

## ROBERT FROST : FOR CHILDREN.

Cana Maeda.

## Introductory Note.

Robert (Lee) Frost was born in San Francisco, California, March 26, 1875. Once teacher, editor, and for eleven years, farmer, he is now recognized to be the foremost American poet but remained in oblivion for twenty years of writing in his own country. In 1912 he went to England and achieved distinction for the first time with the publication of "A Boy's Will", a book of lyrics in 1913. His "North of Boston", said to be one of the most intensely American books ever printed, was also published in England in the spring of 1914. It is, as the author called it, a "book of people" and contains some of the finest poetry of modern times.

In March 1915, Frost came back to America, to Franconia, New Hampshire. "North of Boston" had been reprinted in the United States and the poet who had left the country an unknown writer, upon his return, found himself famous. Within ten years, one university after another conferred degrees upon him who had been unwilling to graduate from any of them. He became "professor in residence" at Amherst.

"Mountain Interval" containing some of Frost's most characteristic poems appeared in 1916. In 1923, "New

Hampshire" was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for the best volume of poetry published in that year. "West-Running Brook" was hailed with unprecedented praise in 1928. With a revised "Selected Poems" (revised in 1928 and 1935) and a rearranged "Collected Poems" (1930) which again won the Pulitzer Prize, his works became contemporary classics. In 1937, "A Further Range" also won the Pulitzer Prize.

A "combination of youthful vigor and aging wisdom" is manifest in "A Witness Tree" published in 1942, the fourth of Frost's books to win the Pulitzer Prize; in "Steeple Bush" (1947), "A Masque of Reason" (1945) and "A Masque of Mercy" (1947). The sadness of age is sounded in his later works although there is no evidence of deep despair or bitter cynicism. The two "Masques" are satirical variations on Biblical themes, skeptical but searching, with dialectical turns of thought and "wild flashes" of humor. "Complete Poems" of Robert Frost containing all the later volumes appeared in 1949.

The 1939 "Collected Poems" is prefaced by an essay, "The Figure a Poem Makes" and the 1946 popular edition, "The Poems of Robert Frost", by "The Constant Symbol". Both pieces of prose are as distinctive as his poetry. In the former, he summarized the characteristics of his poetry when he wrote, "A poem begins in delight and ends in wisdom. It has an outcome that, though unforeseen, was destined from the first image of the original mood. 'No surprise for the writer, no

surprise for the reader. For me, the initial delight is in remembering something I didn't know I knew".

The sponteneity, wholesome delight, and sheer simplicity of Frost, born of his genius as poet, led the writer of this thesis to believe that children, too, may be able to share in the pleasure that his poems afford to adults, that here is a rich field as yet scarcely exploited, of material for the juvenile's study of poetry. For similar reasons, he believes that the poems of Frost afford excellent material for Japanese students of English. Being unable to complete "Robert Frost : For students of English" for this publication, "Robert Frost: For Children" (English-speaking children) was submitted with the hope that it will not be altogether lacking in interest for the reader in this country.

---

Most people will agree that the majority of children are generally fond of poetry. Stauffer implies this when in discussing the boredom the average adolescent or adult feels toward this particular form of writing, he says in parenthesis, "for children know what poetry is".<sup>(1)</sup> He means further that children are able to appreciate poetry that may be classed as a work of art as opposed to the toy-like nursery rhymes variety. The truth of this is borne out by the fact that the poems traditionally held to be the favorites of children include many that are not exclusively children's poetry but are the immortal works of recognized poets such as William Blake, John Masefield, Robert Browning, Emily Dickenson, Christina Rosetti and others. And since poems reveal

for their reader "human experience expressed at its fullest, noblest and best"<sup>(2)</sup>, it behooves one to widen the horizon of poetry for children by discovering new poems of merit that may be appropriate for them. This thesis contends that in the works of Robert Frost, there are many poems that a child can appreciate and enjoy and aims to show how their characteristics qualify them for an exalted place in the repertoire of poems for children.

It has been said, "no poet or critic of whatever school can question or minimize the magnitude, the force and beauty of Frost's achievements"<sup>(3)</sup> and indeed, he has often been thought to be the greatest of the moderns. The poems for children that may be chosen from such an author are usually limited by the inevitable circumstance that the young reader must be able to understand, at least to some extent, what a given poem is about. This is also true of the poems of Frost but, of the recognized poets, his works contain perhaps by far the greatest number that can be considered for children. (Sixty-six are listed at the end of this thesis.) While all of them cannot be dealt with separately, the most characteristic ones will be analyzed for their appropriateness with regard to subject matter, language, concreteness, significance and form.

It is possible for great poems that satisfy the taste of adults to delight also the impulse of children primarily because, as Frost says, the chiefest thing about poetry is that "it is metaphor, saying one thing and meaning another, saying one thing in terms of another, the pleasure of ulteriority."<sup>(4)</sup> Metaphor allows a subject matter that is concrete and far simpler than the theme

it illustrates as witness "The Lamb" or "The Tiger" by William Blake. Thus, although the poems of Frost are deep in metaphysical significance, they are, for the most part, simple anecdotes about a person, event or object that belie the inner meaning implied. There are many that are suitable for children because many dwell on casual things, simple, familiar yet exciting to any child as evidenced by such titles as "The Pasture", "Stars", "The Tuft of Flowers", "Blueberries", "The Bonfire", "The Wood-Pile", "The Telephone", "Wild Grapes", "Pea Brush", "Birches", "The Kitchen Chimney"<sup>(5)</sup>. It may be the "cosmic philosophy"<sup>(6)</sup> of "The Pasture" that interests the adult but with the child it is the pasture itself with the spring running through it and the little calf tottering by its mother. More of this will be said later in connection with concreteness and significance. Suffice it to say here that because the literal holds ample interest for the artless child, the employment of simple metaphors enables many of Frost's poems to appeal to children.

Familiar metaphor, however, is not of itself the key to a child's mind. A poem must obviously be read so that the suitability of the language along with the factor of material takes precedence to other considerations. Fortunately easy or hard to understand is not a criterion of the merit of poetry but simply "exactness"<sup>(7)</sup> of the word so that there exist great poems in easy language that are quite understandable for children. The majority of the poems of Frost are of this order. In his essay, "The Constant Symbol", he declares, "We play the words as we find them. We make them do"<sup>(8)</sup>. And there is no striving for unusual expressions in any of them. His language is the

language of common folk which, by the magic of his poetic skill, he turns into song. Take for example, "The Pasture":

"I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;  
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away  
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):  
I sha'n't be gone long. —You come too.

I'm going out to fetch the little calf  
That's standing by the mother. It's so young,  
It totters when she licks it with her tongue.  
I sha'n't be gone long. —You come too."<sup>(9)</sup>

or "Lodged":

"The rain to the wind said,  
'You push and I'll pelt',  
They so smote the garden bed  
That the flowers actually knelt,  
And lay lodged — though not dead,  
I know how the flowers felt."<sup>(10)</sup>

There is no word in either of these poems that would not appear in a third grade reader or at least, a fourth, and even a six-year-old, if he is clever, would be able to understand if they were read to him. The language does come a bit harder in some of the others but on the average, a fifth or sixth grader would have no difficulty in grasping the literal meaning. "Stars", one reckons, is about representative of the average for hardness:

"How countlessly they congregate  
O'er our tumultuous snow,  
Which flows in shapes as tall as trees

When wintry winds do blow. —

As if with keenness for our fate,  
Our faltering few steps on  
To white rest and a place of rest  
Invisible at dawn, —

And yet with neither love nor hate,  
Those stars like some snow-white  
Minerva's snow-white marble eyes  
Without the gift of sight.<sup>(11)</sup>

As one can see from the above poem, a glossary or an explanation on the part of a teacher is generally sufficient to enable pre-adolescents to gather what a poem has to say.

Not only is the language easy for children, it is remarkably congenial. Here and there are to be found words that are in themselves almost childish although in their context, they are amazingly fitting. In "The Pasture", for example, consider the line,

"She totters when she licks it with her tongue";  
and in "Lodged",

"You push and I'll pelt".

In "Evening in a Sugar Orchard",<sup>(12)</sup> any child's heart would enter the plea,

"O fireman, give the fire another stoke,

And send more sparks up chimney with the smoke".

In "Pan with Us",<sup>(13)</sup> there are the lines,

"Or homespun children with clicking pails

Who see so little they tell no tales".

The girl in "A Girl's Garden"<sup>(14)</sup> has a "slim-jim" arm. There are many other examples but in this regard, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", one of Frost's greatest poems, affords in its entirety, perhaps the best illustration:

"Whose woods these are I think I know  
His house is in the village though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep."<sup>(15)</sup>

The language of this poem considered for itself, is indeed the language of small children, simple and unadorned. Yet, of these lines it has been said that if Frost had written no other, his eminence would have been assured. How the instrument of such



plain language can be made to sound with such lyrical charm the deepest thoughts and emotions of the human mind is a secret of the poet's art. For the matter at hand, the fact remains that as in this poem, Frost's simple and congenial language will always be an aid to a child's appreciation of his poems.

The next factor to be considered is rhythm. Rhythm is the chief element that distinguishes poetry from prose and it may be said to be the main source of pleasure in poetry for all. However, the pleasure that children derive from this element is far greater than is the case with adults and many seem to read poems for their rhythm and little else. A brief consideration of rhythm in general will aid in showing how the particular rhythm of Frost's poems makes a number of them especially attractive and ideal for children.

The pleasurable effect of rhythm is said to be triple: intellectual, esthetic and physiological.<sup>(16)</sup> To quote Stauffer, "intellectually, it pleases by its continuous although not obtrusive assurance that order, control, purposefulness are at work. Esthetically its artificiality and formality hold us steadily; it leads us pleurably into the mood of imaginative contemplation out of the real world of action and utility."<sup>(17)</sup> Physiologically, man has a natural craving for rhythm supposedly because he lives by physiological processes that are rhythmical. The same author thinks that it is not too much to believe that the exhilarating effect of poetry may come from the fact which he discovered that the rhythm of poetic feet is usually only slightly faster than the rhythm of the pulses. This indeed, would make poetry "the language of the heart".<sup>(18)</sup> And delight in it would

spring from an instinctive pulsation beyond the usual conscious considerations of criticism.<sup>(19)</sup>

There is no reason to suppose that the triple effect of rhythm does not hold, in some measure at least, also in the case of children but one is inclined to believe that with the young, the effect is predominantly physiological. For children are rhythmic creatures. Not only is their living rhythmic in the common physiological processes of walking and sleeping, inhaling and exhaling, contracting and expanding the heart but also in nearly all their external physical activity. They skip, hop, jump, clap and even walk rhythmically and one surmises that when they can speak rhythmically as they can with poetry they feel an impulsive gladness. Also, they seem to gain a delectable satisfaction from being able to read the lines of verse trippingly and with a flourish. They delight in reciting poems in "sing-song" fashion and however this may annoy the teacher, children only feel they are doing justice to the nature of poetry.

Rhythm, according to Stauffer's definition, is "the more or less regular recurrence of any pattern detectable in time with variations depending on the phrase, "more or less regular recurrence"<sup>(20)</sup>. The question then arises, how regular do children prefer rhythm to be. Both from the fact already mentioned that children delight in emphasizing the singing quality of poetry and from a consideration of the hitherto favorite poems of children it may be assumed that they derive the greatest pleasure from rhythm that is even with a basic regularity. From the very regular iambic of Stevenson's verse:

"In winter I get up at night  
 And dress by yellow candle-light,  
 In summer quite the other way,  
 I have to go to bed by day."<sup>(21)</sup>

to the modified iambic of Masefield's "Sea-Fever":

"I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and  
 the sky,  
 And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,—"

poems for children all have a conspicuously even rhythm. This is also true of the poems of Frost and one feels that it is the predominance of this even singing rhythm that makes so many of them particularly inviting for children.

Frost's rhythm, however, is not altogether regular. In the "Nature of Poetry", Stauffer maintains convincingly that absolute metric regularity is neither possible nor desirable but that there must be an established pattern that arouses the expectation of its recurrence and some manner of satisfying that expectation. Surprise changes of the rhythmic pattern when in keeping with the mood and meaning give rise to powerful emotions aroused as in music by a change in tempo. A rhythmic pattern that is too regular becomes ineffective and limerick-like while, on the other hand, extremely free verse becomes "a monotony that cannot escape from its perpetual formlessness"<sup>(22)</sup>. The ideal is the happy medium, as it were, and this is what Frost achieves. The pleasurable rhythm of his poetry is born of the adherence to a basic rhythmic pattern that varies only as occasion demands. The frequent recurrence of the pattern satisfies the expectations of children, producing the nimble rhythm that they like so well.

Moreover, the rhythm of Frost's poems is distinguished by a conversational tone that must be congenial for children. For Frost's individuality and distinction as a poet is said to rest on his skill in "setting the traditional meters against the natural rhythms of the human voice".<sup>(23)</sup> This is possible because "meter has to do with beat, and sound posture (of meaning) has a definite relation as an alternate tone between the beats. The two are one in creation but separate in analysis".<sup>(24)</sup> Because of the conversational tone, the lyrics have a homely quality while the narratives, dramatic monologues and dialogues sparkle with life. All are characterized by a naturalness that is pleasing to the unsophisticated and unaffected.

In the lyrical and narrative poems the conversational tone is caught in the singing rhythm of the iambic tetrameter with a trimeter sometimes alternating or ending a quatrain. This is the rhythm that children enjoy so much in the traditional poems for children mentioned earlier like Stevenson's "My Shadow" or Walter de la Mare's "Nod". They will recognize a similar strain in poems like the previously quoted "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening":

( )   /   /   /   ( )   /   /   /  
 "Whose woods these are I think I know,  
 /   /   /   ( )   /   /   /   ( )  
 His house is in the village though;  
 /   /   /   /   /   /   /   ( )  
 He will not see me stopping here  
 /   /   /   /   /   ( )   /   /  
 To see his woods fill up with snow." — (25)

In Frost's poem, however, it will be noticed that although the gait is a regular iambic, the strong accents do not fall on any word that would not be accented in ordinary speech. The weaker accents (bracketed) fall with seeming inevitability on the most

appropriately unemphatic words while the unaccented syllables are those that could never be naturally accented. Thus, consciously or unconsciously Frost succeeds in re-creating in poetry the natural cadences of conversational speech with its atmosphere of spontaneity. For children, the natural tone of the rhythm will be especially congenial.

The same tripping rhythm is found in a host of suitable poems including, besides the already mentioned "Stars", "Ghost House", "My November Guest", "Going for Water", "Revelation", "Good Hours", "The Road Not Taken", "Pea Brush", "The Kitchen Chimney", "Looking for a Bird in Winter", "A Peck of Gold", "A Girl's Garden", and "Pan with Us". In <sup>(26)</sup>"The Thawing Wind", another likely poem for children, the rhythm is the dancing trochaic tetrameter not unlike the one in Longfellow's "Wah, Wah Taysee, Little Fire-fly". In Frost's poem, however, the buffeting consonants like the "b"s, "d"s, "g"s and the hard "c"s at the beginning of the strongly stressed syllables have the effect of achieving a more lively swing in keeping with the mood of the poem:

Come with me, O loud Southwester!  
 Bring the singer, bring the nester,  
 Give the buried flowers a dream,  
 Make the settled snow-bank stream——" <sup>(27)</sup>

While the rhythm of these poems is marked by a regularity that is pleasing to children, there is a careful reconciliation of the tone of meaning with the rigidity of the meter. Where occasion demands, a foot is inverted or varied to obtain a fitting cadence. This together with the conversational tone tends to

discourage a mechanical reading of the poems. For example, it will be almost impossible to force a metronomic beating of the accents in reading the second stanza of "Stars":

√ √ √ √ √ √  
 "As if with keenness for our fate,  
 √ √ √ √ √  
 Our faltering few steps on,  
 √ √ √ √ √  
 To white rest and a place of rest  
 √ √ √ √ √  
 Invisible at dawn."<sup>(28)</sup>

Since an intelligent reading of poetry is desirable, the poems of Frost are ideal for children because they are conducive to a natural and meaningful recitation without losing the pleasure of rhythm.

As far as the conversational tone of the rhythm is concerned, Frost's genius and originality show to greatest advantage in the dramatic monologues and dialogues in blank verse and sometimes in iambic trimeters and dimeters in which the particular sound that goes with the "sense of every meaning" in spoken language lives in admirable harmony with the metric pattern. The longer poems are somewhat beyond the interests of most children (they would be very appropriate for 'teen-agers in high school) but the comparatively short monologue, "The Last Word of a Bluebird" purported to be "As Told to a Child" is a masterpiece for children. Throughout the poem one hears the chattering sound of the talk of a five or six-year-old, and while the charmingly child-like tone appeals to an adult as a nursery song might when sung by a prima donna, it will fascinate children by its kindred spirit.

The rhythm of this monologue is basically iambic and most of the lines seem to read most suitably as dimeters with many

of the feet taken as a kind of "compound iambic"<sup>(29)</sup> as follows :

"As I went out a Crow,  
 In a loud voice said, 'Oh,  
 I was looking for you.  
 How do you do?  
 I just came to tell you  
 To tell Leslie (will you?)  
 That her little Bluebird  
 Wanted me to bring word  
 That the north wind last night  
 That made the stars bright  
 And made ice on the trough  
 Almost made him cough  
 His tail feathers off.  
 He just had to fly!  
 But he sent her Good-bye,  
 And said to be good,  
 And wear her red hood,  
 And look for skunk tracks  
 In the snow with an ax--  
 And do everything!  
 And perhaps in the spring  
 He would come back and sing."<sup>(30)</sup>

The climactic line, "And do everything!" is a monometer and the change in this one line gives the poem its verve. There is a casual note at the beginning and then in almost monotonous rhythm until the summary climax, a breathless gush of short sentences that is truly child-like. The rhythmic denouement of

the last two lines is characteristically Frost and brings the poem to an enchantingly wistful close.

Another poem, "Locked Out", is similarly "As Told to a Child". This monologue, however, is in stanzaic iambic tetrameter having been mentioned with the other lyrics and is more in the tone of an adult deliberately speaking in a manner congenial for a child.

Agreeable rhythm has such a powerful appeal for children that it often makes up for what the poem may lack in suitability of material or language. Thus, by virtue of a pleasing rhythm, didactic poems that would otherwise be boring reach the minds of children with more pleasure than tedium. Such are some of the verses of Longfellow, for example,

"The lives of great men all remind us,  
We can make our lives sublime;  
And departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time."

or Emerson's,

"So high is grandeur to our dust,  
So near is God to man;  
When Duty whispers low, 'Thou must',  
The Youth replies, 'I can'."

There is a bit of didacticism in almost all of Frost's poems that are in every way suitable for children but because of the congenial rhythm, even the more abstract and difficult ones offer lines that are similarly appropriate. From "Tramps in Mud Time", a child may learn that

"Only where love and need are one,



And the work is play for mortal stakes  
Is the deed ever really done  
For Heaven and the future's sakes."<sup>(31)</sup>

or of "A Soldier", sometimes regarded as his greatest poem,

"But this we know, the obstacle that check'd,  
And tripped the body, shot the spirit on,  
Further than target ever showed or shone."<sup>(32)</sup>

As with the didactic lines, a number of poems that have the stuff of children's poetry yet are not exactly simple, appeal for their tuneful rhythm. An admirable illustration is the invitingly lilting lyric, "Flower-Gathering":

"I left you in the morning,  
And in the morning glow,  
You walked away beside me  
To make me sad to go.  
Do you know me in the gloaming,  
Gaunt and dusty grey with roaming?  
Are you dumb because you know me not  
Or dumb because you know?

'All for me? And not a question  
For the faded flowers gay  
That could take me from beside you  
For the ages of a day?  
They are yours and be the measure  
Of their worth for you to treasure,  
The measure of the little while  
That I've been long away."<sup>(33)</sup>

In the same category may be included "Rose Pegonia", "October", "Sand Dunes", "The Line-Storm Song", "A Late Walk" and others listed at the end.

It has been seen that for children more than for adults, rhythm is a great source of pleasure in poetry and that Frost's particular rhythm constitutes a most important part of the enjoyableness of his poems. The next factor to be considered is concreteness. There is a degree of concreteness in any poem so that as Stauffer observes, it is a part of the nature of poetry as such.<sup>(34)</sup> It is that which gives a poem its palpability, makes of philosophy an art. That concrete modes of expression are more attractive to children than abstractions is obvious and the fact that Frost's poems could not be more concrete vastly increases the interest of his poems for them.

As stated previously, his poems are, to begin with, all metaphor. The metaphor is developed by concrete examples or "samples" to use Frost's own word, which dramatize for the reader, the most abstract and metaphysical of themes. An adult delving into the depths beyond the facts, may be whisked away to a world of metaphysical contemplation by the significance of the final words that often flash the total meaning of a poem. But the child's mind need only saunter among the anecdotes and tales and his imagination is lit by the brightness of each sensual imagery and his intellect enriched by a myriad little discoveries often in the world of nature that the poet's insight affords. In "The Tuft of Flowers", for instance, how perfectly fitting for a child is the drama of the butterfly leading one to a spot where the mower had spared a tall tuft of flowers

beside a brook and how appropriate that it should be the butterfly weed! This dramatic illustration enables the child to appreciate the "message" revealed at the end :

"But he turned first and led my eyes to look  
At a tall tuft of flowers beside a brook,

A leaping tongue of bloom the scythe had spared  
Beside a reedy brook the scythe had bared.

I left my place to know them by their name,  
Finding them butterfly weed when I came.

The mower in the dew had left them thus,  
By leaving them to flourish not for us,

Nor yet to draw one thought of ours to him  
But from sheer morning gladness at the brim.

The butterfly and I had lit upon,  
Nevertheless a message from the dawn,

That made me hear the wakening birds around,  
And hear his long scythe whispering to the ground,

And feel a kindred spirit to my own,  
So that henceforth I worked no more alone ;

But glad with him I worked as with his aid,  
And weary, sought at noon with him the shade ;

And dreaming, as it were, held brotherly speech  
With one whose thought I had not hoped to reach.

‘Men work together’, I told him from the heart,  
‘Whether they work together or apart.’ ”<sup>(35)</sup>

Other poems afford many examples of graphic concreteness. The closing lines of “The Vantage Point” are a cluster of sensuous acts that could not fail to stir the interest of the curious child:

——“My breathing shakes the bluet like a breeze,  
I smell the earth, I smell the bruised plant,  
I look into the crater of the ant.”<sup>(36)</sup>

The revels in “Going for Water” are in perfect keeping with the elfin mood of childhood:

——“We ran as if to meet the moon,  
That slowly dawned behind the trees,  
The barren boughs without the leaves,  
Without the birds, without the breeze.

But once within the woods, we paused,  
Like gnomes that hid us from the moon,  
Ready to run to hiding new  
With laughter when she found us soon.

Each laid on each a staying hand  
To listen ere we dared to look,  
And in the hush we joined to make  
We heard, we knew we heard the brook.

A note as from a single place,  
A tender tinkling fall that made  
Now drops that floated on the pool.

Like pearls and now a silver blade."<sup>(37)</sup>

One also notices how concretely the barrenness of the trees is emphasized and how dramatically the mood of expectancy is attained in the third stanza. In still another poem, vividly detailed imagery reveals for the child

"How Love burns through the Putting in the Seed  
On through the watching for that early birth  
When, just as the soil tarnishes the weed,

The sturdy seedling with arched body comes  
Shouldering its way and shedding the earth crumbs."<sup>(38)</sup>

Examples are endless but for the metaphor developed completely in concrete terms, "Pea Brush" is for children perhaps supreme:

"I walked down alone Sunday after church  
To the place where John has been cutting trees  
To see for myself about the birch  
He said I could have to bush my peas.

The sun in the new-cut narrow gap  
Was hot enough for the first of May,  
And stifling hot with the order of sap  
From stumps still bleeding their life away.

The frogs that were peeping a thousand shrill  
Wherever the ground was low and wet,  
The minute they heard my step went still  
To watch me and see what I came to get.

Birch boughs enough piled everywhere! —  
All fresh and sound from the recent axe.

Time someone came with cart and pair  
And got them off the wild flower's backs.

They might be good for garden things  
To curl a little finger round,  
The same as you seize cat's-cradle strings,  
And lift themselves up off the ground.

Small good to anything growing wild,  
They were crooking many a trillium  
That had budded before the boughs were piled  
And since it was coming up had to come."<sup>(39)</sup>

It was said that a child need not bother about the inner meaning, that there is enough interest in the metaphorical tale that enables him to appreciate the poems. However, even though the innermost philosophy implied be too deep for him, if he can understand the poems as they stand in their cloak of metaphor, he will be able to sense the significance at his own level. This is part of the beauty of Frost's poems for children. They do not state their themes exactly, leaving the reader free to garner what thoughts he fancies from them. The meaning of, say, "The Pasture" for children may simply be that the poet is inviting them to the field of poetry where he proposes to show them some fresh poems which he will make after he has cleared the stream of old practices that are no longer useful. And so with all his other poems.

The final element to be dealt with that in a way sums up all that has been said is the form of Frost's poetry. Form is both the inner organization of the thought of a poem and the technical

devices of rhythmic pattern, rhyme, stanza, alliteration and sometimes onomatopoeia that are aids to its structure. Rhythm was treated separately, earlier, because of the prominent part it plays in the nature of poetry for children. But the various factors are not separate; "they overlap, they play into, and depend on each other".<sup>(40)</sup>

From the beginning, Frost committed himself to form, moulding the organization of his material to the rigidity of its metric pattern and rhyme. He exclaims in a triplet:

"Let chaos storm !

Let cloud shapes swarm !

I wait for form."<sup>(41)</sup>

In "The Constant Symbol" he says, "To the right person it will seem naïve to distrust form as such. The very words of the dictionary are a restriction to make the best of or keep out of and be silent".<sup>(42)</sup> He remains true to his own contention leading one critic to observe, "He handles as few modern poets except Yeats and Auden have done, a great number of English meters. More remarkable is what he makes of the strict iambic and loose iambic in which most of his verse is written. One would not have supposed that there was so much blood-pulse left in the ancient meter in which English rhythms characteristically flow."<sup>(43)</sup>

The majority of Frost's poems that are the most suitable for children are in stanzaic verse. This is particularly felicitous for the fact is (ask any child) children prefer the formal to the formless. As an evidence, it may be mentioned that when thirty-five students ranging in age from nine to twelve years were asked which of the two poems by Emerson they preferred, "The

Mountain and the Squirrel" or the prayer poem, "We Thank Thee", in spite of the fact that the former is the more "interesting" of the two, the unanimous choice was the latter. The former is not altogether free verse, having both rhyme and a basic iambic rhythm but the meter is irregular and the lines are not divided into stanzas; the latter is in the form of quatrains in iambic tetrameter each followed by a refrain consisting of two dactyls and a trochee. This then is the first poem:

"The Mountain and the Squirrel"

"The mountain and the squirrel  
Had a quarrel,  
And the former called the latter, 'Little Prig',  
Bun replied,  
'You are doubtless very big,  
But all sorts of things and weather  
Must be taken in together  
To make up a year and a sphere.  
And I think it no disgrace  
To occupy my place.  
If I'm not so large as you,  
You are not so small as I,  
And not half so spry.'  
I'll not deny you make  
A very pretty squirrel track;  
Talents differ, all is well and wisely put,  
If I cannot carry forests on my back,  
Neither can you crack a nut'."

and the first stanza of the other,



“For flowers that bloom beneath our feet,  
For tender grass so fresh and sweet;  
For song of bird and hum of bee;  
For all things fair we hear or see, —

Father in heaven, we thank Thee.”

As with these poems it is surmised that children will prefer the stanzaic verses of Frost to those like the two previously mentioned ones written “As Told to a Child”. By the same token, it can be said that the majority of his poems for children are all the more suitable because of their stanzaic form.

It may be asked why children have a predilection for poems in stanzaic verse. The reason one supposes is that the visible form makes more apparent the inner organization of thought and that such a poem slips into the mind with greater ease being more palpable, “as a globed fruit”.<sup>(44)</sup> The fact that a poem is metaphor makes for palpability and so does concreteness but these are only elements of a whole and complete form which is the poem itself.<sup>(45)</sup> The exterior structure too, is a relatively small part of the larger all-embracing form but it plays a greater part for children than for adults in the appreciation of a poem. Thus “The Tuft of Flowers” which is a comparatively long poem is rendered more intelligible for children by the division into couplets of each step in the progression of the thought. Similarly, “Into My Own”, a Shakespearian sonnet, is more suitable because of the separation of the quatrains and the couplet. Furthermore, the division into stanzas makes more convenient the choice of a part of a poem for children.

Rhyme and repetition are useful devices which aid in

achieving emphasis, a particular mood or emotion. For children, they are, moreover, pleasurable appurtenances to the whole structure of a poem like the periodic whistle of a toy train. Also they are aids to memory and children like what is easier to learn. The younger the child, the more eager is he for rhyme and repetition as may be seen from the use that is made of them in primary education. As he grows a little older, he begins to appreciate their effects in great poems where their use is more subtle than in the jingles. For this reason, the admirable employment of rhyme and especially repetition make the poems of Frost ideal for children in the middle and upper grades of elementary school.

The conscious use of repetition is most noticeable in Frost's earlier poems as if he were experimenting with this device. An excellent example is afforded by "Stars" quoted previously. In this poem, a pleasurable effect is achieved by the repetition of a consonant, a vowel, a syllable or a word. The repetition of the hard "c"s and the "t"s in the first stanza aptly conveys through sound the presence of the multitudinous stars; the alliteration of the "w"s and the "wh" sounds as well as the repetition of the first syllables in "Wintry winds" produce an effect that is appropriate to the idea of wind; the diphthongs in "How countless", the long vowels and the liquid "l"s give a lyrical tone to otherwise plain speech. The recurrence of the voiceless "f"s softens the music of the second stanza while the repetition of the word "rest" first in the abstract phrase, "To white rest" and then in the concrete "a place of rest", achieves poetic emphasis. The melody is sustained in the third stanza by the long vowel sounds

but there is an agreeable change in the texture by the frequency of the "s", and the repetition of "snow-white" reflects the idea of snow in the first stanza. The second and last lines of each quatrain rhyme in this poem.

In "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", a later poem, the use of repetition produces similar effects but less obtrusively than in "Stars". The reader is made to feel the effect of the device without being aware of the device itself and Frost in this poem may be said to be complete master of his own particular style. The earlier poems including "Stars" are suitable for young children while the later ones will be appreciated by those a little older.

However suitable and attractive the various factors that have been discussed may be for children, they are but fragments and Frost's poems must, in the end, be considered for their form taken as a whole. For form as such is the soul of a poem; it is that which "makes it memorable, makes it pleasurable, makes it art".<sup>(46)</sup> Frost's genius in creating fresh tunes "from the dramatic tones of meaning struck across the rigidity of a limited meter"<sup>(47)</sup> and the simplicity of his material and language make his poems suitable for children. But what makes them pre-eminently so is their form or in the words of the poet, "the figure a poem makes".<sup>(48)</sup> It is especially appropriate because the figure "begins in delight and ends in wisdom", having a "wildness" at the same time a subject is fulfilled.<sup>(49)</sup> For children, what more could one desire than that a poem begin in delight and end in wisdom?

The author's account of how a poem comes into being tells better than any description of a poem itself how it runs from

"delight to wisdom" creating a flavor of "wildness" that can stir the enthusiasm of children: "I am in a place, in a situation, as if I had materialized from cloud or risen out of the ground. There is the glad recognition of the long lost and the rest follows. Step by step the wonder of unexpected supply keeps growing".<sup>(50)</sup> His "glad recognition of the long lost" is for the inexperienced child, a new discovery while the "wonder of unexpected supply" that keeps growing for the poet is synonymous with the wonder of the way the "great, wide, beautiful, wonderful world" keeps expanding for the child.

"A poem's most precious quality", says Frost, will remain its having run itself and carried the poet with it. Read it a hundred times, it will forever keep its fragrance. It can never lose its sense of a meaning that once unfolded by surprise as it went." The "sense of a meaning" that unfolds for Frost is never darkly despairing or bitterly cynical but rather "a momentary stay against confusion"<sup>(51)</sup> because he delights in the beauty of simple things and clings to permanent values. Delight to wisdom. So far as children are concerned, herein lies the crowning beauty of his poems; for learned in childhood, they will hold for future years an inestimable treasure in the sense that as Keats once observed,

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever:

Its loveliness increases; it will never

Pass into nothingness, but still will keep

A bower quiet for us and a sleep

Full of sweet dreams and health and quiet breathing".<sup>(52)</sup>

Robert Frost: A List of Poems Proposed  
for Children

(The numbers refer to "The Poems of Robert Frost", The Modern Library, Random House, New York; those marked by an asterick, refer to "The Collected Poems of Robert Frost", Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., New York )

1. Poems most suitable in all respects:

Pasture (3)

Going for Water (21)

The Tuft of Flowers (24)

The Road Not Taken (117)

Pea Brush (130)

The Last Word of a Bluebird (146)

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening (238)

Kitchen Chimney (250)

A Peck of Gold (270)

Lodged (273)

A Minor Bird (274)

The Birthplace (297)

A Patch of Old Snow (\*188)

A Girl's Garden (\*167)

The Lockless Door (\*299)

The Armful (\*341)

Locked Out—As told to a Child (\*169)

11. Poems suitable for their pleasing rhythm:

To the Thawing Wind (12)

Flower-Gathering (14)

A Prayer in Spring (13)

Rose Pegonias (15)

Stars (10)

A Late Walk (\*11)

Wind and Window Flower (\*44)

Revelation (23)

Looking for a Sunset Bird in Winter (25)

The Line Storm Song (28)

October (30)

The Aim was Song (237)

Sand Dunes (288)

111. Poems for older children:

Storm Fear (11)

In a Vale (\*21)

Pan with Us (\*33)

The Vantage Point (19)

Mowing (20)

The Demiurge's Laugh (27)

Mending Wall (36)

Blueberries (69)

After Apple-Picking (80)

The Wood Pile (112)

An Old Man's Winter Night (121)

The Telephone (123)

The Oven-Bird (125)

Birches (127)

Putting in the Seed (132)

- A Time to Talk (133)
- The Cow in Apple Time (134)
- Range Finding (136)
- The Bonfire (141)
- The Gum-Gatherer (153)
- The Line-Gang (155)
- Wild Grapes (217)
- Fire and Ice (232)
- Dust of Snow (233)
- The Runaway (236)
- Gathering Leaves (253)
- The Freedom of the Moon (264)
- Two Tramps in Mud Time (314)
- Departmental (330)
- At Woodward's Gardens (335)
- The Need of Being Versed in Country Things (259)
- Unharvested (357)
- Design (349)
- Evening in a Sugar Orchard (\*289)
- A Cloud Shadow (396)
- The Quest of the Purple-Fringed (397)

#### References.

- (1) Stauffer, Donald A.: "The Nature of Poetry", W.W.Norton & Co. Inc., New York, 1946 ; pg. 12.
- (2) ibid., pg. 264.
- (3) Adams, J. Donald : "The Shape of Books to Come", The Viking Press, New York, 1945 ; pg. 146.
- (4) Frost, Robert: "The Poems of Robert Frost", The Modern Library, New

York, 1946; 'The Constant Symbol', pg. xvi.

- ( 5 ) *ibid.*, (pages are given in the list of poems for children.).
- ( 6 ) Untermeyer, Louis: "Modern American Poetry", "Modern British Poetry"  
combined edition, Harcourt, & Co., New York, 1950; pg. 181.
- ( 7 ) Stauffer, Donald A.: *ibid.*; pg. 58.
- ( 8 ) Frost, Robert: *ibid.*; pg. xxii.
- ( 9 ) *ibid.*; pg. 3.
- (10) *ibid.*; pg. 273.
- (11) *ibid.*; pg. 10.
- (12) Frost, Robert: "The Collected Poems of Robert Frost", Garden City Pub. Co.  
Inc., Garden City, New York, 1939; pg. 289.
- (13) *ibid.*; pg. 33.
- (14) *ibid.*; pg. 167.
- (15) *ibid.*: "The Poems of Robert Frost"; pg. 238.
- (16) Stauffer, Donald A.: *ibid.*; pg. 193.
- (17) *ibid.*; pg. 194.
- (18) *ibid.*
- (19) *ibid.*; pg. 195.
- (20) *ibid.*
- (21) Stevenson, R. L.: "A Child's Garden of Verse".
- (22) Stauffer, Donald A.: *ibid.*; pg. 227.
- (23) "The Literary History of the United States", Vol. 11. The MacMillan Co.,  
New York, ; pg. 1193.
- (24) *ibid.*; pg. 1194.
- (25) Frost, Robert: "The Poems of Robert Frost"; pg. 238.
- (26) *ibid.*, (pages are given in the list of poems for children)
- (27) *ibid.*; pg. 12.
- (28) *ibid.*; pg. 10.
- (29) Stauffer, Donald A.: *ibid.*; pg. 226.
- (30) Frost, Robert: *ibid.*; pg. 146.
- (31) *ibid.*; pg. 312.
- (32) *ibid.*; pg. 290.
- (33) *ibid.*; pg. 14.
- (34) Stauffer, Donald A.: *ibid.*; pg. 120.
- (35) Frost, Robert: *ibid.*; pg. 25.
- (36) *ibid.*; pg. 19.



- (37) *ibid.* ; pg. 21.
- (38) *ibid.* ; pg. 132.
- (39) *ibid.* ; pg. 130.
- (40) Stauffer, Donald A. : *ibid.* ; pg. 263.
- (41) Frost, Robert : *ibid.* ; pg. 357.
- (42) *ibid.* ; pg. xxii.
- (43) "The Literary History of the United States" : pg. 1196.
- (44) MacLeish, Archibald : "Ars Poetica", 1 ; 3.
- (45) Stauffer, Donald A. : *ibid.* ; pg. 263.
- (46) *ibid.* ; pg. 262.
- (47) Frost, Robert : "Collected Poems of Robert Frost"; 'The Figure a Poem Makes'.
- (48) *ibid.*
- (49) *ibid.*
- (50) *ibid.*
- (51) *ibid.*
- (52) Keats, John : "Endymion", Bk. 1, 1, 1—5.

### Bibliography

- Adams, Donald J. : The Shape of Books to Come, The Viking Press, New York, 1945.
- Literary History of the United States, Vol. II. ; The MacMillan Company, New York, 1948.
- Stauffer, Donald A. : The Nature of Poetry; W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., New York, New York, 1946.
- The Poems of Robert Frost ; The Modern Library, Random House, New York, 1946.
- The Collected Poems of Robert Frost ; Garden City Publishing Co. Inc., Garden City, New York, 1939.
- Untermeyer, Louis: Modern American Poetry, Modern British Poetry, Combined Edition ; Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York, 1950.