

### **Brilliant Takeaway from Robert Frost's "Fireflies in the Garden"**

The Oxford English Dictionary defines *takeaway* as something like “a key fact, point, or idea to be remembered, typically one emerging from a discussion or meeting”.<sup>1</sup> This particular word has been included in the title because I have learnt something after analysing the poem.

My favorite poem is Robert Frost's "Fireflies in the Garden" – not because it expresses my ideal way of life, but because it challenges our conventional ideals. Just by looking at the title of the poem, I initially thought that this poem has to do with the great nature; however, after reading its analysis, I was pretty amazed at how the poet, making use of only six lines in the poem, is able to express his thoughts to the reader. Therefore, "Fireflies in the Garden" has left me a deep impression.

The main theme of Robert Frost's "Fireflies in the Garden" is based on a contrast between the 'genuine' and the 'imitation'. In order to bring out this theme, the poet did a brilliant touch on symbolism. The 'genuine' is symbolised by the "real stars" in the sky and the 'imitation' is symbolised by the tiny "fireflies". It is dusk and the "real stars" have begun to shine in the sky above; at the same time, on the earth below, the fireflies with brightly lit up tails begin flitting about. Frost feels inspired to make a connection between these two seemingly unrelated phenomena.

At the beginning, the poet leads the readers to ponder if fireflies can really fulfil the majestic role of stars in the night sky. He hence states, “Here come real stars to fill the upper skies,/ And here on Earth come emulating flies,/ ... /Achieve at times a very star-like start” (lines 1-3,5). In the middle of the poem, Frost actually foreshadows his conclusion by

expressing his doubt in line 4: “And they were never really stars at heart”. Towards the end of the poem, Frost then concludes that fireflies cannot equal the stars by mentioning that the fireflies “can’t sustain the part” (line 6). This hence shows that Frost believes the beauty of a firefly is inferior to that of a star.

I noticed that the word “emulate” in line 2 can be used in a positive and in a negative sense. Frost seems to approve of the effort of the minuscule fireflies in trying to imitate the stars above, however, in another aspect disapprove such imitation.

To begin with, the fireflies shine brightly on earth, but being tiny, the short-lived fireflies die out as soon as they give off the warm glow at night. Fireflies definitely are no match for the heavenly stars that sparkle brightly forever; nevertheless, their attempt to shine like the stars is praiseworthy.

Conversely, in the negative aspect, Frost also seems to disapprove of the effort of the fireflies in trying to imitate the bright stars above in the sky. The implication is that the tiny fireflies are arrogant in trying to compete with the "real stars".

Relating Robert Frost’s “Fireflies in the Garden” to reality, human civilisation progresses by imitation. Role models actually help us to channelize our energies to achieve success. There is, nonetheless, a flip side to such imitation: without being fully aware of our own shortcomings or limitations, we, like the tiny fireflies, are not able to "sustain the part" and often end up as pathetic failures.

People in today’s society, symbolized by the fireflies in the poem, idolize their role models and try their might to follow in their footsteps. The role models then are represented by the stars in the poem. The poet agrees that people might be able to reach their goal initially, which can be inferred from “achieve at times a very star-like start” (line 5). However, “only,

of course, they can't sustain the part" (line 6); imitating their role models is not an effective way in the long-run. Nevertheless, having said so, the poet seems to also recognise their efforts in imitation.

Through the brilliant use of symbolism, the readers can better grasp the vital underlying theme of this poem, and that is, the importance of knowing one's weaknesses and strengths. Rather than just follow or imitate blindly, we should strengthen or work on our weaknesses wisely.

And if we were to take this poem to another level, we could interpret it as if Frost is comparing fireflies and stars to any feeling a person could have, such as love and friendship. An example could be a big love that leaves and another one may come and take its place, even though it will never replace it or be as the original.

Because of the implicit way this poem challenges our conventional ideals towards success in life, it may result in certain critics of the poet's perspectives in "Fireflies in the Garden".<sup>2</sup> However, despite the fact that this practice of inner change within any individual requires critical introspection, it is still worthwhile undertaking. After all, in order to achieve long-term success in the contemporary society, quiet introspection is extremely valuable.

**Work Cited:**

1. *Oxford Dictionary*. Website.

<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/takeaway>

2. Frost, Robert. "Fireflies in the Garden." *The Norton Introduction to Literature* (Page 768 - 769). Eds. Alison Booth and Kelly J. Mays. 10<sup>th</sup> edition. New York: Norton, 2010. Print.