

# Robert Frost as a Modern Poet

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**Abstracts:** -Robert Frost invests common objects and occurrences with uncommon significance. He imparts deeper meaning to common situations and events. Naturally his poems begins with a picture and ends with an idea. All his best poems have a hard core of moral truth. His typical method is to use a common place, event or situation as a metaphor illuminating an eternal poetic truth presented symbolically.

“When we describe a work of literature as modern we are as modern we are ascribing certain intrinsic qualities to it, though we may be vogue in our minds about what these qualities are. Thus the question of date need not rise at all.”

“It is a responsibility to contemporary phenomena like machinery, the industrial city, and neurotic behavior.”

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## Introduction:-

Some critics feel that frost is essentially a traditional poet. His poetry is marked by simplicity while the hallmarks of modern poetry are complexity and intricacy. In his poetry irregular verse forms, fragmentary sentences, learned allusions difficult ironic contrasts, abstruse symbolism are more or less missing and these qualities are characteristics of modern poetry.

Yvor Winters finds him and of tune with modern age and all its problems. He believes that

“Frost has affinities with the great 19<sup>th</sup> century romantics rather than with the great moderns”

However some critics advance and advocate the view that frost is essentially a modern poet. Cleanth Brooks, trilling and John F Lynen are ready to put frost in the forefront of modern poetry.

Frost’s world is a rural world. But he is modern in his pastoral technique. No doubt he retires into New England’s scenery and drifts away from the humdrum of contemporary world. His retreat into country side is not a romantic escape from theharsh unpleasant realities of

modern life rather it provides him with a point of view for studying and commenting on the facts of modern life.

Modern science finds nature as merely matter, soul less and mechanical. Frost too emphasizes the otherness of nature. He stresses the difference and contrast basic and fundamental. In the tree at my window he says –

“Your head so much concerned with outer

Mine with inner weather “

Frost uses the method of indirectness as is used by the modern poets like T.S Eliot, W.B Yeats etc.

Just as T.S Eliot in his poem The Wasteland juxtaposes the past and the present to reveal and interpret the present in a similar way, frost juxtaposes the rural and the urban. The rural serves as a comment on the urban. Frost comments are implicit rather than explicit just like those of Eliot's.

A simple everyday situation from rural life is presented. It is presented in such a way that it serves to illuminate and clarify some aspects of the modern age.

In his poem, Mending Wall he shows the modern desire for alienation:-

“Good fences make good neighbors“

Whereas nature likes a sense of brotherhood.

“Something there is that doesn't love a wall.”

Frost may not depict the scenery of modern life its chimney and factories its railways and automobiles but he certainly deals with the basic problems and the basic facts of modern life. The ache of modernism finds its fullest expression in his poetry.

As Cleanth Brooks says:-

“Another sense in which frost is truly modern poet is his portrayal of the disintegration of values in modern life and disillusionment of the modern man. Most of his poems deal with characters who suffer from frustration, isolation and helplessness disease of modern life, which are portrayed in modern poems like The Wasteland.”

The poem The Road Not Taken depicts the confusion of making a choice with prevails in modern life. The protagonist in the poem, represents the modern man who habitually wastes energy in regretting any choice made. He signs over the attractive alternative which he rejected:-

“I shall be telling this with a sigh , Somewhere ages and ages hence Two roads diverged in a wood , and I took the one less travelled by And hat has made all the difference “

In Two Tramps in Mud Time, the point of the poem is explicitly stated in the last stanza:-

“My object in living is to unite

My avocation and my vocation,

As my two eyes make one sight”

Only where love and need are one

And the week is play for mortal stakes.”

The statement clarifies the incident presented in the poem. The speaker is chopping (cutting) wood and having a great deal of pleasure in his activity when two tramps from the lumber camps came by and pause to ask for job. The poet enjoys his work and he does not want to give it up. The incident provides a dramatic framework for the generalization. But the generalization is stated directly rather than enacted in terms of the symbol.

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening describes a moment of pure joy in the mid of beautiful snow covered woods. It has a hidden or symbolic meaning. It indirectly teaches the flavour of placing duty above enjoyment and pleasure.

As the poet says:-

“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 poet has made his meaning clear through symbols. The fine lovely woods in the poem stand for temptations which make us turn away from our goal. The journey becomes symbolic of 'life and the 'sleep' becomes symbolic of the final sleep-death. And Stopping before the final destination begins to signify more than yielding to the attractiveness and the mystery of scene; it becomes symbolic of death wish which tempts man away from the meaningful journey of life.

The poem The Road Not Taken has philosophical idea life offers several avenues of exploration and achievement and we have to choose one. Thus we face the problem of making a choice. When the choice is made, we feel that perhaps we made a mistake; we suffer from a sense of loss. But it is too late for us to take the other course. Moreover there is hardly surety that the second course would prove better. This is the dilemma of human existence:-

“I shall be telling this with a sigh somewhere ages and ages hence,  
Two roads diverged in a wood and I took the one less travelled by and that has made all the difference “

There is a slashing criticism of modern age where man lost all sympathy for his fellowmen and has become selfish, callous (cruel) and self-centered:-

“They might as well not try to go at all  
No, from the time when one is sick to death  
One is alone, and he dies more alone”

The problems of this world do not make the poet an escapist his feet are firmly footed on this earth. He is sure to find solution here only.

As the poet says in Birches:-

“Earth’s the right place for love I don’t know where it’s likely to go better”

Frost like the great made poets employs a metaphysical (beyond earth) symbolic technique of expression. His simplicity is deceptive. His poetry has layers with in layers of meaning. In the manner of the metaphysical poets and their 20<sup>th</sup> century admirers he juxtaposes such opposites as man and the nature, the rural and the urban. He seeks to achieve a synthesis of such opposites in the same way as:-

“My two eyes make me sight”

Thus all the arguments, all the illustrations logically lead to the conclusion that Frost is a genuine modern poet and his poem not only talks about truth, they also teach us wisdom. Frost himself said about his poem:-

“They begin in delight and end in wisdom”

Rexford Stamper rightly remarks:-

“Frost is a modern poet concerned with the same problems of self-identity, the regenerating power of art and the need for a basis for action that concern Eliot or Yeats”.

**Conclusions:-** Indeed Frost is a modern poet. Frost's attitude to nature is neither Epicurean nor romantic. It is modern. It is scientific. He does not take any theory of nature for granted. Rather he writes from his own personal experience and observation. His appeal is pragmatic, realistic and original.

His message to his fellow is to have:

“Courage in the heart, to overcome the fear in the soul and go ahead to any accomplishment”

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