



# Beauty Vs Duty: A Comparative Study of Robert Frost and W. H. Davies

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**Abstract**— *The purpose of this research paper is to focus and analyse on the conflict while choosing between beauties of nature and duties of an individual, of which should be given more importance and prominence. This paper is mainly intended to bring out the similarities and differences of opinion and views of both Robert Lee Frost and William Henry Davies towards beauties and duties, in their respective poems Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening and Leisure. The reason for comparing the two poems of these poets is due to their outlook not only towards nature and beauties around but also the mundane and routine chores of man. Most of the themes in their poetry dealt with realistic life and situations familiar to the common man. Both the poets are eminent, well-reputed and widely accepted by the common readers of English poetry.*

**Keywords**— *Beauties and duties, realistic, mundane and routine chore.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Robert Lee Frost and W.H. Davies are very well noted, eminent and contemporary modern poets known for their earnest stance towards life and their sympathetic view of nature with all its beauties.

Both the poets expressed mostly similar feelings and views in their respective poems- “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” and “Leisure” towards nature and hectic life style of a modern man. But They concluded their poems with different perspectives or outlook.

**Robert Lee Frost** was born on March 26, 1874 in San Francisco, California. He is the only poet to receive four Pulitzer Prizes for his work. He also received many honorary doctoral degrees, although he never actually earned a bachelor’s degree. An avid teacher and a gifted writer, he is one of America’s most admired poets of the Twentieth Century. He wrote in traditional poetic forms but with a twist—capturing the rhythms and vocabulary of ordinary speech. He was a great man and was very loyal too.

President John F. Kennedy, at whose inauguration Frost delivered a poem, said of the poet, "He has bequeathed his nation a body of imperishable verse from which

Americans will forever gain joy and understanding." And famously, "He saw poetry as the means of saving power from itself. When power leads man towards arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses."

**William Henry Davies** is a Welsh poet who was born on July 3, 1871. Born in the harbor town of Newport, Monmouthshire, Wales.

Davies wrote seven hundred poems throughout his life in twenty-five different volumes, *Nature Poems and Others*, *Forty New Poems*, and *The Loneliest Mountain*, just to name a few. His *Collected Poems* was published two years after his death. Most of his poetry was about the beauty of nature, something he learned to appreciate during his life on the road, and his experiences traveling and wandering the countryside. Davies has been praised for his incredibly simple, natural style of writing poetry.

## II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- *What is the purpose of human existence?*
- *How does a modern man spend his leisure?*
- *Which are more important 'beauties' or 'duties? And why?*
- *How to balance between beauties and duties?*

## III. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This article aims at

- The dilemma of modern man in prioritizing between his responsibilities towards his fellow beings and the beauties around him in nature.
- Describe the present life style of modern men

## IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article adopts descriptive and qualitative methods to analyse, compare and contrast the theme, style and poetic devices employed by the poets in their respective poems.

## V. FINDINGS

### A. Similarities

#### 1. Theme

Both Robert Frost and Henry Davies dealt with the same theme i.e., of the individual caught between nature and civilization. In "**Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening**", the speaker's location on the border between civilization and wilderness. The speaker is drawn to the beauty and allure of the woods, which represent nature, but has obligations— "promises to keep"—which draw him away from nature and back to society and the world of men. The speaker is thus faced with a choice of whether to give in to the allure of nature, or remain in the realm of society. Some critics have interpreted the poem as a meditation on death—the woods represent the allure of death, perhaps suicide, which the speaker resists in order to return to the mundane tasks which order daily life.

The opening two lines of the poem, "**Leisure**"-

"What is this life if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare"

warns that "the hectic pace of modern life has a detrimental effect on the human spirit." Modern man has no time to spend free time in the lap of nature.

#### 2. figurative language

Figurative language is a way to describe different literary techniques that help make writing memorable. Poetry, in particular, uses figurative language to help say something in a more beautiful or meaningful way.

**2.1. Symbolism** is figurative language that enhances literal things with symbolic the poem, the poet and his horse go through snowy woods surrounded by nature, he stopped 'without a farmhouse near.' The village and farmhouse can be seen as symbols of society and civilization. The lonely journey of the poet or rider might symbolize the journey of an individual through life. The dark woods that surround the poet are often interpreted as symbols of death.

**2.2. Personification** is a tool where an inanimate object or an abstract idea is attributed with traits of living beings. William Davies beautifully personifies beauty as a beautiful dancing girl with smile on her face. Here natural beauty is attributed with living beings' traits like dancing, smiling and having feet. The use of personification in the poem increases its beauty and creates interest for readers.

Robert Frost has personified the thinking of the horse mildly in the second stanza when it stops, and in the third stanza he gives a sign to the rider.

"He gives his harness bells a shake/ to ask if there is some mistake." It shows as if the horse is a human being who understands his owner's needs or inquires if they have to stop.

**2.3. Alliteration** is the repetition of the same consonant sounds in the same lines such as the consistent use of /w/, /wh/ and /s/ sounds. The following phrases are examples of alliteration from the poem: "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" –

"Watch his **w**oods", "sound's the sweep", "His house".

The following phrases are examples of alliteration from the poem: "Leisure" –

"Stand and stare", "beneath the boughs" and "Streams full of stars".

**2.4. Imagery** draws on the five senses, namely the details of taste, touch, sight, smell, and sound. Imagery can also pertain to details about movement or a sense of a body in motion (kinaesthetic imagery) or the emotions or sensations of a person, such as fear or hunger (organic imagery or subjective imagery).

The following phrases are examples of imagery from the poem: "Leisure" –

"Stand and stare", "squirrels hide their nuts in grass"

The following phrases are examples of imagery from the poem: "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" –

"Other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake", "frozen lake"

**2.5. Extended metaphor** refers to a comparison between two unlike things that continues throughout a series of sentences in a paragraph, or lines in a poem.

The last line of the third stanza, of “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”

“Sweep of easy wind and downy flake”

“No time to turn to beauty’s glance” in the poem the “Leisure”.

### 3. Repetition, There is a repetition of the verse

“And miles to go before I sleep” “and miles to go before I sleep “which has created a musical quality in the poem.

“We have no time to stand and stare” repeated twice in the poem “Leisure”.

## B. Differences

### 1. Tone

The poet in poem LEISURE is satirical. The poet satirizes human beings and prefers animals upon them who have time to enjoy nature. The diction is very simple and quite appropriate to the subject-matter of the poem.

The general tone of *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* is **calm and serene, quiet and contemplative**, according to some critics it is **dark and depressing**.

### 2. Structure and Form

The poem, ‘*Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*’ is composed in iambic tetrameter, pioneered by Edward Fitzgerald. All the respective verses conform to the a-a-b-a rhyming scheme. On the whole, the rhyme scheme follows the pattern of aaba-bbcb-ccdc-dddd convention.

“Leisure” consists of seven couplets. It means there are a total of 14 lines in this poem. The poet uses a regular rhyme scheme. The rhyme scheme of the poem is AA BB and it goes on like this. As an example, in the first couplet, “care” and “stare” rhyme together. Apart from that, there is also regularity in the metrical scheme of the poem. There are a total of 8 syllables in each line and the stress falls on the second syllable of each foot. It means each line contains four iambs. For this reason, the overall poem is composed in iambic tetrameter.

### 3. Animals as illustrated in the poems

“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 above lines in the poem “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” deals with the most striking things about the human and the animal appear to exchange their values. The horse is the one who is in a hurry, who needs a place of business—a farmhouse—in order to make sense of their brief stop. It is the human who is able to temporarily put aside all materialistic worldly aspects like property

ownership and destination and to appreciate the moment. The horse is impatient, the human tranquil. This shows us how completely the horse has been brought into the human world, indicating the completeness of nature’s transformation to mankind’s uses.

“No time to stand beneath the boughs

And stare as long as sheep or cows”.

In the above couplet from the “Leisure” W. H. Davies asserts that the human condition contrasts unfavourably with that of “sheep and cows.” Those animals are permitted the time to stand and stare as long as they desire.

The speaker is, of course, bemoaning his own sad situation. He is implying that he would prefer to be a cow or a sheep that could take all the leisure time it wishes. But instead, he will be called a good-for-nothing, a shirker, or a slacker, if he tries to emulate the activity of animals.

### 4. Message

The last two lines of Williams Davies’ ‘Leisure’

“A poor life this if, full of care,

We have no time to stand and stare”.

unveils the richness of life as embodied in nature and wants us to avoid falseness of life as exemplified in our daily pursuits. The poem has an important message that is to change our attitude to nature; from that of indifference to seriousness. The main theme is that we should abandon our material pursuits and establish a firm contact with nature to lead a rich and diverse life. The poem starts with a rhetorical question, i.e., the author is sure you will agree with him that it’s important to have free time. The idea of “stand and stare” is picked up all through the poem. He reminds us that even animals have time to look at things; then moves on to looking at animals and then to broader pictures like the wonders of the night sky and finally Beauty itself – personified as a dancing girl. So, by the end of the poem, we’ve realized that if we don’t forget our pursuits, we miss everything – all the beauty, joy and movement of life. Thus, the writer has criticized modern man for his leisure less material life devoid of natural beauty.

The last two lines of the poem “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” gives message as

“And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep.”

The important thing here is that the poet repeats the last line to make an emphasis and attract the attention of the readers. In this very last line lies the allegorical interpretation. Here ‘sleep’ may refer to death. and ‘promises’ may refer to our duties. The poem apparently presents the picture of a snow-covered woods and tells the tale of a man who wanted to

enjoy the beauty of the woods but could not do so for long. He had to go to keep his promises.

“Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening” examines just how difficult it has become in the modern world for man to stay in touch with nature. The poem is made up of contrasting images of the natural and the man-made: the woods and the village, the farmhouse and the lake, even the horse and the harness-bells. The speaker is enchanted with the things of nature, but is constantly reminded of human things, and, after a few minutes of giving in to the enchantment, decides with regret that this return to nature cannot last.

We, in our real life, have many things to look at with awe, many things to enjoy. But in most cases, we cannot, simply because we have other things to do in our short lifespan. So, we have to move on. This is the message or theme inherent in the poem.

Again, the woods are symbolic of the beautiful aspects of life, as well as life’s temptations and distractions. We have got to go on our way to achieve our goals. So, we should not get distracted by the fascinating things around us. According to Dereck Walcott, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” is "A poem begins in delight and ends in wisdom."

## VI. CONCLUSION

After reading the last lines of both the poems one can observe that W. H. Davies is requesting the modern man to give some time to stand and stare the beauties in the nature surrounded by him. He is asking the modern man to return to nature from his maddening daily routine chores.

Whereas Robert Frost through his poem suggests the modern man to return to his duties and responsibilities towards his family and society without distracted by the beauties around him. The poet describes the beauty and allure of the woods as “lovely, dark, and deep,” that his entire life span is not enough to explore all the external beauties but reminds himself that he must not remain there, for he has “promises to keep,” and a long journey is ahead of him.

Both the poets are right in their own perspective. But it is the modern man who has to maintain an equilibrium between the duties and the beauties. Both are equally important. Nature is our first guru. It teaches us so many life lessons like patience, selflessness and sacrifice so on and so forth, which one has to learn and implement those lessons while discharging his duties towards his family and society.

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