

Critical Appreciation of Mending Wall

"**Mending Wall**" is a poem by the American poet Robert Frost. The poem is set in rural New England, where Frost lived at the time **Mending Wall** is autobiographical as it recalls real life events occurring between the poet and his neighbor. Napoleon Guay, while staying in New Hampshire. In fact, the poem's most popular line, "**Good fences make good neighbors,**" refers to a phrase frequently used by Guay, about wall mending that undoubtedly formed a seasoned issue of discussion during such walks.

The poem describes how the speaker and a neighbor meet to rebuild a stone wall between their properties—a ritual repeated every spring. This ritual raises some important questions over the course of the poem, as the speaker considers the purpose of borders between people and the value of human work.

The first four lines of "**Mending Wall**" establish the poem's broad concern as well as its form. The poem opens with a mysterious assertion, there is some force that dislikes walls. It spends the next three lines describing the attempts of that force to topple a wall down, it sends frost underneath the wall, causing the ground to swell; when the summer sun later melts that frost, some of the wall's stones become dislodged, opening gaps wide enough for two people to pass through side by side.

**"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"**

The force, the thing that "**doesn't love a wall**" remains unnamed. The opening lines thus establish a question, the reader is invited to speculate about what the force is, and why it might oppose the very existence of a wall. This mystery makes the lines feel weighty, as though the deepest mysteries of life are being explored here. But the language of the lines is simple and conversational except for the compound word "**frozen-ground-swell,**" the lines contain no words longer than two syllables. These are common, everyday words that anyone might use, perhaps suggesting the universality of the themes that the poem will go on to explore. And then there are the hunters who take apart the wall—that's something different. The Speaker often has to come and fix the spots where hunters haven't left a single stone in place, as they try to flush out the rabbits that hide in the wall in order to make their barking dogs happy. No one has seen or heard these gaps in the wall being made. They just find them there in the spring, when it comes time to fix the wall. The speaker reaches out to his neighbor, who lives over a hill, and they find a day to get together and walk along the wall, fixing these gaps. They maintain a wall as they walk together. "**We keep the wall between us as we go**" and they deal only with whatever rocks have fallen off the wall on our side of it. Some of them looks like loaves of bread and some are round like balls, so they pray that they'll stay in place,



balanced on top of the wall, saying/addressing the wall, **"Stay where you are until our backs are turned"**. Their fingers get chafed from picking up the rocks. It's just another outside activity, each of us on our side of the wall, nothing more.

Speaker further says that **"There where it is we do not need the wall"**. On my neighbor's side of the wall, there's nothing but pine trees, on my side is an apple orchard. **"He is all pine and I am apple orchard"** It's not like my apple trees are going to cross the wall and eat his pine cones. I say to him. But he just responds, **"Good fences are necessary to have good neighbors."** Since it's spring and speaker feels mischievous, he wonders if he could make his neighbor ask himself: **Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it where there are cows? But here there are no cows"** As cows are important symbols, in the American philosophical tradition of the damage that one person might cause another. **Henry David Thoreau writes:** "Who are bad neighbors? They who suffer their neighbors'. Cows that symbolizes the small injuries that if left unchecked, might grow into more serious conflicts between people who live close to each other. Cows also suggest a certain selfishness and greed, as one may allow their own cattle to graze on another pasture—taking another resources for themselves.

The cows in "Mending Wall" function similarly. Though it's true that neither the speaker nor the neighbor seem to own cows, the speaker is concerned with something broader when announcing **"here there are no cows."** The lack of "cows" points to a lack of potential conflict—the speaker and the neighbor use their lands differently and don't compete for resources, meaning there's little danger of tension. They can live peacefully side by side, and thus perhaps don't need a wall between them. That's why Speaker wants to ask his neighbor before building the wall **"What I was Walling in or walling out and to whom I was like to give offense. "** Speaker is convinced that **"Something there is that doesn't love a wall, that wants it down"**. He further speculates that Elves are responsible for the gaps in the wall, but it's not exactly Elves and anyway, I want my neighbor to figure it out on his own. I see him, lifting up stones, grasping them firmly by the top in each hand like an ancient warrior. He moves in a deep darkness—not just the darkness of the woods or the trees above.

**"He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees. "**

In western thought, darkness is often treated as a symbol for ignorance or error. (By contrast, light is a symbol for enlightenment and truth). Darkness also serves a symbol for history or the past, the past is often described as lost in darkness, in obscurity. The speaker may mean both at once, the neighbor is not only wrong and ignorant, but he also remains tied to obsolete, antiquated ideas—such as his **"father's saying"** about good neighbors, which makes him **"like an old-stone savage armed."** He does not want to think beyond his set idea about the world, and he likes having articulated this idea so clearly. So he says it again:

"Good fences make good neighbors."



The main theme of "Mending Wall" is the **difficulty of change in society**. Social customs and traditions are important sometimes, but Frost points out the struggle to change the same once they are rooted in society. The speaker mentions that the neighbor's words come from his father. His only reason for rebuilding the wall every year is that he has heard the words good fences make good neighbors again and again from a source of authority. He likes the tradition and **"likes having thought of it."** The character does something simply because his father did it before him. This cyclical nature of human interaction and relationship building is exactly what the speaker of **"Mending Wall"** ultimately questions.

Then there is another theme of **Language and Communication**. There is definitely a disconnect between our speaker and his neighbor. They work together to mend the wall, but they don't talk to each other as they go along. The speaker wishes to put a "notion" in his neighbor's head, but he doesn't actually attempt to challenge his neighbor's love of the wall. The wall takes on greater meaning as the lines of communication shut down between the speaker and his neighbor.

Conflict between nature and man and the natural and artificial world is yet another theme of this poem **"Mending Wall"**. The speaker takes great pains to describe the setting of this New England countryside. He tells that, **"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,"** (lines 1-3). In doing so he points a big fat finger toward nature. Nature seems to be the unnamed culprit who, in addition to hunters, continues to destroy the wall. It is the frost that damages the wall over and over again, forcing the speaker and the neighbor to repair it over and over again. Nature itself with its capacity to damage and destroy human artifacts, seems to defeat human ambitions to force it to repeat the same futile projects without making progress.

As the poem unfolds, we learn how spring (and all of its feverish weather and spirit of new life) makes the speaker a bit mischievous. **"Mending Wall"** by Robert Frost is a poem that contains many symbols, the chief of which is the **title** of the poem mending wall itself. The wall is normally put up as a security measure, protecting their property, for privacy and comfort but the wall also acts as a barrier to the relationship between the neighbors. The wall is a representation of the barriers to friendship and communication. The wall causes an alienation and separation between the two. The wall is a metaphor for the wall that blocks communication between our speaker and his neighbor. Society has a lot of barriers that prevent normal communication of individuals. These include gender, religion, race and political preferences. These factors are the barriers that the narrator is talking about in the poem

The word **mending** suggests there is something that exists but in destroyed form. The physical barrier of the wall represents the psychological or symbolic barrier between two human beings. The season of spring which deteriorates the wall could symbolize the narrator's repressed feeling that he would



like the wall to come down and to have a closer relationship with his neighbor or conversely it could also reinforce his desire to keep the wall in place since he is fixing it throughout the poem. The neighbor could symbolize the narrator's distrust of society since he shows that he would like to remain separated by the fence. This poem begins as a quest to find the identity of the wall-destroyer. It ends in a meditation on the worth of tradition and boundaries. An appealing aspect of "Mending Wall" is the addition of a sense of mystery and loneliness by Frost.

There are a number of literary devices employed by Robert Frost in this poem. **Assonance** is the repetition of vowel sounds in the same line such as /e/ sound in

'To please the yelping dogs.
The gaps I mean, No one has seen'.

Enjambment refers to the continuation of a sentence without a pause beyond the end of a line, couplet or stanza such as,

'And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again,

'Good fences make good neighbors.'

Imagery is used to make the readers perceive things with their five senses. Frost has used visual imagery in this poem such as,

'And some are loaves and some so nearly balls',
'He is all pine and I am apple orchard' and
'Not of woods only and the shade of trees.'

Consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds in the same line such as /n/ and /t/ sounds

And set the wall between us once again'.

Symbolism is using symbols to signify ideas and qualities, giving them symbolic meanings different from their literal meanings. Similarly, 'fence' symbolizes 'gap' that the speaker and his neighbor have between them. 'Nature' symbolizes the reunion of the two as the speaker meets his neighbor every year in spring to fix the fence.

Metaphor is a figure of speech in which an implied comparison is made between objects different in nature. There is only one metaphor used in the poem. It is used in seventeenth line where it is stated as, 'And some are loaves and some so nearly balls.' He compares the stone blocks to loaves and balls.

The literary analysis shows that Frost has masterfully used these literary devices to talk over the intense and profound subject of limits and boundaries between human beings and relationships to make them more intense.

