

Critical Analysis of 'After Apple Picking' by Robert Frost

Robert Frost was a very popular Poet. Although he was considered a quintessential New England poet, he had spent the first 11 years of his life in San Francisco. Upon his father's death, he and his family moved to Lawrence, Massachusetts where Frost continued his schooling and later on started college. A modern writer, Frost has been critiqued for being his subtle wit, broad humor and strength of content, ensured his place in the eyes of almost no influence of any specific school. Eventually, Frost mastered his art of poetry writing and hence, worked outside of movements and manifestos to create his own niche in English literature.

This poem is based on the narrator being tired as he spent the day apple picking and he is now tired of continuing this job. He has felt sleepy since morning. Even when he picks up a piece of ice from the drinking trough and he looks at his apples through it, he cannot escape the thought of his apples even in his sleep, as he narrates how he can imagine the apples growing from the blossoms, failing off trees, and piling up in the cellar. He ends the poem by questioning himself, if the sleep he is getting is a normal 'human's' sleep or a deep winter's sleep like the Woodchuck when it hibernates.

After Apple Picking, is a great representation of Frost's writing. He breaks in and out of traditional structure. Almost half the poem, (25 lines), are written in standard iambic pentameter, and the rest (17 lines) end with rhymed words. This drifting structure symbolizes the switch between the consciously awakened state and a dream-like state, which the narrator is constantly dwelling about.

This poem could simply be talking about an apple picker who is tired after a hard day of work but cannot seem to escape the mental act of apple picking. He mentions how he can still feel the ache in his foot as if he is standing on a ladder and vision all his apples. He also mentions the apples that are fallen to the ground and are injured could still be consigned to the cider press.

The narrator's everyday act of picking apples also speaks to a more metaphorical discussion of seasonal changes and death. Although we do not know where the poem is set, we do know winter is coming near. Winter, symbolizing, death and decay: the grass is "hoary," the surface of the water in the trough is frozen enough to be used as a pane of glass, and the overall sense of the decay that occurs in the "essence" of winter. The narrator does not know whether the death that is coming will either be renewed by spring in a few months or if everything will be trapped under the snow for the rest of the eternity.

Nature figures prominently in Frost's poetry, and his poems usually include a moment of interaction or encounter between a human speaker and a natural subject, like the apple, in this case. A day of harvesting fruit leads to a new understanding of life's final sleep, or death. The ice melts, the apples get damaged as they fall to the ground, and he does not feel the need to do what he loves anymore, therefore, the death of his passion to pick apples is also dying as life as an apple-picker is too monotonous for his liking; "For I have had too much Of apple-picking: I am overtired". But there is no logical connection between being sick of picking apples and simultaneously thinking about apples, as opposed to one who would run away from all ties with something they have had an excess of. The narrator has lost his passion.

The falling of apples helps in biblical imagery. Just like the 'forbidden fruit', where the apples are a symbol of earth and the speaker is feeling sympathy for them. The images of these apples "trouble" him in some way.

The title of the poem provided the time in which the poem is set. The title is actually quite helpful because, without it, we might think that the poem is set DURING the apple-picking. As the speaker is about to fall asleep he imagines that he is back in the orchard, but his reflection is confused and disoriented. Apple-picking was a common job in autumn in New England, therefore, Frost might be hinting toward how he doesn't not like the monotonous lives he and his people live.

Robert Frost: Poems Summary and Analysis of "After Apple-Picking" (1914)

At the end of a long day of apple picking, the narrator is tired and thinks about his day. He has felt sleepy and even trance-like since the early morning, when he looked at the apple trees through a thin sheet of ice that he lifted from the drinking trough. He feels himself beginning to dream but cannot escape the thought of his apples even in sleep: he sees visions of apples growing from blossoms, falling off trees, and piling up in the cellar. As he gives himself over to sleep, he wonders if it is the normal sleep of a tired man or the deep winter sleep of death.

Analysis

In terms of form, this poem is bizarre because it weaves in and out of traditional structure. Approximately twenty-five of the forty-two lines are written in standard iambic pentameter, and there are twenty end-rhymes throughout the poem. This wandering structure allows Frost to emphasize the sense of moving between a waking and dream-like state, just as the narrator does. The repetition of the term “sleep,” even after its paired rhyme (“heap”) has long been forgotten, also highlights the narrator’s gradual descent into dreaming.

In some respects, this poem is simply about apple picking. After a hard day of work, the apple farmer completely fatigued but is still unable to escape the mental act of picking apples: he still sees the apples in front of him, still feels the ache in his foot as if he is standing on a ladder, still bemoans the fate of the flawless apples that fall to the ground and must be consigned to the cider press.

Yet, as in all of Frost’s poems, the narrator’s everyday act of picking apples also speaks to a more metaphorical discussion of seasonal changes and death. Although the narrator does not say when the poem takes place, it is clear that winter is nearly upon him: the grass is “hoary,” the surface of the water in the trough is frozen enough to be used as a pane of glass, and there is an overall sense of the “essence” of winter. Death is coming, but the narrator does not know if the death will be renewed by spring in a few months or if everything will stay buried under mindless snow for all eternity.

Because of the varying rhymes and tenses of the poem, it is not clear when the narrator is dreaming or awake. One possibility is that the entirety of the poem takes place within a dream. The narrator is already asleep and is automatically reliving the day’s harvest as he dreams. This explanation clarifies the disjointed narrative — shifting from topic to topic as the narrator dreams — as well as the narrator’s assertion that he was “well upon my way to sleep” before the sheet of ice fell from his hands.

Another explanation is that the narrator is dying, and his rambling musings on apple picking are the fevered hallucinations of a man about to leave the world of the living. With that in mind, the narrator’s declaration that he is “done with apple-picking now” has more finality, almost as if his vision of the apple harvest is a farewell. Even so, he can be satisfied in his work because, with the exception of a few apples on the tree, he fulfilled all of his obligations to the season and to himself. Significantly, even as he falls into a complete sleep, the narrator is unable to discern if he is dying or merely sleeping; the two are merged completely in the essence of the oncoming winter, and Frost refuses to tell the reader what actually happens.

