

Sample Question and answer on ROBERT FROST

This is both an example of answering technique and an interpretation of four Frost Poems

‘Robert Frost creates both enchanting and haunting moods’.

In the light of the above statement, discuss the manner in which Robert Frost explores various themes in his poems.

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Statement

Task

Key Words = ‘manner’ & ‘themes’.

NB.

Ring or underline the key words of the question

The Marking Code for this extended answer is *TM*, for ‘Theme’ & ‘Manner’, the key words of the task. ‘M’ and ‘T’ should be linked in the answer.

The TASK requires discussion of themes and style in the context of the STATEMENT. The statement defines the significance of ‘manner’.

Marking Scheme

Many of Robert Frost’s poems create either an enchanting or haunting atmosphere due to the themes he selects to explore and the mood he creates in his poetry. Above all many of his poems are debates offering opposite views of the same issue. ‘After Apple-Picking’, ‘The Road Not Taken’, ‘The Tuft of Flowers’ and ‘Out Out’ provide a good range of poems for exploring this aspect of Frost.

Intro that embraces the question. The Intro is brief and lists the poems to be covered.

One such example is the poem ‘*After Apple-picking*’, probably one of Frost’s most cryptic and complex poems. At the most literal level of theme, the poem describes how after a strenuous day of apple-picking, the speaker dreams dreams in which his previous activities return to him ‘*magnified*’, blurred and distorted by memory and sleep. At another level though, the poem suggests a theme of how sleep and death are central to human happiness.

The poem has a strange, almost surreal, atmosphere to it. The metaphors envelop us in the poem. The apples are metaphors for memories of life.

Magnified apples appear and disappear.

The recurring ‘*app*’ sound lends a music that reinforces the repetition, amplifies the feeling that the speaker is haunted by his own past as his life closes in. It is the poetic touch, the living imagination, that magnifies the apples, turning them into symbols.

The images drift in and out of dream and consciousness:

I am drowsing off.

I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight

I got from looking through a pane of glass

Straight to the business of the poems—avoiding an intro on the poet’s background which has v. low marks value. In the early part of this answer words that hit the task are boxed.

In this sample the quotes are in italics, just for easy reading. In

*I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough
And held against the world of hoary grass*

Looking at the world in a different way could here be a metaphor for the poet's vision and engagement with the world. The pane of glass is the poet's view from his imagination. In this way, the gathering of apples is part of an artistic process and the fruit becomes a metaphor for the work of imagination.

Many of Frost's poems contain a philosophical contemplation on life and AAP is no different. In the poem, the poet looks back at his accomplishments,

*There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.*

and the richness of a life fully lived. In fact, he has experienced so many of life's pleasures and rewards that he confesses:

I have had too much

Of apple-picking: I am overtired

Of the great harvest I myself desired

The balance of 'overtired' and 'desired' cleverly expresses the contrast between an aged and a young heart. At a figurative level, the poem appears to be about evaluation of a life lived, assessing the achievements and disappointments. Frost has some regrets, but resigns himself to these losses and to the missed opportunities:

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.

Here we see as well that Frost is highlighting a recurring theme from his poetry: the theme of choice haunts him frequently. It is at the end of these poems that a sense of regret is evoked, to embitter the sweetness of the recollection. **TM**

the exam it is a good **OPTION** to use black and blue pen, but not red or green, for quotes.

There is a convincing fusion of theme and style, with regular reference to mood and the two key adjectives from the statement.

Thus the answer is relevant, that is, it has the '**P**' factor. The support from the poems is well chosen and apt, giving the answer the '**C**' factor, coherence. The language, '**L**', is efficient, achieves clear communication, is controlled and fluent.

Another example of the enchanting and haunting atmosphere centred on the **theme** of choice is the poem '**The Road Not Taken**'. This poem also possesses a philosophical dimension as Frost explores the **theme** of the human condition. While this poem appears to be about choosing a path to walk in the woods, it is also about life's choices and decisions. It is in fact a dramatic lyric about the journey of life and how choices and decisions impact on the individual's path.

I took the one less travelled by,

And that has made all the difference.

This quote links to the title. The aftermath of choice leads to a **mood** of wistful regret. Opposites lead to soul searching, which always leads to the what-if factor. Like much of Frost's poetry, I feel the poem has a contemplative quality. It takes the form of a memory. Frost is looking back, and the tone is nostalgic. The yellow colour that bathes the wood suggests warmth and brightness, as the poet recalls the moment he had to choose one direction over another:

Then took the other, as just as fair,

And having perhaps the better claim

Because it was grassy and wanted wear

I believe that, ultimately, the poem is a celebration of individualism and imagination, and therefore it is a romantic poem. Frost emphasises the decision is a conscious act of self-definition:

Oh, I marked the first for another day!

Yet knowing how way leads on to way

I doubted if I should ever come back.

There is a feeling of enchantment in knowing that one's life path leads to unknown paths, but a haunting regret that one's choices lead away from common paths. The romantic mood is created by the triumph of being able to re-live the moment of choice so imaginatively. **TM**

A '*Tuft of Flowers*' explores another mysterious and profound moment of existence. I think the overall **atmosphere** of '*A Tuft of Flowers*' is enchanting. The opening **view** of Frost is that all people are alone:

And I must be, as he had been,—alone,

'As all must be,'

From this quote we can see that the poet is lonely and that he does not have a large amount of belief in the unity of people. The quote, philosophical in nature, induces a haunting sense of isolation and rural disconnection. The speaker's mood and his opinion are soon changed when he observes a butterfly leading his eye towards a tall tuft of flowers. Frost then feels connected to the mower through the tuft. The butterfly represents Frost's wandering mind, which establishes this connection. The poet—grass-turner—and mower share a mutual view of the beauty of '*leaping tongue of bloom*'. The delight felt by the turner is the same as what motivated the mower not to cut the flowers down. The manner in which this connectivity is conveyed is enchanting. The metaphor of the tongue leaping from mower to hay turner shows the unspoken communication as experienced by the turner and poet. The poem shows that it is the consciousness of the poet that sees the overall situation. The tongue is a human feature that the poet confers on the inanimate tuft. The personification expresses the beauty. It is the poet who opens out the communication involved—otherwise it would remain hidden. The tuft stands out from the '*levelled scene*'. I can picture the flowers shooting up from the ground, triumphing over the necessity of turning the meadow into produce. As the poem continues we see a mood change; by the end there is a clear contrast from a feeling of isolation to one of togetherness. A bond charms us out of desolation as a '*spirit kindred*' warms our souls:

'Men work together,' I told him from the heart,

'whether they work together or apart'.

Frost no longer feels lonely, as he now feels a spiritual bond with the mower, based on their mutual impulse of respect for nature. The manner in which the beauty of nature changes the mood and view is enchanting. The theme is nature, beauty and the poet's distinctive gift of recognition and communication.

TM

The poem 'Out Out' provides further examples of Frost's style and his deep interest in life as lived in rural New England. In the opening section of the poem, Frost sets the scene with both harsh and sensual imagery:

*The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard
And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood,
Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.*

This sibilant imagery of the third line creates, what is soon to be a false, sense of innocence and peacefulness. The opening is ominous, the saw personified as a beast waiting to strike. There is a perturbing sense of the family ignoring the surrounding beauty of the Vermont mountains:

*And from there those that lifted eyes could count
Five mountain ranges, one behind the other.*

It is implied that the family are too materialistic to appreciate beauty. The suggestion is that without a poetic outlook people like the Fitzgerald's are doomed to loss.

The initial tension arises from the repeated line 'And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled', where the consonance of the letter 'r' emphasises danger. The personification, 'snarled', injects a mood of fear, danger lurking. This is built upon when the boy's sister calls for supper, which with a touch of dark comedy prompts the snarling saw to feed on the boy's arm. The use of direct speech here creates an immediacy as the action is brought to the present tense.

Frost describes how the boy's hand was cut off by the saw, using black humour and irony:

*At the word, the saw,
As if it meant to prove saws know what supper meant,
Leaped out at the boy's hand, or seemed to leap -
He must have given the hand. However it was,
Neither refused the meeting.*

The casualness of 'neither refused', the euphemism, portrays a grave event in a wry manner. The eagerness of the saw to prove itself resembles the over eager teenager trying to be a man about the farm. This black humour surprises, but leaves a more haunting impact on the reader. Frost possibly does this to highlight negligence by the boy's family to the boy himself and also to spiritual elements due to their tendency to overwork:

*And they, since they
Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.*

The poem condemns such pragmatism.

TM

In a letter he wrote in 1932 Frost revealed that 'most of my ideas occur in verse'. Frost regularly makes use of imagery to communicate the most profound ideas. His images and tone of voice create interesting moods—nostalgic, enchanting and haunting— within which to communicate his themes. Frost's concern for the human condition we all live in is something I feel makes him feel really impressive as a poet

**Conclusion—a
brief
restatement of
the task and
verdict**

