

**TREATMENT OF THE THEME OF COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE IN  
FROST'S POETRY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO  
HOME BURIAL AND MENDING WALL**

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**Abstract:**

*The main purpose of this article is to analyze the treatment of theme of communication and language in Frost's poetry with special reference to Home Burial and Mending Wall. In Home Burial, the mother cannot reconcile to the fact that she has lost her kid while her husband is forced to realize this bitter truth. Frost has presented this theme of communication excellently and as a result he depicts the real portrayal of a domestic life which is disturbed due to lack of communication. In Mending Wall this theme takes the shape of barrier between the two neighbours. This study investigates the barrier of communication in Home Burial and Mending Wall, which proliferates melancholy, alienation and distressed condition. If there is no harmony between the views of the two individuals, they cannot remain happy and they cannot lead a calm life. Use of harsh language comes to the forefront as a result. Frost as realist has depicted this theme which ultimately generates his other theme of isolation, suffering and conflict.*

**Key Words:** Frost, Home Burial, Mending Wall, Communication and Language,

**Introduction**

Robert Lee Frost estimated himself as an American towering poet among the outstanding Twentieth century poets. He was born in San Francisco California in March 26, 1874. His parents William Prescott Frost and mother Margaret Isabella Moodic had to leave England due to post civil war politics and later on returned England. Events of daily life really influenced him as

a poet and he portrayed every emotion realistically. He opted for the pastoral life as a subject for poetry as he found rustic life profitable as compared to city life. Frost was highly appraised by Ezra Pound, Thomas and other literary figures which further glorified his position. Like Wordsworth, Frost boldly employed 'ordinary' words and cadences (Burnshaw, 2000, pp. 1-15).

Burnshaw (2000) explores that in 1930 Frost won a second Pulitzer Prize for *Collected Poems*--the first had been won by *New Hampshire in 1924* and in the next few years, other prizes and honours, including the Charles Eliot Norton Professorship of Poetry at Harvard. However, when *A Further Range* appeared in 1936, several influential leftist critics, unaware that Frost had "twice been approached" by the *New Masses* "to be their proletarian poet," attacked him for his conservative political views, ignoring the bitter meanings in "Provide, Provide" and such master poems as "*Desert Places*," "*Design*," and "*Neither Out Far nor In Deep*." *A Further Range* earned him a third Pulitzer Prize in May 1937. Ten months later, on 26 March 1938, Elinor died and his world collapsed. Four years before, in the wake of their daughter Marjorie's death, they had helped each other to bear the grief. Alone now, wracked in misery and guilty over his sometimes insensitive behavior toward Elinor, he hoped to find calm through his children, but Lesley's raging's only deepened his pain. For some time, he continued to teach, then resigned his position, sold his Amherst house, and returned to his farm. In July Theodore Morrison invited him to speak at the Breadloaf Writers' Conference in August. Frost's lectures enthralled his listeners, but at times his erratic public behavior drew worried attention. To the great relief of his friends, Kathleen Morrison, the director's wife, stepped in to offer him help with his affairs. He accepted at once and made her his official secretary-manager (para. 18).

In this article the general objective is to analyze the treatment of communication and language in Frost's poetry with special reference to *Home Burial* and *Mending Wall*.

The specific objective is to:

- Examine theme of communication in Home Burial
- Evaluate the lack of communication and its reasons
- Analyze the poem Mending Wall with reference to communication
- Explore the treatment of language in Home Burial and Mending Wall

*Home Burial* begins with a depiction of husband and wife. It describes the difficulty of a wife who cannot reconcile herself to the fact that she has lost her motherhood. The wife, in this story, walks down the stairs she pauses to look over her shoulder at something, but will not tell her husband what. Her husband figures out that she is looking at the child's grave so he climbs the stairs in order to talk her. She avoids her husband as every look at the fresh grave scratches her heart. She feels confined and tries to leave her house. He convinces her to talk to him but his loving arm offers no consolation due to her deep grief. He attempts to tell her bury the past and live for the living but she is unable to comprehend the reality. The poem ends with extreme situation where the wife opens the door to leave the house and the readers are left to the confused guess whether or not she manages to get out.

*Mending Wall* illustrates this barrier between man and man. Two neighbours meet in the spring to repair the wall between them, the narrator asks one of the neighbours the purpose of wall. The answer he gets is: "Good fences make good neighbour". Both neighbours are aware of this fact, but one of them knows that wall is the representation of a barrier between these two individuals.

## Review of Relevant Literature

Kalpakgian, (2013) asserts that in '*Mending Wall*' two men have a serious disagreement about the virtues of a neighbour one insisting good fences make good neighbor a proverbial quote he has inherited from his father that he associates with timeless wisdom. Another holds the view that 'something is there that doesn't love a wall.' These different views maintain clear boundaries that prevent understanding and provoke continuous arguments.

why do they make good neighbours? Isn't it/ where (Frost, 1919, L.29).

He is all pine and I am apple orchard' (Frost, 1919, L.23).

Munaza, et al (2015) in the study "*An Analysis of Home Burial By Frost in Psychoanalytic Perspective*" finds the theme of worldly constraint due to which a man cannot understand the world due to its chaotic look. Barriers of different kind stop man to see the reality and hence it shows his utter incapability.

Kadim, j et al (2009) in his article “*Acute Isolation in the poetry of Robert Frost*” manifests the main theme of his poetry is isolation. All the time the poet finds all alone and perplexed (p.26). He presents the example of “stopping by woods on the Snowy Evening” where the poet finds isolated among the woods. The poet seeks refuge in the silence and says something to communication to hold relationship yet he feels an obligation to seek refuge in isolation (p.28).

Maheswari (2008) observes the universal theme of an individual relation with another man, God, nature and to the world (p.1). Sareen (2012) analyzes the main theme of Frost poetry is that of communication. She highlights that communication in '*Acquainted with the Night*', could have protected the narrator from his seclusion.

The current research finds these grim issues of isolation and sorrowful condition due to the lack of communication. Here the two poems of Robert Frost Home Burial and Mending Wall are taken into consideration.

### **Methodology**

This research is qualitative in nature. The tool of research is its primary and secondary sources. Primary source is Frost's poems '*Mending Wall*' & '*Home Burial*' while the secondary data is available criticism, research articles and reviews on the mentioned poems. All the contents are analyzed critically while focusing on the problem of the treatment of language and communication with reference to '*Mending Wall*' & '*Home Burial*'.

The following questions are kept in mind while proceeding with analysis of Mending Wall and Home Burial:

- Q. What is the treatment of language and communication in Frost's poetry?
- Q. What are the reasons of lack of communication?
- Q. How does the lack of communication lead to misunderstanding?

## DETAILED ANALYSIS OF HOME BURIAL

Frost has presented the natural emotions and feelings of human beings. Here in the poem the talk of every day reflects the story of a couple with their different perceptions. There are many reasons when people fail to communicate. From the context of the poem, melancholy is the major reason which leads the couple to miscommunicate. The wife is standing and observing the grave of a child.

When the husband asks the question “what is it you see?” (Frost, 1915, 5-10) whereas she thinks him ‘a blind creature’ the overwhelmed wife is crippled by the thought that he as an insensate man has dug a grave for the child with his own hands. In the next lines, she says:

“Making the gravel leap and leap in the air,

leap up, like that, like that, and land so lightly (Frost, 1915, p.79-80).

So in the wife's eyes, her husband's grief is absent. She sees him to behave outwardly, but in reality he is forbearing his pangs in another way. His grief does not change his attitude like his wife. She is totally critical in her tone and condemns the style of husband who she considers a blind creature.

The next motive of this lack of communication, which I find as a researcher is, their gender. Amy utters this line. I don't know rightly where any man can.” (Frost, 1915, p. 40). In fact, she is doubtful about her husband that any man would know how to talk about his dead child, which seems unfair. She is offensive in her grief but he is not. This shows her womanishly thinking which creates a gap between the couple. Another evidence further reveals the reality of Amy's gender discrimination.

‘What was it brought you up to think the thing

To take your mother-loss of a first child

So inconsolably.... (Frost, 1915, 66-68).

She contemplates the loss as a mother-loss only. This one-sided view of merely disperses the communication between the couple. It seems unfair. God... A man can't speak of his own

child that's dead" (Frost, 1915, 73-74). This assertion reinforces Amy's extremism which creates problem in their relationship. Things fall apart when people misunderstand each other.

There is nonverbal communication between the couple. Frost highlights about the lady's communication "Her fingers moved the latch for all reply (Frost, 1915, 47). This is the time when her husband calms her but she only moves the latch or stiff her neck.

I don't know how to speak of anything

So as to please you. [...]" (Frost, 1915, 49-50).

This couple's conversation is so stilted that the man feels that he can't speak to his wife at all. These lines put all the blame on her, though we have a feeling that he's partly at fault here, too. In the rest of the poem, he shows us how he pretends to try to listen to and support his wife without making much of a real effort at all (Shmoop Editorial Team, 2008). Amy said to her husband "You can't because you don't know how (Frost, 1915, 75). "How" reflects wife's attack on her husband. Wife blames her husband that he is unable to communicate about the child due to his less grief.

Think of it, talk like that at such a time!" (Frost, 1915, 98).

In this line, the woman reacts to what she believes is yet another instance of how her husband doesn't know how to speak. Right after digging his son's grave, the man talks about birch fences rotting. Now, we can see that rotting actually does have something to do with graves. But if we were this woman, that's definitely *not* talk that we'd want to hear after watching our son's grave be dug (Shmoop Editorial Team, 2008).

"You—oh, you think the talk is all [...]" (Frost, 1915, 116). The wife says this line just after her husband tells her to talk about her grief. If only it worked that way. For this lady, grief is more than just talk. It's buried deep down inside, beyond the reach of language and communication and beyond repair (Shmoop Editorial Team, 2008).

The setting of the poem – a staircase with a door at the bottom and a window at the top – automatically sets up the relationship between the characters. The wife stands at the top of the stairs, directly in front of the window overlooking the graveyard, while the husband stands at the bottom of the stairs, looking up at her. While the couple shares the tragedy of their child's death,

they are in conflicting positions in terms of dealing with their grief (Vincent, Caitlin., 2009). Basically the husband is able to understand the natural cycle of life while her husband grief is misinterpreted by his wife. Husband is realistic in his approach.

## CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MENDING WALL

This poem is the first work in Frost's second book of poetry, "North of Boston," which was published upon his return from England in 1915. While living in England with his family, Frost was exceptionally homesick for the farm in New Hampshire where he had lived with his wife from 1900 to 1909. Despite the eventual failure of the farm, Frost associated his time in New Hampshire with a peaceful, rural sensibility that he instilled in the majority of his subsequent poems. In terms of form, "*Mending Wall*" is not structured with stanzas; it is a simple forty-five lines of first-person narrative. Frost does maintain iambic stresses, but he is flexible with the form in order to maintain the conversational feel of the poem. Instead of any obvious rhyme pattern, he follows the occasional internal rhyme and use of assonance in certain ending terms (such as "wall," "hill," "balls," "well"). The wall is a metaphor for the wall that blocks communication between the speaker and his neighbour (Shmoop Editorial Team, 2008). The speaker utters these line when the poem begins:

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun (Frost, 1915, 1-3)

This word 'something' reveals the unknown person and the mysterious force. The speaker is unable to substantiate his argument against the wall.

Stay where you are until our backs are turned!' (Frost, 1914,19)

The actual dialogue that he presents us with in this poem consists of a proverb 'Good fences make good neighbour,'. The only real communication we know that our speaker and his neighbour engage in doesn't have anything to do with each other, but, rather, with the wall and with the past opinions of others. He will not go behind his father's saying (Frost, 1914, 44) What does it mean to "go behind" a saying or an idea? Is it like going behind someone's back and

doing something that you said you wouldn't do without telling him or her? How is this phrase different from "reject," as in, "He will not *reject* his father's saying?"

To us, "go behind" sounds a bit more secret, and the speaker almost seems like a teenager daring his friend to do something that his parents forbid him to do. The speaker doesn't seem to judge the neighbor for believing in the proverb, but he does seem to judge him for his inability to think outside the box, at least temporarily (Shmoop Editorial Team, 2008). The new fashioned speaker questions the role of wall but old farmer seems to have a deep seated faith in his father's assertion. The speaker holds diametrically different opinion to that of his neighbour.

“Something there is that doesn't love a wall

That wants it down! I could say “Elves” to him

But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather

He said it for himself...” (Frost, 1914, 34-37).

Here the lack of communication between the farmer and the speaker comes through their clash of ideas. They have different perceptions about the presence of a wall. The farmer sees the value of a wall as a result of his father's saying but unable to rationalize his saying whereas the speaker negates it but again from the context of the poem the readers observe that he himself sees the supernatural elements to love the wall.

## Conclusion

The conflict between the individuals and its influence on communication and language comes to the forefront in *Mending Wall* and *Home Burial*. The lady in the poem cannot reunite herself to the fact that she has lost her child while at the same time she considers her husband as insensible person who digs a grave for his own son. At the end her husband brings her to life by force. The husband utters line: I'm not, I'm not (Frost, 1914, 71) .... While readers observe the language of the lady “you can't because you don't know how” (Frost, 1914, 75). The husband in the story implores his wife to share the grief with him. He wants to convince her that in reality he is not as unconcerned as her standing apart from him would make it appear to other people. This is a complete drawback of communication that at times we do not understand reality and fail in making a relation strong. On the contrary, *Mending Wall* presents the universal problem should



we tear down the barriers which discriminate and isolate the people or should we be practical and admit that limitations are necessary for human beings, if we are interested to maintain peace and happiness in the world. This treatment of language and communication establishes Frost as a universal poet. To him, man can live peacefully and happily if there is a mutual understanding between people. Otherwise they will be in constant conflict marring their peace and happiness. However, it is difficult to see it among the modern people. Modern man has been isolated as a result of this conflict and clash of ideas.

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