

A Parable Repartee of Deviated Poetic Norms in Frost's poetry

Rafi' Mahmood Hussein¹

Assistant Professor

Waleed Shihan Muslih²

Assistant Instructor

^{1,2}Department of English, College of Education for Humanities, University of Anbar, Iraq

Abstract: Robert Frost (1874-1963) writes poetry in two styles. In composing short poems he uses direct language and continuous sentences. But in his versification of long poems he follows a particular way of writing poetry using the inflected language of a rural colloquial dialect of New Englanders. In Frost's long poems there are irregularities in syntax. Frost disregards the rules of the sentences. The sentences are broken and loose. They are characterized with many qualities such as breaks, incompleteness, parentheses, colons, dashes etc. The speaker in the poem breaks up the sentences in the lines of verse and other times the speaker cuts his speech off to talk about other things. Moreover there are deliberate irregular breaks of sounds within the regular beat of meter, which are constituent parts of syntax, to the extent that some times the poem sounds as natural as actual speech. In this way Frost makes an essential break from the more impressive style of the Victorian, Genteel, and Modernists poets. However, the present study aims at explaining the poetic deviation in syntax in Frost's rural poems, line of verse, impressive style and keywords and the motive behind them.

Key Words: *versification, colloquial, line of verse, poetic deviation:*

"After Apple-Picking" taken from *North of Boston* (1914) is one of the most celebrated of Frost's poems. This poem presents the complexity in Frost's poems in syntax. However, the outlook of the poem could be read as a realistic presentation of the feeling of a physically exhausted man after a hard working day. It shows Frost's ability to create the type of sensation we practice in the poem. It describes the feeling of the speaker in the poem after a working day. The speaker in the poem feels himself as a stranger.

The title of the poem is a symbolic one. It has two readings. First, apple picking is a work that could be done in the day and in autumn and as a matter of course night and winter come after it. Both night and winter stand for death. Secondly, apple-picking is a traditional symbol of the fall of Man that is, it refers to the story of Adam and Eve. Furthermore, these two connotations have the idea of the speaker is about to die.

The first five lines suggest the idea of incompleteness in that the speaker in the poem talks about an unachieved work. He leaves the ladder in the tree without filling all his baskets. The ladder is directed up but to an unreachd heaven. Moreover, there are many baskets still unfilled with apples. Thus, the first lines show that the apple-picking is unachieved, though the speaker thinks that he has finished his work. While on picking apples he looks at a piece of ice which he has picked from the frozen water in the orchard. This makes him feel sleepy and he remembers the feeling of being a stranger:

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.

(Frost)

However, the meaning of the first section of the poem ends with the speaker's saying that he does not like picking apples any more in the usual way of picking apple (Brower):

But I am done with apple-picking now
It melted, and I let it fall and break.

(Frost)

The speaker seems unable to conceive that his feeling of incompleteness is not after his hard working day. It is suggested by the speaker's rethinking of his morning work when he hold the ice in his hand and looked through it. At the moment of remembering the ice falling from his hand the speaker falls a sleep. He makes a picture in his mind about what shape the ice will take when it falls from his hand. He can imagine its new form but he cannot know its meaning. He had seen things in a distorted way. The distorted form represents the activities of the day which are related to the speaker's way of life. In his life, the speakers, Frost himself, wants every thing in a perfect way. He is a person who is only satisfied if what he does is flawless. But its clear that because of his being incapable of reaching successfully the ideal in life he does not want to go on. He works hard to reap all the tremendous number of the apples in the trees without making any of the apples which he wants to reap to fall. Before he suggests the shape of his vision. He sounds not sure that he does not mention any other thing in the outer world which he imagines. The speaker's words demonstrate the form that he thinks that his vision will take:

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.

(Frost)

As a matter of fact, the poet realizes that he is exhausted from apple picking. Then, he clarifies that it is clear that what will disturb his sleep is his knowing that if he were not a sleep for the winter, his sleep will be like his hibernation. The speaker feels sleepy but he is confused and not sure about what makes him sleepy and why he feels so. He thinks he could get an idea about the nature of the sleep he is about to fall in from the woodchuck. But he also knows well that man is different from animal in that man does not hibernate or be unconscious every winter. He keeps working to prove his humanity by having a momentary stay against confusion(Conder):

This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is
 Were he not gone,
 The woodchuck could say whether it's like his 40
 Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
 Or just some human sleep.

(Frost)

Talking about the shape of his dreaming he leaves the piece of ice falls from his hand and breaks:

It melted, and I let it fall and break.
 But I was well
 Upon my way to sleep before it fell.

(Frost)

However, these different themes cause various irregularities in the poem in its syntax which are related to the subject that the poet wants to portray which is the incompleteness(Brower).The similarity between the speaker's drowsiness and the most important quality of winter sleep is connected by uncommitted colon in the third line of verse of the below stanza. Clearly, the "essence" is held together with "the scent of apple" in a way stronger than with speaker's feeling of drowsiness. This equivalence is loosely linked by the colon which breaks down in the next

stanza, that gives an idea about an alien vision of winter world through a piece of ice. He may view via this "glass" the old –fashioned world of grass:

Essence of winter sleep is on the night
The scent of apples: I am drowsing of
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight.

(Frost)

Reading these lines aloud makes clear that the meaning is not complete due to the incompleteness of the speaker's activity in filling some of the baskets with apples. The forty two-lines poem rhymes in a very irregular way. The rhyme scheme changes particularly in the first ten lines and the length of the lines varies in rhythm from two syllables at the beginning to twelve syllables at the end.

Obviously, Frost's playing of tones is against the traditional poetic norms. Everything in the poem is received by the reader in a spell-like repetition and rhymes and rhythm come from sounds of the same pattern. The opening lines ends in rhymes of many sorts of varied patterns. Each one of these patterns is a unit of syntax. Every unit of syntax stands as a stanza by itself. It is cut off by different rhyming scheme, that is, the last word either introduces a new rhyme which is changed in the next stanza such as **off** in the second line, **break** in the third line and **it is** in the ninth line/or it completes a rhyme which is used only one time as in **now** in the first line, **take** in the fourth line, **clear** in the fifth line, in the sixth line, **deserved** in the seventh line, **worth** in the eighth line and **sleep** in the tenth line. The first group of the rhymes links between the stanzas while the second type of the rhymes gives the sense of monotony in that they tell the same facts of the speaker's distorted feeling of drowsiness for the word **sleep** is repeated five times. Thus, these irregularities in syntax; in the shortness and the length of the sentences and in the rhythm and rhyme of the poem make a special sense of finality of rhyme and rhythm which is on contrary to the then prevailing poetic modes.

"Mending Wall" taken from *North of Boston*(1914) is a lyric about two neighbors who meets regularly every year to talk about repairing a stone wall separating between them. The speaker of the poem is inquiring about the existence of the wall for both of the speaker and his neighbor do not have cows, sheep or other types of animals but fruits and pines trees. So, he feels that the

wall means something beyond its existence. The wall creates ambiguous gaps between the two neighbors since the wall is made by nature; by boulders falling alone.

The two men in the poem differ in their ideas concerning the wall. The neighbor takes part in rebuilding the wall only as an urgent need. The speaker does not mind constructing the fence but obviously he sympathizes with the definite pronoun "something" more than building the wall. On the other hand, the neighbor assures that the wall is important for good relationship explaining/Good fences make good neighbor/. While on mending the wall, however, the speaker tries to persuade his neighbor in every other way to except his view describing him as an old fashioned for sticking at old tradition. The neighbor sees that it stands to reason that "Good fences make good neighbors". Throughout the poem the two neighbors shape up into one person which is the speaker himself.

The first lines of the poem shows the poet's ability to bring our attention close to concrete walls and boundaries. Clearly in the speaker's mind mending the wall is left undecided. The speaker is at once against and with building the wall. This is embodied in the versification of the poem's blank verse. For the poet writes within and against the traditional poetic structure:

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
(Frost)

As in all of Frost's poems this poem looks simple but close reading shows that there are few breaks in syntax and tones. In the above lines of verse there are sentences continuing beyond the end of the line of poetry. These lines are run on lines and we find caesura and breaks within the line of verse. The opening line states the simple and colloquial language results from Frost's use of syntax. He uses contraction like "doesn't" and this contraction contributes to Frost's colloquial style which is in a plain contrast to the post-Victorian poets' poetic norms. For most of the post-Victorian poetry, in most of its instances, is a self-conscious one while Frost's style is simple and colloquial. Talking about the language of the first line, Marie Borroff's opinion is that if this line is rewritten as "There exists an antipathy towards barrier" it would be expected to give a completely different effect for the words and rhythm of the poem(Beach;2003:17).

The simple syntax in the poem conceals powerful meaning. Obviously, because of Frost's use of syntax, the sense of the conflict in the poem is not clearly seen but it is not wrong. There is an immediate reordering in syntax till the poet achieves perfection. That is, the phrase "frozen-ground-swell" has its own strength under the indicative outlook of the poem. Moreover, Frost makes the indefinite pronoun "something" go together with the loose demonstrative "there is" to create a sense of ambiguity before talking about the wall which is the main subject. He uses informal language allowing himself to make change in the poem. By employing inverted syntax("Something there is ...") to provide a confused disordered number of relative clauses and compound verb phrases("that doesn't love... that sends... and splits...and (Kemp).

The ambiguous force of the wall which is referred to as "something" also, causes the speaker's speech to be sensitive to this force. Active verbs such as "sends", "spills", "makes" are followed by direct objects to show that the speaker probes well the destructive vague power that dislikes walls(ibid). The continuity of the sentences beyond the end of a line of poetry and the variation and interchange in meter help the main theme in this stanza .Which is to talk about a disordered wall in lines of verse which are themselves disordered(Richardson):

I let my neighbor know beyond the hill
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again
We keep the wall between us as we go.

(Frost)

Furthermore, Frost's use of syntax is characterized by repetition. Frost sheds light on the use of repetition which represents the relationship between the form of the poem and its subject matter. His use of vocabularies, as compared with the modernist poets such as T.S Eliot(1888-1965) and Ezra Pound(1885-1972),is limited. He depends heavily on repetition. Frost uses an unusual number of repeated words and phrases. For example the word **wall** is used more than six times in addition to the word **walling** which is used in the participle tense to suggest working. The first line/something there is that doesn't love a wall,"/is used not less than two times. Furthermore the phrase "Good fences make good neighbors" is repeated twice.

The syntax in "Mending Wall" is also recognized by the use of concrete descriptive words which add a sense of simplicity to the picture that the poet conveys such as **wall ground, boulder ,gaps, hunters, stone dogs, spring, neighbor, hill, line, cones...** These nouns do not present a sense of challenge to the reader. But they are used symbolically by the poet to heighten the texture of the poem.

The patterns of sounds and rhythm in the poem resist the regularities of the traditional poetic norms. They go in contrast with the mainstream poetic norms. The opening line starts with a trochaic "something" while in line two there are words with two strong syllables and the same spondees continues in line four and seven:

;And makes gaps even two can pass abreast

 ,where they have left not one stone on a stone.
 (Frost)

The metrical variation emphasizes the strong devastating powers at mending the wall. Frost's writing in this pattern makes a clever tension between line six and line seven-- In a larger metaphorical sense this metrical tension suggest the situation in which the poet is in. More to the point it shows the opposition in his mind concerning the wall. Most of the lines of verse are end-stopped ones. They are kept within the limits of ten- syllables boundaries. They are easy to understand that is, their meanings are not vague. Most of the words are monosyllabic. For instance the seventh line /where they have left not one stone on a stone/all the words in this line are monosyllabic one. According to the accepted post- modern literary standards this line could be considered unpoetic though it looks closer to ears than the poetry written by Alfred Lord Tennyson(1860-1892)and other poets:

The work of hunters is another thing:
 I have come after them and made repair
 Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
 But they would have the rabbit out of hiding
 To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean
 (Frost)

The changing case of the wall affects the outlook of the poem itself. The rhythm changes in the lines where Frost talks about the yearly ceremony of rebuilding the fence by the speaker and his

neighbor. The rhythm becomes iambic and the lines change from run –on-lines to end stop ones. (Tilak;2010:18):

We wear our fingers rough with handling them
 , oh, just another kind of outdoor game
 :One on a side. It comes to little more.
 (Frost.)

Though he depends on colloquial language, Frost also talks figuratively in his description of the wall's stones. His figurative language, also, looks like natural speech more than literary one. Metaphorically, the words "loaves" and "balls" mean the wall's stones. Then he makes a comparison between the gardens of the two neighbors and their owners:

He is all pine and I am apple orchards
 (Frost)

After this line Frost starts speaking jokingly about the type of trees in in each orchard:

My apple trees will never get across
 .And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him
 (Frost)

These lines, also, sounds unpoetic for they are like a natural speech and the second line seems like a prose more than like poetry. Frost keeps versifying in this way, which appears unpoetic till the final part of the poem. In this part only, the poet shifts to the level of symbolic vagueness. He talks about "darkness" in an ambiguous way without explaining what does this "darkness" mean:

He moves in darkness as it seems to me
 Not of woods only and the shade of trees
 (Frost).

Then the poet returns to a conventional style of addressing the reader. He addresses and shares the reader's thinking in a more direct way moving a little away from the elevating language. The reader is involved in thinking and has the feeling of comfort. This style is elevated at the point when the poet sounds to break the influx of his own thinking and states something which he has early mentioned when he says "the gaps I mean" in the ninth line. This looks unpoetic in that Frost clarifies this in a way as any person does in an ordinary speech:

,To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean
 , No one has seen them made or heard them made.

,But at spring mending-time we find them there.
(Frost.)

The phrase "the gaps I mean" brings us back again from moving around about the hunters and pulls us again to the main subject of the poem which is the wall. Furthermore this phrase, at once, reminds the reader of the presence of the speaker. Moreover, the presence of the speaker is suggested by the way most sentences are constructed around such as the use of "and" and "but".(Tilak;2010:17).For " and" is used eight times and "but" is used three times. This creates the effect produced in our minds that the speaker works from his own free will and settles linking while on speaking the poem.

However, the simple syntax of the poem and the interesting rhythm are caused by the interchange of the simple declarative sentences that fit well within the lines of verse. In terms of theme, the interchange of the declarative sentences also repeats the past action of the wall itself. The wall is amended and re-amended just, according to the speaker in the poem, to be fallen by man or nature:

'He only says,' Good fences make good neighbors
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
: if I could put a notion in his head
Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't'
.where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
(Frost)

Thus, the interchanges in the poet's mind casts its shadows on the creative and effective use of language which is shown in his making use of the pun and word play and the use of rhythm and meter(ibid:18).

"Stopping by woods in a snowy evening" taken from *New Hampshire* (1923) is one of Frost's poem in which he works out of the traditional poetic structure. It shows Frost complex use of syntax. The poem, however, tells a story of a man struggling for responsibility and social environment versus keeping on the same way of living. In this poem Frost employed many details to bring the reader to the field of reading a story. According to the poet himself, the poem was written quickly in one morning after spending a whole night wondering in a quarter in New Hampshire(Coles Notes;2008:58). Talking about setting down the first line of the poem and working out of the traditional poetic structure Frost explained that he was free in choosing

the way he wrote the first line. After that he wrote the second line and made it rhyme with the previous one. The third line in the first stanza does not rhyme with the first two lines. The same thing happens in the second stanza when Frost makes the third line in the second stanza rhyme with the third line in the first stanza. Commenting on the rhyming in this poem John Ciardi writes:

"In *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*" Frost took a long chance. He decided to rhyme not two lines in each stanza, but three. Not even Frost could have sustained that much rhyme in a long poem. He would have known instantly, therefore, when he took the original chance, that much rhyme in a long poem. He would have had that foretaste of it. So the first stanza emerged rhymed, a-a-b-a. And with the sure sense that his was to be a short poem, he decided to take an additional chance and to redouble: in English three rhymes in four lines is more than enough; there is no need to rhyme the fourth line. For set himself to pick up that loose rhyme and to weave it into the pattern, thereby accepting the all but impossible burden of quadruple rhyme. The miracle is that it worked. Every word and every rhyme fell into place, as naturally and as inevitably, as if there were no rhymes restricting the poet's choices" (Tilak;2010:107).

Thus, Frost wrote his poem using his own literary theory that is "a poem is" a reaching-out toward expression; an effort to find fulfillment. A complete poem is one where an emotion has found the words" (Thompson).

The title of the poem suggests that something worth looking at stopped the narrator of the poem. Knowing why and where the narrator stopped enriches our knowledge to know the way of thinking the narrator has. He stopped near the forests and a lake away from people in the dead of winter watching the falling of the snow. The soft and white snow and the shape of the woods motivated him. Moreover the importance of the poem comes from two attitudes the poet has and these attitudes are jointly provided. First, the poet views the woods at which he stopped as someone's property, they belong to the world of men. Secondly and at once the woods are the poet's belongings by means of his strong feeling of joy and their especial significance. The poet is charmed and has a temporary period of calm by the virtue of white snow and the deep dark woods. The duality of the speaker's react to the scene of woods and snow is reflected in the contrast between the conversational tone of the poem. However, the speaker in the poem starts

by a rhetorical question separating himself from those who live in the village near the woods(Ogilvie):

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

(Frost)

Clearly, in "Stopping by woods in a snowy evening" Frost follows a strict iambic pentameter. In line fourteen there is a slight metric variation frost use it to break the monotonous rhythm of the poem. However, Frost succeeds in drawing the reader's attention by many ways. First he makes the reader concentrate on specific things in each stanza. For instance in the first stanza the focus is on the woods and snow then the attention is drawn to horse and darkness. After that to the horse and snow and in the last stanza the reader's concentration is on woods and darkness. Another way of breaking the monotony is by the inverted syntax.(Diyanni;2004:594). Frost's stress put on certain words through turning upside down the accepted order of the words in the one sentence within the line of verse. The poem's first line is revered:

Whose woods these are I think I know. (Frost)

The standard order is:

I think I know whose woods these are.

A third way of killing the monotony is by using familiar language of every day speech and the most important way is by making each stanza carrying a different end stopping lines. The incomplete tones of the first line puts us in the mood of the poem without explaining where it leads to but the use of **though** in the end of the second line brings us again to feel that we are in this world. Moreover, the repetition of the sound /o/ and the **though** also gives rise to a number of rhymes that follow. Furthermore, "Stopping by Woods in a Snowy Evening" contains poetic deviation in the speed at which the sentences in each stanza are read. For in the first stanza there are punctuation marks causing pauses in the sentences and this affect the tempo of the rhythm. In the second line only there are two pauses/His house is in the village, though;/.The third stanza

differs from the two previous stanzas in that there is only one pause in this stanza. While the last stanza contains five pauses three of them are in its first line:

,But The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
,I have promises to keep,
,And miles to go before I sleep,
(Frost)

Due to the dialogical reversal Frost emphasis falls on the woods that are more essential than what the speaker think of these words while considering them. Another important poetic fact in such line of verse is the difference in the quality of the speaker's voice between the two orders of the words. Frost's syntax, the disorder of words, gives the lines a more even tone by making it's rhythm slower. The alternative line of verse lacks the regular rhythmical movement and it looks like an unpoetic speech. Moreover, the second stanza is a one single line stanza.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.
(Frost)

Frost explained that what troubles people in his poems is his aim to use varieties of tones aiming to bring sentence tones which had never been caught before. His heavy use of punctuation is for a thematic purpose, that is, to enhance the expressive power of the poem and to master its rhythm(Diyanni;2004:576).Frost himself said "in speech, the movement of a sentence is an expression of its sense, the accents, the pauses, the voice's rise and fall, evoking a feeling which exactly fits the tenor of what is said"(Tilak;2010:63).

Finally, What seems to be simple in Frost's poems is not actually simple, but it is the art that conceals art. Writing poetry, for Frost in most of his poems, does not mean to be bound to write in a logical order but instead he writes in a way which is bent at the end. Frost sees that the poet's goal is there but he moves towards it with an alliteration and interruptions as in someone's life. In terms of the order of the sentences in the lines of verse Frost uses a disordered syntax to get the full expressive power of the sentence as in the opening lines of "Mending Wall" and Stopping by Woods in a Snowy Evening".

Moreover, in witting poetry, Frosts was amused by the restrictions that encountered the experimentalists, his contemporaries, when they wanted to define the extent at which poetry could be free. The problem that faced the experimentalists was with form and content. Frost has his own distinctive experiments which is neither with form nor content but with structure or the texture of the poem. His emphasis was on speech rhythm and what he called the sound of sense. In his use of language he depends on his lived experiences and his emotions in addition to his linguistic memories that are related naturally and spontaneously, to the subject matters of the poems which he wants to write. Furthermore he writes poetry using the every day language of New Englanders to have the natural voice of the speaker and the intonation fully and naturally inflected. Distinctively he uses the dialogical tones of the New Englanders.

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