

Robert Frost as a Modern Poet

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Abstract: Robert Frost is a prominent and major American poet, and can be regarded as the greatest of the modern poets of America. Like other modernist poets he wrote his poems in ways that were new and different when he was writing, at the beginning of the 20th Century. But unlike other modernists, Frost also kept some of the traditional aspects of poetry. He was caught between two movements the traditional movement and the modernist movement in poetry. He is a perfectionist poet and deals with the life, people, customs, beliefs and activities of rural parts of the region of America, known as New England. Frost is essentially a regional poet who portrays the rustic life and people of New England to which he belonged and where he passed a major portion of his life. But his poetic vision isn't restricted to this region alone. It encompasses the whole humanity. It is through a simple poetic diction he has carved a niche among the literary elites as well as the common reader. The numerous awards, honors and degrees bestowed on him. He had the unique distinction of winning the coveted Pulitzer prize four times. There is a plathora of themes Frost deals with in his poems.

Keywords- Prominent, Modernist, Encompasses, Plathora

Introduction:

Frost is one of the most representative poets of the twentieth century of America. He has rightly been called. **“The voice of America”**. He has fully observed the essence of what constitutes America. He describes the hopes and fears, the aspirations and doubts of American people. The most striking features of Frost's poetry is simplicity. But this view is based on superficial reading of frost's poetry. **Cleanth Brooks Says:-**

“Frost's simple style is both misleading and deceptive”.

There is always a hidden meaning under the surface simplicity. Frost uses the symbolistic technique to resolve some of the dilemmas of human existence. Frost poetry has universal appeal and goes straight to the heart to the reader.

Robert Frost

Frost's poems are Nature lyrics. Frost belong to the state of New England in America. He writes of the life and occupations of the people of his states. Frost is a keen observer of the phenomena of Nature. He minutely describes the various sights and scenes of nature of his home states.. **“This has led many critics to call frost a regional poets.** They say that frost has no concern with the complexity of modern life. John Lynen, however contradicts this point of view. He rightly observes that frost retreat into the country side **‘is not a romantic escape from the harsh reality of modern life’**. This very well illustrated in his poem “Mending Wall”. The poem narrates a personal anecdote of repairing a wall which he shares with his neighbours they both decide to mend the common, broken wall. The poet-persona is a young man with progressive outlook. His attitudes reflects the modern spirit of enquiry on the other hand, his neighbour is an old ignorant man. He only repeats what his father had said. **“Good fences make good neighbor”**. The ‘wall’ in the poem becomes the symbol of man made barriers political, racial religious and social. In this respect frost is one with modern poets like Eliot, Yeats and Auden.

Frost does not depict the outward event and the scenes of urban life as Eliot does. But he certainly deals with some of the basic issues of human life. His most well known poems “Stopping by woods on a snowy evening” is a metaphor of the journey of life. A simple anecdote of a horse-rider passing through a forest on a winter evening acquires a deeper meaning. The poem becomes a symbol of the human conflict between duty and pleasure, obligation and temptation. The last stanza of the poem is an echo from every human heart.

“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 poem ‘The Road Not Taken’ deals with the confusion that prevails in modern life. The modern man does not know which way to go. He is confused and his life does not have a definite purpose. Every man is faced with the problem of decision making. The choice once made can not be retreated but modern man wistfully sighs over the alternative which he rejected.

**“I shall be telling this with a sigh
Some ages and ages hence,
Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, and I
Took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference”**

Robert Frost love of nature is an indication that modern man has gone far away from nature; his salvation lies only in taking a refuge to nature. Frost knows what he should do when he grows weary of consideration.

“And life is too much like a pathless wood where your face burns and tickles with cobwebs Broken across it, and one eye is weeping from a twig’s having lashed across it open I’d like to get away from earth a while and then came back to it and begin over.”

The poetry of frost has several layers of meaning. At the surface level, one can enjoy the rural scenery and the rural life. But a closer examination reveals the elements of modernity in it. The poem ‘Birches’ admits a number of interpretation. Unlike Keat’s ‘Nightingale ode’, the poem is not an escape from the world of ‘fever and fret’. The poet would never like to leave the earth permanently. He would come back to the world of reality after getting his batteries recharged. He says.

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

Frost’s pastoral perspective reveals that he juxtaposes the rural and the urban, the regional and the cosmopolitan, and the human and the natural exactly same way as Eliot contrasts social classes and holds up things for comparison. Mark ran Doren beautifully sums up this aspect of Frost’s poetry and observes, (in the Permanence of Robert Frost)

“Mr. Frost is a skillful a symbolist as anyone but the mystery in is poems is never of the sort which makes so many contemporary poems sound like puzzles. It is merely the mystery which there is in existence and which he has in his own personal way of feeling.”

Randall Jarrell assessed that:

“Frost grants himself a freedom from recording naturalistic details, he creates a Supernatural scene where the obscure mechanics of the universe are presented as in harmonious with man’s ordinary hopes-----”

Most of his poems deal with persons suffering from loneliness and frustration, loss and disease of modern life. Frost’s poetry lack the style of modern poets like Eliot, Pound, Yeats and Auden, yet it is the poetry of good conversation and plain style. His pastoral farm in poetry is not an escape from reality but an advantage to study man in relation to nature. Modern man’s disillusionment are reflected in the lines of ‘Home Burial’.

“No, from the time when one is sick to death one is alone, and he dies more alone friends make pretence of following to the grave but before one is in it, their minds are turned.”

The poem contains the modern concept of ‘break’ or short holiday to get over the physical and the mental stress of life. Frost may not depict the objects of modern life like railways, bridges, aeroplanes. But the poetry of Frost is no less modern than that of Eliot. Frost is no less modern than that of Eliot not only the voice of America but the voice of the whole mankind.

Conclusion:-

The element of modernism is ubiquitous in frost poems. He brings it out through deft use and handling of symbols, images and metaphors. In spite of dabbling with nature he remains a modernist through out his poems. Modern are and contemporary spirit are both reflected in his work. Cleanth Brooks is of the firm opinion that “Frost’s best poetry exhibits the structure of symbolists metaphysical poetry, much more clearly, than does of many a modern poet”. The symbolist verse of Pound, Eliot and Yeats represents the dominant mode of modern poetry considered in the light of symbolic techniques, Frost is a modern poet. He is not only a poet of the twentieth century but the one who deals with the very problem concerned to the symbolists.

In fact the world of nature in Frost’s poetry is not a world of dream. It is much more harsh, horrible and hostile than the modern urban world. His employment of symbolic and metaphysical techniques and the projection of awareness of human problems of the modern society in his poetry justly entitle him to be looked up to as modern poet.

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