

Significance and Aptness of the ‘Titles’ in Robert Frost’s Poetry

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Abstract:

Robert Frost, a great American poet is known for his conversational, realistic, rural, and introspective style of writing. He is also well known as a nature poet. Though his poems are filled with nature images, but his main concern is humanity. He depicted realistic picture of rural life and used American Colloquial Speech in his writings. The setting of his poem revolves around rural life in New England, and examines complex social and philosophical themes. His poems are optimistic, and teach to accept life with all its limitations.

The title of a poem plays a significant role. It should draw reader’s interest and so should have first impression. The title conveys insight of speaker, depicts tone and mood of the poem, theme, symbolic and philosophical meaning. Frost’s poem titles are catchy, draws curiosity of the readers and hold a distinguished position in literary world. He chooses evocative language, raises a question or conflict and is thought provoking when titles of the poems are of concerned.

The research will focus on the selected poems of Robert Frost and will analyze the significance and aptness of the titles used by Robert Frost in his poems. The title of Frost’s poetry is deep rooted in symbolic meaning showing path to reader how to live life, how to tackle situations, decision making, humanity, learning from nature and much more.

Keywords: title, significance, life learning experience, humanity, nature

Robert Frost, a great American poet is known for his conversational, realistic, rural, and introspective style of writing. He is also well known as a nature poet. Though his poems are filled with nature images, but his main concern is humanity. As compared to other nature poets such as William Wordsworth, Shelley and others his writings treat nature as a real part of life rather than mystic and spiritual. He uses simple and straightforward language to express his ideas and convey message rather than using “flowery” language in order to avoid complexity. Frost has a special bonding with nature hence his poems reflects deep love and sympathy towards nature. He used to wander in the open, in the woods with his kids, which gave him better understanding of nature and inspiration to write poems. He depicted realistic picture of rural life and used American Colloquial Speech in his writings. The setting of his poem revolves around rural life in New England, and examines complex social and philosophical themes. His poems are optimistic, and teach to accept life with all its limitations.

The title of a poem plays a significant role. It should draw reader’s interest and so should have first impression. The title conveys insight of speaker, depicts tone and mood of the poem, theme, symbolic and philosophical meaning. Frost’s poem titles are catchy, draws curiosity of the readers and hold a distinguished position in literary world. He chooses evocative language, raises a question or conflict and is thought provoking when titles of the poems are of concerned.

Frost poem “The Road Not Taken” talks about the dilemma present in every individual’s life. The poem wants to make the readers aware of such dilemma and should make a right choice in their life even if they happen to choose the path which is less travelled. The poem deals with the situation of a speaker who has been caught in the mid of the woods and is in a quandary. He is unsure which way he should go and he chooses the one which is less travelled. The speaker reflects on how he made his plan and went ahead which he suspected might not be fruitful in his future. The decision which he took was final and has changed his life. In this poem ‘road’ symbolizes our life. Frost conveys that ‘the road not taken’ is the path we don’t choose in our life and the way it affects our present as well as our future.

The title “The Road Not Taken” focuses on the mislaid opportunities in a person’s life, in addition what would the person’s life be if he had chosen the other way.

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

In this stanza the poet's tone is sad and melancholic. The speaker now in his old age, still has fresh memories, the decision he took ages back. Somewhere back in his mind he is unable to wipe out the decision he once made in his life. Even at the old age he is facing primal strain. The poet highlights those time and moments in life when a decision has to be made. Individual's choice and decision will lead to the destination in future. The conflict in the poem is presented metaphorically by the speaker. The difficult choice is represented by the road "less travelled by", and the easy choice by "road more travelled by".

Frost another poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" deals with the message that one should not be tempted by beauty and forget one's destination and goal in life. The speaker conveys the message that one should fulfill his/her responsibilities and duties before one's death. One should not get attracted by the surroundings that we forget our work, our goal. Temporary relax is acceptable but it should not drive us away from our responsibility. The poem emphasizes on the moment of the traveler who is charmed by the beauty of the woods, the lovely dark woods of a villager. The wood where he stops has captivated his mind and he could not resist spending his time in the midst of the wood. The beauty of wood is luring the traveler and represents the contended situation in his life. The traveler bears a sad image and feels lonely from the world which he belongs.

Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year

The traveler is in such situation that he has to take decision whether he should end up his life in the woods or go back to his real world and fulfill his responsibilities towards his family and society. Harness bell of horse reminds the danger ahead and consequences he can face if he stays longer in the woods. The situation symbolizes the hurdle and despair created by society for him. But the traveler resists the temptation to stay longer and

finally decides to move ahead with courage and confidence. The last line stresses on the temptation and choice the traveler makes over his responsibilities, obligations and contribution towards the society.

But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

The most significant symbol in the poem is woods. Woods connotes mystery and danger. The title signifies how people fail to appreciate the beauty of the world and are busy with their own selves ignoring their surroundings. “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” also signifies the personal joy and pleasure, peacefulness, silence related with one’s life. It makes the traveler escape from the mundane reality of life which further highlights disturbed state of the traveler.

Frost’s “Birches” is yet another most appreciated poem. It takes readers to the journey from woods to heaven and from childhood to adulthood. The title explores the speaker’s relationship to the truth which can be further looked into by three aspects – Naturalistic: dealing with ice-storms and its effect on the birch tree, Personal: it deals with the idea of boy conquering the tree and Philosophical: it relates with the balance between reality and idealism. The poem draws image of swinging on birches as an escape from the harsh reality of adult, materialistic world. The act of boy’s climbing up the tree is symbolically presented as if he is climbing toward heaven where his imagination is free. The birches tree symbolizes the life of poet and the change in his perception of life as he grew up. The act of swinging relates to the life of the speaker who swings from present to past, revisiting the present to wishes in future. The poem highlights the state of youth, nostalgia and spirituality.

I like to think some boy’s been swinging them ...
You may see their trunks arching in the woods
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground ...
So was I once myself a swinger of birches.
And so I dream of going back to be.

I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,

The poem centers on the act of swinging from birch tree, which symbolizes the youthful ability to find joy, happiness and excitement in an ordinary act of swinging. Seeking joy in an adult age is difficult and troublesome. Everyday mundane routine has kept adults away from wonder and excitement as children do. The act of climbing and swinging from birch tree does not only signify youthful joy but it also signify speaker's desire to recapture that joy, the joy of childhood which is a most joyous period of life. It also represents creativity of life, flexibility and balance in life. The title also suggests accepting the reality of life, and simultaneously focuses on enjoying the odd moments of freedom too. The title explores the idea for human beings to go creative and maintain a balance between wish, desire and contained with existence.

“Acquainted with the Night” is a remarkable poem by Robert Frost associating with darkness and loneliness. The word ‘acquainted’ means to be familiar but not exactly friendly with. At a glance the title indicates that the speaker is familiar with the night but is not exactly friendly with it. The speaker seems to be acquainted with the night but not necessary that he liked it. Night symbolically represents darkness and loneliness so the title is associated with the dark, gloomy and depressed mood of the speaker. It is an expression of despair, sorrow and inescapable moment of life. The speaker of the poem walks around at night in the city as well as outside the city, but is found to be lonely in the dark streets. He walks with the hope to get company, but he is ignored and unacknowledged with the passer by. Ironically speaker has become friend of darkness and night.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.
I have passed by the watchman on his beat
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

The poem thus explains the terse relationship of the speaker with his own self as well as with the society. It also draws reader's attention with the personal past experience of Robert Frost regarding his life and give a better understanding of the poet and the context

of his poems. The title represents many hardship, suffering and depression faced by the poet in his life and gives message that the same situation can be with any individual. He gives the reader a better understanding of life. The poem takes the reader to a journey of the speaker, looking back at his past with certain impassiveness. Further since the speaker takes a solitude walk at night he has less chance to meet someone who can be of help to him and can take him out of depression. His acquaintance with night constructs a non-escape depression, wrapped in never ending sorrow.

“Fire and Ice” is one among the shortest poem by Robert Frost dealing with the subject of sinners, hell and lake of ice. The central idea of the poem symbolically reflects fire as desire, greed or love, and ice as destruction, rigidity and hate. The poem with title conveys a controversy about how the world will end-in fire or in ice. The title represents consciousness, concern, unique vision about global concerns and human life philosophy. The title reflects power of two important elements ‘fire’ and ‘ice’ which relates destructive potential of human feelings, emotions and desires which in the end may cause chaos, conflicts, devastation to earth-earths destruction when the world will come to an end. The title also reflects the conflict and destruction caused to earth due to environmental issues centered on nuclear disaster, climate change and general condemnation. It predicts the world’s fate.

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.

The title speaks more about the idea of human satisfying their greed which further results in hatred ruining humanity. Every individual knows that the world is going to end, but the poem stresses on whether by ‘fire’ or by ‘ice’. On the humanity ground poet stresses the end on the concept either by desire or by hate. Fire is desire leading to passion whereas ice is hate leading to reason. So the one who strayed away from positive and optimistic life through reason they are the worst offenders and will result in ending up in a lake of ice. The poem deals with the issue of ethics in the world. One’s concern about morals, principles, religious concepts, following God’s will and belief will help in slowing down the destruction in world. The poem with its catchy title is known for its simplicity and stinging message dealing with the concept of end of this world.

Title of a poem is the first thing which the readers come across. Therefore, it should draw the attention of the reader. Title should make the reader to think on it, ponder over it and grasp the clue the author wants to convey. Choice of words in the title is important which relates to poetic diction. Robert Frost poetry is rich in all the above aspects. His titles often seems to have one meaning at the surface level but as we progress we find multiple layers of meaning deep rooted in nature and philosophical world. His poems connects the relationship of human and nature proving nature to be the best friend of humans, teaching and guiding them, overcoming the trials and errors, and finally helping readers to find a better life for themselves. His *titles* play a significant role in understanding various roles and paths of life.

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