

Responding to Robert Frost's "Design" and "'Out, Out—'"

Instructions

- 1) Before you read these instructions and complete the assignment, *first* read "An Introduction to Robert Frost" at the beginning of your Robert Frost packet. I expect you to know this material.
- 2) Then discuss each topic below in a fully-developed paragraph in which you use at least three direct quotations from each poem to illustrate your ideas. (Write two paragraphs total—one for each poem.)
 - In each paragraph, please smoothly incorporate all quoted evidence in a way that maintains the clear flow of your ideas.
 - Moreover, when you discuss quoted evidence in each paragraph, identify the specific literary techniques involved and the important effects that these techniques create.

1. "Design" – One time when Frost read this poem aloud to an audience, he then told his listeners: "I always wanted to be very observing. But I have always been afraid of my own observations." In "Design," Frost's speaker describes another experience involving animals and the natural world: the time he found a *white spider* perched on a *white flower*, eating a *white moth*. One might say that "Design" is indeed a poem about death. Notice the structure (or organization) of this sonnet; the first eight lines describe the image that the speaker encountered, and the final six lines pose a series of questions about the image.

What seems to be the significance of this experience for the poem's speaker, and what does the speaker's series of questions communicate about death—and about life? Pay close attention to the importance of imagery, choice of detail, and diction, as well as figurative language. (Also consider the multiple meanings of the poem's title.)

2. "'Out, Out—'" – Is there an order and purpose to the Universe? Does everything happen for a reason, or are our lives governed largely by chance? Questions like these are of central importance not only in novels like *The Sun Also Rises* and plays like *Our Town*, but also in much of Robert Frost's poetry. Like "Design," the poem "'Out, Out—'" is a poem about a death, but in this case, it is about a death that occurs in the human world. (As a matter of fact, Frost actually wrote the poem in response to a specific death after he learned about it.)

What seems to be Frost's attitude toward the death that is described in this poem, and how do techniques such as imagery, choice of detail, and diction help communicate Frost's attitude? Moreover, of what significance is the allusion that Frost makes in the poem's title? (Consider how a reader might take away a very different impression of the event if the poem's title were different.) Based on the allusion, does Frost seem to agree with Macbeth's view of life, or does Frost present Macbeth's view ironically? How can we tell?