Frost’s Acquainted With the Night
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At first glance Robert Frost’s *Acquainted with the Night* may seem like a man in the throes of depression or at least trying to communicate that he is not stranger of grief. But, critics Keat Murray and Richard Poirier say, “Robert Frost’s poems are often about the poet’s process—the choices he has to make—in writing a poem.” (Amano, p. 39). I agree with this evaluation, but believe that this opinion is short sighted. I am certain that *Acquainted with the Night* takes in the writing process for any writer.

Kyoko Amano begins to explain this view by saying, “Yet the "night" should not be taken as a conventional symbol; rather, the darkness of the night represents the symbols, form, and structure of a poem that no other poet has explored in the past” (p. 39). This is true for all writers. In every form of writing there is an expectation and tradition of what makes good literature. However, within that world there is always the invitation to explore what could be done differently. This leads writers to out walk “the furthest city light.” The “city light” could symbolize the traditional type of writing. All writers know that if they stay within the traditions of writing they will be safe and their work accepted as good literature. But there is always the beckoning call to go beyond and see what waits in the dark. Keat Murray also comments on the meaning of the word “night” saying, “In the beginning of the poem, he views himself as somewhat detached from night, yet at the same time lured toward it as a suitable place for his loneliness. His acquaintance, as acquaintances are, lacks a clear identification with the night but also urges him to explore it, else he would not go beyond "the furthest city light" (5th paragraph). Authors of all literature look for new ways to capture the public’s good opinion. For example Mark Twain wrote *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* with the characters speaking phonetically. Up to his time that had never been done before and his work is still considered one of the greatest works of all time.

The voice of the poem indicates that writers do not fear to experiment. With the lines “I have been one acquainted with the night/ I have outwalked the furthest city light/I have passed by the watchman on his beat/ And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.” implies that a writer does not fear seeking different ways to write and does not feel the need to explain why. The “watchman” could symbolize a critic or editor that watches out for those who wander too far from traditional writing. Although this person may inspire fear the writer does not stop from seeing what is beyond, most of the time the writer returns to the traditional style with a little change. This was said about Robert Frost himself. Sheldon W. Liebman stated, “It is hardly surprising, then, that an overwhelming majority of Frost's critics believe that, whatever else he may have been, Frost was not a romantic. Like Lawrance Thompson (43, 93, 98), they are willing to grant that he grew up in the romantic tradition. Yet, again like Thompson (43-49), they insist that Frost either greatly modified his romanticism or abandoned it altogether” (p. 417).

Another work of Robert Frost that also speaks of the writing process is *The Road Not Taken*. The first line of the poem speaks about two paths that split in a wood. These paths could mean one the traditional writing and the other the more experimental. The speaker of the poem couldn’t see what was at the ends of the road and so had to make the decision about which to
take without knowing how it was going to end. Both paths were similar and yet the other was not as well worn. In the end the voice says “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -/ I took the one less traveled by/ And that has made all the difference.” The writer chose to take the road that not many have ventured on and that decision has made all the difference in their work and their experience as a writer.

There is a constant need to go beyond what is usually accepted and try to create something new by pushing the boundaries of tradition. Acquainted with the Night and The Road Not Taken describe the very process and perhaps emotional process that each writer of any type of literature goes through when creating a new piece. They have the choice to stay within the “city light” or to become one “acquainted with the night.”

Works Cited


