THE TUFT OF FLOWERS

Robert Frost
Some background information

- This poem focuses on the action of a haymaker come to turn grass that has been mowed with a scythe.
- Typical of many of Frost’s poems this one has a rural setting.
Initial reading

- Listen to the poem aloud and read along – focus on the narrative told in this poem, trying to see the setting and hear the voice that narrates it.
- Then read the poem quietly to yourself. Underline any lines that stand out for you.
- Read the poem again and this time start to think about the concept of Discovery. It might be useful to note what the persona is thinking at the start of the poem, what causes this to change and why (the discovery) and what they are thinking at the end (a reflection on their discovery).
- Try to consider both what is happening on the surface (the events depicted, literally) and on a deeper level (figuratively).
Summary

• The poem is told in first person as a dramatic monologue and begins with a haymaker turning grass that has been recently cut.
• He feels a sense of loneliness and wonders about the mower who came before him. He muses that all men must be alone “Whether they work together or apart.”
• As he muses he notices a butterfly that draws his attention to a tuft of flowers that the mower has left untouched.
• In this act of leaving the flowers (a thing of beauty) the narrator recognises a kindred spirit in the mower and recognises that he no longer works alone changing his former thoughts to “Men work together”.
Detailed Analysis

- *The Tuft of Flowers* is written in **heroic couplets**.
- These are pairs of rhyming lines where each pair is written in **iambic pentameter** and each is self-contained (with no or little enjambment).
- The heroic couplet usually uses a **masculine rhyme** – a rhyme where only the last (single) syllable rhymes.
- Think about how the use of rhyming couplets contributes to the sound and rhythm of this poem.
- This poem is written as a dramatic monologue (a one sided conversation) the use of which is typical of many of Frost’s poems.
Ideas to consider

• Notice the initial reference to the mower as “one” – he is not given a name or identity and the narrator is reflecting on something that has happened in the past “once”

• In the second couplet the imagery of a “leveled scene” suggests a scene of destruction (of man’s destruction of nature)

• Notice how the narrator “looked” and listened” for the mower. He seeks communication with him but is met with silence and is left “- alone”. The use of the hyphen acts as a caesura to create emphasis on the word.

• He speaks the following line to himself “I said within my heart” to emphasise his isolation.

• Note the resigned tone of these lines “As all must be … ‘Whether they work together or apart.’” This idea of man’s isolation is extended to all mankind.
• The following couplet (6) marks a change in his reflection indicated by the word “But”.

• The butterfly, which is “bewildered” by the change to its environment flies in a confused manner, searching for the flowers “yesterday’s delight”. Note the use of the word “Seeking” which mirrors the narrator’s earlier search for the mower in the third couplet, linking the butterfly and the narrator (and perhaps all mankind in a fruitless search)

• The ninth couplet uses repetition of “And then” to suggest the butterfly’s persistent search. The use of the word “tremulous” indicates the excitement of discovery. Notice how the butterfly seeks to share this discovery with the man.

• The narrator then thinks of “questions that have no reply” – suggesting that he has no answer for the butterfly.
• The eleventh couplet again starts with the word “But” indicating an interruption to the narrator’s reflections.

• The butterfly leads the narrator to the “tuft of flowers”

• Notice the personification “A leaping tongue of bloom”, as though the flowers are speaking to him and providing the communication that he sought earlier.

• Notice the “scythe had spared” and then “bared” the flowers indicating the deliberate action of the mower who had “loved them thus” and left them “to flourish, not for us”. The mower has left the flowers for his own pleasure from “sheer morning gladness at the brim” – the sight of the flowers had filled him with a sense of joy.
Despite the mower’s intention the narrator sees his act as a “message from the dawn”. It is as though the mower is communicating with him which again links back to his desire in the third couplet.

“The butterfly and I had lit upon” – discovered by a chance encounter.

The high modality in “made me hear” suggests the importance of this communication between the narrator and the natural world “wakening birds” and the mower “his long scythe whispering to the ground” leading the narrator to “feel a kindred spirit to my own” and the discovery that “henceforth I worked no more alone;” which indicates a change from the start of the poem and his sense of isolation.

The reference to “wakening birds” suggests a kind of awakening for the narrator to the world around him.
Again the eighteenth couplet starts with “But” indicating his growing awareness of companionship with others as he “worked as with his aid”. His worked has been eased by a sense of joint purpose.

In the nineteenth couplet the newfound companionship is emphasised when he “held brotherly speech” in contrast to the fifth couplet where he spoke “within my heart”.

The phrase “I had not hoped to reach” tells us that this discovery, although welcome, was not actively sought by the narrator.

The movement from a sense of isolation to one of companionship is given emphasis in the final couplet:

“Men work together,’ I told him from the heart,”

‘Whether they work together or apart’”