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An Explication Of After Apple Picking by Robert Frost

The poem is part of Robert Frost's second collection of poems titled *North of Boston*. While not strictly adhering to the laws of poetry, it exhibits a subtle iambic pentameter much like many of Shakespeare's sonnets. The setting for the poem is New England in fall and shows the reader a despondent man's recollection of the day's work, picking apples off the trees on a top of a ladder. The poet focused his writing on the relationship man and nature (Knepper 124). From a more literal point of view, Frost is telling a story of a man disappointed in his work and the poem itself is filled with hints of complaints.

Some aspects of the poem set it apart upon closer look. These include tone, mood and the stylistic devices used. The tone of the poem tells of frustration on the part of the narrator. From his point of view all the apple picking has turned into a routine that no longer brings a sense of accomplishment and is nothing but a monkey job. The author emphasizes the 'thousands of times' he has had to make improvements to his present stature but all his attempts end in failure. The narrator ponders on the prevalence of harvest as 'loads and loads of apples' and at the same breath concedes that 'there was ten thousand fruit to touch' (Line 30). This is very telling of the frustration born from his routine chore of apple-picking. The meekness in the narrator's tone can be quickly picked from his expression of hopelessness in ever making progress off the apple picking venture. The narrator speaks of how many apples he has picked in his day, but still, there is a barrel or two

he has not filled and did not plan to. He further goes on to ponder on his other opportunities but concedes that he is stuck with his current endeavor. He opines that, he cannot wipe the strangeness from his eyes and that magnified apples appear and disappear in his sight (Frost). Similarly, this is telling of his despondency and probably a feeling of disquiet and discontent which he can do nothing about.

The poet made good use of stylistic devices throughout the narration of the poem and this includes the prominent use of rhyme. It should be noted that each of the poem's 42 lines ends with a rhyme. Its regular rhyme scheme and pentameter reminiscent of iambic could divide the poem into several sonnets. The poet's unique rhyming, however, is evident if we take a closer look at how he used different rhyming techniques to express tone and bring forth various themes in the poem. The poem starts with a more straightforward rhyme scheme, representing the narrator's ease and simplicity of thought. A relatively easy to follow rhyme scheme of ABBACCDEDFEF is used by the poet for the first twelve lines (Frost). However, as the narrator gets more uneasy and stretches his mind, so does the poet's rhyme scheme which changes to a somewhat tricky pattern of GHHHGJIJGKJLKL, the resultant effect of which is that rhyming lines are farther apart from line twelve onwards. For instance, line nineteen rhymes with line twenty-three whereas line thirty-five rhymes with the very last line forty-two (Frost).

The author also exhibits a clever use of enjambment; a device in poetry where the author breaks a stanza into two lines to enhance rhyme; which further heightens the feeling of control over the themes in the poem (Gale). A quintessential example of this technique would be lines fourteen and fifteen which ideally could be one single line reading ' , but I was well on my way to sleep before it fell'. The poet instead writes them as two lines, one ending with 'well' and the other with 'fell' (Frost). In so doing, the poet enhances the rhyme in the poem.

Another feature of the poem which sets it apart is its density; this refers to the poet's ability to say much with few words or lines. The narrator uses various connotative devices in an effort at enhancing the poem's density and chief amongst this is the prevalent use of hyperbole (Gale). This is a connotative device where the author employs the use of exaggerated statements which ideally, should not to be taken literally. There are at least three instances of the use of hyperbole in this poem, and these are to wit; line twenty-six whereby the author describes his harvest as loads and loads of apples which is an obvious exaggeration as logic dictates that one person harvesting apples in barrels can only harvest so many apples. Similarly, the poet describes himself as 'overtired', another obvious exaggeration. The narrator, therefore, uses this hyperbole to show just how much he cannot take it anymore. Another instance of hyperbole is used with regards to the bountiful harvest where the narrator states that there are tens of thousands of fruit to touch.

The poet is also an ardent user of personification in this work with at least two prominent examples of this connotative device (Gale). Personification is a connotative device where the poet accords human attributes to inanimate characters in a poem. For Frost, however, he went ahead to expressly term his sleep as a human in the last line of the poem. Similarly, the poet denotes a scenario where a woodchuck could have a conversation with him so that he could get a different perspective to the harvesting endeavor.

From an in-depth look at the poem, various themes are evident. Perhaps the most prevalent idea is that of the journey of life and the undesirable eventuality of death (Su 1374). The poet also seems keen in depicting life as a vain venture to which no one must hold too much attachment. Arguably, the chore of apple-picking as is being undertaken by the narrator is symbolic of life. Human life involves routine and a visibly repetitive cycle; much like the constant apple picking of the narrator. Also, much like for human life, we often get much more than we anticipated in our

wishes just like the narrator prayed for a bountiful harvest but is now tired of picking the produce. Often, we pray for that which overwhelms us. For instance, graduates pray for well-paying careers but end up crushed under the weight of the workload. On the other hand, the narrator's sleep is symbolic of death. It is evident that eventually, after all the hard work and toiling, the man puts his head down and sometimes never wakes up thus in this way, all is in vain.

In light of the above mentioned, the poem 'After Apple Picking' is a quintessence in every sense of the word. Frosts' exhibition of the various elements of a poem can be worst described as a trendsetter even by the meanest of critics basing on the highest attainable standards of poetry.

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