



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 3. Issue.2.,2016 (April-June)

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

MODERNISM AND ITS APPLICATION IN ROBERT FROST'S POEMS "AFTER APPLE
PICKING", "THE ROAD NOT TAKEN" AND "MENDING WALL"

MEENAKSHI T

Assistant Professor, Department of English, New Horizon College-Marathalli
Bangalore



ABSTRACT

Modernism is a literary and cultural movement that spanned all of the arts in the early decades of the twentieth century, especially after World War I. The Movement identifies new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts, and styles of literature. Modernist art began in Europe's capitals, and gradually spread to the cities of the United States and European academy. Modernism's roots are in the rapidly changing technology of the late nineteenth century and in the theories of late nineteenth-century thinkers like Freud, Marx, Darwin and Nietzsche. The movement's concerns were with the increasing pace of society towards destruction and meaninglessness. In the late 1800s many of society's certainties were undermined. Marx demonstrated that social class were created, not inherent; Freud boiled down human individuality to an animalistic sex drive; Darwin provided evidence that the Bible might not be literally true; and Nietzsche argued that even the most deeply-held ethical principles were simply constructions. The movement sifted through the shards of the past looking for what was valuable and what could inspire construction of a new society. In spite of the pastoral element predominant in Frost's poems, he is still a modern poet because his poetry has been gifted with the awareness of the problems of man living in the modern world dominated by Science and Technology. Frost is a modern poet in his rural, working-class personality, his traditional, metered voice and the use of colloquial phrases as well as the ordinary and routine subjects of most of his poems. The poem 'Mending Wall' is modern in its approach. It deals with the theme of isolation. The tiredness of the farmer due to over work in "After Apple-Picking" and as a result of it his yielding to sleep. The poem "The Road not Taken" deals with the dilemma of the modern mind. The poem depicts the confusion which prevails in modern life.

Key Words: Modernism, Science and Technology, Isolation, Dilemma, Confusion, colloquial phrases, movement..

©KY PUBLICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The movement modernism is a trend of philosophical thought emerging from the widespread changes in culture and society in the age of modernity. Modernism rejected the Enlightenment thinking, seeking to better the present reality in a new, more industrialized and technological world. Modernism emphasized much on impressionism and subjectivity. By employing innovative narrative methods like 'Stream of Consciousness', modernism tried to break up the narrative continuity, departed from the standard ways of representing characters, violated the traditional syntax and coherence of narrative language. The English modern writers are James Joyce, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf. Among other European and American writers who are the central representatives of modernism are the novelists Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, Andre Gide, Franz Kafka, Dorothy Richardson, and William Faulkner; the poets Stephane Mallarme, Yeats, Rainer Maria Rilke, Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, and Wallace Stevens; and the dramatists August Strindberg, Luigi Pirandello, Eugene O'Neill, and Bertolt Brecht. Although Robert Frost was not the central representative of modernism, yet his poetry contains modernist traits in it.

Modernism: New Concept of Interpreting a Text

A prominent trait of modernism is self-consciousness and irony concerning literary traditions, which led to the experiments with form, in addition to the use of techniques that drew attention to the processes used in creating a poetry, prose, novels, and dramas, etc. Modernism emphasizes subjectivity and moves away from objectivity by employing omniscient third person narrator, fixed points of view, and clear-cut moral positions.

Modernism blurs the distinction between genres as in 'Poetry Prose' of E E Cummings, and 'Prose Poetry' of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Modernism lays emphasis on fragmented forms, discontinuous narratives as in the work of T.S. Eliot "*The Waste Land*" which is in the form of collage. Modernism favors reflexivity, self-consciousness about the production of a work of art. It emphasizes parody, pastiche and playfulness and also on the decentred and dehumanized subject. Modernism voices the insecurities of the 20th century Western World, resulting from lost colonies in the Third World, the world torn apart by two major World Wars, emergence of new social theories and developments such as Marxism and Postcolonial migrations and new technologies.

Robert Frost as Modern Poet

Robert Frost, New England poet, is a well-known modernist poet. Frost wrote his poetry in new and different ways, yet kept the traditional aspects of poetry. Robert Frost was caught between the traditional movement and modernist movement in poetry. Like a modern poet, Frost has used ordinary, simplified and conversational language in his poems by leaving them a little bit pessimistic. Like a traditional poet he adhered to traditional meter and rhyme and abundant natural images as he lived in the countryside. He employs Modernist traits in his poetry by offering commentary on the tragic underside of life, doubt, and uncertainty in everyday life. Frost leaves some of his poems vague and open to the interpretation by the reader himself.

Modernist Traits in Robert Frost's poem 'After Apple Picking'

After a long day's work, the speaker is tired of picking apples. He has felt drowsy and dreamy since the morning when he looked through a sheet of ice lifted from the surface of a water trough. Now he feels tired, feels sleep coming on, but wonders whether it is a normal, end-of-the-day sleep of something deeper.

The Pleasure of Ulteriority

The chief element found in the poem is the use of metaphor, saying one and meaning another, saying one thing in terms of another, the 'pleasure of ulteriority'. "After Apple Picking" is about picking apples, but with its ladders pointing 'towards heaven still', with its great weariness, and with its rumination on harvest, the coming of winter, and inhuman sleep, the reader feels certain that the poem harbors some "ulteriority". The natural images (metaphors) used in the poem seem quite common and usual at the surface level but when the reader dives into the depth for seeking the lurking meaning, he ends up finding something ominous, impending danger or death occurring in the near future. The poet Frost, like other modernist poets, gives the freedom for the reader to draw his own interpretation.

Symbolism

"Final sleep" is certainly one interpretation of the "long sleep" that the poet contrasts with human sleep. The sleep of the woodchuck is the sleep of winter, and winter, in the metaphoric language of seasons, has strong associations with death. Hints of winter are abundant: The scent of apples is "the essence of winter sleep"; the water in the trough froze into a "pane of glass"; the grass is "hoary". Yet is the impending death destructive or creative? The harvest of apples can be read as a harvest of any human effort like study, laying bricks, writing poetry, etc. and the poem looks at the end of the harvest. Employing the literary technique "Symbolism" is also one of the main characteristics of modernist poetry.

The Confusion between the dream and the real

One of the main traits of modernist poetry "Confusion" reigns the poem "After Apple Picking" completely. The sequence and tenses of the poem are a bit confusing and lead one to wonder what is dreamed, what is real and where the sleep begins. It's understandable that the speaker should be tired at the end of a day's apple picking. But the poem says that the speaker was well on his way to sleep before he dropped the sheet of ice, and this occurred in the morning. The speaker has tried and failed to 'rub the strangeness' from his sight. Is this strangeness induced by exhaustion or suggestive of the fact that he is dreaming already?

Modernist Traits in Robert Frost's poem 'The Road Not Taken':**Dilemma in choosing one road between the two**

Frost's poem 'The Road Not taken' based on the dilemma which the modern man confronts often in his several pursuits like educational, marital, professional etc. The first mention of a forked road in the woods arouses in reader's mind the keywords such as life and choices. The narrator is faced with two options; the result of each choice is unknown. Frost points out that we are free to choose, but we really do not know what we are choosing between until we go down that path, so our route is determined by choice and chance- with no way to separate the two. Here, Frost says that when making choices in life one is always alone, as is the narrator in "The Road not Taken".

The narrator points out that both of the roads were similar and were equally untraveled, so he is confused as to which one to choose. And also he feels that when man chooses one road and travels considerable miles on it and later regrets his decision, can he take it back and remake it as one way might have led to another, and the man will be too far from the starting block to start over again?

The poem begins in delight and ends in wisdom

As modernism believes in constructing and creating something new, different and unique for the development of the society and mankind as a whole, Frost also comes out with a solution for the dilemma which the narrator faces in the poem, in a way which is a universal dilemma faced by every man and a woman. Frost's wise and hopeful advice leaves the reader optimistic.

According to Frost, writing a poem is discovering. He believed that a poet never takes notes and a lover never takes notes in a love affair. Frost didn't plan; write down notes or ideas when he wrote this poem. It just came to him and he wrote it down. Thus, the poem reveals that man may make any decision, he needs not be worried as the situations and surroundings will turn out to be conducive and favorable for his progress and growth which would urge him to discover more as it happened with the poet himself while writing the poem.

Simple, ordinary language

The poem "The Road Not Taken" takes on an appearance of being just a simple narration, but the poem is often misunderstood for its simplicity in choice of language and structure. The important modernist element is poem's meaning: there are a lot of things that are not clear in the poem.

Modernist Traits in Robert Frost's poem 'Mending Wall':**The theme Isolation and alienation**

The metaphoric poem 'Mending Wall' is based on the theme, Isolation. Robert Frost's "Mending Wall" represents two opposing ideas through its dialogue between two neighbors. The narrator represents a newer

way of thinking while his neighbor, the old farmer represents an older mindset. The narrator, with his **modern** approach tries to change the traditional conventions and beliefs but in vain. The two men work together to repair the wall that separates their property line, a task that seems unnecessary to the young narrator. The older neighbor cannot fathom the thought of not having a wall to separate his land from his youthful neighbor, a belief that has been passed down from his father.

In spite of youthful narrator's repeated attempts through several ways to make his older neighbor realize that the wall between them is not necessary, that does not seem to make any sense. On the contrary, the older neighbor comes out with his argument stating that "Good fences make good neighbor" told by his father. He stands firm in his belief in the truth of that statement. He poet compares old farmer to "an old-stone savage moving about in the darkness, armed and dangerous". The old farmer is seen as a prehistoric figure, someone who is in eyes of the narrator, refuses to modernize himself with new ways of thinking.

In this poem, Frost represents the friction between the newer and older ways of thinking. Old farmer's resistance, indifference, ignorance towards the logical thinking and reasoning of the young narrator widens the gap between them as human beings by *isolating* and *alienating* hem from one another.

Conclusion

Though Robert Frost's world is rural, yet it is not his escape from modern inconvenient and bitter realities, rather the countryside life provides him with the novel perception and frame of reference to comment and critically analyze the truths of modern life. Robert Frost believes in some kind of power or energy and also a set of values but not traditional Christian values. His poem "After Apple Picking" tells that man's life after his death is similar to the hibernation of an animal. The poem "Mending Wall" advocates modern way of thinking versus traditional thinking. In the poem "The Road Not Taken", the speaker hesitates to take any one of two roads which represents modern man's dilemma in making choices at crucial times, but the poet ends the poem with positive note that the man becomes successful by selecting either of the roads. The above mentioned poems of Frost put forward and recommend revolutionary thinking which is modern in character.

REFERENCES

- Abrahms, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Seventh Edition. Heinle & Heinle. USA. 1999.
- Alam, Md.Saiful. "English Literature and Grammar". 25 February 2013
<<http://literaryhelpinenglish.blogspot.in/2013/02/robert-frost-as-modern-poet.html>>
- Appelbaum, Stanley. *The Road Not Taken and Other Poems*. Dover Thrift Edition. New York. 1993.
- Boyd, Natalie. "Robert Frost Poetry Analysis: The Road Not Taken and Other poems".
<<http://study.com/academy/lesson/robert-frost-the-road-not-taken-and-other-poems.html>>
- Levenson, Michael. *A Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. Cambridge University Press. UK. 2003.
- Lynen, J.F. "Literary Articles". March 2009 <<http://www.literary-articles.com/2009/03/robert-frost-as-modern-poet.html>>