

Robert Frost: A World Poet

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Abstract : *Robert Frost's life is filled with curious contradictions. He wrote poetry using traditional theories and practices of versification. Frost found 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. Speaking about the relationship between the poem and the reader, Frost says the poem is twice blest once by the poet and then by the reader. Pertinent themes of love, nature, alienation are typically universal in the poetry of Robert Frost which sum up the past, enlivens the present and anticipates the future transcending the barriers of time and space. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the qualities that go into making Robert Frost, a truly global poet.*

Keywords : *Beauty, Duty, Metaphor, Nature, Inspiration, Alienation, Love, Memories, New England, America, world Poet.*

INTRODUCTION

Robert Frost is the most important modern American poet and the second most quoted author in English only after William Shakespeare. Frost's poetry has touched every dimension of human life making him a world poet indeed. Winner of four Pulitzer prizes, Robert Frost has touched each and every dimension of human existence in his poetry and has left a rich legacy for the posterity. Modern poets like T.S. Eliot Ezra Pound are profoundly influenced by the technique and themes of Robert Frost. Pound thanked him for breaking away from "stilted Pseudo- literary language" and daring to write in the natural speech of New England. He was a special guest at President John F Kennedy's inauguration where he recited the Gift Outright at the age of 88. Frost remained the unofficial Poet laureate of the United States whole of his life. President Kennedy mourned his death in 1963, "His death impoverished all of US but he has bequeathed his nation a body of imperishable verse from which Americans will forever derive joy and understanding. He has promises to keep and miles to go and now he sleeps".

Frost struggled a lot, both in his personal and professional life, for his reputation and recognition and his popularity grew gradually and never declined in the course of his life or afterwards. When Frost moved to New England, the process of industrialization had set in pushing up people in the vicious trap of struggle for bare survival. Consequently, Frost had to grapple with quite gloomy future. The socio-economic turbulence touched Frost's view and vision of life. Frost portrays man as a solitary figure, alienated from Nature and God. At times, his view of human condition in the world becomes a little terrifying though honestly speaking Frost does not reject life but calls for a hectic and challenging life in spite of all limitations. Man's environment as seen by frost is quite indifferent to man, neither hostile nor benevolent. Man is alone and frail as compared to the vastness of the universe. Such a view of man on earth confronting the total universe is inevitably linked with certain themes in frost's poetry. Whether men live together or apart, the stark reality remains that he has to exist only as an individual. Isolation and the awareness that he is, "no more than grass for the mower" (Gerber 147), lay the seed for the fear of loneliness deep in the heart. It gradually grows up into a parasitical creeper and ultimately engulfs the peace in the man. The girl in The Fear of Man, who walks breathlessly at midnight to her home, symbolizes man's thronging for warmth and reassurance. In Frost's dramatic narrative particularly in North of Boston, this theme gets strongly advocated. The fear of Old Silas in The Death of the Hired Man, his wish to die by a familiar hearth: the timid professor in A Hundred Collars his unwarranted suspicion resulting up in isolation, dramatize a familiar human conflict. The struggle between the need for companionship and the innate fear of the unfamiliar becomes quite prominent.

Nature is frequently used in his poetry though Frost denied being a nature poet. "I'm not a nature poet," he once declared, "there is almost always a person in my poems."

Robert Frost uses nature as a background to illustrate people's psychological struggle with everyday life. His poems usually begin with an observation in nature and proceed to the connection to human situation, such as loneliness, helplessness, confusion, and indifferent human relationship to a philosophical level. Frost concentrates on the dramatic conflict happened in the natural world, such as the confusion and dilemma in life in Mending Wall, and the danger of nature in Exposed Nest. Before Frost, Wordsworth believed in perfect harmony between nature and mankind while Nature in Emerson's eyes is symbolic of spirit. In Frost's poetry, there exists bright side of nature in Tree at My Window. The poet makes a comparison between himself and the tree of the window. The rustle of the leaves could be meaningless talks. However, the poet has seen the tree tossed in the storms, and the tree has also witnessed the poet swept by the storm in his dreams. The poet's fate is closely connected with that of the tree. The poet feels that they are companions—the tree is standing up in the natural weather, and the poet is standing up in his inner weather.

But tree, I have seen you taken and tossed,
And if you have seen me when I slept,
You have seen me when I was taken and swept
And all but lost.

The same Frost in Two Tramps in Mud Time, warns the reader about the lurking danger beneath the apparently calm façade.
Be glad of water but don't forget.
The lurking frost in the earth beneath.

Robert W. French reveals in Robert Frost and the Darkness of Nature that there is impenetrable barrier between man and nature. Hence his comment on the human issue of modern world his realistic treatment of Nature, his employment of symbolic and metaphysical techniques and the projection of the awareness of human problems of the modern society in his poetry makes him a world poet.

Loneliness is hallmark of modern civilization which is accentuated with the advent of social media. The modern man appears to have been alienated and cut off from the society and culture and the same alienation and isolation is palpable in the poetry of Robert Frost. Frost writes in Desert Places, "The loneliness includes me unawares." Man is essentially alone, as enunciated Frost's poetry. Frost is not so much concerned with depicting the cultural ethos of New England people as with presenting them "caught up in a struggle with the elementary problem of existence". The New England of Frost reflects his consciousness of an agrarian society isolated within an urbanized world. Man

is alone in the countryside or in the city as vindicated in Acquainted with the Night.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet

When far away an interrupted cry

But not to call me back or say good-by;

The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost by John F. Lynen is well worth reading in its entirety for insight into the use of pastoralism as a poetic device. Lynen's observation of how Frost uses nature in his poetry is particularly useful. In Theory of Literature, Austin Warren makes a comment on Robert Frost's natural symbolism to show that in most of his poems, there are some natural symbols which are quite difficult for readers to grasp and it is for his natural symbolism that he has drawn a wide audience all over the world. In Home Burial the lady suffers from a terrible sense of self-alienation, as well as alienation from her surroundings. And, more than the physical loneliness, man suffers from the loneliness within.

I have it in me so much nearer home

To scare myself with my own desert places.

Like many other modern poets, Frost deals with the tension and problems of modern people. Just as in The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock by T. S. Eliot, the lead character is suffering from indecision to propose the woman he loves. The same indecision and dilemma is palpable in The Road Not Taken by Frost, the speaker hesitates to choose one of the two roads passing through the yellow woods.

And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could.

Frost like T.S. Eliot is a passionate promoter of modernity. He portrays the breakdown of values, disenchantment of modern man. His poem deal with characters who suffer from aggravation, loneliness, helplessness, and homesickness which are known as modern evils and ills. Frost's poems are liked for their modernity which implies a broad outlook, a fusion of the metaphysical and the symbolic. The constraints of modern life are portrayed in the poem The Hill Wife. Frost has portrayed the cumulative sense of fear and marital estrangement of an isolated woman who is misunderstood by her husband.

Birches shows his realistic attitude to life and it also tells us that man constantly aspires for things beyond the world. Frost suggests that one should not do it rather one should know and love the things of the world and let the afterlife take care of its self, so the Speaker says that: "Earth's the right plans for love. I don't know where it's likely to go better."

Frost earnestly believed that the world of nature is not world of dreams but is much harsher and demanding. His poetry emphasizes the otherness of nature. His approach towards nature is scientific, rational and objective. He presents both bright and bleak aspects of nature. He proves his point by giving the example of his poem, Stopping by Woods in a Snowy Evening:

"Woods are lovely dark and deep

But I have promises to keep

And miles to go before I sleep

A mile to go before I sleep:"

A concern with barrier is another leading theme in Frost's poetry. Man is always erecting and trying to bring down barriers- between man and environment, between man and man, between country and country. To Frost, these barriers seem favorable to mutual understanding and respect. Frost insists on recognizing these barriers instead of trying to tear them down as in the modern trend. And he even builds them wherever necessary as exemplified by Mending Wall. Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening conveys the sense of an impenetrable and indefinite universe. Frost's human beings are aware of the gap between the ideal and the actual.

In most of Frost's poems, the speaker undergoes a process of self-discovery. The wood-chopper of "Two Tramps in Mud Time" realizes by the end of the poem that he chops wood for love of work only but love and need should not be separated. The nature can at once be a destroyer, causing frustration and disappointment. Frost driving a middle path seems to declare, that nature is at once harsh and mild. Frost's observation regarding man's relationship to man is quite opposing. For instance, The Tuft of Flowers, speaks of the bond that lie between the individuals effecting universal brotherhood.

Men work together,

I told him from the heart,

whether they work together or apart.

Symbolism is the use of one object or action (a symbol) to represent or suggest something else. It is a prevalent use for poets to express their ideas through indirect statements, thus invest the object with an implied meaning. A poem may have a surface meaning but it may also have a deeper meaning which is understood by the reader only by interpreting the deeper significance of the words and phrases used. Frost's poetry always presents the general through a particular scene. After Apple Picking is a good example of Frost's symbolic poem. The act of harvesting apples is a symbol for the daily work in life. Afterwards, the speaker reveals his insight.

Essence of winter sleep is on the night,

The scene of apples: I am drowsing off.

The speaker is aware of the coming winter after the harvesting autumn. On the literal level, it is a natural cycle for change of seasons, and sleep is what one must get during the night. On the deeper meaning, winter is a symbol for death. The speaker knows that he is getting old, and death is a natural end for him. After accomplishing the task in life, the speaker feels that he is drowsing off which suggests that he is ready for death. This universality of theme makes Frost a truly global poet.

Lionel Trilling defined Frost as a "terrifying poet" who depicted a "terrifying universe. Trilling's speech made many critics re-examined Frost's poetry, which they once thought bright and optimistic. In fact, the "dark" quality in Frost's poetry is so conspicuous that it will by no means escape our eyes.

The "dark" quality brings about the dark side of nature in Frost's poetry. The word "dark", in its various forms, often occurs in Frost's nature poetry. "Into My Own", the first poem in Frost's first book, A Boy's Will, begins:

One of my wishes is that those dark trees,

So old and firm they scarcely show the breeze,

Were not, as'twere, the merest mask of gloom,

But stretched away unto the edge of doom.

Robert Frost, in a foreword to his Collected Poems (1939), wrote: a poem "begins in delight and ends in wisdom." Frost's wisdom has been well recognized which comes largely from his communication with nature. He is a remarkable reader of nature who reads and thinks and

learns. What's more, he is always trying to share with us what he has learned. Frost expects us to see what he has seen, and learn what he has learned or even beyond.

CONCLUSION

Whether we talk of Mending Wall, Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening, The Road not Taken, Birches, Nothing Gold Can Stay, all his poetry has a universal theme and appeal and keeps on inspiring people across the globe which makes Robert Frost a truly global poet. The poet/critic Randall Jarrell often praised Frost's poetry and wrote, "Robert Frost, along with Stevens and Eliot, seems to me the greatest of the American poets of this century. Frost's virtues are extraordinary. No other living poet has written so well about the actions of ordinary men; his wonderful dramatic monologues or dramatic scenes come out of a knowledge of people that few poets have had, and they are written in a verse that uses, sometimes with absolute mastery, the rhythms of actual speech." He also praised "Frost's seriousness and honesty," stating that Frost was particularly skilled at representing a wide range of human experience in his poems.

According to Wilcox and Barron, Robert Pinsky, the 1999 poet laureate of the United States, conducted a yearlong survey of Americans, asking for their favorite poet, and Frost won national poll by a large and impressive margin. It sufficiently demonstrates Robert Frost as the representative poet of universal dimension.

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