

The Analysis of 'Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening'

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Abstract: Most of Robert Frost's writings are set in the New England countryside and are so intensely rural and idyllic that he has been called the "Field Poet". 'Stopping by the Woods on a snowy evening', one of Robert Frost's most famous poems, this poem was written in the winter of 1922 while he was at home in Shaftsbury, Vermont. Frost himself later called it "my most memorable" poem. As a popular poem, it is often mistakenly thought to be merely a landscape poem, in which the poet laments the charms of nature. In fact, however, the poet has a deeper intention; he is borrowing the main character in the poem to tell his own inner world, using the most simple and ordinary descriptive language, but also containing many life truths. Frost's use of fresh and native traditional English coupled with neat and traditional meter makes the poem readable and relatable to the readers. This paper analyzes the writing techniques, the choice of imagery, and the central theme of the poem to provide readers with new ideas for interpreting the poem. The analysis shows that Robert Frost is able to use plain and simple language with ordinary things in his poems to convey profound life lessons to the readers, which is intriguing and worth the readers' repeated readings and speculations.

Keywords: robert forest, stopping by woods on a snowy evening, image, writing technique

1. Introduction

In 1922, the renowned poet Robert Frost, often referred to as the 'nature boy' due to his profound connection with the natural world, composed the enchanting poem titled 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.' This composition found its place alongside his extensive work 'New Hampshire' and would later be regarded by Frost himself as "his best effort for remembrance." The backdrop of Frost's childhood was marked by losing his father when he was only eleven years old, prompting a relocation with his mother to New England. This transition ignited a lasting affinity for the land, particularly the rural expanse, which deeply influenced his creative endeavors [1].

Nurtured by years of countryside living, Frost honed a unique insight into rural life, often weaving these perceptions into his poetic expressions. The snowy evening serves as the setting for the poem, ostensibly depicting a mundane occurrence. However, beneath the surface, profound life lessons await discovery. Frost's poetry has garnered acclaim for its timeless relevance and forward-looking perspectives, reflecting the depth of his introspective musings. Within this particular poem, the narrator halts before a snow-draped tree, captivated by the scene's beauty, momentarily releasing the burdens of reality's obligations and concerns.

This contemplation transcends temporal constraints, allowing the observer to escape the bounds of time and age. Remarkably composed, Frost maintains his equilibrium even in this immersive

experience, recognizing the imperative to persist despite fleeting pleasures. This recognition underscores unfulfilled duties and responsibilities, prompting a return to reality. Moreover, the poem traverses multifaceted themes encompassing existence, mortality, loyalty, pessimism, positivity, and enigma. The poem's core revolves around the journey of existence, permeating its entirety.

Preceding the composition of this paper, the author diligently examined numerous works concerning the poem, engaging in meticulous comparison and contrast to illuminate prevailing insights and gaps in analysis. A vast and diverse body of research envelops this piece, thus necessitating a more exhaustive and inventive interpretation. Notably, the poem's imagery, particularly the motif of 'snow,' has not received extensive scrutiny in existing scholarship, rendering the author's innovative analysis a novel vantage point for readers.

Methodologically, this paper adopts a comprehensive and comparative approach, dissecting the entire text horizontally to dissect writing techniques, imagery choices, and thematic profundity. Consequently, readers are presented with an innovative perspective, inviting renewed contemplation while engaging with the poem.

2. Life Experience of Robert Frost

Frost was born in San Francisco, California. His father, William Prescott Frost, was a journalist and a descendant of an English immigrant who arrived in America in 1634. Besides journalism, Frost's father worked as a teacher and later passed away due to tuberculosis when Frost was only eleven years old; after the death of his father, the family, which was in a dire financial state, relocated to Lawrence, Massachusetts. Frost's grandfather, who had provided for the family following William Prescott's passing, bought a farm in New Hampshire for Frost and his newlywed wife, Elinor White. He worked on the farm for nearly a decade, writing whenever possible. His years on the farm were among Frost's most fruitful. It could be argued that despite his evident intelligence and ultimate success, Robert Frost's education held great promise but ultimately failed to deliver. Frost completed his studies at the Lawrence High School, Massachusetts, in 1892 and saw the publication of his first poem 'My Butterfly' in the same year. He then proceeded to Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, where he abandoned it and attempted to pursue a career instead. During this period, he undertook various jobs, including delivering newspapers and working in factories. Nevertheless, his intellectual inclinations eventually prevailed, and he enrolled at Harvard University in 1897. Despite displaying great potential, Frost withdrew from his studies two years later due to illness. However, the lack of academic credentials did not prevent him from becoming one of the greatest poets of his generation. Throughout his lifetime, he received numerous awards, winning the Pulitzer Prize four times and having the distinction of reciting his poem at President Kennedy's inauguration ceremony [2].

3. Technique of Writing

3.1. Use of Personification

The entire poem is 16 lines long, short and sweet, but also catchy to read. The author also uses many writing techniques to give the poem more depth in seemingly simple lines.

First of all, there are six occurrences of the form "I" once "me" in the poem. This shows how much the author emphasizes the embodiment of the concept of "self". The main character of the poem seems to be a passer-by, but in fact, Frost is expressing himself from the passer-by's point of view, and he is the character in this poem. Robert has also mentioned that 'Because of his background, someone calls him nature poet but he is not only a nature poet and readers can find something else in his my poems. "Something else" is to supplement human factor to nature background; thus, must always remember to put human beings in the most important position' [3].

In Western societies, where individualism is extremely prevalent, everyone emphasizes the importance of the self in society and focuses on empowering the individual. In this poem, the author's devotion to individualism is also revealed. On a snowy evening, before the lonely woods, villages of human habitation are in the distance. The scene cannot help but give a sense of desolation, but the protagonist of the poem does not feel any deterrence, but instead appreciates the beauty of nature while realizing that he still has a lot of responsibilities and duties to fulfill, and that society needs him, and that he is an indispensable part of it. This shows that the author sees himself as a very important and independent individual in the society. Behind his choice to move on is an emphasis on the realization of his own self-worth, and behind this ability and responsibility is his confidence in his own abilities and personal importance.

3.2. The Technique of Repetition

At the end of the poem, the author uses the writing technique of repetition. He repeats twice: 'There's still a long way to go before I fall asleep.' The poem is only 16 lines in total, but it takes two lines to repeat a phrase that must be very important. The poet ends the poem by pushing the atmosphere of the poem to its highest point, drawing the reader's attention to the part he wants to emphasize. Firstly, in terms of connotation, the poet is cautioning himself that there are many earthly responsibilities and things to be done, yet here, sleep also suggests death. The author wanted to express his inability to stop and that the day he falls asleep is the day his life ends and that there can be no rest until the end of life. By emphasizing the repetition of the last sentence, the author tries to get the reader's special attention [3]. The mood of the poem is immediately heightened, and a sense of silence and solemnity does not end with the poem, leaving the reader to ponder. Secondly, the technique of repetition is also used to realize the aesthetic function. Neat stanzas make the poem more rhythmic when read, adding musical beauty and regularity to the structural pattern[4].

3.3. Emblematic

In the poem, the poet mentions many things that seem common and ordinary; they are actually metaphors.

For example, the woods have an owner, and the village in the distance mentioned at the beginning of the poem actually symbolizes human society and human beings seeking profit. Then, the poet's short stay in front of the woods after the snow, feeling the snow, wind and other things in nature, symbolizes that he is far away from human society during that period of time, briefly getting rid of all his responsibilities and obligations in this society. The sleep mentioned at the end of the poem, to explore its deeper meaning, is symbolizing eternal sleep, i.e. death, the end of life. Sleep also symbolizes that the poet has to go on fulfilling his mission without being able to stop until life comes to an end. Another example is the poet's little horse, which seems to refer to an animal but also symbolizes all the people in the world who cannot understand the poet [4]. The poet keeps using symbols to hide what he wants to express in ordinary things, which is even more intriguing. From an ordinary small thing to think about the big issue of life and life is what the poet wants to express.

4. Choice of Imagery

In this poem, the poet chooses many things in nature as imagery, among which the choice of imagery for 'snow' and 'woods' is very novel and has research value.

First of all, snow cannot be seen everywhere; its beauty can only be seen in a certain season and place, so this image also represents the poet's beautiful fantasy, ideal poetry, and spiritual world while also suggesting that the ideal state he seeks is not easily attainable. The real world may make the poet feel tired and stressed, so when the snow night comes, reality takes the cloak of the ideal, and the poet

gains a feeling different from the usual, and it is this feeling that he can not extricate himself. 'He will not see me stopping here' makes clear that the poet is also aware that the village representing human society was far away from the woods [5], so no one would notice his unusual actions at this time. Furthermore, in such a snowy winter, it is routinely understood that no one will be outside, but all choose to heat their homes. Viewed in this way, without realizing it, the poet becomes the 'outsider' of reality, while others are 'insiders', which is the group of people who are considered to be normal. The contrasts hidden here enable the reader to experience more about the boundary between the real and the ideal.

To quote what Forest once wrote in his notebooks, 'A poem would be no good that had not doors. I wouldn't leave them open though.' In this poem, he sees the snow as the invisible door. It can be seen that there is also a door between the ideal and the reality. And also a door between Forest and others at that time. The poet's short stay in the snow also represents that he briefly has a glimpse at the ideal world he yearned for.

However, the additional point to note is the characteristics of the snow itself. Just like anything else in nature, it follows the laws of nature. When the sun shines again, the snow will melt. This is also a metaphor here; people will eventually return to real society; that is, as the author said, he closed the door in person.

Instead of continuing in the snow, he chose to move on. That is what it is saying; he finally opened the door between reality and imagination and returned to his own real life for the reason that he had a lot of unfinished tasks and responsibilities. Snow is a natural phenomenon, but in this poem, Frost has given more profound life meaning. This invisible door is finally closed by himself, and left the reader with a profound life lesson[6].

In addition to the unique imagery of snow, readers are forced to focus on the imagery of the woods, which also holds deep meaning behind it. Being the two things mentioned in the title, both occupy an important place in the poem. The poet uses three words to describe the woods, 'lovely, dark deep'. This represents two different layers of meaning. First of all, the poet speaks of the woods as 'lovely', which suggests that deep in his heart, he longed to walk into them. In the snowy evening, the woods are covered with snow, which adds a mysterious color, making people even more curious about the secrets deep in the woods and yearning for that piece of the unknown. People could make their way to the woods or return to their humdrum duties. The woods signify a kind of independence, unshackled from the restrictions of society and free from the never-ending responsibilities of daily life. In the woods, the poet will be able to immerse himself in the ideal spiritual world and forget to enjoy the offer from nature.

Secondly, there is the explanation about 'dark and deep'. On such a snowy evening, the author himself mentions that it is 'the darkest evening of the year.' When walking into the woods, one should be surrounded by loneliness and fear. The woods themselves are characterized by being deep and cluttered, and there are many trees in the woods, making it easy to get lost and trapped. The woods also bring a sense of blindness to the author at this point, an expression of crisis[7]. This crisis does not only refer to the poet's reluctance to leave the beautiful scenery but also refers to the crisis of the poet's own life and career, the helplessness and blindness in the face of reality. This poem was written in 1923 when Robert Frost was nearly fifty years old. The poet suddenly realized that his career was still nothing, and the heart could not help but surge a feeling of melancholy, thinking about their own ideals and future. Thus, this inner sense of crisis is also reflected in the poem.

Overall, the snowy woods symbolize the real world full of temptations, where people have to be able to see the real essence through appearances and not be confused by external objects in order to finally find the real ideals and meanings of life [8].

5. Poetic Theme

The first theme that this poem tries to convey, first and foremost, is positive. Throughout the poem, the tone is ultimately given by the poet of moving forward to face life in a positive way. At the end of the poem, the poet deeply realizes that he still needs to continue to work hard to accomplish both his career and his life to pursue his dreams. Compared to other poets who have also been through trials and tribulations, Robert Frost's thoughts on life and death are more profound due to the fact that he has experienced many misfortunes in his life and witnessed the loss of many of his loved ones. However, even though the reader can always feel a sense of emptiness, loneliness and pain in his poetry, there is nothing negative about dealing with the world. Perhaps this is the real reason why his poems have been passed down through the ages and inspired people's hearts.

The second keyword is choice. Everywhere in the poem, the poet reflects that he is making a choice whether to stay here or move on. Among the deeper choices is whether to continue his journey as a poet or to give up. The process of hesitation of the protagonist in the poem can also be seen as the poet struggling within himself. However, in the end, he makes his own choice, which is to continue to go forward and finish his life's journey. The theme of choice is very common in Frost's poems. In another of his famous poems, "The Road not Taken," the poet encounters two paths during an early morning walk. In the end, he chooses to take the path that is overgrown with grass and less traveled. This choice is different from the public, which means that the poet wants to experience more to meet more challenges[9]. It can be seen that Frost's choice of life is unique insights, whether he chooses not to covet the beauty of the scenery and continue to move forward, or to take the rare path, are all signaling that the poet has been well prepared to meet every change and every kind of trials and tribulations on the journey of life. This kind of active choice is admirable, and it is an excellent poem that can give readers enlightenment in life, and it is worth savoring and learning over and over again[10].

6. Conclusion

This study takes Robert Frost's famous poem 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' as the object of study and analyzes in depth the characteristics and strengths of the poem in terms of content and writing techniques. The method of reading the poem in the context of the poet's life experience enables a more accurate grasp of the overall tone of the poem. For the poet Frost, in the twentieth century in the United States, his fresh and unassuming style of poetry was different from the prevailing style of work and was not widely welcomed, but he was deeply influenced by the puritanical thought and the living environment, and he always took all the creatures of the natural world as the source of inspiration for his own poems and insisted on his own self, and never gave up. This style of writing, which uses the most simple and popular language to reveal the truth of life, gives Frost's poetry a different charm. He followed the traditional techniques of composition but with unique innovations, making him a master of poetry worthy of the admiration of future generations.

In the course of studying the poem 'Stopping by Woods in a Snowy Woods', this paper does not deal with its specific analysis regarding the rhyme of the poem and has relative limitations here. In the analysis, a few key writing techniques and imagery have been selected and interpreted. However, this is not the only perspective from which the poem can be interpreted. Different perspectives of individual attention may bring different knowledge and understanding. All in all, Robert Frost's poem not only gives readers a wonderful aesthetic experience but also teaches readers the philosophy of life and the right attitude toward life.

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