

Artistic Vision embedded in Reconciliation of Contraries and opposites: An evaluation of selected poems of WBYeats and Robert Frost

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ABSTRACT - Art being imitation of life and life being so rich and varied ,complex and intriguing, vague and uncertain that art must inherit these aspects of life in its form, structure and content .The basic function of art and an artist ,for that matter, is to record the human experiences with utmost honesty and entirety and ,as a result ,the interaction between man and itself, man and man, man and nature man and God, man and his environment inform the content of any art form and more so in poetry .As Robert Frost himself observes :‘every poem is an epitome of the great predicament of a figure of the will braving alien entanglements’. The present paper attempts to traverse the artistic trajectory of both W B Yeats ad Robert Frost in the light of their double or circular vision about life and its manifestation in art ,that is to say ,their poetry .In its pursuit of locating their double vision in the inevitability of conflicts, the present paper attempts to make sense of life at both levels -superficial and philosophical level as encapsulated in the poems of WB Yeats and Robert Frost. The elements of romanticism and realism put together create a new combination in the aesthetic sensibilities of both the poets when art aspires for higher goals of achieving unity between the real and ideal ,mortal and Immortal ,transient and eternal ,physical and spiritual ,near and distant and more so when one is the mirror image of the other.

Terms :tension ,conflict, ambivalence ,site of contestation ,double or circular vision

The nostalgic dream of recurrence of a happy past in a future time is reflected in every culture ‘s cherished myth of an age in which man lived in harmony with himself and the community. Due to a marked attention of the Western mind to matter and material existence, it may be more legitimate for a western writer to feel nostalgic for utopia. The writer has always considered his autonomy over the site of conflict and entangled himself dialectically to make sense of it while considering it a major springboard to soar higher in the realms of philosophical insights and spiritual renderings .

Sigmund Freud took the Western world by storm when he explained that man is born with savage instincts and dangerous ,aggressive sexual propensities .He sought to account for the human predicament and the disintegrated self of man by means of what he called the Oedipus Complex. Since man is relatively helpless ,society must either tame or perish him .This proposition was challenged by Kohut contending that explaining human vulnerability in terms of the Oedipus complex would be to treat a complex problem in a simplistic manner. He sees man as “born ready to confront his drowning in an active dialogue creating his self as part of the world and the world as part of himself”. Unlike Freud, he seeks to favour the idea of culture as man’s expressed wholeness. Kohut comes close to defining the art which deals with the wounded self and gives a meaning to the inevitability of pain and suffering .As Josef Frank put in *The Widening Gyre* :

“ Art is no longer a miraculous gift of an individual genius to mankind which creates a freedom from destiny .Now it is only a symbol that expresses man's collective and eternal struggle to transcend the conditions of his servitude”.

This eternal contestation of opposites is the crux of life which paves way to some sort of reconciliation or harmony eventually as these contraries are not mutually exclusive but interdependent. Harmony in contrariety as in the case of the bow and the lyre". The conflicting elements can not be reduced to a common denominator. If they are equal and opposite, they can balance each other out in a coexistence of contraries" resulting in a dialectical unity. But one thing that is undeniably to be taken for granted is a contraries and its manifestation in art is the staple diet for an artist. WB Yeats's first predilection towards the theory of 'Art for life's sake' conceded the world of reality as beautiful but dead and the world of reality as harsh but living. Yet Yeats was ever attempting to yoke the two in a tense balance. The conflict that the antinomies between dream and reality caused in his mind could neither be resolved nor ignored. In the second book of 'A Vision' Yeats writes:

My instructors identify consciousness with conflict, not with knowledge, substitute for subject and their attendant logic a struggle towards harmony, towards unity of being logical and emotional conflict alike lead towards a reality which is concrete, sensuous and bodily. So W B Yeats takes conflict as a good not a necessary evil but a subjective merit. Of his instructors he says again- 'it was a part of their purpose to affirm that all the gains of man come from conflict with the opposite of his true being'. For WB Yeats poetry is a search for Unity of Being, a search which would fuse physical and spiritual, and finally 'wither into truth'-

Though leaves are many roots is one
 Though all the lying days of my youth
 I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun
 Now I may wither into the truth.

(The coming of wisdom with time)

Yeats' poetry is marked by a duality. The two blood streams that run in his veins represents two contradictory strains. The double vision of Michael Robertes (1919) juxtaposes opposite pictures of man: one in the dark phase- single, soulless and willless surrounded by dark dread forces busy pounding it into bits but only to shape the happy animal body for the second phase -where the soul is pure spinning round and round between Sphinx (intellect) and Buddha (love) like that dance of a girl. It was his ambition, as Joseph Hone says, to be able to play with hostile minds as Hamlet played, to look into lion's face, as it were, with quivering eyelash. Conflict, tension, struggle are to be celebrated as they are manifestations of churning of thought process, mind in its characteristic act as said 'Tension is but vigour of the mind' (The Circus Animals' Desertion). The fascinating and arresting aspect about the difficult phase is not that it creates a problem but that it makes a drama. "Only the greatest obstacle that can be contemplated without despair rouses the will to full intensity."

Likewise, Robert Frost also seeks to entertain conflicts and unite them to achieve harmony in the end. He acknowledges that man's very existence depends upon such a condition of tension and conflict. Straumann draws attention to Frost's polarity, his power to holding contrary states of mind in unison. This sense of polarity finds visibility here- 'Speaking of contraries see how the Brook in that white wave runs counter to itself' (West Running Brook).

So the poetry of Yeats and Frost sets the tone and path for the reader not only to accept the contraries in life but to celebrate them because the delights of life lie in that junction only. What they offer as a sort of manual to the problems of individual choices is on the way of life is a mind in full

maturity , a mind that leaves us with impressions of harmony personal relationship, of contraries united of a balance achieved with ease between life and death, love and fear , physical and spiritual , fair and foul, Earth and sky .Lawrence Lerner says about Yeats: I am sure he did : as coherent and valuable a world as any modern poet It's true that his poems occasionally contradict one another ; total consistency is an appalling virtue. In particular, he varies between the joyous view and that 'everything will look upon is blest' and the bleak view that love is a consolation in a world. Yeats is not cramped by any single attitude; on the other hand his double vision enabled him to see all the aspects of a situation and so enabled him to run with the hare and hunt with the hound. Yeats had read Blake and Nietzsche and their ideas left a deep impression upon his mind , mind as proclaimed by Blake 'Without there is no progression, attraction and repulsion , reason and energy , love and hate , necessary to human existence.' Blake's without contraries there is no progression maybe equated with Yeats's consciousness as conflict and the concept of self and anti self. Yeats owed to Nietzsche for his organic view of life while embracing the different versions of one's self and developing an understanding with it- the necessity to surpass oneself , satisfaction not as in the thing achieved but in achieving the concept of heroic joy, salvation from life's suffering through creation, the need for much suffering and much transformation before the creator can appear , the dance as the greatest expression 'of life' meaning as is made clear in

O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer ,

Are you the leaf , the blossom or the bole ?

O body swayed to music , O brightening glance

, How can we know the dancer from the dance?

The questions are actually implied answers where body and soul , matter and spirit are inseparable and derive meaning and existence from each other. Every moment of life paves to another but the former cannot be separated from the later in the continuum of moments , so is dance and obviously life as well where each following moment is a refined version of the previous one - more elevated, more pure, more artistic. That's how life and art blend together through the process of gradual purification and having subjected to all the agonies and complexities . Yeats seems more modern than Frost in that the former is more obscure , complex and allusive and so multi-layered but Frost though apparently simple at surface level but his simplicity is deceptive as it contains layers within layers meaning Frost's symbolism, like that of Yeats is rich and complex and his imagination moves from the earth to the skies. Indeed , his symbolism comprehends his private experiences , the sociological and psychological forces and becomes , in the final analysis , a many splentoured dome . In the manner of the metaphysical poets , he juxtaposes such opposites as a man and nature , the ruler , the rural and the urban and regional and the universal . In 'Mending Wall' Frost symbolises the conflict between the new trend of Breaking down barriers between men and nations, and the old views that for good neighbourly relations fences and boundaries are essential . The poem portrays a clash between these two points of view and Frost offers us this conflict , a contrast which presents the poet's double vision which lays the problem before The reader and suggests to explore it further without any intention to resolve it . As a matter of fact , the real strength and effectiveness of the poem arises from this contradiction and clash of opposites and not in exploring resolution for synthesis of two issues. The ambivalence in his work appears in the taste for the contraries, in the opposition of world of light with the world of darkness, in the passion for balancing one idea against its opposite, in the conflicts between the good and evil , reason and instant , conflicts which Frost is always reluctant to resolve completely and he enjoys the dichotomy and celebrated as he anticipates

, dreams that he will dream in his sleep in his poem 'After Apple picking' which is the fine example of unison of supports in act and fancy . His imagination plays upon reality and transforms and transfigures it but it is still a reality .In this way , fact and fancy are united as , 'two eyes make one right' the fine lyric of 'Fire and Ice' brings out several aspects of Frost's art. Fact and fancy are the two polarities of Frost's art and both find presence in the lyric . The duality of his artistic vision gets explicit here in the poem but goes ahead one step further. Here the poet has shown the preference for reconciling and harmonizing the opposites by pointing out that both are equally good for destruction . Fire, symbolising the intensity of passion or desire, is as destructive as ice , symbolising the cold hatred . Though the poet does not speak of his personal emotion , yet the lyric vibrates with the consciousness of experience actually felt . The conflict expressed in the poem 'Stopping by Woods on a snowy evening' is between the demands of practical life with its obligations to other and the poignant desire to escape into a land of reverie, where consciousness is dimmed and the senses are made independent of necessity, personal experience of the poet gets generalised as an image of experiences common to all .

Both Yeats and Frost stand on common grounds so far as their duality of their artistic vision is concerned . They believed in conflict, as centre of worldly experience as the be all and end all of the artistic creation . Tension, to both of them, was at contesting site where contraries mingle on converge, opposites face each other and define each other and, as a result, life as well. As true artists and born poets, they resorted to magic and mysticism in their poetry to come to the ultimate truth . They looked at life with open mind and never got fixated in monolithic ideas and maintained a circular vision to embrace the comprehensive reality of life.

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