TEXT 1: “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost

Two roads diverged\* in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could

5 To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,

And having perhaps the better claim\*,

Because it was grassy and wanted wear;

Though as for that the passing there

10 Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay

In leaves no step had trodden\* black.

Oh, I kept the first for another day!

Yet knowing how way leads on to way,

15 I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

20 And that has made all the difference.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| diverged (1): Man, that don’t mean nothing ‘cept that those two ways separated | claim (7): an assertion of the truth of something, typically one that is disputed or in doubt | trodden (12): walked upon |

TEXT 2: “October” by Robbie Frost

O hushed October morning mild,

Thy leaves have ripened to the fall;

Tomorrow’s wind, if it be wild,

Should waste them all.

5 The crows above the forest call;

Tomorrow they may form and go.

O hushed October morning mild,

Begin the hours of this day slow.

Make the day seem to us less brief.

10 Hearts not averse\* to being beguiled\*,

Beguile us in the way you know.

Release one leaf at break of day;

At noon release another leaf;

One from our trees, one far away.

15 Retard\* the sun with gentle mist;

Enchant the land with amethyst\*.

Slow, slow!

For the grapes’ sake, if they were all,

Whose leaves already are burnt with frost,

20 Whose clustered fruit must else be lost—

For the grapes’ sake along the wall.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| averse (10): having an opposition to or a dislike for | beguiled (10): to be deceived. An older form (rarely used any more) of “beguile” means to help pass the time pleasantly. | Retard (15): the literal definition here of the word in its verb form means to delay or slow down or hold back | amethyst (16): a purplish tinted gem. The word’s Latin roots denote to make drunk or to intoxicate. |

TEXT 3: "Reluctance" by Robert Frost

Out through the fields and the woods

   And over the walls I have wended\*;

I have climbed the hills of view

   And looked at the world, and descended;

5 I have come by the highway home,

   And lo, it is ended.

The leaves are all dead on the ground,

   Save those that the oak is keeping

To ravel them one by one

10   And let them go scraping and creeping

Out over the crusted snow,

   When others are sleeping.

And the dead leaves lie huddled and still,

   No longer blown hither and thither;

15 The last lone aster\* is gone;

   The flowers of the witch hazel wither\*;

The heart is still aching to seek,

   But the feet question "Whither\*?"

Ah, when to the heart of man

20   Was it ever less than a treason

To go with the drift of things,

   To yield with a grace to reason,

And bow and accept the end

   Of a love or a season?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Wended (2): to travel | aster (15): a purple flower  witch hazel (16): yellow flower | Whither: an old way of saying “to what place” or “to which place” |  |

TEXT 4: Fire and Ice by Robert Frost

        Some say the world will end in fire,

Some say in ice.

From what I’ve tasted of desire

I hold with those who favor fire.

5 But if it had to perish twice,

I think I know enough of hate

To say that for destruction ice

Is also great

And would suffice.

Frost was born someplace, married someone, probably other people died, then he moved to England.

“Frost’s Life and Career” by William H. Pritchard

The most important friend [Frost] made in England was Edward Thomas, whom Frost encouraged to write poetry and who wrote sharply intelligent reviews of Frost's first two books. While many reviewers were content to speak of the American poet's “simplicity” and artlessness, Thomas recognized the originality and success of Frost's experiments with the cadences of vernacular speech--with what Frost called “the sound of sense.” His best early poems, such as “Mowin,” “Mending Wall,” 5 and “Home Burial,” were composed under the assumption that, in Frost's formulation from one of his letters, “*the ear does it*. The ear is the only true writer and the only true reader.” The best part of a poet's work, he insisted, was to be found in the sentence-sounds poems made, as of people talking. [ . . . ]

England's entry into the First World War hastened Frost's return to America early in 1915. [ . . . ] A third volume of verse, *Mountain Interval,*[was] published in 1916 but still [drew] on poems he had written in England and before, showed 10 no falling off from his previous standard. In fact such poems as “The Road Not Taken,” “An Old Man's Winter Night,” “The Oven Bird,” “Birches,” “Putting in the Seed,” and “Out, Out” were among the best he had written or was to write. [ . . . ] [Frost’s poems] remained earthbound [ . . .] and, like the poet who created him, sang about the things of this world.

Soon after he re-established himself in America, [ . . . . ] [Frost began] the practice of reading his poems aloud-- rather, “saying” them, as he liked to put it public gatherings. These occasions, which continued throughout his life, were often 15 intensive ones in which he would read, comment on, and reflect largely about his poems and about the world in general. Particularly at colleges and universities he commanded the ears and often hearts of generations of students, and he received so many honorary degrees from the academy that he eventually had the hoods made into a quilt. [ . . . ]

During the 1930s, as he became ever more honored and revered, Frost endured a terrible series of family disasters. In 1934 his youngest and best-loved child, Marjorie, died a slow death from the puerperal fever contracted after giving birth to her 20 first child; in 1938 his wife Elinor died suddenly of a heart attack, then, when he seemed to be pulling things together once more, his son Carol committed suicide in 1940. Another daughter, Irma, suffered--as did Frost's sister Jeannie--from mental disorders and was finally institutionalized. A number of poems in*A* *Witness Tree*undoubtedly derived their dark tone from the family tragedies suffered over the decade; but at any rate lyrics such as “The Silken Tent,” “I Could Give All to Time,” “Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same,” and “The Most of It'\” stand in the top rank of Frost's work (he himself 25 thought that some of his best poetry was contained in this book). In words from his prose essay “The Figure a Poem Makes,” they exhibit both “how a poem can have wildness and at the same time a subject that shall be fulfilled.” [ . . .]

While standing apart from the modernist work of his famous contemporaries--Eliot, Pound, Stevens--his own poetry, in its complication of tone and its delicate balancing of gravity and wit (“I am never more serious than when joking,” he said more than once), asks for constant vigilance on the reader's part: a listening ear for the special postures of speech and the 30 dramatic effects of silences. Like the works of his great predecessor, Emerson, Frost's poetry has never been sufficiently appreciated in England, the country which gave him his start. This neglect may be in part a reaction to the rather promiscuous admiration he inspired from so many different sorts of American readers (and non-readers), many of whom would have no time for Eliot or Stevens. But if, for some Americans, the homely nature of Frost's materials--cows, apples, and snow-covered woods—predisposes them to like his poetry, such readers are no more narrow than the 'cosmopolitan' 35 ones who accept mythical allusions in Eliot or Pound but disdain stone walls as a fit vehicle for serious poetry. Frost's own formulation to an American friend in 1914 is helpful in thinking about his achievement: he told the friend, Sidney Cox, that the true poet's pleasure lay in making “his own words as he goes” rather than depending upon words whose meanings were fixed: “We write of things we see and we write in accents we hear. Thus we gather both our material and our technique with the imagination from life; and our technique becomes as much material as material itself.” It was this 40 principle that Pound saluted in Frost when, in his review of *North of Boston*, he remarked conclusively: “I know more of farm life than I did before I had read his poems. That means I know more of ‘Life’.”

From *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-century Poetry in English*. Copyright © 1994 by Oxford University Press.

1. Using this passage, write a paragraph that accurately describes Frost’s poetic style. Be sure to integrate quotes from the article to support your analysis.

2. Several poems are mentioned in this bio. Pick one of the poems (at random or whatever). Look it up on the interwebby, read it, analyze, write a paragraph of analysis for it.