

Now let us have  
all the warmth  
of poetry of this  
second paper A-

An Analysis of  
"For Once, Then, Something"

In "For Once, Then, Something," Robert Frost says that people have made fun of him for peering into wells. They insist that he looks in the wrong light, so that all he sees is his own "godlike" reflection. Frost does not answer this charge, but goes on to say that once, while looking into a well, he thought he discovered something deeper than his own reflection. The water picture was blurred, however, by more water; a drop fell from a leaf over his head, and whatever he saw or thought he saw disappeared forever. The poem ends with a question- what had it been? Something as large as truth or as small as a pebble? But at least he had seen something once.

Frost's poetry, while it reads almost as if it were everyday <sup>True</sup> speech, is nevertheless very tightly constructed. "For Once, Then, Something" is no exception. A scansion of the poem reveals a regular variation of trochaic pentameter. The second foot of each of the poem's fifteen lines contains a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables, rather than the usual one in each of the other feet. These dactylic feet have the effect of creating a slight dip and slide as each line is read, providing a smooth spot in each line before it builds regularly to its climax. Although the poem can be viewed as having no variations, a few of the regular feminine line ends receive stronger stress than other unstressed syllables. This occurs in the word "well-curb," which appears at the end of the first and seventh lines. The greater stress placed upon "curb" underlines the importance of the well-curb

as the setting of the poem and provider of its insight. In the twelfth line, the word "drop" in "One drop fell" also receives more than the usual stress, emphasizing the importance of Frost's losing whatever he saw in the bottom of the well. OK

There is no regular rhyme scheme in the poem. Several of the lines rhyme with each other because line ends are repeated. In addition to "well-curb," "picture" and "water" are repeated at the ends of two lines as well. Again, this repetition provides emphasis, the words providing keys to the poem's meaning. All the line ends, with the <sup>slight</sup> exception of the ones already mentioned, are feminine. This has the effect of adding further weight to the stresses which begin each line. The beginnings of each line are especially important words, such as "Others," "Always," "Deeper," "Me," "Looking," "Once," "I," "Blurred," and "Truth."

Because of his use of everyday language, Robert Frost does not attempt to achieve the rich tone color of a Dylan Thomas. The sounds of his words do work well for Frost, however, in "For Once, Then, Something." The sounds of the words in the poem are as tightly constructed as its meter. The repetition <sup>at</sup> of "n," "r," and "t" sounds contribute to the poem's well-knit construction and meaning. Alliteration is a particularly important aspect of the tone color, and can be observed in words such as "well, wrong, where, water, what, and white," and "shining, surface, summer, and something." Consonance ("knelt, well") and assonance ("shining, light, white") are also used in creating the tightly organic tone color.

*John...  
this...  
more...  
with...*

Primary cadences are particularly important in underscoring the poem's fulcrum and climax. Each of the fifteen lines contains eleven syllables, the first primary cadence ending with the sixth line. This sixty-six syllable cadence is the poem's longest, and the fulcrum falls between it and what follows. Further emphasis is placed on the balancing point by italicizing "Once," which begins the seventh line. The second cadence is also a long one, lasting from the seventh through tenth lines. The third cadence consists of only the eleventh line, and the fourth terminates mid-way through the fourteenth line. The last line and a half of the poem splinters into either two or four primary cadences, depending upon whether the three questions are **considered** as being one complete thought or three separate ones. Because of their crucial importance, especially of "Truth?" where the poem's logical and emotional climaxes are reached, I would label each of the *OK* questions as a separate primary cadence. Adding to these the final cadence, from which the poem's title was taken, the final primary cadence count is eight (66, 44, 11, 28, 5, 1, 5, and 5 syllables long). Once again, the logical and emotional climax reached through the *question* "Truth?" is underscored by its abruptly short cadence of one syllable.

As usual in Robert Frost's strongly New England influenced verse, nature plays an important role as a teacher of man. A major nature motif is woven throughout the poem, with attention placed there by words like "summer," "wreath of fern," "cloud puffs," "quartz," and, especially, "water." Water itself provides a major motif, with words such as "well," "surface," "depths," and "ripple" appearing regularly.

The imagery of "For Once, Then, Something" is primarily visual. "Seeing," "shining," "picture," "Looking," "discerned," "blurred," and "blotted" all contribute to this dominant visual imagery. The poem is also rich in kinetic ("knelt, fell, shook") and kinesthetic ("taunt, uncertain, lay") imagery.

In the poem, Robert Frost sees himself as unlike other people. He mentions "others" who misunderstand and make fun of some of his actions. The burden of the poem indicates that those other people lack something which he has, an awareness of beauty and an ability to seek meaning beyond the obvious. The poet can understand the other people, however; in the first six lines of the poem he acknowledges that he must look pretty ridiculous, peering into the water, apparently admiring his own reflection. What other people, do not see, however, is the indiscernible something in the depths of the water. *and he doesn't always - but once he did*

The poet is the man trying to investigate the depths, trying to discover the meaning of life which lies beyond the obvious. The implication is that he will never really find this- the water defends itself from penetration, breaking into ripples which warp the image. But once the poet did see something, and though it might have been only a pebble, it might also have been the truth- and so he must keep on searching, despite the taunts of the uncomprehending.

For Once, Then, Something

1 Others taunt me with having knelt at well-curbs  
2 Always wrong to the light, so never seeing  
3 Deeper down in the well than where the water  
4 Gives me back in a shining surface picture  
5 Me myself in the summer heaven godlike  
6 Looking out of a wreath of fern and cloud puffs.  
7 Once, when trying with chin against a well-curb,  
8 I discerned, as I thought, beyond the picture,  
9 Through the picture, a something white, uncertain,  
10 Something more of the depths--and then I lost it.  
11 Water came to rebuke the too clear water.  
12 One drop fell from a fern, and lo, a ripple  
13 Shook whatever it was lay there at bottom,  
Blurred it, blotted it out. What was that whiteness?  
Truth? A pebble of quartz? For once, then, something.