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Lyric Impulse in Robert Frost's Poetry

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Abstract: Frost is basically and instinctively a lyric writer. As a poet, the lyrical impulse was dominant in him – he had the eye, ear, music and intensity required. Throughout his long poetical career Frost mainly wrote lyrics and is generally described as a lyrical poet. One of the basic reasons of the mass appeal that his poems have, is the music, the rhythm, the lyricism of his poetry. Frost began as a lyric poet and after deviating into experimental blank verse monologues and conversational narratives, he returned to his main course – the lyric. Louis Untermeyer, a keen scholar on Frost's poetry, feels that "when his work is viewed as a whole, it will be seen that he never left the lyric for long. The impulse grows with the convictions, and the conviction grows with the years. The later songs reinforce the early ones; they are perhaps somewhat riper, more mellow, more sure of all I thought was true..."

Keywords: impulse, lyric, blank verse, monologue, conviction

The Milestones of Frost's Poetry are Lyrics: Rolfe Humphries has made a deep study of Frost's lyrics. Enumerating the best-known lyrics of Frost, covering different periods of his poetical creativity, appearing in different selections, Humphries says : 'There is the fine and beautiful lyric poetry *Reluctance in A Boy's Will; The Road Not Taken, The Sound of the Trees, in Mountain Interval; Fire and Ice, In a Disused Graveyard, Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening in New Hampshire; Bereft; Acquainted with the Night in West-Running Brook; Come In in A Further Range; A Nature Note in A Witness Tree* – these are not all, only the most conspicuous that can be cited.' The lyrics of Frost are both short and long and though his shorter pieces are more popular and appealing, the longer ones also have an appeal of their own.

Lyrical Inspiration is Two-Fold : First the personal lyrics which include such poems as *Rose, The Pasture, Into My Own, Love and a Question, Flower Gathering, Away, Bogonias, Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*; secondly the meditative ones in which his thoughts on liberty, man and humanitarian feeling are expressed. Among the second group mention can be made of such lyrics as *To Earthward, Fire and Ice, Nothing Gold Can Stay, The Need of Being Versed in Country Things*.

Earlier Poetry Specially Lyrical : A striking and characteristic quality in much of what Robert Frost writes is lyricism, and particularly in his earlier works this lyrical strain is manifest in theme, characterization and narrative. His earlier lyrics are written most naturally and effortlessly. They have the tinge of breathing and contain the simple unforced lyric charm. As a New Englander, he had an ardent passion for the natural object e.g., rivers, woods and gardens, fruits and seeds and buds as well as the genuine emotions of the peasants. In his lyrics the transmutation of the poet's personal feelings and experience takes place.

In *A Boy's Will*, the first volume of poems, he portrays the thoughts of youthful period in a wavering and subjective tone. The lyrics of this volume portray the scenes of New England with a view to give them a local colour and habitation. Some notable lyrics of this volume are *Into My Own*, *Flower Gathering*, *Rose Bogonias*, *Revelation*, and *A Line Strom Song*. Through the strength and quality of these lyrics the poet reaches the highest rank of a painter of New England landscapes. This volume characteristically shows the developing mind of the poet striving for the perfection of later volumes. In this volume the poet does not describe the character of people who inhabit New England as he later does in later in *North of Boston*. It also does not show a unity of tone and theme.

The lines of *Come In* from *A Witness Tree* are pure lyric in every sense. The words employed by the poet ensnare and allure our heart with their poetic melody, music and metrical felicity. Here, the speaker is not a useful worldly-wise practical realist but a dreamer sort of man. He speaks from the circumstances in his contemporary world and responds to this world in some degree of personality. The lyric is characteristic for its images of 'woods', 'dark outside' and 'inside dark'. The contrasting images of dusk and dark, and dark and light of the sun aggravate the lyrical tone and add music.

Frost- A Rare Genius of the Lyric and the Dramatic : it is generally found that the lyric poet is very sensitive and self-contained. What is often found lacking in the lyric poet is the ability to turn outward, to manage the modes of speech as well as those of song, to be dramatic as well as personal. But Frost is a rare exception in this respect. There is no one word like 'lyric' which encompasses this aspect of Frost's excellence. One falters and gropes for words- what shall we say, dramatic monologue, bucolic idyll, epyllion, to describe those somewhat longer poems of Frost's so many of which are so good? *The Death of the Hired Man*, indeed almost all the poems in *North of Boston*, *Out, Out and Snow in Mountain Interval*, the first one missing melodrama, perhaps, only by its terrible brevity and economy. *The Witch of Coos in New Hampshire* – the only thing that can be said about these poems is that they stand with Chaucer's and Browning's, a little less in good cheer and gusto, and a little more in sensitive and reserved compassion.

The Lyrics are a Testimony of Frost's Warmth : Frost's early lyrics are found in *A Boy's Will*. These poems generally deal with Nature. *Mountain Interval* too contains few lyrics like *The Road Not Taken* and *The Sound of Trees* but the more substantial lyrical achievement of Frost is to be found in *New Hampshire*. The undercurrent of warmth that is there in Frost's lyrics is most apparent in the lyrics of this selection. There are a few circumlocutory asides, but in the direct communications only a firm intensity.

The 'Magnum Opus' of Frost's Lyrics : *Acquainted with the Night*. Frost achieves the pinnacle of artistic finesse in *Acquainted with the Night*. This deeply suggestive lyric is in *West-Running Brook*. The most interesting thing and the supreme achievement of this poem is its firm and calculated reticence, its insistence on understatement, its refusal to say more than the

poet thinks or feels. In this it is typically Frostian, in another sense it is rather uncharacteristic; it shows Frost simply setting a scene and rejecting the opportunity to draw a moral or a conclusive statement from it. The resonance and power of the poem reside entirely in its implication; in the possibilities of interpretation which the poet lay before the reader. It is a non-committal poem but definitely not an indecisive one. The rhyming five-foot lines reflect the poet's firm thought and his resolve to remain undaunted in a scene of suggestivity. Frost here depicts his negative capability of resting decision among uncertainty and not drawing dogmas too easily out of deeply felt personal experiences.

When Frost declares "I have been one acquainted with the night", he is not lying claim to other men; he is neither making a defiant gesture nor seeking comfort. He is simply describing with immense restraint a mood which is well-known to men and women with sensibility and inquiring minds.

Conclusion

Frost's Lyrics are a Blending of Thought and Emotion: We can conclude that, as Lawrance Thompson puts it, Frost's 'primary artistic achievement rests on his blending of thought and emotion and symbolic imagery within the confines of the lyric.' In his lyrics, Frost is at his best. No one else writes in this way, no one else has ever written precisely in his way. The quality is vibrant, eager and curiously young; it is the pure incantation, the more moving because it is managed by the simplest and the homeliest means. His best lyrics abound in cadence, colour and skill.

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