**Robert Frost – a poet of sadness.**

Robert Frost is a poet of sadness, which somewhat ironically allows his poetry to be reassuring for the reader. The sad and trying times Frost explores through his poetry are familiar to his audience: in showing others experience such difficulties the poet confirms such are universal. Frost uses various poetic features to convey the habitual nature of such sadness, such as his use of natural imagery, which can be seen in the poems I have studied: Mending Wall, The Road Not Taken, Out Out, Provide Provide, Design and Acquainted with the Night.

Such is seen in Mending Wall where Frost examines the natural human desire for connection and interaction with others. But the speaker is not allowed this, presenting their longing as unrequited, a depressing experience which will resonate with the reader as everyone suffers at some point from such rejection. This is heavily emphasized in the poem through the speaker’s neighbour refusing outright to leave the fence broken and interact, not even being willing to consider this. The speaker longs for interaction with his neighbour and breaks down the wall that separates them each year to attempt to bring this about, however does not receive the desired response. The speaker’s act is clearly confirmed with the revelation that he always knows of the wall being broken down before his neighbour and thus always reveals this to the person he longs to connect with, remarking “I let my neighbour know beyond the hill”. As a result he and his neighbour come together, presenting the wall as a symbol for connection. However even when brought together it becomes clear the neighbour will not contemplate a permanent connection and instead remains distanced, a depressing revelation considering there is initial conversation and shared experiences between the two. The speaker and his neighbour even walk on different sides of the wall, “And on a day we meet to walk the line/ And set the wall between us once again. We keep the wall between us as we go”: this presents the wall as ironic also, for while the speaker is brought together with his neighbour due to the destroying of this boundary they are always kept separate by the remnants of this structure. Such is represented by the use of collection pronouns in a sentence used to emphasize alienation rather than communal values.

As the speaker openly explores the possibility of removing the wall his neighbour rejects such an idea outright, emphatically confirming that any current connection is mere necessity rather than personal preference. This presents the wall as an extended metaphor for their disconnect, reinforced by the use of personification as Frost declares that the possessions of he and his neighbour will not intermingle, akin to their owners: ‘There where it is we do not need the wall:/ He is all pine and I am apple orchard./ My apple trees will never get across/ And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him./ He only says, ‘Good fences make good neighbours’”. Frost conveys such disconnect as normal through the use of pastoral imagery, with the poem taking place in the natural world. Such a technique suggests that the isolation the speaker experiences is inherent to the human state as it occurs in ordinary surroundings, thus removing any element of the unusual from this occurrence. The rabbit pursued by the hunter may present a pessimistic outlook through such cruel activity but this is metaphorically shown as commonplace in the world: “out of hiding, / To please the yelping dogs.” The countryside mirrors that which one would experience if they left any city and entered the rural arena,

where there would be “the world of hoary grass” where the “woodchuck” resides. Indeed, the wall is the only non-natural element in the poem but it can be seen as enclosed in the natural environment of the “apple orchard”, “apple trees” and “woods only and the shade of trees”. As a result the natural world is presented as the dominant feature in the poem, with the wall a part of this world rather than a defining feature in its own right. It, as said, is a metaphor of the speaker’s unwanted isolation, and as this experience takes place in the natural world it is appears as commonplace: thus like the wall becomes part of the natural setting, so does isolation in the human experience.

More of the same is seen in Acquainted with the Night, as the poem focuses on another depressing experience, the bleakness of isolation, with the speaker completely disconnected from all others in his world. The poem’s setting is a bleak, dark, lonely place at night-time, which is the only element the speaker can connect to: “I have been one acquainted with the night”. The connection to an inanimate element reinforces the speaker’s isolation as it emphasizes how this state prevents any human connection, which results in lesser and alternative forms of interaction occurring. The darkness can thus be viewed as a metaphor for loneliness, “I have walked out in rain – and back in rain./ I have outwalked the furthest city light”, while it is also naturally symbolic of the depressing experience with darkness having connotations of despair. Frost’s interaction, or lack of, with the only other person in the poem seen confirms how isolation is a debilitating experience, as the two cannot meaningfully connect despite being in close proximity to each other. Despite having a desire for connection Frost now cannot even attempt to foster such with this person, instead ignoring him: “I dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.” This confirms the inherent state of isolation, even when one has others around them to connect with.

The poem thus focuses on the lack of relationships available to the individual, due to uncaring people who will not reach out and offer connection to others. This presents Frost’s poetry as sad but also universal, as all individuals suffer at some point from loneliness, when they are unable to form a relationship with another despite a desire to. As a result the speaker’s difficult situation is at least evidence for the reader that unwanted loneliness they have experienced is not due to their own faults, but a natural part of life. Frost illustrates this by presenting the individual as disconnected from others, rather than adopting an unrealistic idealized version of the individual connected to all around him, never wanting for interaction: “When far away an interrupted cry/ Came over houses from another street,// But not to call me back or say good- buy”. The personal element is necessary for exploration of the speaker’s isolation and the poet’s representation of this inherent state for the individual. Of note is the use of repetition, not meant to create monotony but rather represent the prolonged nature of isolation, that it is constant and appears to be never-ending. The use of anaphora with “I have” is therefore representative of how the speaker views isolation as the only constant experience in his life, when one would hope for a relationship to offer some element of consistency: “I have been one acquainted with the night./ I have walked out in rain – and back in rain./ I have outwalked the furthest city light.// I have looked down the saddest city lane./ I have passed by the watchman on his beat/ And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.”

Out Out is similarly depressing in its focus, considering the fragility of relationships as devotion and loyalty are exposed as false concepts when isolation and disconnect occurs. Such a concept will resonate with readers as this resembles the end of relationships when individuals who were once close move radically apart in a sharp contrast to how they once cared for each other. This is introduced by the personification of the saw which represents how precarious the youth’s situation is, as he is exposed to such a dangerous act by uncaring relatives: “The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard”. The use onomatopoeia and

conduplication reinforces this as the saw’s dangerous qualities are heightened some lines later: “And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled”. Later, when the boy passes away due to an injury received by the dangerous saw Frost confirms how devotion or connection is false or at the very least a weak ideal, as it is swiftly abandoned and not challenged with the destruction of a relationship. The family’s true cold nature confirms the facade of relationships, that individuals ultimately do not care for those who they are supposedly closest to: “and that ended it,/ No more to build on there. And they, since they/ Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs”. This is clear as the family should show extreme care with the death of a loved one, albeit at least temporarily: the response of the family instead is to return to their daily lives, with the movement away from the body a metaphorical representation of this decision to ignore the plight of a family member.

The final poem where Frost shows difficulty and sadness is in Provide, Provide. Here Frost shows how one is inherently subject to physical decline and the unwanted occurrences that go along with this experience, which will show all individuals who are subject to this in some form that they are not alone in this regard. The “withered hag” is the analogy to represent this to the reader, who was once a splendid woman: “Was once the beauty Abishag”. However, the use of the past tense immediately suggests that her beauty is no longer present, thus introducing the aforementioned physical decline. We are told Abishag was the “The picture pride of Hollywood”, with the use of alliteration allowing easy reading of the sentence, to convey how pleasant it was to look at her once upon a time. However, it is revealed that others have suffered physical decline like Abishag, thus confirming, as said, that this is a universal occurrence that the reader can thus empathise with: “Too many fall from great and good/ For you to doubt the likelihood.” Frost’s use of “great and good” initially appear to mean the same thing, the decline of beauty. However, “great” is superior to “good”, which symbolises once again Abishag’s physical decline, through adnomination, the repetition of a word in a different form.

Frost, depressingly, thus advocates choosing to “Die early and avoid the fate”. But he also says that people should form a particular mental state if they live long: “Or if predestined to die late,/ Make up your mind to die in state.” The lack of preferable options sum up how death is inescapable, thus symbolizing the powerlessness of humankind in this regard, which the reader can again empathise with as they are ultimately helpless to prevent their own physical decline, as well as feelings of inferiority that may result. The poet thus encourages the reader to make the most of life before it’s over, indulging in hyperbole for emphasis, telling the reader to buy all the stocks and take a king’s throne: “Make the whole stock exchange your own!” But the mention of throne has added significance, as it reinforces the individual’s fear that people will treat them differently when their looks decline. The throne is a metaphor for such fears, with the speaker suggesting if you get a throne you’ll be king, so people will have to treat you nicely: “If need be occupy a throne,/ Where nobody can call you crone.”

As the poem nears its end Frost explores the idea of losing physical beauty and trying to find some other way to be remembered. On one level this is a metaphor for the insecurities of the person affected by the loss of their appearance, such as Abishag, which the reader as said can relate to: “No memory of having starred/ Atones for later disregard/ Or keep the ends from being hard.” The idea of keeping the ends from becoming hard is another metaphor, as it suggests attempting to halt an inescapable state from forming, very much like the loss of looks focused on in the poem. Frost thus reminds the reader that the decline of beauty is inevitable, and to therefore not worry about people who care about such superficiality. Instead, the reader should focus on those who’ll support them regardless of how they look: “Better to go down dignified/ With boughten friendship at your side/ Than none at all. Provide, provide!”

As has been shown, the sadness of Frost’s poetry is ironically reassuring as it shows his readers such as myself that certain problems and obstacles must inevitably be encountered in life, such as difficulties in relationships and isolation. Frost shows his readers these messages through various devices such as pastoral imagery and his use of “I”, all of which combine to present the reassuring sadness of his poetry.