



A Study of Robert Frost Mysticism

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Abstract

Frost is regarded basically as a philosophical poet who always uses the pastoral setting as a modus operandi for his inquiries in to the nature and meaning of life. He is more difficult writer than what we often suppose. He is complicated poet with contradictions. A close study of Frost's poetry makes us know much about his views on man, God and nature and his views are a measure of his wisdom and profundity.

Keywords: God and Nature, Wisdom and Profundity

Introduction

We come across Frost's richness and depth of thoughts in his poetry. Many critics attempted to show his association with contemporary movements but he created philosophical and mystical tradition of his own. His poems are often coupled with elements of both Oriental and Western philosophy and mysticism. Several critics misinterpret Frost as a spiritual drifter. As a matter of fact, Frost was essentially a religious poet and a great mystic. He set up his religious belief in Swedenborgian Mysticism. It was Darwinian Theory that shattered him but he reaffirmed his belief in a spiritual reality. He tends to relate the individual self to the divine. Swedenborgian Mysticism was a crucial part of Frost's mother and this hierarchy of mysticism is inherited by Frost.

Mysticism

Mysticism in a brief is the existence of realities beyond intellectual apprehension that are directly accessible by subjective experience. Anything that is explained from a state of higher than the average consciousness of a human being is mystic. But here the dilemma is, till now no authority has given a proper definition on mystic poetry or what characterizes mystic poetry or which category it falls into. Two central questions concerning the nature and literary history of mystical poetry remain open. As a result of this any work that deals with experiences of super consciousness, union with the absolute power, any philosophical address on spirituality and the like can be considered as a work of mysticism and the writers may be referred to as mystics. A majority of the mystical experiences find their way into the genre of poetry.

Poetry is one of the most useful expressions of a mystic's inner experiences. By nature a mystic is able to access a state of consciousness that is beyond the usual awareness of human being. At a

certain stage mystics and great seekers have said that it is impossible to describe the consciousness they have attained.

Thus it also shows that though they try to express their mystic experiences through poems, the strength of the poems is often too limited to grasp the full essence of the mystic experience achieved by the writers. But they try to reach people with their delicate endeavours. However through poetry, it is possible for the mystic poets to give a glimpse of higher worlds or their elevating experiences.

Life and Literary Career of Robert Frost

William tested his novel ideas about living and education on Robert. At the age of thirty four he met tragic end, died of tuberculosis leaving two children at the care of Isabelle the young Robert and his sister Jennie. Isabelle spent whatever she could to pay for burying the body of William in the homeland of his father. It is due to the early death of father the memories remained faint, what remained in Robert's memory were the sea and cliff which he employed in his literary career.

The special attention and care by mother left greater influence on him. Isabelle joined school in Salem, New Hampshire. Robert and Jennie were among her pupils. The small family remained close both at home and school. It was after the completion of school Frost entered in Lawrence. By the time he was fourteen and good in studies. He took up odd jobs during spare hours to help the family expenditure. He wanted to contribute the expenditure of family. The school he joined was the same which his father attended. The roots of love for poetry and career in it might have been there in the consciousness of the young man and the spur came in the form of his sweet heart Elinor White. Elinor served with him as co-valedictorian of their graduating class. She encouraged him and the first composition appeared in *School Bulletin*. Frost inclined to personal lyric but his ambitious work showed the influence of his reading of *LaNoches Triste* in the translation of William Prescott's *The Conquest of Mexico*. Frost's youthful mind was already occupied with what would eventually become both vocation and avocation. When the poem *My Butterfly* published in the magazine *The Independent* edited by W. H. Ward in 1892, it was a real beginning. It was as beginning partly and partly a great lesson for the young poet. For, the appearance of the poem on the front page and the fifteen dollars it fetched made to rise the wing of the poet and he prepared to commit a blunder like that of other young poets. Frost published volume entitled '*Twilight*' on his own. The volume contained five poems including the '*Butterfly*' only two copies came out of the press of which the Frost kept one for himself and the other gifted to Elinor. At this time there occur a kind of difference between Robert and Elinor as she failed to appreciate *Twilight*. Robert tore his copy impulsively; the other one is available in the library of Frostiana. Robert took the failure so intensely that he probed to find the alternative in committing suicide. As the future would have it he recovered his emotional balance. When he returned home Robert and Elinor bridged the differences among them. By the time Robert's mother launched a private school in Lawrence and both Robert and Elinor served as teacher. The nearness culminated in the happier moment in the form of their marriage in 1895. Frost composed more poems and published in '*The Independent*'. He became father in Sept. 1896 as Elinor gave birth to son Elliott.

Frost would have enhanced the glory of the Nobel Award itself. For, the popularity and recognition he achieved is yet unsurpassed. The secondary of the Swedish Academy Dr. Anders Oesterling admitted that Frost's name had been considered on a number of occasions. The reasons why Frost did not receive Nobel were ambiguous but it is certain that not getting the prize could not and will not lessen the popularity of the poet.

The other honours and rewards to the credit of the poet are *Loines Prize for Poetry* (1931), *Mark Twaine Medal* (1937), *Gold Medal of the National Institute of Arts and Letters* (1938), *Frost Medal* from the Poetry Society of America (1941), *Fellowship* from Academy of American Poets (1953), and *Bollingen Prize for Poetry* (1963), Frost served as the consultant in poetry to the *Library of Congress* (1958 to 1959), and he was chosen *Poet Laureate of Vermont* by The State League of Women's Clubs (1961). One can simply be dumb founded over Frost's achievements and no less to above literary awards. He received over 40 honorary degrees from colleges and universities. Frost indeed crossed 'miles before he slept'.

Critical Study of the Selected Works of Robert Frost

The place to begin an account of Frost's poetry is with the narrative persona and dramatic situation, for it is here that Frost draws the reader into the poems and begins his illusions. Only a few of his poems have no dramatic context-most of his celebrated ones do, such as *Mending Wall*, *Two Tramps in Mud Time*, *Death of the Hired Man*, *West-Running Brook*, *Tree at My Window*, *Two Look at Two* and except for such very short lyrical poems as *Nothing Gold Can Stay*, the dramatic context offers the surest chance of discovering Frost's themes. Keeping in mind this one has to attempt thematic study of Frost's poems. For deriving exactly any particular interpretation as noted above can possibly be mistaking. Still one has to rely on the general study and interpretations of scholars and critics to extract the themes out of the apparent vagueness that Frost's poetry is full of.

The land in its weather, topography finds full reflection in his poetry. Most of his poems deal with the themes of changing seasons in the region. In *Two Tramps in Mud Time* we are told of summer:

The sun was warm but the wind was chill.
You know it is with an April day

When the sun is out and the wind is still,
You're one month on in the middle of May.

The Modern note

The issue of modern technology and changing panorama has greater effects on Eliot, Pound, Yeats and countless poets whose work is regarded as social criticism. The method and technique of every other poet differs, so also with Frost. Frost's poetic world may seem to be retreat from modern city but Frost never advocates that retreat is only panacea. This New England is still away from 'sick hurry and divided aims'. New England provides the very infrastructure to examine and evaluate complexity of urban life. "Written in an age of spiritual doubt his poems help to clarify the perplexity of our age and may well stand the test of ages to come".

Mystical Influence on Robert Frost

The age in which Frost grew was deeply influenced by the spirit of romanticism. In England there was a kind of retreat from romantic ideals but the Georgians acquired fresh attention again towards the balmy power of Nature. Darwinism could retain its impact but for a very short duration, specifically on literary thinking. Undoubtedly, it generated scepticism regarding the process of man's concern of his place in the universe. Frost was exposed to uneasiness of new universal order. "Darwinism further helped Frost to distance himself from the idea of nature's unalloyed benevolence celebrated in the romantic poetry".

Mysticism of Robert Frost

Frost's interest in mysticism is unquestionable, for his poetry, prose, letters and other writings reflect mystical doctrine. Although several critics have touched upon Frost's mysticism, it appears that many of them are not comfortable with the term 'mysticism' in connection with his poetry. Therefore it becomes inevitable to have some discussion of mysticism in general in order to understand the term and to trace mysticism in the poetry of Frost. At the very outset it must be taken into consideration that it reveals the difficulty of categorising it. Whether the mystical experience is psychotic or not; the question may be but a small problem. There is a difficulty of agreeing on the exact or workable definition of mysticism. Among the interpretations, most definitions generally grant mystical experience to be 'ineffable'. "One of the most striking consistencies among various definitions", writes Bowers "is the claim that mysticism is basically ineffable. Although it cannot be easy to describe the indescribable, many writers have made the attempt, their descriptions are remarkably similar".

An Analysis of Robert Frost's Poetry from Mystical Perspective

Frost is essentially a thinker and philosophical poet who often use the pastoral mode as a medium for his curiosities in to the nature and meaning of life. His wisdom lies in a far more complex writing than is often supposed. He is complex and full with contradictions. From a perusal of his poetry we come to know much about his views on mankind, divinity and nature and his views is a measure to weigh his sanity and profundity.

The poet seems to suggest that Nature and he feels the same joy. This was a mystical experience to have an insight into 'the ways of God' and the functioning of the universe. Man lives in a time-bound world and his life is bifurcated into segments of time. The world is torn apart by inner conflicts. In *The Times Table* Frost writes in a matter of fact tone:

A sigh for every so many breath,
And for every so many sigh a death. That's
what I always tell my wife
Is the multiplication table of life.

A careful perusal of his poems gives us an insight into a progression of the various stages in the mystical consciousness. We come across a spiritual awakening of the self, an awareness of the barriers towards God-realisation, the dark night of the soul, the way of illumination in his poems.

Conclusion

The study has revealed that majority of Frost's poems deal with New Testament and spiritual themes. He seeks solace in the mystical second sight rather than the inventions in science in the modern world. Frost demonstrates nature's part in human life. He demonstrates the straight relations with nature throughout his poetry. He employs various metaphors and myths from the language of Emerson and Thoreau to dramatise the concept of nature. Several and his poems reveal poet's will to hold the romantic idealism derived from the Romantic-Transcendental fashion. Frost adapted the idea of diverse thinkers to construct his own intellectual prediction and his poetry shows that Emerson and William James were the chief influences upon his intellectual development. Lawrence Thompson has critically analysed Frost's familiarity with the Bible. Frost wrestle with the threats posed by materialism to the religion. He often expresses his trust in the tone of the philosopher-poet; similarly he expresses his belief in visionary moment. His poetry echoes transcendental vision more affirmatively. The critical examination of his poetry shows the influence of Swedenborgian religion on Frost's spirituality in which he was baptized and which he was persuaded to practice by his mother. In fact the waves of Swedenborgian mysticism run through his poetry. Several of his poems clear away his wish to climb up toward heaven and demonstrate his dualism. This thesis has clearly shown the mystical influences on Frost and recorded the gradual development of his mysticism.

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