



CONTROVERSIAL CONVERSATION IN SELECTED POEMS OF ROBERT FROST

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at an analysis of Robert Frost's poems and its dramatic quality. Life is full of contrariness. Contradictions are sometimes required to get a better communion. Poems like 'Home burial', 'The Death of the Hired Man' and 'West Running Brook' are witnesses to Frost's capacity in representing conversation in verse form. The title itself shows the contrariness. These poems are based on the conversation between the husband and the wife. During their conversation there are lot of controversies in their thoughts and feelings. Contrariness in life are needed to build a harmonious and meaningful life

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INTRODUCTION

Robert Lee Frost is an American poet, often called 'the voice of America' as he represents the feelings of American people. His poetry celebrates the countryside of New Hampshire. His poems deal with familiar native scenes. He uses simple words from the plain language of every-day life. In his work, 'The Figure a Poem Makes' he defines "a poem begins in delight ends in wisdom".

One of the significant features of Frost's poetry is its dramatic quality. Poems like 'Home Burial', 'The Death of the Hired man' and 'West Running Brook' are witnesses to Frost's capacity in representing conversations in verse form. All these poems are based on the conversation between the husband and the wife. During their conversation there are lot of controversies in their thoughts and feelings.

Home is a safer place for all human beings in this world. But the poet titled it as 'Home burial' i.e., the home is a burial place. In the poem 'The Death of a Hired man' Warren and Mary discuss the life of a hired man but the poem bears the title as

'The Death of a Hired Man.' In New England all other brooks are running towards the east to merge in the sea. This brook has different courses towards the west i.e., 'West Running Brook'.

"Home Burial"

It deals with the conflict between the father and mother about the death of their first born son. As the poem begins the mother is looking through the window and she notices that someone is digging grave for her son. Later she has come to know that her husband i.e., the father himself digs the grave for his son. She is unable to tolerate that, so she considers him as a callous and brutal man. This situation alienates her from her husband. It paves way for the contrariness between the father and the mother.

As the poem opens the husband is standing at the bottom of the staircase and the wife is standing at the top of the staircase. He is moving towards his wife but she is getting down in opposition to him. This shows that both of them are in extreme ends in their thoughts and actions. While he is standing at the bottom of the staircase

he does not understand what she is looking through the window and why she has suddenly become so distressed.

Once he reached beside the window he said "Just that I see". Through the window he noticed tombstones of his three relatives made up of stones and marbles and a mound. He utters the word 'a child's mound'.

She says

'Don't, don't, don't

Don't, she cried'.

She could not tolerate even the word uttered by her husband. He feels hurt and demands,

"Can't a man speak of his own child he's lost?"

She replies that someone can speak about their child's death but "Not You". She prepares to leave and accuses him no man can speak of his child's death like him. He requests her not to leave the place and he wants to retain her. She finds his words are injurious and he does not know how to please her. He seeks her help to understand her feelings. It shows that he is willing to learn from her.

'Help me, then.'

'I don't know how to speak of anything

So as to please you'

He says that it is possible for two individuals who have no love for each other can live together with certain terms and conditions. These terms and conditions are meaningless when two people love each other. He decides himself to never use any injurious words towards her.

"Though I don't like such things' twist those that love.

Two that don't love can't live together without them".

The husband feels that she is overreacting in this matter. He says "I do think, though, you overdo it a little". But it is not a little thing for a woman. He pleads her to give him a chance to prove his love. He requests her to gain strength from his love and it gives the capacity to bear the grief of the death of their first born. According to her all are pretending in this world and no one is sincere. It is an evil world. So she wants to leave this insincere world.

He is shocked by the behavior of his wife and he considered her as a brutal woman.

She is shocked because of her husband's casual behavior after he buried his son. He seems to be carefree and not to bother about what will happen to the child's tender body. The husband feels that he is a cursed man in this world because he is hearing all this from no one else but his own wife. She opens the door wider and he demands where she means to go, so that he may bring her back. Time is good remedy for everything. It heals the wounds created by persons and incidents. With this hope one day or other day he will bring her back to home. Here the poem starts with the fear of the wife and ends with the will power of the husband. In the beginning of the poem, the poet presents the feeling of the wife,

"Looking back over her shoulder at some fear"

In the concluding part, the poet depicts the change in the attitude of the husband, 'I'll follow and bring you back by force, I will—'

"The Death of a Hired Man"

This poem is the conversation between Mr. Warren and Mary about an old farm hand, Silas who is back to his master's home to die. Here, Warren does not have good opinion on Silas. But Mary has a very good opinion and kind towards him. When Silas is back to his master's home, Warren is not in the home at the time. Mary conveys the arrival of Silas to Warren with an initial hesitation.

'Silas is back'

'Be kind'

He says,

But I'll not have the fellow back,

Warren is not interested to take him back to the service since Silas is old. According to him, the old man is of no use and he shouted him for his former ingratitude.

"What good is he? Who else will harbor him

At his age for the little he can do?"

"Sh! not so loud: he'll hear you,' Mary said I want him to: he'll have to soon or late".

Mary is trying to convince her husband that Silas does not have any pride with his past and hope for his future. This time he will leave the place permanently i.e., he has come home to die not to live.

“Home,’ he mocked gently.”

She justifies that home is a place whenever we go, it has to take a person in and also it is a place where we get dignity, love and affection. Even though Silas’ brother is a director in the bank, he does not visit his brother’s home. He feels that he can get self-respect, love and affection only in his master’s home.

Mary is still trying to extract sympathy from her husband. She says that Silas has not hurt anyone in his life time. Warren replies that he hurts him in many ways. Silas left the farm whenever his service and presence was needed. He has returned to the farm, while his service is not needed. It creates a bad impression in the mind of Warren and he considers Silas as a man of ingratitude and insincerity.

Mary is consistently trying to rouse pity in her husband towards helpless Silas. She says that Warren will understand the broken heart of Silas if he happens to see him. His working days are done and he is nearing his death. When Mary speaks in favour of Silas’s character, he does not contradict her. Now he has softened down in his attitude towards Silas. But there is no use because Silas breathed his last.

“Warren returned- too soon, it seemed to her-

Slipped to her side, caught up her hand and waited.

‘Warren?’ She questioned.

‘Dead’, was all he answered”.

“West Running Brook”

It is a dialogue between the young couple who is settled on a farm beside a brook. The brook attracts this young couple by its act of flowing in opposite direction. As the couple may innately possess the contrariness, the brook’s contrariness seems to attract them. It seems the brook has confidence on the choice of its own direction. The following lines illustrate the idea,

“When all the other country brooks flow east

To reach the ocean? It must be the brook

Can trust itself to go by contrariness

The way I can with you- and you with me -”.

The wife is fascinated by the brook and finds emotional attachment with it. She wants to adopt the brook as a member of the family. When she utters, she notices white waves on the surface of the brook. She feels that the brook has heard her voice and it has accepted her wish.

“Look, look it’s waving to us with a wave

To let us know it hears me”.

He does not have any emotional attachment with the brook. He cannot digest the idea that the brook has a power of communication. He explains logically that the white wave was there since the time the river came into being. It is formed when the gushing water dashes against a submerged rock. So it was not particularly created for the husband and wife to see and enjoy the scene.

“That wave’s been standing off this jut of shore-

Ever since rivers, I was going to say,

Were made in heaven. It wasn’t waved to us”.

The wife explains the movement of the white waves indicates that it has accepted her proposal. It is a kind of annunciation; how the Gabriel announced the birth of Jesus Christ to Virgin Mary.

“It wasn’t yet it was. If not to you

It was to me – in an annunciation”

Their discussion leads to philosophical thought about the nature of human existence. The backward motion of the brook suggests the need for knowing the source of existence. It will give a clear picture of life and help to avoid bewilderment.

“It is this backward motion toward the source,

Against the stream, the most we see ourselves in,

The tribute of the current to the source

It is from this in nature we are from

It is most us.”

It is a fact that the life embraces many contrary features like good and evil, God and Satan, peace

and chaos, tolerance and intolerance. Everything created in this world has to face the inevitable end of decay and extinction. But one has to offer resistance to this decaying process. It is an ideal world where man and nature co-exist.

Conclusion

Life is full of contrariness. In all these three poems, the husbands are practical and wives are emotional. They follow their own ways of dealing with a crisis; one has to balance both these extremes to lead a fruitful life on earth. Compromise must be the spirit of an ideal couple. In 'Home Burial' the father and mother mourn for their lost child. In the second poem, the husband and wife mourn for the death of an old man. In 'As you like it', Shakespeare mentioned the last stage of life as "second childishness"- super -old man ,tooth-less, blind, and as helpless as a baby. Therefore, in "The Death of a Hired Man", Silas who is in the last stage of life becomes a child to Warren and Marry. In 'West Running Brook', the young couple wants to adopt brook as their child. The poet attempts to unfold the merciful, compassionate and peace-loving nature of women. Woman, being a creator, knows the pains and pleasures of creation. On the contrary, a man is of stern and stubborn stuff. Contradictions are sometimes required to get a better communion. It can be said that contrariness in life are needed to build a harmonious and meaningful life.

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