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Symbolism in frost's poetry

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Abstract

Frost is a great regional poet and the scenes and sights, characters and events of New England form the basis of his poetry. He does not depict all even of this limited region. There is a constant selection and ordering of material. Even of New England, he deals only with the region that lies North of Boston, and of this region, too, only with the countryside and country-dwellers. The result of this sifting and selecting of material is that his regionalism acquires a symbolic significance. The region of North of Boston becomes a microcosm of the world at large, and his Yankee characters become symbolic of human nature in all ages and countries. Emotional responses of his *dramatis personae* acquire a deeper significance as being symbolic of basic human responses. For example, the emotional agitation of the mother in *Home Burial*, and the fate of the servant in *The Death of the Hired Man*, are symbolic of the emotional stress and strain, isolation and alienation, which are the lot of humanity in the modern age. In this way, he is able to embody vast concepts and infinite depths within little space. Vast vistas are thus presented to the mind's eye, and the effect created is one of unlimited expansion. It thus becomes possible to read even the simplest of his poems at a number of levels.

Keywords: Symbolism, frost's poetry and basic human responses

Introduction

Robert Frost is a great regional poet. New England is the focal point of his poetry. There is a constant selection and ordering of material. Even of New England, he only deals with the region that lies North of Boston, and of this region, too, only with the countryside and country-dwellers. His constant recourse to regionalism acquires a symbolic significance. The region, North of Boston becomes a microcosm of the world at large, and his Yankee characters become symbolic of human nature in all ages and countries.

Emotional responses of his *dramatis personae* acquire a deeper significance as being symbolic of basic human responses. Thus, the emotional stress and strain, isolation and alienation, of the modern mankind are well reflected in Frost's poetry. In this way, Frost is able to embody vast concepts and infinite depths within little space. Warren Austin uses the term 'natural symbolism' to describe Frost's symbols, for they are all derived from the ordinary, common place objects and phenomenon of Nature and from the common everyday events and situations of human life. Such symbols are not peculiar to Frost; they have rather been used by all poets through the ages, as they come to mind naturally and spontaneously.

Frost's poems, some of the best of them, use natural symbols the reference of which we find it difficult to control:

we think of 'The Road Not Taken', 'Walls', 'The Mountain'. In 'Stopping by Woods', 'miles to go before I sleep' is literally true of the traveler, we assume; but in the language of natural symbolism 'to sleep' is to 'die'; and if one couples by contrast the 'woods are lovely, dark and deep' (all three adjectives panegyric) with the moral and social check of 'promises to keep', one can't wholly reject the passing, not insisted on.. Warren writers: "Presumably no constant reader of poetry will go wrong with Frost; but, partly because of his natural symbolism, Frost has drawn a wide audience, some of whom, once grasping the possibility of symbols, will bear down too heavily on both the natural symbols and their companions, giving to his plurisigns a fixity and rigidity alien to the nature of poetic statement, especially contemporary poetic statement."

Frost's symbols are simple because they are drawn from the simplest sources, but they are also complex because they operate on more than one level of meaning. Ordinarily symbolism is an object that represents something else. Originally it originates in France with the idea to express a higher and invisible world other than world of concrete phenomena. This movement also affected American literature in the nineteenth century. Symbols, signs,

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metaphors and similes are used all over the world to create images in the work of literature. It became an acceptable technique and medium to express and interpret the materialistic realistic of life and the mysteries of human life. Man is instinctively impelled by his nature to know about the mysteries of life. These mysteries can be understood easily when ideas pertaining to the hidden aspects of life, which are beyond perception, are expressed in terms of sense experiences of the material world. The poet has to use these material objects and physical experiences in a suggestive manner to acquire significance as symbols.

Robert Frost worked individual poems into a larger unity by presenting in them a recurrent speaker, a wise country person living close to nature and approaching life in a spirit of compassionate realism. Many people assumed that this speaker was Frost himself, but in fact it was a brilliant artistic creation, a persona or mask. In addition he wrote many dramatic monologues whose speakers were New England farm people. The poems in which he makes use of the familiar aspects to suggest a symbolic meaning are Mending Wall, The Road Not Taken, Stopping by Woods by Snowy Evening, Birches etc.

In the poem 'The Pasture', we are introduced with a farmer who is engaged in day to day farming life. The Pasture describes simple, every day pleasures on the farm. Here the speaker says he is setting out on an ordinary farm chore to clean the pasture spring of leaves, and perhaps wait for the water to clear. But in deeper sense the poem shows the process of purifying human hearts from sin.

Pasture symbolizes the world. To clean the pasture spring means to purify the heart and soul from sin. Leaves symbolize the sins that lie inside the heart. 'Wait to watch the water clear' means wait until the clear from sins. "To fetch the little calf" means to guide the people who still have weak faith. 'It totters when she licks it with her tongue' means God will send his messenger to guide the ordinary people. So, God will not directly give enlightenment to them.

In the poem 'Mending Wall', for example, Frost portrays a typical farming work in the context of New England. The New England farmers built walls as boundaries to their farms. These walls often became weak and broke down. So, they needed mending. The poem Mending Wall is also a poem about two neighbors and a wall. The wall acts as a divider in separating estates-apple and pine trees. It is a very common picture of farming life where the people believe that "Good fences make good neighbors." But the suggestiveness of the poem is very modern in its approach. The poem is based on the modern theme of isolation. Modern men built boundaries and made themselves isolated from each other. Frost's metaphysical treatment of this physical and psychological isolation is also an evidence of his modernity. In "Mending Walls", Frost juxtaposes the two opposite aspects of the theme of the poem and then leaves it to the reader to draw his own conclusion. The conservative farmer says:

Good fences make good neighbor
and the modern radical farmer says:
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,

But the question remains unsolved. And it is up to the readers if they will keep the wall or pull down it.

'Stopping By woods on a Snowy Evening' is another poem, in which the familiar things finally become highly suggestive. Apparently, the poem describes the evening walk of a rural farmer, may be the poet himself. But out of his evening walk beside a snowy woods, the traveler discovers a truth universal in appeal.

In the poem "Mowing" the poet as a laborer identifies himself with his scythe. The narrator works in the field on a hot day. He notices that his scythe seems to be whispering as it works. Instead of dreaming about inactivity or reward for its labor as a person would, the scythe takes its sole pleasure from its hard work. It receives satisfaction from "the fact" of its earnest labor in the field, not from transient dreams or irrational hopes. The narrator follows the scythe's example: seizing on the pleasure of hard work and making hay.

In the poem 'Two Tramps in Mud Time' Frost has taken notice of both the bright and dark aspects of nature. Beneath the apparently beautiful calm there is lurking turmoil and storms:

Be glad of water, but don't forget
The lurking frost in the earth beneath

There is a famous poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening". On the surface, it is a poem about a traveler who feels tempted to go into the woods which are "lovely, dark and deep" and to stay there in order to enjoy their strange beauty and charm, but who is not able to carry out his wish on account of the realization that he has promises to keep and miles to go. But the poem has a deeper, symbolic significance. The words "promises", "miles", and "sleep" have deeper meanings. "Promises" and "miles to go" imply duties and responsibilities. "Sleep" symbolizes death. There are the promises which he has made to himself and to others, or which others have made on his behalf. And there are the miles he must travel through other kinds of experience before he yields to that final and inevitable commitment-death. We are not told that the call of social responsibility proves stronger than the attraction of the woods, which are "lovely" as well as "dark and deep". The dichotomy of the poet's obligations both to the woods and to a world of promises is what gives this poem a universal appeal.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

The closing stanza of the poem is especially symbolic. The poem symbolically expresses the conflict which everyone feels between the demands of the practical life and a desire to escape into the land of reverie.

The poem "The Road Not Taken" was also based on the poet's personal experience. It was based on his visit to the woods of Plymouth, New Hampshire in 1911-1912. But the poem symbolizes the universal problem of making a choice of invisible barriers built up in the minds of the people which alienate them from one another mentally and emotionally, though they live together or as neighbors in the society. At the heart of the poem is the romantic mythology of flight from a fixed world of limited possibility into a wilderness of many possibilities combined with trials and

choices through which the pilgrim progresses to divine perfection.

'Apple Picking' describes the feelings, of a man who has been plucking apples from the apple trees. He's describing how he takes them off the tree and places them in a bucket and sends them off. His is a tired apple picker. He cherishes the apples like they were jewels. After a long day's work, the speaker is tired of apple picking and feels sleep coming on. Similarly the Birch trees in "Birches" symbolize man's desire to seek escape from the harsh suffering man to undergo in this world.

He wanted to write about the unusualness of the usual thing. His unusualness is not in the object but in the treatment of the object. So much so that incidents like plucking berries, returning home, going for water, harvesting etc. become highly symbolical.

In the Poem Mending Wall, nature is a destroyer of the boundaries between men. But the old – conservative man has no idea without it. He only occurs: "Good fences makes good neighbours." Yet the former argues:

"There where it is we do not need the wall.
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across.
And egad the cones under his pines, I tell him. "
But
He moves in darkness, as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
...., 'Good fences make good neighbour'.

Thus, Frost chooses the symbols from his experience to denote the cultural transformation or the conflict between two contrary forces. But at the same time as a progressive, liberal man he observes:

"What I was Walling in or Walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.
Something there is that doesn't love a Wall,
That wants it down."

Frost uses the symbols to depict nature, the relationship between the Man and Nature. Frost does not observe nature as heal - all and or the perennial source of solace. But unlike the Romantics he witnesses nature's conflict with man on various levels. At the same time, he does not deny the beauty of nature and benefactions for man.

The activity of apple picking in the poem, "After apple Picking" is a real experience. It is symbolic of man's routine life, daily activity of which he is addicted and get tired. That is why thinks to get rid of it and after life. He feels momentary stay against confusion by dreaming of eternal sleep. On his ladder he had transcendental experience:

My long-two-pointed ladder's sticking through a
tree
Toward heaven still,
He is satisfied and longs, for long sleep:
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough,
But I am done with apple - picking now.
Essence of winter sleep is one the night,...

Frost is a conscious artist who views the society around him in a pragmatic manner. He observes the daily activities, customs, and rituals. He also witnesses the socioeconomic and the philosophical changes that take place with the development of society in an unknown natural setting in relation to the scientific developments. The behaviour of human beings is lucidly suggested. In the poem "The Death of the Hired Man" real social drama is depicted, around the symbol of "House". The house stands for the roots, the permanent shelter, something that is yours from birth to death. The poet brings to our notice that the only source of peace and comfort in the present complex social structure is one's home. The meaning of "Home" is interpreted differently by wife and husband, who are representatives of different attitudes. Husband defines home as "the place, where when you have to go there/they have to take you in." But the wife defines it as, "something you somehow haven't to deserve." But the old Silas have no place even to die. The house for him becomes a symbol for eternal rest even after death. Clean the Brooks has called the poem "dramatic decorum."

I concludes, After a long discussion in his symbols I can say that Frost was shy of self-revelation, the extremely moral purpose of his poetry was clothed in simple rustic language and conveyed through parables and incidents. His stories teach the modern man to gain his lost aboriginal strength by turning against materialism. His wisdom is implicit and inspiring so that its effects are long lasting.

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