

## Symbol and Theme on Robert Frost' Poem by Using Biographical Perspective

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### Abstract

The objective of this research was to find out the symbol and theme that was used by Robert Frost in his literary works. It was also to elaborate on his biographical aspect in using symbol and theme in his poem. The method used to make this paper was qualitative method. The writer also used two approaches to analyze this paper; first, the intrinsic approach consists of the symbol and theme and second, the extrinsic approach is biographical perspective. The data were collected through library research. The results of this research indicated that the symbol on "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" was related to his nature or everyday life, while the theme on "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" was about journey. The last, Robert Frost wrote his poem based on his experience of life when he was teenager.

**Keywords:** biographical perspective, symbol, theme

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is the class of writings distinguished for beauty of style or expression, as poetry, essays, or history, in distinction from scientific treatises and works which contain positive knowledge. Literature is a term used to describe written or spoken material of literary works. Broadly speaking literature is used to describe anything from creative writing to more technical or scientific works, but the term is most commonly used to refer to works of the creative imagination, including works of poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction. Nevertheless, literature is more important than just a historical or cultural artifact. Literature introduces people to new worlds of experience. People learn about books and literature, people enjoy the comedies and the tragedies of poems, stories, and plays, and people may even grow and evolve through their literary journey with books.

In a literary work, some elements built the work can be analyzed both in many point of views. Sociological point of view is how the people consider a literary work based on the social life of the character, the author, the reader, sociology of production-consumption, or even sociology of the work. Meanwhile, the psychological point of view is how people consider a literary work based on the psychology of the author, psychology of the reader, psychology of the work or psychology of the characters.

Perrine as quoted by Heavilin (2013:1) argued that poetry might be defined as a kind of language that says more and says it more intensely than does ordinary language. In addition to, poetry language has deep language that is interesting to be implied to. Furthermore, (Deepa & Ilankumaran, 2018) stated that Poetry is a form of literature that

uses beauty, strong patterns of sounds, words and qualities of language. It can be said that poetry is kind of literature that can applied in lyric songs or just a poem. The language in a poetry is a plastic language, but it can accommodate some explicit dimensions of meaning. The dimension such as imagery, that is an imagination when people read a literary work therefore people can feel and get involved in the author's experiences.

### Research Questions

Two research questions below are stated in this study as the guideline of the research process.

- 1) What kinds of Symbol and Theme cover this *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Eve* poem?
- 2) How does this poem describe the poet's life using biographical perspective?

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A poetry contains some elements, those are intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Intrinsic elements are elements which build and describe the poetry, such as the diction, symbol, figurative language, theme, imagery, tone, rhyme, meter. Symbol and theme will be the main discussion in this research because from these intrinsic elements the writer is able to connect them with biography of the poet, that is Robert Frost.

Groft and Hellen (2000:332) explain that symbols in literature is a thing that suggest more than its literal meaning. Like images, symbols represent something else. In very simple terms a red rose is often used to symbolize love, distant thunder is often symbolic of approaching trouble. Symbols can be very subtle and multi layered in their significance". It means that symbol is a thing that suggest more than its literal meaning, such as image is used to represent something else. Harmon (2003:498) notes that there are two broad types of symbols. First, there are symbols that carry a universal meaning. In this case, a sunrise may represent a new beginning or a stream the passage of time. With the second type, an object or process is invested with a particular meaning by an author. *Moby Dick* is a book rich in both types. For example, while the voyage in search of the white whale is a universal symbol of a quest, the whale itself is an invested symbol that comes to represent, among other things, the incarnation of evil. It means there are two types of symbol, universal meaning and particular meaning. Universal symbol means symbol shared by groups of people worldwide while the particular symbol means an ideas or object used within specific groups.

Previously, analyzing symbol had been discussed by (Moniri & Dohniyatkar, 2019) using Persian Poetry. They divided symbols of sacred war poetry intonational, international, political, and literary style.

Staton (2007:7) was stated that theme gives a strong explained about the unity of what is happening in the story and tell about the story of life in a common content. It means theme is wholeness of the content of story. With theme the reader knows the story and what the story is telling about. In other opinion, theme is broad idea. Theme

can be discovered by responsive reading of the whole story because theme may be implied rather than stated explicitly.

Extrinsic elements are elements which tell about aspects out of the poetry itself, such as psychology of the author and the readers, sociology of the author and readers, sociology of production-consumption, and sociology of work. In this research, the writer will focus on biographical perspective as the main variabe to be discussed. According to Diyanni (2001:158), "Biographical Approach focuses on connection of work to author's personal experiences". It means biography perspective only focuses on author life. It is also supported by the previous analysis stated by Cuddon (2014:83). He said that "Biography is an account of a person's life. Many people can write about someone's life because of their interest of their favorite person that they like. To make biography of someone's life, people need do research first before they write it". It means that biography is an account of a person's life that is written by other person before making the biography someone must do research because biography is about someone's real history or fact. Thus, biographical perspective, is A knowledge of an author's life can help readers understand his or her work more fully. Events in a work might follow actual events in a writer's life just as characters might be based on people known by the author.

Biographical approach was also used by (Permatasari, 2016). She analyzed Maya Angelou's poems using two extrinsic elements, they are feminism and biographical approaches. The biographical approach as the method to analyze the poem by examining it in relation to what is known about the poet's life. Therefore in this research, Robert Frost's poem can be the object of analysis and the writer wants to know his personal life during writing his work.

Other research that is focus on Robert Frost' poem was discussed by (Wang, 2013). Li Wang focused on one of Robert Frost' poems, *Desert Places*. An artistic analysis is used to revealed this poem based on theme, title, setting, imagery, sound quality, syntax, rhythm, figures of speech, and diction. After discussion, Li Wang concluded that the poem analyzed is like Robert Frost's life. Some years later, other researcher (Liu, 2017) was also interested in analyzing Frost's poem. She analyzed Frost's poetry in the light of spiritual ideology, contains "Discover the beauty of life", "Relationship between people" and "Ideology to Live the Life". Analyzing Frost's poem is interesting to be discussed because many aspects can be elaborated from his poems. One research analyzed in literature elements, yet other research can analyze the things like Liu's work.

Robert Frost is one of the most popular American poets. Frost was considered the most successful poet of nature in the United States. Frost was born in San Francisco, California, in 1874 and died in 1963. Robert Frost loved nature. His poetry was full of sentimental expressions about his personal life and conduct. Besides, his poems are simple and profound. He also wrote simple stories about everyday people, often inhabitants of rural New England. Robert Frost wrote extraordinary prose, using simple and direct language, his poems contain symbolism, hidden meanings, sounds, rhyme, meter, metaphors and more.

Robert Frost has seven collections of poetry: *A Boy's Will* (1913), *North of Boston* (1914), *Mountain Interval* (1916), *New Hampshire* (1923), *West-Running Brook* (1928), *A Witness Tree* (1942), and *Come In and Other Poems* (1943). The poems demonstrate different aspects of Frost's style, some are long narrative works that are more like short stories than poems, and others speak from his sharp sense of irony and literary brilliance. His poems show the deeper meanings of everyday activities, the rural setting of New England, and the "truth" of real people and real struggles.

The first collection, *A Boy's Will* 1913, contains poems such as "Mowing" and "Reluctance." The title of the work is a reference to a line from Longfellow's poem "My Lost Youth," which reads: "A Boy's Will" is the wind's will / And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts. After his return from England with his family, Frost published the collection called, *Mountain Interval* (1916), which established his reputation as a prominent New England poet. This collection contains "An Old Man's Winter Night," "A Patch of Old Snow," "Bond and Free," "Birches," "Out, Out," "The Sound of Trees," and "The Road Not Taken." It can be considered that it is to be the most famous of Frost's poems. The collection of *New Hampshire* (1923) contains the poems "Fire and Ice," "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," and "The Lockless Door." The collection *West-Running Brook* (1928), contains the poems, "Once by the Pacific" and "Acquainted with the Night." The collection of *A Witness Tree* (1942) was published after several unfortunate tragedies had occurred in Frost's personal life: His daughter Marjorie died of complications from childbirth in 1934, his beloved wife died of heart failure in 1938, and his son Carol committed suicide in 1940. Despite these losses, Frost continued to work on his poetry and eventually fell in love with his secretary Kathleen Morrison, who became the primary inspiration of the love poems in *A Witness Tree*.

This collection is the last of Frost's books that demonstrate the seamless lyric quality of his earlier poems. This collection contains "The Gift Outright," which describes American identity and it was recited at the presidential inauguration of John F. Kennedy in 1961.

The final collection, *Come In and Other Poems* (1943), contains the piece, "Choose Something like a Star". These seven collections of poetry reveal different sides of Robert Frost, in different times of his life giving a complete vision of his development as an artist. Each poem read has the most basic aspects of a work, from the number of feet in a line to the specific sound of a syllable. As a result, the poems have infinite possibilities in terms of meaning and interpretation.

The writer was interested to analyze the symbol and theme on Robert Frost's poem. Its title is "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening". The writer focuses on the intrinsic approach and extrinsic approach. The intrinsic approach that will be analyzed are symbol and theme in order to know the meaning of the story on the poem and remarkable with the extrinsic aspect is biographical perspective in order to know and understand the connection between the content of the poem and the author's life or experiences.

### 3. METHODS

The writer uses library research for collecting the data and finding the references about the topic of this research. It includes comparing this research with the previous one. Some references can be taken not only from internet or websites but also from some books and journals. After collecting the data completely, the writer indicates and selects the important point of data that relates to the object that will be analyzed. Next, the writer analyzes the poem with reading the poem carefully and connect it with the data. The writer uses descriptive method for writing this thesis. The writer describes and analyzes this research based on the theories that the writer uses in this paper.

### 4. FINDINGS

Robert Frost wrote "Stopping by Woods on Snowy Evening" in 1922, in just a few minutes at his house in Shaftsbury, Vermont, that is now home to the Robert Frost Stone House Museum, and it was published in 1923 in the New Hampshire collection. "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is Robert Frost's most well-known poem, and its simple and unforgettable beauty is incomparable. It shows that Frost is smart in creating beautiful poem.

Whose wood these are I think I know.  
His house in the village, though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promise to keep.  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.

The first stanza talked about that a man is returning home at dusk in his one horse sleigh stops to enjoy the piece and beauty occasion that the snow is falling so softly and covered the woods. There is no other human but he thinks the owner of these woods is someone who lives in the village and will not see the speaker stopping on his property.

In the second stanza, the man did not find any farmhouse in the wood. It seems that the wood is isolated. Only he and horse are there, so he talks to his horse. He says to him to think it queer. The speaker in the poem is not alone, as he seems to be in the first stanza, and we sense conflict of some sort between him and the horse.

While the speaker continues to gaze into the snowy woods, his little horse impatiently shakes the bells of its harness. The speaker describes the beauty and allure of the woods as “lovely, dark, and deep”, when the horse “gives his harness bells a shake” the narrator depends on our ability to hear these sounds. It presents to the readers his concrete world of things and recalls the sight and feel of them.

In the fourth stanza, the man realizes that he actually has another task to do. He gaze at woods that so beautiful covered by the snow but must leave the wood and continue his journey. He still has distance to go by and so with the promises which must be kept. In this stanza, the narrator makes repetition and according to the writer this sentence mean the man still has distance to do and he warns himself that he must keep his promises, because it is the most important thing than enjoyment of life.

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Symbol

Here are some symbols that can be found in the poem. The woods represent a symbol of mystery, danger but as the lyrical eyes it is also lovely. The village and farmhouse symbolize society, civilization, duty, sensibility, and responsibility. The darkest evening of the year symbolizes a feeling of doom and sadness. This line can also be interpreted as a moment of great depression in a person's life.

The horse could be a symbol of the pressures of the “civilized” world. The snow is a white blanket that covers everything living. The white symbolizes open and empty spaces, or purity, peace and death that the speaker feels while stopping in the woods. Snow falls in downy flakes, like a blanket to rest under, but it can cause the loss of the path and death by freezing. The blank environment symbolizes the emptiness that the speaker feels.

The frozen lake is cold and hard just like a death no life can be detected in the lake. The darkness can symbolize many different things, in this case darkness symbolizes the atmosphere and the mystery of the woods. The silence makes the speaker feel secluded from all other aspects of reality and it may also be associated with death. Sleep symbolizes death as an eternal sleep. It is tempting as it offers the individual rest from worries and obligations. For some, sleep is a short escape from life, while death is the final escape.

### 5.2. Theme

The theme of “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” poem is one has to be responsible for every choice that one makes, and it is revealed through words, such as “woods”, “snow”, “frozen lake”, and “downy flake”. The narrator chooses to stop in the woods to watch the beauty of the woods, which is lovely, dark, and deep.

The temptation comes when the narrator chooses to stop in the woods. The narrator has to choose whether to stay in the woods, where he can enjoy the lovely

scene or to continue his or her journey. In the end, the narrator is aware of his or her responsibility and chooses to continue his or her journey.

### 5.3. Historical Background and the poem

Robert Frost said that the poem was composed in just one night. The poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" was composed in 1922 and published in 1923 in New Hampshire volume. After pulling of an all nights on his poem New Hampshire, he stepped outside in wee hours of the morning and had sudden inspiration for the poem.

Based on <http://www.online-literature.com/frost/> (accessed on November 2019), *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* is a poem about speaker's desire to be alone in the forest responsibility in a classic New England setting. The poem was inspired by an economical problem that frost had in a winter in New Hampshire when Frost was returning home after an unsuccessful trip at the market. He did not have enough money to buy Christmas presents for his children, Frost was depressed and stopped his horse on the road in order to cry. After a few minutes, the horse shook the bells on its harness, and Frost was cheered enough to continue home.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The writer would like to give a conclusion from the results of the analysis in the previous section about Robert Frost's poem. The title of the poem that has been discussed is *Stopping by Wood on a Snowy Evening*.

Mostly in every stanza of this poem showed symbol that relate to nature and everyday life. In the poem of "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" the symbol are the village and farmhouse symbolize "society", "civilization", "duty", "sensibility", and "responsibility",

*The darkest evening of the year* symbolizes a feeling of doom and sadness, the horse could be a symbol of the pressures of the "civilized" world, white symbolizes open and empty spaces, or purity, peace and death that the speaker feels while stopping in the woods, sleep symbolizes death as an eternal sleep.

The theme of selected his poem, *Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening* poem is one has to be responsible for every choice that one makes, Robert Frost writes his poem by his experience from his life. By using biographical perspective the writer know the connection between the poem and the history of the poem. The history of the poem relate to the events of the poem.

It can be concluded that Robert Frost uses the symbol such as nature and uses the symbol the things in everyday life. And the theme is about the life. So the reader gets the interesting message. The author suggests for the readers that they can learn about kinds of poetry and elements of poetry such as symbol and theme by analyzing the poetry itself. If they have known what the elements of poetry at poetry itself, so they can analyze it easier and understand the meaning of the poetry talks about.

In poetry, the readers can know the meaning of the symbol and theme that are used in poetry can be seen from extrinsic element of poetry such as biographical perspective, because most of the poem's writer writes their story.

The next research can analyze other poem of Robert Frost which can be focused with different aspect. The aspects come from the intrinsic approach or extrinsic approach. It means the researcher can analyze the literary devices or element of poetry or the extrinsic which focuses on the outside of literary work.

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