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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF NATURE DEPICTED IN "STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING" BY ROBERT FROST

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Abstract:
Robert Frost wrote "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" in 1922, two years before winning the first of his four Pulitzer Prizes. The poem tells the story of a man traveling through some snowy woods on the darkest evening of the year, and he's pretty much in love with what he sees around him. He's on his way back to town, but he can't quite tear himself away from the lovely and dark woods. Robert Frost is a beloved American poet, and many people associate him with nature and with the New England landscape, because, well, he liked to write about nature and the New England landscape. He was born in San Francisco (land of the sourdough), but spent most of his years in snowy places like Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

Key Words: Depiction, Landscape, Nature, Scenic & Woods

1. Introduction:

It may happened that you saw this little poem on a gift card or your favorite teacher recited it to you and your classmates with a chilling, gravelly voice or bychance you simply came across it once upon a time and can't seem to get it out of your head. No matter what, we're willing to bet big thing that you and this poem are already friends. People love to talk about what this poem means. Some argue that it is simply a description of a man appreciating nature. Others would tell you that there is some heavy metaphor action going down, and that the poem is about death. And there are those who take it a step further and say that this poem addresses suicide. Nature-lovers see it as a piece that trumpets nature and that scorns civilization (take that, civilization!). You probably have your own idea of what this poem means. The heart of this poem's awesomeness lies in how it sounds rather than in what it means, and so we're going to take some time to look at and listen to the sounds in this poem. Frost is known for creating simple poems that can be interpreted on many different levels. He also loved to inject every day, colloquial speech into his poems. He was big on sounds, often talking about how the sounds of words carry more meaning than the words themselves. So, if we follow Mr. Frost's advice, we shouldn't be so concerned with what this poem means as concerned with how it means. Let's warm up our vocal chords and perk up our ears, because something tells us we're going to be reciting and listening to "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" until the early hours of the night.

2. The Landscape Beauty:

Our speaker is in the woods, but (gasp) he's trespassing. He first wonders who owns these woods. In the same breath, he tells us that he thinks he does know who owns them. The lucky landowner lives in a house in the village. Phew. So, our speaker won't get into trouble for trespassing, because there's no one to catch him trespassing. Surprise! Our speaker has a horse (neigh), and this horse is little. Our speaker psycho-analyzes his little horse and supposes that said little horse must think it's pretty strange for them to be stopping in the middle of nowhere, with no one in sight, with not even a farmhouse close by, and absolutely no sign of hay. Newsflash: the speaker and his little horse are chilling (pun intended) between the woods and a frozen lake. Ice skating? Nope. Also, it happens to be the darkest evening of the year. Little Horse is starting to really lose it. Fortunately, he has some harness bells on his back, and he gives them a little shake in order to get his master's attention. The only other sounds are of a slight wind and of falling snow. It's quiet. Our speaker admits to having a hankering for the dark woods, but he tells us he's got things to do, people to see and places to go. He's got a long way to go before he can rest his head on his little pillow, so he had better get going.

3. Some Views:

Symbols: It is the land of symbols, imagery, and wordplay. The woods in this poem are something to write home about. Our speaker can't get enough of them, telling us that "the woods are lovely, dark and deep" (13), as though he were hypnotized. The woods must be all that and a bag of chips, because our speaker is compelled to stop and stare at them on the freezing, dark winter evening. There's a mysterious element to these woods as well, and we get the sense that the speaker is not alone, even though he is very much by himself. Whenever we see woods in literature, we almost automatically see them in contrast to civilization. If you've read The Scarlet Letter, think about the woods Hester Prynne frequents. We also think of woods as being mazelike and full of hidden obstacles, like the Fire Swamp in The Princess Bride (watch out for the Rodents of Unusual Size and the quicksand). These are some pretty intense woods, so feel free to interpret them how you will. In lines 1, 4, 7, 13 the woods as an extended metaphor for death or in line 4 woods as a clear and crisp image as our speaker describes them filling up with snow. Our speaker is digging the natural world. Picture him hanging out with his horse, between a frozen lake and the edge of the woods, while the snows falls gently all around him. The ideas of the village, of a farmhouse, or of the promises he must keep are not nearly as appetizing to our speaker as the cold beauty of the world around him. There's something very lulling about the "easy wind and downy flake" , and we get the sense that the natural world is pretty compelling and pretty good at convincing our speaker to forget about civilization. Nature is powerful in this poem. With lines 6-8, we get a crystal clear image of the snowy woods and frozen lake at night. In line 11, we can almost hear the sound of the wind in the alliteration of "sound's the sweep. In line 13, while the fact that the woods are "lovely, dark and deep" might not seem visually helpful, this description actually helps us visualize the image of the woods even more clearly [1]. Alone on his journey, that's our speaker on this snowy evening. Why then, do we feel like he's not alone? Is it his little horse that seems to have a mind of its own; is it the landowner who is snug in his cozy house in the cozy village, or is it the presence of something else entirely? Horses have thoughts is personified. The "village" and the

farmhouse seems like a symbol for society and civilization. Giving his harness bells a shake, the horse is personified once more as he asks "if there is some mistake.""Sleep" could be interpreted as a metaphor for death.

Form and Meter: Rubaiyat Stanza, Iambic Tetrameter, and bears, oh my God.You may or may not have noticed that "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" has a nice ring to it, almost like a song. There's rhythm and there's reason, and even some rhyming in this poem. Composed of four four-lined stanzas, this poem is a classic example of the Rubaiyat Stanza. Do not be scared by the number of vowels in that word. "Rubaiyat" is a beautiful Persian word for "quatrain," which means a stanza composed of four lines. The Rubaiyat Stanza has a rhyme scheme of AABA. What all of those strange letters are in bold, you ask? Well, we (along with other scholars) like to pick poems apart and look at how they work and at how they sound. When poems contain lines that rhyme with one another, we like to map out these rhyme schemes, so that we can see what words rhyme with each other. You'll notice that the first two lines and the last line of each stanza rhyme together, whereas the pesky third line introduces a new rhyme altogether. When the next stanza begins, the pattern is, three of the four lines rhyme with the third line of the previous stanza. Have we thoroughly confused you? Take a look at "whose woods these are I think I know./ His house is in the village though./ He will not see me stopping here/ To watch his woods fill up with snow" (1-4). In this case, "know," "though," and "snow" all rhyme together, but "here" is like the ugly duckling of the group, not fitting in. Fortunately, "here" rhymes with the first, second, and fourth lines in the next stanza. That's just the way a Rubaiyat stanza works. You'll notice that there's an exception to this rhyming business in the final stanza. In this grand finale of a stanza, each line rhymes together – no new rhyme is introduced. In this way, we know the poem has come to an end [3]. Let's talk about rhythm. If you've heard about or read any Shakespeare, the word "iambic pentameter" might ring a bell. Shakespeare liked to write most of the lines in his plays with a particular rhythm of stressed and unstressed syllables. His lines usually have ten syllables, or five pairs of syllables (pentameter). Frost's lines in "Stopping by Woods of a Snowy Evening," however, have eight syllables. Frost uses iambic tetrameter (think Tetras=four). Because it has a regular rhythm, and because each line only has eight syllables, the poem moves along at a brisk pace. It's a very neat and tidy poem. Look at the syllables in the first line (stressed syllables are in bold font): "whose woods these are I think I know." The iambic (unstressed/stressed) nature of these lines is what allows us to hear this poem in the way that we've been hearing it all of our life – in that slightly sing-songy way [2]. Call us crazy, but we went ahead and counted every word in this poem: 108. Out of those 108 words, only 20 have more than one syllable. In other words, this poem is built mostly of monosyllabic words. What does that mean exactly? Well, we're not quite sure, but monosyllabic words do help to keep up the pace, and they also seem to make the poem sound simpler than it really is. New York Times crossword puzzle words clutter up this poem; and yet, we could argue about its meaning until the cows come home. It's that multi-dimensional.

The Speaker: The speaker is a lonely poet who has learned how to keep himself company by viewing nature. He's your typical dude. You know, the one riding his horse though the countryside around 5:00pm near the end of December, taking a breather to watch the woods fill up with snow. Wait just a minute. Who is this guy? Well, for starters, he is slightly lacking in the confidence department, as the first line suggests: "Whose woods these are I think I know." Why can't he just say, "I know whose woods these are?" Instead, he has to go and invert his sentence and tell us that he thinks he knows what's going on. Second, our speaker is one of those people who just loves nature, who can't get enough of it. He is so taken by the sight of the woods that he doesn't quite know what to do with himself and almost gives up on his village life, his home, and his family, in order to, well; we're not sure exactly what. It's right about then (when he has to remind himself of the promises he has to keep and of the miles he has to go before he can sleep), that we get the sense that something might be awry. Perhaps, instead of being a nature lover, our speaker is philosophical and reflective. Maybe he's one of those people who is always in his head. If that's so, he may just be reflecting on something deeper and darker, like death. Perhaps it's the end of the year, people all around him are getting their New Year's resolutions ready, and he is trying to figure out what life is all about. Perhaps he's thinking, "Am I all about my life in the warm, cozy village with the warm, cozy villagers, or should I try to find more meaning and feel closer to a higher power by chilling with nature?" Either way, our speaker is a very thoughtful (and perhaps slightly depressed) guy. Third, we wouldn't totally blame you if you began to question our speaker's sanity. He seems like a normal guy at first, one who's communicating in a poetic kind of way, but then we realize that he's trying to guess his horse's thoughts and that he kind of wants to hang out all night and look at the woods. There's something in that first line too that suggests he's not thinking normally ("Whose woods these are I think I know"), and he seems way too paranoid about getting caught trespassing on someone else's property. If it's snowing, it must be cold. If it's evening, it must be dark. If there is no farmhouse close by, there's no one to help him out or give him a place to stay. We could imagine taking a break to appreciate the scenery in the middle of the day, but it's the evening, which means that temperatures must be dropping and that the road home must be difficult to see. Finally, yes, our speaker may be a bit strange for trying to decode his horse's thoughts, but this effort also tells us that he's a caring, empathetic kind of guy who spends a lot of time with his horse and who loves it very much. He wants to know how his horse is feeling. We get the sense that if the horse were not with him, our speaker might not make the decision to continue home right away. It's as though the horse reminds our speaker of the "promises" he has made to those in the village and reminds him of the life he has in the village.

The Setting: We imagine it's a dark evening, perhaps around 5:00pm, near the winter solstice (late December). Although our speaker doesn't tell us why he's out, we picture our speaker has been traveling across the countryside to pay a family visit or a business visit in a town ten or fifteen miles away from his own. Perhaps he's stayed longer than he would have liked, and now he's caught in the dying light of evening. Our speaker doesn't have any flashlights, floodlights, or torches with him, and so the only light around is from the dipping sun and the brilliant white of snow. He travels across a little road used by villagers that is quickly disappearing, and he arrives upon a clearing that is bordered on one side by a glassy dark lake and on the other side by deep, dark woods. The darkness contrasted with the white of the snow is startling, even in the dying light. The scene is beautiful but lonely. There are no houses nearby that he can see. His small hometown (a village) is still miles and miles away, and he can't hear a single thing other than the snow, the wind, and occasionally his horse's bells. He is completely alone.

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4. Conclusion:

Among all the Nature poets available worldwide Robert Frost is famous for his vivid description and deft touch. He has the capacity to compel the reader to accompanyhim. It is his exceptional skill that creates the Natural picture in front of our mind's eye. The poem is full of beautiful imagery which compels us to be with Nature.We're not going to lie; nature seems pretty darn scary in this poem. Not scary like it's going to throw thunderbolts at our speaker or let hungry tigers lose on him, but scary in that it is mysterious and even rather seductive. Our speaker is almost enticed into staying and watching the woods fill up with snow, but if he stays too long, we've got to believe that he might freeze to death, catch a really bad cold, or forget his way home. Nature is a beautiful siren in this poem, compelling our speaker to hang out in spite of the dangerous consequences.

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