

Frost's views on society in mending wall

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When it comes to poetry, it is not often that it is studied without reflecting on the famous poet Robert Frost. Robert Frost was a troubled man with an intricate pathway in life that followed to an unexpected path to success. His life was translated into his poetry, always being consistent to his roots and his rural lifestyle. “ If popularity could be regarded as the measure of a poet’s eminence, Frost would certainly be among the most eminent poets of the English language” (Chelliah, 99). Robert Frost’s opinion of society within his poem the “ Mending Wall” is conflicted but we are able to see that he considers both his opinion but also the opinion of his neighbor. Society is either thrusting to be separate or parts of it are allowing the possibility for change. The hesitation could be the result of fear and Frost explores this possibility throughout “ Mending Wall.” Throughout the poem, Frost’s use of literary devices such as metaphors, symbolism, and imagery allows us to see that the narrator is struggling with his own beliefs and accepting the beliefs of his neighbor. But also his neighbor’s stubbornness and ignorance to the facts around him.

Frost starts his poem the “ Mending Wall” with a line that has more meaning behind it than the words written. “ Something there is that doesn’t love a wall” (Frost) which is then repeated later on for a second time. This is not the only time Frost does this throughout the poem. He also repeats “ Good fences make good neighbors” (Frost) and then ends the poem with this line. The repetition of these two lines was a calculated move made by Frost. There is an importance to why Frost chose to do so. This plan of action enabled these lines to be engrained into the audience’s mind. Frost was allowing people to envision that he was attempting to stay unbiased about

his relationship with the way society should function. That in truth he was not certain whether he believed society should work as a community or as separate entities within a community. In actuality though, Frost considered that we should coexist cohesively together. “ The poem’s voice, belonging to a narrator who is in character, is open and relaxed, yet inward and musing; it welcomes the reader, at the same time enticing him into a riddle which becomes essential to the poem’s meaning” (McNair). This riddle becomes the reader’s riddle making us question whether or not the wall is really a necessity in our lives and our society. The narrator is considering this struggle among himself and whether or not his own views match that of his neighbor.

Even though the above lines describe both opinions in the argument of whether or not we should be divided from our neighbor or peacefully coexist and whether or not Frost justified these views, there were other parts of “ Mending Wall” that shadowed Frost’s feelings on the topic. He turned it into almost a comical topic when he personified trees and their abilities to move.

“ 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, I tell him” (Frost).

We can see here the imagery Frost uses alongside personification and quite frankly symbolism as well. The way Frost used imagery, although simplistic,

allowed us to imagine an apple tree wobbling over to the pine tree and snack on his pine cones without permission. This is how much the narrator finds this wall that he is building, absolutely absurd. The wall is not something that is necessary to their survival as farmers, yet it is a symbol of the stubbornness his neighbor holds. “ The poems about nature by Frost make a delightful reading on account of their skillful handling of the poetic devices like images and personifications. Personification is generally employed to add vitality to descriptions of nature. The personifications of the Romantic take the form of brief metaphor, while Frost’s are nearly always extended analogies” (Chelliah, 110) Their crops, pine trees and apple trees, are far enough apart that there would be no possible way that either would cross over the others land, unless they grew legs and wondered over. Frost is implying that his neighbor’s ignorance to that fact, is what is forcing them to perform this menial chore. It could also be that his neighbor is so stuck in his ways that, even considering this logical point about their crops, doesn’t stop him from building the wall. The same can be said about the narrator though, even though he understands the absurdity that is accompanied with building the wall he does not stop either. The uncertainty of the narrator is based off of his own fear of the unknown, that in fact it is a possibility that “ Good fences make good neighbors”(Frost).

After awhile Frost’s “ Mending Wall” takes on a more serious tone. He goes from a lighthearted man joking about walking, thieving trees to a more serious man evaluating the man beside him. The narrator can sense the importance of the task at hand just by analyzing the man before him.

“ 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 woods only and the shade of trees”(Frost).

This passage is what changes the tone of the poem. Frost’s use of imagery here allows us to see the seriousness of this old man doing back breaking work. It brings a change to the narrators thoughts.“ Eventually the narrator’s speculation about what might not love a wall turns to a description of the difficulty of wall-mending and into a questioning of why he and his neighbor have met to carry out the task in the first place. His range of tone as he does so moves from seriousness to whimsy to be-musement to cajolery. As is usual in Frost, that movement is heightened by a tension between spoken English and formal meter” (McNair). The change in his tone changes the meaning to this poem. We can evaluate how the narrator considers how the building of the wall affects his life. He considers it to be just a chore but as he looks onto his neighbor he considers the meaning the wall has to his neighbor. Here’s this old man doing back breaking work because he believes in the wall and the meaning behind the wall.

The wall described in the “ Mending Wall” is a symbol among the characters within the poem but also the readers of the poem. “ Many critics of Robert Frost’s Mending Wall” have seen the poem as a symbolic statement about

barriers men create between themselves. For them the wall is a visual icon for these barriers” (Morrissey, 58). The wall allows the to lessen their fear about what is beyond their home. The wall is their security from what lies beyond in the world and a security of the fear they hold for the unknown. The wall is Frost’s way of expressing how people want to remain separate from their neighbor. Every year they meet to build this symbol of a wall. Frost knew that simple objects like walls often allow a person to feel comfortable even if the wall doesn’t actually protect anything in the physical world but rather protects their subconscious. Robert Frost’s perfectly executed use of imagery, personification and symbolism illustrates how the world functions together as a society.

Works Cited

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