

# Robert frost's design analysis



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Robert Frost's petrarchan sonnet, written in iambic pentameter, "Design," questions the role of God in the world through predestination and divine intervention with the use of tone, juxtaposition, imagery, and symbolism. He does so by narrating a scene in the octave in which a spider holds its prey while standing on top of a heal-all, then by asking provocative questions about the occurrence of such in the sestet which follows.

"Design" has two separate tones with a shift after the first octave. The first part, being a narrative, is light and observant, such as it would be from an onlooker's perspective, watching from afar instead of taking a personal role in the action described. Frost uses this tone to keep the poem neutral as he uses imagery and symbolism to bring about his point. The imagery is used specifically as symbolism in this piece, most obvious in the coloring of three objects: a white spider, fat with prosperity and cruel in its actions, a white flower which heals, and a white, dead moth, victimized by the spider. Juxtaposition can be seen within these symbolic elements, as the purity of the color white contradicts the actions of the spider, "fat" and "holding up a moth." Not only do the colors contradict the actions of the spider, but also the spider itself contrasts the idea of a pure flower that heals. The phrase "snow-drop spider" gives a euphonic, soft sound, but the feelings conjured relate more to the flower than the spider, who is a "fat" spider, known to kill, while the flower is more affectionately referred to as a "heal-all" and "a flower like a froth." We know that the spider, flower, and moth are supposed to be compared, seen together, and not just as three separate unities because of the lines "Assorted characters of death and blight / Mixed ready to begin the morning right, / Like the ingredients of a witches' broth". In "

Design," the spider seems to represent the bad in the world. Since the poem can be seen to reflect on the entirety of human existence in terms of divine intervention, the spider is The Unplanned Negative, seen as he kills a moth. The flower is The Good, taking less of an obvious action in the poem, but still present and apparent. The moth seems to represent victims of the evil in the world, as it is like "satin," but "rigid" with death. This also gives context to the questions he asks in the sestet about the "design" involved in bringing the three to the state in which they find themselves.

The second of the two parts, after the shift in tone starting with the sestet, carries a darker, more analytical, anxious, and contemplative tone, as the speaker asks questions relating just as much to humanity in general as they relate to the scene described. Although the octave sets the stage up for analysis, these questions bring the poem to its completeness in the theme of questioning God and the role He takes in regards to humanity. In the ending lines, Frost writes, "What but design of darkness to appall? - / If design govern in a thing so fall," referring to the concept of predestination. Does 'design' or God govern things as small as these, bringing these rare creatures of color together at just the right time and place just for the spider to eat the moth in the end? Or is there no 'design' at all? Is everything simply a random occurrence? He shows through darker diction in words such as "darkness" and "appall" that this is a dark occurrence whether a god has personally decided to make this happen or if it is just chance. He contemplates the absurdity of the entire situation, wondering "what had that flower to do with being white" despite its usual blue hue. This is further exemplified in "wayside" and "innocent," referring to its blueness. Frost

speaks of it as though it did not choose to be white, but rather was made so by design. But whose design? God's or chance's? In "What but design of darkness to appall?" he speaks as though the designer would be one of darkness. The diction further illustrates this, as appall serves to mean both "to horrify," or "the lid of a coffin." Everything links back to a negative view of the concept of predestination or the void of chance meetings. He never determines which it is, leaving the last line as a provocative statement, questioning how far design would go, and whether or not it would apply to matters as small as these.

In summary, in Robert Frost's petrarchan sonnet, "Design," he speaks of the existence of, or perhaps the lack of, predestination. In the first part of the poem, in an octave, he does so by setting a scene with a narrative. In the second, after a shift in tone to a darker and more contemplative expression, he speaks of predestination and chance through a series of provocative questions. Although not a Christian, Frost seems to speak of His potential existence in the poem.