

Research paper on meaning in stopping by woods on a snowy evening by robert frost...

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening paints a beautiful picture of a different time. A horse and rider take time to stop and watch the snow falling in the woods. It sounds like a painting. Yet, much more is going on here than appreciation of nature. The meaning of the poem is that the only character is about to go on a long journey to fulfill a promise. The promise is a great responsibility. The promise might be going to war, taking care of a loved one who is ill, or just taking a moment to rest before resuming the normal responsibilities of life.

The first stanza of the poem invokes the feeling that the subject in the poem needs to rest and that he has chosen a place to rest where he will not be discovered. The person in the poem will not be discovered because the owner of the woods will not see him stopping there.

The third stanza gives a feeling of complete silence except for the sound of the bells on the horse's harness. It is almost as if the person in the poem needs the silence provided by the falling snow. The person seems to be looking for peace.

In the fourth stanza, the reader can see and feel the subject of the poem rouse himself from the lull of the snow and force himself to keep going. As much as the person needs rest and peace, he must keep going. Readers feel the person is exhausted and wants to lay down his responsibilities but it is not possible. The critic, John T. Ogilvie, seems to agree that the subject of the poem is caught between the need for "quiet and solitude" and "social responsibilities".

Frost uses the senses to convey the experience depicted in the poem. The first stanza uses the sense of sight to create a mental picture of the woods

and the falling snow. The second stanza makes use of the sense of sight to let readers know it is a dark night. In the third stanza, Frost makes use of the sense of sound when the horse shakes the bells of the harness. The sound of the bells seems to rouse the rider from the spell of the snow falling. The fourth stanza makes use of the sense of sight again by saying, "the woods are lovely, dark and deep" (Frost).

Most poetry only infers its meaning rather than directly stating its meaning. This way, the reader can connect with the poem based on his or her own experiences. In the first stanza, the line, "Whose woods these are I think I know" (Frost), leads readers to assume that the poem's subject is familiar with the community. He knows who lives where and who owns what. Poetry critic Richard Poirer seems to think the poem's subject is a friendly man who is knowledgeable about his community. The opposite could also be true. The subject of the poem could be coming back home from a long journey because the subject says, "Whose woods these are I think I know" (Frost). Readers could infer that the person in the poem has been away for a long time and does not know if the land has changed ownership.

The second stanza takes readers back to a time before cars where horses were a means of transportation or a method of delivering goods. The character in the poem thought his horse would find it "queer" to stop in the middle of nowhere, implying that the horse was familiar with the character's route. Based on this line, the reader could infer that the person in the poem lived in the area and made regular stops but this was an unscheduled stop. In the third stanza, readers could again infer that the horse is familiar with his rider's route and does not think they should be stopping here.

The fourth stanza lends itself to several inferences:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep. (Frost)

The subject describes the woods as “ lovely” (Frost). This could mean the subject wants to take time to explore the woods. The subject also describes the woods as “ dark and deep” (Frost). Maybe this means the rider wants to lose himself in the woods. This could infer the rider just wants a break from his responsibilities or that he wants to die. Poetry critic, Jeffrey Meyers, seems to think the poem refers to the “ temptation of death”.

What are the promises the person in the poem has to keep? Each reader can come up with a different inference. I get the sense that the subject of the poem has come back from a long journey and still has a long way to go before he gets home. “ Miles to go before I sleep” can have several meanings. Some can infer the person has a long journey ahead of them. Others can infer the person has a long life yet before he can rest in death. Still others might think the person is one of great influence with great responsibilities, does not get much rest, and desperately needs the rest. So far, we have considered the feelings invoked by the poem, the senses used in the poem, and inferences that can be made regarding the poem.

Next, let us look at the dramatic situation in the poem. The situation is that a horse and rider are stopping in the woods during a snowstorm. The speaker is the rider of the horse. The action takes place either in the woods or on the edge of the woods. The events take place before the advent of cars. Readers

do not know exactly why the speaker is stopping by the woods. The temporal setting is during the winter solstice. The events of the poem probably last only a few minutes. The mood of the poem is serious. The speaker is contemplating something deeply.

The tone of the poem tells the reader the speaker's attitude toward the subject of the poem, the audience, or even himself. The speaker's tone in *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* appears to be one of resignation. The speaker has to do what he has to do, regardless of how he feels physically, mentally, or emotionally. The speaker is resigned to his fate and is comfortable talking to the audience about his situation.

The tone of this poem is intimate, conversational, somber, and regretful. The poem seems intimate because it is just the horse, the rider, the snow, and the reader. The snow falling around the horse and rider seems to make their world very small. The tone is so intimate it actually seems conversational. The subject of the poem could be talking to the reader or to himself. The tone is somber because the subject of the poem contemplates the promises he has to keep. The subject of the poem is regretful because he cannot get the rest he so desperately needs.

Another factor to consider when looking at a poem is syntax, or word order. Since this poem is from a different time, the words used and the order that they are used in is different from what we use. Of course, a poem uses different syntax than normal conversation. Although, in this poem, the syntax does seem like a regular conversation.

When looking at a poem, one must look at the poem's rhyme. *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* has end rhyme. In this poem, each stanza is four

lines long and there are four stanzas. In the first three stanzas, the first, second, and fourth line rhyme. For example, in the third stanza, the three rhyming lines end in shake, mistake, and flake. The fourth stanza is unique to the poem. In the fourth stanza, all four lines rhyme. Is it meaningful that all four lines rhyme in the fourth stanza? It could be. It could mean that the speaker has reconciled something within himself. He may have gathered the strength that he needs to carry on.

Critic Clint Stevens says the rhyme in *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* is natural and produces a “pleasant hypnotic effect”. I agree. The poem is very soothing, even when the subject of the poem has to go back to his responsibilities.

Another poetic device similar to rhyme is assonance. Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds. Frost uses the repetition of vowel sounds to create a dreamy feeling to the poem. This dreamy feeling is pleasant and at the same time, this dreamy feeling could lull the speaker of the poem into danger. The speaker could fall asleep and perish in the elements from exposure. It is interesting that one characteristic of a poem, such as assonance, can create something pleasant like a peaceful, dreamy feeling and yet create the possibility of danger.

Figurative language is another component of poetry. When using figurative language the words mean something other than the actual definition of the words. For example, what does the word “sleep” mean in Frost’s poem? Is it literal? Does the speaker in the poem want to lie down and sleep in the woods? Does he want to lie down and sleep at home? Does he wish his life was over and that he could get eternal rest? This is open to interpretation

and that is one of the beauties of poetry. People can develop their own meaning of the poem. This can make the poem seem personal to the reader. The reader can connect to it on a personal level. Once this connection has been made, the reader may learn a lesson from the poem or be inspired by the poem.

As for an evaluation of the poem, it does realize its poetic intentions. Poetry is intended to make readers pause and think about the meaning of the poem. Readers are supposed to contemplate how the poem relates to their lives. The poem is simple to read with words that are easy to understand. Even though it is simple, it is beautiful with its rhyme, assonance, and images.

The poem makes me care about what the speaker's experiences. It makes me wonder what the speaker has endured. My interpretation is that the speaker is coming home after being away for a long time. Perhaps the speaker fought in a war such as the Civil War. He has been gone so long that he is not sure that the same person owns the property where he stops for a rest. I do not think the speaker wants the landowner to see him.

It seems like it is a long journey home for the poem's speaker. He has probably stayed at various farms on the way home so the horse is confused as to why they are stopping in the middle of nowhere without a farmhouse in sight.

If I am right and the speaker has been in a war, he is enjoying and appreciating the tranquility brought by the snowfall. In fact, he probably needs the peace and quiet of the snowfall. Cannons and gunfire may be echoing in his head.

The woods look like a tempting place for the poem's speaker. He wants to go lose himself in them. However, he promised his wife and children he would come back so he is going back. He may be close to home since he thinks he knows who owns the land. He may say he has a long way to go before he sleeps because he will never rest peacefully after what he has seen in the war. He may not rest peacefully until after his death. He is torn between wanting death and peace now and returning to his family and his promises. I stand by my thesis that the meaning of the poem is that the only character is about to go on a long journey to fulfill a promise. It makes no difference whether the speaker is his way home from a journey or just setting off on his journey. The poem discusses the human condition of balancing a need for tranquility with the responsibilities of life.

Works Cited

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