**Robert Frost**

**Intro:**

RF is an interesting poet, who throughout his work, explored the relationship between humanity and nature.

In reading his poetry I get an insight into his thoughts.

Through his words I found understanding.

His pastoral scenes are often sources of philosophical insight.

(Name all the poems)

**1. Mending Wall**

Through the use of words, Frost expresses his beliefs.

These being that human beings live in isolation, despite being in close proximity to each other.

Evident to us in ‘Mending Wall’.

Says **“We keep the wall between us as we go”,** and **“good fences make good neighbours”.**

Opens on a mysterious note: some unidentified force exists that dislikes walls.

Soft ‘s’ sounds capture the sensation of the silently swelling ground that dislodges the stones.

The broad vowels mimic the shape of the rounded boulders that roll off the wall, leaving ‘o’ and ‘u’ shaped gaps behind.

Beliefs in human relationships made clear.

Two characters – narrator and his neighbour ironically work together to maintain the boundary that separates them.

They are unified by their divisions.

Deeper meaning behind the wall - boundaries.

Boundaries can be physical, political or psychological.

I find the psychological differences between the two men to be the most striking. Narrator seems more open to change, more humorous and more imaginative than his conservative neighbour.

Narrator realises that sometimes **“we do not need a wall”** but his neighbour is a traditionalist and stands behind received wisdom with the same tenacity as he stands behind the stone wall.

**2. Mending Wall**

Find the poem interesting and thought provoking.

Balance seen and kept between two very different characters.

Frost was not taking sides in the poem: played fair.

Twice says **“good fences make good neighbours”** and twice says **“something there is hat doesn’t love a wall”.**

Tension between neighbours is played out in the poem.

Frost succeeds in presenting strong arguments on both sides. It is how he presents these opposite, contradicting arguments that I admire the most.

**3. Birches**

Same idea of isolation is slyly brought into other poems. One of these = Birches.

**“Whose only play was that he found himself**

**Summer or winter, and could play alone”**

Throughout the poem, Frost emphasises human loneliness and isolation.

Frost shares all of his observations with the reader in a gentle inviting way.

Immediately we are drawn in as Frost creates a beautiful snow scene with the birches as the central image.

First twenty lines of the poem are so descriptive it is as if he is proceeding to paint his thoughts and feelings.

**4. Birches**

So much of poetry enlists the senses, beginning with the sense of sound.

Whether it is the rhythmic flow of the poem of the mere need to recite the words for a clearer understanding.

The sense of sight can not help but participate while one reads a poem. Imagery is a key part of poetry creating a visual understanding of words.

In general, poetry gives a voice to the un-sayable in our lives and indeed to life itself.

After reading Birches my senses were reeling. Poem reads beautifully and is soothing to the ear.

Frost, while knowing the realistic cause behind the bent birch trees, prefers to add an imaginative interpretation behind the bending of the birches.

Conversational tone creates intimacy between poet and reader **“but I was going to say”.**

Command and control of language succeeds in making the overall tone personal and intimate.

‘Birches’ exemplifies Frost’s ability to join the pastoral and philosophical modes in lyrics of unforgettable beauty.

**5. The Tuft of Flowers**

While he often emphasised human loneliness and alienation he sometimes believed human solidarity couldn’t really exist.

In some poems, Frost believed – 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.

**Tuft** is a poem which supports this.

The last eight lines are the most important – build up to the essential, though somewhat paradoxical argument of the poem:

 **“Men work together**

**Whether they work together or apart”**

Speaker discovers a bond that ties people together even when individuals were alone.

**Tuft** somehow permits the speaker to realise this. He feels a sense of permanent community with others, he senses their presence even in their absence.

**6. The Tuft of Flowers**

Whereas at the beginning of the poem he **“listened”** for the mower’s **“whetstone on the breeze”** but heard nothing, now he hears the mower’s scythe **“whispering to the ground”.**

Whereas before he was certain that he must be **“alone”**, the speaker now feels a **“spirit kindred”** to his own.

Close tie has formed between speaker and the mower – a bond created in spite of the mowers absence.

In **Tuft** I see the butterfly as a symbol of Frost’s inquisitive and longing soul.

Flowers represent beauty and human tenderness.

The phrase **“a message from the down”** reveals a hidden message for me. Following the butterfly’s lead Frost and the speaker here suddenly discovered that there is a wonderful world of beauty and objective value to be appreciated, if one can find it.

**7. Acquainted with the Night**

Provides a moving portrayal of a mind at the end of its thether.

Speaker = a man whose inner demons give him no rest. Driven to keep walking all night long.

His inner turmoil will not allow him to sleep, relax or even sit still. He must keep moving.

We witness the speaker entering a terrible, neutral state of apathy and indifference.

Provides a memorable illustration of depression.

Speaker = trapped in a world where nothing changes.

Night after night he is compelled to make his journey through the streets.

Rain, it appears, falls constantly: **“I have walked out in rain – and back in rain”.**

Poem = thought provoking as the speaker never reveals what is troubling him.

We are left wondering exactly what tragedy has befallen him, what misfortune has plunged him into such a state of despair.

The poem, therefore, can be regarded as a failure to communicate; one in which the poet is unwilling or unable to put across his worries. He is, as he puts it himself **“unwilling to explain”.**

**8. Acquainted with the Night**

Once again in *Acquainted with the Night* we see the theme of isolation.

Presents an urban loneliness, the loneliness of a world where it can be difficult to forge communities and personal connections.

Many of Frost’s poems include an element of melancholy or regret.

We see feelings of sadness and longing that reflects a darker side of the poet.

Considering the difficult childhood and life he experienced, it is logical to conclude that poems with these attitudes were an outlet for his darker emotions – mostly loneliness and loss.

*Acquainted with the Night* is a clear example of this tendency.

**9. Design**

In many of his poems, Frost examines the chilling possibility that god does not exist.

It is possible to read *Acquainted* in these terms, as depicting a universe where there is no god to hear our prayers and pleas.

There is some doubt in the poem *Design*.

In *Design*, Frost offers a chilling variation on this “argument from design” aka god.

Instead of suggesting that the universe is governed by a benign and gentle god, Frost argues that it is controlled by the powers of darkness, by some evil and menacing force.

Frost points to a disturbing little scene from nature, involving a flower, a spider and a moth, in order to suggest that the universe is actually run by a demonic, Satan-like being.

Frost goes against our usual expectations. He presents a world where things usually associated with good are instead linked with evil.

The colour white here is lined with death and disease.

Frost is suggesting that nothing happens for a reason. There is no purpose or design behind anything, the entire universe is nothing but a random arrangement of molecules.

*Design* = rich in powerful and suggestive comparisons.

Two similes compare the moth to a “piece of satin cloth” and to a “paper kite”.

I find that the most interesting simile is the one that suggests the three little organisms have been combined “like the ingredients of a witches broth”.

This line sums up Frost’s doubts in god.

**10. Conclusion**

In Frost’s world, God is either hostile or indifferent to the plight of helpless creatures. Who, like humans, are victims of fate or chance.

His poetry brilliantly records an ever-present, underlying darkness that erupts in a random manner with tragic consequences.

Frost is one of the most philosophical poets I have studied.

His ideas seem to come directly from his own experiences and observations of life and for me have a ring of wisdom about them.

He does not force his conclusions on the reader, instead he uses metaphor and word pictures to suggest things and to provoke us into asking ourselves life altering questions.