

MENDING WALL

ROBERT FROST

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About the Poem

Mending Wall written by **Robert Frost** introduces two neighbours who join to repair the stonewall that divides their properties. The speaker of the poem is a farmer who holds the view that a wall is not necessary in certain places. But his neighbour sticks on to the conventional belief that "Good fences make good neighbours."

Humour in the poem

In a colloquial style, the speaker explains how and why a wall resists man's efforts to maintain it. The speaker maintains humour throughout the poem. Humour is highlighted in the use of irony "we wear our fingers rough with handling them." Also the speaker's remark "Stay where you are until our backs are turned!" reveals the speaker's sense of humour. References like 'Elves' and 'spell' club element of mystery with humour. The speaker regards the wall mending activity as an outdoor game and mentions the shape of the stones. In addition, the speaker humorously compares his neighbour to a stone-savage. By plotting the neighbour quoting the dictum for a second time, the poet succeeds in drawing a humorous caricature.

Symbol

The wall is a symbol of mental barrier between two human beings. Nature doesn't expect a wall between two human beings. The 20th century man's incapability to engage in meaningful communication is symbolically represented in the poem by means of the speaker's failure to convince his neighbour.

Mystery in the Poem

The poem narrates the routine activity of setting right the boundary between two farms. But in the opening line itself, the common place convention is presented with an air of supernaturalism or mystery. References like 'spell' and 'Elves' add to the magical air of mystification in the poem. By comparing his dissenting neighbour to a stone savage, groping in darkness, the speaker hints that the neighbour's thought processes are mysterious and unreformed. The reference "No one has seen them made or heard them made, but at spring mending time we find them there" is an attempt to mystify a usual occurrence.

Irony

They engage in the activity with a purpose to mend the wall between their properties. But the outcome of the activity is quite different from what they expected. The speaker ironically remarks that "We wear our fingers rough with handling them."

Simile

The speaker compares his neighbour to a Stone Age man. The poem plots the neighbour walking with stones in his hands to reset the wall. The speaker who feels miserable at his failure to convince the neighbour finds parallel between a stone savage and his neighbor. For the Stone Age man, 'stone' was his major tool; here for the neighbour, a stone wall is a necessity. The simile highlights the speaker's grudge to the dissenting neighbour.

Elves

The speaker doesn't actually know the culprit who pulls the wall down. Though a 20th century man, the speaker says that a supernatural force is behind this. He also knows that if he accuses the 'Elves', his neighbour will think it absurd. So he hopes his neighbour may find out the actual culprit on his own. The speaker's weird thoughts reveal his dilemma to convince the neighbour. As in fairy tales, he might be manipulating the prevalent popular belief in supernatural elements like 'Elves' for communicating his view to the neighbor.

The speaker's view

The speaker is a farmer with a broad outlook on human relationship. He believes that men build walls between their properties for convenience, but nature doesn't like a wall. He is the one who informs the neighbour about the damage of the wall. However, his view is that a wall is necessary only in certain places. A wall is not essential where they have two different crops. Also in places where there are no trespassers like cows, there is no need of a wall. He tries to convince his view to the neighbour. Humour and irony in the language used by the speaker reveal him as a person with a broad outlook and sense of humour. Even though the speaker has a precise view, he is rather confused about convincing his neighbour.

The neighbour's view

The neighbour is delineated as an adamant. According to the speaker, his neighbour believes that a wall is necessary between their properties. He repeats the dictum "good fences make good neighbours". He absurdly sticks to his forefathers' wisdom. But he doesn't actually imbibe its implied sense. So the speaker compares him to a stone savage.

Language

Simple, colloquial language is used in the poem. The dramatic opening of the poem is very impressive. Several nature (and farming) related terms are used in the poem. The poem is more or less a dramatic monologue with conversations that operate at different levels. We see the speaker addressing the reader, talking to the stone wall (boulders), and the neighbour repeating his motto. But the most striking thing is the (probably imaginary) conversation that the speaker wishes to have with his neighbour. The poem opens with the speaker's comment and ends with the neighbour's remark. The language, especially the dictum (vocabulary) used in the poem is typical of a romantic poem.