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**Исследовательская работа**

**Особенности пейзажной лирики Роберта Фроста**

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**Introduction**

Robert Frost is one of the finest American poets. His works are very different from the works of other poets.

When I first started reading his poems, I was surprised to find out how plain their language is: few metaphors, few epithets. But later I understood that there is deep meaning behind this simplicity. For instance, “Fire and Ice” contains informal language without any means of expression. However, the author reflects on one of the subjects that had always agitated people’s minds: the world’s end.

Every critic of Frost’s poetry has his own opinion about it. Some consider it plain and bucolic; and the others agree with me thinking there is a philosophical subtext (like Ezra Pound, William Butler Yeats and Edward Thomas – famous British poets, who were Robert Frost’s contemporaries). People are still discussing Frost’s poetry today, and there are many different points of view on this topic, that’s why it is a topical issue nowadays.

**The main subject** of my paper is the peculiarities of Frost’s poems.

**The objective** is to study Frost’s poems, try a hand in translating them and create my own verses in his style.

**To achieve this (METHODS OF Research)**I have studied and analyzed Robert Frost’s poems, books about his work and critics’ reviews on his poems; made a comparative analysis of Frost’s poems in the original and their translations.

This paper consists of the introduction, three chapters, conclusion, bibliography, and the appendix, that contains my translations of Robert Frost’s poems and my own in his style.

Doing this research I studied books and articles both in English and Russian, translated some poems and sent them to the American Council Competition, on the results of which I’ve been awarded a certificate for “The best overall work”.

1. **Robert Frost: life and work**

Robert Lee Frost was born on March 26, 1874 in San Francisco to Isabelle Moodie and William Prescott Frost, a journalist and a descendant of a Devonshire Frost who had sailed to New Hampshire in 1634. After the death of his father he moved with his mother and sister to Lawrence, Massachusetts near his paternal grandfather.

Frost wrote his first poems when he was a student in Lawrence High School. They were published in the school newspaper, and young Robert Frost soon became its editor. He was the head of his form.

In 1894 Robert Frost’s poem *My Butterfly* was published in a New York magazine called *The Independent*. In the following year he married his ex-classmate Elinor White and they both worked as teachers. In 1897 Frost entered Harvard University, studied there for about two years and returned back to Lawrence because of problems with his lungs and family matters.

In 1900 Frost’s grandfather bought him a farm in New Hampshire, where he wrote his first collection of poems – *A Boy’s Will*. In 1906 he became a teacher again.

In 1912 Robert Frost and his family moved to England, where they lived near London. There he made acquaintances in the literary world, such as Frank Flint, Ezra Pound, William Butler Yeats and Edward Thomas (one of Frost’s best friends), who wrote reviews on his works.

According to Robert Frost’s biographer William H. Pritchard, these critiques helped Frost to have a reputation of the leading American poet. He returned to this country in 1915 being a famous person. His publisher Henry Holt showed *North of Boston* to the Americans. Frost gained popularity after the publication of this book. At first he was invited to Tufts College as honorary speaker, the next year he was elected to the National institution of Art and literature.

In 1915 Frost wrote *Mountain Interval*, including such things as *The Road Not Taken*, *An Old Man’s Winter Night*, *The Oven Bird*, *Birches*, *Putting in the Seed* and *Out, Out –*. His poems remained having a simple language, but started to assume Frost’s own intonation noticed by critics.

Soon after that Robert Frost was invited to be a professor in Amherst College in Massachusetts, then in Michigan University, in Harvard, in Dartmouth. He also started reading his poems in public (he did this throughout his life and was extremely popular among his listeners).

In 1924 Frost got his first (he had four) Pulitzer Prize for his fourth book *New Hampshire*. The next followed in 1930 for *Collected Poems*. *A Further Range* earned Frost his third prize in 1937.

This book of verses was disliked by critics on the left. One of those critics, Rolfe Humphries (his review was titled “A Further Shrinking”), noticed that Frost no longer showed a sympathetic attitude towards his New English characters, that his poetry became stern and at times sarcastic and didactic.

Such changes in Frost’s sense of writing happened because in 1930s, when he was on the peak of popularity and got a lot of awards, he went through family tragedies. In 1934 his younger daughter Marjorie died, in 1938 his wife Elinor had a heart attack with a lethal outcome, in 1940 his son Carol committed suicide. Frost had a really hard time. He stopped reading lectures and devoted himself to farming. In *A Witness Tree* (1942) many poems have the tragic tone. Some of them are considered the strongest in Frost’s lyrics.

The last 14 years of Frost’s life were successful. He was reputed to be the most significant American poet of XX century, got 44 honorary titles (such as Honorary Consultant of the Library of Congress), addressed on John F. Kennedy inauguration. After the World War II Frost visited many countries: Brazil, England, Greece, Israel and etc. In 1962 he had a trip to Russia, where he met Anna Akhmatova, Alexander Tvardovski and Nikita Khrushchev. Boris Khlebnikov, a translator, noticed Frost was fading, and he was right. Robert Frost died in 1963 of embolia.

1. **Landscape in Frost’s poetry**

Robert Frost had always been called “a landscape poet”. Landscape appears in almost every his poem. He has a wonderful talent to describe nature in simple, colloquial language and simultaneously leave the reader a mystery to solve.

Frost had lived in rural areas of New England (New Hampshire and Vermont – the agricultural states) most of his life. There is no surprise he had always had everlasting attachment to these places. They had been both his home and the source of his inspiration. New Hampshire had always been the favourite Frost’s state, that’s why he devoted the whole book of poems to it. Thus Frost describes the charms of home nature (farms, forests etc.) and passes his feelings on to the reader. Later, after 1936, he stopped describing the New England landscapes and preferred to comment on philosophical and scientific theories with a touch of irony. As for the subject of socializing with nature, it passes through all Frost’s works, figures in every other subject and is the stern of his poetry.

Frost usually pays the greatest attention to nature and to thoughts of people who are close to it. For example, in *Christmas Trees* he describes a forest during the Christmas Eve, sorrow of the woodman, who doesn’t want his trees to be cut down; his surprise when he discovered he had a thousand of trees and his happiness: the trees would give joy to people.

“…He asked if I would sell my Christmas trees;  
My woods – the young fir balsams like a place  
Where houses all are churches and have spires.  
I hadn’t thought of them as Christmas Trees. …”

“…He said, “A thousand. …”  
“…Then I was certain I had never meant  
To let him have them. Never show surprise!..”

The leitmotif of “landscape” poetry of Robert Frost in the whole is the self-definition of a man’s spirit in natural surroundings. Attraction and antagonizing in the relations of a man and nature corresponds to the “swinging” of Frost’s character. This is a metaphor of the character’s movement from poem to poem: from wild nature to people and backwards. All character’s positions are “intermediate” – everything is led into the channel of pragmatic vagueness.

W.H. Auden, a famous Anglo-American poet, called Frost “a poet of autumn and coming winter, sunset darkness, thickening dark and inclement weather”. According to his research of Frost’s books, one book contains 21 poems describing winter (and only in 5 the scene is set in spring). The action takes place at night in 27 poems, and 14 portray bad weather. For example, a scene of bad weather is seen in *A Line Storm Song*:

“The line-storm clouds fly tattered and swift.  
  The road is forlorn all day,  
Where a myriad snowy quartz stones lift,  
  And the hoof-prints vanish away.  
The roadside flowers, too wet for the bee,  
  Expend their bloom in vain.  
Come over the hills and far with me,  
  And be my love in the rain.”

Robert Frost became a professional poet when he was not a boy, so he had never been “in love” with the surrounding nature. He was attracted to absolutely different emotions – doubt, enlightened sorrow, moderate skepticism. He was interested in a man’s ability to get over hard periods of his life, his behavior in these periods because he had a hard life himself. Frost usually describes winter, night, bad weather (they are often found in one poem, like night and bad weather in *Acquainted with the Night*) – the situations where a man is tested on steadfastness, endurance, ability to keep his virtue. Types of nature in Frost’s poetry symbolize human states; they can be called the landscape “alphabet” used for reproduction of thoughts.

Nature in Frost’s poetry is usually showed from its grey, not festive side. It is, as a rule, indifferent to people. The exception is “Two look at two”. The doe and the deer (representatives of nature) are friendly to the boy and the girl.

“A doe from round a spruce stood looking at them  
Across the wall, as near the wall as they. …  
Like some up-ended boulder split in two,  
Was in her clouded eyes; they saw no fear there. …”

“A buck from round the spruce stood looking at them  
Across the wall as near the wall as they. …  
Thus till he had them almost feeling dared  
To stretch a proffering hand -- and a spell-breaking.  
Then he too passed unscared along the wall.

Penetration into the secrets of nature is an unexpected gift in this poem. It can also be an illusion (as in “A Boundless Moment”, where a beech with last year’s leaves that didn’t fall is taken for a blooming apple tree).

“…'Oh, that's the Paradise-in-bloom,' I said;  
And truly it was fair enough for flowers  
had we but in us to assume in March  
Such white luxuriance of May for ours.  
  
We stood a moment so in a strange world,  
Myself as one his own pretense deceives;  
And then I said the truth (and we moved on).  
A young beech clinging to its last year's leaves.”

The secrets of nature are an element of the unknown, that’s why Frost’s famous agnosticism is felt there. According to several researchers, its culmination is in the famous late quotation of Robert Frost: “We dance round in a ring and suppose, but the Secret sits in the middle and knows”.

Frost’s poetry dramatizes a man’s position in every point of the “ring” concerning the Secret that “sits in the middle”. Ultimately, this position leads to aspiration to overcome any kind of philosophy leaving a man (who is surprised) alone with the infinity.

In order this dramatic meeting happened, the contiguous points between “the final” (a man) and “the infinity” (nature) are set. Single objects (constant elements of Frost’s landscape) become such points. They act as both an objective landscape contrasting with the character and his inner state and “objective” interpretation of intuitively nominated conception (it doesn’t have a definite philosophic theory). The meaning of some of these landscape constants is evident.

Snow, for example, has an antispiritual character that is hostile to people. On the other hand, snow is a signal to action, a catalizator of human will and artistic power; and just snow, which, as Cummings said: “doesn’t give a soft white damn on where it falls”. Stars are the “spiritual barrier”. They show a man’s insignificancy concerning space. At the same time they are the evidence of eternity that makes a man wish to join it and determine “our place amongst the infinity”.

The symbolism of snow and stars is nuanced very subtly in Frost’s poems. Forest and brook turn out to be more complicated landscape constants.

The brook is the lightest symbol in Frost’s poetry. It is the part of objectively existing New England landscape. Its appearance in poems defines the movement of thought in every verse. In “The Tuft of Flowers” the revealing of the sense of central figure brought into the title begins exactly from the brook. It (as a subject of a character’s consciousness) gives evidence concerning the wish for finding the commonality with the world and people. It also shows his completeness in himself.

“I went to turn the grass once after one  
Who mowed it in the dew before the sun.  
The dew was gone that made his blade so keen  
Before I came to view the leveled scene.  
I looked for him behind an isle of trees;  
I listened for his whetstone on the breeze.  
But he had gone his way, the grass all mown,  
And I must be, as he had been -- alone,  
'As all must be,' I said within my heart,  
'Whether they work together or apart.'…”

In Frost’s poems “The Mountain” and “The Generations of Men” (“North of Boston”) the brook becomes the source of creative process. In “The Mountain” the character’s affection for empiric facts hinders his contact with an old mysterious farmer. The unhurried talk of these two men about an enormous hill hiding the sun from the people gradually narrows around the main object of the poem – the brook on the top of this mountain.

“"You've never climbed it?"   
"I've been on the sides   
Deer-hunting and trout-fishing. There's a brook   
That starts up on it somewhere--I've heard say   
Right on the top, tip-top--a curious thing.   
But what would interest you about the brook,   
It's always cold in summer, warm in winter.”

The farmer characterizes the brook as a miracle – it seems to be confronting with the run of time, the change of seasons of the year. The brook is cold in summer and hot in winter. This can be explained quite simply – water of a spring brook has constant temperature that seems warm or cold concerning air temperature. However, the problem set by the poem comes to light only when the character discovers that neither the farmer nor anybody else has ever seen this brook and that all the information he got is a myth. The farmer is quite satisfied with this legend and isn’t eager to confirm it by some facts. The character, on the contrary, finds the corroboration by his own experience necessary. He is not sure whether the farmer is right or not. The talk between them ends on a half of a word – it is Frost’s tendency to put a question and not answer it. “"As to that I can't say. But there's the spring,   
 Right on the summit, almost like a fountain.   
 That ought to be worth seeing."   
 "If it's there.   
 You never saw it?"   
 "I guess there's no doubt   
 About its being there. I never saw it.”

“"Warm in December, cold in June, you say?"

"I don't suppose the water's changed at all.   
You and I know enough to know it's warm   
Compared with cold, and cold compared with warm.   
But all the fun's in how you say a thing."   
"You've lived here all your life?"   
"Ever since Hor   
Was no bigger than a----" What, I did not hear.   
He drew the oxen toward him with light touches   
Of his slim goad on nose and offside flank,   
Gave them their marching orders and was moving.”

Forests is the main landscape symbol in Frost’s poems. A lot of articles are devoted to research of forest symbolism. Nearly all works on Robert Frost contain a chapter

or part that examines this phenomenon.

“Forest” poems attach some lyrical focus on Frost’s poetry, because their character often stays alone with nature and himself. Both Frost’s first poems (“Into My Own”) and the last poem are organized around the image of forest. Thus they make a “frame” to all Frost’s works and show the special importance of this image.

Forest is correlated with the character’s inner world, especially with the sides of it that are difficult or impossible to reach for the others. At the same time it exists as something isolated from the character – nature, the outer world. Forests are set off against the human society in both cases. They symbolize only a part of the character’s inner life: aspiration to separate from people and blend with nature exists as aspiration that is never realized completely. The contrasting aspiration to people is never realized either.

But the main role of the landscape in Frost’s poetry is to help the reader discover the philosophical subtext of the poems. One of the peculiarities of Frost’s lyrics is the switch from the nature to human life or another subject of meditating.

1. **Peculiarities of Robert Frost’s poems**

Robert Frost’s poems are different from most of poems of his contemporaries. When I was reading Frost’s poems the first time, I was surprised to find out that they are full of colloquialisms and lack stylistic devices. W.H. Auden wrote about Robert Frost in his essay: “Frost seldom uses metaphors. There is nothing that may be incomprehensible to a teenager in his poetry (if I take it in the whole, including literature and historical allusions). Frost’s poetic voice is the voice of a wise mind: it is clear and sober.” Iosif Brodsky also remarked on it: “Unlike Russian poets Frost never pours himself out on the piano”. **Plain language** is **the first peculiarity** of Frost’s poems.

At first, this colloquial language seems to be simply describing nature. But later the reader begins to understand this simplicity is deceitful. It covers the depths of psychological contents: the reader discovers sub textual sense and begins meditating about universal laws of being. **This is another feature.**

As Robert Frost said: “A poem begins in delight, but ends in wisdom”. Take case of “Nothing Gold Can Stay”.

Nature's first green is gold,

Her hardest hue to hold.

Her early leaf's a flower;

But only so an hour.

Then leaf subsides to leaf.

So Eden sank to grief,

So dawn goes down to day.

Nothing gold can stay.

The first lines remind us that willow leaves opening earlier than the others are yellowish at first. But they gradually become green, and the trees become covered with leaves after shedding off the gold colour. Later these leaves will fall off. However, the most expressive point of this poem is the switch from the landscape to the very depth of the poem’s idea. Frost wakens the hidden meaning using only two words of the sixth line – “Eden” and “grief”. Unquestionably, the sixth line puts the new (human) measurement in the poem.

The reader decides what “gold” means depending on his own imagination. He may consider it is the carefree period of childhood, the gift of love, golden feeling of a child’s ignorance, life in general or something else. Frost doesn’t impose his own specific interpretation on his readers. This is the third peculiarity of his poems. Take case of *The Road Not Taken*. Frost lets the reader think: was it the road of life, or some important choice?

“Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both…”  
  
“…I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.”

**The fourth** peculiarity is Frost’s love for nature and his affection to it. It had always been the main figure of his verses. Landscapes appear in every topic of Frost’s poetry, and due to this D. A. Priyatkin, a Candidate of Philology, who wrote a dissertation on the topic “Social and philosophic aspects of Robert Frost’s poetry”, called them “the pivot of all his poetry”. Nature was first seen in Frost’s first poem of his first book.

Moreover, the main questions of life seem to “arise” from the sense of nature. They “widen” the observation of natural (a forest, a brook, stones, flowers, birds, stars, snow) and semi-natural objects (neglected houses, decaying firewood and other things that people “returned to nature”). These objects themselves take at least three linked meanings: a symbol of the idea associatively correlated with this object, the “mirror of soul” and the object itself.

**The fifth peculiarity** is that the unknown is present in nearly all well-known Frost’s poems. For instance, in “West-Running Brook” “something” is the central subject of the character’s reasoning, and “For Once, Then Something” turns out to be the declaration of “realistic” agnosticism.

This poem illustrates Democritus’ thought that “truth is at the bottom of the well”. When the character looks into the well he sees his own “godlike” reflection against a background of reflected sky. After choosing another point of view the character looks under the surface of water. He manages to see “Truth? A pebble of quartz? For once, then, something” at the bottom of the well just for a moment. But then the water drops immediately fall from the walls of this well on its surface and make the water cloudy, so he doesn’t manage to look on “something” carefully. The truth is independent of a man in this case. It may be equal to a “pebble of quartz”, but principally unknowledgeable, because nature itself stands in the way of its cognition.

“…Gives me back in a shining surface picture  
Me myself in the summer heaven godlike…”  
Looking out of a wreath of fern and cloud puffs.

“…I discerned, as I thought, beyond the picture,  
Through the picture, a something white, uncertain,  
Something more of the depths--and then I lost it…”

“…What was that whiteness?  
Truth? A pebble of quartz? For once, then, something.”

The **next peculiarity** is Frost’s ability and the rhythm of live speech. He carries on the tradition of William Wordsworth, who affirmed the poet is just an ordinary man who speaks with ordinary people. It’s worth mentioning that Frost achieves this without the help of blank verse. Moreover, he always hated it. According to A. Ledenev, Ezra Pound tried to stimulate an interest to vers libre (blank verse, which was popular in that time) in Robert Frost, but he flatly refused: rhythm, sound design of poems and using rhymes were not just elements of form, but means of ascertaining the sense of the poem.

Robert Frost spoke much for traditional poetic euphonia. Some of his quotations on it are: “The sound is a gold bar amongst the ore” and “Writing free verse is like playing tennis with the net down”.

It is one of his poetic principles, which began to form in the same years when his philosophy of life was establishing. Another poetic principle is the sound of sense. Frost widely declared it because he was afraid of reproaches for incorrectness and “clumsiness” of verse.

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**Appendix**

**Robert Frost’s poems and their translation made for**

**“Poetic America Poetry Translation Competition”**

1. **The translation of Robert Frost’s poems**

In Hardwood Groves

The same leaves over and over again!

They fall from giving shade above

To make one texture of faded brown

And fit the earth like a leather glove.

Before the leaves can mount again  
To fill the trees with another shade,

They must go down past things coming up.

They must go down into the dark decayed.

They must be pierced by flowers and put

Beneath the feet of dancing flowers.

However it is in some other world

I know that this is way in ours.

В лиственных рощах

Те же листья снова и снова!

Они падают с древа макушки,

Чтобы стать одним блёклым множеством

И лечь вместе на землю подушкой.

Прежде чем они смогут подняться,

Чтоб снова создавать от солнца тень,

Они должны сойти вниз, не остаться,

И обветшать должны в какой-то день.

Цветы проколют их. Они возложены

Вниз, под ноги танцующих цветов.

Не знаю, как в других мирах всё сложено,

Но в нашем листьев путь всегда таков.

(Перевод А. Хотулёвой)



Devotion

The heart can think of no devotion

Greater than being shore to the ocean –

Holding the curve of one position,

Counting an endless repetition.

Привязанность

Мне кажется, что больше нет привязанности,

Чем океана берега обязанности –

Не изменяя положения,

Считать приливов повторения.

(Перевод А.Хотулёвой)



Dust of Snow

The way a crow

Shook down on me

The dust of snow

From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart

A change of mood

And saved some part

Of a day I had rued.

Снежная пыль

То, как ворона

Стрясла на меня

Снежную пыль

В середине дня,

Сняло мне с сердца

Чёрную тень

И спасло мой

Разрушенный день.

(Перевод А. Хотулёвой)



Fire and Ice

Some say the world will end in fire,

Some say in ice.

From what I've tasted of desire

I hold with those who favour fire.

But if it had to perish twice,

I think I know enough of hate

To say that for destruction ice

Is also great

And would suffice.

Огонь и лёд

Кто говорит, что мир в огне сгорит,

А кто-то – что его покроет лёд.

Я много знаю, думаю, читаю,

И я решил – огонь предпочитаю.

На случай, если дважды мир падёт

(Знавал я столько ненависти всё ж),

Я вам скажу – для разрушенья лёд

Вполне хорош, И мне он подойдёт.

(Перевод А. Хотулёвой)



Fireflies in the Garden

Here come real stars to fill the upper skies,

And here on earth come emulating flies,

That though they never equal stars in size,

(And they were never really stars at heart)

Achieve at times a very star-like start.

Only, of course, they can't sustain the part.

Светлячки в саду

Восходят звёзды в небосвод в ночи,

Внизу им подражают светлячки.

Размерами сравниться им нельзя,

И неживые звёздные друзья.

Любой светляк звездой хотел бы быть,

Но надо ведь усилья приложить!

А их у бедных светлячков так мало!

Желаю, чтоб земля им помогала.

(Перевод А. Хотулёвой)



The Last Word of a Blue Bird

As told to a child

As I went out a Crow

In a low voice said, "Oh,

I was looking for you.

How do you do?

I just came to tell you

To tell Lesley (will you?)

That her little Bluebird

Wanted me to bring word

That the north wind last night

That made the stars bright

And made ice on the trough

Almost made him cough

His tail feathers off.

He just had to fly!

But he sent her Good-by,

And said to be good,

And wear her red hood,

And look for the skunk tracks

In the snow with an ax-

And do everything!

And perhaps in the spring

He would come back and sing."

Последнее слово синей птички

Как я рассказывал ребёнку

Только вышел я из дома,

Как сказала мне ворона:

«Я тебя ждала.

Как твои дела?

Я хочу передать:

Надо Лесли сказать:

Её синяя птичка велела

Передать ей (важное дело!).

Прошлой ночью поздно

(Горели ярко звёзды,

Даже изморозь была)

Птичка кашлять начала,

Хвост почти утратила,

И просто улетела!

Но Лесли она велела

Вести себя хорошо,

Носить красный капюшон,

Искать следы скунса в снегах

С молотком в руках,

И делать всё самой!

И, возможно, весной,

Птичка прилетит

И песня прозвучит!

(Перевод А. Хотулёвой)

**Poems created by Arina Khotuleva in the manner of Robert Frost**

The other side

The moon… How beautiful it is!

We love to watch it full and bright,

It often hides behind the trees,

And always beautifies the night.

Although the moon gives us its light

And leads us home,

We’ve never seen its other side –

That side’s alone.

Другая сторона

Луна… Красавица она!

Её мы видим яркой, полной,

И за деревьями луна

Нам часто светит ночью тёмной.

Хотя даёт нам свет луна

И провожает нас домой,

Её другая сторона

Всегда одна, сама с собой.

