

HISTORICAL FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW: REEVALUATING STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING THROUGH NEW HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The study follows the footprints of New Historical aspects in Robert Frost's poem Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening. New Historical theory uncovers various contexts such as political, historical, social, and economical. The poem showcases human experiences after WWI along with the Harlem Renaissance and Roaring Twenties. It also has a tension between social obligation and individual desires. The obligation also gives a sense of the financial burden and responsibilities of modern time. This sense further defines the relationships between nature and humans. Politically, the poem offers the importance of individual freedom and the problems of modern life complexities. This leads to a rebellious attitude towards political and social means. In addition to this, the poem contains power dynamics like social class, individualism, relationship of master and servant, inner conflict, and uncertainties. In conclusion, the poem includes historical, political, social and economic contexts for getting the relevant meanings.

Keywords: New Historicism, obligation and desires, individual freedom, power dynamics.

Introduction

There is a unique relationship between literature and history. They support a text at the same time to offer logical and standard understanding of the meanings. New Historicism suggests the study of both for the analysis of a text. It is a literary practice that is used for textual and contextual meaning of any writing. New Historicism showcases many perspectives of the text which offers various meanings of a single text. A text can be studied

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through history and history through text for getting the related meanings. It assists to examine literature from a comprehensive interpretation including cultural discourse, social discourse, past history, and political and economic context too (Pratheebaa, 2020).

Robert Frost is an American writer who contributed to American literature through his poetry. He produced many poems on the motifs of nature, individual, society, politics, historical contexts, human experience and psychology. *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* is one of his poems that is widely explored from multiple perspectives due to its uniqueness and richness of meaning.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher selects the theory of New Historicism by Stephen Greenblatt for this study. It is an approach to text which instructed the text or the interpretation of the text in the setting of literature. Literature and history work together to give the actual meaning. According to Tyson (1999), the text should be studied within the context to produce the actual meaning out of it. The text, context, culture, political, history, etc. are all important to understand the meaning of the text. This theory provides a broader historical aspect that examines the time of the author as well the reader.

Research Questions

How does New Historicism help to understand the historical, cultural, social, and political contexts of the poem?

How do historical, cultural, social, and political contexts help to understand the meaning of the poem?

Literature Review

According to Lois Tyson (1999), New Historicism offers historical situations from the time in which the text emerged. The time of the author along with historical, social, political aspects are important for getting the meaning of the text. It came from a counter theory of New Criticism as they believed that only text is important and context is not important. Without context, no one can relate the text or find the universal meaning of the text. Context contains biography, culture, political, economic, social and historical aspects which provide the actual or relevant meaning of the text; otherwise, the text gives its meaning in isolation and allusions are kept aside for no reason. Therefore, text along with context both are important for text to get its relevant meaning (Kaçmaz, 2011).

John Brannigan (1998) explained that New Historicism creates a logical connection to understand the stories of the past in their actual context. It

covers a vast field in literature while studying a text from social, political, power dynamics, economical and historical perspectives. Pratheebaa (2020) analyzed the writings of Mahmoud Darwish and Stephen Gill through New Historical Perspective to find the relation between brotherhood and peace. They wrote about terrorism, war, violence in their writings highlighting the main features. To understand these features, cultural, political, and historical aspects are important for a text.

Rahman (2016) applied the theory of New historicism on Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and explored the biographical, political, historical, cultural and social contexts. He highlighted the fact that the play presented the great depression era, his life experiences, WWI and its impact, lower and middle classes, and American dreams. He examined all the above context with the help of New Historicism to relate the text to its time, place, and circumstances. The play also commented on beliefs, customs, values, morals, and fragments of American society.

Kaçmaz (2011) also utilized New Historicism on Harold Pinter's *One for The Road* to discuss political scenarios and power abuse at the time of writing this play. The play is based on the Turkish writers who are unable to speak their hearts in Turkey. The cultural and social background of the play lead readers towards the people who are not able to speak for themselves.

Khaled Hosseini's novels (*The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*) have also been analyzed through New Historical perspective to get the historical angels. These angels offer a relationship between history and political realms. The books shaped mostly the deconstructed part of Afghanistan along with its culture and social states (Nazeer, et al., 2022). Abid and Mushtaq (2020) discussed this theory in Manto's *Stories* to find historical and social integration. He believed that history forms a text and text showcases the history. These two work parallel in literature. It presents and represents power dynamics and cultural issues. He further expressed that the theory helps to uncover the relation among culture, identity, power, and political norms.

Prologue to the Canterbury Tales by Chaucer is also interpreted through this theory as it unfolds the mysteries behind the stories. All the characters of the book have a unique sense of understanding and social status. They have their wellbeing in the society according to their profession. Every character faced the influence of culture, power, politics and social discrimination. The theory makes the stories to find the meaning according to the historical and social domains (Khan, et al., 2022).

The poems of Robert Frost have been analyzed from various domains such as duality, tradition and modernism (Wu, 2021), stylistic analysis (Latif, et

al., 2022), questioning nature, death and isolation (AlKhrisheh, et al., 2023), nature and its beauty (Rashid, et al., 2021), treatment of nature and humanity (Nolan, 1942), deconstructive analysis (Rehman, et al., 2024), and symbols and themes (Adi, 2020).

The analyzed aspects offer a research gap for this study; therefore, the researcher has applied the theory of New Historicism to analyze the aspects of political, social, economic, and historical contexts of the poem.

Research Methodology

The researcher has analyzed the poem from a New Historical perspective with the help of Textual Analysis along with Close Reading of the Text. Textual Analysis assists to guess the meaning between the line and Close Reading divides the text into chunks for getting relevant meaning of the chunks.

Textual Analysis

Historical Context

The poem is written after WWI during its impact in 1922. The War has affected rural and urban areas where Frost was living among woods and snow. The poem gives the reflection of tension between modern era and traditional life as well as cultural and social upheavals. This era builds a path for technological advancement, industrialization, and urbanization. The historical context is the Harlem Renaissance and Roaring Twenties. Harlem Renaissance was related to poetry, art, and fiction emerged during roaring twenties, but it failed to produce a pivotal modern art (Baker, 1987).

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.

In this upsetting poem, Robert Frost skillfully illustrates the key tension of modern and natural/ traditional life. The Speaker stops there for a while to free himself from all the tensions which he faces during that time. He wants to take a precious time for himself to satisfy his desire along with his social expectations. The reason behind his stay is that outside the woods everything is captured by industrialization and urbanization.

Social Context

The setting of the poem, where the speaker stops, showcases simple time that is related to his introspection. It also gives the sense of restlessness and flexibility of that time. The poem presents pastoral life, nostalgia, and modernity ahead in the form of a village. The horse's confusion in the poem highlights the speaker's own sense of disorientation in a rapidly

changing world, where traditional markers of identity and community (such as the farmhouse) were disappearing. The social context also includes human connection with nature and their place as an individual in this world, but the poem presents a lack of social support that damages the individual integrality (AlKhrisheh, et al., 2023).

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near;

.....

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.

The shake of the harness bell brings back the speaker from his contemplation in the woods. This gives the idea of disconnection, distortion or disorientation from the natural world to the modern urban world. The bell is also a reminder for the speaker that social responsibilities are more important than individual life, so go ahead and accept the hard reality of modern times. This is for sure an example of various social aspects related to human experience to the nature, their obligations, and personal life (Wiranota, et al., 2024).

Power Dynamics

The speaker of the poem is mesmerized by the woods, but he knows that he has to continue his journey to fulfil his responsibilities. It emphasizes on the desire of an individual and the expectation of the society. The speaker knows that he is unable to control nature; therefore, he decides to enjoy woods for a short time period and then moves ahead due to his unwanted responsibilities. Power dynamics contains social class, individualism, relationship of master and servant, inner conflict, and uncertainties. This had to be a chaotic experience due to industrialism and global conflicts which drive human towards uncertainties (Orlov, 1986).

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.

Woods symbolizes the traditional or natural world which evokes the sense of marvel, wonder and mystery. The speaker realizes that the time is melting or gives away during his stay in the woods; therefore, he continues his journey for his inevitable duties. This is also a journey from natural to industrialization or rural towards modernization.

Economic Context

The poem seems to be written in the era of great depression, industrialization, and economic growth, but the speaker has an economical

mood of transport in the form of horse which presents a traditional way to transport at that time. Economic context also offers a sense of commitment to obligations and responsibilities. The poem has hardships in the era of industrialization which creates demands for more work and more obligations (Watson, 2016).

Miles to go before I Sleep

Miles to go before I Sleep

These repeated lines show the responsibilities, duties and obligations which are related to economic conditions. The tension between the said elements have direct or indirect relationship to economic context.

Political Context

The poem also offers a glimpse of political pressures such as the Red Scare, rise of communism and the great depression. The pause in the woods by the speaker gives the sense of rebellious attitude towards social and political norms. It is a kind of resistance against modern, political and industrial norms. The poem presents the actual context of politics at the era after WWI and everyone common person goes against the WWI due to its aftereffects on every individual (Aldalabeeh & Alam, 2017).

The only other sound's the sweep

Of easy wind and downy flake.

These lines provide comfort to the speaker in terms of environment, peace, and atmosphere in the woods. Later, he realizes that even the sound of 'easy wind and downy flake' is causing chaos in this tranquil place due to the distortion of modern upheavals. The speaker does not want to leave the calm places, but the societal and political issues compel him to leave the place.

New Historicism provides a vast comprehension about the poem that includes political, social, economic, and historical context. There is also a tension between individuals and social standards along with modernity and traditional norms. New Historical perspective gives an overview of contradiction, tension, uncertainty in culture, political, social and in individual life of the 20th century.

Conclusion

The poem Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening by Robert Frost is a masterpiece about human experiences, nature, the Harlem Renaissance, Roaring Twenties, political, economic, social and historical contexts. Robert Frost skillfully illustrates all the above New Historical perspectives woven together directly and indirectly. The poem mirrors the after effects of WWI and The Great Depression era. It also searches for the relevant meaning in the fast changing world. It reflects the tension between social

obligation and individual desires in that uncertain atmosphere. Moreover, the poem elaborates the financial burdens and responsibilities in that transition of culture and behavior. It also presents a commentary on personal freedom, modern intricacies of real life and the place of individuals in society. All these complexities of modern life make people blind and uncertain due to leaving nature behind, and the transition towards urbanization. New Historicism directs a comprehensive analysis of the poem from all the above viewpoints which give an overview of the entire century.

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