

Robert Frost: Fire and Ice

In his poem "Fire and Ice" Robert Frost compares and contrasts the two destructive forces: fire and ice. In the first two lines of the poem he presents two options for the end of the world: an end by fire or by ice. He takes the position of fire in the next two lines and relates fire to desire. This comparison suggests that Frost views desire as something that consumes and destroys. Desire does indeed have a way of consuming those it infects. However, in the next stanza Frost makes the case for the destructive force of ice. He compares ice to hate. This comparison relates to the reader a view of hate as something that causes people to be rigid, unmoving and cold. Also, ice has a tendency to encompass things and cause them to crack and break. The last line of Frost's poem asserts that the two destructive forces are equally great. Fire, or passion, consumes and destroys quickly, leaving ashes in its wake. Ice, or hatred, destroys more slowly. It causes objects to become so immovable that they crack from the pressure created, leaving split fragments that once were whole. From the views Frost states in this poem it would be fair to extrapolate that he believes the world will end in violent war for coveted things. However, Frost also could conceive of an end of the world caused by people becoming too rigid, unmoving and set in their ways and ideas that the world breaks apart into factions.

Care must be taken, evidently, to keep the world at room temperature.

Robert Frost: Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

I have read "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" several times. Each time I read it brings a new meaning deeper than the last. I feel there are two emotions being expressed. The emotion I first felt was that of wonder and serenity in a private moment watching the snow fall. The other emotion is a sense of loneliness and sorrow. The author is trying to convey the feeling of someone trapped in a sorrowful time. This person feels alone and wishes he/she could stop time where it stands and let life go on without him/her. The jingle of the harness bells represents the person's "snap" back into reality. He or she cannot stop (commit suicide) because of promises made and a long life left to live. -Catherine Mathias

"And miles to go before I sleep, And miles to go before I sleep." I chose these lines from Frost's "Stopping By the Woods on a Snowy Evening" because of their depth and hidden meaning. I did not fully grasp the significance of Frost's words until we discussed the poem in class. As we said, Frost often repeats lines in his poems, but makes each line contain a different meaning. This is a prime example. The first line means, literally, that the man has a long way to go before he can get home and go to bed. The second line, however, is much more complex. It refers to the amount of time the man has until he dies. I also agree with the "suicide interpretation" that was brought up in class. The man may have been contemplating suicide, but after spending some time in the woods, he realized that he has too much left to do in life to end it all. In this way, these snowy woods were his salvation. -Margaret Evans

"And miles to go before I sleep, And miles to go before I sleep." This poem by Robert Frost is very simple in structure, but can be looked at in a very complex manner. The basic story in this poem is that a man is riding in the woods on a horse-drawn sleigh, he stops, then starts going again. The last stanza of this poem is the point right before the man starts traveling again. At this point, Frost ends the poem by repeating the same line. The interesting thing about this is that each of the identical lines have two entirely different meanings. The first can be taken literally. It can be interpreted as the traveler has a long time before he gets home.

But the next line has to be looked at more closely. Frost's meaning in this line expresses the traveler's feeling towards life. The pause in his travels may have been to contemplate suicide or leaving his old life behind. But, he makes the decision to go on because he still feels he has a lot of things to do with his life. By sleep, Frost is talking about the man's death, not actual sleep. -Brian Ross

I disagree with the class' interpretation of the poem "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost. In class, the repetitive "s" sounds were described as signifying the sound of the narrator's sled. However, I think that this poem is about a man on a mission to kill himself. So, he goes into the woods of a man he knows in town (perhaps his boss). He is scared and unsure, so he shivers making "s" sounds. He calls it "the darkest night of the year" because it is the night he has made the decision to die. At the end of the poem, the repetitive "s" sounds stop. This is because he changes his mind and decides that he will not kill himself on this night. So, he stops shivering. This explanation of the "s" sounds seems to better fit the theme of the poem. While the "s" sounds can be interpreted as the sounds of the sled, it seems more logical that the word choices were chosen to show the person's nervousness and shivering in anticipation of killing himself. -Sarah Stopek

William Wordsworth: I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud

In this poem, the speaker wanders by himself upon a field of daffodils and is awestruck by their beauty. As the daffodils sway and “dance” in the wind, the speaker captures them in his mind’s eye. Later, while in solitude, the beautiful vision of the daffodils dancing brings joy to the speaker well after the event. Wordsworth presents three common elements of Romantic literature: individualism, natural beauty, and joy.

Summary

In this poem, the poet recounts his tale of chancing upon a long belt of daffodils. He is struck speechless by their sheer number and beauty. He says that they seem to be as numerous as the stars that shine in the sky. He also remarks on the beauty of the waves dancing next to them, though they are overshadowed by the daffodils.

Commentary

This simple poem, one of the loveliest and most famous in the Wordsworth canon, revisits the familiar subjects of nature and memory, this time with a particularly (simple) spare, musical eloquence. The plot is extremely simple, depicting the poet's wandering and his discovery of a field of daffodils by a lake, the memory of which pleases him and comforts him when he is lonely, bored, or restless. The characterization of the sudden occurrence of a memory--the daffodils "flash upon the inward eye / Which is the bliss of solitude"--is psychologically acute, but the poem's main brilliance lies in the reverse personification of its early stanzas. The speaker is metaphorically compared to a natural object, a cloud--"I wandered lonely as a cloud / That floats on high...", and the daffodils are continually personified as human beings, dancing and "tossing their heads" in "a crowd, a host." This technique implies an inherent unity between man and nature, making it one of Wordsworth's most basic and effective methods for instilling in the reader the feeling the poet so often describes himself as experiencing.

Emily Dickinson: How Happy is the Little Stone

My absolute favorite poem from the poetry slam was Shanna's reading of How Happy is the Little Stone, by Emily Dickinson. Shanna did a great job by using the *plain* little stone as a prop.

This poem is short and simple, but makes a great point. I looked up the word exigencies to get a better interpretation of the poem. The definition I found that best fit was #3: *urgent requirements; pressing needs. Often used in the plural.*

This line explains how the stone has no needs...no urgent demands (like most people have).

This poem is perfect for college students, because we have all these demands on us from parents, professors, employers and peers. We stress about our complicated lives. We should be more like the sun which "associates or glows alone". This to me means that maybe the sun "mingles" with clouds or rain or birds in the sky...or it sometime stands alone, when the sky is clear. The only thing I don't understand about this poem is the last phrase "Fulfilling absolute decree In casual simplicity". I looked up the word decree and most, if not all the definitions, had to do with law. Maybe it has to do with the mere existence of the stone. Could anyone explain this to me? It would help me better understand and appreciate this poem.

Jennifer

Hello Jennifer,

I am glad to see that a classmate appreciates this poem too. I thought that this poem also contributes to a college students life; therefore, answers the reason why I chose this simple poem.

Now "Fulfilling absolute decree. In casual simplicity". I took this to mean that a rock is a solid mass, and can be extremely heavy. The rock has power to fulfill. Power, which means decree. However, the rock also can be still and calm, which explains simplicity as lack of complication and plainness in manners or way of life. Again, relating to a college student, there are those days when you feel power to conquer and maybe that one day out of the week that is simple or does not involve much thought.

Shannah

This poem was written during the Transcendentalist period, and writers believed in an "oversoul" that encompasses all living things. "Fulfilling absolute decree" is the stone fulfilling his purpose in this world. "absolute decree" is a reference to god and god's will. "casual simplicity" is another transcendental ideology.

Laura

William Shakespeare: Sonnet 130

Sonnet 130 is Shakespeare's rather lacklustre tribute to his Lady, commonly referred to as the [dark lady](#) because she seems to be non-white (black wires for hair, etc). The dark lady, who ultimately betrays the poet by loving other men, appears in sonnets 127 to 154. Sonnet 130 is clearly a parody of the conventional and traditional love sonnet, made popular by Petrarch and, in particular, made popular in England by Sidney's use of the Petrarchan form in his epic poem "Astrophel and Stella."

If you compare any of the stanzas of that poem with Shakespeare's sonnet 130, you will see exactly what elements of the conventional love sonnet Shakespeare is light-heartedly mocking. In sonnet 130, there is no use of grandiose metaphor or allusion -- he does not compare his love to Venus; there is no evocation to Morpheus, etc. The ordinary beauty and humanity of his lover are what is important to Shakespeare in this sonnet, and he deliberately uses typical love poetry metaphors against themselves. In Sidney's work, for example, the features of the poet's lover are as beautiful and, at times, more beautiful than the finest pearls, diamonds, rubies, and silk. In sonnet 130, the references to such objects of perfection are indeed present, but they are there to illustrate that his lover is not as beautiful -- a total rejection of Petrarch form and content. Shakespeare utilizes a new structure, through which the straightforward theme of his lover's simplicity can be developed in the three quatrains and neatly concluded in the final couplet.

Thus, Shakespeare is using all the techniques available, including the sonnet structure itself, to enhance his parody of the traditional Petrarchan sonnet typified by Sidney's work. But Shakespeare ends the sonnet by proclaiming his love for his mistress despite her lack of adornment, so he does finally embrace the fundamental theme in Petrarch's sonnets -- total and consuming love.

One final note: Shakespeare's reference to hair as 'wires' confuses modern readers because we assume it to mean our current definition of wire -- a thread of metal -- which is hardly a fitting word in the context of the poem. However, to a Renaissance reader, wire would refer to the finely-spun gold threads woven into fancy hair nets. Many poets of the time used this term as a benchmark of beauty, including Spenser: "Her long loose yellow locks like golden wire" (*Epithal*).