

Dilemma in Robert Frost's Select Poems

Miss. K. Karpagam

Bon Secours Arts & Science College for Women, Mannargudi, Tamilnadu

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INTRODUCTION

Robert Frost was born on March 26, 1874 in a New England Puritan family. Robert Frost's early life was full of excitement and adventure. In "The Constant Symbol" Frost says that there are so many things in poems, but the chief of those is metaphor. Metaphor is saying one thing and meaning another, saying one thing in terms of another. He says that poetry is simply made of metaphor. Every poem is a new metaphor inside or it is nothing.

Frost presents a dramatic situation or twist to most of his poems by developing them through speakers or characters. So we can call him the poet of dilemma. This adds intensity to his art. Because of these qualities, Frost has become the great role model to many poets. His conception of poetry is quite different. Frost would present only the situational crises and dilemmas. He won't conclude his argument in his poems. He would let the readers think and get their own solutions for those crises. This is the specialty of Robert Frost.

When Frost began his poetic career, the old poetical order was losing its power and the modern poetry form was not yet taken shape. So Frost is not a modern poet, at the same time we cannot separate him from it. Thus Frost himself is standing in dilemma for his poetic status. So his poems also have the same dilemma like himself. Frost has used some dramatic and speech devices like unfinished utterances, pauses, breaks, parentheses and sudden ejaculations.

Even though all the poems of Frost are interesting, only four poems are chosen here to be discussed such as, "The Road Not Taken", "Two Tramps in Mud Time", "Mending Wall" and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening". Frost has presented situational crises and dilemmas voluntarily in all these poems. Let us see how he has created the apt situations and dilemmas in his poems.

The Road not Taken

This poem "The Road Not Taken" is one of the popular lyrics of Robert Frost. This poem is very famous for its dilemma. Frost has expressed his dilemma in finest lyrics. This poem has held its place in the collection "Mountain Intervals", published in 1916. Frost does not give his poem the title *The Road Taken* but, *The Road Not Taken* to show that he does not want to be ordinary.

The theme of the poem is easy to understand in the first reading itself. While traveling alone in a forest, the poet reached a point where the road diverged into two different directions. The poet became confused and he was not able to select one road of the two.

- Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
- And sorry I could not travel both
- And be one traveller, long I stood
- And looked down one as far as I could
- To where it bent in the undergrowth;
(line 1-5)

When we read his poem for the first time, we can understand only the surface meaning, but by deep reading we can understand the deep meaning hiding under the simple verse. Frost gives importance to voice tones. His poetic lines have a double duty to convey one meaning by diction and another meaning by tone of the voice. In the surface meaning the poet was in dilemma, because the two roads looked same. To make readers understand Frost has portrayed some characteristics about those two roads. The phrases describe these roads as follow,

As just as fair
Perhaps the better claim
Really about the same
Both that morning equally lay

These expressions clearly show that both roads looked same. The poet looked down as far as he could look, but he could not find out where the roads lead to. Finally he decides to take the one road which is less traveled by the people. In the deep layer this poem means there are many ways in life. If we pass a certain stage in our life it's impossible to return to the same stage again. Hence choosing the correct direction is necessary.

Two roads diverged in a yellow
wood and I –

Took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

This poem is very nice to read, but the problem is it does not go far enough to give a complete form. This poem is left by the poet incomplete. Thus we do not know whether it made a better way or not. This poem is a perfect example of Frost's poems for dilemma.

Two Tramps in Mud Time

The poem "Two Tramps in Mud Time" was published in October 1936. It was later published in "A Future Range". It is like an autobiographical poem of Frost. In this poem he has expressed his own personality and some glimpses about his activities. The theme of this poem is about love of hobby and necessity. Being a farmer Frost has portrayed natural scenes in a beautiful manner. It is a delightful picture of Frost, working in his dooryard and talking with the passerby. The poem opens like this.

Out of the mud two strangers came
And caught me splitting wood in the
yard, (line 1-2)

Frost, straight away comes to his point in the first line itself. When he is splitting wood two tramps go along that way, they look at him. One of them tells him cheerfully to hit the wood hard. The poetic persona is splitting the wood for pleasure, even though wood splitting is not his profession. He has some other ways to earn his livelihood. But strangers who look at him while passing along the road are in want of job. They do not ask the poet to give up his hobby, but the man himself understands that the tramps want to take his job for earning their livelihood. So the dilemma here is whether we can do a work for pleasure, which would help others to lead their life.

As that I had no right to play
With what was another man's work for gain.
My right might be love but theirs was need.
Frost is always interested in dilemma that means standing in the middle without choosing either side. He has brought that concept in the season also. The action takes place on an April day. It is neither March

nor May that means neither winter nor spring. He describes the weather as warm and also chill one. He can feel the warmth of May and chillness of March in one day. After describing the phenomena of the nature, he again comes to the main point of dilemma. The tramps come out of the wood think that they alone have the right to split wood and they must have judged the poet as a fool from the way he holds the axe. By taking up their work for play, he is depriving them of their means of livelihood. Frost does not want to separate pleasure from work. Finally he says that love and need must be one to make the work perfect.

Mending Wall

This poem Mending Wall is a blank verse poem, published in the collection "North of Boston", published in 1914. This poem expresses Frost's philosophy of brotherhood and tolerance. The theme of the poem is very simple. The speaker and his neighbor are keeping their stone wall in good order. It is one of the regular duties of a farmer to keep the wall in order. This poem is in the form of monologue. The other character is not speaking in this poem though he does not speak even a single word, we come to know about his view and attitudes from what the speaker says about him. The opening lines are like this,

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen ground swell under it,
The speaker and his neighbor are mending their stone wall. The neighbor is an old farmer who follows the tradition. But the speaker does not want to follow the tradition. Actually the speaker does not want to keep a wall between them. He thinks that the wall is unnecessary, because he has

apple orchard and the old man has pine orchard. The speaker ridiculously says that his apple trees would not cross their border and ear cones under his pines. The need for a wall does not come here but he quickly realizes the other condition also and says that if there is so then the wall would be necessary. Hence there is no ping in keeping a wall between apple and pine orchard. But the neighbor does not think practically. He wants to follow what his father said,

Good fences make good neighbours ()

Frost does not give solution to this dilemma. He leaves that to his reader's opinion. Somebody wants walls, but somebody does not like that. So the readers can choose either way according to their point of view. The strength of the poem is the contradiction between the first line and the last line being opposed to each other.

Like many of Frost's poems, this poem also has its symbolic meaning. The poet speaks about international relationship, brotherhood and universal unity. The wall is a symbol for man-made barriers that disturbs the universal brotherhood. The neighbor says that there should be a limit between each country. Then only the relationship would be healthier. So the poem makes his reader indulge in a dilemma whether he or his neighbor is correct. There is no solution given to the dilemma in the poem, but left for the reader's idea.

CONCLUSION

The study of Robert Frost's poetry reveals that he has serious messages to convey to the world under light words. His language and method show us clearly that his intention is to make the reader enjoy the

poetry but with some serious thoughts. He has found themes for his poetry from ordinary life situations. He is a modern man and he wants to save the modern world from going into the pit of ruin. Thus this study reveals that he is very much interested in presenting dilemmas in most of his poetry. Thus Frost is the only poet to present dilemmas in such an interesting manner.

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