



Robert Frost and the Challenge of Darwin

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Robert Frost and the Challenge of Darwin gives us a new and compelling portrait of the poet-thinker as a modern Lucretius--moved to examine the questions raised by Darwin, and willing to challenge his readers with the emerging scientific notions of what it meant to be human.

Combining both intellectual history and detailed analysis of Frost's poems, Robert Faggen shows how Frost's reading of Darwin reflected the significance of science in American culture from Emerson and Thoreau, through James and pragmatism. He provides fresh and provocative readings of many of Frost's shorter lyrics and longer pastoral narratives as they illustrate the impact of Darwinian thought on the concept of nature, with particular exploration of man's relationship to other creatures, the conditions of human equality and racial conflict, the impact of gender and sexual differences, and the survival of religion.

The book shows that Frost was neither a pessimist lamenting the uncertainties of the Darwinian worldview, nor a humanist opposing its power. Faggen draws on Frost's unpublished notebooks to reveal a complex thinker who willingly engaged with the difficult moral and epistemological implications of natural science, and showed their consonance with myths and traditions stretching back to Milton, Lucretius, and the Old Testament. Frost emerges as a thinker for whom poetry was not only artistic expression, but also a forum for the trial of ideas and their impact on humanity.

Robert Frost and the Challenge of Darwin provides a deeper understanding not only of Frost and modern poetry, but of the meaning of Darwin in the modern world, the complex interrelations of literature and science, and the history of American thought.

"A forceful, appealing study of the Frost-Darwin relation, which has gone little noted by previous scholars, and a fresh explanation of Frost's ambivalent relation to modernism, which he scorned but also influenced" -- William Howarth, Princeton University

Robert Faggen is Associate Professor of Literature, Claremont McKenna College and Adjunct Associate Professor, Claremont Graduate School.

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