

Mending Wall

Critical appreciation

This poem is the first work in Frost's second book of poetry, "North of Boston," which was published upon his return from England in 1915. While living in England with his family, Frost was exceptionally homesick for the farm in New Hampshire where he had lived with his wife from 1900 to 1909. Despite the eventual failure of the farm, Frost associated his time in New Hampshire with a peaceful, rural sensibility that he instilled in the majority of his subsequent poems. "Mending Wall" is autobiographical on an even more specific level: a French-Canadian named Napoleon Guay had been Frost's neighbor in New Hampshire, and the two had often walked along their property line and repaired the wall that separated their land. Ironically, the most famous line of the poem ("Good fences make good neighbors") was not invented by Frost himself, but was rather a phrase that Guay frequently declared to Frost during their walks. This particular adage was a popular colonial proverb in the middle of the 17th century, but variations of it also appeared in Norway ("There must be a fence between good neighbors"), Germany ("Between neighbor's gardens a fence is good"), Japan ("Build a fence even between intimate friends"), and even India ("Love your neighbor, but do not throw down the dividing wall").

In terms of form, "Mending Wall" is not structured with stanzas; it is a simple forty-five lines of first-person narrative. Frost does maintain iambic stresses, but he is flexible with the form in order to maintain the conversational feel of the poem. He also shies away from any obvious rhyme patterns and instead relies upon the occasional internal rhyme and the use of assonance in certain ending terms (such as "wall," "hill," "balls," "well").

In the poem itself, Frost creates two distinct characters who have different ideas about what exactly makes a person a good neighbor. The narrator deplores his neighbor's preoccupation with repairing the wall; he views it as old-fashioned and even archaic. After all, he quips, his apples are not going to invade the property of his neighbor's pinecones. Moreover, within a land of such of such freedom and discovery, the narrator asks, are such borders necessary to maintain relationships between people? Despite the narrator's skeptical view of the wall, the neighbor maintains his seemingly "old-fashioned" mentality, responding to each of the narrator's disgruntled questions and rationalizations with nothing more than the adage: "Good fences make good neighbors."

As the narrator points out, the very act of mending the wall seems to be in opposition to nature. Every year, stones are dislodged and gaps suddenly appear, all without explanation. Every year, the two neighbors fill the gaps and replace the fallen boulders, only to have parts of the wall fall over again in the coming months. It seems as if nature is attempting to destroy the barriers that man has created on the land, even as man continues to repair the barriers, simply out of habit and tradition.

Ironically, while the narrator seems to begrudge the annual repairing of the wall, Frost subtly points out that the narrator is actually more active than the neighbor. It is the narrator who



selects the day for mending and informs his neighbor across the property. Moreover, the narrator himself walks along the wall at other points during the year in order to repair the damage that has been done by local hunters. Despite his skeptical attitude, it seems that the narrator is even more tied to the tradition of wall-mending than his neighbor. Perhaps his skeptical questions and quips can then be read as an attempt to justify his own behavior to himself. While he chooses to present himself as a modern man, far beyond old-fashioned traditions, the narrator is really no different from his neighbor: he too clings to the concept of property and division, of ownership and individuality.

Ultimately, the presence of the wall between the properties does ensure a quality relationship between the two neighbors. By maintaining the division between the properties, the narrator and his neighbor are able to maintain their individuality and personal identity as farmers: one of apple trees, and one of pine trees. Moreover, the annual act of mending the wall also provides an opportunity for the two men to interact and communicate with each other, an event that might not otherwise occur in an isolated rural environment. The act of meeting to repair the wall allows the two men to develop their relationship and the overall community far more than if each maintained their isolation on separate properties.

The Road Not Taken

Introduction

["The Road Not Taken"](#) is the opening poem in Robert Frost's third collection of poems titled *Mountain Interval*, published in 1916. The inspiration for writing the poem came to Frost in 1914 when he was with his friend Edward Thomas in Gloucestershire, England. During his stay, he used to go for long walks into the countryside accompanied by Thomas. The latter was seriously interested in acquainting his American friend with the rarities and specialties of the area and as such always took a route that could serve his purpose. However, before the end of that walk, he would regret the choice he had made and wished that they had chosen the other available routes. Such a thing happened regularly and Frost took it as an occasion to jest at the expense of his friend's 'wasted regrets'. Frost sought to romanticize this notion of ruminating over what might have been and on his return to America in 1915, he incorporated this notion into the composition of a poem for his new volume of poetry.

Critical appreciation

The Road Not Taken is a poem which has been much praised by readers and the critics. It was published in 1916 in the volume of poems "*Mountain Interval*". It is a personal lyric which records the personal experience of the poet.

This short, simple, poem conveys a very important message to the readers. The poet's experience becomes symbolic of human experience in all ages.

Once, travelling alone in the woods, the poet stood at a point where two roads diverged. He felt confused in selecting the path. He could not travel both roads at the same time. So he chose



the path that was less travelled and this choice had “made all the difference.” It was in 1912, that Frost took an important decision in his life. He decided to make poetry his vocation in life. For this purpose, he went to England with his family. His first volume of poems was published there and received high praise. With his reputation established, he returned to America. Then he was eminently successful as a poet. It was the choice the poet made which determined his destiny. Here, the poet suggests that timely and proper decisions have far-reaching and life long consequences in human life.

~~The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost~~
The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost

The poem is written in very simple language. There are four stanzas each of five lines. Each stanza presents a small episode. and successfully brings forth the theme of making a choice. The title of the poem is suggestive and symbolic. The personal experience of the poet acquires universal proportions. It is not restricted to the personal level.

POETIC TECHNIQUES

The most significant poetic technique applied here is that of symbolism. Added to that, the poet has also made a clever use of natural imagery. The metaphor of two roads represents the two possibilities of where only one could be entertained at a time. The central metaphor clearly suggests the external human problem of choices. But Frost has not dealt with the problem philosophically. He allows the situation to speak for itself and allows the deeper meaning to emerge naturally. This makes the poem easy to read. One of Frost's favourite modes is the dramatic mode in which a situation is depicted. In this poem, we can easily realize the situation in which a traveller is faced with the dilemma about selecting either of the two roads lying before him in a yellow wood. Robert Frost is known as a poet of “simplicity”. His poems are usually short, seldom running over from one page to another. The verses are composed usually of brief forms such as the quatrain (4-line stanza).

In this poem, however, he has used 5 line stanzas with the rhyme scheme abaab, cdccd, dedde, efeef. Infact, he has enlarged the quatrain to the 5 line stanzas to offer variety.

