

Common themes in the tuft of flowers and mending wall

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A Look at the Theme of Separation in the Poetry of Robert Frost

The creation of borders and boundaries has been around since the beginning of civilization. The division of property and possessions among individuals establishes a sense of self-worth. The erection of fences and walls keeps property separate. Walls also serve as a means of separating worlds. Modern society demands the creation, and maintenance of these boundaries. In his poems, *The Tuft of Flowers*, and *Mending Wall*, Robert Frost explores the role that walls play in our lives. He examines how the lives of men are both separated, and drawn together by walls.

In *The Tuft of Flowers*, Frost shows how men work alone. In contrast, Frost then shows how men can work together through their separation. Frost describes how a simple, uncut tuft of wild flowers can unite two separate people. The appreciation of nature's beauty has an effect on the mower, leading him away from cutting the flowers. The man that follows the mower feels a special kinship to him because he also likes the flowers. The beauty of a simple patch of flowers brings the narrator to realize that although he may work by himself, he is part of something bigger; the human race.

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Frost also demonstrates how men never exist alone when surrounded by nature. In *The Tuft of Flowers*, the speaker thinks he works alone. Then Frost writes, *But as I said it, swift there passed me by on noiseless wing a wildred butterfly (18)*. The Butterfly becomes the speaker's morning companion, and its flight leads the speaker to the flowers. He serves to help lead the man to

realize that life and beauty unite all things. Frost writes, The butterfly and I had lit upon, Nevertheless a message from the dawn (19). By directing the man to the flowers, the butterfly becomes an important character in this poem.

Mending Wall takes up where the theme of The Tuft of Flowers leaves off. In Mending Wall, two neighbors repair the wall that divides their property. The speaker realizes that questioning the existing wall is senseless, but he likes to view the task of repairing the wall playfully. Frost writes, Oh, just another kind of out-door game (28). As if playing a game, the speaker tends to his side of the field, and his neighbor to the opposing side. Frost writes, Spring is the mischief in me (28). By this, the speaker knows that the acceptance of the wall is a way of life, and that his questions against the wall will produce no substantial answers. Wallace writes, Frost knows as well how radical and difficult it is to take in another, and yet maintain a sense of ones own and the others distinctness (227). The statement encompasses the entire theme of Mending Wall.

The poems central moment occurs when the narrators tone shifts from playful to dark. This is apparent when Frost writes, 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, not of

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woods only and of shade of trees (29). At this point, the speaker sees the distance between himself and his neighbor. He also sees darkness in the neighbors acceptance of the simple phrase, Good fences make good

neighbors. The neighbor hides behind the repetition of this phrase. The speaker also hides, but behind his teasing questions. Patricia Wallace writes, He realizes that it seems to him the neighbor is surrounded and enclosed by something like darkness, a darkness perceptible to the speaker who must know his own separateness more full (227). The wall separates the two men, but brings them together in time of repair.

A wall serves as a reminder of the unique individuality of each person. It can also serve as a challenge to climb. A wall can be a driving force to overcome the individual world and to peer over to the world of another. Robert Frost explores the role that walls play in life. He describes the individual world that each man exists in, but shows how these worlds are parallel. The task of life unites all living things. In these poems, *The Tuft of Flowers*, and *Mending Wall*, Frost helps ease the life's harsh complexities through simple verse.