

Mending Wall

Commentary

The image at the heart of “*Mending Wall*” is arresting: two men meeting on terms of civility and neighborliness to build a barrier between them. They do so out of tradition, out of habit. Yet the very earth conspires against them and makes their task *Sisyphean*. Sisyphus is the figure in Greek mythology condemned perpetually to push a boulder up a hill, only to have the boulder roll down again. These men push boulders back on top of the wall; yet just as inevitably, whether at the hand of hunters or unknown creatures, or the frost and thaw of nature’s invisible hand, the boulders tumble down again. Still, the.....

Symbol Analysis

The Wall/Fences

In the poem itself, Frost creates two distinct characters who have different ideas about what exactly makes a person a good neighbor. The narrator deplores his neighbor’s preoccupation with repairing the wall; he views it as old-fashioned and even archaic. After all, he quips, his apples are not going to invade the property of his neighbor’s pinecones. Moreover, within a land of such of such freedom and discovery, the narrator asks, are such borders necessary to maintain relationships between people? Despite the narrator’s skeptical view of the wall, the neighbor maintains his seemingly “old-fashioned” mentality, responding to

*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.*

Clearly, he is a casual sort. He broaches no difficult subjects, nor does he insist on talking about himself; yet Frost is at his best in a sentence like this. Through the language and rhythm of the lines we gain a faint but unmistakable sense of the poem's conflict. Like the "frozen-ground-swell," it gathers strength while lying buried beneath the denotative surface of the poem. From the start, we suspect that the speaker has more sympathy than he admits for whatever it is "that doesn't love a wall."

- The wall is the great unifier in this poem. It unites our speaker and his neighbor, but it separates them as well. As we hear the neighbour speak the proverb twice ("*Good fences make good neighbors*"), we start to consider

Setting

While reading this poem, we perceive New England countryside, muddy and green after a spring rain. We see a crumbling rock wall running alongside an apple orchard and some tall pine trees. We see two men in the distance, kneeling in the mud, trying to fit little boulders into the spaces of the rock wall. We might also hear the distant sound of hunters and their dogs chasing after a little bunny rabbit. As we walk along, the sun filters through the treetops and bathes everything in shadows which shakes with the breeze. This is not a place

"Mending Wall" (1914)

Every year, two neighbours meet to repair the stone wall that divides their property. The narrator is skeptical of this tradition, unable to understand the need for a wall when there is no livestock to be contained on the property, only apples and pine trees. He does not believe that a wall should exist simply for the sake of existing. Moreover, he cannot help but notice that the natural world seems to dislike the

Background Analysis

This poem is the first work in Frost's second book of poetry, “North of Boston,” which was published upon his return from England in 1915. While living in England with his family, Frost was exceptionally homesick for the farm in New Hampshire where he had lived with his wife from 1900 to 1909. Despite the eventual failure of the farm, Frost associated his time in New Hampshire with a peaceful, rural sensibility that he instilled in the majority of his subsequent

poems. "Mending Wall" is autobiographical on an even more specific level: a French-Canadian named Napoleon Guay had been Frost's neighbor in New Hampshire, and the two had often walked along their property line and repaired the wall that separated their land. Ironically, the most famous line of the

Form

In terms of form, "Mending Wall" is not structured with stanzas; it is a simple forty-five lines of first-person narrative. Frost does maintain iambic stresses, but he is flexible with the form in order to maintain the conversational feel of the poem.

This study of Frost's treatment of his persona in "Mending Wall" should be sufficient to establish that the poem is not primarily an expression of moral views on