

Fire and Ice by Robert Frost

Theme of the poem:

Global warming: Frost's theory about the destruction of earth by fire, if taken literally, bears many similarities with the currently prevalent theory about global warming. Environmentalists say that the earth is going through a process of heating because of which atmospheric temperatures are rising steadily every year. As a result of this rise in temperatures, weather conditions all over earth are changing like never before.

Ice age: Frost's theory about the destruction of the earth by ice, if taken literally, bears many similarities with another theory that environmentalists are currently contemplating. This theory says that the earth will experience another ice age like the one that supposedly led to the extinction of the dinosaurs. All presently habitable lands will freeze over, and it will be too cold for human beings to survive. Not just man but almost every other species will also find this cold unbearable and will die out as a consequence.

Power of desire: Frost compares fire with human desire. That is perhaps why passion is often said to be fiery. The poet knows that love and desire can make a man take extreme measures. Man's biggest desire is to possess – to possess wealth, or even to possess another person. This desire breeds covetousness, greed, envy and jealousy. Hence desire and all its allied emotions can make a man kill others to get what he wants. When in the hold of a fervent desire, man loses his capability for rational thinking. He reverts to his instinct and sometimes his instincts tell him that nothing is too heinous for the achievement of the purpose. That is why crimes of passion are easily relatable.

Power of hatred: Frost compares ice to hatred. That is perhaps why when we hate someone and we choose to ignore them, it is said that we are giving them the cold shoulder. However, this is not always the case. Instead of ignoring the person we hate, we can decide to take matters into our own hands. Thus hatred can also lead us to kill. Let us take the example of Hitler, who appeared a few decades after this poem was written. His hatred for the Jewish race made him commit mass murder.

Fire and Ice Summary

Robert Frost's poem "Fire and Ice" is a strong symbolic poem where fire is used as the emotion of desire and ice, that of hatred. He has used the idea of two groups who have their own possible explanation for the end of the world. One is of the opinion that fire alone, can destroy each and every possibility of life on Earth while the other thinks that if ice as a result of extreme low temperatures could cover the earth's surface, it would lead to the end of the world. Both the components are compared with self-destructing human emotions: desire and hatred. The poet is originally of the opinion that he has been very closely associated with the "fiery desires" and considers it capable of bringing human beings on the verge of destruction. Thus, he considers fire as more competent for destruction. But then he thinks that "icy hatred" is just as capable of ruining humans, though slowly and steadily. Therefore, if Earth was to end twice, ice would be just as good as fire. If fire would lead to rapid destruction, ice would lead to silent damage. Similarly, if fire is pure passion, ice is pure reason. Thus, the poem, very artistically, underpins the philosophy that we let our emotions rule us and if don't control them they will surely bring us all on the verge of chaos.

Answer the following questions in 30- 40 words each.

- a. Write down the two different views about the end of the world
- b. Why does the poet hold with those who favour fire
- c. Give the significance of fire and ice in the poem . How will they result in the end of the world ?
- d. "But if it had to perish twice ". How will the world perish twice ?