

The Poetry of Robert Frost: Themes and Technique

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ABSTRACT

Robert Frost's life and poetry is full of curious contradictions. He composed poetry using traditional theories and practices of versification. Frost said there is striking analogy between the course of a true poem and that of a true love, each begins as an impulse, a disturbing excitement to which the individual surrenders himself. An attempt has been made in this article to show American poetry as reflected in the American poet Robert Frost. His poetry is the poetry that never pretends it is the poetry of conversation and playing style. It sums up the past and enlivens the present for happy and wise future. He transcends time and space. It is universal in its appeal. It is powerful enough to express both things and thoughts. It is symbolic it plays on modern technique of contrasts and suggestions.

KEY WORDS: *Beauty, Duty, Metaphor, Nature, Inspiration, Memories*

ARTICLE

Robert Lee Frost holds a unique and almost isolated portion in American letters. Though his career fully spans the modern period and though it is impossible to speak of him as anything other than a modern poet, it is difficult to place him in the main tradition of poetry. Frost stands at the cross roads of 19th C tendencies and traditions as well as parallels to the works of his 20th Century contemporaries. His work was initially published in England before it was published in America. He is highly regarded for his realistic depictions of rural life and his command of American colloquial speech. He won four times Pulitzer Prize winner in poetry, depicted realistic New England life through language and situations familiar to the common man. He was a special guest at President John. F. Kennedy's inauguration; Frost became a poetic force and the unofficial "Poet laureate" of the United States. The greatest of all modern poets, T.S. Eliot and many other poets are profoundly influenced by the technique and themes of the imagist Robert Frost. His poetry is deceptively simple; He uses speech tones for his poetic style. Though his style is speech rhythm, it is elevated and inimitable. Frost further created the illusion of a New England Farmer-poet writing the poetry of opinion, the woods, since Frost strove hard towards pastoral poetry of the woods that are lovely, dark deep and Frosty. He has come out of the restrictions of the contemporary poets in their quest for new ways to be new and teased them for their desperate attempts to follow same body. He said,

"Poetry, for example, was tried without punctuation. It was tried without capital letters. It was tried without any image but those to the eye. It was tried without phrase, epigram, coherence, logic and consistency. It was tried without ability, these many things where it tried without, and what had we left? Still something "Frosts" introduction to king Jasper."¹

Frost has said many times that there is a striking analogy between the course of a true poem and that of a true love, each begins as an impulse, a disturbing excitement to which the individual surrenders himself.

"No one can really hold that the ecstasy should be static and stand still in one place. It begins in delight, it inclines to the impulse, it assumes direction with the first line lay down, it runs the course of lucky events and ends in a clarification of life "—Frosts" The Figure a poem Makes."²

Robert Frost, America's 'the most beloved poet', describes poetry as 'an act of clarification' and, through his verse expresses nature as the most revealing mirror of human personality. Nature is the metaphoric home for

Frost, where he finds for himself a sense of harmony and peace. This conviction led him to explore the darkest forces of both nature and humanity. Frost, four time winner of Pulitzer Prize celebrates the complementarities of the natural world and the familial world. While doing so, he intends to strengthen the bond between the two worlds by discovering the deep connections existing in them. He deliberately attaches the human qualities to them so as to integrate the two—the human and the natural to celebrate the zest for creativity available in them. In the poem, “Dust of Snow” he narrates how the beauty of nature changes his mood and how he becomes tension free.

Frost recollects his own childhood in the poem “The Birches,” when he himself was a swinger of birches. As a child, he enjoys the swing and also the natural beauty when the wind blows. When the birches swing up and down and the ice on them shines, they take on many colored hues owing to the reflection of sun the rays. The beauty of nature steals away all his sufferings. Thus, he accepts nature as his home and wants to live here forever: It’s when I’m weary of considerations, And life is too much like a pathless wood.

The childhood memories represent a sense of bonding, an attachment with the place and love for a passive relationship with nature. In “The Death of the Hired Man” Frost gives the definition of home and its importance in human life. According to Frost, “home” is a shield that protects us from the piercing arrows of chill outside and from the fierce blows of death:

“Home is the place where, when you
have to go there, They have to take
you in.
I should have called it
Something you somehow haven’t to deserve.”³

The first kind of recognition which Frost suggests as a part of poetic impulse may be seen by examining his “stopping by woods”. The poem is a dramatic lyric which breaks into the middle of an incident so that there is a drama in miniature, revealed with setting and lighting and actors. Frost never mystifies nature as *Wordsworth*. It is only a backdrop to his profound philosophical thoughts. He is more a poet of man than a nature he sees man as always cradled within nature.

William Wordsworth, the prophet of nature took pleasure in turning from the present to find an emotional excitement and inspiration in happy memories of the past. Paradoxically *Wordsworth* goes to the vernal woods to escape from the unpleasantness of the present. Frost’s method is diametrically opposed. He takes pleasure in ignoring the ultimate reality takes pleasure even in turning his back on the past, until a momentary experience is illuminated with richen value by that his past experience accidentally brings to the present.

He says, “For me the initial delight is in the surprise of remembering something I did not know I knew, I am in a place, in a situation, as if I had materialized from a cloud or risen out of the ground. There is a glad recognition of the long lost and the rest follows. Frost does not imply that the poem writes itself. The poet must establish a careful balance between the present experience and the remembered experience. This equilibrium is truly a large part of artistry. To attain this equilibrium you adjust yourself to the motion of the thing itself”. The projection of the poem arises out of the poet’s pleasure in discovering words, images, metaphors, and phrases, native to the grain of emotion, thought and situation.

Frost is above all a nature poet again he is not a nature mystic like *Wordsworth*. Man has need for nature, though he should never make the mistake of crossing the wall into her pasture. The woods are lovely, dark and deep against the snowfall, a place to linen and forget duty; but to linger only and not to stay. Frost believes that nature is different towards man; Man is to survive by being courageous and fearless in the face of natural barriers. There is much in nature against us, but we forget including human nature, in peace and war, And it must be a little more in favour of man (our hold on a planet).

To sustain such injuries as nature inflicts, “its well to have all kinds of feelings, for it’s all kinds of a world. And frost expresses all kinds of his feelings towards the natural world. *Wordsworth* would never have (even in his worst dream) written like this. He never sees in the natural world the pervading spirit which *Words worth* saw. What is high seriousness is *Wordsworth* is humor in Frost. In Frost’s nature- poetry we find the picture of lonely man, the solitary protagonists in Home burial, stopping by woods, Birches etc. Frost is above all the poet of humanity. He picturises the actual life lived by the people in New England and New Hampshire. He has written on many subjects, but his external subject is humanity. Others have written about people, but Frost’s poem is the people. They converse and tell their stories with the freedom of common speech. His treatment of man is significant. He gives humanity a better place than nature in his heart and poetry.

His treatment of mankind is based on realism. He does not idealize or glorify his men and women. No American written knows his subjects, people and place, as thoroughly as he does. Frost once said “There are two kinds of realism, the one who shows potato with its dust and the other who is satisfied to show a potato brushed clean. I am inclined to be the second kind.

Frost is mainly interested in the contradictions which his characters show in their makeup. He believes that life

itself is a bundle of contradictions. He lets them express their views freely and frankly through the medium of dialogue in the poems. We may or may not agree with them and their stand, this is the liberal understanding of frost for instance. Mending wall is both a plea for doing away with the wall “*Something there is that does not love of wall*”⁴ and a plea for its retention.

In Birches he shows a village boy and his pass time climbing the birches, not only in doing so he becomes universal, but he also gives his approval to what the boy does. So was once myself a swinger of birches. And So, I dream of going back to be. Frosts people do not suffer from a sense of ignobility and lack of courage. They strive towards their goal without a shoulder, despite their sensory existence. They are in brief brave and heroic in advice situation. Finally, Frost’s poetry is the poetry that never pretends. It is the poetry of conversation and plain style. It seems up the past and enlivens the present for a happy and wise future. It transcends time and space. It is universal in its appeal. It is powerful enough to express both things and thoughts. It is symbolic it plays on the modern technique of contrasts and suggestions.

“We talked and laughed, but for the most part listened while Robert Frost kept on and on and on”.⁵

Holding us with shrewd turns and racy quips like a piece of ice on hot coals his poetry melts on to its his ultimate goal- beginning in delight and ends in wisdom. Frosts poetry is subjective. His poems were used by President Kennedy for his election campaign. He participated in the American Presidents inauguration program. He visited Russia in 1961 as a cultural ambassador. And it was then he read his poem “Mending wall” – The poet’s reprimand to the Russians. He died in Boston in 1963. President Kennedy mourns him in the following words. In Robert Frost’s poem the speaker actively chooses solitude and isolation in order to learn more about themselves by not interacting with nature but by observing and meditating. They find solitude among trees, besides running water or under the moon and in Nature, which help them to rediscover the self and creativity. They feel the warmth of home in the laps of nature and find new insights which provides relax from mental stress and physical labour. So, Frost gives more stress to human relationships in general and the relationships within home in particular, which he believes help to develop the self. He agrees that home is the epicenter of the universe which guides its inmates in right direction. The learning process of a learner (from the child-hood) begins from his/her own family which plays a very significant role in his/her personality development and outlook. The values which she/he learns from his/her family helps him/her to grow in the present competitive world. The present study shows that emotional intelligence is a part of requirement process which defines one’s control over emotions and handling skillfully emotion to achieve the target.

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