

Robert Frost's Poetry & Poetic Style: Read and annotate each Frost poem.

Frost's poetic art contrives a relationship between dramatic intonation and 'accents of sense.' He regards meter, **dramatic sense** and **traditional ordering of stresses** as essential factors for good poetry. His language conveys **conversational tones of meaning**. He is a master of native speech, **syntax**, **drama**, and **meter**. He fills **iambic** with **colloquial** color and the flow of his **dialectical speech**. This simple kind of speech expresses a **wide variety of emotion and experience**. His conception of the sentence is central to his poetic theory and his phonological approach gives a **subtle connection between structure and meaning**. Also, he frequently employs: **synecdoche**, **epigram**, **rhyme**, **parable/anecdote**, **repetition** and **disjunction**.

His poetry achieves unity and coherence through his use of several controlling images which are occasional **metaphors** and **similes** that frequently appear intensifying and shaping the body of his whole work. He uses both literal and nonfigurative **imagery**. Often there is an **antithesis** revealed through a contrasting pair of images which represent the conflict between imagination and reality. Some images reveal his attraction to detached thought and natural elements (e.g. poverty, fire, flowers, darkness, birds, the human body, the sea, and ice).

Birches (1916) ^{plural} starting in present #1 (transitions=4) → * a journey of sorts

* Short, simple as it stands (like trees)

enjambment lines 5-9 encourages reader to continue who pause which changes how opening words are stressed

Shift

Simile

transition

wish

majority in **iambic pentameter** but primarily **Blank verse** = unrhymed + iambic pent.

(When I see birches bend to left and right
 Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
 I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
 But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay
 As ice-storms do. Often you (must have seen) them
 Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
 After a rain. They click upon themselves
 As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
 As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
 Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
 Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust—
 Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
 You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.
 They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,
 And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed
 So low for long, they never right themselves:
 You may see their trunks arching in the woods
 Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
 Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
 Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.
 But I was going to say when Truth broke in
 With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm
 I should prefer to have some boy bend them
 As he went out and in to fetch the cows—
 Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,

1
 5
 moving on into the past #2 - casual assumption

14
 = lines 14-20 full of prepositions signifying end of ice storm

* Boy's game as dream = metaphor

- * a journey of sorts
- * Speaker's relationship to the Truth = into
- 3 aspects:
 - 1) naturalistic (ice effects on birch)
 - 2) personal (boy conquer. tree)
 - 3) philosophical (bal. bet. reality & idealism)

* **Contrasts** the Truth of natural effects w/ imagination

* **extended metaphor** = Birches represent (creative) life itself, their flexibility to support, + come back down to reality + enjoy odd moments of freedom (Swing a little)

* tree is both life giver & life threatener = **biblical + mythological**; tree is a vehicle for transcendence

repetition - **Blank verse** = unrhymed + iambic pent. swings thr. rhythm/meter art mimics subject

Whose only play was what he found himself,
 Summer or winter, and could play alone.
 One by one he subdued his father's trees
 By riding them down over and over again
 Until he took the stiffness out of them,
 And not one but hung limp, not one was left
 For him to conquer. He learned all there was
 To learn about not launching out too soon
 And so not carrying the tree away
 Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise
 To the top branches, climbing carefully
 With the same pains you use to fill a cup
 Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
 Then he fung outward, feet first, with a swish,
 Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.

27

* underlined words = internal consonance & alliteration

* swinging on branches is akin to climb to heaven + if one's not careful something might give (fall)
 * Two forces are capable of achieving meaning (life + death) (nature vs. man)
 symbolic

So was I once myself a swinger of birches.

40

41

(And so I dream) of going back to be.
 It's when I'm weary of considerations,
 And life is too much like a pathless wood
 Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
 Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
 From a twig's having lashed across it open.

difficult to navigate simile imagery

(I'd like to get away) from earth awhile
 And then come back to it and begin over.
 May no fate willfully misunderstand me
 And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
 Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
 I don't know where it's likely to go better.

reincarnation want to stay on earth - visit heaven, but return

I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
 And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
 Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
 But dipped its top and set me down again.
 That would be good both going and coming back.
 One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

53

59

risks outweigh danger / it's worth it adventure

* lines 41-53 = speaker declares himself a swinger of birches thr. pyrrhics + amphibrachs (the rhythm changes)

amphibrachs, feminine syllab...
 * trochees, spondees
 L & pyrrhics = prevalent thr. poem - very technically masterful

* pliable, malleable quality of birch is inspiration for meditation - speaker becomes philosopher

* musical texture, repetition, clever alliteration & internal rhyme = great out loud poem

* some have interpret. poem as extended sexual metaphor "swinging" / "love" / "conquering" / "riding" / "girls" = "earth is the right place for (sexual) love" "out and in" (or) for extended metaphor writing poetry

* nature vs. man; the mind seeking out metaphors + meaning in nature/rural scene; testing limits = irony = man's meaning imposed on the landscape

#3 before revisiting the present

#4 and en w/ future wishes

death