natural world. This includes examining how literature portrays attitudes towards nature, the impact of human activities on the environment, and the ethical dimensions of these interactions. Strengthened by Singh (as cited in Al Fawareh et al., 2023) that ecocriticism tries to bring attention to the need to reaccess man's connection with his environment.
3. **Place and Landscape:** Ecocriticism pays attention to the significance of place and landscape in literature. It analyzes how settings, such as forests, mountains, or urban environments, influence the narrative, characters, and themes of a work. Place is considered not just a backdrop but an active participant in the storytelling. The concept of place extends beyond the physical setting to include a consideration of the social, historical, and ecological contexts that influence a particular location. Analyzing how places are represented and the significance of landscapes helps researcher uncover the ecological, cultural, and ethical dimensions of literary works.
4. **Anthropocentrism:** the belief that human interests should be central, while biocentrism is the belief that all living things are equally important. Anthropocentrism, in its original connotation in environmental ethics, is the belief that value is human-centered and that all other beings are means to human ends (Kopina et al., 2021).
5. **Wilderness and the Sublime:** Ecocriticism often engages with the concept of the sublime in nature. It examines how literature represents the awe-inspiring and sometimes terrifying aspects of the natural world, emphasizing the power and beauty found in wilderness areas.

The concepts of ecocriticism are clearly described in Robert Frost's poems entitled “Out, Out-” and “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.” Robert Frost's poems are timeless relevance. It is because Frost's themes are often timeless and universally relatable, making his poetry relevant across different eras. Ecocritics can draw connections between Frost's exploration of

nature and contemporary environmental concerns, providing insights into the enduring relevance of ecological themes in literature.

## METHODS

The most suitable method of research used is descriptive method. Punch (2000) explains that descriptive method is setting out to collect, organize and summarize information about the matter being studied. Hence, this method is aimed to describe the concepts of ecocriticism in Robert Frost's poems entitled "Out, Out—" and "Stopping by Wood on a Snowy Evening". Document analysis is used for data collecting technique. There are several documents which are analyzed. Firstly, some articles that are related to theory of ecocriticism. Secondly, the documents are in the form of words and phrases in lines of the poems.

Three approaches are used to support the analysis. The approaches intended include structural approach, formalist and ecocriticism approaches. To begin with, structural approach is applied in this research because this kind of approach is very effective for analyzing a poem which has some poetic meaning of the words. Structural approach concentrates on each constituent of the construction. By understanding the meaning of the words, the truth can be discovered. D'haen (2014) states that structural approach is producing relevant results by looking in places where one would not look without being urged by sturdy model. In other words, the structural approach is used to get the mastery over the structures. It concentrates on each word to get the detailed meaning of the two poems.

Furthermore, formalist criticism regards literature as a unique form of human's knowledge that needs to be examined in its own terms. The natural, sensible starting point is the interpretation and analysis of the works of literature themselves. To explore the intense relationship within a poem is done by close reading, a careful step-by-step analysis and explication of a text. The formalist criticism which is now called as the new criticism or formalistic approach is defined as the assumption that a given literary experience takes a shape proper to itself, or at the least that the shape

and the experience are functions of each other (Guerin et al., 2005).

In addition, ecocriticism investigates the relation between humans and the natural world in literature (Mambrol, 2016). It looks at how environmental issues, cultural issues, and attitudes toward nature are presented and analyzed. One of the main goals of ecocriticism is to study how people in society behave and react to nature and its elements. An ecocritical lens, which focuses on the connection between literature and the environment, has been used to evaluate Robert Frost's poems. Frost's art frequently conveys a strong bond with nature as well as the effects of human activity on the environment. In his melancholy poem "Out, Out—," which describes a boy's buzz saw mishap, Frost captures the harshness of the outdoors and the apathy of nature. This interpretation of Frost's poems demonstrates his knowledge of how humans affect the environment and the importance of adopting eco-friendly practices. A framework for comprehending how Frost's writing addresses environmental issues and the relationship between nature and human existence is provided by ecocriticism.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 'Out, Out—'

The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard

And made dust and dropped stove-length  
stick of wood,

Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew  
across it.

And from there those that lifted eyes could  
count

Five mountain ranges one behind the other

Under the sunset far into Vermont.

And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and  
rattled,

As it ran light, or had to bear a load.  
And nothing happened: day was all but done.  
Call it a day, I wish they might have said  
To please the boy by giving him the half hour  
That a boy counts so much when saved from work.  
His sister stood beside him in her apron  
To tell them 'Super.' At the word, the saw,  
As if to prove saws knew what supper meant,  
Leaped out at the boy's hand, or seemed to leap—  
He must have given the hand. However it was,  
Neither refused the meeting. But the hand!  
The boy's first outcry was a rueful laugh,  
As he swung toward them holding up the hand  
Half in appeal, but half as if to keep  
The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all—  
Since he was old enough to know, big boy  
Doing a man's work, though a child at heart—  
He saw all spoiled. 'Don't let him cut my hand off—  
The doctor, when he comes. Don't let him, sister!  
So. But the hand was gone already.

The doctor put him in the dark of ether.  
He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.  
And then—the watcher at his pulse took fright.  
No one believed. They listened at his heart.  
Little—les—nothing!—and that ended it.  
No more to build on there. And they, since they  
Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.

In the poem entitled 'Out, Out—', it contains several ecocritical concepts that highlight the relationship between human and the natural world. The first is the setting of the poem. It is set in a rural landscape in a Vermont farmyard. It is described by the surrounding environment with phrases in lines 6 and 7 of the poem, "Five mountain ranges" and "the sunset far into Vermont". By providing these details, connection between the characters and their natural surroundings is established. It also emphasizes the inseparable bond between humans and nature. Those lines suggest that the individual's identities, feelings and lifestyles are interconnected with the landscape. The ecocritical notion that human existence is not distinct from nature but rather a component of a broader ecological system is reflected in this interconnectivity. The poem's portrayal of a rural Vermont setting highlights the close, indivisible relationship between human and nature when it is viewed through the lens of ecocriticism. It emphasizes how crucial it is to acknowledge and honour this relationship, encouraging an ecological consciousness that sees the natural world as an essential component of human existence. The manual work done by the people behind the beautiful portrait of Vermont is associated with dangerous work. However, because of the beautiful environment and the cool

and pleasant atmosphere of the day, they do not feel a heavy burden when they work. Even the noisy sound of saws does not interfere with the heavy work they are doing. It is seen in lines 1 and 2 of the poem, “The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard; And made dust and dropped stove-length stick of wood”, the eerie sound of buzz saw is broken by line 3 “Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it” that the atmosphere brought the fragrance of the mountains so that nature provided comfort in human life.

Moreover, the second is human impact on nature. The poem explores the consequences of human activity on the natural world. The tragedy can be seen in lines 16, 17 and 18 of the poem:

“Leaped out at the boy’s hand, or seemed to leap—

He must have given the hand. However it was,

Neither refused the meeting. But the hand!” that tells the story of a young boy who suffers a fatal accident while operating a buzz saw. The buzz saw symbolizes human industrialization and technology which destroy the harmony of the natural world.

“Since he was old enough to know, big boy

Doing a man’s work, though a child at heart—...

He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.”

Lines 23, 24 and 29 show that the boy’s death represents the destruction power of human actions and the tragic consequences they can have on both human life and the environment. The lines offered powerfully highlight the terrible results of human behavior. The boy’s death highlights the need for a more compassionate attitude to labor and a clearer understanding of the fragility of human existence by providing a vivid illustration of how society pressures can result in individual and community loss.

Then, pay attention on the following poem:

### **Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening**

Whose woods these are I think I know.

His house is in the village though;

He will not see me stopping here

To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer

To stop without a farmhouse near

Between the woods and frozen lake

The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake

To ask if there is some mistake.

The only other sound’s the sweep

Of easy wind and downy flake.

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.

While primarily a lyrical and introspective work of art, the poem contains elements that can be interpreted through an ecocritical lens. The first is Nature’s allure. It is seen in the first stanza of the poem that begins by describing a picturesque scene of a traveler stopping by woods on a snowy evening. The vivid imagery captures the beauty

and serenity of the natural world, enticing the speaker to pause and appreciate the scenery like in the line "To watch his woods fill up with snow." This appreciation of the beauty of nature is in line with ecocritical viewpoints that stress how important it is to understand the inherent worth of the natural world.

Moreover, the second concept of ecocriticism in the poem is natural versus human world in which it is the juxtaposition of the woods and the frozen lake with the absence of human structures that shows the contrast between the natural and human worlds. While the line "darkest evening of the year" may suggest a profound that enhances its emotional and aesthetic impact. The presence of "frozen lake" indicates the winter season. The element is used to create a sense of time passing and the cyclical nature of the natural world. This temporal dimension connects with the ecocritical understanding of nature's rhythm and cycles, highlighting the interconnectedness of human and environment within a larger temporal framework. Additionally, the farmhouse's setting between the woods and the frozen lake (line 2 and 3 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> stanza) highlights the complicated and frequently precarious relationship that exists between people and their surroundings. The abandoned wood pile serves as a reminder that human endeavors are transient and eventually dependent on natural processes. This placement in space represents the need for people to recognize their role in the greater ecological system. Readers are urged by ecocriticism to recognize this equilibrium and to honor the boundaries set by nature.

Furthermore, the phrases "easy wind" and "downy flake" descriptions (the 3<sup>rd</sup> line of the 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza) evoke a sense of peacefulness and quiet natural beauty. These noises highlight the peaceful existence and soft motions of the natural world, which are frequently overlooked in the rush of daily life. Ecocriticism appreciates these depictions because they serve as a constant reminder of the intrinsic worth and beauty of the natural world, unaffected by human activity. These phrases also advocate for an understanding of the subtle and sometimes disregarded features of nature, implying attention of and respect for the natural world. This

awareness is promoted by ecocriticism as a first step toward more considerate and sustainable relationships with our surroundings.

And then, the 1<sup>st</sup> line of the last stanza "The woods are lovely, dark and deep," captures an essential meaning in which the description of the woods as "lovely" suggests the intrinsic aesthetic natural value. Ecocriticism highlights the beauty and value of nature that extend beyond human use. This sentence encourages a viewpoint that values nature for its own sake by urging readers to recognize the innate beauty of the natural world. Subsequently, the "lovely, dark and deep" woods' attraction alludes to a profound spiritual and emotional bond between people and the natural world. By analyzing these relationships, ecocriticism draws attention to the ways in which natural settings affect human awareness and welfare. The allure of the woods alludes to a desire for harmony and immersion in nature.

Eventually, the three lines that follow

"But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep." that the serene and inviting imagery of the woods evokes a space for contemplation and reflection. Such environments are highly valued by ecocriticism as being essential for promoting environmental consciousness and a more profound comprehension of our place in the natural world.

In conclusion, based on the poem entitled "Out, Out,—" can be examined that the first concept of ecocriticism is actually in contrast with the second one. The beauty of nature is portrayed sparkingly through "five mountains around the Vermont and the sunset", on the other hand, behind its beauty, there is a boy under the age who does the man's works by working in a saw mill and unfortunately his hand has been cut in accidentally, and he dies in suffer. The contrast in these lines, viewed from an ecocritical angle, emphasizes the conflict between the vulnerability of the natural world and human technological

growth. The poem invites readers to reflect on the often-overlooked costs of progress and the need for a more harmonious relationship with nature, while subtly criticizing the effects of industrialization on both human life and the environment. While in the poem entitled “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening, it figures out that people can find solace for introspection in nature and reestablish a connection with both the natural world and themselves. It can be known as environmental ethics that the last three lines of the poem convey sense of responsibility and commitment to human’s obligations. This admission raises questions about how important it is to understand and carry out our social obligations. It can be seen as a reminder that, despite the allure of nature, people have responsibilities and tasks that demand them to interact with the world outside of the wilderness..

## CONCLUSION

“Out, Out—“ and “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” highlight various aspects of how human interacts with the natural world when viewed through the concepts of ecocriticism. “Out, Out—“ highlights the frailties and fleeting nature of human existence amidst the natural world while examining the conflicts and fallout from industrial human activity. On the other hand, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” promotes a deeper understanding and contemplation of the natural environment by offering a meditation on the inherent beauty, mystery, and worth of nature.

When taken as a whole, both poems highlight the intricacy of human relationships with the natural world and promote a sensible viewpoint that acknowledges the value of the natural world and the necessity of thoughtful stewardship. Readers are encouraged to ponder on their personal interactions with the environment and the significance of promoting a happy coexistence with the natural world through thought-provoking insights and evocative pictures.

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