

Poetry

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Robert Frost's *Mending Wall* To learn to really appreciate poetry, one must often learn how to analyze it appropriately by looking at aspects such as rhythm and symbolism. By looking at these individual elements, the reader can often develop a greater understanding of the author's skill and a finer appreciation of how these elements are constructed to contribute to the final impact of the poem. Because of his skill in using these elements, Robert Frost is well known for his ability to combine idyllic pastoral settings with philosophical commentary. Analyzing the rhythm and symbolism in Frost's poem "The Mending Wall" illustrates how he manages to merge pastoral settings and philosophical considerations.

"The Mending Wall" basically tells the story of two men, the narrator and his neighbor, and their annual ritual of walking along the wall between their two properties and mending the stone fence. He starts the poem by indicating how unnatural a wall is in the words "Something there is that doesn't love a wall" (1). Within this single sentence, Frost has already managed to establish a rambling rhythm to his poem. The reader is forced to slow down and pay attention to the grammatically correct but unusual phrasing of this statement. As the story continues, this rhythm is punctuated by sudden bursts of energy from the narrator, "'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!" (19), answered by the steady beat of the neighbor's response, the repetition of an old adage, "Good fences make good neighbors" (27). Thus, if rhythm were light, we'd see steady pulses interrupted by sudden flashes of color rebuffed by an equally sudden, light-deadening gray wall.

The rhythm of the poem is echoed by the symbolism of the poem. As the narrator tries to determine what it is that doesn't love fences, he manages to

convey the sense that it is something larger or deeper than the superficial elements he is naming: " The gaps I mean, / No one has seen them made or heard them made, / But at spring mending time we find them there" (9-11). This prompts the reader to begin thinking below the surface early in the poem and, as the narrator continues to discuss the mundane elements of rebuilding a fence that will only be falling down again ' the moment their backs are turned', the sense continues to build that the fence is not a physical fence at all, but a fence upon the mind. This is made much clearer by the end of the poem as the narrator, after several attempts at levity, watches his neighbor bringing more rocks back to the wall: " I see him there, / Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top / In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed. / He moves in darkness as it seems to me" (38-41). His neighbor's mind is so steeped in the traditions of the past that the narrator sees him as little more advanced than a stone-age hunter while his mind remains closed to the possibilities of greater thought and imagination. Through rhythm and symbolism Robert Frost is able to make a connection between a simple yearly pastoral chore and some of the great philosophical questions of humanity. Without lecturing or brow-beating, Frost is able to suggest that a mind closed by strict adherence to the traditions of the past is incapable of considering a greater world in which some traditions are no longer valid all while simply discussing a mundane country activity.

Works Cited

Frost, Robert. " The Mending Wall." New Enlarged Anthology of Robert Frost's Poems. New York: Washington Square Press, 1971: 94.