

About Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"

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Word Count 713

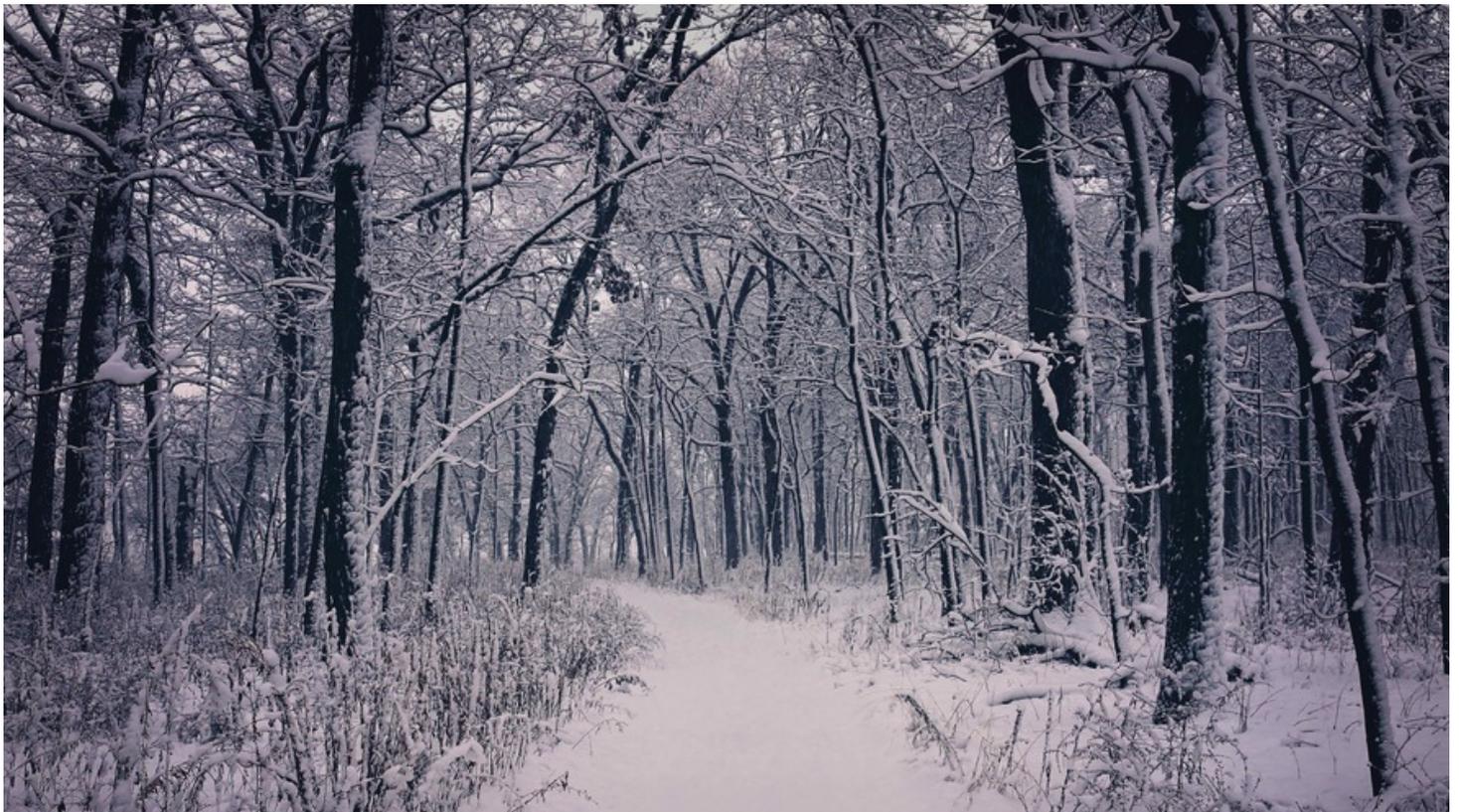


Image 1. A path through a cold winter forest. Photo from the public domain

Robert Frost was one of America's most loved poets. His poetry often recorded rural life in America, particularly the northeastern part of the United States.

The poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" has only 16 lines. Frost described it as "a short poem with a long name." People have said it's the perfect model of a simple poem.

Frost wrote this poem in 1922 in a moment of inspiration. "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" was published in 1923 in Frost's poetry collection called "New Hampshire." It won a Pulitzer Prize. This is an award given every year to great works of writing.

Deeper Meaning In "Stopping By Woods ..."

The narrator of the poem is riding in a horse-drawn carriage. He stops by the forest one day on his way back to his village. The poem goes on to describe the beauty of the forest, covered in a sheet of snow.

But there's a lot more going on than just a man riding home in the winter.

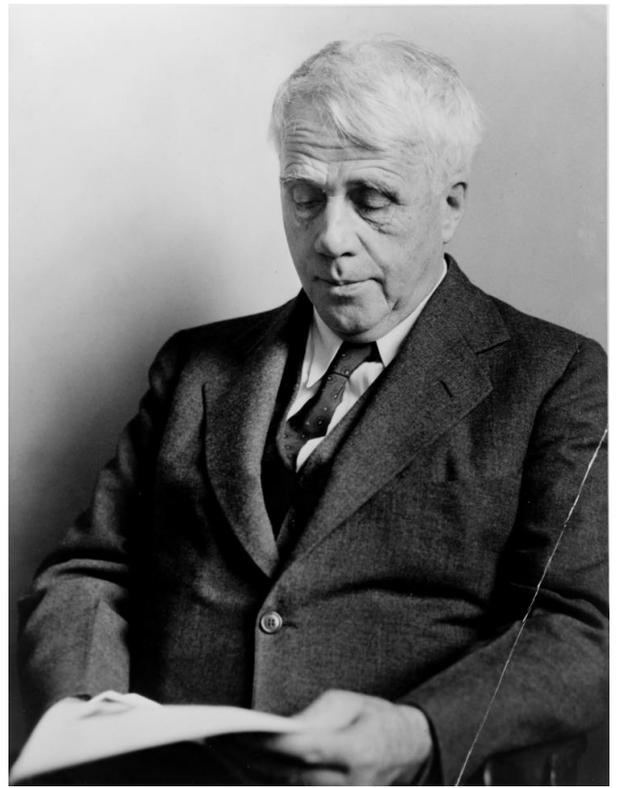
Some interpretations of this poem suggest that the horse is actually the narrator. Or, that the horse has the same mindset as the narrator and is echoing his thoughts.

The central theme of the poem is the journey of life and the distractions that come along the way. In other words, there is so little time, and so much to do.

Maybe It Was About Santa Claus

Another idea is that the poem is describing Santa Claus passing through the woods. The time period described is the beginning of winter when Santa is making his way to the village.

It seems possible he could be Santa because he says he has "promises to keep" and "miles to go before I sleep." There are also bells on his carriage. It is also possible that the horse is Santa's reindeer.



The Staying Power Of The Phrase "Miles To Go Before I Sleep"

This line is the most famous in the poem. There are many ideas as to why it's repeated twice.

It may be speaking about the unfinished business we have. This line has often been used by people who study literature and others who are involved in politics.

For example, Robert Kennedy made a speech in honor of his brother, President John F. Kennedy, after he was shot and killed. Robert Kennedy said his brother often quoted a line from Frost's poem. The line was:

"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."

John F. Kennedy had told his brother that this line applied to himself, the Democratic political party and to all of us as people.

The first prime minister of India was Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru kept a copy of Frost's book close to him. He also liked the same line that Kennedy did. Nehru wrote the line on a pad that he kept on his desk.

Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau died in 2000. His son Justin is now Canada's prime minister. He wrote this in a speech to honor his father:

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep. He has kept his promises and earned his sleep."

Does The Poem Reflect Frost's Sadness?

On a darker note, the poem may have been a statement about Frost's sadness. He faced many tragedies during his lifetime. Frost was also very poor for more than 20 years.

His younger sister Jeanie and his daughter were both hospitalized for mental illness. Also, Frost, his wife, and his mother suffered from a deep, long sadness called depression.

Many critics suggested that "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" was Frost's deep thoughts. Frost may have been describing his own mindset.

Frost described the snow as cold and the forest as dark and deep. This adds the feeling that something bad may happen.

However, other critics just read the poem as a ride through the woods. It's possible Frost was being hopeful by ending the poem with, "But I have promises to keep."

This may suggest the narrator wants to go back to his family to complete his duties.

Quiz

- 1 Read the sentence from the introduction [paragraphs 1-3].

His poetry often recorded rural life in America, particularly the northeastern part of the United States.

Which selection from the article BEST explains what "rural" means?

- (A) "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" was published in 1923 in Frost's poetry collection called "New Hampshire."
- (B) He stops by the forest one day on his way back to his village. The poem goes on to describe the beauty of the forest, covered in a sheet of snow.
- (C) He faced many tragedies during his lifetime. Frost was also very poor for more than 20 years.
- (D) It's possible Frost was being hopeful by ending the poem with, "But I have promises to keep."

- 2 Read the paragraph from the section "Deeper Meaning In Stopping By Woods ..."

The central theme of the poem is the journey of life and the distractions that come along the way. In other words, there is so little time, and so much to do.

Which word, if it replaced the word "theme," would CHANGE the meaning of the first sentence?

- (A) message
- (B) meaning
- (C) image
- (D) idea

- 3 What relationship do some people see between Frost's life and his poem?

- (A) They say that Frost's children's love of Santa Claus made him write a poem about it.
- (B) They say that Frost's admiration of world leaders caused him to write a poem for them.
- (C) They say the darkness of the woods stands for the sadness that Frost experienced in his life.
- (D) They say the coldness of the woods was about the dislike that Frost felt for winter.

- 4 Read the paragraphs from the section "The Staying Power Of The Phrase 'Miles To Go Before I Sleep.'"

Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau died in 2000. His son Justin is now Canada's prime minister. He wrote this in a speech to honor his father:

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep. He has kept his promises and earned his sleep."

Why did the author include these paragraphs in the article?

- (A) to emphasize the meaning the poem has for people
- (B) to illustrate the hard work of Pierre Trudeau
- (C) to elaborate on how the poem is used in speeches
- (D) to introduce the importance of the poem in Canada