



Introduction

Robert Frost's poem "Fire and Ice" expresses the profound idea that the world would end in either of two ways, either by ice or fire. Both the components are compared with self-destructing human emotions: hatred and desire. The poem, very artistically, underpins the philosophy that we let our emotions rule us and if don't control them they will surely destroy everything around us. Similarly, he thinks fire and ice, both are just as competent in bringing the world to a catastrophic end.

Fire and Ice Poem and Explanation

Some say the world will end in fire
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favour fire.

The poem expresses the profound idea that the world would end in either of two ways, either by ice or fire. One group is of the opinion that someday the Earth's core will get so heated up that it would lead to fire destroying the earth's surface. On the other hand, the second group says that if the temperature goes down to an extent that makes life on Earth impossible, it would have the same catastrophic effect. The poet then compares fire and ice with the destructive features of human emotions; desire and hatred. He says that from what he is aware about "fiery desires", he would favour the ones who say that it would be fire. By saying so, he brings about the idea that human beings let their emotions rule them and the consequence of unmonitored longing is chaos.

But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

Then by not waving off the first option of fire, he considers if the world has to expire twice, ice would be equally competent in ending it. He brings about a contrast between "ice" and "hatred". The human capability of insensitivity and hatred has the potential for inner destruction. Though slow and steady, it has the same effect that desire has on us. So if given an option between fire and ice, ice would be just as good as fire to destroy the world.

THEMES- HATRED, DESIRES AND THE END OF THE WORLD

Despite its light and conversational tone, “Fire and Ice” is a bleak poem that highlights human beings’ talent for self-destruction. The poem is a work of eschatology—writing about the end of the world—and poses two possible causes for this end: fire and ice. The speaker uses these natural elements as symbols for desire and hatred, respectively, arguing that both emotions left unchecked have the capacity to destroy civilization itself.

The speaker begins by relating that, when it comes to how the world will end, “some” people favor fire and “some” ice. At this early stage of the poem, these two elements could easily relate to a natural disaster. For example, a potential world-ending “fire” could be something like the asteroid that most likely destroyed the dinosaurs; and ice could relate to a future ice age, or the extinguishment of the sun. But as soon as those more naturalistic ends to the world are suggested, the poem changes direction and makes it clear that fire and ice are *symbols*—not of *natural* disasters, but of humanity’s ability to create disasters of its own.

By “fire” the speaker actually means “desire”—and from the speaker’s limited personal experience, the speaker knows desire to be a powerfully destructive force. Humanity, then, could bring about the end of the world through passion, anger, violence, greed, and bloodlust. Indeed, the “fire” now seems like an image of warfare too. (Indeed, the poem was written shortly after the end of World War I.)

Though the speaker feels “fire” is the likely way for humanity to destroy itself and the world, the speaker also feels that human beings’ capacity for destruction is so great that it could bring about this destruction more than once. (This is tongue-in-cheek, of course, as once would certainly be enough.) Here, the speaker presents “ice” as another method for ending it all, aligning it with hatred.

Ice works differently from fire in this eschatological prediction. Human destruction doesn’t have to be bright, noisy, and violent—hate can spread in subtler ways. Ice has connotations of coldness and indifference, and so a possible reading here is that the end of the world could be brought about by *inaction* rather than some singular major event. A contemporary reading could map climate change onto “ice” here: if people fail to act over humanity’s effect on the climate, it will gradually, but assuredly, bring about destruction.

By the poem’s end, though, the choice between “ice” and “fire” starts to seem a little false—particularly as the speaker’s tone is so casual and even glib (“ice is also great”). Ice and fire, though utterly different in the literal sense, here represent one and the same thing: the destructive potential of humanity. Either method will suffice to bring about the inevitable end of the world. In just nine short lines, then, “Fire and Ice” offers a powerful warning about human nature. Finally, it’s important to notice something that *isn’t* in the poem: any hint of a possibility that humanity *won’t* end the world.

FIRE AND ICE SYMBOL-

FIRE-At first, the poem seems like it could be discussing natural disasters as events that might bring about the end of the world. The “fire” of line 1 could be interpreted as a meteor event, for example—the kind that most likely devastated the dinosaurs. But from line 3 onwards, it becomes clear that the “fire” in this poem is more symbolic than literal (though the former doesn’t exclude the latter). The speaker directly links “desire” with “fire,” which asks the reader to call on the symbolic associations that they have with the element.

Accordingly, fire comes to stand for inflamed passion, greed, bloodlust—scenarios in which humanity brings about destruction by acting rashly and violently. War, of course, would be a prime example, and so the poem is gently suggestive of the kind of wars the could bring about the end of the world. It's also important to remember the positive associations of fire: warmth and light. These symbolic qualities *don't* feel very present in the poem, underscoring the speaker's implicit belief that, one way or another, humanity is fated to bring about the end of the world.

ICE-

In line 2, the end-world scenario brought about by ice could be interpreted as an ice age or the death of the sun. But from line 3, when the symbolic association between fire and desire is established, it becomes clear that the ice is also not primarily—or exclusively—literal. Indeed, from line 5 onwards, the poem makes the connotations of ice more clear. The speaker draws a link between ice and hate, putting forward the proposition that ice is "also great" for bringing about the end of the world. Though "fire" might be a kind of hate too, the hatred symbolized by ice is more about indifference or a failure to empathize.

“Fire and Ice” Poetic Devices & Figurative Language-

- Assonance- it is repetition of vowel sounds in same line. The repetition is at different places in different words.

Example- The long sound of “o” in “I hold with those who favour fire”

- Alliteration- alliteration is the repetition of a consonant sound at the start of two or more closely placed words.

Example- The sound of “f” in “favour fire”, “w” in “world will”

- Imagery- Imagery is used to make readers perceive things involving their five senses.
Example- “Some say the world will end in fire”

“To say that for destruction ice Is also great”

- Anaphora- the repetition of a word or expression at the start of two or more consecutive lines.

Example - “Some say” is repeated at the start of lines 1 and 2.

- Personification- Personification is to give human qualities to inanimate objects. In this poem, “fire” and “ice” are capable of destruction. Thus, the poet personifies fire and ice by giving them mind and power to destroy anything.
- Enjambment- it is defined as the thought or clause that does not come to an end at a line break, rather it moves over to the next line.

Example- “From what I’ve tasted of desire

I hold with those who favor fire”

RHYME SCHEME- ABAABCBCB

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.

What is the central idea of the poem 'Fire and Ice'?

The poet has tried to bring the difference between the fire and the ice, which represent two different kinds of people. According to the poet, the world can perish by fire and also by ice. Thus it can perish twice- one by fire and then by ice. The poet feels that the ice of hatred is as powerful as the fire of desire to bring complete end of this world.

What message does the poet give to the reader?

Once Robert Frost claimed, "my poem begins in delight but ends in wisdom". The present poem echoes the above statement. In this poem, the poet considers the age-old question whether the world will end in fire or in ice. It is quite interesting that the poet does not give his own opinion in this regard. It is meaningless to ask which one is stronger as we know both of them are equally harmful to the world. We can associate fire with lust, greed, avarice and intolerance whereas ice can be associated with hatred and indifference. The fire of lust and greed gets publicity but the coldness of hatred is also dangerous as it is a silent killer. All of such black sides of human nature can obstruct the progress of human civilization.

Comment on the ending of the poem.

The ending of the poem implies that ice has also the power to bring about the destruction of the world. So we should not bother about the matter that which one of the two (fire and ice) is stronger rather, we should keep in mind that both of them have destructive power. We should not ignore the potential power of ice which is equally harmful.

"But if it had to perish twice"

Why does the poet use 'if' in the above quotation?

Nobody knows whether the world will end in fire or in ice. But the idea of the destruction of the world twice is somewhat complicated. The poet does not believe that the world will end twice. That's why the poet expresses his suspicion by using the term 'if'.

Is the poet's personal view regarding the end of the world clear enough?

The poet in the present poem represents the dominant views regarding the probable causes of the destruction of the world. It may end either in fire or in ice. In other words, both of them have the power to ruin the world. But the poet does not give his own stand in this regard rather he leaves the question unanswered.

“I think I know enough of hate.” What does the speaker know about hate?

The speaker in the above line says that he knows enough of hate, but we are not told he has first-hand knowledge about hate or he experiences it at a distance. But the poet’s intuitive power reminds him it is no less dangerous than the fire of lust, greed, hatred. It can also play a trick upon anybody as it is a silent killer.

Read the extracts given below and answer the questions that follow-

*Some say the world will end in
fire
Some say in ice.*

From what I’ve tasted of desire

I hold with those who favour fire.

- (a) What do people think of the world?
- (b) What is the poet’s opinion about the world?
- (c) Which two things will destroy the world?
- (d) What is the prediction of the people about how the world will come to an end?

Ans. (a) The world will be destroyed with fire and ice.

(b) The poet thinks that we should check our growing desires and love our fellow-beings.

(c) Hatred and Desire.

(d) Some people say that the world will come to an end in a fire while others say it will come to an end in ice.

But if it had to perish twice,

I think I know enough of hate

To say that for destruction ice

Is also great

And would suffice.

- (a) Why does the poet feel that ‘ice’ is also great for destruction?
- (b) What is the rhyme scheme of this stanza of the poem?
- (c) The two things that the poet thinks are good enough for destruction are
- (d) What does ‘it’ stand for in the first line?

Ans. (a) Ice equates with 'hatred', which is enough to destroy the world.

(b) a b a b a.

(c) fire and ice which means 'hatred' and 'desire'

(d) 'it' here stands for the world.

VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

Q.1. What is 'fire' a symbol of?

Ans. 'Fire' is a symbol of lust and endless desires.

Q.2. What is 'Ice' a symbol of?

Ans. 'Ice' is a symbol of hatred.

Q.3. What will fire do to the world?

Ans. Fire will put the world to an end.

Q.4. What will the world end in?

Ans. The world will end in fire as well as ice.

Q.5. Why does the poet hold with those who favour fire?

Ans. The poet holds with those who favour fire because the lust for material things is increasing.

Q.6. Why do some people say that the world will end in ice?

Ans. They say so because hatred among people is increasing.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What will the world end in?

(A) fire

(B) ice

(C) both (A) and (B)

(D) none of the above

Ans. (C) both (A) and (B)

2. What does violent desire refer to?

(A) fire

(B) ice.

(C) both (A) and (B)

(D) none of the above

Ans. (A) fire

3. What does 'ice' symbolizes?

(A) love

(B) hatred

(C) violent desire

(D) all of the above

Ans. (B) hatred

4. What do some people think, the world will end in?

(A) fire

(B) sun

(C) moon

(D) rain

Ans. (A) fire

5. What does the poet think, the world will end in?

(A) love

(B) ice

(C) both

(D) none of the above

Ans. (B) ice

6. Can hatred destroy the world?

(A) yes

(B) no

(C) maybe

(D) may not be

Ans. (A) yes

7. According to Robert Frost, what will end one day

(A) fire

(B) ice

(C) both (A) and (B)

(D) the world

Ans. (D) the world

8. Who is the poet of the poem 'Fire and Ice'?

(A) Robert Frost

(B) William Cowper

(C) Ben Jonson

(D) William Blake

Ans. (A) Robert Frost

Long Answer (Value Based) Type Questions

Question 1.

Discuss how extreme behaviour can hasten the end of the world with respect to 'Fire and Ice'.

Answer:

'Fire' symbolises desire and 'Ice' symbolises hatred. Desire is a kind of intense love or want that

focuses people on getting and possessing and acquiring. Our society is full of people who spend their lives working to get a bigger and better TV, a more stylish car or a more extravagant house. This kind of desire can lead people to destruction in the form of bankruptcy or even broken relationships. Frost's poem speaks on the issue of greed corrupting people and even society. The power of hate, which is symbolised by ice is just as great as desire. While desire consumes quickly hate produces shy yet restrained devastation. For instance, Kate is the root cause of racism and war. It can linger in people's mind for lifetimes. Moreover, it consumes the hater even more than the person hated. It thus, ruins lives.

Question 2.

The poem 'Fire and Ice', carries with it very deep thematic ideas. Elaborate on these darkest traits of humanity.

Answer:

Frost presents the two of the darkest traits of humanity; the capacity to hate and the capacity to be consumed by lust or desire. Of the two, he attributes the greater of the two evils, is desire. In giving desire the foremost position with regard to the destruction of the world, Frost is providing a powerful statement on the subject of greed and jealousy, saying that above all trait of humanity that is most likely to lead to its demise. Desire represents the greatest problem that attributes to the cause of the war. Frost then attributes hatred with the same capacity to do harm. However, he lessens the relative importance of hatred but still presents it as having the ability to lead to the destruction of the world if it were to happen for a second time.

Question 3.

The poet presents two reasons which will lead to the destruction of the humanity. What values do you garner from the two possible causes provided by him?

Answer:

The poet provides and deals with two possible causes for the end of the world. He points more towards the emotional and sentimental side of the issue. As for him, fire denotes deep passion and burning desire, while ice is highlighted for its icy cold and hatred side of the emotions. He favours both the arguments and says that either the deep burning passion or the cold hatred and jealousy factor will push the people to walk on the path of destruction. The poet is sure of this destruction of humanity. He first talks about the destruction because of fire and in case this fails, then ice will end the world. The love that people have for one another will turn into hatred. In race of climbing up and outdo one another, people will tend to hate each other. These negative emotions will become so strong that it will surpass all the love and lead to the destruction of humanity.

Question 4.

How will the world end? Support your answer with scientific explanation.

Answer:

According to the scientists, the two reasons for the destruction of the world will be either fiery core or the ice age.

Some scientists believed that the world would be incinerated from its fiery core, while others were convinced that a coming ice age would destroy all living things on the Earth's surface. In other words, either the deep heat or fire under the Earth beds will lead to natural calamities like volcano eruptions, earthquakes and tsunamis which will one day end the world or the melting of ice from the snowy mountains due to global warming will shrink the world. As a result, one day

the entire world will die of the icy water. Frost, thus, tries to warn people against the two greatest problems facing humanity and the consequences of human vices with an increased effectiveness.

Thinking about the Poem

Question 1: There are many ideas about how the world will ‘end’. Do you think the world will end some day? Have you ever thought what would happen if the Sun gets so hot that it ‘bursts’ or grows colder and colder?

Answer: There are definitely many ideas about how the world will ‘end’. I do believe that the world will end someday as anything that has a beginning will have an ending. This stands true for the world also. If the sun got so hot that it bursts, the whole of the earth would perish immediately as no part of the earth can bear the heat of that intensity. But if the sun grew colder and colder, everything will come to an end as without sunlight, life will end.

Question 2: For Frost, what do ‘fire’ and ‘ice’ stand for? Here are some ideas:

greed, avarice, cruelty, lust, conflict, fury, intolerance, rigidity, insensitivity, coldness, indifference, hatred

Answer: ‘Fire’ stand for greed, avarice, lust, conflict and fury.

‘Ice’ stands for cruelty, intolerance, rigidity, insensitivity, coldness, indifference and hatred.

Question 3: What is the rhyme scheme of the poem? How does it help in bringing out the contrasting ideas in the poem?

Answer: The rhyme scheme of the poem is – a b a a b c b c b

This rhyme scheme helps in bringing out the contrasting ideas of ‘fire’ and ‘ice’ presented in the poem. The poet mentions that both fire and ice are probable ends of this world. He talks about how fire represents desire and can therefore bring an end to the world.

Frost also mentions Ice in between to symbolise that the coldness and indifference towards one another will be enough to end the world. In second stanza, he says that he knows of enough hate in the world to be sure that even destruction through ice would be sufficient to bring about the end of the world.