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ROBERT FROST ON WORDSWORTH

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ABSTRACT

Frost in his tribute begins by presenting Wordsworth's poetic forms, through his concepts of essential and intellectual Wordsworth by comparing him to his contemporary romantic poets like Byron, Shelley, Keats etc. , with each one of them differs from each other in tone, meter, style, structure etc. Frost praised the lyrical quality in the poetry of Wordsworth . Wordsworth's quality of seeing into the insight of the simple and ordinary objects is something Frost appreciated the most. He laid importance to Wordsworth dictum of 'write with your eye on the object' alongwith his own belief of 'writing with your ear to the voice'.



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This is what Wordsworth did himself in all his best poetry proving that there can be no creative imagination unless there is a summoning of experience, fresh from life, which has not still been evoked. The power however to do this does not last very long in the life of a poet. After ten years, Wordsworth had very nearly exhausted his giving us only flashes of it now and then. As language only really exists in the mouths of men, here again, Wordsworth was right in trying to reproduce in his poetry not only the words – and in their limited range, too actually used in common speech- but their sound.

Robert Frost in his *Tribute to Wordsworth* published in *The Cornell Daily Sun*, March 1963 begins by quoting the following lines from "The Glories of Our Blood and State", a poem by James Shirley –

THE GLORIES of our blood and state
Are shadows, not substantial things;
There is no armour against fate;
Death lays his icy hand on kings:
Sceptre and Crown 5
Must tumble down,
And in the dust be equal made

With the poor crooked scythe and spade.

The comparison with Shirley or with Matthew Arnold's poetry as suggested in the starting of the speech by Frost laid the background of the type of poetry that Wordsworth practiced that is not Wordsworth, i.e. another kind of poet, the kind of the thing Wordsworth could not do, tried to do, or just barely tried to do when used the word 'behold' to being a poem, to 'behold', I set myself for something of that kind, the word 'behold' starts me, but no that is not the way he uses it. He is going to do something of a ballad like thing, not going up on that pitch.

Robert Frost then went on to explain about his views under the category Essential Wordsworth. He knew that Wordsworth favoured simple language for simple men and simple incidents. He was against the artificiality of diction.

After citing examples of the two famous poems by Southey to fill in the background, Frost now turns to Wordsworth's poem "Expostulation and Reply" published in the first addition of lyrical ballads. Frost notes that the poem conveys the theme of Wordsworth favour idea of nature as a teacher and imparts knowledge not to be imparted from books. Frost recites-

WHY, William, on that old grey stone,
Thus for the length of half a day,
Why, William, sit you thus alone,
And dream your time away?

"Where are your books?--that light bequeathed
To Beings else forlorn and blind!
Up! up! and drink the spirit breathed
From dead men to their kind.

"You look round on your Mother Earth,
As if she for no purpose bore you; 10
As if you were her first-born birth,
And none had lived before you!"

Frost notes the Wordsworth's famous tone of didacticism and wisdom, regarding the all pervading nature, with the same old accent of iambic tetrameter used and popular in the age of romanticism. Now Frost recites another poem of Wordsworth titled 'Anecdote for Fathers' which again celebrates childhood in his same naïve tone by advising adults to heed and pay special attention to children-

I have a boy of five years old;
His face is fair and fresh to see;
His limbs are cast in beauty's mould,
And dearly he loves me.

One morn we strolled on our dry walk,
Our quiet home all full in view,
And held such intermitted talk
As we are wont to do.

Frost then stops and points out that the presentation of the innocence in childhood as presented by Southey in his poem and by Wordsworth in his very poem looks rather boring and flavourless to him, something he cannot digest. Nevertheless he goes on to read-

My thoughts on former pleasures ran;
I thought of Kilve's delightful shore,
Our pleasant home when spring began,
A long, long year before.

simple language, quite boring both sometimes, flavoured or unflavoured style for common men and for elite and high readers, Wordsworth touches the heart of everybody. The cloyingly sweet tone in which he speaks Frost then goes to highlight the intellectual Wordsworth to the listeners. He begins with the popularity that Wordsworth had during the time when he was poet laureate.

I think that's essential Wordsworth. That lovely banality and that penetration that goes with it. It goes right down into the sole of men. This insipid tone. Now that's the Wordsworth I care for.

To explain the intellectual Wordsworth Frost first recites a poem by Keats and in the background of him will go on to explain Wordsworth just as he did while explaining his talk on Essential Wordsworth. Frost quotes from Keats' famous poem 'Hyperion' which is written for the most part in blank verse.

Frost denotes that Wordsworth was fully aware of the age he was living in and the style that he adopted suited to that age and period to which he belongs. The political instability that Frost wishes to point out that existed in his time, he explains, by reading another poem "London 1802" by Wordsworth which shows that the English society has become infectious to immoral values, corruption and dirt.

Frost concludes his speech by saying that he tried his best to present Wordsworth's poetic forms, through his concepts of essential and intellectual Wordsworth by comparing him to his contemporary romantic poets like Byron, Shelley, Keats etc. , with each one of them differs from each other in tone, meter, style, structure etc. ..

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