

Frost's poetry is more about nature than people- Discuss.

Throughout all of this collection of poems, Robert Frost captures the true meaning of human behaviour through his comparisons with nature. Taking inspiration from his experiences of farming and agriculture, Frost uses parallel's between the natural order of nature and that of human behaviour.

Originally he was not recognised in the UK but recognition for his work was a huge success in the USA. Acknowledgment for his work within England however, came much later on in life. He presents an idealistic idyllic view of beauty and contrasts this to the stark harsh reality of everyday life created by people. By doing this, he appreciates that the harshness of everyday life will always remain an essential feature to human nature.

His poems could be described to be deceptively straightforward as it is through the simplicity of nature that Frost examines the true human nature of people and it is through this, that I shall examine the themes of 'barriers', 'duty versus desire' and isolation.

Barriers appear to be a recurring theme within this collection of s poems. In general everyday conversation, a barrier can be defined as, anything that separates or holds apart and it is through this concept that Frost takes on this basic assumption of barriers being physical 'things' and extends it by looking at barriers in an abstract sense.

For example in his poem, 'The Road not Taken', Frost focuses on the barrier of not being able to see the end consequence. It looks into the choices that people make and uses the metaphor of two roads in order to show this. He acknowledges that he is unable to travel down both "I could not travel both", so is forced to travel one. He chooses to take the one that is less travelled by "I took the one less travelled by" and by doing so decides to seize the day and express himself as an individual, claiming that his life was fundamentally different than it would have been had he chosen the more well travelled path. In this sense, Frost is saying that people can only make a life choice based on the present. One particular barrier people have in life is not being able to see the end consequence and as such, we have to choose what seems right at the time.

'Mending Wall' also looks at the theme of barriers. Here, Frost uses the physical barrier of the wall to question whether boundaries are necessary. Frost creates two distinct characters; both have different ideas about what makes a person a good neighbour. The narrator dislikes his neighbour's preoccupation with repairing the wall, "we do not need a wall." He views it as old-fashioned and archaic. He retorts that his apples are not going to

invade the property of his neighbour's pinecones "my apple trees will never get across and eat the cones under his pines".

Moreover, within such a free land, the narrator asks whether such borders are necessary to maintain relationships between people and encourages the reader to think of their own self made barriers and whether these are necessary. Despite the narrator's sceptical view of the wall, the neighbour maintains his "old-fashioned" mentality, responding to each of the narrator's questions with nothing more than "good fences make good neighbours".

Barriers in 'Death of a Hired Man' however, are represented through Warren's disappointment and anger towards Silas. He struggles to forgive Silas for never fulfilling his obligations and as such makes it hard for Silas to return to work. Mary's compassionate nature eventually convinces him, but when Warren goes to get Silas, he is already dead. It is through Warren's failure to forgive, that Silas is forced to die alone.

According to Mary, Silas is ill "I didn't recognise him" and believes that he has returned home to die in the companionship of those he knew. Warren creates the barrier of being unable to let go of the past and it is through this that we see barriers prevent humans from seeing the obvious. This leads us to question how life might be without such barriers. Again this theme is highlighted in 'the Road not Taken' as we hear of the subject wondering how different life might have been for him.

The theme of Duty versus desire is another theme which runs throughout Frost's poems. In his poem, 'Stopping by the Woods', 'Out Out' and 'Death of a Hired Man', Frost examines the internal battle people face with responsibility and free will.

In 'Stopping by the Woods' for example, the narrator in the poem appears to deal with the conflict of, what he feels he should do with what he wants to do. From the opening lines, this internal conflict is revealed in that he stops by a property and is anxious that the owner of the property will be upset by his presence, however realising that the owner lives in the town he recognises that he is free to enjoy the beauty of the snow falling "To watch his woods fill up with snow".

Again in the second stanza, he mentions his desire to admire the beauty of nature "the woods and the frozen lake" but once again is drawn to the reality that duty must prevail. The horse acts a reminder that it is time to move on, in that the horse is becoming impatient and wants to continue with its journey. "My little horse must think it queer to stop without a farmhouse near". The horse here can be seen as metaphor for the narrators' overwhelming sense of duty, and perhaps guilt, He would prefer to watch the snow falling in the woods, even with his horse's impatience, but he has "promises to keep," and obligations that he cannot ignore even though temporarily he expresses his desire to so.

However, in the final lines, he acknowledges that he must continue in that his duty overcomes his desire to admire nature. This is emphasised by Frost's use of repetition in the last lines "But I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep." At the end of the day, he must continue

In 'Nothing Gold Can Stay', Frost emphasises the theme of duty by claiming that it is through responsibility that the true innocence of human nature is lost. The structure of the poem serves to highlight this process in its eight lines, Frost summarises the life cycle of humans.

In the opening two couplet's innocence is highlighted "Nature's first green is gold, her hardest hue to hold, her early leaf's a flower but only so an hour." Youth, while one of life's most wonderful times, cannot be held onto forever. The reader is forced to look past this and at the cycle of their own life. "Then leaf subsides to leaf." One leaf is replaced by another, just as newborns replace those who grow old and die. Frost makes the point that this is the case for every species on our planet, including humans. Towards the end, the poet writes of the beauty of Eden being lost. "So Eden sand to grief", reflecting Eve and the eating of the forbidden fruit. Here, he is trying to point out that all good things must come to an end, this is also seen in the poem, 'Stopping by the Woods' as the subject realises that he cannot stop and admire the beauty of the snow forever. Nothing beautiful can last forever.

The overriding, point made by Frost here, serves to encapsulate the fact that, the true beauty of human nature lies in its innocence and that over time everything as we know it we eventually begins to decay. Humans are innocent when they are born and lose this as they get older and a sense of responsibility and duty feature heavily in day to day living. All pure things fall away in the end, just as Eden was once pure, the purity of Eden was lost through Eve and the forbidden fruit.

'Out Out' and 'Death of the Hired Man' also explore this theme using the harsh reality of life to show this. The passivity/ innocence of the boy, in 'Out Out' is used to highlight the sacrificial loss of the boy's hand, and his subsequent death, and the death of Silas and his failure to carry out his obligations.

'Out Out' tells the story of a young boy who works as a man within a farming community. Little attention is paid to his age and he is regarded as an equal amongst the adult ranch workers.

As day is drawing to a close, "day was all but done", the boy is distracted by the heavy "buzz saw" he holds in his hands, by his sister "to tell him Supper". In that instant, the saw accidentally slips from his hand and nearly severs it. The tragedy is this; if the boy had respite from his duty, he

could regain his childhood, if only for a moment, “by giving him the half an hour” he obviously craved “to please the boy”.

Repetition is used here to emphasise the ever growing danger of the saw as it's menacing sounds “snarled and rattled” acting almost as a reminder that even within this idyllic setting with its “sweet scented stuff” and the “five mountain ranges behind the other” danger is imminent and in the case of the young boy it is. “Little—less—nothing!—and that ended it”. Here, the theme of desire is highlighted as the boy wishes only for a brief glimpse of escapism from the harsh reality of life however, this was not the case.

Through the use of personification, Frost is able to describe the saw as having a mind of its own by describing it as, “leaping” out of the subject's hand, yet Frost does not place the blame on anyone in particular. This reflects the attitude of the adults, “since they were not the one dead, turned to their affairs”, suggesting that they are devoid of emotion and do not see it as their responsibility or problem. Life carries on.

Similarly, in death of a Hired Man Silas dies trying to fulfil his obligation to Warren Duty features heavily in ‘Death of a hired Man’. Silas a former farmhand, having failed to fulfil his obligations previously, returns back to the farm where he once worked in order to finish work he once started. We hear from Warren's wife, Mary, of Silas' illness, and according to her has returned “home” in order to die. Warren, who has not seen Silas in his ill state and, still angry over the contract that Silas broke, does not want to have Silas on his property. Mary's compassionate nature eventually convinces him to forgive Silas, but when Warren goes to get Silas, he is already dead.

Silas' return to the farm also signals the importance of the work that he performed on the farm as a way to give his life meaning and satisfaction. Silas does not have any children or close family; only the sense of duty and the satisfaction of hard work can provide him with comfort. Moreover, he dies without ever fulfilling his contract to “ditch the meadow” and “clear the upper pasture”. For all his attempts to fulfill his duty, achieve satisfaction through hard work, and find a sense of family, Silas' efforts are unsuccessful.

Finally isolation is another theme that appears to run throughout Frost's poetry. Loneliness is generalized to the human condition and Frost appreciates that this can be both positive and negative. In ‘Stopping by the Woods’, the narrator appreciates his isolation as he stops to admire the snow falling around the woods. He acknowledges that even the horse finds it strange to stop in the middle of no where, “My little horse must think it queer to stop without a farmhouse near”. However the narrator does not. It is the isolation that he enjoys and sees it almost as if it's a much needed

break from the chore of life. It is unclear what these specific obligations are, but Frost does suggest that the narrator is particularly attracted to the woods because there is “not a farmhouse near.” He is able to enjoy complete isolation and by doing so, appears to relish the secretive nature of his visit.

In the same way, the subject of the poem, ‘Death of a Hired Man’ dies alone. Ironically, he has returned ‘home’ to die fulfilling his duty and with those he feels closest to however never accomplishes this. After persuading Warren to forgive Silas, Warren returns too soon and declares him “Dead”. After hearing of Silas’ attempts at reconciliation with Warren and Mary, and, upon his imminent death, we are compelled to feel sorry for him when we realise that he never fulfilled his wish and that he died in isolation. Frost’s reference to the “silver cloud” is representative of the bridge to heaven and it is this that Silas has crossed towards the end of the poem.

Isolation also features heavily in Frost’s poem ‘Tuft of Flowers’ where the theme of loneliness is highlighted through the kinship the subject feels with the mower. The speaker goes to a field to turn the grass that has been mowed there. He feels lonely *“But he had gone his way, the grass all mown, And I must be, as he had been—alone”*. *Through a butterfly, the subject’s attention is drawn to a tuft of flowers in the distance and he realizes that the mower has left them for their true beauty. “The mower in the dew had loved them thus, by leaving them to flourish”. It is through this shared appreciation and recognition for the flowers that the subject of the poem feels comfort knowing that others think and feel the way he does. By doing so, his loneliness is banished. “And feel a spirit kindred to my own; So that henceforth I worked no more alone”*. The emphasis in this poem, serves to highlight the loneliness of farming as it can be seen that farmers work for long periods of time in complete isolation.

He then sees a butterfly, which leads his eyes to a tuft of flowers that the mower left standing. The joy that must have led the mower to admire and spare the flowers is transferred, through the sight of the flowers, to the speaker. He feels now as if he were working with the mower side by side.

The themes duty, barriers and isolation are ones in which Frost has observed to be part of human nature. It is natural for us to go through each of these phases at one point or other in life. People intrinsically feel the need to value freedom of self expression over what needs to be done and as such, this is a conflict that is indeed felt by people on a day to day basis.

In addition, it can be seen that people create their own barriers in life and this is essentially what Frost is trying to say throughout his poems. These barriers may be placed out of people’s insecurity and therefore serve to protect or, on a deeper level, can be seen as people destroying the innocence of the natural and what should be. Walls and barriers are merely man made obstacles. Finally, he warns that isolation should not always be

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seen as negative and that at times it is good to appreciate the true beauty isolation can bring.