

Societal Relations in Robert Frost's writings

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Abstract

Most of Frost's poems open in the middle of an incident because for purposes of dramatic presentment it is not the beginning or the end of a situation that is significant but the points where the characters are poised for action – the points which excite the greatest revolution in minds of the characters. One of the central things about his poetry is that it reflects the experiences of everyday life; its ironics, delicacies, joys and sorrows. These are derived from real life itself and not by any formal study of philosophy. The central principle of Frost's poetry is the truthful presentation of material. He always desired to go behind something to hide his personality and make his characters speak. This paper purely highlights about societal relations, for that two poems were selected titled "*The Telephone*" and "*A Time to Talk*".

Keywords: dramatic presentation, everyday life, delicacies, joys, sorrows, intrapersonal talk, etc.

Introduction

"Poetry is a way of life" says Frost. For him, 'poetry is all there is to know'. One of the central things about his poetry is that it reflects the experiences of everyday life; its ironics, delicacies, joys and sorrows. These are derived from real life itself and not by any formal study of philosophy. The central principle of Frost's poetry is the truthful presentation of material. He always desired to go behind something to hide his personality and make his characters speak. The triumph of Frost is in discovering that he himself could be a persona. The total effect of the poem is not moral or philosophical, it is dramatic.

Frost's method is to take up a single situation or a specific confrontation and squeeze out its significance – dramatic and model- to the mind, to the character or characters involved in it. The essence of Frost's methods is to study a character's response to a situation. This situation may be a moment of crisis, a confrontation or just a point of reflection but it is a state in which the mind is revealed in all detail in a crisis of realization or awareness.

Societal Relations in his poetry

Most of Frost's poems open in the middle of an incident because for purposes of dramatic presentment it is not the beginning or the end of a situation that is significant but the points where the characters are poised for action – the points which excite the greatest revolution in minds of the characters. While the poetry of Robert Frost utilizes a predominantly conversational style, further review reveals that his conversations in poetry are usually debates more than anything else. These debates reinforce Frost's admiration of conversation, but also work against it-making his portrayed values more conflicted than one would immediately expect.

This conflict through conversation is especially showcased in "*The Telephone*" and "*A Time to Talk*". Each poem deals with one aspect of knowing through nature, "*The Telephone*" focusing on internal communication in that purpose, while "*A*

Time to Talk" focuses on internal communication for similar reasons. Debate, or conflict, develops in both poems through observations of the natural world and the constructed. Harold Watts labeled these opposites as "Process" and "Society", respectively upon labeling these aspects so common in Frost's poetry; we can already see how contradictions plague the seemingly flawless conversation in "*The Telephone*" and the anticipated conversation in "*A Time to Talk*". Both poems consider the importance of nature and its role in human society, more so in "*The Telephone*" than "*A Time to Talk*".

"*The Telephone*" opens with a feeling of being outside, in nature. The speaker comes upon a flower, through which he converses with a force that reflects the qualities of nature. Questioning how the speaker came to be called to this place, the conversation involves curiosity and perhaps even pursuit-as the caller beckons the speaker of the poem to the flower, it seems. The poet ends the conversation, subsequently ending the poem, with a finality of action.

Similarly in "*A Time to Talk*" the reader is confronted with the scene of a field. This poem, however, does not rely on any actual conversation or clear connection to anything greater than man. From the moment the speaker announces the arrival of his friend, conversation is anticipated. As the horse slows, and the work done by the speaker comes to a halt, Frost creates a scene of friendly conversation, again, without saying a word. The poem ends with an image of human separation and reunion, divided by a stone wall, but clearly gathered for conversation. These poems speculate through scenery and events that any individual could encounter, making them all the more realistic and understandable to the reader.

Frost struggles with the connection between society and process in "*The Telephone*", utilizing forms of process nature to represent ideas of society. Within the first two lines the reader gets the impression that the speaker is not near society, but instead, immersed in nature-perhaps a field, often appearing in Frost's writing. The verse, "When I was just as far as I could walk/from here to-day", suggests a journey,

unfolding to more than just a physical journey the moment the speaker leans his "...head against a flower".

While, the reader imagines leaning against a flower, Frost continues with these words: "I heard you talk". Who speaks, we do not know, but the voice comes from the flower – meaning the second speaker must be a derivative of the flower and nature itself. That the flower can communicate, or that a second speaker communicated through the flower, creates a metaphor of the telephone in nature. This is Frost's way of communicating his main idea, as "for him the metaphor is the challenge....to appropriate a thing or an object to some subjective use or what he would call "enthusiasm". The concept of nature is quite subjective, and halfway through the first stanza.

"*The Telephone*" it is introduced so subtly that at first glance most readers might not even think of it. Having introduced his concept, Frost furthers the metaphor by beginning a conversation between the two speakers. Strangely, the first speaker refers to a windowsill while speaking –the line, "You spoke from that flower on the windowsill" pulls the speaker immediately out of nature and back into society. Perhaps the message was initially received in society, through a small aspect of nature that still thrives with mankind-the windowsill flower. Regardless, the connection exists and is strengthened when the second speaker responds to the first. As the speaker asks, "Do you remember what it was you said?" the second responds without responding –"First tell me what it you were thought you heard". This response furthers the connection that Frost implies between society and process-that humanity is aware, perhaps subconsciously, of its obligation to nature. Frost desires society "to be responsive to the pressures of nature of process", Harold Watts says in regards to the broken connection between them.

In closing "*The Telephone*", Frost again utilizes societal ideas to strengthen the pursuit of nature. Saying "...I heard it as I bowed" as if the second speaker, the "Someone" is worthy of praise, higher than man and society. Frost continues to emphasize the relationship between the speakers when the second one, whom we can safely infer is nature, responds to the first, saying, "I may have thought as much, but not aloud", as though a symbolic relationship exists between the two. This passage drives the metaphor Frost initially proposes to a close, a final resolution between both society and process that recognizes the strong bond they share. As the poem comes full-circle, the first speaker ends the conversation, saying simply, "Well so I came". Here is a subtle recognition that society is obligated to nature and process, that the two are intertwined and perhaps more divided than they should be. "In us nature reaches its height of form and through us exceeds itself"; this mindset of Frost's becomes apparent in "*The Telephone*".

While the techniques Frost uses in "*The Telephone*" are more complex than those in "*A Time to talk*", both poems bring nature to the mind of the reader. These poems, when paired, display perfectly how "poetry operates between....two poses of communication and non-communication". With no conversation taking place in "*A Time to Talk*", the poem exemplifies the idea of communicating without speaking, especially in the conversational style Frost uses. Implementing the idea of conversation without actually creating a conversation is one of Frost's many talents as a poet, as he "believed that next to poetry itself, the art of

conversation....was the great social, aesthetic, and intellectual passion of his life".

Immediately in "*A Time to Talk*" the reader is aware of a connection between characters, labeling the approaching character as a friend of the speaker. Frost utilizes words that inspire double-meaning, as exemplified here: "And slows his horse to a meaning walk". The word "meaning" conveys two messages, one of slowing down & eventually stopping before the farmer's property & the other of actual purpose. The meaning of the horse and his owner walking that path is full of intent-conversation! The reader may draw one of these conclusions in regard to the word "meaning", or perhaps even both. While whatever the reader attains from this tool of Frost is completely subjective, with each reading, it implies his poetry of conversation.

The only conversation in "*A Time to Talk*" occurs interpersonally, as the farmer reflects "I don't stand still and look around/on the hills I haven't hoed, / and shout from where I am, 'What is it?'". This thought process may not constitute conversation, but it is a form of communication in the self and serves to accentuate the importance of conversation. Furthermore, the poem places value on time, and how one spends it. It is not surprising to see Frost express such value, and effort, as these are reoccurring themes of his work. When the speaker is internally discussing his actions, he ends his intrapersonal talk by saying, "No, not as there is time to talk", thereby placing value on conversation again. While this poem lacks a metaphor for thought, such as in "*The Telephone*", it does not lack a message. Through repetition Frost makes his point very clear-communication and interactions are important.

Conclusion

Conversation is the core of Frost's poetry, his reasoning, and his theory of language. The skepticism of Frost shines through "*The Telephone*" and is diminished in "*A Time to talk*", completing his desires through poetry to bring process and society together. Frost is not skeptical of society, or nature, but of their interaction with each other and within conversation, and yet "he leaves us more, rather than less, confident about ourselves and our capacities".

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