THREE LOVE POEMS BY ROBERT FROST

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I selected this topic because I think Robert Frost is a very fine poet, and I mean to praise these poems in examining their excellences. Moreover, here are poems that have been conceived in the words and music of our own splendid American English, and for once we will not have to approach our text through the filter of translation.

I call these three poems "love poems" because that is what I think they are. I don't mean that in any "clever" way, such as postulating that every poem is somehow a love poem. That may be nearly true, if the poet has attained to a sufficient vision. But in this lecture I mean it in the ordinary sense of a poem written by the poet to a beloved person declaring that love. In such poems, poets tend, by and large, to talk at least as much, and usually more, about themselves than about the beloved, and that is what we have come to expect of love poems.

I give a few examples:

> O my luv's like a red red rose
> That's newly sprung in June.
> O my luv's like a melody
> That's sweetly played in tune.
>
> How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
>
> Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
> Thou art more lovely and more temperate
>
> Come live with me and be my love,
> And we will all the pleasures prove.
>
> Farewell, thou art too dear for my possessing,
> And like enough thou know's thy estimate.
>
> Come, madam, come, all rest my powers defy,
> Until I labor, I in labor lie.

But I'm being carried away. I'm sure I could go on like this for the rest of our brief hour together, leave you frustrated, and say no word about Frost. What I really mean to say is that Frost's love poems are not like these. If you are disappointed, it will be as lovers. If you are instructed, it may be as lovers. And if you are lovers of poetry I hope you may be... pleased.

I

Happiness Makes Up In Height For What It Lacks In Length

I'll begin with the title, since that is what the poet puts first. You will notice that the first of the three poems has a long title for a fairly short poem, Happiness Makes Up In Height For What It Lacks In Length. Indeed, I suspect that Frost may be having here a private joke, namely, that the title is long, a hexameter verse, while the trimeter verses of the poem are only half as long; but the poem makes up in height, what it lacks in length, that is, twenty-four short verses compared to the title's one long verse.

First of all, the title is a longish declarative sentence, rather than the more usual phrase like Dover Beach or To A Skylark. Logically, it is a universal affirmative proposition, declared to be true in every case. Rhetorically, it is dogmatic. Materially, it is controversial. Formally, it seems to stand there like the enunciation of a Euclidean proposition, the truth of which is to be demonstrated by what follows. Metrically, it is a hexameter verse, beginning with a dactyl; and it has two alliterative pairs which stress its thesis, Happiness makes up in Height for what it Lacks in Length. Frost says somewhere that in the order of compositions, it is the title that is discovered last. Indeed he says that the order of a poem "is from delight to discovery," so the title poses the discovery.

I'm guessing that we know what he means by happiness. Or at least we know negatively what it is, for we can say, "I am not happy." Length surely means a long time, for happiness is commonly said not to last very long. But Height? That is harder, because the very point seems to be that height and length are either not of the same kind of dimension, or else not on the same dimensional scale. We wonder how Height on one scale can "make up for" Length on another. Does it mean "to equal"? I do not propose to resolve this difficulty. If it is one.

Let's read the poem now. Or, if you are willing, try not to read it, but only listen, because your eye tends to turn off your ear, and the ear is, not surprisingly, more perceptive about the meaning of sounds than the eye is. Sight and sound are a little like height and length - dimensionally different.

Happiness Makes Up In Height For What It Lacks In Length

Oh, stormy stormy world,
The days you were not swirled
Around with mist and cloud,
Or wrapped as in a shroud,
And the sun's brilliant ball
Was not in part or all
Obscured from mortal view--
Were days so very few

I can but wonder whence
I get the lasting sense
Of so much warmth and light.
If my mistrust is right
It may be altogether
From one day's perfect weather,
When starting clear at dawn,
The day swept clearly on
To finish clear at eve.
I verily believe
My fair impression may
Be all from that one day
No shadow crossed but ours
As through its blazing flowers
We went from house to wood
For change of solitude.

What did you hear? (You may look now.) Short trimeter lines that rhyme in couplets and go very fast without lingering on the rhymes. There are no gorgeous "poetic" words. Hardly any word that anyone of us would not use every day of the week. Except, maybe, verily, which you might save for Sunday. No complicated sentences. These go straightforwardly to what they mean. The meter is steadily iambic, with only a few substitute feet in the whole poem. All of the rhymes are easy and perfect, except the very last one.

The principal figure of speech is the metaphor of sunshine and stormy weather -- the most familiar one possible. You hardly think about it, hardly notice that it is a metaphor, so well do you know it. It is a staple of popular and folk songs:

> Don't know why there's no sun up in the sky,
> Stormy weather!
> Since me and my gal ain't together
> It's rainin' all the time.

or

> O sole mio

There are dozens of other such songs.

But wait a moment before you dismiss it as being unsuitable for serious poetry. Plato in the Republic, Dante in the Comedia, Shakespeare in King Lear and The Tempest go very far and very high with it. What do you make of this range?

My point, though, about the poem at hand (to which in future I shall refer as Happiness because the full title is so long) is that there is no difficulty in the grammar or diction or metaphor to impede our thought, except the difficulty of the thought itself. All of this is so perfectly simple that one begins to suspect virtuosity.

I postulate that structure is intelligibility.

The demonstration goes in three parts, that is in three sentences. (Frost's thoughts in general go in sentences, because they are complete thoughts.) The first part, (lines 1-11) is the longest, because it is trying to frame the question of the poem, and that is always the hardest part of dialectic. The argument is something like this. [I speak for the poet, but in paraphrase.] "From day to day the world appears to me to be wholly dark, gloomy, and devoid of goodness; yet, at the same time, I seem to have a contradictory and permanent inner sense of pervading warmth and light. I wonder how this can be? What am I to think?" I suspect that everyone must in serious reflective moments have felt this way. It can be an agonizing personal question that different persons answer have answered in different ways. By putting the question to themselves some have lost a religion, others have found one.

The next dialectical question is, What kind of answer could there be to the question, "Where do I get my lasting sense of so much warmth and light?"

The second section of the poem (ll. 12-17) begins with a hypothesis.

> If my mistrust is right
> It may be altogether
> From one day's perfect weather,

The hard word here is "mistrust." Does he mistrust the appearances? Or does he mistrust his own inner sense? Then he remembers that there was one time, metaphorically speaking, when appearances for a whole day conformed to his inner sense. His present mistrust, mistrust in the truth of dark appearances,

> ...may be altogether
> From one day's perfect weather
> When starting clear at dawn
> The day swept clearly on
> To finish clear at eve.

This is logically sound. One actual contradictory case does destroy the universality of a proposition. Here the proposition which he feels to be thrust upon him by appearances, namely, that the world is wholly evil, is destroyed by the counter-example that he has himself experienced of "one day's perfect weather." That one experience says "not always," "not necessarily." The terms of the argument as I have put it are, of course, the terms of the metaphor. To literalize it would be much more laborious.

In the third section he returns in memory to the particulars of "that one day/ No shadow crossed but ours? as through"...But stop..Wait! Hear that last word. "Ours." For the first time there is another person in the poem. Or maybe she has been there all the time in his

thoughts, and we didn't know because he didn't mention her. But now we know that if so far these thoughts have seemed to be mere solipsistic maunderings on the world's evil, the entrance of another person upon the scene alters everything. He remembers

> ...that one day
> No shadow crossed but ours
> As through its blazing flowers
> We went from house to wood
> For change of solitude.

Let me pursue the figure a little to interpret it. Again the poet speaks, and I paraphrase and comment parenthetically. "There was a time once when we [does "We" mean "You and I" or "She and I"?] were alone together, and, leaving the house" [which implies its own shadows and those of other persons - family, friends, neighbors, all the world] "we walked hand in hand in the full light of the sun, seeing no shadow except our own single one, through that sun-drenched meadow filled with "blazing flowers" [a sudden, almost surrealistic image for, among other things, their passion], and into the wood for "change of solitude." This is the kind of solitude that lovers desire. To be alone together, not to be solipsistically alone. This is Eden remembered and re-enacted, re-experienced.

It is the <u>actuality</u> of that remembered one day's experience - it was no dream, we were broad waking - which answers the question that he wondered about:

> ... whence
> I get the lasting sense
> Of so much warmth and light.

It comes from the real memory of that one day.

This answers the question <u>for him</u>. I do not know that it answers the question <u>for us</u>. Or that it could. The poet bears witness to his own experience. What kind of understanding or conviction can <u>we</u> gain from an account of another person's intimate experiences?

The poem is an account, a telling, of one lover's discovery that followed, perhaps long afterwards, the experience of what may have been a brief moment of unshadowed love. Is it of any use to anyone else? To us?

One more question remains about the poem. A question about time. <u>When</u> was "that one day?" Was it, literally or figuratively, only yesterday? Or was it a long time ago? Now experience is many memories, so his affirmation of the proposition that "Happiness Makes Up In Height For What It Lacks in Length" must mean that he has known <u>both</u> the height and the length.

I think, therefore that "We" in line 23 must mean "She and I" rather than "You and I"; that their day in the sun must have been long ago. All of which strengthens his witness, but maybe not for us. On this depends the possible value for us of poetry.

* * * * *

Frost, like most of us, was haunted by the myth of Eden. This is why I felt that I might appropriately mention that myth in interpreting this poem. Here is another poem he wrote about twenty years earlier than he wrote Happiness.

Nothing Gold Can Stay

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief.
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

II

Never Again Would Birds' Song Be The Same

My second love poem is a sonnet entitled Never Again Would Birds' Song Be The Same. The title is simply the 13th line of the sonnet taken whole in preluding anticipation of the conclusion. Or partial conclusion. Like the title of Happiness, this too is at once a complete sentence, a complete verse - this one in iambic pentameter - and a declaration, albeit a riddling one. It is not, however, abstractly universal, like Happiness Makes Up In Height For What It Lacks In Length; for by declaring "Never again" it implies that it will sing of some transforming event in time. It seems, therefore, that we shall have a story or its equivalent.

First, however, we must have the sonnet itself

Never Again Would Birds' Song Be The Same

He would declare and could himself believe
That the birds there in all the garden round
From having heard the daylong voice of Eve
Had added to their own an oversound,
Her tone of meaning but without the words.
Admittedly an eloquence so soft
Could only have had an influence on birds
When call or laughter carried it aloft.
Be that as may be, she was in their song.
Moreover her voice upon their voices crossed

Had now persisted in the woods so long
That probably it never would be lost.
Never again would birds' song be the same.
And to do that to birds was why she came.

As you hear, we are not told the story, because we know it already. But we find that there is one small detail which has been officially omitted until now, and which will be revealed by the poem.

Notice how delicately the poet introduces his persons. It begins "He would declare," (so there is He) "that the birds there" (so there are birds) "in all the garden round" (so the place is a garden) "From having heard the daylong voice of Eve" - (O, we think, that garden, Eden Garden, and "He" can only be Adam.") Now we know the time, the place, and the characters. All in the first three lines and before the end of the first sentence. That is masterful story-telling. And when the sentence ends, we know the action as well:

...the birds there in all the garden round
From having heard the daylong voice of Eve
Had added to their own an oversound,
Her tone of meaning but without the words.

In short, the poet has called up to our minds one of our great "origin myths" as anthropologists call them. By this they mean accounts given under the modality of story about how all things came to be in the beginning, and how they came to be the way they are now.

If this is a love poem, as I claim it is, it must be about the love of man and wife, of the first man-and-wife. Here we see them in their Edenic solitude, as at the end of the first poem. And more, we cannot avoid at least our shadowy memory

Of man's first disobedience and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden...

and of all the consequences that have ensued. But the events of which this poem treats all took place in the Spring and Summer of Creation and before the Fall.

I think that I must now repeat the octave - that is, the first eight lines - of the sonnet so that we can address the change.

He would declare and could himself believe
That the birds there in all the garden round
From having heard the daylong voice of Eve
Had added to their own an oversound,
Her tone of meaning but without the words.
Admittedly an eloquence so soft
Could only have had an influence on birds
When call or laughter carried it aloft.

"He would declare..." To Eve, surely, since there was no one else. He must have said something like this: "Eve, it may sound strange for me to say, but these birds around here are beginning to sound like you. It must be from having heard you all day long, day in and day out, calling to me and laughing. I know birds can't say the names, but somehow they have your tone of meaning without the words." With "daylong voice" Adam may be poking gentle fun at Eve for talking rather much - more, certainly, than Adam - more, he may think, like the constant twittering of the birds, and less like his own manly taciturnity.

I can't resist a parenthesis here to point out one lovely effect that Frost achieves in these lines. In line 4 he writes

"Had added to their own an oversound,"

I think we expect overtone, which would rhyme internally with their own, but he avoids that with the invented word, oversound (much more strictly accurate, but the way), and then in the next line, follows immediately with "her tone of meaning but without the words." And words is now set up for the meaningful end-rhyme, with birds in line 7.

Adam, perhaps a little ashamed of his jibe at Eve, hastens to qualify.

> Admittedly, an eloquence so soft
> Could only have had an influence on birds
> When call or laughter carried it aloft.

Adam must concede that Eve's voice is "ever soft, gentle and low,/ An excellent thing in woman." In "admittedly" I think he recants his joke by praising her voice, her "eloquence." Besides, what could the calls of laughter have been about? Since they are the only two people in the world, she could only have been calling Adam. And what is her laughter? Surely it must have been the laughter of pure delight in all Creation...in the "strain of the Earth's sweet being in the beginning."

We learn in Genesis that after the Creation and before Eve came,

> The Lord God brought all the birds and animals to (Adam) to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called them, that was the name thereof.

So Adam is the inventor of names, of the words for beings, and it can only be he who taught the names to Eve.

I think Eve's call, then, must have been something like this:

Eve: O Adam, Do come here. Come and see this one. What did you name this one?
Adam: Frog;

Eve: Frog, Oh yes, I hear. It does sound just like frog looks. So nice and green. And--Oh, it can hop!
(Then later)
Eve: O Adam, come and see. What's that bird with all the little ones following in a row?
Adam: Gambril's quail with chicks.
Eve: Quail. What a good name! How perfectly delightful they are. Adam, how do you call the striped one?
Adam: Skunk.
Eve: No, no, not that one. The big orange and black one.
Adam: Tiger.
Eve: O yes, it does look like "Tiger" sounds. Tiger, Tiger. How beautiful and strong. May I stroke it?
Adam: Yes
Eve: What's the name of that beautiful bird there?
Adam: Bird of Paradise.
Eve: (laughing delightedly) Why Adam, you made a joke! They're all birds of Paradise, aren't they? Or did you run out of names?

In the first chapter of Genesis God speaks, and his words create beings. In the second chapter Adam speaks, finding names for the created things. Adam is the grave inventor of names. Eve has learned the names and has given them wings that carry them aloft. "Winged words." Delighting in Creation she exclaims

> O wonder!
> How many goodly creatures are there here!
> .....O brave new world!

With luck, and for brief moments in time, Eden is restored to each of us. After a spring rain when all the world is fresh again. Or in a day of unshadowed love, as at the end of the last poem, amid "the blazing flowers."

John Muir writes that, once hiking along the High Sierras, he came to a mountain meadow filled with alpine flowers, and that for half an hour he sat on the edge of the woods and watched a great male mountain lion leaping there and playing with the butterflies.

> In just proportions we true beauties see,
> And in short measure life may perfect be.

I have mentioned in anticipation the change that happens at the end of the octave. The last six lines of the sonnet, the sestet, take on a somewhat different tone of meaning from that of the first eight, because it looks to the future.

> Be that as may be, she was in their song.
> Moreover, her voice upon their voices crossed
> Had now persisted in the woods so long
> That probably it never would be lost.

"Moreover, her voice upon their voices crossed." What a perfect and lovely audile image of counterpoint!

Who speaks these lines? and to whom? Perhaps Adam, but not to Eve, for he would not speak of her to herself as "she."

Never again would birds' song be the same.

This sounds, both logically and musically, almost like a full cadence. Now we know the end of the story. The poem has now told us the detail omitted from the official version. It goes on to say "Never again," and there is nothing after "never again." The story of Eden has been set right. Birds' twittering songs have been forever transformed by the added oversound of meaning, and likewise Adam's namings have been transformed. Song is metaphorically an image of the marriage of words and music, as, reversing the metaphor, music is an image of marriage itself.

Moreover, speech itself has acquired a "tone of meaning," even without the words, for sometimes in speech we can hear a meaning even when we can't make out the words. We can also detect falseness or mere emptiness in speech when words and music disagree.

So,

Never again would birds' song be the same.

But there is yet one more line. The music of the verse demands the next line for the full cadence,

And to do that to birds was why she came.

She did not come to offer an occasion of sin to Adam. She came to give meaning motion to birds' song and to human words and to Adamic names. Probably her gift never will be lost.

I have left dangling the question, Who speaks the lines of the sestet? It cannot be Eve, nor can it be addressed to her, for it speaks of her in the third person. But it could be - perhaps must be Adam who speaks. Adam or one of his descendants, man or woman or both, by whom the story passes on to successive generations. If Eve had not come, there would be no poetry, certainly, and hardly any speech as we know it. Without poetry we would never know about Eden at all. Poetry recounts what has been memorable. Poetry itself is made memorable so that we will be able to remember the things it recalls.

Frost himself had a sort of theory - he never systematized it because, for one thing, he didn't believe in systems. He was against them. But he believed that the meaning of speech lies not primarily in the words that we string together into a sentence, but in the string of meaning on which they are strung. Or, as the poem puts it, "the tone of meaning."

I myself believe that. The separation between the tone of meaning and words conceived as those units listed as such in a dictionary probably didn't come about until writing had been invented. In Greek *logos* means (among other things) a sentence, a complete thought, not a dictionary entry. When we speak, the words and the tone of meaning simply come together - are the thought. But when we confront printed words naked on a page, we have to discover a tone of meaning for them that is at least plausible.

This is the hard part about reading poetry. It is why you can't read it fast and understand it. You have to find the voice. I'll give an example, I'm not sure how the last line of this sonnet, "Never Again..." should be read' I'll read some different versions of the couplet, I'm pretty sure about the first line,

Never again would birds' song be the same.
And to do that to birds was why she came.
And to do that to birds or was why she came.
And to do that to birds or was why she came.
And to do that to birds or was why she came.

Which of these sounds the right tone of meaning?

III

Come In

In the title of the third poem, Come In, we recognize our customary invitation to a guest to enter our home and to partake of our hospitality. These words seem to conceal no enigma now, so let's go on.

Come In

As I came to the edge of the woods,
Thrush music--hark!
Now if it was dusk outside,
Inside it was dark.

Too dark in the woods for a bird
By sleight of wing
To better its perch for the night,
Though it still could sing.

The last of the light of the sun
That had died in the west
Still lived for one song more

In a thrush's breast.

Far in the pillared dark
Thrush music went--
Almost like a call to come in
To the dark and lament.

But no, I was out for stars:
I would not come in.
I meant not even if asked,
And I hadn't been.

Remembering my postulate that structure is intelligibility, I shall take the risk of observing some obvious structural elements of the poem - as well as some that may not be quite so obvious - so that we shall have these before us in common.

1. In large, the poem comprises five stanzas, each of which is a quatrain. The quatrains alternate three-stress lines (trimeters) with shorter two-stress lines (dimeters). Only the two shorter lines are rhymed.
2. Each stanza ends with a full stop, creating pauses between the stanzas.
3. The first and last stanzas comprise two sentences, while the middle three stanzas are single sentences.

For a contrasting example, we saw that in Happiness the movement of the verse, and therefore of the thought and feeling, was much more rapid than it is here. There were no stanzas. The lines ran on through the complete rhymes. There was very little punctuation, four commas, a dash and 3 periods. We always need to know such things in order to help us find the voice for a poem.

As for the meter, we need to try the first few verses to discover the "metrical contract" that the poet enters into with us. In Happiness he begins

O stormy, stormy, world,
The days you were not swirled
Around with mist and cloud,
Or wrapped as in a shroud,

and so on establish the contract with us for iambic trimeter in run-on lines and in rhyming couplets. We know what to expect for the rest of the poem.

With Come In it is more complicated.

As I came to the edge of the woods
Thrush music -- hark!
Now if it was dusk outside,
Inside it was dark.

The first line gives us a regular meter of three anapests. (˘˘/˘˘/˘˘/). No other such regular line occurs in the poem, and this one serves to establish what we will discover to be, so to speak, the dominant metrical foot. This dominant foot mingles with other kinds of feet that are needed for the right "tone of meaning." But the anapest is dominant in that it appears in every line but four. Every possible two-syllable foot appears at least once in the poem. The other possible ones are clearly these:

Iamb: ˘ /
Trochee: / ˘
Spondee: / /
Pyrrhic: ˘ ˘

This sort of analysis quickly grows tedious, and maybe I've lost some of you already. If so, I'm sorry. Anyway, this is the last of it. And if any of you want to talk about it later, we can do so.

I thought I needed these things, especially the anapests, because they are quite specially essential to the music of this poem. Namely, thrush music. For thrushes (and robins, which are thrushes too with a different name, but a similar song) sing in spring and early summer with a song in which the clusters of notes are dominantly anapestic and, when the song is long, with other meters - mostly iambic - mixed in according to the inspiration of the singer. This is surely what Frost meant us to hear; and we do hear it, whether we know it or not. Of course, you need to have heard this birdsong in order to recognize it. When Frost wrote this poem in 1940, I don't suppose it ever occurred to him that these birds weren't everybody's neighbors. It may even work backwards. If you know the poem, maybe you'll recognize the thrush sometime.

> As I came to the edge of the woods,
> Thrush music - hark!
> Now if it was dusk outside,
> Inside it was dark.

The poem presents itself in the first stanza as being straightforwardly narrative. We could tell the story thus. The poet, who happens to live near a woodland, approaches it, probably with no conscious intention of going in. As he comes to the edge of the woods, however, he hears a thrush pouring out a cascade of song from the darkness deep inside.

> Too dark in the woods for a bird
> By sleight of wing
> To better its perch for the night,
> Though it still could sing.

In the second stanza, he pauses to listen, moved, as I suppose anyone might be - I confess that I am - to witness the sheer act of a small bird singing what seems to be a lovely and heartfelt melody, quite alone in the darkness, possibly betraying its presence to a marauding owl or cat or weasel, and that from a place where it is too dark even

to find a safer perch for the night. Does he intend a turn of wit by his substitution of "sleight of wing" for the human "sleight of hand"? If so, is the serious point of it a suppressed self-identification with the bird? Or is it both at once, trying to pass off the self-identification with a seemingly patronizing little joke? I don't know. But I have never forgotten the phrase, "sleight of wing" since I first heard Mr. Frost read it years ago.

Why does the thrush sing in the darkness, and why should we find it moving that it does? Partly, no doubt, because songbirds are creatures of the daylight - who, like ourselves - naturally withdraw from the world at night. In any case, the figure of the "darkling singer" has long engaged poets. Frost himself has at least three other poems in which this figure plays a part.

> The last of the light of the sun
> That had died in the west
> Still lived for one song more
> In a thrush's breast.

In stanza three, the central one, the poet becomes more reflective. His thought moves to a quietly stated but striking metaphor. The light of the sun has just died in the west, but its light, remembered by bird and by the poet, has been transformed into song in the breast of the singer. A mysterious and a magical transformation! Light into song! The dead past into a living memory. Now it lives in the thrush's breast for "one song more." When that song is finished there will be silence. Reading the metaphor backwards, silence is final darkness.

> He continues to listen:
> Far in the pillared dark
> Thrush music went ---

Another unforgettable line "Far in the pillared dark". What does that mysterious phrase mean to us? The "pillars" are surely the tree trunks, and they are likened to the columns of a cathedral or a temple, that perhaps reach to its roof. It is not exactly a visual image, however, because in the imagined darkness we cannot <u>see</u> them. It seems to me that in our imagination the tree trunks in the darkness have almost been transformed into a sound image, and that somehow, we <u>hear</u> them.

I have proposed that up to this point, the dash at the end of line 2 stanza 4, the poem has in manner been narrative - a story of an evening walk in the countryside - although his observations and reflections on the birdsong have become increasingly metaphorical. But at this point there is a radical change. His thought becomes inward.

Far in the pillared dark
Thrush music went ---
Almost like a call to come in to
The dark and lament.

"Almost like a call" (to him personally an invitation, or a seduction like the sirens' song, - or perhaps a summons) "...to come in to the dark and lament," to join his voice to the thrush's voice in the darkness where the light had died and where the thrush's voice will soon be silenced as well. He construes it as an invitation to join his own inner darkness to the mourning of the bird. The bird, the woods and the darkness have become for him metaphors of his own inward state. And we see now that all along the poem has been a poem of darkness. The word "dark" or its equivalent, like the anapest, occurs in every stanza. This New England woodland is Dante's "dark wood" that he has nearly been lured into. The darkness of Death and Hell.

In the fifth stanza a new kind of thing happens. The poet makes a decision. Until this moment he has been observing, listening, brooding, and being drawn towards the darkness and the lament. Suddenly

But no, I was out for stars:
I would not come in.

An almost violent refusal of the invitation to "come in" and a recollection of his real purpose. He remembers where he had been going when he started out. How are we to understand "out for stars"?

First let us take it as a natural metaphor. What we see in the heavens after the sun has gone down and all is darkness, are the stars overhead. They are lesser lights than the sun, but lights. Moreover, they are fixed - most of them - and we can take fixes on them, find our direction by them, and navigate. Neither can we steer by the light of the sun <u>remembered</u>. We have to use what is present to us.

Literarily, Frost may have had in mind Shakespeare's sonnet that begins

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O, no! it is an ever-fixéd mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.

I think Frost here, as in the other two poems, is remembering and mourning the death of his wife. All three of these poems were written in the years immediately after her death, and are about remembering her. He was given to despair and to the contemplation of suicide. He wrote of her to a friend "She has been the unspoken half of everything I ever wrote, and the best half of everything from My November Guest to the last two stanzas of Two Tramps in Mud Time." By the end of the poem I think he has rejected the alternative that suicide seems to offer to grief and decides to steer by such stars as he has crossed to safety with and which still shine in his darkness. Chiefly he refuses to admit impediments to the marriage of their true minds, which death has threatened, and to steer by the stars that have been given him.

Here, as in Never Again, he adds a coda, and this may be a witty one to lift his spirit and ours. He may laugh at himself a little in his rejection of the despair and for refusing the invitation to come into the dark and lament. He discovers that he has refused an invitation that had never been extended. Or maybe, in a darker interpretation, he means only that he recognizes in sorrow and acceptance - but not in despair - that he must continue to go in the dusk by starlight until the invitation is extended to him. He even prepared for this outcome in the poem, at the end of the fourth stanza, the darkest one, when he says that the thrush music was

> Almost like a call to come in to
> The dark and lament

To speak for a moment longer about the "tone of meaning" in the last two stanzas of the poem where the dramatic change occurs, let us consider metrically the endings of these stanzas. I have spoken of the "dominant" anapest, identifying it with the call of the thrush, and I pointed out that after the opening line of the poem, which is purely anapestic, no other such line occurs. But in Stanza Four after the dash, where the thrush music is most poignant, we have

> Almost like a call to come in
> To the dark and lament

First an iambic foot and then four uninterrupted anapests followed by the silence between the stanzas. This is clear enough to the ear, but to make it so for the eye, he divides the preposition "into" into its constituent prepositions, one for each line. And we hardly notice.

In the last stanza it seems to me that in the second and fourth lines a sort of defeated and disappointed music is sounded, again in the metrics. Both of these lines begin with an anapest, but as I read them end in a pyrrhic foot (˘˘). This cancels the second stress from the lines, shortening it and deadening it.

But no, I was out for stars:
I would not come in.
I meant not even if asked,
And I hadn't been.

The tone of meaning again depends in large part on the metrics. But of course it is the felt meaning which dictates the metrics.

At the beginning of the lecture I quoted Frost as saying the the order of a poem is "from delight to discovery" and that the title is discovered last, so that the title poses the discovery. And so the title, "Come In", which seemed to pose no initial difficulty, is now seen to be the very fulcrum on which the poem is poised.