

Good essay on robert frosts home burial and its place in literary movements

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Robert Frost was one of the most preeminent modernists and existentialists of his time, and his poem “ Home Burial” demonstrates the various aspects that made up his modernism quite well. Telling the tale of a domestic dispute that occurs between a frantic woman and her taciturn husband at the death and burial of their young child, Frost showcases the nihilism and despair that occurs when characters and poets alike look at the fragility of human life and relationships. Through his sparse, dialogue-heavy prose, Frost creates a stark, grounded feel to his poem, which is very much in line with modernist/existentialist poetry.

“ Home Burial” is written in blank verse, Frost removing the lyricism inherent to many other schools of poetry, thus making it more realistic and modern. To that end, Frost does the best he can to approximate true speech between people. By removing the ‘artiness’ of the words being read or spoken by the characters, Frost better approximates the real emotional awkwardness that would occur between two people actually having this conversation. The lack of clear lines and rhythm keeps the reader off balance, which befits the unsettling and confrontational nature of the poem.

At its heart, the poem is about the couple, and how they behave and interact with each other given certain contexts - a very human and modernist outlook. From the first lines, it is clear that the wife would have behaved differently had she seen him first - “ He saw her from the bottom of the stairs / Before she saw him” (Frost 1-2). This sets the tension fairly high right from the beginning of the poem. Early on in the poem, the contrast between how men and women relate to each other becomes clear, as the man is clearly confused about what he has done to upset his wife. At one point, he

laments that “ A man must partly give up being a man / With womenfolk”; at several points in the poem, he seems to be frustrated at his lack of understanding for his wife’s concern and hysterics, thinking he must give up parts of himself in order to relate to her (Frost 49-50). This sort of mundane rejection of the dramatic is very modernist, as they focused on the regular lives of people in a more stripped-down way.

Frost’s point of view in the poem is fairly pessimistic, which falls in with modernism as well. There is never a sense that the couple will see eye-to-eye, and it seems as though they are unwilling to look at the other person’s perspective. The wife sees the man’s pragmatism as cruel and aloof, while the husband thinks he is just doing what needs to be done for their dead child. The husband refuses to empathize with his wife’s emotions, certainly: “ I do think, though, you overdo it a little. / What was it brought you up to think it the thing / To take your mother-loss of a first child /So inconsolably” (Frost 62-65). The man, instead of being sad that his child is dead, merely takes it as a given of life, which falls in with Frost’s sense of modernist pessimism. The wife, on the other hand, is extremely emotional, and in hysterics at the idea of seeing her husband so glibly bury their child. By framing the mundane in the midst of this dramatic turn of events, Frost further emphasizes the normalcy of modernism: “ You could sit there with stains on your shoes / Of the fresh earth from your own baby’s grave / And talk about your everyday concerns” (Frost 84-86). This condemns him fairly conclusively as being oblivious to her needs and wants, cementing their inability to truly know each other. The ‘ home burial’ isn’t just a reference to his burying the child in their backyard; the family itself may become buried

as a result of this conversation. Again, this seems inevitable from the first lines of the poem, falling in with the modernist sense of pessimism Frost has; nothing can repair this marriage or relationship, which is true of all things: “Three foggy mornings and one rainy day / Will rot the best birch fence a man can build” (Frost 92-93). While the wife is appalled at her husband saying this (it is the reason she is so upset), Frost frames her behavior as both valid and naïve. She does not understand how the husband emotionally distances himself with existentialist views like these, while refusing to engage in them herself.

Despite this emotionality, this experience in particular seems to turn the wife around to her husband’s pessimism. Her words seem to echo Frost’s idea that everything is ephemeral, and no bond of friendship or love will truly get one through hard times: “ Friends make pretense of following to the grave, / But before one is in it, their minds are turned / And making the best of their way back to life / And living people, and things they understand” (Frost 101-105). Instead of having to deal with the inconvenient truth of the emotional death of a child, people naturally gravitate toward what is still alive, which she sees as disrespectful. She is the one sensitive person in an insensitive world, and her misery shows Frost’s modernist perspective as being the more practical one.

The ending of the poem itself cements the dissolution of the relationship; however, there is implication that the cycle will continue. As the husband’s response to her wife’s grief is just as aloof before (thinking that all he has to do is let her talk and she will be fine), her wife responds by attempting to leave. This leads the husband to abandon his patient, patronizing attitude

and exert control over her: “ Where do you mean to go? First tell me that. / I’ll follow and bring you back by force. I will—” (Frost 115-116). By ending the poem in the middle of the argument, with nothing concluded or finished, Frost showcases his modernist perspective that events keep going long after a story is done, and we can never know the whole tale. This keeps the poem grounded and set in a realistic yet pessimistic world.

Robert Frost’s “ Home Burial” is a fine example of modernist and existentialist poetry. The world of the poem is harsh, with death being treated with glibness and impermanence. The grounded, arrhythmic dialogue between the husband and the wife makes the poem seem as though it could realistically take place in the modern world, and its pessimistic point of view shows the impenetrable rift between man and woman in terms of how they look at the world. For these reasons and more, Frost’s “ Home Burial” presents itself as a modernist poem.

Works Cited

Frost, Robert. “ Home Burial.” Poetry Foundation. 1962.

[http://www. poetryfoundation. org/poem/238120.](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/238120)