

Mending wall analysis



With a delicate mixture of philosophy and play, Frost's "Mending Wall" explores themes of tradition and human nature. Though at first the poem seems simplistic in its representation of pastoral life, it gently evolves to raise larger questions about the way in which outdated traditions stunt the growth of new and meaningful experiences.

Caught between the impulse to respect the customs of the past and announce the absurdity of it all, the speaker silently reflects as he and his neighbour perform the yearly ritual of mending the wall that separates their lands. Although it seems as if this tradition has lasted for generations, the speaker has begun to question the validity of its legacy: "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" (lines 23-26).

The neighbour, on the other hand, is locked solidly in the tradition that has brought him to this moment and, "like an old-stone savage armed" (line 40), continues to unthinkingly persevere in his task. For a brief moment, the speaker thinks of sharing his playful thoughts with his neighbour, and imagines himself joking to point out the ludicrousness of their task: "I could say 'Elves' to him," he remarks (line 36). In the end, however, he concedes: "But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather/He said it for himself" (lines 36-38).

Recognizing the fact that the neighbour would never "go behind his father's saying," (line 43), and would have to recognize the absurdity of the situation for himself in order to experience any meaningful degree of enlightenment, the speaker resigns his conscience to the truth of his neighbour's condition: He moves in darkness as it seems to me/Not of woods only and the shade of

tree," (lines 41-42). In the end, only the speaker reflects upon what they are collectively "walling in or walling out" (line 33).