

THE SYMBOLISM OF NATURE IN SELECTED POEMS BY ROBERT FROST: A ROLAND BARTHES SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 29-06-2026 Revised: 13-07-2026 Accepted: 25-07-2026 Published: 31-07-2026 Volume: 10 Issue: 3 DOI: 10.33019/lire.v10i3.660	This study examines the symbolism of nature in Robert Frost's <i>The Sound of Trees</i> and <i>Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening</i> using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. The study aims to analyze how natural symbols construct meaning through the processes of denotation, connotation, and myth within Barthes' framework of first- and second-order signification. A qualitative descriptive method with a library research approach was employed. The primary data consist of the two selected poems, while secondary data were obtained from books, journal articles, and relevant literary criticism. The findings reveal that natural elements such as trees, woods, snow, and wind function not merely as descriptions of the physical environment but as symbolic signs that communicate broader cultural and ideological meanings. At the connotative level, these symbols represent ideas of freedom, contemplation, responsibility, personal transformation, and emotional reflection. At the mythological level, the symbols engage with cultural beliefs concerning mobility, self-determination, solitude, purity, and responsibility. However, rather than simply reproducing these cultural myths, Frost's poems also complicate and negotiate them by presenting the tension between personal aspiration and social obligation. The study demonstrates that Barthes' concept of myth provides a useful framework for explaining how ordinary natural imagery operates as a second-order sign system through which cultural values are constructed and critically examined in Frost's poetry.
KEYWORDS	
<i>Robert Frost, symbolism, nature, semiotics, Roland Barthes, poetry</i>	

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature serves as a medium through which human experiences, emotions, and ideas are expressed artistically. Among various literary genres, poetry is regarded as one of the most complex forms because it conveys meaning through condensed language, imagery, and symbolism. According to (Perrine, 1974), poetry communicates ideas indirectly by encouraging readers to interpret meanings beyond the literal level. Likewise, (Eagleton, 2007b) argues that poetic language requires readers to actively construct meaning through symbolic expressions. Consequently, symbolism becomes one of the most significant literary devices for representing abstract concepts, emotions, and philosophical ideas.

One of the poets widely recognized for employing nature symbolism is Robert Frost. Throughout his poems, Frost uses natural elements such as trees, woods, snow, and wind not merely as descriptions of the physical environment but as symbols representing human emotions, personal experiences, and philosophical reflections. Nature in Frost's poetry functions as a meaningful system of signs that encourages readers to interpret meanings beyond the literal



description of the natural world. As (Rajkhowa & Das, 2025a) argue, natural imagery in Frost's poetry reflects philosophical ideas concerning human existence and the relationship between individuals and nature.

Because natural imagery functions as a system of signs, a semiotic approach provides an appropriate framework for interpreting its meanings. Saussure, (1983a) established the concept of the sign as the inseparable relationship between the signifier and the signified. Building upon this foundation, Barthes (1967a, 1972a) proposed that meaning operates through two orders of signification. At the first order, the relationship between the signifier and the signified produces a denotative sign. At the second order, this complete first-order sign becomes the signifier of a broader cultural and ideological meaning, which Barthes refers to as myth. Through this process, meanings that are historically and culturally constructed become naturalized and are perceived as common sense. Accordingly, Barthes' semiotic theory enables literary scholars not only to identify what a symbol represents but also to explain how symbolic meanings participate in the construction and naturalization of cultural ideologies.

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that nature plays a significant role in Robert Frost's poetry. Rajkhowa & Das (2025a) argue that Frost's natural imagery reflects philosophical concerns about human existence, while (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) interprets natural symbols as representations of emotional and psychological development. Other studies have applied semiotic approaches to literary texts, including Dewi & Asrifan (2023) , who employed Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics to analyze Robert Frost's *Love and a Question*, and Ifnaldi & Carolina (2023) , who applied Roland Barthes' framework to Indonesian poetry. Although these studies successfully reveal symbolic meanings, they primarily focus on identifying symbolic representations rather than examining how those meanings develop through Barthes' second-order signification and become vehicles for cultural and ideological myths.

This limitation reveals an important research gap. Existing studies have paid limited attention to how natural symbols in *The Sound of Trees* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* function as first-order signs that become carriers of broader ideological discourses through Barthes' concept of myth. Consequently, questions concerning whether Frost's poems reproduce, expose, complicate, or challenge cultural myths surrounding freedom, mobility, solitude, responsibility, and self-determination remain insufficiently explored. Addressing this gap, the present study applies Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to analyze the natural symbols in both poems through the interconnected processes of signifier, signified, denotation, connotation, and myth. Rather than merely identifying symbolic meanings, this study investigates how Frost's natural imagery constructs, negotiates, and sometimes destabilizes cultural ideologies embedded within representations of nature, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of Barthesian semiotic analysis in literary studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW



This study focuses on two poems written by Robert Frost, namely *The Sound of Trees* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*. Both poems contain dominant natural imagery that contributes significantly to the construction of meaning. The analysis specifically examines natural symbols appearing in the poems and investigates how their meanings are constructed through Roland Barthes' concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth.

2.1 Symbolism in Poetry

Symbolism is one of the most important literary devices used by poets to convey meanings beyond the literal level of language. Symbol refers to an object, image, person, or action that convey meanings beyond its direct and literal sense (Abrams & Harpham, 2015). Through symbolism, poets are able to express complex emotions, philosophical ideas, and cultural values in a concise form. Symbolism also enables readers to interpret literary texts from different perspectives based on their experiences and cultural backgrounds. As a result, symbols often generate multiple layers of meaning that enrich literary interpretation.

(Perrine, 1992) argues that poetry often communicates meaning indirectly through symbolic language, requiring readers to interpret signs and images rather than relying solely on literal understanding. Similarly, Eagleton (Eagleton, 2007a) states that poetic language encourages readers to move beyond surface meanings in order to discover deeper layers of interpretation. In the context of this study, such symbolic language appears in Robert Frost's *The Sound of Trees* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, which use natural imagery as symbols of freedom, contemplation, responsibility, and personal growth.

Natural elements are frequently used as symbols in poetry because they provide concrete images that can represent abstract human experiences. Nature in modern poetry often functions as a reflection of human emotions, psychological conditions, and spiritual experiences. Consequently, natural symbols become an effective medium through which poets communicate universal themes such as freedom, loneliness, responsibility, and personal growth.

Although symbolism enables readers to recognize meanings beyond literal representation, it does not fully explain how symbolic meanings become associated with broader cultural values and ideological assumptions. A symbol may represent concepts such as freedom, solitude, or responsibility, yet the process through which these meanings are culturally constructed and perceived as natural often remains unexplained. For this reason, a semiotic approach is required to examine not only what symbols signify but also how they generate multiple layers of meaning through systems of signification. Roland Barthes' semiotic theory is particularly relevant because it explains how symbolic meanings develop from denotation to connotation and ultimately to myth, where signs function as carriers of cultural and ideological discourse.

2.2 Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory

Semiotics is the study of signs and the processes through which meaning is produced. The foundation of modern semiotics can be traced to Ferdinand de Saussure, who proposed that every sign consists of two inseparable components: the signifier and the signified (Saussure, 1983b). The signifier refers to the physical form of a sign, while the signified refers to the concept or meaning associated with it.

Every sign consists of two inseparable components: the signifier and the signified (Saussure, 1983b). The signifier refers to the physical form of a sign that can be seen, heard, or



read, while the signified refers to the concept or meaning associated with that form. For example, in Frost's poetry, the word "tree" functions as a signifier, whereas the ideas of freedom, growth, or movement may function as the signified depending on the context. Barthes adopts this concept and further expands it into a broader system of signification through denotation, connotation, and myth.

Building upon earlier semiotic theories, Roland Barthes expanded the study of signs by introducing the concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to the literal and direct meaning of a sign (Barthes, 1967b). Connotation refers to secondary meanings that emerge through cultural and emotional associations. In *Mythologies*, (Barthes, 1972b) argues that signs can function within a second-order signification system called myth, through which ideological values become naturalized within society.

According to Barthes, literary texts operate as systems of signs that generate multiple layers of meaning. Therefore, semiotic analysis allows researchers to uncover hidden meanings and ideological messages embedded in literary works. This approach is particularly useful for analyzing poetry because poetic language often relies on symbolic representation rather than direct expression as argued by Michael Riffaterre (Riffaterre, 1978).

2.3 Nature Symbolism in Robert Frost's Poetry

Robert Frost is widely recognized for his extensive use of natural imagery as a medium for exploring human experiences and philosophical concerns. Although his poems often depict rural landscapes and natural scenes, these elements rarely function as mere descriptions of the environment. Instead, they serve as symbols that reflect emotional, psychological, and existential dimensions of human life. Through natural imagery, Frost establishes a close relationship between the external world and internal human experiences. As a result, nature becomes an important medium for conveying complex philosophical ideas in his poetry.

Nature and symbolism are central characteristics of Frost's poetry (Rajkhowa & Das, 2025b). Their study demonstrates that natural objects frequently represent philosophical reflections on human existence. Similarly, M. Johnson (Johnson, 2017) finds that natural imagery in Frost's poetry often symbolizes stages of human emotional and psychological development. This perspective is consistent with the Romantic literary tradition, in which nature functions not merely as physical scenery but also as a space for contemplation, emotional reflection, and spiritual experience. Consequently, natural landscapes in Frost's poetry invite readers to explore both personal introspection and broader philosophical questions through symbolic representation. These findings suggest that Frost consistently employs nature as a symbolic framework rather than merely as descriptive scenery. Consequently, natural imagery plays a crucial role in constructing meaning within his poetic works.

Beyond individual choice, Frost's natural imagery also reflects cultural assumptions concerning mobility, progress, and self-determination, in which movement is frequently associated with freedom and personal development. Such ideological perspectives provide an important context for interpreting *The Sound of Trees*, whose symbolic tension between movement and rootedness extends beyond personal experience to broader cultural values. The symbolic elements found in Frost's poetry often encourage readers to reflect on their own life experiences. They also demonstrate how ordinary natural objects can communicate profound



philosophical messages. Therefore, symbolism becomes one of the defining characteristics of Frost's poetic style.

Among Frost's poems, *The Sound of Trees* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* contain prominent natural symbols that invite deeper interpretation. Trees, woods, snow, and wind function not only as physical elements but also as representations of freedom, contemplation, tranquility, and life's journey. Moreover, these natural symbols are associated with broader cultural meanings. For example, snow has frequently been interpreted as symbolizing purity, silence, and stillness within Western literary tradition, while also suggesting isolation and emotional distance depending on its cultural context (Babb, 1998; Dyer, 1997). Therefore, these poems provide valuable material for semiotic analysis. The symbolic meanings associated with these natural elements extend beyond their literal references. Consequently, a semiotic approach is necessary to reveal the deeper layers of meaning embedded within the poems.

2.4 Previous Studies

Several previous studies have examined symbolism and semiotics in poetry, particularly in relation to Robert Frost's works. Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory has been applied to analyze Robert Frost's *Love and a Question*, revealing that symbolic signs contribute significantly to the construction of poetic meaning (Dewi & Asrifan, 2023). Similarly, Roland Barthes' semiotic framework has been employed to examine the poetry of Sapardi Djoko Damono, demonstrating that the concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth effectively uncover multiple layers of meaning embedded in literary texts (Ifnaldi & Carolina, 2023). These studies confirm the usefulness of semiotic analysis in interpreting poetic symbols; however, they investigate different literary objects and do not specifically examine how Barthes' concept of myth functions in Robert Frost's representation of nature (Dewi & Asrifan, 2023; Ifnaldi & Carolina, 2023).

Studies focusing on Robert Frost's poetry have likewise emphasized the importance of natural symbolism. Natural imagery has been interpreted as reflecting philosophical ideas concerning human existence (Rajkhowa & Das, 2025a). In addition, natural symbols have been described as representations of the speaker's emotional and psychological conditions. These findings demonstrate that nature is a fundamental element in Frost's poetic style. Nevertheless, previous studies primarily interpret natural symbols from thematic and philosophical perspectives without explaining how their meanings are systematically constructed through Barthes' process of signification, particularly at the level of myth as a second-order semiotic system.

More specifically, several scholars have examined *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* and *The Sound of Trees* from different critical perspectives. Brower (1963) interprets *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* as one of Frost's most philosophically complex poems, emphasizing the tension between the attraction of solitude and the speaker's social obligations. Likewise, (Alrdaat et al., 2020) monstrate that the poem's stylistic features reinforce its reflective atmosphere and contribute to the expression of its central themes. Meanwhile, Malik et al., (2023) analyze *The Sound of Trees* through the perspective of language style, arguing that Frost's diction and stylistic choices strengthen the poem's contemplative tone and symbolic expression. Although these studies provide valuable literary interpretations of both poems, they do not



examine how their natural symbols function as second-order signs that generate broader cultural and ideological meanings through Barthes' concept of myth.

Based on the previous studies, two important research gaps remain. First, existing studies on Robert Frost mainly explain what natural symbols represent but pay limited attention to how those meanings are constructed through the interaction between signifier, signified, denotation, connotation, and myth. Second, although previous studies have examined *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* from philosophical and stylistic perspectives (Alrdaat et al., 2020; Brower, 1963) and *The Sound of Trees* from a linguistic perspective, research applying Barthes' semiotic theory has rarely investigated how the natural symbols in these poems generate ideological meanings through second-order signification. Therefore, this study applies Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to analyze the natural symbols in both poems, with particular emphasis on how Barthes' concept of myth reveals the cultural and ideological values that are naturalized through Frost's representation of nature.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method with a library research approach. John W. Creswell (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) states that qualitative research is an approach used to explore and understand the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to social and human problems. Qualitative research was chosen because the study focuses on interpreting meanings embedded in literary texts rather than analyzing numerical data. The research aimed to identify and interpret the symbolism of nature in Robert Frost's poems *The Sound of Trees* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* through Roland Barthes' semiotic theory.

3.1 Data Source

The primary data of this study consisted of two poems by Robert Frost, namely *The Sound of Trees* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, obtained from *The Poetry of Robert Frost* edited . These poems were selected because they contain dominant natural imagery that functions symbolically throughout the texts. The secondary data were collected from books, journal articles, and previous studies related to symbolism, semiotics, Roland Barthes' theory, and Robert Frost's poetry. The secondary data also included scholarly sources on Romanticism, cultural symbolism, mobility, and whiteness to provide theoretical and cultural contexts for interpreting the ideological meanings of the natural symbols identified in the poems.

3.2 Data Collection

The data were collected through close reading and documentation techniques. Close reading was applied to examine the poems repeatedly in order to identify significant natural symbols. Documentation techniques were used to gather relevant theories and scholarly sources supporting the analysis. These sources included studies on Romantic conceptions of nature, cultural meanings of snow and whiteness, mobility, solitude, and previous interpretations of Robert Frost's poems to provide the theoretical and cultural context for the analysis. The identified symbols were then classified according to their frequency, contextual significance, and relevance to the research objectives. This process helped ensure that the selected symbols were closely related to the focus of the study and contributed meaningfully to the analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis



The data were analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework through the process of first- and second-order signification. The analysis examined how meaning develops from denotation to connotation and finally to myth, in which the complete first-order sign functions as the signifier of broader cultural and ideological meaning. The analysis began by identifying the signifier and signified represented by natural elements such as trees, woods, snow, and wind. The next step involved examining their denotative meanings based on literal references. Subsequently, the connotative meanings were interpreted through cultural, emotional, and philosophical associations attached to the symbols. Finally, the mythological meanings were analyzed by examining how the complete first-order sign functions as the signifier of broader cultural and ideological meanings embedded within the poems. To ensure the credibility of the findings, the interpretations were compared with previous studies and relevant theoretical perspectives concerning symbolism and semiotics.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study investigates the symbolism of nature in Robert Frost's *The Sound of Trees* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. The findings reveal that natural elements in both poems function not merely as descriptions of the physical environment but as signs that convey philosophical and ideological meanings. The analysis is presented through three levels of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth. Both symbols are repeatedly emphasized throughout the poem and play an important role in shaping its overall meaning. The presence of these symbols allows readers to connect natural phenomena with human experiences. Through symbolic representation, Frost transforms ordinary natural objects into meaningful literary signs.

4.1 Natural Symbols in *The Sound of Trees*

The analysis reveals that *The Sound of Trees* presents **trees** as the primary natural symbol through which Robert Frost develops multiple layers of meaning. Rather than functioning merely as elements of the natural landscape, the trees operate as semiotic signs that generate meaning through Roland Barthes' process of first- and second-order signification. Following Saussure's concept of the sign, the analysis begins by examining the relationship between the signifier and the signified, which together constitute the first-order sign. This sign is subsequently interpreted at the levels of denotation and connotation before functioning as the signifier of myth, where broader cultural and ideological meanings become naturalized (Barthes, 1972a). The discussion is supported by textual evidence from the poem and relevant scholarly sources to explain how the symbolic meaning of the trees develops from a literal natural object into a cultural sign that reflects and negotiates ideas of mobility, freedom, and responsibility.

Table 1. Semiotic Analysis of the Natural Symbols in *The Sound of Trees*



Symbol	Signifier	Signified	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
Trees	The word "trees" and the image of moving trees	Freedom, personal transformation, and aspiration	Physical trees moving in the wind	Human desire for change and freedom	The cultural myth that individuals should pursue mobility and self-determination, which Frost complicates by emphasizing responsibility, rootedness, and the realities of human life (Barthes, 1972; Cresswell, 2006).

4.1.1 Trees

Following Saussure's concept of the sign, the word "*trees*" functions as the signifier, while the concepts of rootedness, aspiration, and freedom function as the signified. Together, these elements constitute the first-order sign, which serves as the basis for Barthes' process of signification. At the denotative level, the trees refer to actual natural objects that sway in the wind while remaining firmly rooted in the ground. Frost describes them as beings that "*talks of going / But never gets away*" (lines 10–11), presenting the literal image of trees that appear to move but never leave their place. This literal representation establishes the first-order sign before broader cultural meanings emerge.

At the connotative level, the trees symbolize the human desire for freedom, movement, and personal transformation. Although they appear eager to leave, they remain rooted, reflecting the tension between aspiration and limitation. This symbolic meaning becomes more explicit when the speaker declares, "*I shall set forth for somewhere, / I shall make the reckless choice*" (lines 19–20), expressing a determination to pursue change rather than merely imagining it. As (Lentricchia, 1975) argues, Frost's natural imagery frequently reflects the conflict between individual aspiration and the realities that shape human experience. Likewise, observes that ambiguity in Frost's poetry encourages readers to recognize the coexistence of desire and responsibility rather than viewing them as opposing values. Consequently, the trees function not merely as natural objects but as symbolic representations of the human struggle between personal ambition and commitment.

At the mythological level, the complete first-order sign, represented by the image of trees that continually "talk of going" while remaining rooted, functions as the signifier of a broader cultural myth concerning mobility and self-determination. According to (Barthes, 1972a), myth transforms culturally constructed values into meanings that appear natural and unquestionable. In modern society, mobility is frequently associated with freedom, opportunity, and personal achievement (Cresswell, 2006). Through this cultural discourse, the denotative image of rooted trees develops into a second-order sign that represents the ideological belief that individuals should continually pursue progress and shape their own destiny. However, Frost does not simply reproduce this myth. Instead, he complicates it by presenting the contradiction between the



desire for movement and the reality of remaining rooted. The personification of the trees, together with the contrast between their persistent longing to leave and their physical immobility, exposes the limitations of the modern ideology of absolute freedom. Rather than portraying mobility as an unquestioned ideal, the poem suggests that human aspirations are continually negotiated with responsibility, attachment, and the practical realities of life.

The symbolic meaning of the trees is further reinforced by their recurring sound throughout the poem. The recurring sound produced as the trees move, creates an auditory image that accompanies the speaker's contemplation of movement and rootedness. Rather than functioning as an independent symbol, this recurring sound intensifies the meanings already established by the trees by emphasizing the speaker's persistent contemplation of change and the tension between aspiration and reality. Through this auditory imagery, Frost further develops the symbolic role of nature, inviting readers to reflect on the relationship between freedom, responsibility, and the limitations that shape human experience.

Overall, the finding demonstrates that the symbolism of the trees in *The Sound of Trees* extends beyond their literal representation as elements of nature. Through Barthes' process of first- and second-order signification, the trees develop from a denotative image into a cultural sign that conveys broader ideological meanings concerning mobility, freedom, and responsibility. Rather than simply reinforcing the modern cultural ideal of self-determination, Frost complicates this myth by portraying the tension between the desire for movement and the reality of remaining rooted. Consequently, the poem presents nature not merely as a physical setting but as a medium through which broader cultural values and human experiences are expressed and critically negotiated.

4.2 Natural Symbols in *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*

The analysis identifies three dominant natural symbols in *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*: *woods*, *snow*, and *wind*. These symbols contribute significantly to the construction of meaning throughout the poem. Rather than functioning merely as descriptions of the natural landscape, they operate as signs that generate multiple levels of meaning through Barthes' semiotic system. By examining the relationship between the signifier and the signified, the analysis reveals how Frost transforms ordinary natural imagery into representations of cultural and ideological values.

Table 2. Semiotic Analysis of Symbols in *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*

Symbol	Signifier	Signified	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
Woods	The word "woods" and the image of a snow-covered forest	Contemplation	Forest during winter	Solitude and self-reflection	The Romantic ideology that solitude in nature naturally leads to wisdom and self-discovery.



Snow	The word "snow" and the image of a white landscape	Peace, purity, and spiritual calmness	Frozen precipitation	Silence and emotional calmness.	The cultural belief that whiteness and untouched nature signify purity and spiritual peace.
Wind	The word "wind" and the movement of air	Movement continuity, and responsibility	Moving air	Passage of time and live journey	The modern ideology that mobility and progress shape human life, while responsibility guides individual choices.

4.2.1 Woods

Following Saussure's concept of signification, the word "*woods*" functions as the signifier, while ideas such as contemplation, function as the signified. At the denotative level, the woods refer to a forest covered with snow where the speaker briefly stops during his journey. Frost writes, "*Whose woods these are I think I know*" (line 1) and later describes them as "*lovely, dark and deep*" (line 13). These expressions establish the literal setting of the poem while simultaneously inviting readers to consider meanings beyond the physical landscape.

At the connotative level, the woods symbolize a space of contemplation and temporary withdrawal from everyday life. The description "*lovely, dark and deep*" (line 13) is particularly significant because each adjective contributes to the symbolic meaning. The word *lovely* expresses attraction and admiration, suggesting that the speaker is emotionally drawn toward the woods. The word *dark* evokes uncertainty, mystery, and the unknown, while *deep* suggests psychological depth and profound self-reflection. Together, these expressions transform the woods into a symbolic space where the speaker momentarily distances himself from social obligations in order to reflect upon his own existence.

At the mythological level, the complete first-order sign represented by the snow-covered woods functions as the signifier of the Romantic cultural belief that solitude in nature leads to wisdom, self-discovery, and inner peace (Barthes, 1972a). Within literary tradition, forests are frequently portrayed as places of contemplation and spiritual reflection (Eagleton, 2007a). However, Frost does not simply reproduce this myth. By allowing the speaker to admire the "*lovely, dark and deep*" woods before continuing because of his "promises to keep," the poem complicates the Romantic ideal of nature as a place of complete escape (Brower, 1963). Instead,



it suggests that self-discovery may begin in solitude but must ultimately coexist with human responsibility.

4.2.2 Snow

The second dominant symbol is *snow*. At the denotative level, snow refers to frozen precipitation covering the woods, creating a quiet winter landscape. Frost describes the speaker watching the woods "*fill up with snow*," (line 4) presenting a literal image of snowfall that contributes to the stillness of the setting. Connotatively, snow symbolizes silence, purity, and emotional calmness. Its white appearance softens the landscape and creates an atmosphere that encourages contemplation rather than activity. Unlike storms or heavy rain, the gently falling snow produces a peaceful environment in which the speaker experiences temporary emotional balance. The symbol therefore reinforces the reflective mood established by the woods and strengthens the poem's atmosphere of tranquility.

At the mythological level, the complete first-order sign represented by the snow-covered landscape functions as the signifier of the cultural belief that snow and whiteness symbolize purity and spiritual peace. In many Western traditions, whiteness is associated with innocence and renewal (Babb, 1998; Dyer, 1997; Murray, 2021). However, Frost does not simply reproduce this myth. Although the peaceful landscape invites contemplation, the speaker ultimately continues his journey because of his "promises to keep," suggesting that peace is only temporary rather than an escape from life's responsibilities.

4.2.3 Wind

The third important symbol is *wind*. At the denotative level, the wind refers to the movement of air that accompanies the falling snow. Frost writes, "*The only other sound's the sweep / Of easy wind and downy flake*," (line 11,12) emphasizing that the wind is one of the few sounds interrupting the surrounding silence. At the connotative level, the wind symbolizes the passage of time and the inevitability of movement. Although the speaker wishes to remain in the peaceful woods, the presence of the wind subtly reminds him that nature itself is never completely still. The wind introduces gentle motion into the otherwise quiet landscape, symbolizing the continuous flow of life and the impossibility of remaining forever in moments of contemplation.

At the mythological level, the complete first-order sign represented by the movement of the wind functions as the signifier of the modern cultural belief that life is defined by continuous movement and progress (Barthes, 1972a). According to (Cresswell, 2006; Payne, 2023) modern societies frequently associate mobility with freedom, opportunity, and personal development. However, Frost does not simply reinforce this ideology. Through the quiet movement of the wind and the speaker's decision to continue his journey because of his "promises to keep," the poem suggests that progress is shaped not only by movement but also by responsibility and commitment. Thus, the poem complicates the modern myth of mobility by presenting progress as a balance between personal aspiration and social obligation.

The relationship among the woods, snow, and wind demonstrates how Frost constructs a coherent semiotic system in which natural elements function as interconnected signs rather than isolated images. While the woods invite contemplation, the snow intensifies the atmosphere of silence and purity, and the wind reminds the speaker that movement and responsibility cannot be avoided. Together, these symbols illustrate Barthes' process of signification, revealing how



ordinary natural objects communicate broader ideological meanings concerning solitude, responsibility, self-discovery, and the human condition. Rather than simply reproducing Romantic ideals of nature, however, the poem complicates these cultural myths through the speaker's repeated commitment to his "promises to keep," suggesting that contemplation and inner peace ultimately coexist with human responsibility.

4.3 Construction of Meaning through Barthes' Semiotic System

The analysis demonstrates that the natural symbols in *The Sound of Trees* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* operate through Barthes' three levels of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth. At the denotative level, the symbols refer to ordinary elements of the natural world, including trees, woods, snow, wind, and the sound of trees. These elements initially function as physical objects within the poetic setting. According to (Barthes, 1972a), the complete first-order sign subsequently functions as the signifier of a second-order signification through which broader cultural and ideological meanings are produced. Instead, they develop additional meanings through cultural associations and ideological constructions. The findings of this study confirm that Frost's natural imagery functions as a complex semiotic system rather than as decorative descriptions of nature.

At the connotative level, each natural symbol acquires meanings that reflect human experiences and emotional conditions. In *The Sound of Trees*, the trees and their sound symbolize the speaker's desire for freedom, personal transformation, and self-development, while simultaneously expressing the limitations created by responsibility and attachment. Likewise, in *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, the woods symbolize contemplation and temporary withdrawal from daily obligations, the snow creates an atmosphere of silence and emotional peace, and the wind represents the continuous movement of life. These meanings emerge not from the natural objects themselves but from the cultural and emotional associations that readers bring to the process of interpretation. Consequently, Frost transforms ordinary landscapes into symbolic representations of universal human experiences.

The mythological level provides the most significant contribution of this study because it explains how natural symbols communicate ideological meanings rather than merely philosophical reflections. According to Barthes, myths are second-order sign systems that transform culturally constructed values into ideas that appear natural and unquestionable. The findings reveal that these symbols do not function in the same way at the mythological level. While some symbols reproduce widely accepted cultural beliefs, others complicate or question them through the speaker's experience and choices. The trees and the wind complicate the modern ideology of mobility and self-determination by showing that freedom is continually negotiated with responsibility. Likewise, the woods and the snow draw upon Romantic and cultural beliefs concerning solitude, purity, and spiritual peace, yet the speaker's decision to continue his journey prevents these myths from becoming absolute truths. These ideological meanings demonstrate that Frost's natural imagery participates in broader cultural discourses rather than functioning solely as personal expression.

Furthermore, the comparison between the two poems reveals a consistent semiotic pattern in Frost's representation of nature. Although the poems employ different settings and symbols, both portray nature as a medium through which individuals negotiate the relationship between personal desire and social responsibility. In *The Sound of Trees*, the speaker imagines leaving in



search of freedom but remains aware of the realities that prevent complete independence. Similarly, in *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, the speaker is attracted by the peaceful solitude of the woods yet ultimately chooses to continue his journey because of the promises he must fulfill. This parallel demonstrates that nature in Frost's poetry does not encourage escape from reality; instead, it becomes a symbolic space where human beings confront the tension between individual aspiration and social obligation.

These findings distinguish the present study from previous research on Robert Frost's poetry. Earlier studies primarily interpreted natural symbols as expressions of philosophical ideas, emotional experiences, or thematic concerns. By applying Barthes' semiotic theory, particularly his concept of second-order signification, this research demonstrates that Frost's symbols also function as ideological signs that naturalize particular cultural beliefs about freedom, responsibility, contemplation, and self-determination. Therefore, the contribution of this study extends beyond identifying symbolic meanings by explaining how those meanings are systematically constructed through Barthes' process of signification.

Overall, the findings confirm that nature in Frost's poetry should not be understood merely as a descriptive background or a reflection of individual emotion. Instead, natural imagery operates as a semiotic system in which literal objects become vehicles for cultural meanings and ideological values. Through Barthes' concepts of signifier, signified, first-order and second-order signification, denotation, connotation, and myth, this study demonstrates that Frost transforms ordinary elements of nature into signs that communicate broader cultural and ideological meanings while simultaneously revealing the tensions embedded within those meanings.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the symbolism of nature in Robert Frost's *The Sound of Trees* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* through Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. The findings demonstrate that natural elements such as trees, woods, snow, and wind function not merely as descriptions of the physical environment but as symbolic signs that communicate multiple layers of meaning. Through the processes of denotation, connotation, and myth, these natural symbols represent broader ideas concerning freedom, contemplation, responsibility, personal transformation, and human experience.

The analysis further reveals that Frost's natural imagery operates through Barthes' process of second-order signification, in which the complete first-order sign becomes the basis for the construction of broader cultural meanings. Rather than functioning in the same way, the myths represented by the symbols are negotiated differently throughout the two poems. In *The Sound of Trees*, the symbolism of the trees complicates the modern cultural ideal of mobility and self-determination by emphasizing the coexistence of aspiration and responsibility. Likewise, in *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, the woods, snow, and wind draw upon cultural beliefs concerning solitude, purity, and movement, yet these beliefs are ultimately moderated by the speaker's decision to continue his journey because of his "promises to keep." Consequently, Frost's poetry does not simply reinforce cultural myths but presents them as ideological constructions that are continually negotiated through human experience and social responsibility.

This study contributes to literary semiotic scholarship by demonstrating how Barthes' concept of myth helps explain the ideological dimensions of natural symbolism in Robert Frost's



poetry. Rather than merely identifying what natural symbols represent, this study explains how their meanings are systematically constructed through the relationship between signifier, signified, denotation, connotation, and myth. The findings also highlight that Frost's representation of nature extends beyond personal emotion and philosophical reflection, functioning instead as a medium through which broader cultural values and ideological assumptions are expressed, negotiated, and critically examined.

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis is limited to two poems by Robert Frost, namely *The Sound of Trees* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, so the findings cannot be generalized to his entire body of work. Second, the interpretation of natural symbols through Barthes' semiotic framework inevitably involves a degree of interpretive subjectivity, as different readers may construct different connotative and mythological meanings. Third, the analysis focuses only on selected natural symbols that are considered most relevant to the research objectives, meaning that other potentially significant symbols are beyond the scope of this study. Finally, although the study incorporates relevant literary criticism and cultural scholarship to support the interpretation of myth, it provides only limited historical contextualization of the cultural discourses surrounding mobility, Romanticism, and whiteness. Future research may address these limitations by examining a broader corpus of Robert Frost's poetry, exploring additional natural symbols, or integrating Barthesian semiotics with other literary approaches to enrich the interpretation of nature symbolism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express sincere gratitude to Allah SWT for His blessings, guidance, and mercy throughout the completion of this study. The authors also extend appreciation to the lecturers of the English Literature Department for their valuable knowledge, guidance, and encouragement during the research process. Special thanks are addressed to family and friends for their continuous support, motivation, and understanding. Finally, the authors are grateful to all scholars whose works and publications contributed significantly to the completion of this research.

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