

ROBERT FROST

Explain how Robert Frost explores one aspect of the human condition in his poems?

The human condition is inescapable in all aspects of human life and has been since the development of our society. This concept has made an apparent mark on literature throughout history, and can be observed in Robert Frost's pastoral poems, composed in the early 20th century. Frost, a paramount figure in American literature, encountered extraordinary hardship and experienced the pain of grief after the loss of countless family members. The emotion which occurred as a result of these experiences is likely to have influenced the themes explored throughout his poetry, of which confront the consequences of death, grief and isolation. Who are we in the absence of human connection? In 'Mending Wall' and 'Home Burial', both composed in 1914, Frost explores the significance and power of human relationships where there is an absence of empathy and emotional connection, this void being detrimental to mankind in times of conflict.

Even when grieving the same death, no two people grieve the same, with numerous relationships breaking down after loss. This common aspect of the human condition is explored in 'Home Burial,' a dramatic lyric poem which discusses the emotional detachment that occurs between a husband and wife in the absence of empathy after the loss of their child. The vignette utilises contrasting dialogue throughout to convey the raw emotions and thoughts of the parents, neither of whom can understand the experiences of one another. 'She let him look, sure that he wouldn't see,/ Blind creature; and awhile he didn't see,' employs a metaphor and repetition of 'see' to emphasise his inability, or perhaps his unwillingness, to see his wife's perspective. Their contrasting views creates confusion and a sense of unsettlement, conveyed by the husband's low modality, and uncertain tone. He states 'I don't know how to speak of anything,' whilst standing at the top of the staircase, which acts as a physical barrier between them. Mordecai Marcus, critic for Modern American Poetry, relays a common view regarding Frost's use of barriers to portray the disconnection of people in his poetry. His summary of the poem discusses the broken communication between the couple in the text, with neither of them being able to accept the comfort of one another. He states that the wife 'refuses the husband's concern for her grief,' which can be seen through the italics and the exclamation point in 'You couldn't care!'

An argument erupts between the couple, of whom are positioned at either end of the staircase:

'Can't a man speak twice of his own child he's lost?'

'Not you! Oh, where's my hat? Oh, I don't need it!

I must get out of here. I must get air.-

I don't know rightly whether any man can.'

'Amy! Don't go to someone else this time.

Listen to me. I won't come down the stairs.'

The staircase is ever-present throughout the poem, embodying the inevitable destruction of their relationship as they remain separate, unable to connect with each other emotionally. This lack of empathy creates clear tension between the couple, and ultimately leads to the demise of their relationship. This concept is emphasised further with "I'll follow you and bring

you back by force. I will-!" This line marks the close of the poem, an unfinished sentence emphasised by italics, which disallows closure for the responder and suggests an end to their relationship due to their inability to empathise with each other's opposing grieving processes. Robert Frost's 'Home Burial', a poetic narrative regarding the eventual breakdown of a marriage, deals with aspects of the human condition such as grief and its variations amongst mankind.

In *Mending Wall*, also composed in 1914, the consequences of a lack of connection are explored. The text presents the tension caused by contrasting opinions through a story discussing two neighbours, of whom disagree regarding the need for fences. Similarly to the staircase in 'Home Burial,' which acts as a physical barrier to the connection of the couple, the rock wall central to the pastoral poem metaphorically conveys the absence of connection. Critic for 'UkEssays' argues that 'the term "two opposites attract" resonates with analysing *Mending Wall*,' as it is the speaker himself who initiates the repair of the fence, as evident through the use of the first person pronoun in, 'I let my neighbour know beyond the hill;' However, despite him being proactive and inviting the annual repair to take place, the visual imagery in, 'And makes gaps even two can pass abreast,' establishes that although the wall invites one neighbour to view the other's perspective, neither make the journey - illustrating both men's unwillingness to understand the view of the other. Do you think they would continue to rebuild a barrier between their homes, if they were looking to connect with one another? Weathering and erosion resulted in the need to repair the fence every year, considering whether 'Good fences make good neighbours.' The physical barrier of the fence symbolises the denial of a potential human connection, the narrator's neighbour reluctant to explore what lies beyond the barrier. This concept is central to the human condition - we are often unwilling to start a conversation with a stranger, mutually assuming they will be of no value to our lives, assuming, like the in the poem, that connection is improbable. 'He is all pine and I am apple orchard,' highlights this through juxtaposing metaphors, four words balanced by 'and' separating the pair like the wall and demonstrating, through high modality language the persona's unwillingness to try to understand. As the text closes, metaphorical language in 'He moves in darkness as it seems to me,' finalises the personas inability to connect with his neighbour, his lack of empathy denying him an opportunity to build a new relationship. Through contrasting perspectives, '*Mending Wall*' demonstrates that by refusing to empathise with other perspectives and by turning away from human connection, the opportunity to gain knowledge and build potential new relationships can be lost. This same denial of human connection and relationships is exhibited in 'Home Burial', demonstrating Robert Frost's attraction to facets of the human condition within his poems.

Joe Straynge states 'Human connection is the most vital aspect of our existence, without...another being we are lonely stars in an empty space, waiting to shine...' Robert Frost confronts this aspect of the human condition through his poetry, exploring the limitations that occur as a result of an inability to empathise with the perspectives and opinions of others. Through the study of his texts, we have gained a deeper understanding regarding the significance and power of human relationships. We have been given an opportunity to develop our perspectives and values, which has resulted in both of us questioning if we are making the most of the opportunities to develop relationships within our cohort as we embark upon our senior studies. Relationships require hard work and persistence in order to be maintained between two people, although this work reveals itself to be worth it, human connection allowing for an understanding of empathy and its importance. So today we encourage you to knock down a social barrier: speak to someone before your next class who you normally wouldn't, reach out to an old friend, or even just share a smile as you walk past a stranger.