

Department of English
Nesamony Memorial Christian College
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American Literature
Robert Lee Frost-Birches

Robert Lee Frost was an American poet. He has received four Pulitzer Prizes for his poetry work. In 1960, he received the Congressional Gold Medal and later became the poet laureate of Vermont. Frost was influenced by the rural landscapes and the life of New England, where he had spent a significant part of his life.

Frost's poems often focus on ordinary people in everyday situations. Through these situations, he explores complex questions about life, death, nature, and human choices. While Frost's poems seem simple on the surface, they often have layers of meaning. Some of his most famous poems include 'The Road Not Taken,' 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,' and 'Mending Wall.'

Birches by Robert Frost was published in Atlantic Review, along with 'The Road Not Taken' and 'The Sound of Trees' in 1915. It was also included in his third collection of poetry, titled 'Mountain Interval', published in 1916. Originally titled 'Swinging Birches,' it describes the game that children used to play in New England, swinging on birch trees.

The poem opens with the speaker observing bent birch trees. The branches are bent in a way that contrasts with the straighter, darker trees around them. He chooses not to consider the bent branches a result of the ice storm, but rather as a playful act of a boy who climbed and swung on them. The speaker quickly acknowledges that swinging wouldn't bend the trees much. He also observes the ice-dust clinging to the branches.

The speaker explains how the branches covered in ice shine in the sunlight and make a clicking sound when they sway in the breeze. The scattered bits of ice on the ground resemble shattered pieces of glass the poet feels compelled to sweep them away, just as one would clear broken glass. He describes the scene as if it were heaven itself having fallen to earth, shattered into countless fragments.

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.

The speaker thinks about how the snow has changed the birch trees, and he is not sure if they will ever straighten out again. The weight of the snow has permanently altered the position of the trees, causing their leaves to trail on the ground. The speaker compares this image to "girls on hands and knees that throw their hair / Before them over their heads to dry in the sun".

The speaker observes a boy playing on his father's birch trees. The boy found swinging on birches to be exciting and captivating. He climbed every birch tree owned by his father, determined to reach the top. The boy bends each tree. The speaker compares the pain he takes each time he climbs a tree to the filling of a cup to the brim or even above the brim.

The speaker, now an adult, remembers his younger self as a 'swinger of birches.' It was a time of carefree life. However, his current life is depicted as confusing and pathless. It is like a tangled forest. He desires a temporary escape, not death, but a chance to refresh and return with a new perspective.

The speaker feels "weary of considerations" – his mind is cluttered with worries and complexities. These anxieties create a sense of unease, like the "cobwebs" that "burn and tickle" his face.

The poem Birches explores the human desire for escape from the challenges of life. It reminds us of the bittersweet transition from childhood innocence to adult complexity, which leaves us to contemplate on the balance between imagination and reality.