

that so it is with love and loneliness and joy and grief, going to live again in some other spring.

I met Joe's tragic eyes. Perhaps if I told Joe this it might help him through Christmas Day and all the other days that were to come. We began to walk in the snow. Somehow, I knew as we walked along the words would come.



Robert Frost

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OF THE contemporary poets, I think Robert Frost is the best. Now, I'm no judge of poetry; in fact, a good deal of the time I can't even figure out what the poet is driving at. But, after reading over the produce of the cream-of-the-crop of modern verse vendors, I've come to the conclusion that this Frost fellow tops them all.

I've been wondering what there is about Frost's work that can make it appealing to a guy like me who doesn't know art from apples. One reason, I think, is that he writes in a language that I can understand. You don't have to read every author from Home on down and memorize the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in order to get the drift of his poems. No frills, no abstract phrases, no poetic ornamentation clutter up the paths of his expression. It's the simple language of New England; it's clear, and it's straightforward. Take, for instance, this bit from "Two Tramps in Mud Time."

"Only where love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes,
Is the deed ever really done
For Heaven and the future's sake."

SEE? I get some sense out of that. But it isn't just the language that makes Mr. Frost's work great, because almost anyone can write little verses about the bees, birds, and buttercups in much the same sort of simple diction. It's the way he uses that language, the way he combines the words of everyday speech to create a picture that is clear-cut and vivid—a picture that sticks—

that classes his poetry as art. I can give you an example of that, too; take a look at this:

“The weight of an axhead poised aloft,
The grip on earth of outspread feet,
The life of muscles rocking soft
And smooth and moist in vernal heat.”

When I read those lines I almost feel as if I were swinging that ax. I like Mr. Frost's poems for the images he paints in my imagination. The potency of those images gives his poetry power; and power, I am told, makes for art.

Mr. Frost doesn't wander far from his beloved hills of New Hampshire for subject matter. He can't, because it's the impression of intimate association with the soil and with nature and with rural life that makes his poems so effective. And that fact leaves him pretty wide open for criticism. Some folks can't see any reason for a person's writing about snowy woods and stone walls in a day of sit-down strikes, traffic jams, isms, flying fortresses, and vitamin pills. Most modern poets seem to think they have to include the various troubles of modern life in their work in order to make it authentic. Robert Frost doesn't think so. He gets around the complexities of the machine age by ignoring it.

HOWEVER, in ignoring the industrialism of his times, Mr. Frost is not ignoring men's fundamental problems and motives. He knows that a New England farmer is as much a human being as a Wall Street executive, and that both have the same fundamental likes and dislikes, the same instincts, the same evils. He also knows that the life of the former is by far the least complex, and thus he chooses to approach his studies of life from the angle of the Yankee farmer. In "The Tuft of Flowers," Mr. Frost superbly describes a feeling of brotherhood which is universal—it is a feeling which men can possess whether working in a hay field, boiler factory, grocery store, machine-gun crew, or the Sahara Desert. It's basic, as are most of Robert Frost's poems. He knows that rural New England won't change for a while, and that nature and the soil will never change. So he puts his poems on that rock-bottom basis.

That's why I think Robert Frost has it all over on those other fellows—his work is enduring. It'll never go out of date. I don't know much about poetry, but that's my guess.