

“Frost’s simple style is deceptive and a thoughtful reader will see layers of meaning in his poetry”. Do you agree with this assessment of his poetry? Write a response, supporting your points with the aid of suitable reference to the poems on your course. (2011)

As Robert Frost once said himself, “Poetry begins in delight and ends in wisdom”. In my opinion, this perfectly sums up what the reader experiences when reading Frost’s poetry. Although written many years ago, the topics discussed in Frost’s poetry continue to be as relevant today as they were when the poems were written. Through his poetry, Frost offers the reader alternative perspectives and wise insights into issues that continue to dominate our world today. I personally found Frost’s poetry to be very educational and his work broadened my knowledge on many a topic. Frost’s poetry takes us on a journey through which we first encounter his poems as light hearted and simple, though as we look deeper, Frost leads us to see a profound and more thought-provoking meaning to his work. Although the language Frost uses is simple and accessible, his careful use of words allows for there always to be a deeper meaning to his poetry than what initially meets the eye. This idea of deeper insights in disguised by simpler topics is particularly evident in his poems ‘Mending Wall’, ‘The Road Not Taken’ and ‘The Tuft of Flowers’. However, Frost’s deceptive style is less prevalent in his poem ‘Out, Out –’, in which he clearly and openly discusses the reality of farming accidents without leaving the reader searching for a deeper meaning.

‘The Tuft of Flowers’ was the first of Frost’s poems which I studied, and I believe it had a profound effect on me as a reader. On the surface, it appears that this poem is about nature, however after deeper study, I can see that this poem deals with the themes of isolation and friendship, a sense of being alone, yet a need to belong. I feel that these themes are especially relevant for teenagers of both past and present generations who struggle to fit in and I found a certain comfort in the poem for this reason. The poem starts off with a lonely pessimistic tone

and any deeper meaning to the poem is unclear. However, as we continue reading the tone becomes inquisitive and later uplifting and positive. I believe that Frost's change in tone effectively captures what the reader experiences while reading this poem- initially unsure as to what message Frost is getting at, then later interested in the morals that are being suggested, and finally enlightened as we understand Frost's message at last, the message that tells us we are not alone. Frost makes effective use of symbolism to capture layers of meaning in his poem 'The Tuft of Flowers'. The "tremulous wing" of the "bewildered butterfly" symbolises the fragility of life, as both the wing of the butterfly and life are delicate and must be treated with care. Comparing life to the wing of a butterfly also puts into perspective for me the beauty of life and the diversity within the lives we lead. I find this beautiful image to be most appealing and it creates a sense of calm in the poem. Frost also discusses "a message from the dawn", a tuft of flowers left uncut by the morning mower for Frost to enjoy. However, I feel that the poet is hinting at something deeper than a random act of kindness. I believe that Frost uses this simple gesture to symbolise how every person is fundamentally good, that is, there is good in everyone. I find such a positive outlook on humanity both inspirational and uplifting. The poem consists of twenty rhyming couplets, which mimic the sound of the scythe the farmer is using. This adds a musical quality to the poem and makes it more enjoyable and memorable for me as a reader. Just as the scythe removes the grass to uncover the soil underneath, the melodic rhythm helps to uncover the depth to this poem. . I believe there is a strongly spiritual element to this poem and that the poet is not merely discussing the relationship between farmers who work different shifts but is talking about humanity's relationship with God. The final line, "Whether they work together or apart", reveals to me that God is always with us in spirit, even if not in presence. I found this to be an incredibly powerful end to the poem and it lingered in my mind long after I'd finished reading it.

While 'The Tuft of Flowers' discusses the similarities between people, Frost's poem 'Mending Wall' contrasts the different types of people in this world.

'Mending Wall' appears to be about mundane farm work, yet like many of Frost's poems, the meaning runs much deeper than this. Written in blank verse, unrhymed iambic pentameter, the poem reads like a story and has a casual, relaxed feel to it. The poem describes two farmers building up a wall between their two farms which has begun to fall down. While one farmer insists on building the wall back up as "Good fences make good neighbours", the other farmer questions the very need for a wall at all, "Why do they make good neighbours?". However, I feel this poem is not just discussing boundary walls on a farm but is hinting at the need for us to

remove international barriers and borders and embrace multiculturalism, embrace our differences. Although this poem was written in 1913, I feel its message is incredibly relevant in today's world, where we are constantly torn between wanting to break down barriers yet feeling obliged to build them back up again. Throughout 'Mending Wall', I feel Frost is subtly comparing the differences between two types of people in this world. Although Frost uses humour while making his comparisons, "He is all pine and I am apple orchard", I am forced to think about my own mind set and which farmer I myself am more like. In my opinion, in this poem Frost is also warning us of the danger of a closed mind set and cutting ourselves off from others, "He moves in darkness". In this way, I believe Frost was ahead of his time with regard to creating a more open world. There is an element of mystery or magic present on 'Mending Wall', "Something there is that doesn't love a wall", "We have to use a spell to make them balance". This creates a sense of intrigue and further engages the reader. I also believe that there is a deeper meaning to this point that Frost is making. It appears to me that he is suggesting that it is the strength and force of tradition that is turning us away from change and forcing us to keep building walls. This interesting idea leads me to think about the enormous will and strength of the person that is required to go against tradition and make a change. This poem is thought provoking, yet humorous, an unusual combination of styles. However, this combination of styles is very effective in this unusual, yet modern approach to poetry, and for this I commend Frost.

Life and society are also reflected on in Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken".

'The Road Not Taken' is a simple, yet powerful piece of poetry. It is one of Frost's shortest poems, but this does not limit the impact it has on me as a reader. In this poem, Frost is describing the natural element to both the physical world around us, as well as the natural course our lives take. This poem, like many of Frost's poems, is ambiguous and is layered with meaning and insights. To me, the journey Frost embarks on, along one road in the wood, symbolises the path he chose to take in life. This poem is full of metaphors, which add to its deep meaning. "And looked down...To where it bent in the undergrowth" is a metaphor for how we can't see what's in our futures when we make our decisions. I found this quite thought provoking as it led me to ponder on the reality that we don't know what's ahead of us when we make decisions regarding our futures, but we just have to hope that things will work out for the best. I found this quite comforting, particularly given that as a sixth-year student, I can't be sure what the next year will bring. The poet identifies with human experience throughout the poem, which is something I find quite comforting. Frost deals with something everyone experiences: decision making. The poet gives meaning to the decisions he has made, "that has made all the

difference”, yet he identifies with the human struggle when it comes to deciding, “sorry I could not travel both”. This two-sided approach that Frost gives on the importance of decisions ensures that all audiences can engage with and relate to this poem, whether they have made their life decisions or are still deciding what path to take. Again, the poet caters for people of all outlooks when he speaks of the impact the path we choose to take in life has. He starts by telling us that all choices are similar, “the passing there/ Had worn them really about the same”, but then finishes the poem by saying that the choice he made “has made all the difference”. This changing view of the meaning of the path we take in life forces me to think for myself and decide which I believe to be true for me. There is a level of inspiration to be gained from this poem as well. Although the poet initially appears to be critical of his indecisiveness, “long I stood”, he comes to realise that this is part of what it is to be human, “I shall be telling this with a sigh”. I find it inspiring that he was brave enough to take the road “less travelled by” as this portrays an important lesson of not to be afraid to make the choice that no one else is making because that may be the choice that is right for you. This poem is full of meaning and is interpreted differently by many. However, Frost took a more universal and blunt approach in his poem ‘Out, Out – ‘.

Frost’s poem ‘Out, Out – ‘ could be described as one of his most disturbing pieces of work. Although this is a very deep and thought-provoking poem, it does not consist of the multiple meanings and different interpretations that his other poems deal with, in my opinion. The poet openly portrays the devastating effects of farming accidents in a simple style that is easy for all audiences to comprehend. The poem begins with a sense of foreboding, which is effectively achieved through the use of symbolism. We are told that the saw “made dust”, just as when humans die they are said to return to dust. From the beginning, the poet is creating a sense that the reader can expect the worst in a way that leaves little room for individual interpretation and pursuit of deeper meanings. Onomatopoeic sounds such as “snarled and rattled” give a harsh tone to the poem and send chills down my spine. The repetition of this line in relation to the saw enforces the idea that the saw is something evil, something to fear, and evokes feelings of terror within me for what is to come. The personification of the saw, “As if to prove that saws knew what supper meant”, shows the power and strength of the saw, similar to that of a human. However, while humans eat food for supper, the saw ‘ate’ the boy’s hand. This is a vivid and grotesque image that shocks me as a reader and stays with me long after I have finished reading the poem. There is little uncertainty that the message the poet is conveying here is about the dangers and ferociousness of what seem like regular farming machines. ”. This poem

reads like a story, with a start, a middle and an end. At the start of the poem, the boy is working on the farm, using the saw to chop the firewood. The middle of the poem describes how the boy lost control of the saw and cut off his arm, as his sister watched on helplessly. The poem concludes with the boy drawing his final breaths and his family continuing with their lives after his passing. Unlike in his other poems, it appears to me that in 'Out, Out – ', Frost does not wish for the reader to uncover layers of meaning. Instead, he wants us to listen to the story he is telling about the fragility of life. I believe that the purpose of this poem is to wake us up, to make us smell the "sweet-scented" coffee and to realise what a precious gift life is. I believe that the poet deliberately made this poem easy to understand in order to enhance the impact of his message. This poem explores the reality of human existence. Sometimes there is no meaning to events that happen in our lives and we just have to accept them as a horrible twist of fate, "He saw all spoiled". The use of the word "saw" in this line can be seen as a play on words, as it was in fact the saw who took the boy's life. The dramatic "So." towards the end of the poem slows down the pace and gives me time to reflect on and take in the cold reality that the poet has put in front of us. The final line, "And they, since they/ Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs" is quite a cold, abrupt end to such an upsetting poem and I was initially angry at Frost for his lack of compassion. However, on reflection I realised that the point Frost is making is entirely accurate. Sometimes there is no happy ending, no deeper meaning to be found in a tragic event and moving on with life doesn't mean that the boy's family don't care. It is their method of coping, as it is for many people. Their silent struggle to cope with the passing of a family member is also evident through the absence of any emotion on their part throughout the poem. While I do not believe this poem to be deceptive or layered with meaning, I do believe it carries a very important message about life, as Frost once said himself, "it goes on".

Robert Frost's poetry had a profound effect on me as a reader. The layers of meaning which he hid within many of his poems offered me different perspectives on life and the world we live in. His simple style contributes to making his poetry thought-provoking, yet comprehensible for the average reader. Frost's poetry fully engaged me in many of the great questions of life and his work lingered in my mind long after I'd finished reading it. His use of simple, yet sensuous language greatly appealed to me and somewhat transported me elsewhere while reading his poetry. I also found the spiritual aspect present in many of his poems to be quite refreshing and increased my understanding of the meaning of life as a whole. The issues he discusses in many of his poems are both relevant and engaging for the modern reader, an impressive achievement for a poet whose work was written almost one hundred years ago. I personally found Frost's

poetry to be very educational and his work broadened my knowledge on many a topic. As Frost once said himself, "Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words", and I believe this perfectly captures the personal feelings and wisdom that is evident throughout Robert Frost's poetry. I thoroughly enjoyed studying Frost's poetry and found it to be a very worthwhile experience.