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.

Desire- a strong feeling of wanting to have something or wishing for something to happen   
Favour- approval, support

*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.

Perish- die  
Suffice- be sufficient

*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.*

Fire and Ice - Literary devices

1. Rhyming scheme- Aba

abc  
bcb

2. 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 h**o**ld with th**o**se who favour fire”

3. 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”

4. 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”

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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”

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.

Fire and Ice Question and Answers

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 got so hot that it ‘burst’, or grew colder and colder?

A. Unfortunately, the world is going to end one day and there is nothing we can do about it. There are many ideas as to how it will end but one can’t say surely. The reason that life exists only on Earth is that the circumstances and temperature is apt to make it possible. If the sun gets so hot one day that it is at the verge of bursting, it would lead to rapid destruction as there would be fire everywhere. Conversely, if it grows colder and colder, there will be ice everywhere on Earth and life in any form would not be able to sustain at such low temperatures.

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

A. According to Frost, ‘fire’ stands for greed, conflict, fury, cruelty, lust and avarice whereas ‘Ice’ stands for insensitivity, coldness, intolerance, indifference, rigidity and hatred.

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

A. The rhyme scheme of the poem is “aba abc bcb”. The poet has used the rhyming beautifully to bring about contrasting ideas in the poem. He has used the ideas of two groups who believe that the world would come to a catastrophic end either as a result of fire or ice. Simultaneously, he portrays these two essential components as features of destructive human emotions: desire and hatred. Just like fiery desires and icy hatred can cause damage to an individual in an irreparable manner, fire and ice can lead the world at the verge of chaos and thus, apocalypse.

***Tasted:****experienced.  
The fast food that I have tasted is not always good for health.  
It is the time that tastes everyone's grit.* ***Perish:*** *die or destroy.  
This multistory building seems perished due to natural calamity.  
Anything that lives on this earth has to perish today or tomorrow.*

***Suffice:*** *be sufficient.  
This much in the plate would suffice for my breakfast.  
This much liquid in the glasses would not suffice as my drink.*

## short questions & answers

Q1:  What are the two opinions discussed in the poem about the end of this world?A:    The two opinions are that this world will end either in fire or in ice.

*Q2:  What does fire stand for in the poem?  
A:    Fire stands for desire as it spreads very fast if remains uncontrolled*

Q3:  What does ice stand for in the poem?A:    Ice stands for hatred as both are same in nature, they make us insensitive and rigid.*.*

## key points

* The poem has been written symbolically.
* The poet says that there are mainly two opinions about the end of this world, one by fire and another by ice.
* The symbols-‘Fire’ and ‘Ice’ have been used for human emotions like desire and hatred respectively.
* As fire can spread very fast and cause a great destruction in no time likewise our desires may also prove very destructive if they go out of control.
* Hatred causes slow destruction like ice but it is also very harmful.