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By ROBERT D. STEVICK

The critical task of formulating the principles of poetry with which E. A. Robinson worked was not performed by the poet himself. He can hardly even be said to have assisted in that task. Robinson did not, so far as is recorded, write a formal essay setting forth, as a systemic set of statements, a theory of poetry, nor did he explain his own poetry.[1] He could not be induced to deliver a lecture of any sort, on any subject. He did not associate himself with any poetic movement or any group of poets whose tenets may be imputed to him. Unlike such of his predecessors as Bryant or James Russell Lowell, or such contemporaries and successors as Amy Lowell, T. S. Eliot, or Ezra Pound, he did not write literary criticism. He refused a request to write something in connection with the posthumous publication of some works by his admired friend William Vaughn Moody: "It seems to me that we poor devils who are condemned to write poetry should write it, and not talk about it."[2] On another occasion he said: "I believe so firmly that poetry that is good for anything speaks for itself that I feel foolish when I try to talk about it."[3] In retrospect he told Carl Van Doren much the same thing: "I am inclined to believe that poetry-makers should stick to their trade and leave criticism to others . . . . [T]hat has been my attitude, in spite of a few lapses, for the past thirty years."[4] After he became well known (after his first *Collected Poems* in 1922 and especially after the publication of *Tristram* in 1927), Robinson received

1 Besides absence of any formal statements in surviving papers and the absence of reference to Robinson's having set down a formulation of his poetic principles, the impressions of those who knew Robinson corroborate the negative assertion—which must always stand as tentative. (I regret not having had the opportunity to examine *Edwin Arlington Robinson's Letters to Edith Brower*, ed. Richard Cary, which has not reached me at time of final revision of this paper.) A main point made by Chard Powers Smith in his recent biography is that, whether in philosophy or in poetics, the logic or system that inheres in theory was not characteristic of Robinson (*Where the Light Falls. A Portrait of Edwin Arlington Robinson*, New York, 1965).

2 *Selected Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson*, ed. Ridgely Torrence (New York, 1940), 90.

3 Ellsworth Barnard, *Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Critical Study* (New York, 1952), 1.

4 *Three Worlds* (New York, 1936), 161.

apparently quite a number of inquiries from literary scholars regarding his poetic theory. His usual response seems to be typified by his reply to such an inquiry by Harry Hayden Clark: "So far as I can make out, I haven't any literary theory or aim in literature except to do as well as I can what insists on being done. I have had to make this unsatisfactory sort of reply to many similar requests."[5]

Informal statements provide a few guidelines for formulating Robinson's poetic principles, but they are far less helpful than we might wish. He apparently did not keep notebooks, journals, or other personal records in which his ideas about poetry might have been set down. The "few lapses" he confessed to Carl Van Doren in criticizing others' poems appear venial indeed. None seems to have taken the form of a systematic pronouncement; unless his criticism was conveyed in a letter, there hardly is any record from which to draw any principles. Even so Boswellian a reporter as Chard Powers Smith admits to being tells us only the following. Robinson undertook to criticize the typescript of Smith's proposed first book of poems.

> I stood by his chair, and we went through it. Besides the two he didn't like, he had indicated bad spots in half a dozen others, and he explained them. If he hadn't pointed out the flaws I should not have noticed them, for his marks were pencil dots in the margins, hardly visible . . . . It would be hard for me to persuade a bibliographer that these were the corrections of Edwin Arlington Robinson![6]

Memoirs, biographies, recollections of conversations, and other types of reportorial evidence also fail in recording statements of the principles operative in Robinson's composition of poetry. Typically: "He hates to walk. He wears a soft hat. He never talks about his own poetry. He never criticizes other people's poetry."[7] They do contain, however, a number of cryptic hints and, together with Robinson's letters, provide important evidence. "He never ceased to marvel at Professor Charles Cestre," particularly for *An Introduction to Edwin Arlington Robinson* (1930); "That Frenchman knows what I am up to. And somehow he always has."[8] "[H]e says a great deal that I have been waiting for someone to say—not only

5 Clark, ed., *Major American Poets* (New York, 1936), 946.
6 Smith, 20-21.
7 John Farrar, ed., *The Literary Spotlight* (New York, 1924), 119.
8 Rollo Walter Brown, *Next Door to a Poet* (New York, 1937), 7.

the praise, which in itself doesn't always amount to much, but simple statements of what I have been trying to do."[9] The few poems Robinson wrote on the subject of poetry also provide some oblique evidence about his poetic principles.

To recall Robinson's historical context, theorizing about poetry was not the fashion among poets when Robinson began to write verse. The "renaissance" of American poetry, with its abundance of theories of one aspect or another of poetry, began when Robinson was about forty years old, when he had been writing for twenty years or longer. When we make due allowance for Robinson's reticence and still find that even when confronted by poetic theories developed by his younger contemporaries he had little to say on the nature of poetry, we must infer one thing: despite his complete commitment of effort and interest to the writing of poetry, Robinson never formulated, never articulated poetic theory. The following assertion seems to be nothing if not candid: "I have absolutely no theories."[10]

That Robinson's principles were intuitively held and intuitively formulated is established by his remarks on poetry and poems as well as his remarks on poetic theory. His statements regarding diction in poetry serve suitably as a paradigm; diction is the most prominent topic of his remarks—in writing and in reported conversation—about poetry. "I demand *a certain something* in the arrangement of words, and more in their selection"[11] is one way he put it; or, his persistent concern was for "the *right* selection and arrangement of words" (my italics). Nothing, perhaps, is more characteristic of Robinson's statements, both within his poetry and without, than the "definite indefiniteness" of a phrase such as *a certain something;* the definition of that something is never brought beyond the felt into the said: it remains nonverbalized. In the same way, the rightness of selection and arrangement of words never has definition either by rules and all too seldom has definition by example. The sense without the prescription for the "right word" underlies countless other of Robinson's remarks, of

9 *Selected Letters,* 161-162.
10 *Ibid.,* 93.
11 *Untriangulated Stars: Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson to Harry De Forest Smith, 1890-1905,* ed. Denham Sutcliffe (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1947), 115.

which the following are but two. In 1930 Robinson recalled that around 1896

> time had no special significance for me, . . . a fisher of words who thought nothing of fishing for two weeks to catch a stanza, or even a line,[12] that I might throw back into the squirming sea of language . . . . I wanted fish that were smooth and shining and subtle, and very much alive, and not too strange; and presently, after long patience and many rejections, they began to bite.[13]

The other remark is an early one, in which Robinson complained that "those verses which ought to go like bees and things . . . want to go like camels. It is hunting for hours after one word and then not getting it that plays the devil with a man's gray matter and makes him half ready to doubt the kindness of the Scheme."[14] On the face of it, Robinson's numerous remarks about archaism in diction would seem to be a marked exception to the intuitive nature of his poetic principles. In letters, conversations, and even in revisions of his own early poems (notably "Horace to Leuconoë," an early version printed in *Untriangulated Stars,* 19-20), rejection of archaic words and constructions is a recurrent note: but the grounds for rejection of them remain as unspecific as they are unshifting.

As with diction, so with the nature and purpose of poetry. All Robinson's statements are plainly personal, and do not form parts of a poetic theory linked to such disciplines as aesthetics, anthropology, linguistics, or psychology. When writing of poetic inspiration he used again the indefinitely designative words such as *something*: "I discovered long ago that an artist is just a sort of living whistle through which Something blows."[15] Or, he used expressions that are not allowed merely to pass as metaphors but, by their being persistently capitalized, are transformed into place-markers in the geography of intuition:

> In the great shuffle of transmitted characteristics, traits, aptitudes, the man who fixes on something definite in life that he must do, at the expense of everything else, if necessary, has presumably got something

12 Robinson says much the same thing in *Selected Letters,* 103.
13 "The First Seven Years," *The Colophons,* IV (1930), n. p.
14 *Untriangulated Stars,* 236.
15 Barnard, 12.

that, for him, should be recognized as the Inner Fire. For him, that is the Gleam, the Vision, and the Word. He'd better follow it.[16]

For its purpose, poetry should have "ethical value"—though it should not be propaganda or crusading for social change. "Message" is a term Robinson himself used repeatedly, and in a sense indicated by such remarks as these:

If printed lines are good for anything, they are bound to be picked up some time; and then, if some poor devil of a man or woman feels any better or any stronger for anything I have said, I shall find no fault with the scheme or anything in it.[17]

Or,

I suppose that a part of it might be described as a faint hope of making a few of us understand our fellow creatures a little better, and to realize what a small difference there is after all between ourselves as we are and ourselves not only as we might have been but would have been if our physical and temperamental make-up had been a little different.[18]

It must be added, however, that the "message" or purposive element is attenuated in some of his poems that Robinson regarded most highly. Miss Bates tells us that, talking of his sonnets, he explained that some of them "were written for their idea, or because they held up some fragment of humanity for a moment's contemplation, or because they turned a light on some aspect of life"; but he added that these "did not have so much in the way of beauty" as the opening lines of "Many Are Called."[19]

In sum, Robinson's poems do not seem to be what they are because of a specific theory that controlled the writing of them, especially a theory of the nature of poetry, or of meter, or of any other of the technical aspects of verse. He seems not to have held to any metaphysic of art that either constrained or guided the construction of poems. Robert Frost recalls that he and Robinson, talking together about poetry during their early acquaintance, "didn't care how arrant a reformer or experimentalist a man was if he gave us real poems. For our-

16 Hermann Hagedorn, *Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Biography* (New York, 1938),[vii].
17 *Untriangulated Stars,* 247.
18 Barnard, 20.
19 Esther Willard Bates, *Edwin Arlington Robinson and His Manuscripts,* (Waterville, Maine, 1944), 22.

selves, we should hate to be read for any theory upon which we might be supposed to write. We doubted any poem could persist for any theory upon which it might have been written."[20]

Formulation of Robinson's poetic principles thus falls by default to scholars and critics who, it may be observed, have for the most part presented their findings in format more appropriate to the lecture hall or classroom than to the study or workshop. That so much of the study of Robinson's poems has been based on published texts—particularly those of the final *Collected Poems*—without attention to the extant manuscripts is a symptom of the limitations within which students of Robinson's poetry have tended to work.

Within those limitations much good work has of course been done. In so far as the poet's subjects may be construed to reveal by implication a set of principles, those principles have been well canvassed in the catalogues of Robinson's subject types; Barnard has provided the fullest inventory of the much-noted "failure" types, for example. As important a point as any is that Robinson avoided using himself as subject for poems, as a matter of principle, it seems; but that principle may or may not belong to his poetics. The poet's characteristic attitude toward his subjects has also been well formulated, though again there is some question of how far the consistency with which the stance of the poet in his poems is maintained throughout the large corpus of verse should properly be construed as constituting one of his principles of poetry: that the mode of expression can be termed "austere," "tragic," having "high seriousness," or being pervaded by "New England chill" may indeed be more informative about Robinson in his role as poet than about the principles with which he operated in writing his poetry.

Surely the best—the most informative—statements thus far offered concerning the poetic principles Robinson held, however restricted to intuitive existence, have to do with style. On the one hand, the poet's characteristic indirection of expression has been discussed extensively. By many, especially since Cestre's *An Introduction to Edwin Arlington Robinson* (1930), it has been admired as the source of Robinson's finest

20 Introduction to Robinson's *King Jasper* (New York, 1935), ix-x.

poetic effects. Redman termed the oblique approach as almost Robinson's signature.[21] Aiken regarded *The Man Against the Sky* as Robinson's first volume to show mature development of the technique of the "vague phrase."[22] Many, though, have regarded the indirectness of expression, as well as of representation and exposition, as the poet's besetting sin: to it Winters attributed Robinson's obscurity and Fussell attributed Robinson's ambiguity and obliquity.[23] Whatever they attribute to it in respect to poetic value, all who have written about Robinson's style nevertheless agree that it is indirect and that it forms part of the essence of his poetry. On the other hand, the term "plain" is most often used to describe another aspect of Robinson's style. Repeatedly it has been remarked that the diction is unornamented, that a paraphrasable element is always present, that (as Mark Van Doren put it) the style of expression is difficult but is never obscure.[24]

When all this has been said, however, formulation of Robinson's principles of poetry seems somehow far from exhaustive; and, I think, most of the formulations, sound as they are and important as they must be, do not converge toward the central principles which in Robinson's case we must regard as a set of dispositions with respect to the writing of verse. The principal signposts pointing to the central principles are to be recognized, it seems, precisely in the poet's persistent refusal—probably his inability, finally—to formulate a theory of poetry. *In his historical context* he seems to have begun and to have persisted in writing within the great tradition of English verse that had its rise in the Renaissance; his writings, whether in their metrical forms, the presence of paraphrasable elements, or other matters, continue in that main tradition, and show distinctive features arising only from his attempts to revitalize that tradition —in rejecting archaism and other types of poetic diction, in turning to subjects whose poetic credentials were good if not yet widely recognized, and so on. There is no need to formulate a theory when one works within a well established tradi-

21 Ben Ray Redman, *Edwin Arlington Robinson* (New York, 1926), 40.
22 Conrad Aiken, "The Poetry of Mr. E. A. Robinson," *Freeman,* IV (September 21, 1921), 43-46.
23 Yvor Winters, *Edwin Arlington Robinson* (Norfolk, Connecticut, 1946), and Edwin S. Fussell, *Edwin Arlington Robinson: The Literary Background of a Traditional Poet* (Berkeley, 1954).
24 *Edwin Arlington Robinson* (New York, 1927), 54-55.

tion: one learns his trade as a craftsman, not as a philosopher.

So it is not enough, for example, to say that Robinson employed traditional verse forms, if it is his principles of poetry that one is seeking to formulate. That he did master the technicalities of the major traditional verse forms—and some of the intricate French forms as well—and that he used them with meticulous care throughout his writing career, imply one of his crucial principles of poetry: that meter is not merely decorative, that it does not have an independent communicative ability, or whatever, but that fixed (traditional) metrical form is an essential element from which genuine poetry is synthesized. From a matrix of defined verse form and an initial "something to say," he seems to have created his poetry from "an almost endless succession of periphrases that [came] nearer and nearer to metered language until he achieve[d] what he want[ed]."[25] His typical remarks such as the one about being a "fisher of words" can have, in fact, little meaning as we regard Robinson fishing for words not in isolation, but for a context precisely defined by conditions of meter in addition to syntax and semantics; otherwise we should have to regard his lifetime of spending hours hunting for words as the result of deficiency of verbal facility.

That this "traditional" principle regarding meter was operative, and crucially so, may be inferred not only from the ubiquitous precision of Robinson's syllable-count and rhyme, but from manuscript evidence as well. "Many Are Called" offers an excellent and compact example. An early version (first written version?) shows the first four lines and the sixth of the octet, the first line of the sestet and the final phrases set down as, with minor exceptions, they remained in the published version, according to Léonie Adams' analysis. "Two lines in the octet are given in a variant and the rest was to be filled in."[26] At one stage part of the octet read thus:

> And though fame-hungry multitudes have tried
> In ecstasy, in anguish and in vain,
> To summon him, their bones remain outside.

25 John Crowe Ransom: *The New Criticism* (Norfolk, Connecticut, 1941), 303-304.
26 "The Ledoux Collection of Edwin Arlington Robinson Manuscripts," *Library of Congress Quarterly Journal of Current Acquisitions,* VII (November, 1949), 11.

This was rewritten then as follows:

> And though melodious multitudes have tried
> In ecstasy, in anguish, and in vain,
> With invocation sacred and profane
> To lure him, even the loudest are outside.

Miss Adams' comment on this (which necessarily implicates the rest of the sonnet as well) deserves to be quoted in full:

> in suppressing "fame-hungry"—an unfortunate word in this position, redundant to and slightly distorting his meaning—Robinson somewhat obscured this meaning. For his Apollo is conceived not directly as inspiring but as rewarding accomplishment. By his use of light in place of "definitive laurel," the other aspect is of course suggested, and both meanings—that of fame and that of achievement—are included. Yet by shifting, as some interpreters do, the surface emphasis to the incidence of genius (inspiration), the last line becomes absurd. Inspiration, unlike fame, is not a property of the dead. Such hovering yet concentration of meaning, without disturbance of logic, is characteristic; and read so that the final irony is the postponement from the "called" of all certitude, not only is the poem more climactic and cohesive, but some dignity from the "patient dead" balances the mockery of the octet's close.[27]

Some further analysis of revisions will reveal even more about the principle by which meter operated, together with other factors, to produce this outstanding sonnet.

The changes were made within one unit of the sonnet: neither the conceptual framework nor the syntactic structure is altered. This unit, in turn, is a unit in the rhyme-pattern, the second quatrain repeating the *a b b a* pattern of the first four lines; and the quatrain is a single, complete syntactic unit. The changes are *inside* the frame. "Fame-hungry" was certainly the more accurate, concrete term, but it gave way to the vague, allusive term "melodious." There were apparently at least three reasons for this. First, the new term brings into the line an alliteration, a device Robinson habitually used; not only here is this the result of revision, but in the last line of the quatrain two terms were changed with a consequent introduction of a second alliteration. Second, "melodious" makes more regular the accent-pattern; Robinson always exercised considerable freedom in position of accent in a metrical line, but this sonnet is otherwise regular in accent-pattern except

27 *Ibid.*, 13.

for an inversion beginning the sestet. Third, Robinson had no objection, as his poems generally show, to using a term we may describe as "denoting by indirection," provided he felt the denotation was accessible and the implications of the indirections could be controlled. This is what Miss Adams' comment (above) points out. "Melodious," as Robinson probably thought of it here, leads by a series of associations to "poets," "singers," then to a characteristic of poets; the particular characteristic "fame-hungry" is isolated by the rest of the poem which describes Apollo's reign and habits. This is certainly indirection and does invite the misinterpretations Miss Adams notes.

Further, in comparing the two versions, we find the addition of the third line of this quatrain, "With invocation sacred and profane." The limited number of rhyme-words in this kind of octet may have determined the choice of these words; once introduced, however, they had an effect on the concluding line of this unit. For one thing, "invocation," fitting as the mode of communication of the "multitude" with "The Lord Apollo," renders the original verbal element "to summon" entirely inappropriate. Once the term "invocation" was established (as opposed, say, to "supplication") and the notion of "fame-hungry" was still implied, a term such as "lure" had the only appropriate connotations. Then, once "lure" was settled on, the tone of "bones remained outside"—fitting perhaps with the tone of "summon"—required change. The idea of "loudest" now became consonant with "invocation" and the choice of this particular word was probably influenced once again by its creation of alliteration within the line.

The principle of utilizing a fixed (and traditional) metrical form as a synthesizing element in creating verse inevitably leads, as in the notes above, to consideration of other factors such as diction and allusion. And on these matters Robinson's principles of poetry are the same as those of any excellent poet or writer, that perfect adjustment of referential elements, both denotative and suggestive, must be attained. On these principles, therefore, little more need be said here.

But let us return to the matters of style. In light of Robinson's principles of meter we have inferred, can his style be formulated more precisely and completely than it has been

heretofore? I think it can be, with the help of analytic tools developed especially in the past two decades. At this stage only a sketch of procedure will have to serve.

A first point is that Robinson's principle of using the rhythms of prose (as it has often been designated) can be restated more accurately in terms of syntax, for it is not rhythms, after all, of prose but those of verse that controlled his composition: characteristically he signaled overtly and completely the relations obtaining among the forms (the "words") of his poetic utterances. It is not merely the word order of expository prose that he regularly employs, but the form-words (prepositions, conjunctions, relative forms) signaling relations between sentence constituents as well that he employs as fully as one reasonably may. Complete explicitness of sentence structure, then (as opposed to "prose rhythm"), is one of his stylistic principles. A prime illustration is a one-sentence poem, "Octave XII":

> With conscious eyes not yet sincere enough
> To pierce the glimmering cloud that fluctuates
> Between me and the glorifying light
> That screens itself with knowledge, I discern
> The searching rays of wisdom that reach through
> The mist of shame's infirm credulity,
> And infinitely wonder if hard words
> Like mine have any message for the dead.

One may parse this poem by any technique he wishes, and find the syntactic relations always fully specified—as with the three *that*'s, for instance, introducing clauses. There is nothing inferential or ambiguous in the task of construing the syntactic structure. (Robinson's prose, we may notice as well, is exactly the same in this respect as his verse.) Thus, both meter and syntax are fully fixed and specified. Both tend to affect a reader in much the same way. Since both are clear, complete, and essential to comprehending verse utterance, a reader gets from them a sense of linguistic and metric security in respect to comprehension.

A second point is that within the secure meter and syntax of all his poetic constructions there is a play of semantics for major classes of words (nouns, adjectives, verbs, essentially), and a play of reference for other classes, particularly pronomi-

nal forms. "Luke Havergal" is notorious for the variety of interpretations it has engendered; one may suspect that the strategically placed *wh-* forms ("wait for *what* will come," "to *where* she is") and the quasi-specification of "western gate" by an extended "there where" statement is the main source of both the fascination the poem holds and the diversity of its interpretations. For a single, compact illustration of the referential waywardness of words within a firm structural frame, however, "Octave XI" is perhaps the most useful.

> Still through the dusk of dead, blank-legended,
> And unremunerative years we search
> To get where life begins, and still we groan
> Because we do not find the living spark
> Where no spark ever was; and thus we die,
> Still searching, like poor old astronomers
> Who totter off to bed and go to sleep,
> To dream of untriangulated stars.

Reducing this poem to its simplest and apparent paraphrase still leaves several possible meanings: Our search for where life begins does not succeed; and, like astronomers who are unable to triangulate certain stars, we are haunted by our failure. The meaning pattern and the syntactic structure are clear in outline. The multiple meanings arise from semantic and referential play.

What is the object of the search? "Where life begins" may mean the origin of life in terms of biological evolution: Darwin's hypothesis was still an issue when Robinson wrote the poem. It may mean the origin of an individual's life in terms of his soul: from what state and under what conditions does one's soul enter into (and create) his life? It may mean the defining limits which determine the real nature of (human) life. Again, "we do not find the living spark." "Living spark" may have meanings to match those of "where life begins"; it may be some sort of initial vital impulse, the soul's uniting with body, or that which constitutes the essence of (human) life.

Why does our search fail? Because we search in darkness ("dusk")? Because the years have no inscriptions that could supply the answer (they are "blank-legended")? Because years simply will not repay our efforts by rewarding the search? Does our search fail because the "living spark" never existed,

or existed but was not where we looked for it, or because we are looking for the wrong thing? For that matter, what are "dead" years: those which are past, those which—because they are dead—can tell us nothing, those which no longer contain the "*living* spark" for which we search? Are the years "blank-legended" because they are dead, because years cannot really be inscribed, or because our vision cannot see the legend written on them? Are they "unremunerative" because "dead" or because "blank-legended" or because all past years are unremunerative? Or perhaps they are our own years which are "dead, blank-legended, and unremunerative" because we have misused them (willfully or not).

Must this search forever fail? "Still" occurs twice in the first four lines, and can take either of its basic meanings: we search (and groan) forever, always; we are searching up to the present and will continue to do so in the future. The verb forms may indicate a limited present time (at least a span of time not indefinitely extended into the future) or they may indicate a "universal" truth, hence imply that the searching will continue forever. The verb forms and the adverbs suggest parallel possibilities of meaning. "And thus we die" at first appears to dispel the ambiguity of this answer; but "we" again may be not only the poet and his readers, but all mankind who will die without succeeding in the search. There is yet one more possibility: when we die still searching, does our search then cease, or may it be satisfied only after death?

This last conjecture of meaning perhaps leads us too far: the last three and a half lines suggest that we end our search without success only to be haunted by our failure. Yet the failure does not cancel all possibility of success. The failure, after all, is one of providing rational or logical structure for that which is not yet included within our general rational accounting of the universe, whether in completing the process of mapping the stars, or in discovering "where life begins." If the analogy between "we" and "astronomers" is a true one, the latter part suggests, beneath the surface meaning and tone, that stars nevertheless can be triangulated, therefore a generic "we" can find ultimately "where life begins." Once more, there are submeanings that keep open the hope of success: "dusk" may be not only the dimness that precedes night, but

the period just before dawn; the latter is also suggested by the time at which astronomers go to bed.

The two central principles of Robinson's intuitively held poetics, I believe, are that meter and syntax should be as completely defined as possible with traditional verse form for the first and with the devices of ordinary (literate and cultivated) language for the second; and that full, thoroughly exploited semantic and referential play should operate within the rigorous metric-syntactic framework. From these most of the other principles Robinson did not articulate can be derived or inferred: the indefiniteness of key words, the negative definitions, the rendering of psychological effect with its cause left implicit, and so on. In all, Robinson's principles of poetry did not produce brilliant lyric effects, they did not weave elaborate (or exotic) tissues of allusions, echoes, and suggestions, they never conveyed the immediacy of dramatic voice. They generated, rather, a characteristically ruminative poetry, modest, intellectual, "public," and at its best, that "conjunction of a few inevitable words"[28] which we, with Robinson, may count as genuine poetry.

28 *Selected Letters*, 103.

ROBINSON ON WRITING POETRY

Poetry must be music; not that it must jingle, but it must be music.

I know that many of the new writers insist that it is harder to write good vers libre than to write good rhymed poetry. And judging from some of their results, I am inclined to agree with them.

Some one line of a sonnet generally does, I suppose, come to me unaccountably, out of the blue ether. But then I have to work like a dog for three weeks to make the other thirteen sound as though they had come out of the blue ether, too.

Six hundred lines of blank verse without any bumble-bees or sunsets is a pretty stiff dose.