My November Guest

POEM TEXT

My sorrow, when she's here with me,
Thinks these dark days of autumn rain
Are beautiful as days can be;
She loves the bare, the withered tree;
She walks the sodden pasture lane.

Her pleasure will not let me stay.
She talks and I am fain to list:
She's glad the birds are gone away,
She's glad her simple worsted grey
Is silver now with clinging mist.

The desolate, deserted trees,
The faded earth, the heavy sky,
The beauties she so truly sees,
She thinks I have no eye for these,
And vexes me for reason why.

Not yesterday I learned to know
The love of bare November days
Before the coming of the snow,
But it were vain to tell her so,
And they are better for her praise.

SUMMARY

When my deep sadness comes to visit me, she finds the gloomy, rainy days of fall quite lovely. She's drawn to the stark, shriveled trees as she wanders down the soggy path through the field.

The delight she takes in the setting convinces me to join her. I'm happy to listen as she speaks. She's happy that the birds have migrated for the season, and she loves how the mist sticks to the wool of her plain, grey clothes, making them glitter like silver.

The lonely, abandoned trees, the colorless landscape with its murky sky hanging above—she's able to fully appreciate the beauty in all this yet thinks I'm immune to it, and she pesters me for an explanation.

Yet, I *have* recently discovered a fondness for the simple, sparse loveliness of the fall, in the days before the first snow. I just don't see the point in telling her—after all, the autumn seems all the more charming in light of her admiration for it.

THEMES

THE BEAUTY OF SORROW

The speaker of "My November Guest" personifies "sorrow" as a woman who delights in autumn's gloomy beauty. As the speaker walks with this "guest" through the dark, rainy countryside, she revels in the barren landscape and urges the speaker to appreciate fall's muted splendor as well. The speaker admits that they do in fact "have [an] eye" for November's "beauties," but doesn't see the point in telling her, as her vehement admiration only renders them all the more appealing. The poem thus suggests the value of making room for sadness and grief, emotions that can add unexpected beauty and richness to life.

The speaker compares their "sorrow" to a welcome "guest" who convinces the speaker to go on walks despite the grey, drizzly weather. As "She walks the sodden pasture lane" (or a soaking meadow path), the speaker says, "Her pleasure will not let me stay." That is, because the speaker's *sorrow* is so enamored by the "dark days of autumn rain," the speaker, too, feels compelled to wander around outside.

While the speaker might normally prefer a warm, sunny day, sadness makes them appreciate "the bare" and "withered tree." Indeed, in this sorrowful state of mind, the speaker finds these "mist[y]" days as "beautiful as days can be." That the speaker has come to admire autumn "Not yesterday" (or no sooner than yesterday) suggests that it was sorrow herself who taught the speaker to see the beauty in the dark and dreary world.

Sorrow, for her part, thinks the speaker doesn't appreciate the splendor of the "faded earth, the heavy sky," and she pesters the speaker to explain "why" this is so. In reality, the speaker *has* begun to "know / The love of bare November days." The speaker just doesn't want to tell "sorrow" this, because her attempts to convince the speaker of fall's bleak beauty only deepen the speaker's own appreciation of the quiet landscape.

In this way, the poem implies that by indulging one's sorrow (i.e., treating it like a welcome "guest" and listening to it "talk[]"), one can learn more about the world and oneself. Though it may be hard to let it in, sadness and grief are ultimately teachers: through them, one can find unanticipated beauty and joy.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Lines 2-3
- Lines 6-10
- Lines 13-15

- Lines 16-20

THE SOLACE OF NATURE

In addition to asserting the power of sorrow, “My November Guest” also illustrates the value of connecting with the natural world. Though the poem doesn’t specify what has caused the speaker's “sorrow,” it's clear that going outside and taking a walk through the countryside eases the speaker's mind and lifts their spirits. The speaker finds nature comforting not because it distracts them from their “sorrow,” but because it seems to *reflect* it. It's as if these "bare November days" were grieving *with* the speaker, making them feel less alone.

Forlorn, the speaker takes a walk through the countryside and is drawn to its “desolate” beauty. The speaker isn't being drawn in by a bright, sparkling, summer landscape, however. Instead, the speaker is enchanted by “sodden” paths, the absence of birdsong, the “mist [clinging]” to their clothes, and the “deserted trees.”

All this gloominess actually seems to make the speaker less sad, perhaps because such a landscape *acknowledges* the speaker's sorrow. Indeed, nature's beauty doesn’t make the speaker's pain go away; it simply *reflects* it. The speaker says that their “sorrow [...] / Thinks these dark days of autumn rain” are lovely. This suggests that the speaker finds the “bare” and “withered tree[s]” and “faded earth” appealing *because* they're feeling dejected. The “dark[ness]” and “heav[iness]” of autumn resonate with the speaker’s bleak state of mind, seemingly expressing their sadness and isolation. Nature seems to mirror the speaker's innermost self, ultimately making the speaker feel a little less dejected and alone. The speaker comes to “love” the “bare[ness]” of the season, in part because the speaker feels like they're *part* of this landscape. Seeing themselves in the world makes the speaker's sadness more bearable.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 2-5
- Line 8
- Lines 11-12
- Lines 16-18

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-3

My sorrow, when she’s here with me,
Thinks these dark days of autumn rain
Are beautiful as days can be;

"My November Guest" begins with the speaker personifying their "sorrow" as a woman who has come to visit. Treating sorrow as a "guest" implies that the speaker isn't always sad (and that this "sorrow" is something *separate* from the speaker rather than an inherent part of who they are). When this sorrow does swing by, however, "she" makes the speaker see the world differently.

That's because the speaker's sorrow "Thinks these dark days of autumn rain / Are as beautiful as days can be." In other words, the speaker thinks that the gloomy, rainy days of fall are just as lovely as anything else. Diacope (the repetition of the word "days") creates a pleasing rhythm while simultaneously emphasizing the fact that these "days" are both "dark" *and* "beautiful." The pounding /d/ alliteration in "dark days" adds emphasis to this phrase, which describes both the weather and the "dark[ness]" of the speaker's thoughts and feelings. It's as if the countryside is mirroring the speaker's *inner* landscape.

The poem is written in iambic tetrameter. This means that each line contains four iambs, poetic feet made up of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable: da-DUM. Here's the first line, for example:

My sor- | row, when | she's here | with me,

The meter stays very regular throughout the poem, lending it a familiar, predictable rhythm. This steadiness, in turn, suggests both the understated loveliness of the season and the speaker's thoughtful, contemplative state of mind.

That said, there is a minor variation on this meter in line 2:

Thinks these | dark days | of aut- | umn rain

By replacing the second iamb with a spondee (two stressed syllables in a row), Frost ensures that the phrase "dark days" stands out even more to the reader's ear.

LINES 4-5

She loves the bare, the withered tree;
She walks the sodden pasture lane.

The speaker's sorrow "loves the bare, the withered tree" and goes out ahead of the speaker to "walk[] the sodden pasture lane." Again, the speaker's sorrow seems to have a mind of its own; like a woman delighting in the "beaut[y]" of nature, it follows its *own* whims rather than the speaker's.

The poet uses clear yet striking imagery to evoke the stark beauty of the autumn landscape. Everything is stripped of life and vibrancy; the trees are naked and gnarled, and the path through the field is soggy with rain. None of this deters the speaker's sorrow, however; this "guest" clearly delights in the dreary countryside.

Listen to the anaphora in lines 4-5:

She loves the bare, the withered tree;
She walks the sodden pasture lane.

The repetition of "She" highlights the way that the speaker's metaphorical "Guest" sees things: it is the speaker's sorrow that enjoys this damp, cheerless countryside, rather than the speaker themselves (at least, for now).

Line 4 is another line of perfect iambic tetrameter:

She loves | the bare, | the with- | ered tree;

Had Frost written this line even slightly differently ("She loves the bare, withered tree") he would have created a hiccup in the poem's smooth rhythm. Note, too, how asyndeton (the lack of any coordinating conjunction between these descriptions of the tree) suggests that "bare" and "withered" are just two of an endless array of adjectives the speaker might have chosen to describe this landscape.

By the end of this stanza, readers have a clear sense of the poem's ABAAB rhyme scheme: the first, third, and fourth lines of each stanza rhyme with one another, as do the second and fifth lines. In this stanza, "me," "be," and "tree" rhyme, as do "rain" and "lane." All of the poem's end rhymes are exact, filling the poem with clear, steady music. This music, in turn, helps to convey the very pleasure that the speaker's sorrow feels.

LINES 6-10

Her pleasure will not let me stay.
She talks and I am fain to list:
She's glad the birds are gone away,
She's glad her simple worsted grey
Is silver now with clinging mist.

Watching personified sorrow take so much "pleasure" in the grim beauty of the barren countryside, the speaker finds themselves unable to "stay" behind. Instead, they follow along in sorrow's footsteps, "fain to list" (or happy to listen) to her "talk." The language is noticeably lyrical and self-consciously *poetic* here; even in Frost's day, the phrase "fain to list" would have sounded a bit outdated.

The rich sounds of these lines add to the beauty of their imagery. There's alliteration ("glad," "gone," "grey"), sibilance ("simple," "worsted," "silver," "mist"), and assonance ("simple," "Is silver," "clinging mist"), which together evoke the ethereal beauty of this quiet landscape:

She's glad the birds are gone away,
She's glad her simple worsted grey
Is silver now with clinging mist.

Note the use of rhythmic anaphora in lines 7-9 as well:

She talks and I am fain to list:
She's glad the birds are gone away,
She's glad her simple worsted grey

This again emphasizes that it is the speaker's *sorrow*, and not the speaker themselves, that is reveling in the absence of birdsong and the damp air "clinging" to clothes. The speaker is witnessing their sorrow's pleasure as if it were separate from their own emotions, slowly convincing the speaker that there's something rather delightful about this murky landscape. The fact that the "mist" turns the "worsted" (or wool) fabric of sorrow's "grey" clothes "silver" (that is, it the drops of mist make her clothes shine and glitter) suggests that there's a certain kind of magic to fall if one knows how to see it.

Of course, the speaker's sorrow isn't *really* a separate person; it's implied that the speaker *themselves* is torn. Part of the speaker, it seems, is grumpy about the weather and wants to stay home; the other part—the speaker's sorrowful side—finds the quiet, empty countryside appealing because it resonates with how the speaker feels. In this way, the poem begins to suggest the way that nature's solitude paradoxically makes the speaker feel less alone.

LINES 11-15

The desolate, deserted trees,
The faded earth, the heavy sky,
The beauties she so truly sees,
She thinks I have no eye for these,
And vexes me for reason why.

The speaker uses more vivid imagery to describe the landscape, which is marked by seemingly abandoned trees, muted colors, and dark, threatening clouds. The heavy alliteration of "desolate, deserted" emphasizes how empty and forlorn things seem in the absence of color, vibrance, and life. These lines are also an example of pathetic fallacy, as the speaker seems to project their own loneliness and dejection onto the natural world. At the same time, however, it's the speaker's sadness that allows the speaker to appreciate the countryside. The speaker's sorrow "truly sees" the "beauties" of the autumn gloom.

Notice the way that anaphora and asyndeton contribute rhythm and momentum to the first three lines of the stanza:

The desolate, deserted trees,
The faded earth, the heavy sky,
The beauties she so truly sees,

The repetition and lack of coordinating conjunctions suggest that these "beauties" are practically endless. The speaker's sorrow keeps being drawn to different aspects of this lonely, haunting environment, although "She thinks [the speaker] ha[s] no eye for" them. In other words, the speaker's sorrow thinks the speaker can't appreciate the loveliness of the landscape,

and she "vexes" (or pesters) the speaker for an explanation. She simply can't understand how anyone could not love all this gloomy weather.

Of course, the speaker's sorrow isn't really a "guest" who exists separately from the speaker themselves; this sorrow is the speaker's own emotion. The speaker is dramatizing how feeling sorrow changes their perception of the world.

LINES 16-20

Not yesterday I learned to know
The love of bare November days
Before the coming of the snow,
But it were vain to tell her so,
And they are better for her praise.

The speaker's sorrow thinks that the speaker can't appreciate the "dark days of autumn rain." In the poem's final stanza, however, the speaker insists that they do, in fact, "have [an] eye for" autumn's "beauties."

Admittedly, the speaker only developed this appreciation recently; it was "Not yesterday," or no sooner than yesterday, that the speaker discovered "The love of bare November days / Before the coming of the snow." Only when the speaker's sorrow came to visit did the speaker learn to admire autumn's somber hues.

Were it not for this inner heaviness, the poem implies, the speaker may never have felt compelled to go out walking in the gloom. But now that the speaker has done so, and since the speaker has spent so much time listening to their personified sorrow waxing poetic about the shriveled trees and empty skies, the speaker has come to see the unique beauty in this environment. In this way, the poem suggests the ways in which difficult emotions such as sorrow can enhance one's love of the world. Sadness can make people more attuned to a special, tender kind of beauty.

The speaker won't "tell her" that they've come to love the starkness of "November." Instead, the speaker would rather let her continue "prais[ing]" the landscape. It seems the speaker has fallen in love not only with autumn but also with the painful emotion that taught the speaker to fully appreciate the season. Ironically, the speaker's sadness and suffering have led to unanticipated delight. By indulging this sorrow the way one would a "guest," the speaker has found a path back to themselves and to the world. Sorrow, then, is a rather *welcome* guest—and the speaker is in no real hurry to see her go.

SYMBOLS

AUTUMN

The gloomy autumn weather symbolizes the speaker's sadness. Readers might even consider much of the poem's imagery to be an example of pathetic fallacy: the speaker projects their inner turmoil into their surroundings, seeing their emotions reflected in the "dark days of autumn," with their "desolate, deserted trees," "faded earth," and "heavy sky." All these descriptions imply that the speaker, too, feels "desolated," "faded," and "heavy"; the speaker is dejected, sapped of energy, and weighed down by sorrow.

The poem makes clear that there's also unexpected beauty in this dreary landscape. This, in turn, means that there's tender beauty in the speaker's sadness. This emotion opens the speaker up to the humble, somber loveliness of the world in "November." It grants space for peace, reflection, and unexpected wonder.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "Thinks these dark days of autumn rain"
- **Lines 4-5:** "She loves the bare, the withered tree; / She walks the sodden pasture lane."
- **Lines 8-12:** "She's glad the birds are gone away, / She's glad her simple worsted grey / Is silver now with clinging mist. / The desolate, deserted trees, / The faded earth, the heavy sky,"
- **Lines 17-18:** "The love of bare November days / Before the coming of the snow,"

POETIC DEVICES

PERSONIFICATION

The speaker personifies their "sorrow" throughout the poem, treating this emotion as if it were a female guest who, in expressing her love of the gloomy landscape, teaches the speaker to love it, too. Treating sorrow as a visitor implies that the speaker's sadness has a will of its own, and, it follows, that it isn't entirely within the speaker's control.

Like a guest, the speaker's sorrow isn't always around, either; the speaker doesn't *always* feel sad. But when sorrow *does* visit, she tends to see things differently than the speaker normally would. The speaker's sorrow "loves the bare, the withered tree," but the speaker *themselves* seems to need a little convincing (at least, at first).

The speaker says that sorrow "walks the sodden pasture lane" ahead of him. As she delights in the stark scenery around her—the lack of "birds," the "clinging mist" that's turning her clothes "silver"—the speaker says that "Her pleasure will not let [the speaker] stay." In other words, the speaker goes out to join her because she makes the landscape seem so appealing. Were it not for her, the speaker would have just stayed home. Somewhat ironically, then, the speaker's sadness leads to unexpected pleasure.

The speaker doesn't want to tell their sorrow this, however,

because doing so would spoil things; as long as she thinks that the speaker doesn't appreciate the beauty of autumn, she'll keep talking it up. The poem implies that the speaker has come to value not only the gloom and splendor of the season but also the very emotion that's allowed the speaker to "truly see[]" that beauty in the first place.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-5
- Lines 6-10
- Lines 11-15
- Lines 19-20

IMAGERY

The poem's vivid imagery allows the reader to experience the gloomy beauty of the November landscape alongside the speaker.

The speaker describes "dark days of autumn rain," "bare" and "withered "tree[s]," and a "sodden pasture lane." The world is dreary, damp, and cold, without the warmth of sunshine or twittering birds. All this imagery helps readers picture the quiet, somber autumn landscape that surrounds the speaker.

The speaker also says that their sorrow is "glad her simple worsted grey" (or the wool fabric of her clothes) "Is silver now with clinging mist." In other words, the drops of mist cling to sorrow's clothing, making them gleam or shine light silver. The juxtaposition of "grey" and "silver" suggests the way the speaker's sorrow is able to see the beauty in something that, at first glance, seems only dark and dismal.

In the third stanza, the speaker again describes the landscape using vibrant imagery:

> The desolate, deserted trees,
> The faded earth, the heavy sky,

The trees, barren of leaves, look empty and abandoned, the earth seems devoid of color and life, and the sky is almost oppressive, so weighed down is it with dark rainclouds. This description paints a vivid picture in the reader's mind of what the speaker is seeing. It also suggests how the speaker is *feeling*: the speaker, too, seems to have experienced some loss or hardship that's left them feeling empty, drained, and heavy.

Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "these dark days of autumn rain"
- **Line 4:** "the bare, the withered tree;"
- **Line 5:** "She walks the sodden pasture lane."
- **Lines 8-10:** "She's glad the birds are gone away, / She's glad her simple worsted grey / Is silver now with clinging mist."
- **Lines 11-12:** "The desolate, deserted trees, / The faded earth, the heavy sky,"

REPETITION

Repetition creates rhythm, momentum, and emphasis throughout the poem, drawing attention to all the ways the speaker's sorrow teaches the speaker to see the world differently.

In lines 2-3, for example, diacope of the word "days" emphasizes that those days are at once "dark" *and* "beautiful"; these qualities aren't mutually exclusive:

> Thinks these dark **days** of autumn rain
> Are beautiful as **days** can be;

The next lines are repetitive as well:

> She loves **the** bare, **the** withered tree;
> She walks **the** sodden pasture lane.

The anaphora (the repetition of "She") stresses the importance of this metaphorical "Guest" in the speaker's life: this personified sorrow is the one who initially takes pleasure in the gloomy landscape.

The repetition of "the," meanwhile, adds to the general parallelism of these lines. The line could simply have read "She loves the bare, withered tree," but this would have interrupted the poem's meter. Alternatively, Frost could have written "She loves the bare **and** withered tree," but this would have removed the lyrical asyndeton (which creates the sense that "sorrow" has picked just a few out of many examples of nature's beauty; the list isn't exhaustive). The repetition and asyndeton together create a sense of heightened drama, as if the speaker is experiencing everything more intensely because of their sorrow.

The anaphora in lines 7-9 (the repetition of "She" and "She's glad") again highlights the importance of the speaker's sorrow. It isn't the speaker themselves who is "glad the birds are gone away," but the part of the speaker that is in pain who sees a kind of beauty in this absence.

Finally, more anaphora and asyndeton in the third stanza create rhythm and a sense of building momentum:

> **The** desolate, deserted trees,
> **The** faded earth, **the** heavy sky,
> **The** beauties she so truly sees,

The repetition here suggests the endless list of ways that the speaker's sorrow teaches the speaker to see the world with fresh eyes.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "days"
- **Line 3:** "days"
- **Line 4:** "She," "the," "the"
- **Line 5:** "She"
- **Line 7:** "She"
- **Line 8:** "She's glad"
- **Line 9:** "She's glad"
- **Line 11:** "The"
- **Line 12:** "The," "the"
- **Line 13:** "The"

ALLITERATION

Alliteration (as well as occasional consonance) intensifies the poem's language, filling it with music that helps to convey the dark, gloomy beauty of the autumn landscape.

Take a look at the heavy /d/ sounds in lines 2-3, for example:

> Thinks these dark days of autumn rain
> Are beautiful as days can be;

The thudding /d/ alliteration draws attention to the imagery: the "dark days" that the speaker's sorrow finds so lovely. There are more /d/ sounds in line 11: "The desolate, deserted trees." This again emphasizes the imagery at hand while also making the poem's language feel heavier, almost weighed down. In this, the poem reflects the landscape itself, with its "heavy sky," silence, and "sodden" ground.

In lines 4-5, whooshing, windy /w/ alliteration in "walks" and "withered" subtly evokes the soggy, chilly weather of fall. And in the next stanza, clear /g/ alliteration again fills the poem with music and rhythm:

> She's glad the birds are gone away,
> She's glad her simple worsted grey

The /g/ sounds draw attention to both the absence and colorlessness of fall ("gone away" and "grey") as well as the pleasure the speaker's sorrow takes in these things ("She's glad"). This highlights the fact that the speaker's sorrow combined with the dreary landscape somehow equals a kind of joy or happiness—not what the speaker expected!

Lines 9-10 also combine alliteration with the related sonic devices of sibilance and assonance. Listen to the hissing /s/ sounds and short /ih/ sounds here:

> She's glad her simple worsted grey
> Is silver now with clinging mist.

The soft sibilance conveys the quiet of this autumn landscape, while the general musicality of these lines reflects that landscape's strange loveliness.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "dark," "days"
- **Line 3:** "days"
- **Line 4:** "withered"
- **Line 5:** "walks"
- **Line 8:** "glad," "gone"
- **Line 9:** "glad," "simple," "grey"
- **Line 10:** "silver"
- **Line 11:** "desolate," "deserted"
- **Line 13:** "so," "sees"
- **Line 16:** "learned"
- **Line 17:** "love," "bare"
- **Line 18:** "Before"
- **Line 19:** "But"
- **Line 20:** "better"

VOCABULARY

Withered (Line 4) - Dried up; shriveled.

Sodden pasture lane (Line 5) - A soaked path through a field.

Fain to list (Line 7) - Happy to listen.

Worsted (Line 9) - "Worsted" refers to a kind of wool yarn. The speaker is describing "sorrow's" clothing as being made from a plain, grey fabric.

Desolate (Line 11) - Without any sign of life; lonely and forsaken.

Vexes (Line 15) - Pesters or bothers.

Not yesterday (Line 16) - No sooner than yesterday.

But it were vain (Line 19) - The speaker is saying there would be no point in telling "sorrow" that the speaker finds the landscape lovely.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"My November Guest" is made up of 20 lines arranged into four quintains (five-line stanzas). The poem feels quite steady and controlled throughout thanks to a consistent iambic meter, line length, and rhyme pattern in each stanza (more on those under the Meter and Rhyme Scheme sections of this guide). Add in Frost's simple language, and the poem sounds distinctly straightforward and approachable—even as it contains complex ideas about despair.

This is true of Frost's poetry more generally. Though Frost was writing during the modernist movement, when many poets were rebelling against old traditions and experimenting with

how poems looked or sounded, his own work was less concerned with disrupting formal rules and exceptions. Instead, he used familiar shapes and rhythms to plumb the depths of human experience.

METER

"My November Guest" is written in iambic tetrameter, meaning that lines are composed of four iambs—metrical feet that follow an unstressed-stressed pattern of syllables (da-DUM). Here's the first line of the poem scanned:

> My sor- | row, when | she's here | with me,

Iambic tetrameter lends a familiar rhythm to the poem. The meter is also very consistent throughout. There aren't any major metrical surprises here, which adds to the sense of a relaxed, contemplative speaker strolling through the autumn landscape.

Line 2 is the only line in the poem that disrupts this rhythm:

> Thinks these | dark days | of aut- | umn rain

The second foot here is a spondee (a foot made up of two stressed syllables in a row: DUM-DUM). This emphasizes the "dark days" the speaker will go on to describe at length, suggesting that they are of central importance to the poem. Despite these deviations, though, the meter still feels mostly intact: this line still contains eight syllables, and half of its feet are iambic. In other words, Frost isn't doing anything wild here; when he does deviate from the poem's meter, he does so subtly.

RHYME SCHEME

The poem follows a strict ABAAB rhyme scheme, giving it a very predictable rhythm throughout. Each of the poem's end rhymes is exact—"me" rhymes fully with "be" and "tree," "rain" rhymes fully with "lane," and so on. Note, too, that all but one of the rhyming words are made up of a single syllable: "me," "be," "tree," etc. (Only "away" in line 4 has two syllables.) Frost uses simple, familiar language throughout the poem, echoing the fact that the great "beauties" the speaker is describing are in actuality quite ordinary: a rainy "sky," "mist" sticking to one's clothes, "trees" that have lost their leaves for the winter.

SPEAKER

The speaker of "My November Guest" is more or less a version of Robert Frost himself, as the poems in *A Boy's Will* (the collection in which this poem was published) are autobiographical. Like Frost, this speaker seems at home in the countryside, with only their own lonely thoughts for company. Of course, the poem doesn't *have* to be read through the lens of Frost's life—the speaker could easily be *anyone* who's ever felt "sorrow" and found some kind of "beaut[y]" in it.

In any case, the speaker is drawn to the "desolate, deserted" landscape of the countryside because its empty "trees" and "heavy sky" reflect their own dejected state of mind. But by personifying "sorrow" as a welcome "guest" who convinces the speaker to wander around in the "dark days of autumn," the poem suggests that there is a part of the speaker that revels in the cheerless, "faded" beauty of "November."

SETTING

The poem takes place in a rural November landscape during the "dark days of autumn rain." The setting is decidedly gloomy: the trees are "bare" and "withered" (they've lost their leaves), the paths through fields are "sodden" (or soggy), and the "birds" have "gone away" (migrated for the winter). In their barrenness, the trees seem "desolate" and "deserted," as though they've been abandoned by the life and vibrancy of summer. The "earth" itself is "faded," implying that all the color has drained out of it, and the "sky" is "heavy" with rain and clouds.

This dark, dismal landscape seems to mirror the speaker's own inner dejection. Of course, the speaker eventually comes to admire these "bare November days / Before the coming of the snow," seeing in them a unique, unexpected beauty (perhaps *because* they reflect how the speaker feels). There is something welcoming about the stark beauty of all this absence which perhaps suggests the speaker isn't alone in their sorrow.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"My November Guest" appeared in Robert Frost's first collection, *A Boy's Will*, published in 1913 in England (and reprinted in the United States in 1915). The title of the book is a reference to "My Lost Youth" by famed New England poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, which includes the lines:

> A boy's will is the wind's will
> And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.

According to Frost, *A Boy's Will* is autobiographical; the poems in the book more or less cover a period of five years in the poet's life in which he retreated from society and later found his way back. "My November Guest" is the third poem in the collection, which as a whole explores humanity's relationship to the natural world, rural life, and individuality—all of which are themes that Frost would return to again and again throughout his life. These themes also link Frost with other New England poets such as Emily Dickinson and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Frost's poetry rather uniquely straddles the line between the

traditions of 19th-century American poetry and the experimentation of 20th-century modernism. Compared to the very deliberate departures from traditional forms and techniques that his contemporaries (such as T.S. Eliot) were making, Frost was not particularly interested in innovation for innovation's sake. While many poets in the aftermath of the first World War were breaking away from formal restrictions, Frost typically used more conventional meter and rhyme. At the same time, he used frank, contemporary language that tied his work in some ways to the Imagist poets.

Frost himself consistently shied away from associating with any one particular school of writing. Instead, his work is notable for its incorporation of various traditions and techniques while also remaining highly accessible.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Though he lived through both World War I and II and saw many significant social and political shifts in his lifetime, Frost hardly ever wrote directly about history or politics. Instead, Frost's poetry is known for dealing with rural New England life and identity. Having lived and worked on a New Hampshire farm from 1900-1912, Frost's interest in rural life, nature, and New England is an extension of his time working the land in what he considered to be the best part of America.

With an eye for austerity and tragedy, Frost's work is known for its realism, particularly as it pertains to the difficulties of rural life and the indifference of nature. Like many poets of his time, Frost had a somewhat pessimistic view of the modern world that was perhaps intensified by his own significant personal losses. His father died of tuberculosis when he was only 11, leaving behind only eight dollars for the family. His mother died of cancer five years later, in 1900, and in 1920 his younger sister was committed to a psychiatric institution, where she later died. Both Frost and his wife also struggled with depression.

In spite of, or more like because of, these personal trials, Frost wrote diligently about individuals searching for meaning and finding, most often in nature, some kind of mirror for their own situations. His poems tend to highlight ordinary moments in which extraordinary or profound insights occur.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- First Edition of A Boy's Will — A listing for a first edition of Frost's first book, A Boy's Will, in which "My November Guest" was published. (https://www.churchillbookcollector.com/pages/books/004042/robert-frost/a-boys-will)
- Learn More About the Poet's Life — A Poetry Foundation biography of Frost. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/robert-frost)
- A 1988 PBS Documentary of Frost — Watch a detailed documentary of the poet from the Voices and Vision series. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMNMGrCvKpA)
- A Look at Frost's Relationship to Farming — A New Yorker article discussing Frost's early years on farms and their significance to his poetry. (https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/02/10/bet-the-farm)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER ROBERT FROST POEMS

- Acquainted with the Night
- After Apple-Picking
- Birches
- Desert Places
- Design
- Dust of Snow
- Fire and Ice
- Home Burial
- Mending Wall
- Nothing Gold Can Stay
- Out, Out—
- Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening
- The Oven Bird
- The Road Not Taken
- The Sound of the Trees
- The Tuft of Flowers
- The Wood-Pile

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