

## ***Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening***

***By Robert Frost***

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.

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 his 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 promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.  
And miles to go before I sleep.

## **CLASS DISCUSSION - PROMPT QUESTIONS**

On the surface, this poem is simplicity itself. The speaker is stopping by some woods on a snowy evening. He or she takes in the lovely scene in near-silence, is tempted to stay longer, but acknowledges the pull of obligations and the considerable distance yet to be traveled before he or she can rest for the night.

- a. In both "Good-bye and Keep Cold" and "Stopping by Woods" the speaker hesitates en route. Compare these hesitations.
  - Do they derive from the same impulse and misgiving or are they distinct about leaving the quietness, loneliness of the orchard/wood?
- b. In "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," Frost writes that the speaker imagines his horse to think him strange. What might be the significance of this?
- c. The basic conflict in the poem, resolved in the last stanza, is between an attraction toward the woods and the pull of responsibility outside of the woods.
  - What do woods represent? Something good? Something bad?
  - Woods are sometimes a symbol for wildness, madness, the pre-rational, the looming irrational. But why do these woods do not seem particularly wild? (They are someone's woods, someone's in particular--the owner lives in the village. But that owner is in the village on this, the darkest evening of the year--so would any sensible person be.)
- d. What is the division between the village (or "society," "civilization," "duty," "sensibility," "responsibility") and the woods (that which is beyond the borders of the village and all it represents)?
  - If the woods are not particularly wicked, they still possess the seed of the irrational; and they are, at night, dark--with all the varied connotations of darkness.
- e. Part of what is irrational about the woods is their attraction. They are restful, seductive, lovely, dark, and deep--like deep sleep, like oblivion. Snow falls in downy flakes, like a blanket to lie under and be covered by. And here is where many readers hear dark undertones to this lyric. To rest too long while snow falls could be to lose one's way, to lose the path, to freeze and die. Does this poem express a wish to be lost, considered, and then discarded?
  - Do the woods sing a siren's song? To be lulled to sleep could be truly dangerous. Is allowing oneself to be lulled akin to giving up the struggle of prudence and self-preservation?
  - Or does the poem merely describe the temptation to sit and watch beauty while responsibilities are forgotten--to succumb to a mood for a while?
- f. Why is the final line repeated? The line "And miles to go before I sleep" need not imply burden alone; perhaps the ride home will be lovely, too.