

Assignment 2: Poetry Analysis

After Apple-Picking – Robert Frost

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,
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 on the night,
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight
I got from looking through a pane of glass
I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough
And held against the world of hoary grass.
It melted, and I let it fall and break.
But I was well
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,
And I could tell
What form my dreaming was about to take.
Magnified apples appear and disappear,
Stem end and blossom end,
And every fleck of russet showing clear.
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin
The rumbling sound
Of load on load of apples coming in.
For I have had too much
Of apple-picking: I am overtired
Of the great harvest I myself desired.
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.
For all
That struck the earth,
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,
Went surely to the cider-apple heap
As of no worth.
One can see what will trouble
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.

Analysis:

NOTE: There can be many interpretations of this poem, however this analysis will focus on one major interpretation: the poem might be about an old (possibly) dying man looking back on his life and his regrets for the things he did not accomplish in life (represented by apple picking)

(Lines 1-2):

*My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still*

→“Long two-pointed ladder” (allusion): the image of a ladder pointing toward heaven might be an allusion to the story of Jacob’s Ladder in the book of Genesis. Jacob dreamed of a ladder going up to heaven that had angels climbing it. God was at the top and told Jacob that his descendants would be blessed.

(Lines 3-6)

*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.*

→“And there’s a barrel that I didn’t fill”: might represent unfulfilled aspirations in life, certain regrets, etc. This line gives the poem a somewhat ominous tone. The narrator’s declaration that he is “done with apple picking now” alludes to a sense of finality, almost as if his vision of the apple harvest is a farewell. Even so, he can be satisfied in his work (or achievements) because, with the exception of a few apples that remained on the tree, he fulfilled many of his obligations to the season and to himself.

(Lines 37-42)

*One can see what will trouble
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.*

→“Long sleep”: can be interpreted as a “final sleep.” The sleep of the woodchuck is the sleep of Winter (hibernation) and is temporary, while Winter (especially when used metaphorically) has strong associations with death.

Note on Form:

In terms of form, Robert Frost's "After Apple-Picking" does not follow a traditional structure of poetry. This is quite different for Frost as his poetry was typically written within the traditional forms and patterns of English poetry. While this poem is not written in free verse, it is one of Frost's least formal works. The lines of this poem vary in length; many of the lines are written in iambic pentameter, while other lines diverge from iambic pentameter and the number of syllables range anywhere from two to eleven. The poem also does not follow a typical or traditional rhyme scheme. In fact, the rhyme scheme is highly irregular with many of the rhyming lines being widely separated throughout the poem. Frost does a great job in manipulating rhyme in varied and subtle ways. There is a mystery to the rhyme scheme as the reader does not know when to expect the rhymes or how abruptly or subtly they might appear. In this way, words and sounds remain active throughout the poem. It is also important to note that there are no stanza breaks in this poem. This creates a sense of hesitation or perhaps even drowsiness, as if the speaker is dozing off into a deep sleep (whether it is hibernation or something more final is up for interpretation as seen in the last two lines of the poem).

Note on Extended Metaphor:

While there are no explicit metaphors present throughout the poem, Frost's "After Apple-Picking" does act as an extended metaphor. There is more to this poem than the narrator's everyday act of picking apples. This poem speaks to a metaphorical discussion of seasonal changes and death. Spring and Summer see the fruit blooming, growing, and ripening, Autumn is the time for harvesting the bounty of fruits, and in the Winter months the trees that bear the fruits are dormant and barren. This poem acts as an extended metaphor for working hard in life to achieve personal aspirations and to gain success in life. Much like a farmer might look back on their successes and failures at the end of the harvest season, near the end of life, people might look back on their lives and think about their regrets and failures and whether or not their lives were meaningful.

Resources:

Frost's "After Apple-Picking" is a great introduction to Pastoral poetry and imagery. This poem can be paired with Pastoral paintings. Teachers could show 2 or 3 Pastoral images along with the poem and do a close reading of the images and make connections between text and imagery. One Pastoral painting that can be paired with this poem can be found below:

Apple Harvest at Eragny – Camille Pissarro



Other Poetry:

Remembered Music –Rumi

'Tis said, the pipe and lute that charm our ears
Derive their melody from rolling spheres;
But Faith, o'erpassing speculation's bound,
Can see what sweetens every jangled sound.

We, who are parts of Adam, heard with him
The song of angels and of seraphim.
Our memory, though dull and sad, retains
Some echo still of those unearthly strains.

Oh, music is the meat of all who love,
Music uplifts the soul to realms above.
The ashes glow, the latent fires increase:
We listen and are fed with joy and peace.

Still I Rise – Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulnes,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise