

Good-bye, and Keep Cold

By Robert Frost

This saying good-bye on the edge of the dark
And cold to an orchard so young in the bark
Reminds me of all that can happen to harm
 An orchard away at the end of the farm
 All winter, cut off by a hill from the house.
I don't want it girdled by rabbit and mouse,
I don't want it dreamily nibbled for browse
By deer, and I don't want it budded by grouse.
 (If certain it wouldn't be idle to call
I'd summon grouse, rabbit, and deer to the wall
And warn them away with a stick for a gun.)
I don't want it stirred by the heat of the sun.
 (We made it secure against being, I hope,
 By setting it out on a northerly slope.)
No orchard's the worse for the wintriest storm;
But one thing about it, it mustn't get warm.
 'How often already you've had to be told,
Keep cold, young orchard. Good-bye and keep cold.
Dread fifty above more than fifty below.'
I have to be gone for a season or so.
My business awhile is with different trees,
Less carefully nourished, less fruitful than these,
And such as is done to their wood with an axe--
 Maples and birches and tamaracks.
I wish I could promise to lie in the night
And think of an orchard's arboreal plight
When slowly (and nobody comes with a light)
 Its heart sinks lower under the sod.
But something has to be left to God

CLASS DISCUSSION - PROMPT QUESTIONS:

1. What are your first reactions to the title of the poem?
 - Who did you think the poem was being written to before you read it?
 - How did you feel when you learned what Frost was speaking to? What else might he have been speaking to?
2. How do you first think Frost feels about this goodbye (up to line 5)?
 - How do you first feel when you know you have to say good-bye to something or someone for a long period of time?
 - What is the significance of the orchard being 'cut off by a hill from the house' (line 5)?
 - What types of things can come between us and another person in a relationship like the hill does between the speaker and the orchard?
3. Why doesn't the speaker want the animals in the orchard?
 - How old do you think the orchard is?
 - How does this affect how the speaker feels about the orchard?
 - What bearing does time have on our relationships with those people/things that we care about?
4. What does the speaker imply when he says he would warn the animals away with a 'stick for a gun' (line 11)?
 - What does it say about he feels about the life of the animals?
 - Why is this important about what the speaker is trying to say about the quality of life and the importance of the orchard to him?
5. What do you learn about apple orchard care-taking in lines 12-16?
 - How does the speaker treat the orchard when speaking to it (lines 17-19)?
 - In what type of relationships do people speak to each other in this way? Why?
6. What time of the year does the speaker indicate it is?
 - How does the speaker seem to feel about this?
 - Whose apple orchard is this?
 - How does he feel about attending to the other trees (line 21)? How do you know?
 - Can you relate to the speaker's circumstance?

- How do you feel when you have an obligation to do something that you prefer not to? What types of things are these?
7. What is it that is to be done to the other trees (lines 23-24)? For what purpose?
- What is so different about these trees and the apple trees? In care? In significance? In utility?
 - How do we treat differently those things that do not intrigue us as much as others? Why?
8. Why doesn't the speaker promise to think about the orchard at night? What else might he be doing?
- How does distance affect our relationships?
 - What can you do to ease the distance? What could the speaker do?
9. What do you think "arboreal" (line 26) means?
- How do you feel when you are out of touch with a friend for a while?
 - Are the speaker and the orchard friends?
 - What does it mean to be friends?
10. What significance does the fact that the speaker gives the orchard a heart (line 28) have on the poem?
- Whose heart do you think the speaker was thinking of when he gave it to the orchard?
 - How does it make you feel to think that the orchard has a heart?
 - What does it do for you to think of everything around us as having a heart? How do/should you treat things that have a heart? Things that don't? Is there a difference? Why/why not?
11. How does the speaker resolve the fact that he has to leave (line 29)?
- What is Frost saying about nature by leaving it to God?
 - What is he saying about the way life can be?
 - Can you think of any situations that you have to leave to be taken care of by somebody else?
 - What does this say about man and nature? Man and man? In what ways do we need each other? Why?
 - Can you think of any situations going on in the world today that can relate to the way the speaker feels?