Chapter 3

TYPOLOGY: A TOOL TO STUDY CHARACTERS

After surveying Frost's manipulation of narrative art and his method of portraying character, our focus now turns to a methodical observation of the characters. A set pattern can be discerned if we analyse the characters in Frost's dramatic poems and the scheme of conflicts therein.

Any earnest effort to observe and study the characters in the narrative requires the employment of some systematic approach and, as such, this section attempts to design a tool to be used for
the next step of analysis. Frost himself states in his poem, "Build Soil": "I prefer to sing safely in the realm/ Of types, composite and imagined people" (ll. 48, 49). It is indeed a challenge to analyse these imagined character types from the psychological point of view.

Defining tragedy as an imitation of a significant and complete action, Aristotle regarded plot and character to "constitute the means of imitation" (Aristotle, 64). Incidents or action, for him, is the chief element and character comes only as a subsidiary to action. "The plot . . is the first principle, and, . . . the soul of the tragedy: character holds the second place" (Aristotle, 65). In modern times this relative emphasis on the action part of a narrative has not significantly changed. "Whereas the study of the story's events and the links among them has been developed considerably in contemporary poetics, that of character has not" (Rimon-Kenan, 29). There has of course been a vacillation between these poles, whether to highlight character or the other aspects of the narrative.
Marvin Mudrich's distinction between the attitude of the purists and the realistic argument puts these poles in perspective:

One of the recurring anxieties of literary critics concerns the way in which a character in a drama or fiction may be said to exist. The 'purist' argument . . . points out that the characters do not exist at all except insofar as they are a part of the images and events which bear and move them, that any effort to extract them from their context and discuss them as they are real human beings is a sentimental misunderstanding of the nature of literature. The realistic argument - on the defensive nowadays - insists that characters acquire, in the course of an action, a kind of independence from the events in which they live, and that they can be usefully discussed at some distance from their context (Mudrick, 211).

Either of these extreme stances could be avoided to combine the best of the two. On the one hand, it is an extreme sentimentalism to allow the
critic's imagination to ascribe motives and extraneous actions on the dramatis persona and develop the character disproportionately beyond the text in question. The narrow literary puritanism of striving for the ascendancy of the plot and narration at the expense of the close appreciation of the character, on the other hand, may be an injustice to the genre in question.

Rimmon-Kenan suggests that a reconciliation between these opposite views should be possible. Firstly, instead of subordinating character to action or the other way round, it may be possible to consider the two as interdependent. It is certainly helpful to look at these various elements as inseparable parts of a whole and analyse one in relation to the other. Secondly, a genre in question may require a greater focus on character rather than on plot. For example, a psychological narrative exploring the inner life and idiosyncrasies of someone may truly require a character-centred approach. Thus "the opposed subordinates can be taken as relative to types of
narrative rather than as absolute hierarchies" (Rimmon-Kenan, 35).

Reversibility of hierarchies could be much wider than the question of genres or types of narratives. It may be as simple as the context and focus at a given point in the narrative. When the action happens to be the centre of attention in the text, the character may be subordinated. Conversely, character should gain ascendancy over the action as the reader's interest shifts to the former. This could be true of the whole critical approach to a narrative:

The reversibility of hierarchies is characteristic not only of ordinary reading but also of literary criticism and theory. Hence it is legitimate to subordinate character to action when we study action but equally legitimate to subordinate action to character when the latter is the focus of our study (Rimmon-Kenan, 36).

The present analysis of the narrative poems of Robert Frost will be with special reference to the
characters in them. As was already discussed, Frost’s personal narratives and story poems are deficient in convincing character sketches and hence a character centred approach may not be applicable for these poems. On the other hand, the monologues and some of the dramatic narratives have sufficient focus on the dramatis personae and their interpersonal relationships and, hence, a character centred analysis may be relevant in their case.

A systematic reading of characterisation and character itself entails a distinct approach as character involves a bundle of attributes abstracted from the text. Quoting Seymour Chatman, Rimmon-Kenan contents:

Character is a paradigm of traits, ‘trait’ being defined as a ‘relatively stable or abiding personal quality’ and ‘paradigm’ suggesting that the set of traits can be arranged, metaphorically, as a vertical assemblage intersecting the syntagmatic chain of events that comprise the plot (36).
Psychology, the study of human behaviour, takes a special interest in personality theory and assessment. The field of study deals not only with the characteristics of the individual, but with the adaptation and interaction in the context of the physical and social environment. Every individual is unique and has a distinct approach to self and the challenges raised from the environment; yet some common approaches are discernible among these diverse paths. Students of human behaviour search for these commonality of approaches and have put forward a number of theories.

American psychologist G. W. Allport (1897-1967) spoke of 'traits' that can account for purposeful, goal-directed behaviour. This he defined as "a generalized and focalized neurophysical system (peculiar to the individual) with a capacity to render many stimuli functionally equivalent, and to initiate and guide consistent . . . forms of adaptive and expressive behaviour" (Thomson, 383). Though traits are learned and gradually developed through individual's
experience, their 'functional autonomy' differentiates them from habits, skills and needs.

The search for some sort of regularity among the numerous traits or certain "vertical assemblage" that Rimmon-Kenan speaks of, is evident in the further developments of trait theory in psychology. Though the search for approaches to classification of individuals into some reasonable groups is as old as the foundation of knowledge itself, in recent times there has been some scientific advancements in the field of categorising of individuals. This exploration is, perhaps best summed up in the extensive attempts at factor analysis and at a further level of groupings of people into various types.

Factor analysis, originally coming from the writings of Spearman (1863-1945) and later developed by Thurstone and Eysenck, employed statistical and psychometric techniques to isolate basic underlying 'factors' that would account for individual differences and help in their measurement. These researchers identified, by factorial analysis, certain basic dimensions of
personality that represent regularities among traits measured on a large number of separate scales. Eysenck "claims to have objectively demonstrated the existence of two different types of personality [extraversion and introversion] which Jung defined on the basis of clinical experience and descriptive qualitative psychological theory" (Thomson, 416)

Carl Jung (1875-1961) put forward a unique approach to the study of human personality. He believed that human behaviour can be better explained in terms of two opposing attitudes and four behavioural 'functions'. Introducing the discussion on Jung's typology, Frieda Fordham puts it in the historical context of typologies:

Jung's contribution to the psychology of the conscious mind is largely embodied in his work Psychological Types. The attempt to classify human beings according to type has a long history; it is nearly two thousand years since the Greek physician, Galen, tried to distinguish four fundamental temperamental differences in men, and his descriptive terms
(though psychologically naive) - the sanguine, the phlegmatic, the choleric, and the melancholic - have passed into common speech. There have been various attempts which, taking modern knowledge into account, aim at a more precise formulation - for instance, Kretschmer's - and Jung's division of people into extraverts and introverts has already come to be widely known, if not fully understood (Fordham, 29).

Carl Jung's famous treatise, *Psychological Types*, set forth two inter-relating typological frames according to which each person is to be described. He says, "The former I would call attitude-types, distinguished by the direction of their interest, or of the movement of libido; the latter I would call function-types" (Jung, *Psychological Types*, 330). Under the category of attitude types, extraversion and introversion, individuals grouped according to their preference either for the external or internal realities, making the former out-going and the latter more on the quieter side, having a greater interest in
one's own inner world. These two types can be further divided into various function types.

Carl Jung speaks of eight personality types: thinking, feeling, sensation and intuitive types each of them extraverted and introverted:

Experience has taught me that in general individuals can be distinguished not only according to the broad distinction between introversion and extraversion, but also according to their basic psychological functions. For in the same measure as outer circumstances and inner disposition cause either introversion or extraversion to predominate, they also favour the predominance of one definite basic function in the individual. I have found from experience that the basic psychological functions, that is, functions which are genuinely as well as essentially different from other functions, prove to be thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition. If one of these functions habitually predominates, a corresponding type
results. I therefore distinguish a thinking, a feeling, a sensation, and an intuitive type. Each of these types may moreover be either introverted or extraverted, depending on its relation to the object as we have described above (Jung, Psychological Types, 6).

In modern times Jungian Typology has come to be of greater appreciation and wider currency due to the assiduous and laudable work of two American women psychologists, Katharine C. Briggs and Isabel B. Myers. This system of personality classification bases itself on the premises put forward by Jung, but developed further to include, among other things, Judging and perceptive types. The result is the presently popular personality measure called the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (hereafter mentioned in abbreviated form as MBTI).

The growing popularity of the instrument in a variety of fields and its wider acceptance in diverse academic disciplines testify to its efficacy in personality measurement, description and prediction. Commenting on the application of
MBTI in business world, Stephen P. Robbins sums up the dynamics of the instrument:

It is one of the most widely used personality tests in the United States - in one recent year alone, some 20 million people took it. . The test labels people as extroverted [sic] or introverted (E or I), sensing or intuitive (S or N), thinking or feeling (T or F), and perceiving or judging (P or J). These are then combined into sixteen personality types (Robbins, 104).

The instrument as well as this widening insights into individual personality and interpersonal relationships is gaining wider currency not only in business and human resource development but in the various academic and application fields as well. Grant, Thompson and Clarke in From Image to Likeness: A Jungian Path in the Gospel Journey sums up their significant search for an effective tool for spiritual guidance. The work is a graphic presentation of the four stages through which the sixteen types grow into wholeness or, as Jung would call it, 'individuation'. A
significant application of MBTI in the field of literary criticism is the four volume, epoch making study of the famous literary characters by Stephen Montgomery, *The Pygmalion Project: Love and Coercion Among Types*.

MBTI can be summed up as four sets of character traits that help describe any given individual. Carl Jung's theory of psychological types mentions three sets of opposites Katharine C. Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Briggs Myers, added a fourth.

The first of these continuaums, Extraversion-Introversion (E/I), describes two ways of relating to the world. Extraversion (E) means focusing one's attention and energy on the world outside self. Introversion (I) means focusing one's attention and energy on the world inside self. The second, Sensing and Intuition (S/N) define two ways of collecting and generating information. They deal with the world of perception.

Sensing (S) involves the use of the five senses to collect information about specifics.
Sensing asks “what are the details?” Intuition (N) seeks to find meaning, possibilities and relationships in the specifics. Intuition asks “what meaning can I make out of the details?” (Brownsworth, 3).

The third category, thinking and feeling (T/F) define two ways of making decisions. They deal with the world of Judgment.

Thinking (T) uses logic to make decisions... Thinking reasons this way: “Given the information I have, what does logic say?” Feeling (F) uses a valuing process to make decisions. Feeling reasons this way: “Given the information, what do I value?” (Brownsworth, 3)

Finally, the fourth set of preferences, Judging and Perceiving (J/P) is the set of opposites that Briggs and Myers added. They describe two different life style orientations and two contrasting ways of relating to the external world. Judging (J) means relating to the external world in an organised and orderly way. It means
making plans and decisions about the external world. perceiving (P) means relating to the external world in a flexible and spontaneous way. With regard to the external world, it means collecting information and responding to things as they occur.

The sixteen Personality types of MBTI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SENSING</th>
<th>INTUITIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking</td>
<td>Feeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Judging</strong></td>
<td>ISTJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceptive</strong></td>
<td>ISTP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceptive</strong></td>
<td>ESTP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Judging</strong></td>
<td>ESTJ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 6: The Type Table

These four sets of opposites form into sixteen different combinations as ISTJ, ESTJ, INTJ, etc., representing each possible personality type. Each of these resultant combinations will be a logical outcome of these various preferences with related characteristics. The various types will have common
characteristics depending on the preferences that they share.

Exhaustive descriptions are possible regarding the peculiarities and possibilities of each type:

INTJ’s [introverted, intuitive, thinking, judging types] are visionaries. They usually have original minds and great drive for their own ideas and purposes. They are characterised as sceptical, critical, independent, determined, and often stubborn. ESTJ’s are organisers. They’re practical, realistic, matter-of-fact, with a natural head for business or mechanics. They like to organize and run activities. The ENTP type is a conceptualizer. He or she is quick, ingenious, and good at many things. This person tends to be resourceful in solving challenging problems, but may neglect routine assignments. (Robbins, 104)

One important advantage with MBTI is that a credible and methodical classification and description of people and their differences are
possible with this instrument. People differ because some have a greater focus on the outer and others on the inner world and as a result they are to a lesser or a greater extent extraverts or introverts. They differ in their preferred mode of perception making them either sensing or intuitives. Taking into consideration the other two preferences also a complete description of personality difference is made possible through the typology. “This magnificent idea makes possible a coherent explanation for a variety of simple human differences, for complexities of personality, and for widely different satisfaction of motivations” (Myers, 25).

Relationships between different persons can be better understood with the help of the typology. An intuitive may better understand the extraordinary future dreams of another intuitive and a perceptive finds it easier to forgive another person who postpones action till the very end. On the other hand a talkative extravert may find a quiet introvert the best confidant and companion.
Such complementing usually works better when there is similarity in the case of the other preferences.

Conflicts and misunderstandings are better fathomed and explained, and, whenever beneficial, better modes of communication can be proposed using the present analysis. "When two people reach a deadlock over the handling of a given situation, the trouble may be a result of their difference in type, which has interfered with their communication" (Myers, 118). It is possible that they don’t know the same facts or considered the same possibilities, as one is an S and the other is an N, or may not have foreseen the same consequences or their impact on the people, as they differ in TF preference.

Sensing people are good at gathering relevant facts; intuitives visualise the long term measures to be taken; thinking people analyse the consequences; and the feeling types are good at realising the impact on the people concerned. The pooling of these perceptions and judgements offers the best chance of finding the most suitable solution in any given situation. In a conflict two
or more people find it difficult to cross these barriers that separate these differing perceptions and judgements.

In this way a reasonable explanation of the conflicts that arise in day-to-day living clearly emerges from this analysis:

People who differ on both preferences [perception and judgment] will be hard to understand and hard to predict—except that on every debatable question they are likely to take opposite stands. If these very opposite people are merely acquaintances, the clash of views may not matter, but if they are co-workers, close associates, or members of the same family, the constant opposition can be a strain (Myers, 4,5).

MBTI is preferred in this study as the system of character analysis due to its multifaceted usefulness as an instrument of character description, interpersonal relational gauge and conflict analyser. The instrument has its limitation in literary application as it is designed for direct personal analysis. A literary
narrative is a text in which character description is only one part of the many elements and that too presented from a specified angle. The reader is able to look at the character only through the text, usually with a certain limited perspective and through a narrow aperture.

The act of reading involves a reconstruction of the specific elements from the available text. With respect to the story of a narrative there is the possibility of reconstructing it from the given text and recognising it in some other medium. The same reconstruction should be possible with respect to the character as well. This, then, becomes the process of nomination that Barthes speaks of: “To read is to struggle, to name, to subject the sentences of a text to a semantic transformation. This transformation is erratic; it consists in hesitating among several names” (Barthes, 92).

Rimmon-Kenan’s description of characterisation is relevant for this character reconstruction, as well as its regrouping:
Character, as one construct within the abstracted story, can be described in terms of a network of character-traits. These traits may or may not appear as such in the text. How, then, is the construct arrived at? By assembling various character-indicators distributed along the text-continuum and, when necessary, inferring the traits from them (Rimmon-Kenan, 59).

In a literary work there are usually hints about character traits and one has to make inferences concerning the traits of the character in question. The only available source to look for cues is the text and we are forced to work with that limitation. Where the narrator comments on the character these direct hints can be valuable indicators of characterisation. Some of the dramatic poems have only a limited presence of the narrator and so almost no direct statement on the nature of the dramatis persona may be available. In such cases dialogues and the movements of characters can be valuable indirect sources of
character information. In some other narrative situations even the backdrop or milieu could add on to the portrayal of character.

Frost, as the foregoing discussions show, relies heavily on dialogue, actions, narrative comments and depiction of conflict for effective characterisation. A discussion of characters in Robert Frost's poems has to be based on these elements. Each poem will have to be taken singly to analyse the individual portraits from the given clues and the psychological instrument of analysis can be applied on these character data.

For instance, Frost's poem, "The Bonfire" in *Mountain Interval* is rather a lengthy dialogue uninterrupted by any narrative comments. This 114 line poem is in fact a long soliloquy, may be by a teenage male character, with just three one-line interruptions by the other children. The only source of character clues available to the reader is the dialogue, primarily the content and style of the main characters own dialogue and the comments by the others present. No action takes place
during the narration, but there are reminiscences about the earlier escapades and discussions on the future course of action. These, of course, are trait indicators. So in this poem the reader will have to deduce the character of the main speaker mainly from his own words.

The poem, "The Bonfire," is an invitation by the protagonist to the other children to "go up the hill and scare ourselves, / As reckless as the best of them tonight, / By setting fire to all the brush we piled" (1-3). The gender of the speaker is never specified, but the available description of the past solitary adventure suits only a male youth in any familiar culture. As a result the preferred pronoun for the protagonist is "he".

The speaker persuades the playmates to do the reckless act of starting a wildfire by detailing the thrill of scaring themselves and shocking the quiet neighbourhood. He recalls an earlier reckless prank when he started a fire which utterly frightened him, but his mesmerising description of the physical details of the whole act should be drawing the listeners to a similar adventure as it
moves the readers to deep involvement. He even stretches his logic to assert the necessity of practising getting frightened because war is an ever present reality and as a preparation they must learn to enjoy being scared:

War is for everyone, for children too. . . .
The best way is to come uphill with me
And have our fire and laugh and be afraid
(The Bonfire, 111, 12,14).

On the scale of the Extraversion - Introversion preference (E/I), the main character is definitely an advanced extravert (E); an action man, ready for outdoor activity and capable of strong leadership and persuasive ability. On the Sensing - Intuitive scale (S/N) character’s Sensing (S) preference is evident with his practical approach, grip with details and lack of idealism. On the Thinking - Feeling (T/F) preference, at least his lack of concern for the others is evident. Surely, he is more on the Thinking (T) side. On Judging - Perceptive preference (J/P), his urgency, decisive manner and clarity of future
action makes him a Judging type (J). In brief the protagonist is an ESTJ.

In *It Takes All Types!*, Alan Brownsword begins the detailed portrayal of the ESTJ type as follows:

ESTJs focus their energies on the world around them. They make quick, crisp, impersonal and practical judgments about everything and anything they see. They are take-charge people. They like being “the boss”. . . . They take leadership roles seriously and work hard to exercise responsible stewardship. . . . Indeed, the word “macho” is an apt one to describe the behavior of many male ENTJs. (Brownsword, 34,35)

The foregoing description is befitting the character under scrutiny, perhaps with the only addition that he employs his personal strength to carry out an act of vandalism. In the present poem, there is no further scope for character analysis, as there is no other well defined character. The three single-line responses are presumably attributed to the chorus of children and
there is hardly any elbowroom either for character
description or for comparison and contrast with the
lead character. Thus from the point of view of
characterisation the poem "The Bonfire" is a vivid
single portrait of an adventurous young ESTJ.

The insights of MBTI, in the present
investigation, will be used not only for a clear
description and classification, but to search for a
pattern of conflict. In the words of Minot,
conflict in drama "is presented in terms of
individuals pitted against each other . . . The
genre thrives on scenes in which two or more
individuals are involved in some type of struggle" (Minot, 236). The search is for ascertaining the
extend to which characterisation contributes to
this dramatic conflict and to facilitate a
description of conflict in terms of character
traits.


Jung, C. G. Psychological Types. A Revision by R. F. C. Hull of the Translation by H. G. Baynes
Bollongen series XX. New York: Princeton UP, 1990 (Copyright 1971)


