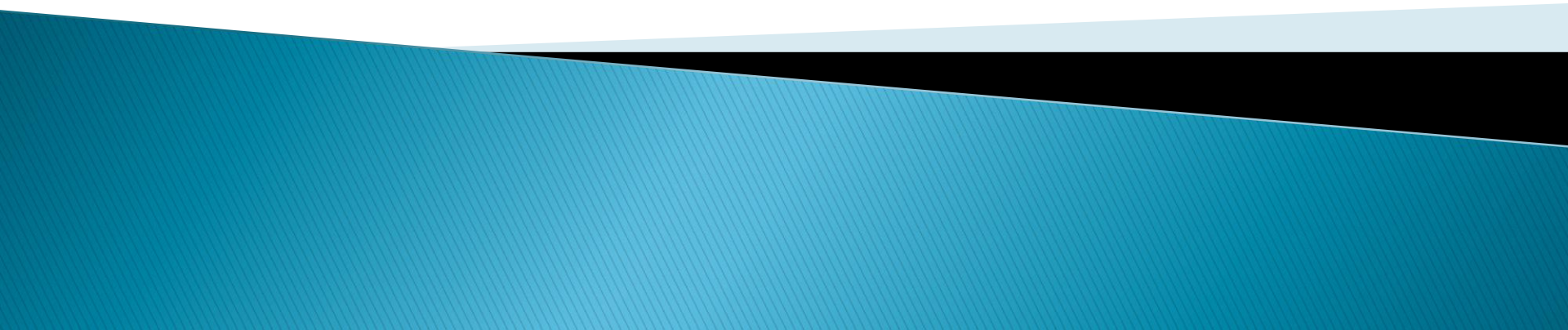


Home Burial

Robert Frost



Robert Frost

Genre

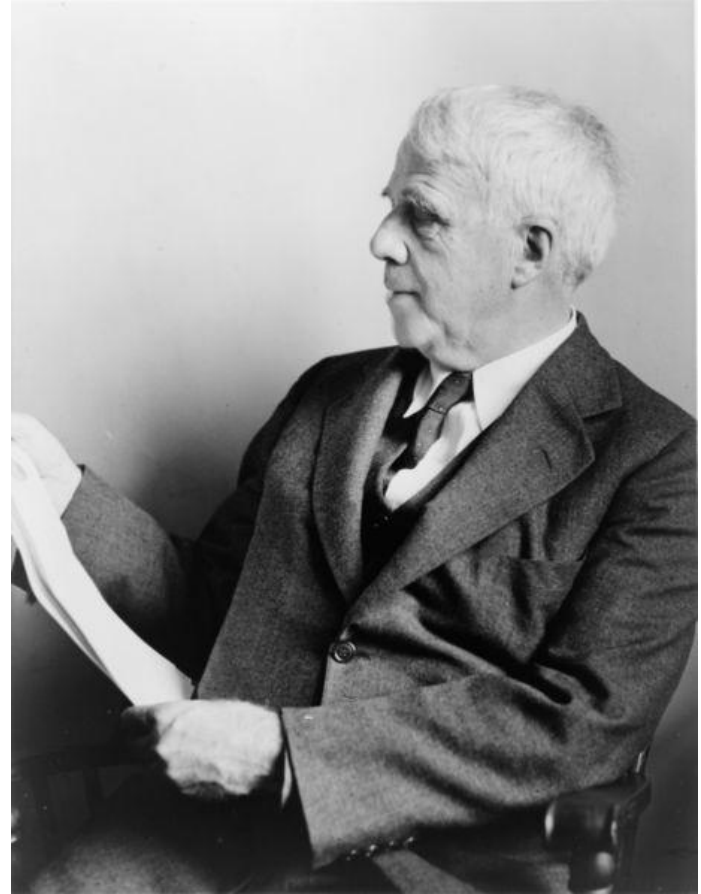
- ▶ Poetry
- ▶ Plays

Style

- ▶ Regional realism

Pulitzer Prize

- ▶ 1924 – *New Hampshire: A Poem with Notes and Grace Notes*
- ▶ 1931 – *Collected Poems*
- ▶ 1937 – *A Further Range*
- ▶ 1943 – *A Witness Tree*



Robert Frost (1874–1963)

Born in San Francisco, Frost, along with his family, moved to Massachusetts when he was eight after his father's death. He lived in New England for the remainder of his life, except for a three-year period when he lived in England.

Unable to support his wife and children as a poet, Frost taught English and wrote poetry in his spare time.

Frost's life was marked by tragedy. Both his parents



died while he was still young. He outlived several of his children, and his wife died of cancer. This may be why much of his poetry has often unrecognized underlying tones of pessimism and menacing undertones.

Home Burial

Background

First published in 1930, “Home Burial” represented a truly new poetic genre: an extended dramatic exercise in the natural speech rhythms of a region’s people, from the mouths of common, yet vivid, characters.

The poem is loosely based on the death of the poet’s son, which seriously affected his parents’ marriage. Although they never divorced, their marriage was never the same afterwards. Frost, like the unnamed farmer, eventually came to terms with the child’s death. However, his wife, like Amy, was never able to accept it and, at times, referred to the world as “evil.”



Home Burial (published 1930)

Summary

The poem presents a few moments of charged dialogue in a strained relationship between a rural husband and wife who have lost a child. The woman is distraught after catching sight of the child's grave through the window – and more so when her husband doesn't immediately recognize the cause of her distress. She tries to leave the house; he begs her to stay, for once, and share her grief with him – to give him a chance. He cannot understand what it is he does that offends her or why she should grieve outwardly so long. She resents him deeply for his composure, what she sees as his hard-heartedness. She vents some of her anger and frustration, and he receives it, but the distance between them remains. She opens the door to leave, as he calls after her.



Home Burial

Style

1. Dramatic narrative largely in the form of dialogue
2. Written in blank verse



Home Burial

Conflict

1. Internal: Both parents mourn the death of their child.
2. External: The couple disagree about how to grieve for their child.



Home Burial

Setting

1. Location: Staircase of a rural home
2. Time: After the death of the unnamed farmer and Amy's child
3. Mood: Dark, pessimistic



Home Burial

Characters

1. Unnamed farmer
2. Amy, the unnamed farmer's wife



Home Burial

Unnamed farmer

The unnamed farmer has accepted the death of his child. Time has passed, and he may be more likely now to say, “That’s the way of the world,” than, “The world’s evil.” He does grieve, but the outward indications of his grief are quite different from those of his wife. He threw himself into the horrible task of digging his child’s grave (into physical work). This action further associates the father with a “way-of-the-world” mentality, with the cycles that make up the farmer’s life, and with an organic view of life and death. The father did not leave the task of burial to someone else, instead, he physically dug into the earth and planted his child’s body in the soil.



Home Burial

Amy

Amy's grief infuses every part of her and does not wane with time. She has been compared to a female character in Frost's *A Masque of Mercy*, of whom another character says, "She's had some loss she can't accept from God." The wife remarks that most people make only pretense of following a loved one to the grave, when in truth their minds are "making the best of their way back to life / And living people, and things they understand." She, however, will neither accept this kind of grief nor turn from the grave back to the world of living, for to do so is to accept the death. Instead she declares that "the world's evil."



Home Burial

Imagery & Symbolism

Frost freights his sparse words with much meaning, often subtle, sometimes symbolic. When he talks of rotting birch wood, Amy says only that his comment has nothing to do with their child's body when it was "in the darkened parlour." The astute reader, however, will connect wood rot with human decomposition. When the husband compares the graveyard to a bedroom in size, he is being harmlessly literal. The reader, however, will think that Amy is recalling with displeasure the bedroom in which their child was conceived.

The stairway should be a place where the two might walk together, connecting levels of shared living; instead, it is merely a stage where



Home Burial

Imagery & Symbolism (cont.)

body language reinforces the poem's words. Amy silently spies on her husband through the window instead of calling and waving to him. He climbs the stairs until his nearness makes her "cower...under him," at which he promises not to "come down the stairs." Frost intends a pun when the husband complains that his words to Amy "are nearly always an offence." Truly the two are fenced apart, by words and acts.



Home Burial

Themes

1. The breakdown and limits of communication
2. The death of a child
3. The collapse of a marriage

