

Robert Frost – overview lifted from Skoool.ie

- His poetry is the story of a man who escaped to the country, because he felt his vocation was to be alone. By his own admission he was ‘unwilling to explain’ his life choice, but his poetry is a symbolic record of his reflections and realizations.
- Frost is often called a pastoral poet, a poet who portrays the benevolent side of country life. This is true in the sense that he expressed the beauty of the landscape of New England in his poetry. But there was usually a dark or troubled spirit at work in his poems. Nature is not always benevolent in Frost’s poems.
- Though he was referred to as a nature poet, Frost disliked this label because he usually included people in his poetry. Frost’s poetry is known for its country philosophy and wisdom. Yet there is an edgy and critical commentary on human life lurking in many of his poems. Frost was not just a happy and easy-going woodland philosopher.
- Frost was a poet of deep thoughts. Behind his descriptions of nature and everyday activities, you can find a deeper meaning. When he described events, Frost usually had a moral point or strange observation to make. He explored an indifferent universe with its mysteries of darkness and irrationality.
- Frost wrote in a clear and easy to understand manner, unlike many of the more experimental twentieth century poets. Frost was both down-to-earth and understated. He was a poet of ironic insight.
- Frost was a poet of searching and often dark meditations on universal themes.
- His portraits have a psychological complexity. He may appear simple but his poetry is profound. His poetry has layers of ambiguity and irony.
- His verse forms are traditional and have a discernable shape and pattern.
- Some of his poems have a strict line rhyming pattern. Many of his poems are written in blank verse [un-rhyming lines], which pre-dates Shakespeare.
- When he began as a poet, Frost disliked the modern free verse. Its lack of regular pattern didn’t appeal to him. But he adopted its rhythms as he matured.
- Frost liked to write poetry in the language he heard spoken everyday. The many everyday phrases in his poetry show this aspect of his style. This trait makes his poetry modern.
- In many of his poems, his rhythm is based on the way the human voice groups or assembles words and sounds in spoken English. While many of his poems have a regular number of syllables and would fit into a traditional system of poetic rhythm, it is better to listen for the rhythm of the everyday speaking voice in Frost’s poems.
- Frost, therefore, is a blend of the traditional and modern poet. Some of his poems have regular lines of ten syllables. This type of line was traditionally divided into ten units of sound. Often in a Frost line of ten or so syllables, there are four units of sound based on the natural rhythm of speech.

Themes

Frost explored the relationship between humanity and nature. Frost's pastoral scenes are often sources of philosophical insights: The Road not taken, Birches, Design, Mending Walls.

Frost believed that human beings live isolated lives, despite being in close proximity to each other: Mending Walls, The road not taken, Acquainted with the night.

While Frost often emphasised human loneliness and alienation, he sometimes believed that human solidarity really existed. In some poems, Frost believed that despite our separation as individuals, humans are social beings. At times he felt the exhilaration of spiritual bonds with people; at other times he felt the need to even purchase friendship.

[Argue Frost's ambivalent attitude to isolation and intimacy by considering the quotes used for theme 2 and the additional quotes below for theme three]

Frost attempted to get at the heart of the mystery of living: Design, The Road not take

Frost explored the relationship between nature and human beings. Nature has emotional, spiritual or sensual effects: Birches

Frost shows an awareness that all life is brief and that it either fades or ends abruptly. Life dies: Out, Out, Design

Tone

Many of Frost's poems include an element of melancholy or regret. They contain feelings of sadness or longing that reflects the darker side of the poet. Considering the difficult childhood and life that he experienced, it is logical to conclude that poems with these attitudes were an outlet for his darker emotions - mostly of loneliness and loss. '**Acquainted With the Night**' is a clear example of this tendency. In other poems Frost experiences the exhilaration of epiphany: a moment of deep spiritual insight.

Sombre: 'I have been one acquainted with the night' [Acquainted]

Cold and Empty: 'Little – less – nothing! – and that ended it'. [Out, Out]

Brutal and Insensitive: 'And they, since they

Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs' [Out, Out]

Contemptuous or Sneering: 'like an old-stone savage armed'. [Mending Wall]

Sarcastic or Mischievous: 'My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines' [Mending Wall]

Rueful or Sorry: 'I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence' [Road]

Philosophical: 'I thought of questions that have no reply' [Tuft]

Delighted and Exhilarated: 'sheer morning gladness at the brim' [Tuft] Alienated: 'I
have passed by the watchman on his beat

And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain' [Acquainted]

Terrified: 'When far away an interrupted cry

Came over houses from another street' [Acquainted]
Grieving [Lamenting]: 'Will like the flowers beside them soon be gone' [Spring]
Frightening and Morbid: 'Assorted characters of death and blight' [Design]
Weary: 'But I am done with apple-picking now' [Apple Picking]
Bewildered: 'I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight' [Apple Picking]
Sensual: 'Essence of winter sleep is on the night, the scent of apples [A P]
Wonder: 'You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen' [Birches]
Mocking, Casual and Ironic: 'But I was going to say when Truth broke in
with all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm' [Birches]
Despairing: 'It's when I'm weary of considerations' [Birches]
Nostalgic: 'So was I once myself a swinger of birches [Birches]
Optimistic: 'And so I dream of going back to be' [Birches]
Longing: 'I'd like to get away from earth awhile' [Birches]
Ironic and Bitter: 'The picture pride of Hollywood' [Provide]
Whimsical: 'If need be occupy a throne,
Where nobody can call you crone' [Provide]
Bleak: 'No memory of having starred
Atones for later disregard' [Provide]
Urgent: 'Provide, provide' [Provide]

Imagery

Many of Frost's images are descriptive or real images. In many of Frost's poems, some descriptive or real objects from nature may have a symbolic meaning. Thus, the orchard of 'Apple Picking', the trees in 'Birches', the wall in 'Mending Wall', the butterfly and flowers in 'The Tuft of Flowers' are all real images. But, on a deeper level, they represent or symbolise abstract or spiritual ideas.

In 'The Tuft of Flowers', the butterfly is a symbol of the poet's inquisitive and longing soul. The flowers represent natural beauty and human tenderness. The poem has a phrase that acts as a pointer to the deeper level of interpretation: 'a message from the dawn'. Look out for these pointers when you read poetry.

In 'Mending Wall', the yelping dogs and the hunters are real. But the wall exists in two dimensions of meaning. It is a real boundary between two farms, as real as the yelping canines. But the words 'elves' and 'something' both suggest there may be a mysterious hidden meaning to the wall. The wall, which is restored annually, may signify the artificial codes, superstitions and traditions by which people separate and isolate themselves.